

Soccer handles sudden start with grace against Mehlville, Saint Mary's

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The St. Louis U. High soccer team secured its first win of the season this past Saturday. Normally, a first win coming in early October would hardly seem cause for celebration. However, in a unique season defined by delays and setbacks, the team was excited to just be on the field.

"It meant a lot to be back on the field after many weeks of training and drilling," said junior defender Benjamin Ridgway. "Just to be where we are today is great."

Until a little over a week ago, players from SLUH soccer were unsure if they were going to have a season. Then, as news came that St. Louis City was lifting restrictions on high school sports, the varsity team made the quick transition from practicing to playing. On the last night of tryouts, 25 players were named to the varsity squad. Their celebration was short-lived, as they were forced to prepare for their first game against Mehlville, which was just two days away.

"It is weird not having a full week to prepare for each game, but I enjoy having a game every two to three days," said sophomore Lucas Hammond. "I think the lack of preparation affects our chemistry and communication on the field. However, most of the players have been to optional training dur-

ing the summer, so their touch and passing are good. Also, the practices in the summer gave us time to get to know each other."

Making the speedy transition from training for fitness, shifting to tryouts, and then preparing for gameplay caused the Jr. Bills to cram what would be a month of prep to just two days preceding their first game. "Having a delayed season definitely has had an impact on us," said senior Adam Wolfe. "We haven't been able to play or even scrimmage until recently."

Their first game of the season against the Mehlville Panthers was a matchup that the SLUH soccer team had won the previous year, 1-0. However, only three of the current 11 starters—midfielder Wolfe, winger Evan Yalavarthi, and defender Tilahun Murphy—were in the starting lineup a year ago.

Still shaking off expected early-season rust, SLUH struggled to string together many scoring chances in the first half, and did not identify the weakness of Mehlville's defense till halftime. SLUH and Mehlville struggled to maintain possessions in one another's opposing half with errant passes.

"In the first half, we quickly realized that the gap between the center backs was where we needed to attack," said junior winger Tyler Van Bree. "We

struggled moving it quickly to the middle of the field and finding the right runs in between the defense."

The first half of true competition of the 2020 season came to a close, and neither team had graced the scoreboard.

Starting the second half on the attack, the Jr. Bills maintained possession and relentlessly pressured Mehlville, something they had been unable to do in the first half.

In the 47th minute of the match, frustrations at the congested play style that had dominated the game showed, as a Mehlville defender shoved Wolfe, earning him a yellow card. Since the yellow card rewarded the Jr. Bills a free kick, the team took advantage of its opportunity and got down the field quickly. Seconds after the free kick, the ball arrived at the feet of right winger Michael Heinlein, who took off down the side of the field, entered the penalty area, and slipped the ball through a small gap between the Mehlville keeper and the near post 14 minutes into the second half.

"At halftime, we knew once we got the first goal we would follow," said Van Bree. "When Heinlein scored, that was the tipping point and we followed it up with two more quick goals."

Twelve minutes after Heinlein's goal, SLUH kept its foot on the gas, and took a 2-0 lead

with 26 minutes left in the second half. Freshman Grant Locker netted the second goal for SLUH, and his first on the varsity team.

After a Mehlville deflection out of bounds, senior defender Will Coovert rushed to throw the ball in. Tossing a long throw to just above the six-yard box, Coovert found senior forward Jack Rudder, who was shielding a defender from behind. Rudder, seeing an opportunity and an opening, flicked the ball over his head to the edge of the six-yard box where Locker, with his back turned to the opponent's goal, delicately chipped it over a defender and the keeper's head for a Jr. Billiken goal.

"It felt great scoring my first goal for SLUH and as a freshman playing on varsity there are obviously a lot of nerves that come with it," said Locker. "I think my goal helped our team by making us feel a little more relaxed, and going up 2-0 allowed us to calm down and take control of the game."

