

# XC gets into State form, '99 style

**Brian Gilmore  
Reporter**

With the sizzling summer winding down and the bleakness of winter still a few months off in the distance, now is the time for one special season. That season, of course, is cross country season, which some uninitiated souls still insist on calling autumn or fall. Nonetheless, the Harrierbills are back, and they look to improve on a "reloading" year in 2000 that saw the team place 6th in the state meet.

Returning four varsity runners from that state meet, including 2000 All-State (23rd) senior co-captain and 4:18 all-state miler Tipper O'Brien, the team appears to be in good shape to get back to its form of 1999, when it won the state championship. Joining O'Brien on the varsity rotation will be senior co-captains John "P Diddy" Parr, Pat Leinauer, and junior Peter Schaefer. After those top four runners, the remaining three varsity slots are still open. Contenders for the three spots include senior Andy Skosky, juniors Kevin Crane, Kyle Gonnerman, Drew Noblot, Geoff Stewart, and sophomore Andrew Linhares.

With the departure of coach and all-around genius Rob Behm, the coaching staff for 2001 is now a four-man operation. Head Coach Jim Linhares returns for yet another season, backed by Tom Flanagan, Pat Hamel, and Tim Chik. Linhares and his faithful minions have been working the team out through the dog days of August, armed with a slightly different approach towards in-season training, which includes more post-hard workout mileage and designs that races, rather than interval workouts, will be the most intense workout of the week.

Obviously aghast at the sudden change in philosophy, team captain Leinauer confessed, "Our practices are a little longer now that the coaches have officially gone insane. No really, we do a lot more mileage now, but I think it's to our benefit."

About his task to take the torch from

his now-graduated brother Dan, the candid Leinauer quipped, "I wish I could say that I am going to fill my brother's shoes, but that would be like Shaq squeezing into a size-3 shoe."

Leinauer is right, as there are definitely some "Shaq-esque" expectations for the year. On the team level, all eyes are focused on the ultimate prize, another state title. "Our goal is to take it one step at a time towards ultimate success at the state meet," said O'Brien. "I would trade any individual awards, while coming in last every race, just to see the team win.

Individual success is nice, and it often comes along with team success, but winning as a team is a lot more fun."

Parr echoed these sentiments, while also adding, "I want to become an elite runner in the state. I have worked hard since day one of freshman year, and this is my time."

"I want, so therefore I will," continued Parr. "We are a well-prepared, intelligent team who can run with anyone in the state, and I can't wait to get it going."

Parr added, "I also want the younger guys on the team to look up to and learn from me and the other seniors, like I did when I was in their shoes."

Success usually comes on all levels for SLUH cross country, and this year should be no different. The JV team aspires to an undefeated season, with many juniors and sophomores playing prominent roles. Led by the dynamic duo of Charlie and Henry Samson, the freshman team looks to rise to its seemingly annual spot as one of the top teams in the state.

However, no good story is complete without a little drama, and the beginning of the year is no exception. With four championship-caliber runners, who will

step up and seize the all-important scoring #5 slot? Also, O'Brien is temporarily on the shelf with a stress fracture in his right leg. How will the team react to the loss of its returning #1 runner in the first few meets? Will O'Brien still have his fitness up at peak level when he returns? Only

time will tell, but no one is overly worried, including O'Brien himself.

"I'm disappointed to be missing the early meets, and it kinda puts the brakes on my season, just for a little bit though," said O'Brien.

Parr saw the silver lining in the unfortunate injury when he said, "It



Coach Linhares exhorts the '01 cross country squad.

will frustrate teams seeing us achieve success when we're not even at 100%. Our 1-2-3 punch, without Tip, will still be more than a lot of teams can handle. Then once he comes back, that's just gravy, and we'll be even tougher to beat."

All speculating aside, it's time to start racing, and everyone is more than ready to toe the line and go. The opening invitational, First Capitol, is today at McNair Park in St. Charles. The varsity race is at 4:30, and the JV run is at 5:30. Several area powers will be there, led by #1-ranked DeSmet and individual standout Stephen Pifer (Edwardsville HS). Hope springs eternal this year for SLUH XC, and as always, fan support is appreciated.

If you can't make it to the meet, though, take some time to check out a new member of the SLUH XC family. Originally a project for computer coach Steve Nicollerat's web design class last spring, seniors Andy Skosky and Brian Gilmore created a comprehensive team website. Throughout the year, there will be results, times, pictures, and other fun stuff. Check it out at [www.geocities.com/sluhcrosscountry](http://www.geocities.com/sluhcrosscountry).