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A legacy older than us: Cross Country takes MCC title for 21st year in a row

Otto Reitenbach and Tristan Kujawa, Core Staff, Staff Oct 25 2024

The St. Louis U. High Cross Country team continued its historic domination of the Metro Catholic Conference with its 21st straight MCC championship, as well as an overwhelming victory at the Hancock Invitational.



English



Team posing with the trophy | Otto Reitenbach

MCC

For the 21st straight year, the SLUH Jr. Bills are varsity champions of the MCC. In a display of utter dominance, the Bills took seven of the top eight varsity places, broken only by a strong race from De Smet senior runner William Poelker.

From the starting gun, the result was clear. The entire SLUH squad opened with a 5:10 first mile or faster, with the top pack of sophomore Jackson Miller, senior Alex Bendaña, and Poelker coming through at 5:06. The top trio continued to fly, as Poelker refused to drop off. After two miles, the lone SLUH competitor was mere seconds from the Jr. Bills leaders. However, despite his best efforts, the strength of Miller and Bendaña was too much, as they attacked the final mile to pull away. In the end, Miller became the individual champion of the MCC, flying with a time of 16:24. Bendaña was right behind, snagging second in 16:26. After losing to the top two, Poelker took third in 16:41, the lone spot of resistance amongst a sea of SLUH dominance.

“The race played out exactly as we had planned,” said head coach Joe Porter. “Poelker injected a little more pace than what I thought, which was good for our guys to put up a battle.”

Senior Gus Talleur (16:48) finished fourth, along with junior Nick Ahlheim (16:51) in fifth and sophomore Ben Yoffie (16:52) in sixth to round out the scoring for the Bills.

The top five SLUH runners and sophomore Michael Luna (17:02) earned All MCC 1st Team honors for their efforts, giving SLUH six of the top seven runners in the conference. Junior Hendrix Fyvie (17:31) followed as the top All MCC 2nd Team runner, with all SLUH runners earning medals on the day. Overall, the varsity squad dominated en route to SLUH's 30th MCC win in the 33-year history of the conference, another monumental achievement for the team.

"It was what we were hoping for," said Porter. "I think Jackson and Alex did a great job responding to those moves and the rest of our pack was close to him and that's what we were hoping for."

The JV MCC meet went no differently. The first 18 JV finishers were Jr. Bills, giving SLUH a complete sweep of the medals, as well as all All MCC JV 1st and 2nd teams containing SLUH runners. Junior Jake Fitzpatrick (17:17.1) held off a kicking senior George Donahue (17:17.4) by 0.3 seconds for the individual win.

"It was good to know the course so well," said Fitzpatrick. "My game plan from the beginning was to not look back and then I capitalized on those downhills. I was really excited to get the win and most happy that my teammates completed the JV sweep."

Sophomore Joe Talleur grabbed third in 17:48, and junior Preston Eash (17:58.2) and senior Patrick Jones (17:58.5) rounded out the Jr. Bills scoring five, finishing with a perfect team score of 15. Those five were joined by sophomores Nathan Khouri (18:06) and Edmund Reske (18:12) as the All MCC JV 1st team. With the Jr. Bills taking the next 11 places as well, the JV races was nothing short of cross country perfection.

"I was really happy with guys making moves and trying to be aggressive and how the race unfolded," said Porter.

Concluding the dominant day was the freshmen race. Freshman Warnicke Beatty took control of the race early and never looked back, winning in 18:23, an over 30-second lead on second place freshman Gibby Fyvie (18:56).

"I felt good," said Fyvie. "I knew Warnicke would take it out fast, so I just stuck to my own game plan and it worked out in the end."

Rounding out the scoring five were freshmen Owen Williams (18:59), Jonah Ebenhoh (19:04) and Phineas Gilbert (19:09). Much like the JV, this squad brought home a perfect score, winning the race easily and grabbing 11 of the 14 available medals.

Hancock

The Jr. Bills built off the momentum from MCC as they traveled back to Jefferson Barracks Park this past Saturday for the Hancock Invitational. High expectations were made for the Jr. Bills as last year they were champions both in the varsity and JV divisions.

In the varsity race, junior Jake Fitzpatrick took home his second win in a row winning with a time of 16:45. Following behind Fitzpatrick was sophomore Luke Hartweger (16:50, 2nd), senior George Donahue (17:04, 3rd), junior Preston Eash (17:14, 5th), and sophomore Joe Talleur (17:24, 7th) rounded out a strong scoring five. These Jr. Bills handily won the team race scoring 16 points, an almost perfect score.

“It is always nice to win a race like this,” said Porter. “Both Jake and Luke did great, and it was really nice to see Jake pull away with not only the win but a faster time than Conference.”

After the excitement of the varsity race, the JV squad was ready to show even more dominance. Junior Jaden Elgin led early and held on to his lead to win in 17:17, an impressive performance after coming back from injury only two weeks ago.

After Elgin, it was all SLUH runners with sophomore Edmund Reske (17:27), senior Gavin Smith (17:28), senior Patrick Jones (17:50), and junior Tristan Kujawa (17:57), making the scoring five. They also were the top 5 in the race as the JV won with a perfect score of 15. The Jr. Bills overall took home 14 of the 15 medals available, overwhelming the competition.

The program now ventures out to Buder Park for the fast and flat Big River Invitational, the final race before the postseason. A strong V2 squad will aim to close out the season strong, and the JV looks forward to once again displaying dominance.



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