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Twilight zone: XC shines in national competition; struggles locally

Otto Reitenbach and Tristan Kujawa, Core Staff, Staff Oct 11 2024

With the top ten runners of the St. Louis U. High Cross Country program competing in a Nike Twilight race, a majority of Jr. Billiken runners competed in the local Parkway West Dale Shepard Invitational last Saturday. Although the Jr. Bills saw mixed results without having their varsity team at the local level, the ten that traveled to Indiana placed sixth among national competition.

English



SLUH at the starting line. Photo I Courtesy of SLUH XC

Parkway West Dale Shepard Invitational:

A majority of St. Louis U. High Cross Country Program traveled west to compete in the Parkway West Dale Shepard Invitational last Saturday. With the top ten racing at Nike Twilight later in the day, this meet gave the opportunity for more athletes to step up.

In the varsity race, high expectations were held as the Jr. Bills came in as the reigning meet champions. Sophomore Nathan Khouri stepped up, finishing first for the Jr. Bills in 17:41, good for 15th place. Behind Khouri was freshman Warnicke Beatty (17:42; 16th place) and junior Preston Eash (17:46; 17th). Rounding out the top 5 was sophomore Edmund Reske (18:08) and senior Ethan Bognar (18:18). Overall, the Jr. Bills placed fourth as a team, not the result they were hoping for.

“It's definitely an opportunity to show off the depth of our program, but we felt like we could have performed higher,” said head coach Joe Porter.

The sophomore race followed, giving the class a unique opportunity to challenge themselves against their classmates. With seven SLUH sophomores competing in other races, new athletes were asked to step up to fill in the gaps. Sophomore J.P. Wildermuth ran an ambitious race, going out hard early and finishing as the top

English

Jr. Bill in 19:10, good for 10th place. His teammate, sophomore Alex Pollaci took 15th with a time of 19:30, followed behind by sophomore Cullen Wenger (19:49) in 18th. This trio of talented runners took the most of their opportunity. Despite missing key teammates, they aggressively pushed the pace and showed tremendous grit.

Sophomore Mark Schoemehl (20:13; 25th) and classmate Lex Wellen (20:22; 28th) rounded out the scoring five. Wildermuth, Pollaci, Wenger, and Schoemehl all earned medals, and the team as a whole placed third behind impressive young showings from Kirkwood and Webster.

“We had some guys that really stepped up,” said Porter. “J.P. Wildermuth being top 10 was great. I really liked Lex Wellen's race. I thought he ran well and made sure that he became part of our scoring five. It was really good to see.”

The freshmen took the course next, looking to claim victory for the Jr. Bills. They did just that. A top pack formed early, and strong team running carried the freshman trio of Owen Williams, Jonah Ebenhoh, and Phineas Gilbert to blazing quick times. Williams grabbed 4th place in 19:02, with Ebenhoh (19:06) right behind for 5th, and Gilbert (19:07) immediately following for 6th. The dominance of this top group was clear, and their teamwork proved to be an example for their classmates.

Another trio of freshmen made the top ten as Ryan Sextro (19:47), Miles Janosky (19:51), and Liam Farroll (19:55) placed 8th through 10th. Taking six of the top ten places was more than enough to secure a clear SLUH victory in the race, and medal winning performances from Henry Riggan, Matthew LeGrand, Clarence Nowak, Gibby Fyvie, Ryan Kindschuh, Joseph Krussel, Liam Collins, and William Schulte only iced the cake for the Bills.

“Having a separate race is a great mental thing for the freshman, especially as we get ready for MCCs,” said Porter. “And having a freshman race that they're performing great in bodes well for our program’s future.”

Finally, the JV race arrived to close out the day. With temperatures rising, the remaining racers fought through the conditions to achieve impressive results. Senior Gavin Smith took off early and held on for a silver medal and a time of 18:09. Senior Patrick Jones (18:40) followed suit and grabbed 5th, followed by junior Brady Vogt (18:43) in 6th. Junior Aidan Smith (18:53; 10th) and senior Jesse Heater (19:02; 12th) finished out the top five for SLUH.

English

Despite missing many runners to other races, the JV squad took second place overall, losing by only five points to a full Kirwood team.

There was a lot to take away from the Parkway West Invitational. Outstanding individual performances give the Jr. Bills examples of the team SLUH cross country hopes to be, and the stage is set for tremendous growth going forward.

Nike Twilight:

After the mixed morning of the Parkway West Invitational, a group of 10 athletes traveled east to LaVern Gibson Championship XC Course, in Terre Haute, Indiana. The meet was a great opportunity for the Jr. Bills to test themselves up against the best in the Midwest region and a team from California. At 9 p.m. eastern time, the night sky was lit up by a red flare to start the Race of Champions.

“It’s one of the top meets in the country in terms of depth,” said Porter. “It’s the chaos of an outstanding field. There's 40 teams in there that made the Race of Champions, and 4500 runners total throughout the day, and it was all about how well we could compete.”

A dark downhill first kilometer fueled the chaos of the race. Junior Jake Fitzpatrick took a fall at 800 meters that led to over 15 other athletes trampling over him. Despite being pushed back towards the back of the race, Fitzpatrick displayed his mental resilience, catching up to his teammates at the first mile.

“Getting knocked down certainly wasn’t easy,” said Fitzpatrick. “I was proud of how I was able to get up and catch up my teammates and I’m most proud of how my teammates responded to all this chaos.”

The leaders of the field set a blistering pace for the duo of senior Alex Bendaña and sophomore Jackson Miller to come through the first mile in 4:41, but they were only in 22nd and 23rd, displaying the unworldly depth of the field. Senior Gus Talleur was farther back in 91st place, leading a pack of four other Jr. Bills to come through in around 4:53. The mass of runners in between the duo and Talleur highlights the importance of every place in championship style racing.

In the end, Miller pulled away from Bendaña, running 15:34 for 31st place. Bendaña was next to come in for the Jr. Bills, finishing in 15:41 for 35th. These times are Nos. 2 and 3 all time for any SLUH XC athlete at LaVern Gibso

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Talleur put up a stellar performance, overtaking 35 places from the first mile to finish in 56th place in 15:53. However, it was a long 27 seconds before the next Jr. Bill came into the now-crowded finish line. Sophomore Ben Yoffie outkicked junior Hendrix Fyvie for 117th place, and Fyvie was 119th. Both ran 16:20 and rounded out the scoring five for the Jr. Bills.

In the midst of the chaos, the Jr. Bills' team placement remained consistent throughout the race as they finished sixth out of 45 teams with a score of 307, besting state rival Rock Bridge, who finished in ninth place.

"I think the guys would say we ran well," said Porter, "but that we have a little bit more to go. We beat some really good programs from Tennessee and California. You know we were still the top Missouri team, which is, which is definitely where we want to be getting ready for, the next bulk of training"

Last night, the Jr. Bills finished __ at the MCC Championships, hopefully capturing their 21st straight MCC title. Read more about how the program completed the historic feat in next week's article.

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