

XC charges forward, a dark horse at State meet

BY NATE HEAGNEY
EDITOR

For the past six seasons, the St. Louis U. High cross country team has earned the right to stand on the podium at the state meet. Since 2005, the Jr. Billikens have been one of the top four teams in the state, earning them a trophy each year. It's a long-tenured streak that means a lot to the program, and not one the team hopes to end anytime soon.

This Saturday, the Jr. Billikens will face off against the top cross country teams from around the state in Jefferson City. The team enters the meet coming off of a strong Sectionals performance last weekend in which the Jr. Bills took six of the first race's first 13 spots.

But the team still enters State facing an uphill battle, with teams like Rock Bridge and Rockhurst fielding very strong squads. Assistant coach Tom Flanagan said the team has a good shot at competing for a state medal.

"We are definitely one of the teams that has a good chance of getting a trophy. But there's probably six that could say that," said Flanagan. "The good thing is that all we really need is for every guy to run a good solid race. We don't need anybody to run out of their mind, we just have to have the

guys perform at a level they're capable of."

One guy who may have run more than a solid race at Sectionals was senior captain Nathan Rubbelke. Rubbelke has battled injuries for much of the year but came up big with a second place finish at Sectionals. Rubbelke said he really felt the need to get momentum going as the team approached the championship meet.

"It was huge. I knew coming off of a good race at the Clayton Invitational the week before that if I slung together another good race it would really boost my confidence for State," said Rubbelke. "I want to be all-State this weekend, and one of the things coach Flanagan always says is that if you want to be all-State you've got to run like you're all-State. So my mental philosophy was that I needed to run an all-State race at the sectional meet."

Rubbelke was closely followed by another five SLUH runners, and the spread amongst the team's top six was just under 40 seconds, a solid indication that the team was pushing each other as a pack, which Rubbelke said bodes well for State.

"If we run a 39-second spread at the State meet I think we'll be in pretty good shape," said Rubbelke. SLUH was third at the State

meet last year, but returns very few runners from that team. Senior Michael McLaughlin is the only all-State returnee, and he said that it was a designation he hoped to keep this year.

"My goal personally is to repeat and be all-State twice," said McLaughlin. "Team's goal is to win it, of course. You've got to go hard. And if not, which we probably won't, it's to get second. And if not that third, and so on and so forth."

Expectations like those of McLaughlin play an interesting role in how the team looks at State this year. Rock Bridge is the clear favorite to repeat, so unlike last season, SLUH is not tying its hopes down to a State championship. In fact, while SLUH knows it has the talent for a good performance at state, it is not aiming for any particular spot. Flanagan said the team just wants to run its best race and see where the chips lie afterwards.

"There were years where we'd go up there thinking, 'If we have a great race we might have a chance to do this.' This year's not like that. This group of guys, they just need to go up there and run the race that they are capable of running, a good solid race. We'll be alright. And if that's not enough, then the other teams would've had to run

awfully well," said Flanagan.

Rubbelke agreed, saying the team would not be downcast with a poor race, but added that continuing SLUH's trophy streak meant a lot to the squad.

"If it doesn't happen I don't think we'll be heartbroken. But we want a trophy, we want to bring home some hardware. I think we're ready for it. I think it's another day at the office. Last year I got too nervous before the state meet, but I don't think those nerves are a problem for us this year," said Rubbelke.

The team has had juniors like Joe Archer, Matt Nicholson, Tom Laughlin, and Michael Dowd step up big this year and will need a big performance from them. Senior Joe Esswein ran very well early during the season, but was SLUH's last runner during the sectional meet. The team needs Esswein to return back to his peak form for a trophy performance.

Flanagan is optimistic that the runners can step up and have a big race.

"I'm confident that they can answer the bell on Saturday, and that they can run well," said Flanagan. "They had a great workout on Tuesday. You know, they are some of the best runners in the state."

Conversation of the Week

The always-friendly Joe Esswein

BY DANIEL SCHMIDT
REPORTER

I sat down with senior cross country captain Joe Esswein to discuss the state race this Saturday.

Daniel Schmidt: Where are you guys racing this weekend?

Joe Esswein: Oak Hills Golf Course in Jeff City. Our race is 12:05 p.m.

DS: As a captain, what do you feel your responsibilities are heading into a state race?

