

SPO RTS

Despite unexpected state finish, XC proud of podium position

BY: MITCHELL BOOHER AND PETER LABARGE STAFF

The XC Bills lined up for one final race at the Gans Creek Course in Columbia, Mo. last Saturday for their state meet with hopes of a State title. However, despite a strong performance, a late surge by Kansas City-based Raymore-Peculiar (Ray-Pec) and an inability to close left the Jr. Bills stunned. Ray-Pec, although down with a kilometer to go, flew past SLUH to win the race, leaving SLUH just short of the State title with a second place trophy.

"It wasn't an ideal day for everyone, but not every race is," said head coach Joe Porter. "I'm proud of our guys and how they battled all the way to the finish line."

As the team headed up to Columbia the day before to acclimate themselves with the course at Gans Creek, they felt confident in their training. Since the team's schedule of races included almost exclusively tough courses and terrible weather plaguing race days all season, the relatively flat course, projected 50 degree temperatures and clear skies for the 12:05 race time were promising signs of what was to come. Although there was pressure mounting and the atmosphere of tent-city was one of nervous energy for senior captains Noah Scott, Lucas Rackers, Joe Callahan, Adam Mittendorf, and Peter Dillon, junior Ryan Kramer, and sophomore Grant Brawley, nothing changed from any other lead up to a race.

"The whole team's philosophy heading into State was to race our best for each

other," said Rackers. "We really didn't try to make getting any particular place a talking point; rather doing this group of great people justice by running our best for each other."

After their usual warm-up routine, last minute strides, and the last team huddle at the starting line, the coaches left the seven to themselves to wait for the gun. Just minutes away from the fastest, most competitive, and most daunting race of the season, the men were not fazed: it was just a race.

"The mentality going in was run with each other and compete," said Callahan. "Before every postseason race, I would say, 'we don't need anything special, just whatever you can give us.'"

With those words and a strong team mentality, the starter raised his pistol and sent 173 racers off to fight for the glory of State.

The wide course quickly crowded as the runners tore down the 500-meter straightaway, and Rackers and Scott put themselves in perfect position, coming in within three tenths of a second of each other at the one kilometer mark. The other five runners were less than 10 seconds behind, but with the best runners in the state all in the same race, half a second can mean 15 positions.

After lead and chase packs dropped the jittery runners who flew off the line too hot, only to drop back quickly as the race settled in, Rackers and Scott found themselves right in the middle of the leaders. But while the pair ran at the front, the crowded chase packs made it hard for the

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Soccer bonds over team chemistry, content with improvement from last year

JIMMY STANLEY AND MICHAEL TROWER SPORTS EDITOR, STAFF

SLUH soccer finished their season in heartbreaking fashion against De Smet in the District Semifinals. Despite that loss early in the playoffs, SLUH had quite the turnaround from where they were last year, emerging as one of the premier high school teams in Missouri and a force to be reckoned with in the future.

The experienced team fought for and with each other, and the chemistry was astounding going into the season. With 11 returning varsity players, this was the second year for the guys to develop together.

"Going into the year, I could feel that we had a strong team not only on the soccer field but off," said senior captain Ethan Joly. "I think since most of the team were seniors, that helped, but even with the younger guys, everyone was very inclusive and we had a good time whenever we were all together."

This chemistry was noticed by head coach Bob O'Connell, who feels that the way the guys showed up to work and perform was infectious.

"It was neat to know everybody and some of the personalities that went with the team," said O'Connell. "All the players were very close and were friends off the field."

Although the Jr. Bills suffered a tough first round loss, they still managed a 16-7-1 record, a nine game win improvement from last year. In addition, they managed to rattle off 11 straight games without a loss, going 10-0-1 during that month-long stretch.

"The record speaks of progress," said O'Connell. "The things that records don't

show is what we're trying to do in building the culture of the team. We are moving in the direction we want to be at and it was a great year in many ways."

The committee of goalies, led by senior Peter Herrmann, held the opponents to 0.90 GAA (goals against average), a massive improvement from last year's 1.9 GAA. In addition to the impressive GAA, SLUH maintained a six-game shutout streak. Herrmann contributed to most of those games, which earned him a selection as the Post-Dispatch High School Athlete of the Week. Junior Johnny Barr also helped the charge and will take over the team next year with the three other senior goalies departing.

"I think the goalies along with the back line really improved last year and we found our groove not giving up any goals. I think the season went really well no matter how it ended," said Herrmann.

