

# Harrierbills rise to the occasion, win District

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Reporter

With only a week remaining until the much-anticipated state meet in Jefferson City, it looks as if the Harrierbills are starting to peak at the right time. Riding the crest of back-to-back victories over rival and state power DeSmet, SLUH has established themselves as legitimate state championship hopefuls.

Two weeks ago, the team won its eighth conference title in ten years at Chaminade, defeating DeSmet for the first time since August. Overcoming horrible conditions on a course that had either standing water or mud at nearly every twist and turn due to the week's rain, SLUH defeated DeSmet by a healthy margin of 34-47.

Getting a brief reprieve from the rain, the race began under overcast skies. Throwing all the race strategy out the window because of the muddy conditions, the Jr. Bills established their position at the top of the race very early and never let up. Even the course couldn't halt the Jr. Billiken parade, as four of the top seven runners in the race donned the blue jersey. Peter Schaefer (4th, 17:58), Pat Leinauer (5th, 18:10), John Parr (6th, 18:13), and Drew Noblot (7th, 18:25) all finished as first team all-MCC runners. It was the first time in school history that a SLUH team has come out of the MCC's with four all-conference runners. Kyle Gonnerman (12th, 18:34), Kevin Crean (13th, 18:36), and a still recovering Tipper O'Brien (16th, 18:47) were the other SLUH finishers.

As soon as the pack of SLUH runners crossed the finish line, the skies opened up and Mother Nature announced SLUH's victory with an incredible rainstorm. The entire SLUH camp ignored the torrential rains and mobbed the runners in what was an incredible moment. Considering the conditions and the nature of the victory, it was one of the biggest and definitely most memorable victories in the history of

SLUH cross country.

"The reason that we were able to run so well was because we looked forward to the horrendous conditions, and ran a smarter race than everyone else," Parr explained.

Continuing, Parr said, "Winning the conference title in a year when DeSmet and Chaminade were such strong teams is one of my proudest accomplishments as a member of SLUH XC."

Earlier in the day, the JV team won, and won big. Having runners in positions



The varsity squad, from left, Peter Schaeffer, Drew Noblot, John Parr, Tom O'Brien, Kyle Gonnerman, John Crean, and Pat Leinauer.

1-5, the team scored a perfect 15 points against the conference competition. Sophomores Andrew Linhares (1st, 18:48) and Brennan Connor (2nd, 18:55) led the charge, with Matt Killiany (3rd, 19:16), Andy Skosky (4th, 19:20), and Geoff Stewart (5th, 19:21) close behind to complete the sweep.

Charlie Samson was the individual champion of the freshman race, covering the muddy course in a time of 19:39. His heroics weren't enough to lead the team to victory, however, as SLUH finished second to DeSmet's freshman team yet again.

Last weekend, the varsity team completed its first step towards a state championship, emerging victorious at Districts, held at Parkway Central. The Spartans once again fell to the Mighty Billiken, but still safely qualified for sectional competition. Peter Schaeffer ran a blistering 16:39

for third place, solidifying himself as one of the elite runners in the entire state. He was closely followed into the chute by Tipper O'Brien (5th, 16:55), Drew Noblot (8th, 17:02), and Pat Leinauer (9th, 17:03). Kevin Crean (15th, 17:15) ran a career best race to nail down the victory for the Jr. Bills. John Parr (17th, 17:28) and Kyle Gonnerman (20th, 17:36) rounded out the assault, as all seven runners earned district medals.

One of the biggest stories out of Saturday was the return to glory of O'Brien.

Coming off all-state finishes in cross country and track, he was set up for a huge senior year cross country season. However, his season was briefly put on hold due to a stress fracture in his leg sustained before the first meet. He returned to action at Jesuit three weeks ago, but Saturday was the first time that the area has had a glimpse of what O'Brien is capable of when he's healthy.

"I was satisfied with my race Saturday, but I still ran too controlled," O'Brien said. "This Saturday I hope to use the hills at Sioux to my advantage, running a very smart race, and sprint like Boyd 'Flash' Gonnerman at the end."

O'Brien added, "Now we've shown that we can beat any team in the area, and we still haven't unleashed the tiger. Once we have a race where we have all the horses going together, it's gonna be game over from there."

Tomorrow, the team will compete in the Sectional meet, held at North County's Sioux Passage Park. The top four teams move on to next weekend's State meet. The varsity race kicks off at 9:30, and support is much welcomed. For anyone who wants to test his grit as a cross country runner, there is an open race that begins at 10:15. Anyone can run in the race, and the team challenges all comers to measure themselves against the "Manmaker." Stop by the switchboard for directions to Sioux, or check out [www.sluh.org/xc/xc.htm](http://www.sluh.org/xc/xc.htm).