

Two meets wrap up the Cross Country regular season with a promising look into playoffs

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The St. Louis U. High cross country team traveled to two meets across the city last Friday to compete in their penultimate showings of the season. As the seniors headed to the Clayton Invitational at St. Vincent Park, the V1 team and rest of JV went to the Big River Invitational at Buder Park.

At St. Vincent Park, the seniors ran the whole meet by themselves as a final race to bond as a class. With some talented competition, the team took 13th overall, led by first time varsity racer senior Joel Miller. Miller took 24th individually with a PR time of 18:10. Also running varsity were seniors Cody Cox (19:27; 51st), Connor Coolbaugh (20:06; 72nd), Ryan Carpenter (20:46; 84th), and Nico Wilson (20:50; 86th).

Keeping with tradition, JV runners seniors Lionel Moise (19:43; 20th) and Nathan Abner (19:50; 23rd) earned medals with Hudson Funke (22:54; 117th) and Joe Abbate (23:00; 119th) following close behind. Although the team didn't score as a team—since there were only four racers—the seniors put up a great performance.

“There's a long-standing tradition of seniors who conclude their season at the Clayton Invitational,” said coach Mike Lally. “Probably the most important thing was not just their contributions to results, team scores, and times but seeing their incredible contributions and leadership they've provided to younger generations throughout the past four years.”

At the same time, the rest of the Jr. Bills prepared for a historically very fast course at Buder Park. Although the day had surprisingly dry weather, St. Louis U. High racers showed up and swept the meet, even getting 39 PR's on the day.

In the first race, the varsity runners went out fast as a pack and made moves together. Although senior captain Tim Griener was taken out mid race by a misstep turned sprained ankle, senior captain Nolan Meara still led the boys in an amazing fight, holding first the whole race but falling to second overall at the end with a time of 16:26. After that, a fast leg from junior Anthony Zangara made him the 2-man on the day in third place with a PR time of 16:35. Following “Z” were scorers junior Charlie Murray (16:45; fourth), senior Carter Lowe (17:07; 9th), and sophomore George Donahue (17:12; 11th).

The team took first place out of 13 teams with 29 points ahead of second place and got six medals in the process.

“We had a lot of guys that are now coming up to fill the spots in varsity that we needed,” said Meara. “Some guys didn't have the best race, but I genuinely think we'll be where we need to be going forward.”

The first of two race champion performances for the day came in the JV-1 race. By the halfway point, junior Charlie Gray had grabbed command and ran alone to a stunning victory in 17:10. The perfect score of 15 was completed by sophomore Gus Talleur (17:21; second), senior Brendan Jones (17:35; third), junior Noah Evers (17:42; fourth), senior Nicholas Purschke (17:55; fifth), and sophomore Logan Phillips (17:59; sixth).

Purschke ran under 18 minutes for the first time in his race, which was a notable performance. Another was freshman Nick Ahlheim, who is the second freshman this year to receive a varsity letter with a time of 18:05, good for 10th place. With a little bit of JV domination, the boys brought home eight medals and a big win.

In the JV-2 race, the runners faced tough competition against a strong pack of Ft. Zumwalt West who put themselves out in front in the first mile. The five scoring runners packed up to pass them in the second mile and moved into position for the perfect score with an insane 800-meter finishing kick. Freshmen Jake Fitzpatrick (18:27; first), Hendrix Fyvie (18:39; second), and Preston Eash (18:56; third) led the way, followed by junior Garrett Franks (18:59; fourth) and sophomore Andrew Moritz (19:01; fifth), who combined for the perfect score. The boys brought excitement through the finish with yet another perfect score and, although top 15 finishers received pumpkins instead of medals, the rest of the team swarmed them at the finish for an impressive performance.

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 tomorrow. 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 at Arnold Park.

“I think if we can stay together and pack up and stay together in the middle mile I think it’s gonna go really well,” said Meara.