



## IHSA CROSS COUNTRY REGIONAL RECAP



By Randy Whalen

Survive and advance.

In the world of the cross country postseason, that is the objective. Even in a year that has had havoc with the coronavirus pandemic.

Both the Lockport Township boys and girls cross country teams did that last weekend in the Class 3A Minooka Regional. The Porters placed in the Top 5 of both the boys and girls 3-mile races, which were held on Saturday, Oct. 24 at Minooka High School.

Both will be in the Class 3A Normal Community Sectional as a team. That will take place on Saturday, Oct. 31 at Maxwell Park in Normal.

Kayla Shea is looking forward to that. The Lockport sophomore is on a roll recently. She continued that with the individual title in a time of 17 minutes: 54.1 seconds at the regional. That came on the heels of winning the SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division title as both an individual (17:31) and a team (29 points) on Saturday, Oct. 17 in the conference meet at Lockport.

"I've been putting in a lot of work in practice," said Shea, who also won the Plainfield South Regional as an individual last season with a time of 18:51. "With the coronavirus out there we know they could cancel the rest of the season at any time so we have to work and put our best times out there.

"The course at Minooka was a little mushy from the rain but also really flat. We had to do three laps and some of it was on gravel."

All seven of Lockport's runners finished in the top 23 as the Porters placed third as a team. Yorkville, which was paced by seniors Helena Kleronomos (2nd, 18:05.7) and Hailey Simmons (3rd, 18:06.5), had all five of its scoring runners in the Top 9 and easily won it with a team total of 28 points. With a trio of runners in the Top 7 including fourth-place finisher sophomore Gabby Kics (18:19.3), Minooka (49 points) edged the Porters (50 points) for second place.

Plainfield North (115) and Bolingbrook (173) were the other two sectional qualifying teams. Plainfield Central (196), Joliet Central (208), Joliet West (227), Plainfield South (241) Plainfield East (253), and Romeoville (335) rounded out the rest of the 11-team field.

"I thought it was cool that the girls got to compete with Yorkville and Minooka," Lockport coach Regan Cronholm said. "Those are two top teams and we've mostly run on our home course and didn't get to see them this season. So it was nice to get out there.

"I think Kayla strives on the more hilly courses and this one was pretty flat. But she did well with that. A lot of the girls have run (at Maxwell Park) in the grade school state tournament so they are ready to go. Every race they just want to go out and keep up the pace."

The Porters kept up the pace as they packed in four more runners between places 10 and 15. They were seniors Megan Mitchell (10th, 18:52.9), Josephine Bober (11th, 18:58.4), Elizabeth Bollinger (13th, 19:08.7), and sophomore Monica Skibicki (15th, 19:18.9). Also in the mix for Lockport was senior Grace Mildice (18th, 19:36.5) and junior Morgan Kesteloot (23rd, 19:56.4).

While there will be a sectional this weekend, the State Finals have always been a goal for the Porters. Last year they placed 10th, which was their highest finish since placing fifth in 2013 and was the ninth time they have made the Top 10. in making the trip for the 11th straight season. It was also the 23rd time in the past 26 years and 26th time since 1987 that Lockport had been to state.

"It's disappointing we don't have state," Shea said. "The best teams are there and it's such an accomplishment to run in it. A lot of times our sectional (assignment) changes. We do have a lot of teams from all over the state (including from the Downstate Granite City Regional) at the sectional.

"I just want to be with the team and be together like we have all season. We just want to put in the work and do what we have to do."

The Porter boys team also did what they needed to do to advance. They placed fifth overall at the regional with a score of 119 to grab the final qualifying team spot.

"We did advance and that was the good thing," Lockport boys coach Tom Razo said. "It wasn't our best race but we advanced and there's room for improvement. Everyone thinks they can do better and be more aggressive."

Just like in the girl's race it was Yorkville (32 points) taking the top spot behind the top two runners in seniors Austin Popplewell (1st, 15:08.5) and Ivan Westcott (2nd, 15:24.5). Minooka (66) placed second behind senior Vincent Van Eck (4th, 15:28). Plainfield North (80), Plainfield South (108), and Lockport (119) were the Top 5 sectional qualifying teams.

Joliet West (147) was sixth while Joliet Central (177), which did have the third-best individual runner in senior Jay Dworak (15:26) was right behind. Bolingbrook (196), Romeoville (291), and Plainfield East (299) rounded out the 10-team field.

In his previous race, the SWSC Blue meet on Saturday, Oct. 17 at Lockport, Lockport senior standout Wil Kiley won the individual title with a time of 14:33. In the regional, however, he placed ninth overall (15:43.6).

"It wasn't his best day but he can still get after it," Razo said of Kiley. "Everyone can improve."

Austin Molitor (16th, 16:08.8), fellow senior Devan Callahan (27th, 16:31.3), sophomore Jaxson Gauthier (29th, 16:32.2), and senior Frank Biamonte (38th, 16:53.3) were the scoring five runners for Lockport. Sophomore Matt Johnson (39th, 16:54.9) and senior Timothy Nielsen 45th, 17:04.6) were right behind for the Porters, who didn't qualify for state last year after making it as a team in the fall of 2017 and 2018.

"Some of my guys have also run at Maxwell Park at the grade school state meet," Razo said. "With everything going on this season, I'm just happy we have the opportunity to run. It's great for the kids to have one more opportunity in the sectional and hopefully they can take advantage of it."