

XC races to fourth at state with three all-state runners; trophy streak now sits at four years



Varsity runners celebrate with hardware after the state meet.

photo | Brian Gilmore

BY SEAN KELLOGG AND
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REPORTERS

The SLUH Jr. Billikens went up against the toughest teams in the state last Friday at the Gans Creek State course in Columbia, and the fastest times that the course has ever seen to bring home a fourth place trophy, adding to their four-year podium streak. Finishing just five points behind third place Liberty North, the Bills finished the season with a strong closing race to cap off a great year. By putting three racers in the top 25, each earning All-State designations, SLUH tied its record for most All-

State runners at a State meet, proving the immense competition Missouri running has produced this year.

On the morning of race day, the team arrived at the Gans Creek Course to prepare for the race, warming up around the course and keeping up with the races before their own. Despite a couple of muddy turns from the SEC Championships that had been held at the course a week before, the course was in good condition and ready to help the team produce some fast times.

"Watching the Class 4 race before us we knew that the times were going to be very fast," said head coach Joe Por-

ter. "The winner had run 15:15 and after him there were a total of 15 runners who were able to break the 16 minute mark."

As the varsity squad warmed up, a plethora of SLUH runners and classmates who had made the trip out to Columbia showed up at the course and helped to give some encouragement to their classmates as they prepared to go to the starting line, even singing the famed "Oh when the Bills" chant just prior to the starting gun.

As the race kicked off, the leaders flew from the very beginning. Even with the aggressive pace up front, the SLUH contingent didn't get discom-

bobulated and they steadily moved up. Through the first kilometer there were 14 athletes running a sub-15 minute pace. SLUH found themselves with 153 points and in third place after the first kilometer.

From then on, SLUH and three other teams had distinguished themselves as the four podium teams on the day—it was just a matter of in what order they would finish. For the next three kilometers, almost every SLUH runner was able to move up and by the time they reached the fourth kilometer they had lowered their score all the way down to 109, fourth place in the team scores. After fading a little bit in the last kilometer, SLUH ended with 116 points and a fourth place team finish.

Although SLUH did not win the race, the Jr. Bills achieved an average top five time of 16:00, which is faster than many previous state-winning teams. Leading the top five SLUH runners was Grant Brawley with an unexpected breakout race, placing 11th overall and setting a huge 33-second PR, running a time of 15:41, which was the third fastest time ever recorded in SLUH's program history. Senior Sean Kellogg followed with a very impressive 16th place finish and a time of 15:47, the fifth fastest SLUH time ever. Senior Baker Pashea was

the final All-State runner, placing 23rd with a time of 15:53, beating his old personal record by 18 seconds. Seniors Justin Glass (48th; 16:18) and Joe LaBarge (50th, 16:19) finished together, rounding out the scoring for the Jr. Bills. Tim Greiner ran a superb race, becoming the fastest six man in SLUH state history, running 16:19 (a 19-second PR) and placing 54th. Charlie Murray rounded out the day for the Jr. Bills with a time of 17:13 and placing 131st. This very impressive day led to SLUH scoring 116 points, an improvement from the previous two years at the state meet.

"We talked all week about focusing on the things we can control which is our own race and we did an excellent job of that by staying confident through the whole race and not letting other teams dictate how we run," said Porter. "In most years, three All State athletes and a 38-second one to five gap would put you right up top in state title contention, but it just so happened that three other teams had outstanding days, but that doesn't take away at all from what we were able to accomplish."

Even though they didn't come away with a state title there was still very much to celebrate. A 38-second one to five gap is the lowest of the whole season this year. Three

All-State athletes tied the record number SLUH has ever had in any one state meet and on top of that they all ran in the top 12 times ever recorded for SLUH. LaBarge and Greiner became the fastest fifth and sixth runners in the state, and the fastest ever fifth and sixth runners for SLUH at the state meet. Finally, a scoring average of 16:00 is the fastest ever recorded by a SLUH team in a five-kilometer race.

"It was a great race to watch and I was very excited to be able to go," said former SLUH varsity cross country racer Ryan Kramer. "It was rough to see such a talented team finish in fourth place because of the elite competition, but I think that the guys know they had a great day and are proud of themselves. Most years we would win with times and a score like that and I think that is what we need to remember at the end of the day."

After a strong state performance to wrap up the XC season for the Jr. Bills, a few of the top runners are looking to improve on their times this Sunday at the Nike Cross Regionals in Terre Haute, Ind. Although associated with the independent running club Flopack and not SLUH, the racers will be looking to finish off seasons with strong performances against some of the top competition in the region.

Soccer's season ends prematurely with crushing loss to Burroughs in District Final; team is upset by loss but pleased with accomplishments

BY NATHAN RICH
EDITOR

In 1386, the great English poet Geoffrey Chaucer first coined the phrase, "all good things must come to an end." These words have echoed timelessly throughout history, snuffing out bright sparks and ending historic runs. For SLUH soccer, the reverberations of this fatal phrase hit at the worst possible moment.

