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Cross Country dominates Sioux Passage despite withholding top nine

Charlie Gray and Tristan Kujawa, reporters Sep 22 2023

The Saint Louis U. High Cross Country program headed to Sioux Passage for the Paul Enke Invitational last Friday. Each year, head coach Joe Porter holds out anywhere from five to ten of the top runners to give the next seven a varsity opportunity. Even though there were nine guys being held out, the seven varsity runners stepped up and came out with a dominating team win over tough competition.

The varsity race featured talent from all over Missouri. Runners like Pattonville's Luke Stevenson, who was an all-state runner last year, and Tyler Anderson who had a very solid track season.

"There were a lot of good runners in that race up front," said Porter. "And you know, Tyler Anderson and Stevenson from Pattonville are some of the top runners in the area. So it was good for our guys to be aggressive against some great competition and then results follow when we focus on ourselves."

Even with this competition, the boys were not deterred and had their eyes set on the victory. Finishing first overall for the team was sophomore Jake Fitz



English

who ran a blistering time of 17:31, earning fifth overall. To put that into perspective, last year's winning time was 17:42, run by sophomore Jaden Elgin. Right on Fitzpatrick's shoulder was senior Charlie Gray. Gray ran a bold race, taking an early lead around one mile, and holding onto it just until there was 1K left.

"I'll pick on an athlete, Charlie Gray," said Porter. "Even going up against some great competition he decided in the middle to just stay focused on his own race and found himself in the lead and then still held on for sixth place finish."

Gray ran a time of 17:35 and earned sixth place, a very impressive time for the Sioux Passage course.

Following Gray was sophomore Tristan Kujawa. Kujawa ran a quick time of 17:44. Negatively splitting his last mile, Kujawa stayed composed and earned himself a seventh place finish.

Following Kujawa was senior Matthew Musial. Coming off of a strong race the week before, Musial put together a solid performance, running 18:00 and getting 10th place overall. Musial edged sophomore Hendrix Fyvie at the line to beat him by just a fraction of a second. Fyvie ran a great time of 18:00 as well to earn 11th place overall. Rounding out the finishers, junior Ethan Bognar put together a solid performance, running 18:22 (14th place). The boys put together a solid team effort, taking home the first place finish with 39 points overall.

The Jr. Bills dominated the JV race, taking the top four spots, and putting seven total in the top ten. Leading the way was senior Lucas Strohmeyer. After winning the JV race at FPXC, Strohmeyer did just that at Sioux Passage. Taking first place overall, Strohmeyer ran an impressive 17:43.

"He and his teammates were able to pull away early," said Porter. "Lucas made a nice move in the back mile to get a gap and held on to the rest."

After Strohmeyer was sophomore Preston Eash, who ran 18:04 to earn second place overall. Following Eash was junior Patrick Jones (18:29, third place), sophomore Nick Alheim (18:34, fourth), and sophomore Aiden Smith (18:54, sixth). The Jr. Bills took first with an impressive 16 points.

As the sun set, the freshmen race concluded the day. They returned to the line without their number one scorer at Forest Park Cross Country Festival, Joe Talleur, who ran in the varsity race.



The race started extremely fast, with freshman Michael Luna running a 5:27 first mile, trailing a talented freshman from Westminster Christian Academy.

In the second mile, freshman Luke Hartweger caught up to Luna, as they both ran up the dreaded “man-maker” hill for the second time.

“It was pretty painful,” said Hartweger. “I was so tired but I rolled on the downhills.”

This racing strategy of rolling the downhills led both Luna and Hartweger to go second and third in the race, with Luna running a swift sub 18 5K time of 17:56 and Hartweger close behind in 18:04. These incredibly fast times were followed by Ben Yoffie (18:28), Edmund Reske (18:35), and JP Wildermuth (19:35) to round out the top five, which led to a victory for the freshmen team and four medalists.

“To have a freshmen group that is so outstanding in the early parts of the season is incredible,” said Porter. “We are really excited about the future and want to see them continue to develop.”

With three freshmen being sent to the Palatine Meet of Champions in Chicago, and one being varsity at Fox Ed White Festival of Races, the depth of this class is immense, securing success in the program’s future.

“I love that I have the opportunity to race varsity,” said Hartweger, who will be racing this weekend at Fox.

Varsity and Varsity 2 will be traveling to the Palatine Meet of Champions in Chicago, where they will perform against highly ranked teams from Illinois and beyond. The rest of the program will be at Fox Ed White Festival of Races, where new athletes will have to step into scoring positions for the program.



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