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XC travels to Chicago, does well in Palentine Meet of Champions

Tristan Kujawa, Charlie Gray. reporters Sep 29 2023

The top 15 runners traveled to Palatine, Illinois last Friday for the Palatine Meet of Champions, a very competitive meet with many high caliber programs. The Jr. Bills have been traveling to Palatine since 2010, and it serves as a good gauge to see where the team is at. After getting ninth place last year, the team was eager to place higher.

In the Varsity division, the Jr. Bills ran very well, taking sixth place and earning the second lowest point total ever. With four of the top ranked teams in Illinois and other competitive programs, it was going to be a fast day for sure. The course features a very narrow starting line, with a quick bottleneck 100 meters in.

The race started out fast, with senior Charlie Murray leading the way, finishing in 20th, the first Varsity medalist since 2018 and at 15:20.19, the fifth fastest finish SLUH has ever had at Palatine..

“I had a goal of getting out quick before most of the pack, all to get a better position,” said Murray. “What led to team success was staying calm and f



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each other.”

After Murray, freshman Jackson Miller finished 31st, running a 15:37.29, the fastest time ever run by a freshman at Palatine from SLUH.

After Miller was junior Gus Talleur (15:41.49) then junior Alex Bendaña (15:47.24) all placing in the top forty. In perspective, SLUH’s number one finisher last year earned 44th.

Following Bendaña was junior George Donahue (15:59.61), senior Noah Evers (16:08.41), and senior Anthony Zangara (16:30.83).

With a scoring spread of only 39 seconds and an average time of 15:41 the Varsity team had a great day, scoring 176 points to earn sixth place.

“You know we're in a nice spot so we're excited about where we're headed,” said Head Coach Joe Porter. “We've been coming here since 2010, so we are very excited about possibilities of what can happen as we move forward.”

Following the Varsity race was the JV race. The JV features around 400 athletes, and a crazy amount of chaos. Coming off of a team win in JV in the prior year, there were high expectations for the boys. Senior Charlie Gray started strong, taking the lead around the 1200-meter mark and holding it up until the very last 400 meters where he came in third at 16:19.21.

Following Gray was senior Mason Scargall (16:21.61), who unleashed a killer last mile to pass 12 people, sophomore Hendrix Fyvie (16:30.85), sophomore Tristan Kujawa (16:38.76), sophomore Jake Fitzpatrick (16:39.03), freshman Joe Talluer (16:51.77), and finally freshman Michael Luna (16:55.04).

“It’s good to have a lot of sophomores and freshmen get great experience and a big race like this,” said Coach Jeff Feorg. “We have the opportunity to continue to improve throughout the season.”

The JV team finished second, losing by only 20 points, and scoring 43. With an average time of 16:26, this was one of the best JV performances of all time.

“It's exciting to come away with a second place overall,” said Feorg, “with such a great field and a lot of great teams. They're excited about the future.”

While there was out of state success at Palatine Meet of Champions, the rest of the program was competing in state last weekend at Fox’s Ed White Invitational at Arnold City Park.

The first race of the morning was the Varsity race, where the V3 lineup was now racing. This was a test to the depth of the program but ultimately the Jr. Bills proved to be victorious over a battle with Seckman High School, with senior Lucas Strohmeyer (17:32) leading the way, sophomore Preston Eash (17:41), junior Patrick Jones (17:43), freshman Luke Hartweger (17:45), senior Matthew Musial (17:52), and finally junior Ethan Bognar (18:02).

“I felt really good”, said Hartweger. “Being able to contribute to my team and helping us win was great”

“To have the next group come back and win a Varsity race really showed the depth of the program,” said Porter. “Two runners who really stood out in that race were Luke Hartweger and Ethan Bognar, I give kudos to both of them.”

In the JV A race, the Jr. Bills took a runner up loss to Webster Groves. Aidan Smith was the standout in this race, running 18:45 for third place, behind him was junior Rowan Lemp (18:49), senior Landon Beiseman (18:54), junior Logan Phillips (19:00), and junior Joseph Stoeckel (19:13) to round out the scoring five.

In the JV B race, the Jr. Bills once again took runner up loss to Webster Groves. Sophomore Martin Miller ran the best race of his career finishing as the #1 scorer for SLUH and running a swift 19:45. Junior Will Martin (20:12), junior Ian Kuehner (20:23), sophomore Titus Zeigler (20:40) and junior Adrian Samaniego (20:41) all scored for SLUH.

The last race of the day was once again, the freshmen race. SLUH took a defiant team victory in this with Edmund Reske getting the race win in a time of 19:08. Right behind him was Ben Yoffie (19:10), Cullen Wenger (19:39), John Pierre (20:05), and Lex Wellen (20:13).

SLUH XC here showed a two team runner up finishes and two team victories, once again showcasing depth within the program.

The program will be reunited this weekend at the Parkway West Dale Shepherd Invitational, a course known for its short hills and sharp corners. The Varsity will be held out of this meet, putting the pressure on the V2 squad as they plan to prevail in the Varsity race.



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