

## XC splits up: JV places second in Clayton Invitational, Varsity dominates at Buder Park

BY JOE LABARGE AND SEAN KELLOGG REPORTERS

The SLUH XC team stretched itself across the city last Friday to compete in their penultimate meets of the season, showcasing all levels of the team. The seniors and a select group of other runners headed to the Big River Invitational at Buder Park while the rest of the team competed at the Clayton Invitational at Shaw Park.

At Shaw Park, SLUH ran their 11-17 in the varsity race and filled the JV race with all non-varsity seniors. Even with the top 10 runners at Buder Park, the team was able to show off its skills and come through with a second place team finish. Leading the way for the Jr. Bills were junior Carter Lowe (6th) and senior Francis Alford (7th), who both ran impressive races. Following close behind them were juniors Nolan Meara (13th), Tyler Barks (19th) and Lucas Rammacher (20th), who all helped contribute to an impressive 65 points, falling short only to Lutheran St. Charles, who ran their top 7.

Rounding out the varsity runners were senior Flynn O'Connell (30th) and sophomore Gabe Sullivan (36th). In total SLUH grabbed 6 medals in the varsity race.

Keeping with tradition, SLUH ran only seniors in the JV race at Clayton, but even with some of the usual JV scorers at Buder Park, SLUH took home the team title. Senior Alex Mittendorf ran an 18:31 to win his second ever race, becoming race champion. Tad Gray finished close behind him running 18:49 to secure second place, followed by Gavin Lawhorn (5th), Peter James (6th), and Tag Arens (14th), giving SLUH a winning score of 28 points. Jack Weremeyer (19th) and Joe Nesser (23rd) both finished strong as well, becoming the sixth and seventh man for SLUH. Eli Dernlan (39th) and Sam Quinlavin (90th) finished out the SLUH runners. Both James and Arens PR'd at the winding course, with Weremeyer also getting a season best.

"Tad and I talked before

the race and decided to run together and after running just behind the top guys for a while we made the move to the front and eventually both finished with very good races," said Mittendorf. "I think it was a great opportunity to show off just how good our team actually is when you take out a lot of the usual top guys and still have great success on both levels of the meet."

In total, SLUH brought home 13 out of 16 possible medals with both Tag Arens and Joe Nesser earning their first ever medals.

Just off of Highway 44, the rest of the Jr. Bills prepared for a historically very fast course at Buder Park. With the great conditions, six of the top seven varsity racers, along with a large number of JV racers, ran PRs. With the large number of PRs, SLUH increased the number of runners running under 18 minutes to 23, blowing the preseason goal of '18 under 18' out the water.

In the varsity race, SLUH narrowly defeated its competition, Rock Bridge, by three points with three runners in the top 10. Senior Sean Kellogg led the SLUH finishers with an impressive 30-second PR, running 15:51 and taking home the third place medal. Seniors Baker Pashea (5th place; 16:11) and Joe LaBarge (7th place; 16:14) each earned himself a medal. Seniors Justin Glass (16:26) and Grant Brawley (16:39) rounded out the scoring five and secured the win despite Brawley's persistent coughing during the race. Junior Tim Greiner (16:39) and sophomore Charlie Murray (16:57) also both ran impressive Varsity races earning themselves spots for the District meet this Saturday.

As the JV1 race was about to kick off, sophomore transfer Mason Scargall looked to make MHSAA pay for refusing to let him run in a varsity race. Unfortunately for Mason, another transfer from Hillsboro was also looking to coast home for the easy win. As the two fought for first place all race, the Hillsboro runner pulled away in the final 400 meters of the race, but not before bringing Scar-

gall to a strong second place finish and first sub-17:00 time of 16:50. Sophomore Charlie Gray (10th; 17:41) and junior Brendan Jones (11th; 17:42) also found themselves running impressive times. Freshman Gus Talleur (17:46) and sophomore Noah Evers (17:52) rounded out the scoring five to cement a second place finish to Webster, who only ran five in the Varsity race compared to SLUH's ten varsity racers. SLUH finished the race with all five scoring racers getting medals and PRs.

"Going into the race, I heard that it was historically fast. I knew that I could get a large PR and maybe even get myself a blue shirt (sub 17:45)," said Gray. "I really relied on my teammates and I knew that Brendan was going to set a good pace, so I shouldered him for most of the race until he got a gap on me in the last 1000 meters. Coming around the last turn I saw everyone screaming at me to kick it into high gear, and I ended up passing a bunch of guys and securing the blue shirt at the end. I felt like I had just won a crazy bet coming across that finish line."

In the JV-2 race, freshman Joe Stoeckel went out with the leaders of the race and managed to hang on to a fourth place finish, earning himself

his first sub-19:00 time and shaving 1:19 off of his previous PR. Juniors Spencer Johnson (7th; 19:00.5) and Conner Coolbaugh (8th; 19:00.7) became the Jr. Bills' second and third finishers in the race while sophomore Joel Miller (11th; 19:07) and freshman Alex Bendaña (12th; 19:09) rounded out the scoring five to earn a prized piece of candy instead of a medal. Juniors Lionel Moise and Nick "The Dawg" Purschke also ran impressive and gutsy races, finishing in the individual top 20. With all of these great times, SLUH placed second to Webster's JV2 and wrapped up a great day of fast times and PRs.

