

Young talent shines in Paul Enke Invitational

Lucas Rammacher and Brendan Jones, reporters

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Although other fall sports teams have struggled on the field despite page-long articles and numerous STUCO emails written about them, the Saint Louis U. High Cross Country team once again showed off its elite talent and depth at the Paul Enke Invitational Meet at Sioux Passage. Even when holding out nine of the top runners on the team, the V2 squad was able to fight to a well-deserved victory over MCC rivals Chaminade and De Smet, scoring 30 points to De Smet's 106 and Chaminade's 186.



Freshmen Jaden Elgin sprints toward the finish line. Photo: Brian Gilmore

“That course is very difficult and just kind of another stepping stone for us trying to get fitter and fitter for the best races to be at the end of the year,” said head coach Joe Porter. “We know that times are going to be slow just because the terrain of the course kind of lets us and I think it's actually good. Everyone's wanting to get away from

focusing on times and thinking about times and just trying to go out and race and compete and we did an excellent job of that.”

In the end, this was the first win for the SLUH team at the Paul Enke Invitational since 1993. This effort was led by freshman Jaden Elgin, who captured his third race victory of his freshman season, running a time of 17:42 and setting another SLUH record, the fastest time run by a freshman, and the fastest time of all runners since Ben Ford’s legendary time of 18:06 in 2009.

Following Elgin were sophomore George Donahue (17:58; 4th), senior Lucas Rammacher (18:01; 7th), junior Charlie Gray (18:01; 8th), and sophomore Gavin Smith (18:11; 10th) to round out the scoring five.

The team’s success wasn’t limited to the varsity race alone, and in the JV heat, the team took its second victory of the day as seven SLUH runners placed in the top ten of the race, led by Noah Evers, who ran a time of 19:00 for second place. After Evers came sophomore Rick Jones (19:22; 3rd), junior Lucas Strohmeyer (19:35; 5th), sophomore Ethan Bognar (19:39; 6th), and senior captain Nick Purshke (19:55; 7th) to round out the scoring five.

“For the last two races, Noah Evers and I have led this elite JV squad not just in racing, but also in warmups and in cooldowns,” said junior Rick Jones. “Racing with Noah really shows me how deep and competitive our team is, and how strong our JV squad can be.”

This JV group had their second great showing in as many weeks as they worked together to navigate the extreme hills that have made Sioux Passage notorious, and showed off their great aptitude for pack racing as the chase pack led by Strohmeyer had only a 27-second gap to junior Matthew Musial, who finished in ninth place.

To secure the clean sweep at the meet, the freshman team had the task of beating a tough Kirkwood group, but met the challenge and won 54-65 without the help of top freshman Elgin.

The group was led by Nick Ahlheim, who ran a time of 20:40 to secure 6th place in the race. Following Ahlheim came Jake Fitzpartick (20:56; 9th), Tristan Kujawa (21:20; 13th), Hendrix Fyvie (21:23; 14th), and Sam Riggan (21:25; 15th), who fought through the last kilometer of the race to help his team win.

This freshman squad’s biggest accomplishment at the infamous course was the fact that their one to five gap (the amount of time between the first scorer and the last) was only 45 seconds. For reference, the second best one to five gap in their race was that of Francis Howell at 118 seconds. This statistic shows just how much this group worked together to push one another up the challenging terrain at Sioux Passage and points towards good things to come for this class.

Tomorrow, the top 16 will compete at the Palatine (Ill.) Invitational meet, which is traditionally an extremely competitive meet and will give the Jr. Bills another chance to show off the insane amount of talent they have against some of Illinois's best teams.

"We're still gaining experience with us being seven weeks away from the end of the season, so it's still time to just gain as much experience as we can that Palatine is going to have with some national top 25 teams there," said Porter. "You know, it's going to be great for us to go out and compete and just try to see where we fit in. And we know that we're running well and our workouts have told us we're ready to run well, so we're just going to have to learn about racing."