

SJ-O harriers run away with M-S invitational title

By DAVID CAMPBELL
News-Gazette Sportswriter

MAHOMET — Never mind that Kankakee Bishop McNamara High School wasn't there and that Frank Roberts is still recovering from a stress fracture.

On Saturday at the Mahomet-Seymour Cross-Country Invitational, the No. 6-ranked St. Joseph-Ogden boys' team was going to go out, run well and win the meet, and there wasn't much anybody could do about it.

The Spartans, paced by a third-place finish by sophomore Rick Walden, ran away with the 15-team scoring meet with 38 points.

Shelbyville was second at 87, Tri-Valley finished third at 115 and Chrisman, tied for No. 8 in the Class A state rankings with Bishop McNamara, took fourth with 117.

For SJ-O coach Jim Acklin, beating McNamara, which was scheduled to compete but canceled late in the week, would not have been as important as seeing the Irish run and preparing for them for later in the season.

"I'm disappointed we didn't get to see Bishop Mac," Acklin said. "We might not see them until sectionals, and that was one team we would have liked to had a chance to compete against."

"But I was pleased with the way we ran today. We packed real

well."

The individual winner was Mahomet-Seymour senior Dan Nielsen, who defended his title on his home 3.1-mile course with a time of 15 minutes, 41 seconds.

Finishing in second place was Joshua Folk of Urbana University High.

Walden was next at 16:22, picking up the meet's award for the highest-finishing sophomore, and Mahomet-Seymour's Burt Huddleston was fourth in 16:36.

Then came SJ-O's pack, which placed its five scorers among the top 11. Melvin Goodman was fifth in 16:41, Nathan Buss took ninth in 17:09, Brian Allen finished 10th at 17:11 and Andy Ingram was 11th in 17:15.

It was a 53-second split between the Spartans' No. 1 and No. 5 runners, and it all happened without Roberts, one of SJ-O's top runners who has been hindered by injury all season.

"We're tough without him," Walden said, "but we're even tougher with him."

"We're hoping to get him on his feet Monday," Acklin added. "It's getting down to crunch time for us. We need to see how he's running before we put our regional lineup out there. It's not like basketball where if he's not running well we can pull him and substitute for him."

The Bulldogs' Nielsen made quick work of the competition, having pulled away from the field by the seven-minute mark.

Then, after the race, he made a quick escape, bypassing the awards ceremony to participate in a band function.

"He ran well, even though there wasn't anybody close to him," Mahomet-Seymour coach John King said.

"The brightest thing is that we've brought him along slowly this year because of a knee injury he had last year, and most of the things he's done this season have been on natural talent. I'm sure he had something left at the end."

For Walden, staying with Nielsen for the entire race was something he was hoping for but was unable to do.

"It didn't work," Walden said. "He took off a lot faster than I thought he would."

"He told me he was going to stick with Nielsen as long as he could, but Dan would have no part of that and he just sprinted away," Acklin added. "But each time out, Rick is staying with them (the leaders) a little bit longer."

Among the freshmen competing, the top finisher was Chrisman's Greg Barrett, who crossed the finish line in 21st place in 17:27.

Wamsley still making strides

By FRED KRONER
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MAHOMET — Distance runners start each race knowing they have a long way to go.

Unity High School senior Karen Wamsley begins each cross-country meet knowing how far she has come.

Wamsley won individual honors on Saturday in the girls' division of the annual Mahomet-Seymour Invitational. Her time of 11 minutes, 27 seconds over the 2-mile course was three seconds better than runner-up Amy Bersig, a senior at Rantoul.

Team honors went to St. Joseph-Ogden, the state's second-ranked Class A school, followed by No. 10 Urbana University High and No. 6 Unity. SJ-O totaled 72 points, Uni High 80 and Unity 87.

Wamsley's win in a field of more than 100 competitors was

run a mile," Meneley said. "Her first time out, she'd run (the distance of) one telephone pole and then walk one telephone pole."

Determination, not discouragement, overcame Wamsley.

"She has definitely put in lots of hard work and lots of hours of running," Meneley said.

Yet, in an area populated by standout distance runners, Wamsley has never developed a feeling of invincibility.

"If you asked her if she was the top runner around, I don't think she'd say she was," Meneley said. "She runs with confidence, but she's so modest."

Wamsley pulled away from a small pack of runners, including defending champion Bersig, near the mile mark and never trailed thereafter. She went under 11:50 for the first time at M-S.

"I don't know what I did differ-

to beat all but four runners despite running in her training shoes, but A-O head coach Henry German attempted to pull Bloch out before she finished and by the time she entered the chute, she was placed in eighth.

Bloch, 10th at last year's state meet, will return to the course with added incentive in three weeks for Class A sectional meet.

Officially placing after Wamsley and Bersig were three SJ-O standouts: Marla McKinney, Ashley Wright and Erin Fuller.

Urbana's Sarah Stephens ran sixth and another UHS freshman, Heather Woodrum, placed ninth, both in season-best times.

Rantoul coach Al Taylor was satisfied with the day's results.

"It's impossible to psych up for every meet, and we have conference, regional, sectional and state coming up the next four week-