

News

2015 - (382 articles)

Featured (62)

Misc News (2)

2015 Cross Country (120)

-  [DyeStat Illinois - Illinois HS XC Wee...](#)
(Yesterday, 11:06am)
-  [Davis wins Richard Spring Invitation...](#)
(Sep 20th, 9:02am)
-  [IHSAA releases 2015 Cross Country S...](#)
(Sep 18th, 6:31pm)
-  [DyeStat Illinois - This Weekend in Ill...](#)
(Sep 18th, 7:51am)
-  [2015 DyeStat Illinois - Richard Sprin...](#)
(Sep 17th, 7:27pm)
-  [DyeStat IL - 2015 Richard Spring In...](#)
(Sep 17th, 7:21pm)

2015 DS IL State XC Rankings (61)

2015 XC Season Previews (12)

2015 Track & Field (247)

Front Page Archives (13)

All (382)

SEARCH

Davis wins Richard Spring Invitational with US#1 time

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Payne pulls away for Girls Individual title; Sandburg Boys and Glenbard West Girls dominate team championships

By Michael Newman
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Peoria, Ill – It was something that Jon Davis (Oakwood HS, Fithian) was not used to when he got to the 2 ½ mile point at Saturday’s Richard Spring Invitational Boys Varsity Race. He had company. In basically every race that he has been in at this stage of the race, he was in a battle with the dock and had his competition behind him. In this race, Irwin Loud (Oak Park-River Forest HS) refused to move from the side of the two time defending 1A state champion.

“It felt great to have someone on my side. When we got into the triangle, it was good that Loud and I could push each other,” Davis said after his race. “It is always good to have somebody breathing down your neck. Around that corner after the 2 mile, I thought it was going to come down to the final 800. I think he is a great racer. My coach told me that there would be some people with me with a mile to go. I just had to hang on and lay down the law with 400 meters to go.”

As they approached 600 meters to go, Davis made a move to try to break the junior. No luck. Loud



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refused to drop off of the pace. As the two runners made the jig-jog on the course with 400 meters to go, Davis unleashed his kick weaving through lapped runners coming up the incline towards the finish. Loud did not have an answer for that.

With a determined look in his face, Davis charged across the line arms in the air in jubilation. His time of 14:10.9 is the fastest time this year nationally for a three mile course. It is also one of the fastest non-state meet times ever on the Detweiler Park course for a male runner. If there were questions that Davis could break the 1A record this November, that question was erased with this performance. Now the question remains if Davis has sight set on the course record.

When I asked him if he could break the course record of 13:50, he quickly answered correcting me.

"13:50.6", he said in a firm voice.

His focus is on that time.

"I really think the record is in my grasp," Davis said. "I've upped my mileage and worked on my strength. I just want to get in position to bring the record down basically. It's not going to be easy. It is going to hurt a lot. My coach and I think it is possible. It is a very good in-game goal."

The margin of victory on Loud was an amazing nine seconds with him crossing the line in 14:20. The time was a personal best for Loud by almost 19 seconds. This race also signifies that he will be one of the favorites for the 3A championship on this course in November.

"We knew there were going to be a couple of really good guys out there. I did not want to take the lead the first two miles," Loud said. "It was helpful that Davis was pushing the pace. It helped me because it was really windy so he could set the pace and block the wind for me. I just wanted to make a move on the downhill (near 2 1/4 miles) if I could. I just wanted to take the lead before I got to the homestretch. He made a move with 450 to go and I just tried to stay with him. He eventually got away."

The Boys race was fast with ten runners at 14:40 or better. Sean Torpy (Sandburg HS, Orland Park) was next running 14:27. Matt Pereira (Lake Zurich HS) crossed the line in 14:28.7. It was good for him especially since it was his first invitational race of the year. Connor Horn (Neuqua Valley HS, Naperville) ran 14:31.4 to finish 5th.

Sandburg had a little chip on their shoulder after their race at Lyons Township two weeks ago when they were only victorious by one point ahead of the host school. The top ranked team in the state also remembered the last time they were here (2014 state meet) and the feelings and the memories they had when they finished second in that race.

If Saturday's race was any redemption for what had happened almost a year ago, then they were redeemed from that race. The Eagles placed 8 runners in the first 28 behind Torpy's third place finish to easily win the team championship with 51 points.

Sandburg's formula to a race is quite simple. Go out hard, establish your position by the mile, and dare teams to break up their pack. It is intimidating to see a sea of blue up front at the mile as they did on Saturday passing the mile as a team between 4:39-4:41.

"I saw four Sandburg guys ahead of me at the mile. What an amazing team," said Mahomet-Seymour #1 man Alex Keeble who finished sixth overall on Saturday. "I kind of gave up. I did not push the pace like I should have the last part of the race."

