



Cross Country dashes to victory in all three races at Granite City Invitational

Tristan Kujawa and Luke Hartweger, Staff, reporter
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Is this the year? The St. Louis U. High Cross Country program kicked off the 2025 season this past Saturday at the Granite City Invitational with a whopping three victories in every division. The course holds a distinct reputation as the flattest and fastest course that the Jr. Bills will run all year and one of the few races run over the 3-mile distance. This year, conditions were primed for yet another historic day with temperatures in the low 60s for the race day.



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The varsity runners circling up for prayer prior to their race. photo I Brendan Sullivan
Brian Gilmore

The varsity race featured a plethora of local talent, with firepower up front from Fort Zumwalt West's Will Doyle, along with fierce competitors from the Prairie State, giving the Jr. Bills plenty of intense competition.

Through the windy first mile, seniors Nick Ahlheim and Hendrix Fyvie and juniors Jackson Miller and Ben Yoffie were with the front pack, taking out the race in a 4:48, a fast but relaxed pace for these athletes.

Courtesy of new race plans from the coaching staff, Fyvie took the lead up until the end of the first mile. Right before the mile mark, Fyvie made a bold move on the front group, pushing the pace and surprising his opponents.

"I felt good making the move," said Fyvie. "Even though it didn't last I really was determined to lead that race and I felt good leading."

The pace continued to be hot through the cement and gravel portion of the course, with Fyvie, Alheim, and the plethora of juniors eventually fading off the top group and forming their own peloton. Miller stayed connected to the elite group all the way into the final stretch as he executed a lethal pass on a talented Illinois runner to take first in 14:40 (15:13 5K). Although the time for Miller was slower than last year, his performance showcases the varsity team's ability to compete with the opponents around them.

"We aren't really concerned about times early on," said head coach Joe Porter. "We care about the competition and I think everyone reacted well to different race plans and Jackson bringing it home really was a good start."

Slowly chipping away throughout the race, running a 4:56 first mile, then two straight 5:09 miles, sophomore Warnicke Beatty shocked the competition as SLUH's No. 2 runner with a time of 15:14 (15:48 5K). Running much of the same race strategy, junior Nathan Khouri (15:16, 15:50 5K) followed shortly behind. Both of these athletes had the race of their careers with Beatty and Khouri achieving a personal best (PB). Last year both athletes were not even in the top ten, showing how much a full year of training can pay off.

To round out the scoring five it was Fyvie (15:17, 15:51 5K) and Ahlheim (15:17, 15:51 5K), courtesy of two bold first miles. and finishing off the top 7 were junior Michael Luna (15:26, 16:00 5K) and Yoffie (15:39, 16:14 5k). With a scoring spread of 37 seconds the Jr. Bills easily took home first with 37 points, far ahead of second place Edwardsville (122 points).

"The guys took some risks and it still worked out," said Porter. "You know we look at this race as a starting point in the season and we are really just setting ourselves up for success later on. Seeing the pack that they formed was what we were looking for."

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Up next, the top seven freshmen and sophomore racers toed the line, looking for the same success as varsity. Much like the last race the Jr. Bills found themselves up front early with sophomores Jonah Ebenhoh, Phin Gilbert, and Gibby Fyvie all coming through the first mile in 5:13 and sophomore Owen Williams was close behind coming through in 5:18. With this strong SLUH presence up front, the Jr. Bills dictated the feel of the pace.

“That was pretty awesome,” said Ebenhoh. “It was definitely better than last race, because I felt like I was kind of in between two people. So it felt great to be running within a big pack and with my teammates. Yeah, it was awesome.”

However, in the final mile the competition caught up with Ebenhoh—the sole SLUH runner in a pack of three in the closing stretch. Overall, Ebenhoh stayed strong despite the absence of his teammates, eventually running 16:14 (16:50 5K), a personal best, for second place.

“I really wanted to win in the final 800,” said Ebenhoh. “My legs felt super tired so I just tried to not slow down and keep on pushing and it pretty much worked. There’s a lot of work left to do, but it was a great starting point. ”

Behind Ebenhoh was Gilbert (16:26, 17:03 5K) and Williams (16:27, 17:04 5K), both running impressive races despite a fast start. Finally, rounding out the scoring five was Gibby Fyvie (16:49, 17:27 5K) who showcased grit and determination finishing the race despite getting injured after the 2nd mile, and sophomore Clarence Nowak (17:21, 18:00 5K).

“I really felt like falling off the pace,” said Fyvie. “Then I remembered our team motto of fighting for our brothers and knew I had to push through the pain for the guys. It sounds dumb, but it really drove me.”

Overall the B/C squad took home another team victory for the day with 43 points, easily beating Edwardsville, and all seven runners took home medals displaying both team and individual success.

To finish the meet, an oasis of blue-tank-topped SLUH runners took to the course for the open race and the story continued to be the same: dominance.

Senior Jaden Elgin took the race from the gun, winning in (15:54, 16:29 5K) behind him for the scoring five was junior Luke Hartweger (16:10, 16:46 5K), senior Jake Fitzpatrick (16:12, 16:48 5K), senior Tristan Kujawa (16:20, 16:58 5K), and junior JP Wildermuth (16:44, 17:22 5K).

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The team won easily with a perfect score of 15 and swept the rest of the field. They dominated the race, causing the other teams to think that they were the SLUH varsity squad.

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"I entered the race knowing I would take the lead," said Elgin. "I was in a good headspace which kept me pushing hard. Every time I heard the fans cheering it just made me enjoy my last Granite City race."

The pages turn now to SLUH's own Forest Park Cross Country Festival, where they look to continue this success. The meet brings in over 2,000 athletes and over 7,000 spectators, creating perfect conditions for a storm of runners to challenge the program's early success. Varsity begins racing tomorrow at 8:35 a.m., where they look to take home a third consecutive team title. The Jr. Bills home meet is just another step in their quest for a state championship.



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