Three more minutes passed, and SLUH finally appeared to have reached the groove they had been unable to establish in the first half. Junior Stephen Saladin gained possession of the ball off a shot deflection at the top of the box. Saladin, with masterful footwork, weaved his way through two Mehlville defenders, and finished with a strike from his right foot to the far post.

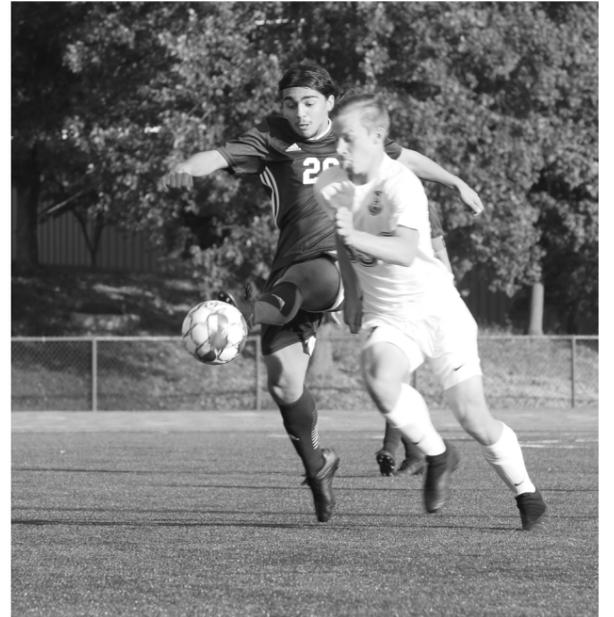


photo | Kathy Chott

Senior Casimir Magruder against Saint Mary's.

With around 23 minutes remaining in the game, SLUH's defense, led by Murphy and goalkeeper Johnny Barr, protected their lead, letting in a lone goal with a little over 22 minutes left.

The final score of the game was 3-1, and a major victory for a Jr. Bills team that had decided its final roster just two days before their first outing. "We came out with a lot of energy and controlled the ball most of the game," said Wolfe. "At times, excitement from being able to play got the better of us, causing a little sloppiness."

The team improved to 2-0 against Saint Mary's on Tuesday. SLUH defeated the Drag-

ons 3-0, led by two goals from Saladin and senior Jack Rudder.

Tonight, the team looks for its third win of the season, playing the Vianney Griffins at 7:30 p.m.

"These upcoming weeks mean a lot, mainly because we have fewer games this season," said Ridgway. "Every game we play in counts and we need to make the most of our limited opportunities."

XC program shows off depth at Chaminade and Parkway, wins four out of six races



Noah Aprill-Sokol leading the pack at Chaminade last Wednesday. photo | Coach Brian Gilmore

BY NOAH APRILL-SOKOL AND
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The SLUH cross country team demonstrated its incredible depth this past week, splitting the team in half between two races—Parkway West Invitational and the Chaminade Quad meet—and still managing to have dominant performances on all levels at each meet.

At the Parkway West Invitational, SLUH cross country secured victories on the varsity and junior varsity levels, topping a number of our strong area rivals, including Festus, Lafayette, and Kirkwood.

In the varsity race, the lead pack established a fast early

tempo, with some of the runners going sub 5:00 for the first mile. Senior Daniel Hogan (7th) was right behind the leaders and clocked 5:01 at the mile with juniors Grant Brawley (11th) and Baker Pashea (17th) running a couple seconds behind him. Each ran his fastest first mile this season during the race.

"With the top runners going out that fast, the race strung out quite a bit really early on," said Hogan. "I felt good and strong still, but with me being a little bit farther back from the top runners, I really had to charge through the next two miles in order to catch them."

All of the racers moved up in position throughout the race, and while the 1 to 5 gap

was still around 50 seconds, all of SLUH's varsity racers placed ahead of the next teams' scoring runners, giving SLUH the win.

