



Cross Country dominates in the Bowles-Wright Invitational with V2 team leading the way

Tristian Kujawa and Hendrix Fyvie, Staff, reporter
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The second best cross country team in St. Louis? This past Saturday, the St. Louis U. High Cross Country program traveled south to Festus for the Bowles-Wright Invitational. The program held out the top 9 runners, racing a V2 lineup in varsity that still managed to win the meet soundly, taking down powerhouses like Kirkwood and Lafayette. The Jr. Bills didn't stop there as they also easily won the JV, capturing a perfect score of 15.



Junior Joe Talleur leading a pack of SLUH runners. photo I Dave Ebenhoh

As the morning dew dried from the grass, the V2 squad toed the line with their hopes high after a fourth place finish at FPXC the week earlier. When the gun went off, SLUH was sent on a mission of domination.

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Coming through the first mile full of sharp turns, steep hills, and solid gravel was junior Joe Talleur, running a 5:11 mile right behind the top pack. Right behind him were senior Tristan Kujawa and sophomores Phin Gilbert, Jonah Ebenhoh and Owen Williams, who all came through in 5:12.

"I was able to keep my eyes on all the SLUH guys," said Williams. "That was my goal going into it and then I was just seeing how it played out after that first mile."

Through the second mile, the SLUH pack thinned. Talleur remained up front, coming through in 10:41 with Kujawa close behind in 10:43. The rest of the SLUH pack found themselves farther back, but still in a good position to win the team race with Williams coming through in 10:47 and junior Luke Hartweger close behind him running 10:49.

The squad looked strong heading into the closing mile with a hairpin curve around a lake and more steep hills.

"It looked good having that tight pack move up even within the technicality of the course," said head coach Joe Porter. "It definitely makes us look like we are in a position to continue to improve and I think that's always the goal."

As the finish line approached, it was clear that SLUH was the winner, having seven guys in front of Kirkwood's three-man. With an impressive last mile, Kujawa led the way for the Jr. Bills, running a 17:11 for 7th place, improving on his time last year by over 40 seconds.

"Tristan had a great race," said Porter. "He moved up nicely competing with Kirkwood's two guys towards the end and I thought that was great."

After Kujawa was the duo of Hartweger and Williams sprinting to the finish. Hartweger ultimately overtook him, running a 17:23 to finish in eighth place, while Williams ran 17:24 to finish ninth. Next to finish was junior Cullen Wenger, who ran a conservative race in the beginning two miles and eventually moved up to score for the Jr. Bills, finishing in 17:33 (11th). Rounding out the scoring five for the Jr. Bills was Talleur in 17:38 (12th).

SLUH pulled away with the win, scoring 47 points compared to Kirkwood's 58. This performance showcases the potential of this V2 squad and the striking truth that they are the second best team in St. Louis behind SLUH's normal varsity.

"I think this race shows that the V2 is number two in the area," said Porter. "This really shows off the depth of the program. We are deeper and a better team than we were a year ago and that's really exciting to see."

Shortly after the varsity race, SLUH Cross Country had another opportunity to flex their depth in the JV race. With runners from all grade levels toeing the line, SLUH overwhelmed the field with its 73 racers. The starting line was dominated by a sea of navy blue jerseys to the point where SLUH athletes had to line up behind other teams' boxes as they had overflowed their own. However, the JV squad did a lot more than cram the starting line—they dominated the field.

Right from the gun, a pack of SLUH runners immediately took the lead of the race. Seniors Preston Eash and Jesse Brower-Toland led the group, separating themselves from the field within the first 800 meters of the race, and a strong SLUH pack trailed not too far behind. Eash and Brower-Toland kept racing head-to-head through the one mile mark, which

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they both came through in an impressive 5:23. Shortly into the second mile, Eash made a decisive move to take the lead of the race.

“Going into the race I made a promise to myself that I wanted to lead by at least halfway,” said Eash. “My second promise to myself was to get out hard. It really paid dividends to me because I was from the top three right out of the gates.”

Eash’s move was pivotal, as he pulled away from the rest of the field and maintained his gap for the rest of the race. He led the JV squad, winning the race in a time of 17:54. Seven consecutive SLUH runners followed Eash, including the scoring five of sophomore Edmund Reske, senior Jesse Brower-Toland, sophomore Ryan Kindschuh, and senior Brady Vogt.

“I was really happy,” said freshman Andrew Yoffie. “I think we got a perfect score and like that’s really impressive. Even the teammates who weren’t racing still came. I saw them cheering on so many turns.”

In a race full of impressive performances, there is one athlete who deserves to be recognized for his grit. During the crowded start, sophomore Clarence Nowak had another runner step on his shoe, leaving it hanging off his foot. Despite running with his shoe halfway on his foot, Nowak still managed to come through the mile at an impressive 5:33. Right before the mile mark, he had to make a very tough decision to kick off his shoe.

“(I knew that) if I stopped, I basically should just quit. So I just kept on going, pushing as hard as I could, because I wanted to finish,” said Nowak.

Nowak persevered through the rest of the race and finished in eighth place with a time of 19:03, ahead of any other team’s best JV runner. Nowak’s race serves as a perfect example of the toughness the program embodies—perhaps one of the main reasons for the cross country’s continued success.

Now the program splits, with the top 16 heading to Chicago for the Palatine Meet of Champions with the top competition from Illinois looking to challenge the varsity’s undefeated record. Meanwhile, the rest of the program looks to compete just across the river at the Freeburg Invitational with an opportunity to showcase even more depth beyond the top runners.

“There’s some great teams at Palatine,” said Porter. “That’s why we started going there in 2010, because we wanted to go where the best were. It’s a chaotic race and it will teach us a lot about racing at an elite level in chaos.”

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