

## Not up for debate: Swimming meets goals with perfect season, championship

JOE FEDER AND NICHOLAS DALAVIRAS  
STAFF REPORTER

One summer morning, in the stuffy, chlorinated basement of Forest Park Community College, the St. Louis U. High swim and dive team gathered around a simple white cardboard sign that spelled out the seven team goals for the season: be a student of the sport, go undefeated in dual meets, be the loudest team on deck, be top three at all Invitationals, be Varsity and JV MCC Champions, earn 17 State Qualifiers, and be State Champions.

These goals, the fruits of several weeks of debate between head coach Lindsey Ehret and senior captains Joe Feder, Daniel Fink, Will Slatin, and Jarrett Schneider, were certain to push the team to higher levels of performance than in previous years, but the team leaders believed that they would motivate the team to succeed where the 2017 team had fallen short.

"At the beginning of the season, I thought that some of the goals were a bit lofty, and I was concerned about all of the seniors we lost last year," said Slatin. "But I think that the whole time, we all knew that this was a super goosing speedy team, and it was going to be the super goosing speedy year for SLUH."

Many other swimmers shared similar hesitations, but to counter these feelings, Ehret decided to have each athlete sign the poster, committing them to achieving those goals over the course of the season.

"It makes everyone feel like they contribute to our goals," said Ehret. "Regardless of speed, they can contribute by making us the loudest team on deck, by learning something new about the sport, and by becoming JV and Varsity MCC Champions. Everybody has a role to play in this intensely individual sport."

But as the first practices of early August passed, it became clear that the goals would not come without work.

"I thought we were a little complacent the first few weeks," said Schneider. "We were work-

ing hard, but I thought we could work harder."

A lack of oxygen, fluctuating pool temperatures, and out-of-shape athletes made consistency difficult early in the season, as many swimmers were unable to finish Ehret's agonizing sets due to sheer exhaustion, coughing fits, and muscle cramps.

"My abs really hurt," said freshman Ned Mehmeti.

The Jr. Bills were resilient though, pushing through a month of monotonous practices to their first dual meets where they beat Francis Howell Central 135-49, and splashed out rival CBC 111-74 in their the closest meet of the season.

The JV Squad had its first opportunity to show off their new swimming abilities early on as well at the Ladue Invitational. This meet saw SLUH's freshmen and sophomores swimming against the varsity teams of other area schools, and they rose to the challenge, finishing eighth out of the 12 teams.

Due to an incredibly large roster of 50 athletes this year—more than SLUH swimming and diving has ever had—the JV swimmers were unable to compete as much as in previous years. However, this lack of competition led to the building of strong team camaraderie.

"The team is a very tight knit group of good friends," said freshman Eric Piening. "The joy and humor within the group was infectious, though it wasn't necessarily from the swimming."

The week after the Ladue Invite, the U. High entered into the meaty part of their season, as each of the next four weekends would be dominated by an Invitational, with dual meets peppered throughout the weeks.

After a redemptive win at Marquette Relays during the first of these weeks—the 2017 team took third due to two controversial disqualifications—the team swam off like a school of whales migrating north to New Zealand for the winter. They easily held off their opponents at the DeSmet and Lindbergh

Invitationals, but the first glimmer of for a State Title appeared on Oct. 6, when the underdog Jr. Bills took first at the CoMo Invitational, a meet that draws the best teams from across the state, including the 2017 Class 2 Champions, Rock Bridge.

"The thing that solidified my confidence (in our goal to win state) was the CoMo win," said Slatin.

Perhaps more impressive than the win itself was the fact that the team was able to find such success without placing first in a single individual or relay event.

Although the swimmers performed beyond their expectations, CoMo was ultimately won by the divers, Juniors Gabe and Max Manalang, sophomore Owen Cooney, and freshman Sebastian Lawrence each dove spectacularly to secure the final points needed for the victory.

The dive team, which can seem like a separate entity from the swim team, had the unique problem of an overcrowded diving well. With six divers, they possessed mass amounts of energy, which head diving coach Brendan LeBrun countered by creating two separate diving periods, dividing the squad into groups of three.

"We never had a not-fun practice," said Cooney. "Most of our practices involved someone belly flopping and us watching it again on the camera. We all love diving, so it made for an awesome atmosphere."

As the team came down from the high of the CoMo victory and headed into the final month of the season, nature itself had a final curfew to throw. Unstable chlorine levels and an unwashed pool deck contributed to the spread of a new strain of the FoPo flu, coupled with debilitating shoulder injuries, two hospital visits, and too many cases of Swimmer's Ear to count brought an unprecedented number of absences from practice, culminating in a canceled Saturday morning practice two weeks before state.

"We need a new pool," said

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Swimmers celebrating their state victory.

photo | Mr. Brian Tremml

## Cross country looks back on renewal of program in second place season



The cross country team at state.

photo | Mr. Jim Hetlage

BY JUSTIN KOESTERER  
SPORTS EDITOR

Seniors Chris Staley, Patrick Hetlage, and Reed Milnor stood in front of their cross country and track teammates last January at a small gathering of the program's best and most committed runners at head coach Joe Porter's house, where the three spelled out their plan for the upcoming season, aptly named "The Podium Project."

