

Letter to the Editors: Walking to School

May 16 2025

Athlete of the Week: Ivan Kennedy

May 16 2025

Man at the Masthead: Missey's humble service at Prep News spans quarter century

May 16 2025



Search

SPORTS

Cross Country can't keep their hands off the history books

Otto Reitenbach and Tristan Kujawa, Core Staff, Staff Sep 13 2024

The St. Louis U. High Cross Country team officially put the rest of the state on notice. The Jr. Bills opened their season with a strong underclassmen performance at the O'Fallon Futures Invitational followed by a varsity win in dominant fashion at the Granite City Invitational.



English



Photo | Jake Fitzpatrick



English

What could top a performance like that? Perhaps the fastest race in school history? Last Saturday, the SLUH varsity squad opened its season with an amazing performance, announcing themselves as one of the top teams in the state.

The Jr. Bills led early, with sophomore Jackson Miller leading senior Alex Bendaña and sophomore Michael Luna through the first mile in 4:45. Teamwork is often overlooked in what may seem like a highly individual sport, but the cooperation and group running of the SLUH pack has been a key part of the team's success.

The fast pace didn't let up, as Miller battled O'Fallon senior Zach Thoman for control of first, trailing by only 0.8 seconds for a final three mile time of 14:21. Bendaña wasn't far behind, finishing in blazing fast 14:31 for third place. Both of these times demolished the 14-year-old school record of 14:55 set by Tim Rackers in 2010.

Senior Gus Talleur took home 8th in 14:56, an incredible achievement not to be overshadowed by the team's high performances across the board. Sophomore Luke Hartweger (15:14.1) and Luna (15:14.8) rounded out the scoring five. Juniors Nick Alheim (15:20, 20th place) and Jaden Elgin (15:28, 22nd) completed an absolutely dominant performance by the Jr. Bills.

The average scoring time of 14:51 is the fastest in SLUH's history, setting the bar high for a season of success.

"We did a great job going out in that race," said Talleur. "Seeing that we had seven of the top ten spots was pretty inspiring to me. It gave me some great confidence later on to go after and chase Alex and Jackson. It was very awesome."

After the dominance of the varsity, SLUH freshmen and sophomores in the B/C race looked to do the same. sophomores Ben Yoffie and Joe Talleur were up front early running the first mile in a 5:08, with competition following closely at the time. At two miles, they were still right alongside each other, splitting a 5:21 mile, until Yoffie made the move to push the pace. Splitting a 5:04 last mile, Yoffie gapped the entire field in fashion to win in 15:32.

"I knew it was a fast course so I was really pushing for a good time in the last mile, even with no one around," said Yoffie. "When I saw my teammates cheering me on it also made me push more in the end."



Finishing strong is something that the Jr. Bills have been practicing throughout many of their workouts throughout the season and it was executed perfectly by Yoffie. Behind him was Talleur in 16:11 snagging 6th place for a top ten finish. Sophomore Nathan Khouri was not far behind in 16:22, an almost six minute improvement from his 22:05 time last year, an outstanding achievement proving further the grit and intensity that the team has put in in the offseason.

Finishing out the top 5 in the B/C race was sophomore Edmund Reske in 16:58 and freshman Gibby Fyvie in 17:02, cementing himself as one of the best in his class in the early season.

Despite the fast times, a scoring spread of 1:30 was just too much for the Jr. Bills to win, and they took second place behind a strong O'Fallon team.

"It shows we are starting from a very strong place," said assistant coach Charlie Hatch. "Although we cannot get caught up in these early results, they do show that our program on all levels can go up against some of the best teams in the St. Louis region and Illinois."

The penultimate race of the day was the open race, which SLUH has ruled almost every year at Granite City. Much like the B/C race, there was another SLUH duo leading the front with juniors Hendrix Fyvie and Jake Fitzpatrick coming through the first mile in 5:15, a slow starting mile for athletes of this caliber. As they hit the asphalt for mile 2, Hendrix Fyvie made his move, definitely dropping a sub-5 second mile with Fitzpatrick only 5 seconds behind. This move made the race play out in just the way Fyvie wanted it to, winning in 15:35. Fitzpatrick was close behind for second in 15:48.

Rounding out the top five were fellow juniors Tristan Kujawa (16:13) and Preston Eash (16:16) and senior Paddy Jones (16:47). All five scorers were in the top ten of this race, securing the team win.

"We have tons of potential this year from all levels of the team," said Hatch. "I think also though we have extremely strong competition in the state which will bring out the best of the program later on in the season."

As more open racers finished into the finish line, there were many high fives and "U's" being thrown up showcasing another dynamic aspect of the team: the brotherhood.

Granite City wasn't the only dominant performance from the Bills this week either. Last Wednesday, SLUH's freshman and sophomore runners trekk



across the Mississippi to O'Fallon, Illinois to take on early cross-state competition. The result: complete domination by the Jr. Bills. SLUH defeated the second place O'Fallon Panthers by a score of 35 to 57 in the freshman race.

"This was really a good test for the freshmen to kind of get that experience to race," said assistant coach Mike Lally. "I was really happy to see some of them find that balance on the course."

The sophomores followed up on the momentum by scoring an impressive low of 21 points.

Yoffie set a new meet record of 16:01 for the three mile race, the fourth straight year a new meet record has been set by a Jr. Bill.

"We expected this very impressive performance from the sophomores," said Lally. "I think Yoffie had a great finish and good starting point from guys like Edmund Reske. Most importantly of all though we saw huge leaps from guys like Nathan Khouri and Mark Schoemehl which is a testament to the hard work they have been putting in."

SLUH's depth was on full display, snagging 11 of the 20 available medals. This meet set the tone for underclassmen competition, and prepared the team for a successful season to come.

The dominance looks to continue this Saturday as the program hosts the annual Forest Park Cross Country Festival. The meet brings in over 4,000 athletes and more than 10,000 spectators from more than 5 states providing a perfect time for the program to test its true depth. The Varsity squad races at 8:40 a.m., where Miller and Bendana hope to continue their successful trend by adding their names to the forefront of SLUH cross country records.