

Linhares on Harrierbills: 'All systems are go'

**Brian Gilmore
Reporter**

On an unseasonably cold October morning Saturday at Sioux Passage Park, the Harrierbills were victorious for the third week in a row. Competing in Sectionals, the meet before State, they destroyed the field in what is believed to have been the lowest score ever recorded by a SLUH team at Sectionals.

They scored 37 points, which easily outdistanced DeSmet (82), CBC (104), and Francis Howell North (107). Because they were virtually assured of qualifying for State, DeSmet rested an all-state runner, but that takes nothing away from the team's sheer dominance of Saturday's race. Moments after the race ended, head coach Jim Linhares said that it was "The greatest sectional victory I've ever seen."

Tipper O'Brien was the first SLUH finisher and the fifth different runner to have been #1 on the team this season. He used the hills to his advantage, exploding on the downs, and finishing in 4th place (17:26). The rest of the SLUH pack was not far behind, with John Parr (6th, 17:33), Pat Leinauer (7th, 17:35), Peter Schaefer (9th, 17:43), Drew Noblot (11th, 17:46), Kyle Gonnerman (12th, 17:47), and Kevin Crean (21st, 18:01) all finishing in strong position.

Crean didn't run the race he was looking for, yet as SLUH's seventh finisher, he still beat nearly every team's third man. Only 21 seconds separated the six SLUH runners from O'Brien to Gonnerman.

In such a large meet as State, having such a fast and tight pack is almost necessary for a team to have a shot at winning.

About the weather conditions at Sioux

Passage, Gonnerman could only muster, "It was (expletive deleted) freezing!"

"It was a great pack for the guys," said Crean, "and this coming Saturday is sure fixin' to be quite a day."

Saturday's meet will be the culmination of another great cross country season for SLUH. As everyone believes, though, the best is still yet to come.

"We are poised to have a great day. It

Schaefer, "but mentally I don't know what to expect, since I've never been there before. I've watched so many State races, but it's totally different once you're actually in it."

Noblot added, "With our tight pack, we have a great chance at winning."

It will be the end of an era for the three seniors on the team. They've put their hearts and souls into the team for

four years, and it all boils down to this. In the midst of everything, though, they are still loose and ready to go. "I'm nervous because my entire life is on the line," joked Leinauer, "but believe me, it's our time now to let 'em know what."

After Saturday's race, O'Brien offered the following: "When we get there and the gun goes off, the proverbial tiger will be fully released from its cage, and, props to the '99 state title team, but there will be no better place than here, no better time than now."

Parr agreed, chipping in, "It's just so amazing just to be a part of this team. Talentwise, we're the strongest team this school has ever seen, and now it's up to us to go out and kick some butt."

The race begins at 12:30 tomorrow afternoon at Oak Hills Golf Course in Jefferson City. If you're interested in going to the meet, come to an informational meeting today at activity period in J124. Among other things, rides to Jeff City will be arranged.

Win or lose, State always proves to be one of the best days of the fall. Always slathered in tons of blue paint and Jr. Billiken spirit, SLUH fans have developed quite a reputation among the crowds in Jefferson City. Come join in the fun.



SLUH XC's top seven—Kyle Gonnerman, Tom O'Brien, Pat Leinauer, John Parr, Peter Schaeffer, Drew Noblot, and Kevin Crean—warm up before Saturday's race.

would simply be a mistake not to go to Jefferson City with the intent of taking home a first place trophy," said assistant coach Tom Flanagan.

Linhares agreed, saying, "It is the most talent we've ever assembled on one team. Everyone is healthy, and I feel like we've got our definite seven best runners ready to go. This is the first year that I have ever been able to honestly say that I have no concerns going into State. People from around the state don't expect us to win, though, so we'll have to take advantage of everything that unfolds Saturday. All systems are go."

The four juniors—Schaefer, Noblot, Gonnerman, and Crean—have never run at State, so it will be a baptism by fire for them.

"Physically, I feel ready," said