The Jr. Bills held an impressive 40-20 goal ratio and were 4-4 in the MCC. They also competed in one of the hardest districts in the state with De Smet, Chaminade, and Ritenour, with Chaminade and De Smet being top five teams in St. Louis.

SLUH had four seniors earn First Team All-MCC honors last week: Charles Neuwirth, Ethan Joly, John Marshall, and Peter Herrmann. Neuwirth led the team with nine goals and nine assists and was the clutch scorer when the team needed a goal. Joly secured a spot through his physical play and leadership, despite missing over a month with a broken jaw. Marshall anchored the defense and provided support for midfielders that didn't go unnoticed.

Second Team All-MCC included junior Tilahun Murphy, an impressive feat for a



Senior Charles Neuwirth versus De Smet.

photo | Jonel Olaf

junior in his second year.

"This year was an extremely fun season of soccer. My teammates and I have never been a part of something so well connected where everyone seemed to truly care for each other. That's going to be something I will miss about this team," said Murphy. "This love pushes every single one of us to become better. This is something that I hope to in my senior year continue. I don't want to lose this drive that we all had."

Murphy is already looking to next season to preserve the work ethic and chemistry.

"Questions keep floating in my head about if we will be a good enough team and who could possibly help us get better," said Murphy. "The only thing that we can actually do is improve ourselves individually. As long as every returner does their job before summer arrives, we will have a great year."

Like Murphy, O'Connell

is optimistic for what is in store next year.

"We have a core group of kids coming back," said O'Connell. "I'm excited to get back at it, starting with offseason weight stuff and our summer program. I'm confident in our program and where we stack up against others."

The team made many memories and grew as brothers throughout the season.

"So, this year as a team we went through a lot of things. A lot of ups and downs. We performed better than we did in the past, so it was awesome," said senior Adam Boll. "We grew as a team together and we bonded unlike any other team that I have been a part of."

"Regardless of how the season ended, I'm thankful to have been part of such as special team for my senior year," said senior Andy Mujezinovic.

Football hopeful after comeback season; players reflect on ups and downs of 2019

BY BLAKE OBERT SPORTS EDITOR

St. Louis U High's varsity football's comeback season did not end with the CBC upset the team has been dreaming of for more than a decade, but this year's season as a whole was a 180 degree turn from last year. The Jr. Bills went from winning only one game in 2018 to winning five in 2019 while playing one of the hardest schedules faced by any team in the St. Louis area. Despite their season being cut short in Districts, the team can't help but feel good about the end result. Their final record was 5-5 including the playoff game.

"I feel really good about the season," said senior linebacker Anthony Bohannon. "A lot of people doubted us, across the city and especially at the school,

but because of that we became closer as brothers, and that's everybody on the team, including the coaches. I know last year it was a lot more separated. They were there to play, but this year we were there to win which I think set us apart."

Though SLUH was outscored by their opponents this year 282-276, the differential this year was an astounding 199 points better than last year when they were outscored 308-103.

The offensive change in pace came in large part from the running back, quarterback, and receiver trio of Kellen Porter, Brendan Hannah, and Isaac Thompson. Porter recorded 18 total touchdowns and 949 all-purpose yards, Hannah recorded 8 total touchdowns and 1,731 all-purpose yards, and Thompson recorded 6 touchdowns and

752 all-purpose yards.

The defense also had a group of standouts in Bohannon, who finished seventh overall in the state in tackles with 165; senior defensive end Luke Schuermann, who recorded 84 tackles, 20 of which were for a loss of yards; and junior Kyle Dulick, who recorded 79 total tackles as a safety.

The Jr. Bills started their season with a statement game against Battle of Columbia, Mo., in which the team surprised any doubters with their raw talent. From there, the Jr. Bills showed they were not the same team from last year, notching wins against Vianney, Jefferson City, Vashon, and Trinity Catholic. The team credited this change in results to the work they put in during the offseason.

Of all their wins this sea-

son, the Jr. Bills felt especially good about their game against Trinity.

"I think the highlight of our season definitely had to be beating Trinity," said senior captain Joey Lansing. "It felt really good because no one had us winning that game. We felt like the underdogs, but we were able to come out on top."

"I think beating Trinity was our best win of the year," said senior Luke Schuermann. "That was a really good team win above anything else because that was the thing that set us apart from them. They didn't play like a team, they played like individuals, but we played that game fully as a unit."

The team's losses came as a result of challenging opponents

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art | Nick Koenig

Varsity Hockey defense strong in 2-0 victory over aggressive Oakville

JULIEN JENSEN
REPORTER

SLUH hockey stayed undefeated with a hard-fought 2-0 victory over Oakville this past Saturday, putting up 33 shots on goal. Senior Cole Jansky recorded his second shutout of the season.