Sandburg had control of the race by the two mile point. Davis, Loud, and Sean Torpy went by that point in 9:33. 10-15 seconds later their pack charged through. That was all she wrote. Behind Torpy, Dylan Jacobs made a charge in the final 100 meters to place seventh overall. The sophomore crossed in 14:36.7. Max Lehnhardt was another eight seconds back as their third runner (14:44.2). Tom Brennan placed 16th (14:57.4) followed by teammate Martin Skucas in 18th (14:59.9). Sandburg had five runners in all under 15 minutes.

The performance is very impressive considering they did not have one of their top five Chris Torpy who was held out of the race due to a minor ankle injury according to Coach John O'Malley. Their split on five runners was a strong 32 seconds.

"This is an experienced group and they have run at nationals. I told them if you are not ready to go, people are going to kick your butt. There are hungry teams out there," Sandburg Coach John O'Malley said. "I knew were ready. I told them to be fearless before the start of the race. We talked about the last time we were here. We could not be passive and to take the next step. They are an anaerobic group. They're a bold group. They need to run with their personality."

Sandburg's top five averaged 14:45.5. That is one of the faster invitational times on the course. Their overall five man team time was 73:45. If you compare that to state team times, it would be the fifth fastest ever...and we are only in September.

"Before you get to Detweiller, it is all guess work. What does this course mean compared to other courses? This place is it," O'Malley added. "We are not really trying to talk about the state title. We just want to be the best five man average of all time. Is it doable? I don't know. The 1999 York team put it out there with their 14:31 average. These guys when you talk to them individually they talk about that York team out there to motivate them and as a measuring stick. It is something that we want to shoot for. We don't know if we will get there but it is something that we want to try for. If we fall a little short, I think we will be okay."

Sandburg knows they have plenty to do before November before the state meet. The way that #3 Neuqua Valley ran on Saturday guaranteed that. The Wildcats finished second with 81 points. The way that they did it made many take notice. Horn led the way with his fifth place finish. Then came their pack. Oh what a pack. Teams were allowed to run ten athletes in the team race. Neuqua Valley had nine runners within elbow reach of each other throughout the race. It stayed that way even at the finish. Jake McEneaney led the way in 17th (14:59.3). Dominic Dina was two seconds back as the third runner in 19th (15:01.6). Jackson Jett followed one second later in 21st (15:02.3). Caleb Ferguson and Zach Kinne came in together as the team's 5/6 men at 15:04. The split on Horn for their first five was 32 seconds. Their 2 to 5 man split was only five seconds. Their split on seven runners was only 36 seconds with a split of only nine seconds between the six behind Horn.

"Today was really more about getting into position and racing. We really did not care about times today," said Neuqua Valley Coach Paul Vandersteen. "First of all, we though the course would really be wet. We thought it would be slow. We knew that Sandburg would go out faster than us, but we were hoping to pull them in the last mile. We just didn't get it done today."

York opened their invitational season placing third in this meet with 155 points. It was a good starting point for the Dukes as no one what expect from this team who nucleus is back from last year's sixth place state team. York stayed off the pace through the first mile going through between 4:52 – 4:55 and then started to move from there. Sophomore Charlie Kern led the way for his team placing 10th overall also under 14:40 (14:39.7). Their 2 through 5 man pack was strong led by 32nd place finish of Max Denning to the 48th placing of Robert Tomaska. The split between that quartet was only 12 seconds. York's overall five man split was 41 seconds.

"This race is a building block. We only had one race before this," said York assistant coach Jim Hedman. "We just wanted to see where we were compared to the other teams. We know that as the year goes on, we will continue to work hard and improve. We have been emphasizing pack running and these guys are getting it. The team had a hard week of workouts so we are happy with our performance."

Mahomet-Seymour, the top ranked team in 2A, looked strong running a 57 second five man split led by Alex Keeble's sixth place finish and finishing fourth with 181 points. #8 Oak Park-River Forest rounded out the top five eight points scoring 189 points to place fifth.

Girls Race

The Girls individual race was highly anticipated as two of the top runners in the state would face off. At the beginning of the race, it did not look that way. Audrey Ernst (St. Charles North HS) took the lead early like she traditionally does going through the mile in 5:25. Kelly O'Brien (Palatine HS) passed through five seconds later followed by a pack led by Lindsey Payne (Glenbard West HS, Glen Ellyn). Only a few steps behind Payne came Maryjeanne Gilbert (Notre Dame HS, Peoria). The 2A defending state champion had no intentions of letting Payne out of her sight.

Payne made her move in the second mile just as she did a week before against Ernst. This time, the St. Charles North sophomore would not let her by. The duo came by the 2 mile in 11:21 running stride by stride. Another four seconds came Gilbert and O'Brien working together to try to get up front. Payne started to make moves going down the course by Route 29 slowing starting to gap herself from Ernst. When she made the turn with a little more than a half mile to go, she put her head down and went opening up a sizeable gap on her competition and making this race hers.

