



Cross Country ready to take Missouri by storm through unmatched brotherhood

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"Fight for your brother"—this is the driving quote as the St. Louis U. High Cross Country program begins its season. With five out of the top seven runners returning, a successful "rust buster" alumni race, and a new coach, the program is ecstatic on what the future holds, all the way from Granite City and beyond.

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Hendrix Fyvie (left) and Ben Yoffe (right) running | Brendan Sullivan

Heading into the season, the program is strong up front. With the top athletes returning from a team that held the second place trophy last year, the Jr. Bills are set on a higher trophy this year. Like last year, junior Jackson Miller will lead the way, coming in as the No. 3 returner in the whole state with a converted 5 kilometer personal best of 14:53.

Right after Miller is a close knit pack of four with junior Michael Luna, junior Ben Yoffie, senior Hendrix Fyvie, and senior Nick Ahlheim all having personal bests under 16:10 over the 5K.

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"We're excited about what we brought back last year in terms of experience," said head coach Joe Porter. "But it doesn't mean anything if we're not improving. So our biggest focus over the next 12 more weeks is just, we've got to get better at getting better, and if we can do that, then the results will take care of themselves."

The annual alumni race this past Friday strengthened the program's confidence in improvement. In heat 1, although the alumni put up a good fight, it was ultimately Miller who pulled away from the field late, running 9:28 in the two-mile distance. This was an impressive performance for Miller who missed all of his sophomore track season due to injury. Adding to the accolades, Miller beat Baker Pashea '22 who currently runs at Dartmouth.

"I wasn't sure of my fitness going into the race," said Miller. "But I knew as long as I could stay attached to the front group I could make a move to take the win. Even with the very hot conditions I was able to stay focused and make that big surge at the end to take the win."

Following Miller was a close pack of five athletes: Ahlheim (9:43), Fyvie (9:45), junior Nathan Khouri (9:46), sophomore Warnicke Beatty Jr. (9:46), and Luna (9:47). The four-second spread of this pack showcases a hallmark of a good cross country team: running together. In addition to that, both Beatty and Khouri are not even in the returning seven, displaying the depth and drive of the program.

"It was a great group to race with," said Ahlheim. "I remember keeping my eyes on the finish line and not really paying attention to what was going on around me, and just staying focused and it worked out."

It wasn't just the fastest guys that had successful performances though. For example, heat wins from junior Cullen Wenger (11:10), freshman Carter Wagner (12:30), and senior Jonah Ruyle (14:16) all showcased that the training and determination flows through the DNA of the entire team.

"It's nice to know that our summer work is paid off," said Porter, "And that's really what the alumni race does, is kind of tell us where we're at and where we can head. We need to continue in that progression to hit our goals on the season."

Finally the night ended in brotherhood, topped with ketchup, as the whole program celebrated the race with hot dogs and Gatorade.

In addition to the alumni race, the program welcomes a new coach Hiral Patel. Recruited by assistant coach Charlie Hatch, Patel looks to help everyone in the program to fall in love with running.

"Hatch's enthusiasm had me bought into the program before even beginning," said Patel. "So marrying my love for running and having the opportunity to coach 100-plus guys on the cross country team is just a win, win

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Patel also adds key running experience to the team. Inspired by a mayoral candidate in South Carolina who ran
Brian Gilmore
the Boston Marathon, Patel started his running journey just six years ago, and since then has found his stride in
long distance running, especially the marathon.

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"I excel in a long distance," said Patel. "I really enjoy the marathon. I've qualified for Boston and I just recently
ran the LA Marathon and I'm hoping to submit my time to qualify for Boston again. So yeah I'm a marathon guy."

Patel's skill set stretches well beyond just his running experience.

"Each coach brings their own gift," said Patel. "For me, I'm an energizer, so bringing positivity, making sure
people feel like they're known and heard is really important to me."

As the program looks ahead, the Jr. Bills are confident that the everyday grind, especially pushing through the
end of the summer weeks, will pay off in November at the State and Midwest regional meet.

"We're excited about where we can head," said Porter. "But we need to focus on the here and now, a lot more
than just on races that are several weeks away. We're just going to get better every day and every week, and if
we do that, results will happen that we want to see in October and November. We're ready. "



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