This title came on the heels of the program's uncharacteristically low-placed finishes at the previous three state meets: 11th, 10th, and 10th in a sport where SLUH has all but become a household name in terms of podium finishes. Before that stretch, the Jr. Bills had accumulated nine podium finishes in ten years.

The emergence of Lucas Rackers during the 2018 track and field season proved to be a critical addition to a squad which lost senior Paul Burka, the lone SLUH 2017 All-State finisher. While Rackers did fill Burka's shoes and even exceeded expectations, it didn't come as a surprise. The Rackers family has produced great runners, the most well-known around the cross country community being Tim Rackers, '12, who is now ranked top-15 in the country in the 5K run.

"We saw Lucas Rackers really come out of his shell at that point, become a great runner during track. The seeds had already been planted all the way back in January, and then we went to Brashear and we talked about a little more the specifics about what it should take, and we focused on ourselves. We can't control what other teams do, but what we can control is how we train, how we mentally approach things, and how I'm not nervous, I'm excited," said Porter.

Although the seeds had in fact been planted back in January, the idea of cross country being "the process" is what drove those seeds to bear fruit ten months later in November. At Brashears, Mo. in a weeklong camp for a select group of the best runners in the program, they started to better realize where their mission would ultimately take them, and the sacrifice it would take to accomplish

those goals. It wasn't just the seven varsity runners, either. The Jr. Bills found it necessary for support from teammates all around the program.

"Personally, it's something that just makes you want to race better. It makes you want to do better, whether it's on a daily kind of thing. I had some freshmen call me out one time because I was feeling lazy and I didn't want to do my last stride, and they noticed that I was going to do it, and they called me out on it. It's kind of embarrassing to be called out by a freshman; I mean, if I'm a senior and a captain that should be happening. But at the same time the support by the team to hold you to your standards, to hold everybody to doing their stretches, doing their workouts, doing their running, and holding them to trying to race competitively, trying to do better each week that they get a new opportunity. That's going to help make it easier to race hard, that's going to make it easier to train hard, to do better and improve because you're going to have a whole community backing you," said Hetlage.

Additionally, at the annual camp, the leaders made a big poster which was eventually hung on the cross country wall just outside the locker room, a telling reminder of daily, weekly, and season-long goals. Daily goals included running in groups, running cool down, signing in with their morning pulse, and cheering on teammates after workouts. Weekly goals stated were to go to Friday morning Mass (for those who were able), to run with a friend on Sundays, typically their day off, and to stay at the racing tent until it was taken down. These smaller goals were cornerstones to their top goals: being a top four team at state, being the best JV team in the state, communicating with the coaches, and maintaining good hydration and nutrition throughout the season.

"One way you can look at it is, when you look at the season goals, there's little things each day that get overlooked that are crucial to those goals. So I kind of see it as each little subcategory of goals builds up to the big goals. If we say we want to have the fastest JV in the state

this year, if you skip out on doing the daily goals of stretching, getting all your strides in, getting your work done, getting your cool down in, you aren't going to improve enough to get to that finishing place," said Hetlage.

There's an old saying that goes something like, "It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up." An extremely vital component to varsity success was the runners' resiliency and stubbornness in fighting injuries and bouncing back from illness. One quintessential example of the stubbornness in fighting off injuries was senior captain Chris Staley.

"Chris had been absolutely beat up through the season, and Chris wasn't really able to do a workout all the way through three or four weeks there towards the end. We tried to rest him as much as we could. His volume dropped, he spent a lot of time on the bike trying to keep his fitness where it was because we knew that if we could get him to the line decently healthy he'll race extremely well, and sure enough, he was our fourth guy at the state meet," said Porter.

The revitalization of junior Adam Mittendorf towards the end of the season also helped the team to its second place finish. His tale of sacrifice and perseverance paid dividends by the time the state meet rolled around. Mittendorf, who ran last on July 21, suffered a stress fracture which set him back almost two months before he joined his varsity teammates on the line.

During his recovery period, Mittendorf spent over an hour each day in a pool. Whether it was at the YMCA, assistant coach Tom Flanagan's pool, or even at his grandmother's house, Mittendorf simulated each day's run or workout, somehow maintaining his fitness level until being able to race in the field again, eventually being the ever important five-man at the state meet.

"A lot of it was not really exciting. I trained by myself nearly the whole season. But what kept me motivated was all the other guys were doing what they needed to do to run fast, and that I needed to do the

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## Cross country completes podium project goal last year with a trophy at State

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same,” said Mittendorf.

“It was a good interchangeable group. It’s a rare thing. I don’t like when guys get settled in. As races go, they feel like they can’t pass their teammates or anything like that. I felt like this group was really good at working together, whether in races, workouts, that they could pick up and build off of each other. If someone wasn’t having a better day and faded, and another teammate comes up to them and catches them, they can work together and finish together,” said Porter.

