



BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RECAP



By Randy Whalen

If all things were equal, the Lockport Township boys cross country team would have accomplished its goal.

But this was a season that was unequaled and not normal, even if it did end in Normal.

The Porters placed 8th overall on Saturday, Oct. 31 at the Class 3A Normal Community Sectional at Maxwell Park in Normal.

That was right in the middle of the pack, but if things were equal the Porters still would have made it to the State Finals since they were equal. They tied for the seventh and final team state-qualifying spot.

Usually, the top-five teams in one of the five sectionals make it to state. So 25 teams total. This year, however, there are only four sectionals. So the word was that the top-seven teams out of those sectionals, including ties, would have advanced to state.

But in this unnormal year it's all a moot point anyway since because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this season's State Finals have been canceled.

"On the bright side if they followed the same criteria we would have qualified," Lockport coach Tom Razo said. "Seven teams would have qualified and anytime in the past if you were tied, you'd get to go.

"We didn't qualify for state last year after being there the previous two seasons. So that was our goal to qualify and we would have done it."

Team wise, Yorkville (61 points) prevailed over Minooka (73) as the teams placed first and second at the sectional. The schools also placed first and second the week before at the Minooka Regional. But Yorkville (32) more than doubled up the host Indians (66) there, so the sectional was a lot closer.

Edwardsville (94) placed third and Plainfield North (125) was fourth. The next four teams were all bunched up with Lincoln-Way East (157), Lincoln-Way Central (176), Plainfield South (177), and Lockport Township (177). O'Fallon (234) was ninth followed by Normal West (236), Pekin (268), Lincoln-Way West (312), Bradley-Bourbonnais (334), Collinsville (349), and Andrew (350) completed the 15-team field.

Instead of running as teams, there were four different flights, each spaced 30 minutes apart. The top runners from the previous week's regionals, along with the individual runners ran the first flight. Based on the previous times, two runners from each school ran each of the subsequent flights. But the overall times were what counted, meaning someone from the second flight could still finish in the Top 10 or even first. It also made figuring the team scores a little longer.

In fact, 10 of the 15 top runners were not in the first flight. Of the top 11 overall runners, Yorkville had four and the Indians had three.

Individually, Plainfield North's Oliver Burns (15:37.93) came out of the second flight to place third. The sophomore nearly got second, placing less than a half-second behind Quincy junior Fiker Rosen (15:36.36). Edwardsville junior Ryan Watts (15:21.18) ran away with first.

Lockport was led by the senior trio of Austin Molitor (19th, 16:16.72), Wil Kiley (26th, 16:26.67), and Devan Callahan (33rd, 16:32.38). Senior Timothy Nielsen (57th, 16:52.02) and sophomore Jaxson

Gauthier (63rd, 16:56.35) also scored, while senior Frank Biamonte (91st, 17:31.01) and sophomore Matt Johnson (101st, 17:45.39) rounded out the Porter lineup.

"I've had faster races but I was happy where I placed with my time," said Molitor, who came out of the second flight to lead Lockport in time. "The goal was just to run for place and see where we could get."

Although there isn't a state meet, it wasn't the last race for Molitor, Kiley, and Nielsen. The three of them will compete in a ShaZam racing event, which is not connected to the Illinois High School Association, this Saturday, Nov. 7 in Peoria.

"Minooka was just a stacked team," Molitor said. "I'm glad we were able to have the season we did and our Locktoberfest (on Saturday, Oct. 3) was still a good meet."

While Kiley didn't do as well out of the first flight, he still had a heck of a season. In the SWSC Blue meet on Saturday, Oct. 17 at Lockport, he duplicated placing first in the preseason meet, as he won the individual title with a time of 14:33. In the regional the following week, however, he placed 9th overall (15:43.6).

"I thought going out in the first 400 that the Yorkville guy was really fast," Kiley said of the sectional. "I was surprised the pack went out that fast. I thought I could hang back and make up some time but with the wind that sadly didn't happen."

Still, it was sort of a bookended 4-years for Kiley, who also finished his grade school career by running at Maxwell Park.

"You want to go out at the state meet so it's really sad that we aren't able to," Kiley said of no actual high school state finals taking place this season. But I got to finish here (at Maxwell Park). I ran here in eighth grade at Oak Prairie and made All-State. So to finish back here was really nice."

With a slew of seniors graduating off this season's squad, the Porters will have a different look next fall. But the seniors will never forget this fall and the journey throughout during a pandemic.

"What I will remember most is the team just practicing together in the summer," Molitor said. "We weren't allowed to see the coaches so we would all meet on our own. You had to be responsible for not getting sick so it was hard to hang out with anyone else outside of school. So we all just hung out with our teammates and really bonded."

Razo appreciated Molitor's leadership on and off the course.

"Austin has probably been our most consistent runner all season," Razo said. "So for him to do that well (in the sectional) doesn't surprise me. As a team in the sectional, I thought we did okay. It was a solid day and we can grow from here."

"We lose 5-of-our-7, so we will see. But this was a great senior group."