"Team spirit really showed this race, all the guys gave it their all and held their teammates accountable," Purschke said. "The varsity guys really inspired me to really go into that hurt locker and it ended up giving me a nice ambulance escort out of the meet, so overall it was a great day."

As the regular season wrapped up last night at the Finlay invitational, the varsity seven now look forward to a fast day at the District meet this Saturday. The top seven hope to carry their upward trajectory through into State next Friday where they will be pitted against rival teams from across Missouri.



JV runners lead the way at Clayton.

photo | Brian Gilmore

## After strong Senior Night win, soccer team reflects on incredible season

BY NATHAN RICH EDITOR

As the 2021 regular season enters the history books, players and fans alike can confidently say that it has been one of the greatest in the history of SLUH soccer. With a total of 21 wins, 89 goals and 14 shutouts, this year's Jr. Bill team boasts an incredible stat line. They now head into Districts confident they can make a deep run in the State Tournament.

The regular season ended last Friday in the Drury Plaza, where dozens of students showed up to watch SLUH's seniors take on MICDS in their final regular season match as Jr. Bills. This year's roster features 15 seniors, and all 15 of them earned playing time against MICDS.

Midway through the first half, it was senior captain Tyler Van Bree who opened the scoring with a volley into the net off a header assist from sophomore Grant Locker. Senior Stephen Saladin also notched a pair of goals against MICDS. His second came off a beautiful assist from junior Sam Tieber, who lobbed the ball over the heads of the defense for Saladin to corral and then finish in the back of the net. SLUH went on to win the game 3-0, finishing their season in typical fashion: a dominant shutout. The win also sealed SLUH's incredible regular season record at 21-1-1, an incredible win-loss ratio for a team that played all around spectacular this year.

"It's a special group. I love the culture of the group, to watch them play soccer is truly a privilege. If I could pick any team and play whatever style I wanted, it would look a lot like this," said head coach Bob O'Connell. "It's been so fun to be around."

The record may seem surprising for many, but senior captain Evan Yalavarthi and his teammates knew from the first few games that this team would defy expectations.

"At first we were a little worried about how the season would end up," Yalavarthi reflected. "We thought it could go a lot like last year where we started out good and then fell off. The first game against Marquette was kind of a statement game, though. We came out and scored two goals quickly and we saw our capability of being able to score quick and attack. That progressed throughout the season."

Indeed it did. This year, the Jr. Bills became synonymous with scoring. Eight of their 21 wins were by four goals or more. This year's scoring title unsurprisingly goes to Saladin, who seemed

to score in every game. He finished the season with 25 goals and had just seven games without a goal. Saladin's impact was significant, but O'Connell was hesitant to name him MVP, instead praising the whole organization behind him.

"I really think this group is better than any one person and it makes us so dynamic and different," he noted.

Saladin's sophomore counterpart, Grant Locker, also put on quite a show this season with 19 goals. Overall, Locker's presence demonstrates the immense role that underclassmen played on the team. Juniors Sam Tieber and Lucas Hammond created several opportunities through the middle of the field this season while sophomore defenders Christian Thro and Gabe Hafner helped anchor the defense.

Sophomore Chris Lewis, the starting goalie, is another example. A strong presence in net, Lewis's many saves late in the season allowed the Jr. Bill offense to truly shine. Lewis and fellow senior goalkeepers Brian Critchfield and Brendan Stein led a defensive unit that also defied expectations this year.

"Our defense we thought was going to struggle at first, but over time they have really developed into strong defensive backs and now they barely let anything in," noted Yalavarthi. "I loved how that developed, it really feels like we are at the culmination of our soccer abilities. We're proud of where we are."

The Jr. Bills aim to carry that pride with them to their first round district match against Hazelwood Central tomorrow. After their incredible regular season, it seems the Jr. Bills have a lot to prove. Yalavarthi feels up to the challenge, though.

"This is what I've been hoping for. After the past two years, losing in the first game of districts was really tough and now that it's my senior year, it's my last chance. It seems like I have all the guys around me to win the State Championship that we're hoping for," he said. "It's exciting and it feels like I'm getting reimbursed for the past two years."

"We've had success in the past, but there's something different about our team this year that gets us over the humps we've struggled to get over in the past," agreed Van Bree. "I can't put a finger on exactly what it is, but it takes everyone. Everyone plays their role and everyone has their part on this team."

## District Schedule

### Football

Oct. 29, 7:00 pm @ Lindbergh

VS

Lindbergh

### Swim and Dive

Nov. 2, MCC Prelims

@ Forest Park

Community College

### Soccer

Oct. 30, 10:00 am @ SLUH

VS

Hazlewood Central

### Cross Country

Oct. 30, 10:15 Districts

@ Hillsboro