

PrepReport

Rutherford runs wild during U High romp

Clay speeds to lifetime best for Pioneer girls

By Randy Sharer

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NORMAL — A spectator at the University High School Cross Country Invitational at Maxwell Park placed a caterpillar on Ryan Rutherford's shoulder Tuesday.

If the furry critter was looking to bum a ride, it could not have found faster transport as Rutherford shocked those present with a 3-mile time of 14 minutes, 43.1 seconds.

That is the fastest time on any course in U High history and well below Rutherford's previous best of 15:04 and Kevin Forde's school record of 15:02.

"I'm kind of surprised it was by that much (under the record)," said Rutherford, whose mile splits were 4:50, 4:54 and 4:59.

His 9:44 for 2 miles echoed his 9:44.38 in the 3,200-meter run at last spring's state track meet.

"That was ridiculous," Rutherford said. "Once I got there, I still felt pretty good and I knew I could do it then."

Making the senior's time doubly impressive was the fact he ran alone the final

2.8 miles and won by a stunning 38.4 seconds as U High swept the top four places.

"Usually I have a really hard time with (running alone), but today nothing was stopping me," said the 5-foot-9, 130-pounder.

U High coach Lester Hampton has been impressed with Rutherford in recent workouts.

"Right now his actual ability to work at a high level and his confidence kind of match each other and that's why he's running so strong," said Hampton, whose squad defended its title in the 16-team meet with 20 points.

Other scorers for U High, ranked No. 2 in 2A, were Alex Parlette (2nd, 15:21.5), Jace Mortimer (3rd, 15:22.2), Wesley Ward (4th, 15:23.5) and C.J. Hamilton (10th, 15:50.9). No. 10-ranked Mahomet-Seymour was second with 66.

"We're happy with where we're at, but we've got a month left," said Hampton, whose five scorers averaged 15:20.2 per man.

Mahomet-Seymour was led by Lucas Prather in sixth (15:34.3). The first freshman was Ponthiac's Zac Justus in seventh with a personal best of 15:41.5.

Fourth-place Illini Central (120) saw Lucas Frye run eighth (15:48.6) and Steven Ingersoll ninth (15:50.5).

All the runners were helped by firm

footing and windless, 64-degree weather. U High's Emily Clay sliced through the calm to win the girls race in a personal best of 17:43.8.

"We knew there were good runners here so I was like 'I'm just going to run with them and see how I feel,'" said Clay, who felt pretty good about her nine-second margin of victory over Decatur St. Teresa's Grace McCormack.

Clay credits her teammates for helping take her fitness to an all-time high.

"I've realized how much training with good competition, how much better that makes everyone," she said. "I've wanted to break 18:00 since freshman year so it's nice to finally do it."

Clay and the Pioneers, ranked No. 8 in 2A, could not break St. Teresa's run of success as the Bulldogs, ranked No. 1 in 1A, edged U High for first, 41-52.

"I just wanted to see if we could push them a little bit and I think we certainly did that," Hampton said.

Mahomet-Seymour, ranked No. 10 in 2A, placed third with 73 points and Brit-tany Bohn clocked 17:53.5 in third.

Central Catholic star Alex Van Hoof was sixth in 18:11.8, well under the 19:01 she posted on this course Sept. 21.

Rounding out the top eight were U High's Alexandra Walch (18:26.6) and Sydney Billingsley (18:31.2).



The Pantagraph/RANDY SHARER

University High School's Ryan Rutherford races toward a school and course record time in Tuesday's J High Cross Country Invitational. He clocked 14 minutes, 43.1 seconds on the 3-mile course at Normal's Maxwell Park.