Oakville opened the game seeking retribution from their loss to the Jr. Bills in Top Hat with aggressive early play.

At 14:40, they got off a few shots on goal, but none were accurate, with SLUH's defenders contesting all their shots.

With 12 minutes left, SLUH gained control of the puck after a few minutes of back and forth play. The Jr. Bills started their first real offensive push quickly after getting the puck, making quick and precise passes resulting in solid shots on goal. Oakville managed to stop them all.

At 10:15, Oakville managed to push the puck into SLUH's zone. Shortly after getting it into the Jr. Bills zone, the puck was sent careening back into Oakville's side of the ice, but managed to stop before requiring a stoppage of play. As the Oakville defender went to get the puck, sophomore Ryan Spinner dashed after the defender. Spinner laid the defender out once he got the puck, and the Jr. Bills pounced on the opportunity. Junior Mathew Warnecke wasn't far behind Spinner, allowing him to gain possession of the puck. He whipped a pass to fellow junior Joey Perotti, who was to the right of the goal. Perotti tapped the puck in off the pass to give SLUH a 1-0 lead with 9 minutes left.

"We were getting our shots on offense, and we knew eventually one was going to find the back of the net. All we had to do was stay aggressive and not allow them to relax, which worked in the end," said Spinner.

The next five minutes after the goal, the Jr. Bills pestered Oakville's defenses, not allowing them to get any passes out of their side of the ice. This allowed the Jr. Bills to ring off a seemingly never ending amount of shots on goal, yet they failed to extend the lead.

Oakville managed to

At 11:45, Oakville's right wing was able to deflect a pass and streak down the side into SLUH's zone. He dished it to other forward right in front of the net, but the pass was batted away by SLUH defenses. Following the close call, the Jr. Bills flipped the momentum with a faceoff in their zone at 10:46. Unfortunately,

consistent back and forth play by the two teams. With 6:15 left, junior Mathew Warnecke exploited a crease in the defense, setting himself up for an open shot. An Oakville defenseman was able to knock the puck off its course for the back of the net.

With 5:00 left, senior Trey Lyons got a shot up,

that our defense was going to have to be resilient by keeping them in front of us and contesting every shot. We didn't want to beat ourselves by giving them a way back into the game with an easy goal," said Hazelton.

Oakville started the third with consecutive shots on goal after solid passing in their opening offense

on any of them.

With 9:45 left, SLUH's dominance on offense was cut short by Oakville getting a power play. The defense held strong, not letting any open shots and managing two clears. With 6:45 left, an Oakville forward was wide open directly to the right of the goal. The puck made it through the defense to the forward, but he whiffed on the shot.

The Jr. Bills gained control of the puck after the whiff and started another prolonged offensive push. With 5:25 left in the third, Hazelton got the puck and skated around the back of the net and dished the puck to Spinner right in front of the net, but he couldn't convert the opportunity into a goal.

At 2:48, an Oakville player managed to steal the puck and race down the ice, with a SLUH defender not far behind. The Oakville player's shot was solidly contested by the SLUH defenseman and easily stopped by Jansky. Yet, at the end of the play, the Oakville player rammed the SLUH player into the boards. Both ended up receiving penalties.

In the waning minutes of the game, Oakville pulled their goalie for a final push to tie the game. Freshman Tyler Woodcock took advantage of the empty net, scoring off a clear with 1:31 left, the first of his varsity career to secure a 2-0 victory for the Jr. Bills.

Had 33 shots but didn't get to the dirty areas," said head coach Jack Behan about the 2-0 victory. "As a team we need to make that commitment to be active in front of their net."

The Jr. Bills hope to stay undefeated, when they face Marquette tomorrow night at the Affton Ice Rink. The puck drops at 8 p.m.



Senior T.J. Thomas versus Oakville.

photo | Jonel Olar

get their offense going with about four minutes left, but couldn't establish anything, as SLUH was able to clear the puck multiple times.

Oakville opened up the second period with solid offensive play. In the opening minute, Oakville's right winger had a shot directly to the right of Jansky, who stopped it. Afterwards the same Oakville player took another shot, raising the intensity for the rest of the game. That was followed by slow play for the next few minutes, with SLUH trying to push the puck out of their side of the ice, but was repeatedly sent back to try again.

ly, during the faceoff, senior Alex Beville got clipped in the back of the head while he was fighting for the puck, which forced him to exit the game indefinitely.

