

Freeman Chose Running

By LOU ENGEL

News-Gazette Sportswriter ST. JOSEPH — Art Freeman isn't following in the footsteps of older brothers Lance and Sean.

The St. Joseph-Ogden High School senior didn't have the 6-foot-7 height that helped make Lance a basketball standout for the Spartans or the overall size the 6-foot, 170-pound Sean used to play fullback and linebacker on the football team.

So the 5-9, 140-pound Art opted for running and hasn't followed in anyone's footsteps very often thus far during the 1979 cross-country season.

Freeman's only loss of the season was to Mahomet-Seymour's Mark Wieneke last week in a dual meet and Freeman avenged that defeat Saturday by winning the Mahomet-Seymour Class A District title in course-record time of 15:55. The district win also stamps Freeman as one of the runners to beat in the sectional meet next Saturday at Effingham.

Athlete of the Week

"I'm pleasantly surprised with the success I'm having this season," Freeman said. "Wieneke always dominated me last year, as did Jeff Stipp of Hoopston. I've been beating them both this season."

Freeman's success this season, however, didn't come as a complete surprise.

"I worked a lot last winter," Freeman pointed out. "I missed running only five days all winter long. I'd run anywhere from three to seven miles a day. One of my main goals this year was to win the Spartan Classic. I also wanted to win the district and I hope to place high in the state meet."

Freeman has already won the Spartan Classic, Okaw Valley Conference, Peoria Heights Invitational and district crowns this season. He's also optimistic about his chances in the sectional Saturday.

"I was only seventh in the district meet last year," Freeman recalled, "and fourth in the Okaw Valley. Our team advanced to the sectional, however, and I was 13th overall there and the eighth indi-

vidual not associated with a team.

"I've improved my time by over a minute on our home course at Homer Lake this year," Freeman said, "and from 40-45 seconds on most other courses. I think the big difference this season is that I have a year's experience under my belt."

"Last year was his first year out for cross-country," SJ-O coach Rick Mohr explained. "I think Art's biggest asset is his leg strength. He usually pulls away from people on hills."

"I try to get out and push the early pace," Freeman said, "although my strategy does vary according to the competition. The strategy in the sectional has to be to go out and run the race that suits your ability best. You have to stick with the leaders and work on your strong points during the course of the race."

"It's hard to say what might happen in the sectional," Freeman continued, "because I'll be running against so many guys I've never faced before. You can look at their times, but that still doesn't tell you that much. I know Gary Bremer of Metropolis will be tough. He won the Class A two-mile state championship last spring and was second in the

state cross-country meet last fall."

Although this is only Freeman's second year on the SJ-O cross-country team, he is no novice to running. He ran cross-country in grade school and has already earned three varsity letters in track.

"I started running in the sixth grade when I failed to make the baseball team," Freeman said. "I wasn't even good enough to compete in the conference meet in track in the eighth grade but I did make it as the fifth man on the cross-country team. I played quarterback on the junior varsity football team my freshman and sophomore years and also was on the JV basketball team."

"Basketball was always my favorite sport, but I just wasn't that good. I quit both football and basketball last year to concentrate on something I could do."

Freeman's success in cross-country this season also has helped erase the memory of his infamous performance in the state track meet last spring. He was disqualified in the two-mile because of a false start after qualifying for the event by finishing second in the district.

"It was a big disappointment," Freeman said



ART FREEMAN

of the disqualification. "I was looking forward to a good day. I also would have gained some valuable experience. The starting instructions didn't seem that explicit, but it was still mainly my fault. I was pretty nervous because I'd never been up against so many good runners. I also was on the inside lane and was afraid of being boxed in at the start."

Freeman has more than made up for that embarrassing moment.