Payne weaved through lap runners in the final 400 meters but found her way to the finish line winning in 16:34. The time was a little slower than expected. Rains the day before had softened up the course. 12 to 15 mph winds from the northwest also slowed the runners down. Peoria Notre Dame Coach Dan Gray was at the race at Detweiller Park the week before. He stated that the course Saturday was running close to ten seconds slower than the previous week due to the conditions.

"I knew it was going to be a tough race. I knew that the course was going to be wet," Payne said afterwards. I knew there was going to be some slower times and windy too. I just did not want to go out too fast and just run my pace. At two miles, I knew I had to make my move and make that gap bigger. I just pushing the pace giving it all I had."

Gilbert also made a move passing Ernst in the final straight to placed second (16:52.9). Even though she finished second in the race, there was no disappointment in her face afterwards.

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It was a good race. I was really excited to race today," Gilbert said. "I always love great competition so I was happy with that. I just trying to stay relaxed the first mile with all that excitement. I just

wanted to pick it up and c_____ople one at a time.”

Ernst finished third (16:56.5) running under 17 minutes for the second week in a row. Isabelle Sparreo (Stevenson HS, Lincolnshire) made a strong move in the last mile moving from sixth crossing in fourth place at the finish (17:08.0). Caitlin Shepard (Lake Zurich HS) passed Kelly O'Brien in the final meters of the race to finish fifth two seconds ahead of the Palatine senior (17:12.3 – 17:14.3).

Glenbard West's Coach Paul Hass has a goal every week of seeing improvement in his team from race to race. The #3 Hilltoppers showed more improvement on this day winning the Girls team championship with only 95 points.

“We were certainly very pleased with how the team ran today,” Hass said after the race. “In fact, for the first time going into this meet I felt relaxed; for some reason I felt confident that we were prepared mentally and physically to run well, and it had nothing to do with the outstanding competition we were facing or the wet conditions of the course.”

One of the key factors for Glenbard West so far this season has been the emergence of senior Kathryn Kenwood. A week ago at Lake Park, she was 80 seconds behind Payne. In this week's race, Kenwood was only 65 seconds back placing 12th overall (17:39.4).

“Our goals going into the meet were focused upon decreasing the size of our split and running as a team. Although our 2-5 split only decreased 1 second from last week at Lake Park, from 36 to 35 seconds, our 1-2 split decreased from 80 seconds to 66 seconds due to the outstanding performances of Lindsey Payne and Kathryn Kenwood,” added Hass. “Having our 3-5 split at 5 seconds was great, and we will continue to work on getting our pack closer to Kathryn.”

Glenbard's strength behind the two is their pack. On this day, Janie Nabholz (26th), Grace Rogers (27th), and Abby Shaver (31st) was only five seconds. Their overall 5 runner split this week was 100 seconds. It was 116 seconds last week at Lake Park.

There were team surprises behind Glenbard West making this season even more interesting. #13 Wheaton-Warrenville South ran a great team race in scoring 176 points to place second overall. Sara Atkins was up front throughout the race ending up placing eighth (17:32.3). Allison McGrath was the team's second runner only ten seconds behind Atkins placing 13th. Mary Erdman was the team's third runner in 25th (18:09.0). A key for Coach Rob Harvey's squad is the emergence of freshman Sarah Kulkarni. She jumped in as the Tigers' fourth runner placing 40th (18:21). Emma Schroer was the fifth runner for the team placing 94th. The team's five runner split was 91 seconds. Their split on their first four runners is only 48 seconds.

“I thought we ran well. After yesterday (all three races included), we have realized that we have all the pieces we need to be a very successful team. I was very pleased with our aggressiveness and confidence. We have a long way to go to become a team, but there is time. There are a lot of great teams in the state this season. Hopefully we now believe we can be one of them,” said Harvey. “Sara Atkins and Alison McGrath both ran excellent races. I was very proud of their performances. It's an indication of great things to come.”

#17 Oswego race their best race of the year (so far) placing third only 11 points away from Wheaton-Warrenville South despite not having a runner in the top 20 in the race. Isabelle Christiansen, who moved up to varsity last week, was the team's #1 runner placing 21st (18:05.5). The strength of this team is their pack. That togetherness showed in this race. The split between Christensen and fifth runner Ava Weyrich was only 29 seconds.

“I had our team within 10 seconds of each other with a quarter to go. They just let loose and see who they could get,” Oswego Coach Eric Simon said afterwards. “Our goal today was just to see if we could run a pack. This environment is challenging and we did it. I thrilled regardless of place.”

#6 Palatine scored 210 points to place fourth behind top twenty finishes by O'Brien, Sam Lechowicz (16th), and Sabina Yosif (18th). #11 Maine South again ran a great pack similar to what they did the week before at Lake Park in placing fifth. The Hawks only had a 15 second split on their first six runners led by Kalina Gardiner's 41st place finish.

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