"If you scored the first mile mark, we were fourth," said head coach Joe Porter. "But, we continued to move up throughout the race, and by the second mile, we had taken the lead. I was really proud of how they competed, and I thought that they ran really well."

In the JV race, SLUH's runners also struggled to get in position early on, with many of the racers shut out of the top 20 through the first 600 meters. Yet, by the second mile, SLUH had six of their racers in the top ten with junior Sean Kellogg (4th) making a move to win the race.

"After finishing the first mile I didn't feel very fatigued and I knew we were coming up on a very steep hill. I knew in the past hills have been a specialty for me and while I was already in the lead pack I remembered Porter telling us to take risks so I decided to surge up the steep hill and the gradual hill that followed it," said Kellogg. "While I ended up losing to him and placing fourth I'm glad I went for it and I hope to make more moves like that for the rest of the season."

The SLUH JV squad was able to keep its dominance in the top ten throughout the end of the race, with all five scorers ahead of the second place team's third racer. SLUH's 31 points were a solid 41 points ahead of the next team.

"Our pack just continued to move up throughout the race," said Porter. "All six of those guys earned a varsity letter on a really tough course. They put themselves in a really good position in the middle mile and continued to work to the end."

Even the freshman squad, who placed fourth as a team, ran well and would have probably won the race if not for racing in a JV race with a mix of juniors, sophomores, and freshmen. All of the freshmen in the race broke their personal records by at least 20 seconds. Freshman Charlie Murray ran sub-19 minutes for the first time and secured the individual championship, and freshmen Anthony Zangara, Nate Boyer, and Gabe Sullivan all broke the

20-minute barrier.

At the Chaminade meet on Wednesday, the SLUH cross country team showed that even its third and fourth set of guys could compete against De Smet, Chaminade, CBC top runners. SLUH took the team and individual victory in both of the JV races and third as a team in the varsity race.

In the varsity race, SLUH raced its third string of racers against the top varsity runners of De Smet and CBC. Although placing last as a team, the runners still competed strongly. Sophomore Steffan Mayer led the SLUH contingent and placed six with a time of 18:12 for 5K, earning himself a varsity letter. Trailing behind Mayer were Tyler Barks (10th), Wyatt Seal (11th), Aidan Byrne (13th), and Cody Cox (15th).

"I think that the race last Thursday went to show how strong of a team we are as a whole. Some of our fastest top guys were at a different race, and yet we went toe to toe with some of their best guys," said Byrne. "The fact that we were able to do so well in such a setting just proves how much of a force we are to be reckoned with once we get to some of the bigger meets."

"I was really happy with how the guys responded to the challenge," said Porter. "Steffan Mayer had an incredible race, sixth place in a varsity race, as one of our third seven, and he was only behind two CBC racers and three De Smet racers."

In the Junior/Senior race,

SLUH scored a low score of 23 points with seven of SLUH's racers in the top ten. Junior Alex Mittendorf led the SLUH charge and won the individual race with one shoe. In the last mile, running up Chaminade's notorious Devil's Hill, Mittendorf tripped and lost his shoe. Despite this, however, Mittendorf continued his pace and even sped up to break 19 minutes.

"When my shoe came off I knew I couldn't go back and get it because in a race every second counts so I just kept running. It turned out to be the right move and I'm glad I did it," said Mittendorf. "Next time I'll make sure to tie my shoes tighter."

In the Sophomore/Freshman race, SLUH almost matched the performance set in the Junior/Senior race, scoring 26 points. Sophomore Bredan Jones took first, followed by Lucas Rammachers, who finished his first race this season and placed third, four seconds back from De Smet's top runner.

"It was great to see the depth of our program," said Porter. "Bredan Jones is farther down on our depth chart, but he was still able to get the individual win. I think that is just a testament to how strong our program is."

Yesterday SLUH swept all level at its annual conference meet—this time with the full force of the program—against Vianney, De Smet, Chaminade, and CBC. See next week's issue for the full story.