The team also had lots of racing experience, with the varsity having six returning runners out of the seven spots. The spot was filled part of the season by freshman Grant Brawley

and then by junior Joe Calahan, who stayed in the spot the remainder of the season.

Besides runners battling through injuries and getting through the nitty gritty goals of each day, week, and meet, when it came to the race itself, the squad’s experience kept them reserved, not panicking in the big race situations.

“It was more about how we approached big meets,” said Porter. “We saw that with the Forest Park meet which was obviously a big meet. We traveled to Palatine and getting fourth was only the second time in school history we’ve been in the top five of that meet. They were in bigger pressure situations and responded with the result

that was pretty indicative of their fitness level. They didn’t panic when things went on in races like that,” said Porter.

And sure enough, they didn’t panic at the state meet, despite running a not particularly satisfying sectional race.

The second place finish has returned the program to what it had become known as over the past few decades, a dominant force in Missouri cross country. It highlighted the sacrifice it required of the runners to achieve this goal.

“In running, you just kind of have to know that when you’re sick, when you’re beat up, you have to know that there’s bound to be another runner in that race who’s feeling the same way and you just have to

race as if you’re fine because you practice every day running the same aerobic pace that you’ve run all season. ... And if you can practice every day with that you should know that you have the strength to go race with the same thing,” said Hetlage.

Now there is a new year ahead, and it is up to the next class of runners to uphold the tradition of excellence set by decades of past runners. Fortunately, SLUH has lots of depth this year, and for the year going forward. The JV squad won the majority of its meets, achieving what the “Be the best JV team in the state.” And despite the varsity team losing three seniors in Staley, Hetlage, and Milnor, the will be determined to take on the new season.

## No Shave November Champion

The editors of the *Prep News*, after rigorous debate, have chosen a *Prep News* No Shave November champion. Friendships were lost, hands were thrown, and a coup was threatened. But in the end, an unpeaceful and debated conclusion was reached. The *Prep News* is grateful to our three contestants and their beautiful handsome facial hair. We have chosen Max Wilson to be our champion. Congratulations Max!

### Max Wilson '19



Mr. Bradley Mueller



Nick Storer '21



## Calendar

### Friday, November Regular Schedule

Adopt-A-Family  
AP Junior Class Mass  
Snack—Chicken Rings  
LUNCH Special—Country Fried Steak  
Vegetarian—Fish Casserole

### Saturday, December 1

Adopt-A-Family  
Loyola Christmas Party  
C Basketball @ Webster Groves Tournament  
JV/V Racquetball Winter Rollout Tournament  
JV/V Patriot Classic Wrestling

### Sunday, December 2

Adopt-A-Family  
9:30AM Alumni Board Mass & Lunch  
12:00PM KEEN

### Monday, December 3 Regular Schedule

Adopt-A-Family  
AP NIE Meeting  
Jazz Rehearsal  
Snack—Mini Corn Dogs  
LUNCH Special—Chick-Fil-A  
Vegetarian—Fish  
B Basketball @ Northwest Tournament

### Tuesday, December Regular Schedule

Adopt-A-Family  
Advent Confessions  
Giving SLUHSDay  
AP Freshman Class Elections  
Senior Graduation Orders  
Snack—Mini Tacos  
LUNCH Special—Chinese  
Vegetarian—Penne Pasta  
7:00PM Jazz Concert

### Wednesday, December 5 Late Start Schedule

Adopt-A-Family  
Advent Confessions  
LUNCH Special—Spicy Chicken Breast  
Vegetarian—Black Bean Breast  
3:15PM Choir Dress Rehearsal  
4:00PM V 1 Racquetball vs Chaminade  
5:00PM C/JV/V Wrestling @ Hillsboro

### Thursday, December 6 Regular Schedule

Adopt-A-Family  
Advent Confessions  
AP Fine Arts Survey Recital  
Snack—Pizza Stick  
LUNCH Special—Papa John’s  
Vegetarian—Grilled Cheese  
3:30PM JV1-1 Racquetball vs Vianney  
JV2-1 racquetball vs Vianney  
4:15PM Blue C Basketball vs Hazelwood Central  
6:30PM Awake My Soul

### Friday, December 7 Regular Schedule

Adopt-A-Family  
Advent Confessions  
F/C 1st Friday Mass  
AP Freshman Class Mass  
LUNCH Special—Chicken Rings  
Vegetarian—Garden Burger  
3:30PM JV2-2 Racquetball vs Lindbergh  
JV1-2 Racquetball vs Lindbergh  
V 2 Racquetball vs Lindbergh

calendar | Ben Klevorn

## Prep News

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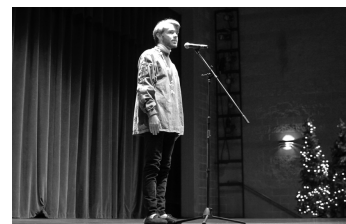
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## Poetry Out Loud



Junior Fitz Cain. photo | Miguel Cadiz

1st Place: Fitz Cain

2nd Place: Michael Drabelle

3rd Place: Andrew Normington