

XC dominates sectionals, looks for State championship this weekend

BY BRIAN SUHRE
REPORTER

photo | Austin Strifler

The St. Louis U. High cross country team continued its march towards State this weekend with a dominating victory at Sectionals in Forest Park. The victory leaves the Jr. Bills poised to win a trophy at State after just missing out last year for the first time in six previous appearances.

This year's team has much higher aspirations than just a top five finish, having set their sights firmly on the Class 4 State Championship this Saturday in Jefferson City. In order to reach the State meet, the team first had to qualify through Sectionals, but did so comfortably. The team replicated their District score of 30 points in a larger, more competitive field.

Senior captain Matt Nicholson again led the way with a strong 16:01 second place finish. Nicholson again lost out to Nick Stewart of McCluer North, an all-State runner last year, again after losing to him at Districts the week before. Nicholson did beat Dillon Williams of Webster Groves by 14 seconds, whom he also finished behind at Districts. Head coach Joe Porter was pleased with Nicholson's individual performance.

"We are really happy with the way Nicholson ran," said Porter. "Nick Stewart is a guy that can finish in the top five (at State) on the right day, and Matt was with him until 300 meters to go. He covered a lot of the moves that he didn't cover in Districts."

"Being able to run with Nick Stewart for basically the whole race is something to build on for State," said Nicholson. "He placed 18th last year so it's a good spot for me to be in."

Junior Tom Rubio ran another strong race to be the team's two-man with a time of 16:19. Rubio said that the caliber of runners in front of him simplified his



Senior Tom Laughlin powers past opponents as he climbs the course's rolling terrain.

race pace.

"My goal was to stay with Matt and Nick Stewart and Dillon (Williams) for as long as I could," he said. "At the third mile I took the lead, but that didn't last long. From there, I just made sure to keep fourth place and I finished well."

Senior captain Joe Archer stepped up to regain the third spot on the team with a time of 16:33 and a seventh place overall finish. Sophomores Matthew Hennessey and Shayn Jackson followed Archer, ensuring that the team put all five of its scoring runners in the top 11. Hennessey and Jackson ran 16:41 and 16:42 respectively. Senior Tom Laugh-

lin and sophomore Jack Sullivan rounded out the top seven.

Some concerns were raised after the race over a possible injury to Hennessey, who was seen with a walking boot earlier in the week, but Porter was quick to assuage any fears.

He said, "We're not worried at all. He's fine. It's all preventative. He's ready to roll and very fit."

The team now heads to Jefferson City with a squad filled with both experience and inexperience. Seniors Matt Nicholson, Joe Archer, and Tom Laughlin have all raced at State before, as has Rubio. Sophomores Hennessey, Jackson, and Sullivan will be rac-

ing at state for the first time and are expected to play key roles in the team's bid for the title.

Because of the team's youth, Porter stressed a "relaxed mindset" and that the team's goals will be the same as they have been all year, as State is "just another race."

"It's a mix of being serious about State but not taking it too seriously," said Nicholson. "Tom (Laughlin) summed it up with his 'Fruity Pebbles' comment. If you think too much about the race, you go crazy and you won't race well. It's a happy medium where we are thinking about it but not over-thinking it."

The class 4 title is generally expected to be a wide open race,

with no clear favorite. SLUH, Rock Bridge, West Plains, and Blue Springs are all expected to compete for the title. Coach Porter is more concerned with his own team's performance than the team's three rivals.

"We can't really control how they race," Porter said. "We can control how we race, so that's going to be our focus is continuing to do the same things we've been doing: keeping our gaps close, keeping our packs real tight and making sure we can find each other in the race."

The Class 4 Boys' final will take place at 9:35 a.m. Saturday at Oak Hills Golf Center in Jefferson City.

Football finishes up and down season with loss to Ritenour

BY WILL GREINER
REPORTER

Covered in mud and drenched in sweat, the Jr. Billikens played under the lights Friday night for the last time this season. The Billikens fought hard on the gridiron against the Ritenour Huskies, but due to some untimely mistakes and Ritenour's stellar play, the Footbills lost in the first round of the playoffs.

"All the players were hyped before the game and we played our hearts out," said senior captain Matthew Hinkebein. "We just needed to come out with a little more firepower in a game like that."

Riding a two-game win streak into Friday evening, the Jr. Bills looked to continue their success on the ground against the No. 5 seed Huskies in a game that seemed to be a fairly even matchup on paper. Adding to the fact that both the offense and defense had been efficient last week against Oakville, many felt the Bills could make a playoff run for the second year in a row.

Unfortunately, it just wasn't

in the cards.

Following a spectacular 47-yard outside run by junior Raymond Wingo with 10:53 left in the first quarter, the Jr. Bills looked to dominate the game.

But following the U. High score, Ritenour went on to compile three consecutive touchdowns, including two short runs and a 33-yard touchdown pass from Ritenour QB Terrence Hollins-White to wide receiver Crishawn Torrey.

"As I said going into the game, this was probably the best Ritenour team I have seen in my time coaching, and they definitely proved me right on Friday," said head coach Gary Kornfeld.

With only one more Jr. Billiken touchdown scored in the first half (by Hinkebein), SLUH found themselves with their backs against the wall, down 28-14 at half.

But that did not stop the relentless Jr. Bills. Following some inspiring speeches at the half from team captains, the U-High left everything on the field and would not allow another offen-

sive touchdown for the rest of the game.

However, the Jr. Bills continued to sputter on offense and could not convert drives into points.

The nail in the coffin came for the Jr. Bills in the third quarter when Ritenour's DeAndre Johnson returned an interception for a touchdown to increase Ritenour's lead to 35-14, the game's final score.

"I know that there is only one team that gets to end their season on a win, but it still hurts having your last game being a loss like this," said Hinkebein.

"It's too bad that it had to end like this. I am going to miss bonding with my teammates," added senior captain Nick Granberry.

The Jr. Bills struggled against the Ritenour defense on Friday as the Bills managed to only put together 259 total yards of offense, 190 yards rushing and 69 yards receiving. The only thing that seemed to work for the offense on Friday was Wingo, who ran for 155 yards with one touchdown on 21 attempts.

On the defensive end of the ball the Jr. Bills managed to find some rhythm towards the end of the game, but it was too little too late for the sinking Jr. Bills after allowing 28 points in the first half.

The defense recorded 75 tackles on the night, led by senior captain Matthew Hinkebein with ten.

As for the class of 2013 seniors, Friday marked the last time that they will ever put on the helmet and pads for the U. High and turned out to be a saddening end

to their SLUH careers.

"It's always tough saying goodbye," Kornfeld said. "You work with these guys for so long and have watched them develop into the players that they are today. It really is tough. But that's just athletics."

"This was a very successful season for me and the team," added Granberry. "I learned a lot, and even learned some lessons that I will carry on with me for the rest of my life."



Seniors Ryan Trenter and Luke Mammen support fellow senior Joel Ocampo as he donates blood during last week's blood drive.