

CLOSE CALL

SLUH nips Parkway W.

By TOM SCHNABLE
CORRESPONDENT

JEFFERSON CITY — Five points.

In a cross country meet, five points is nothing. But, five measly points is what separated St. Louis University High from its closest competition, allowing the Jr. Billikens to capture the Class 4 cross country state championship on Saturday.

"It's five points," SLUH coach Jim Linhares said. "If anybody had given just a little bit less, you lose a race like this. It was a race in which team was spelled with a capital T."

The title marks the second time Linhares has led SLUH to the state crown, the last occurring in 1999. That year also marked the last time a Class 4 team championship was decided by fewer points than this margin, with SLUH edging Liberty

by only one point. It might have been three titles for Linhares, but the Jr. Bills took a runner-up prize last year to Fort Zumwalt South.

"Last year, Fort Zumwalt South was the team of destiny, everybody's pick, and they went and they had their day," he said. "We didn't feel disappointed at all. But, we sure would have had a hard time swallowing it if we came up second today, because we really felt like we had the talent and we had the opportunity, so it's sweet."

Junior John Clohisy led the SLUH charge with an 18th-place finish, which on the surface would seem disappointing because it is five spots worse than he placed at last year's state meet. But, considering the journey Clohisy took to finish where he did, it's quite a feat.

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RICK GRAEFE PHOTO

Junior John Clohisy finished 18th to help lead SLUH to the Class 4 team title Saturday in Jefferson City. The Junior Billikens held off Parkway West by five points for their first state championship since 1999.

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SLUH: Wins Class 4 title

"Clohisy is coming off of a period where he had to deal with, not that he would ever complain about this, but two stress fractures," Linhares said.

The injuries forced Clohisy to alter his training program, and Linhares had him run extra miles and scheduled special practices to make up for the time lost.

"I have great memories from here from last year," said Clohisy, who dropped only seven seconds from his 2006 meet time. "Coming off the injuries, I just wanted to prove to myself that I'm still up there and I'm on the rise, and I feel like I did that today. With the team (victory) to top it off, that's just amazing."

Clohisy credits the pace of the eventual individual champion, Eric Fernandez of Parkway West, for helping him realize his goal.

"The first mile we went off pretty slow; it was rough," Clohisy said. "Then, Fernandez put on a huge move, and it kind of strung out the race, so everyone started to fit into their place in the race, and that helped a lot."

Fernandez's Parkway West squad ended up being the team that fell five points short.

It took more than just the efforts of Clohisy to bring SLUH the title. Austin Cookson and Dan Warner finished 26th and 27th, respectively, helping the Jr. Bills' overall score.

"Austin and Dan ran times that are right at their best on this course," Linhares said. "You've got to say they absolutely came through for us."

Caleb Ford and Chris Murphy finished 43rd and 49th to round out the SLUH top five, and even SLUH's sixth and seventh-place

runners finished before Parkway West's fifth best, something that made Linhares particularly proud.

"For us today, it was the whole group of seven that made the deal," he said.

For Clohisy, the Oak Hills Golf Center course felt just like home. Clohisy does a lot of his running at The Bogey Club, St. Louis Country Club and Old Warson Country Club, so the layout was nothing new for him.

"It's one of the toughest courses anyone races on all year," he said. "I really like the course, because I run on golf courses by my house, so I'm really used to that."

Not everything went SLUH's way, with only one runner winning an individual medal. But overall, they'll gladly take what they got.

"We would have hoped for a few more all-staters," Linhares said. "We would have wished for some of our guys to be a little faster and further up, but when you look at the whole picture of the team, they really came through for each other."