

Letter to the Editors: Walking to School

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Cross country starts season with a bang at Granite City and O'Fallon

Charlie Gray and Tristan Kujawa, reporters Sep 8 2023

Since 2014, the freshman and sophomores of SLUH cross country have started their season at the O'Fallon Futures Invitational, a three mile race in O'Fallon, Ill. For the freshman, this meet is a great introduction to the sport of cross country, as the course consists of rigorous hills, speedy flat fields, and shaded woods. Although the course this year had high grass, that did not stop the runners of the SLUH cross country program from running their absolute best times.



English



Runners Charlie Murry (left), Jackson Miller (middle), and Mason Scargall (right) lead on the straightaway.

Photo | Courtesy of Joe Stoeckel

The freshman race kicked off the meet.

With the sophomores singing “Oh when the Bills,” led by sophomore Martin Miller, the gun was fired and the race was off. Freshman stars Edmund Reske and Michael Luna made their way up to the top of the pack, pushing an extremely fast pace that led to a 5:30 first mile.

“It was a lot of fun”, said Reske. “It went very well.”

It sure did go well for Reske, who won the race with a blazing fast time of 17:20. Behind him was Luna (17:26), Luke Hartweger (17:28), Ben Yoffie (18:32), and J.P Wildermuth (19:26) rounding out the five scorers. John Pierre (19:29) and William Thies (19:51) were the sixth and seventh runners. This strong pack of seven led the freshman team to its first win of the season with a team score of 33; the team had three medalists.

The sophomore race finished off the day. SLUH quickly took charge within the first mile, as four were in the top five. On the second mile through a corn field, Jaden Elgin created a gap on the field.

“Life in the corn is pretty great,” said Elgin. “When you're running through that corn it feels like you're going a couple hundred miles an hour.”

Elgin went on to win the race for the second straight year in a course record setting time of 16:08, (he now owns both the freshman and sophomore course record). Following close behind were Jake Fitzpatrick (16:24), Hendrix Fyvie (16:31), and Tristan Kujawa (16:46), as SLUH took the top four spots of the race.

Behind them was Nick Ahlheim (17:08), Preston Each (17:25), and Brayden Bussmann (18:56) rounding out the top seven. This was a good day for the sophomores on the team side as well, easily winning with six medalists.

“We had some really good performances all the way from top to bottom” said Coach Jeff Foerg. “We also saw a really big jump from a lot of our sophomores compared to last season. It's a great first step.”

Overall the meet proved to be a success, as now all of the SLUH cross country program has had a true taste of what the sport is.

“I loved it,” said freshman Jack Siegel. “It was fun to leave school early. You have a good time cheering for your teammates.”

As the freshmen and sophomores put in more miles this season, their times are expected to only get better from here, which will showcase the team’s immense depth.

Granite

The team witnessed a record breaking day throughout the whole program last Saturday. The past two years, this race has been overshadowed by torrential downpours just hours before the race was supposed to start. However, this year featured clear skies with race time temperatures of 73 degrees for varsity, 79 for B/C, and 83 degrees for the Open race. With the combination of low humidity and cool temperatures, all factors were set up for a great race with great performances.

The varsity race started at 9:10, and featured a very talented field. Teams like O'Fallon Township, ranked No. 9 in the state of illinois at the time, and Marion, who ran Dylon Nally, a nationally ranked runner, squared off against the Jr. Bills. The SLUH varsity team consisted of seniors Charlie Murray, Anthony Za



and Mason Scargall, juniors George Donahue, Alex Bendana, and Gus Talluer, and freshman Jackson Miller.

Before each race starts, each team is designated a starting box, which assigns a position for each team to start from on the line. The varsity team was given box No. 2 which was squeezed in on the left side of the course, and featured a tight bottleneck right away.

At the beginning of the race, the pack was instantly shot out of the back, and held a tight position around 30th place.

“It was difficult to get out fast,” said Bendana. “Because of how quickly the course narrowed, it forced most of the team into the back of the pack.”

Understanding that it was a long race, none of the boys panicked, and picked off places during the first mile. Leading the way through the opening mile were Donahue and Scargall, with the four other runners just two seconds behind.

After a brisk first mile, the team knew they had to keep their foot on the gas and not let up, they did just that. With all six runners coming through the two-mile mark within 11 seconds of each other, they knew they had put themselves in a good position to place well.

After Donahue had led the way for the SLUH varsity squad for 4600 meters, freshman Jackson Miller unleashed a killer kick to gain ten spots in the last 60 seconds of the race. Miller, running in his first ever SLUH cross country race, finished as the team’s number one runner on the day, and fourth overall. Miller split a blistering 15:06.5 for the three mile race, which converts to a 15:40.6 5K and number five all-time in school history.

Following closely behind Miller, Donahue ran 15:11.1 (15:45.3 5K), good for SLUH’s second finisher on the day. After Donahue, Murray ran a 15:13.4 (15:47.8 5K), another solid performance. Following Murray, Scargall finished in 15:22.7 (15:57.4 5K), yet again, another sub 16:00 5K time. Rounding out the scoring five, Bendana finished in 15:33.8 (16:08.9 5k), one of the fastest times by a five-man in school history.

Finishing No. 6 on the team was junior Gus Talluer, who ran 15:34.1 (16:09.1 5K), yet again another crazy fast time for the sixth man. This rounds out the finishing times for the varsity contingent. For the scoring five, they averaged 15:51.9 for the 5K conversion. This average is the program’s fastest Nos. 1 through 5 time.

The Jr. Bills finished just three points behind O'Fallon, who is a very solid team in Illinois. Overall, the varsity team showed up to run fast, and they did just that.

The B/C race featured a team of only freshman and sophomores. With a quick field and nice weather, the boys ran extremely impressive races. Leading the charge was sophomore Jake Fitzpatrick, who ran a 16:22.9, a very fast time for a sophomore. Behind Fitzpatrick was sophomore Tristan Kujawa who finished in 16:31.6, another very respectable time. Rounding out the next seven were sophomores Preston Eash and Jaden Elgin, freshman Joe Talleur, who ran 17:04.3, good for a varsity letter and the elite navy shirt. The No. 7 finisher for the B/C race was freshman Michael Luna, who also earned a varsity letter.

Just like in varsity, the Open race also showed immense depth and talent. After getting out hot, senior Noah Evers led the charge. Although the race time temperature was much higher than varsity, the times were still very respectable for a JV race. Evers finished in 16:29.4 to bring home the race victory with six teammates following behind. Rounding out the scoring five were senior Matthew Musial, juniors Patrick Jones and Ethan Bogner, and sophomore Nick Ahlheim. The boys scored a total of 16 points in their dominating win.

The program looks to show off its talent once again tomorrow morning at the Forest Park Cross Country Festival.

"We just got to keep building off of Saturday to show the competition who we are as a program," said coach Jeff Foerg,

This meet is the SLUH cross country program's home meet, which hosts around 4,000 athletes and more than 10,000 spectators.

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