SLUH set up shop in Oakville's zone for the next four minutes, getting a flurry of shots off. Oakville cleared the puck every so often, but it just ended up back in their zone again. However, with 7:48 left in the second, an Oakville forward got a breakaway down the right side, but Jansky was able to make a diving save to keep Oakville scoreless.

The next couple minutes after the shot, there was

but missed. SLUH recovered the missed shot and started passing it around, looking for a shot opportunity. With 4:25 left, senior Jack Hazelton received the puck at the top of the zone and rocketed a shot at the goal. It hit a SLUH forward in front of the net, who then tried putting it in the goal, but the Oakville goalie was there to stop it. With 40 seconds left in the period, Oakville got a run at SLUH's goal, getting a solid shot off making Jansky have to stretch and snag the puck to close out the second.

"After the first goal, we kept the shots up, but just couldn't convert. We knew

sive push. The push ended with 14:15 left when two Oakville players got called for penalties for dirty hits.

SLUH took advantage of the 5-on-3 by quickly getting into Oakville's zone, circling the net like sharks. Hazelton took shot after shot at the top of the zone. On his last slap shot of the power play, the shot connected with the leg of an Oakville defenseman, breaking his leg.

Right as the double power play ended at 11:15, an Oakville player tripped a SLUH forward, giving the Jr. Bills another power play. SLUH got off a multitude of shots, but failed to connect

XC seniors proud of four year program growth; place second at State

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other five to move up as much as usual.

"The thing with about the State meet is that everyone who's there is solid so the front became crowded extremely quick," said Dillon. "It kind of felt like you were getting swallowed up by the massive packs. Everyone was so close that there just wasn't a lot of room to move."

One exception, however, was Callahan, who, having run at State, knew the blazing fast start was coming and came in with a race plan of his own.

"I knew the race was going to go out too fast," said Callahan. "I focused on not panicking from the start and trying to move up for the whole race."

During the second kilometer, Callahan moved up 29 places, and he kept climbing and shaving precious points off SLUH's team score. During the middle mile, SLUH's middle pack of Mittendorf, Kramer, and Brawley found each other, though Callahan kept pushing, and by the fourth kilometer had moved past Brawley, who was suffering from too hot of a start.

Up in the front, Rackers and Scott found themselves and a Marquette runner all alone, as the front pack had stretched into a string of one or two runners every few seconds.

In the last kilometer, the last one both seniors would wear the fleur de lis, the last time they would race as Jr. Billikens, Scott

and Rackers put it all on the line.

"I committed myself to running for my brothers," said Scott. "During the race, I repeated to myself that pain is temporary, and that it's better to burn out than fade away."

They neither burned out nor faded away, as they dropped the Marquette junior and made a mad dash to the finish line. Scott (fifth, 15:38) came from behind in the finishing stretch to beat out Rackers (sixth, 15:41), though they both finished First Team All-State with the second and third fastest 5Ks ever run by a SLUH athlete.

"I think it was quite a memorable way to end the season," said Rackers. "We went in wanting to stick to-

gether and came out of the race working together. It really shows the work we've put into this team attitude."

Behind Scott and Rackers, Callahan (44th, 16:19) completed his full race charge with two consecutive negative kilometer splits and a 16 second PR to finish third for SLUH. Kramer (60th, 16:26), ran an extremely consistent last three kilometers and finished as SLUH's four man only three places back from where he started. Mittendorf (64th, 16:27) battled to the finish to round out the Jr. Bill's score, with Brawley (75th, 16:33) and Dillon (99th, 16:44) both PRing behind him to end SLUH's racing for the season.

Even though the race as a whole was impressive,

the team did not have the close they had hoped for. In the end, the Jr. Billikens lost the State title to Ray-Pec by 15 points, whose entire team negatively split the last three kilometers.

"We were a little bit down, but we reminded ourselves that it isn't State title or bust, that one race doesn't define a season," said Scott. "Most importantly, we were reminded that the biggest thing is our brotherhood."

While they did not take the title in the end, this team fought through adversity, injuries, and self-doubt to cap off the year with some hardware. For the five seniors on the line, all but one came into a SLUH Cross Country program in 2016 that had just finished 11th

at the State meet the previous year, a 17 year low. They then had to endure two years in 10th place as the foundations for a rebirth of team culture were laid, and with this and last years' runner-up finishes, were able to see their dedication not only to hard work, but to every single runner in the program, to the coaches, and to each other finally pay off.

SLUH Cross Country has returned to its former glory, and these are the guys that helped do it.