JE: Keeping everybody relaxed and excited. Helping them enjoy the moment. Especially the day before the race, you want to keep guys calm and not too excited.

DS: Where are you guys at as a team heading into the race?

JE: We're excited because we're kind of going under the radar. There's one team who is really expected to win, and if they don't, then something really weird would've happened. But as far as second and third place go, we could cause some damage.

DS: Where did "Hungry for more" come from? It's been all over some of the cross country guys' twitters.

JE: (Laughs) Earlier this summer, our favorite runner Ryan Hall tweeted that he had just gotten done watching his wife run on the track, and he was now "Hungry for More." Me and Nathan (Rubbelke) thought it was hilarious, and we've been using it ever since.

DS: Do you or anyone else on the team ever say anything to an opponent when you pass them?

JE: Every now and then if I'm friends with the person. With teammates, you always try to offer them words of encouragement to keep going.

DS: Does the team have any post-season plans?

JE: The Nike Regional Meet in Terra Haute, Indiana. You get a lot of free stuff, and we get to hang out at our coach's house since he lives there. We get free food, and he has a home theatre. Until we win a bunch of state titles in a row, it just gives us an opportunity for a relaxed race, and for me to race one more time.

DS: Do you have any plans to race in college?

JE: I actually got a call from a college coach last night, but we'll see. If I get into Notre Dame, then no. If I go to a small D-I school or a D-III, then probably yes.

JV Soccer kicks their way to a remarkable year

BY BRIAN DUGAN
REPORTER

The junior varsity soccer players at St. Louis U. High have carried on SLUH's winning tradition in mighty fashion: 15 of the team's 20 members have suffered only one loss over the previous two years of SLUH soccer between last year's C- and B-teams and this year's 19-1 JV campaign. Junior Matt Horas said this success has helped make the game a good time.

"It's been really fun playing with everyone over the past couple years, and winning all of those games has added to the excitement," said Horas.

SLUH's only loss of the season came against DeSmet on Sept. 29, a 1-0 loss that marked the only time the team was behind all season.

Despite this one blemish, the Jr. Bills bounced back to win their remaining eight games and boast two tournament championships: the Hillsboro Varsity Tournament in mid-September and the Suburban Junior Varsity Tournament two weeks ago.

At the Hillsboro Tournament, SLUH faced off against Perryville's varsity squad in a hard-fought final. SLUH took an early lead thanks to junior Joey Fisher's goal, a bender into the far corner from just outside the box to open up the game's scoring.

Perryville put up a fight to later tie the score at one, but SLUH ultimately prevailed, 4-1, behind a trifecta of late goals.

Their victory in the Hillsboro tournament championship completed the Jr. Bills' terrorization of their early and mid-season opponents, as the second half of



Junior Jack Thompson knives his way upfield. The JV soccer squad went 19-1 on the season.

their schedule pitted them against some stronger teams, particularly CBC and DeSmet.

Other than their one loss versus the Spartans, the JV's MCC challengers posed no real threat once the opening whistle blew. SLUH disposed of CBC's B-team and JV team, each by a score of 2-0.

One and a half weeks after taking down CBC's JV, the Jr. Bills welcomed DeSmet onto their home field. In a game that SLUH primarily controlled, DeSmet squandered their few chances to finish. Twice in the game, they shot rockets off the post. Those two shots ended up being the difference in the game, as ju-

nior captain Dan Buehler scored the two goals to lead the Bills to a 2-0 victory. Not even DeSmet could contain the red-hot JV team again, as Fisher pointed out.

"We really played well together and realized that when we were at our best, no one on our schedule could stop us," said Fisher.

Entering the final stretch of the season, the Jr. Bills began play in the Suburban Tournament during exam week. Their first game was scheduled against Webster Groves, but rain cancelled the meeting. They then played Francis Howell to a 1-0 victory, thanks to a beautiful free kick that junior captain Andrew Robinson bent

over the wall and just over the goalie's hands into the top left corner from about 25 yards out. The following day, SLUH took down Oakville to capture the tournament crown.

On the final day of the season, the Jr. Bills trekked to O'Fallon, Mo., to take on Fort Zumwalt West. SLUH punished FZW for five goals, ending the season with a stellar performance and capping a dominant season.

"I think we showed a lot of development as a team and as individuals as the year went on. It was an enjoyable and successful season. You can't ask for much more," said Robinson.

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