Last Saturday, in their District Final against John Burroughs, the Jr. Bills suffered their second loss of the season in their most critical game. From the start of the season, head coach Bob O'Connell knew he wanted the district title, more than any national rank or tournament win, more than any one individual player's success. Simply put, the loss was crushing. This year's team knew it had something special, and they had hoped to prove it with a state championship. Burroughs appeared to be a surmountable obstacle between SLUH and that state final.

"I felt the tone we wanted to hit (for the Burroughs game) was to just play, no need to be nervous. If we perform, we'll win. That was the tone and I think in terms of preparation, I felt really good going into the game," said O'Connell. "We absolutely respected (Burroughs), we knew them and we knew that they could beat us. Still, I was so confident we would go play well."

Early into the game on Sat-

urday, though, it became clear the game would not be easy. The match was an instant slugfest. Both teams came out of the gate playing tough, physical soccer. Burroughs' defense kept SLUH's forwards in check for the entire first half, with aggressive positioning and relentless ball chasing. Often, Jr. Bill forwards hit the turf after contact with John Burroughs' stout defense. As a result, the Jr. Bills had few real opportunities in front of the goal, even after a free kick from senior Stephen Saladin and back to back corners midway through the first half.

"John Burroughs came and expected to win," reflected O'Connell. "They played with the energy that was necessary. They had emotion and they came out fast and physical. They played as a team trying to prove something."

Nowhere was Burroughs' aggressiveness more clear than 10 minutes before the half when sophomore Grant Locker just barely entered the opponent's box only to be rattled to the ground by a defender. Locker and the team instantly called for a penalty kick inside the box (which would have been a guaranteed goal, given Saladin's record on the season), but the refs held firm, saying the foul occurred outside the box. As the resulting free kick sailed over the goal, SLUH players were left frustrated with the call, which could have been an instant source of momentum.

As SLUH's offense strug-

gled, the defense also had some uncharacteristic issues against Burroughs. For perhaps the first time all season, it was the opposing team that got the first chance on SLUH instead of the other way around. A Burroughs forward got a breakaway chance 10 minutes into the game, but it went wide.

Ultimately, after a first half that featured equal ball possession, the defense could not hold its ground in the second half. After a little over 10 minutes of play in the second half, Burroughs notched a goal against sophomore keeper Chris Lewis. The forward shot the ball across the net, past the reach of Lewis. Senior center back Ben Ridgway recognized the defensive errors, but also felt the game shouldn't have been decided by them.

"I don't know, we had some defensive positioning mistakes that led to their goal. But we had chances to score on a couple of unfair calls," said Ridgway. "We should have gotten a PK and there was one that may or may not have been in the goal."

Ridgway was referencing a close call later in the half that sent SLUH's bench and student section into a frenzy. Saladin, who was defended heavily the entire game, had rocketed a shot into the crossbar with 13 minutes left in the game. The ball deflected off the bar and bounced right on the goal line. From both the student section and the bench, the shot appeared to be a goal. The



Senior Johnnie Ferrara against Burroughs.

photo | Jack Figge

refs again stood their ground though, and said the goalie had stopped the ball before it fully crossed the line. Players were understandably frustrated.

"Truthfully I do think it went in, but I think it could have been called either way. The buildup (to Saladin's shot) was really good and I thought our momentum at the end of the game would lead to a goal no matter what. It just didn't go our way," said senior Jared Thornberry.

As the seconds ticked down, desperation grew for the Jr. Bills, who, except for the Chaminade game, lacked experience playing from behind. O'Connell subbed in extra forwards, but no one could capitalize.

"We just couldn't get the goal," O'Connell said simply.

When the buzzer sounded, an air of disbelief hit the field. "This was four years of hard work put into this moment and then we just lost," said senior JJ Neuwirth. "It was sad. Everybody stayed around for a while just to capture the moment."

"We were obviously sad and disappointed that it came to an end this way," agreed Ridgway. "We had such a good year and then one game decided our fate, we were done. It was an unjust ending to an unreal season."

After the game, O'Connell did his best to comfort the team, even though he too was upset. From the stands, it was difficult for students to watch the miraculous season come

crashing to an end the way it did.

"It's just really hard when you watch them, they were so upset. They gave us everything this season and there wasn't a whole lot to say. We just said we were proud of them," O'Connell said. "They did so much good stuff."

Even in the face of defeat, the Jr. Bills are doing their best to remember that. An unprecedented record, two tournament wins, some stunning last second goals, even a national ranking—this year's team gave a lot of hope to the SLUH community, something which both fans and players appreciate.

"I'm really proud of us," said Neuwirth. "We really had an outstanding season."