
Cross-country: Davis owns nation-best time

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Jon Davis knew he was moving at a fast clip. Oak Park's Irwin Loud was breathing down his neck, so the Oakwood senior had no time to ease his pace.

But he didn't realize just how fast until he began to stretch out his lead at the Richard Spring Invitational at Peoria's Detweiller Park on Saturday and saw the clock ticking below 14 minutes with about 200 meters to go. Davis surged toward the finish line and finished in 14:10, the nation's top time for a 3-mile race this season and a personal best that is 10 seconds faster than the one he set at the state meet last season.

"It just felt like I couldn't relax at any point, and I think that's a good thing," said Davis, who won the race by 9.1 seconds. "I can't let up on the pace. I have to continuously cover moves and make sure I'm in position. During the race, I had no idea what time I was on track to run. I just knew we were moving at a good pace."

In his first all-out race of the season, Davis showed that his lofty goal of breaking the 40-year-old state meet record of 13:50.6 is within his reach. Davis crossed the line about 31 seconds faster than he did in the same race last year, when he ran 21 seconds slower than he eventually ran at the state meet on the same course.

"Dropping 20.4 seconds from what I ran on Saturday to what I have to run here in six weeks, I think it's very possible," Davis said. "I'll just have to go out strong and just rely on my strength

and hopefully finish well, and that's all you can ask for."

Davis knows he has plenty of room for improvement because he hasn't started doing speed workouts yet. Despite that, he closed with a 4:34 mile.

The senior's goals go beyond the state meet on Nov. 7. A month later, he hopes to contend for titles at the Foot Locker National Championships and the Nike Cross Country Nationals.

So Davis won't push it into full gear just yet. On Saturday at Palatine, he expects to run a tactical race against some of the best suburban runners. The next time he'll fly through the finish line in a personal best, he envisions, will be back on the Detweiller course at the state meet.

"I think my season will go well into December, so we don't want to burn ourselves out," Davis said. "Concerning the time itself, I'm really happy I'm running that in-season."

Mahomet-Seymour takes fourth in Peoria

Alex Keeble showed at the Richard Spring Invitational on Saturday that he should be a top contender to win the Class 2A title, improving on last year's fourth-place state meet performance by 12 seconds with a time of 14:36.0.

"Hopefully this gives him confidence into the end of the season," coach Neal Garrison said. "He's a tremendous worker, even in practice to where I don't think people get to see what a talented and intense of a runner he is. I think this gives them a little bit more of an indication. State will probably be his next big competition, and I think he's got a pretty good chance to win at most meets."

Keeble wasn't the only Bulldog to improve mightily on his

previous top time on Saturday. Six of the seven Mahomet-Seymour runners, who finished fourth in the team contest, set personal records. Brian Butcher finished 25th in 15:05.8, and Andrew Walmer was 41st in 15:17.1.

If they can stay healthy, the Class 2A No. 1 Bulldogs should be favored to win their first state meet after finishing second last year.

“It took us 45 years to get a trophy (last year), so we’d be elated to get a trophy (this season),” Garrison said. “We showed ourselves last year we could get in the top three, and I think we have a little bit more belief that we can do it. ... Now that we’ve been to state a few times, I think we’re comfortable there.”

Unity ready to kick into full gear

Unity has torn through its early part of the season, winning the PBL Invitational two weekends ago in dominant fashion before taking five of the top seven spots at the Tuscola Classic on Saturday, led by Andrew Warnes’ first-place time of 15:28.96 and Getch Eisenmenger’s third-place time of 15:35.78.

And yet, the Class 1A No. 1 Rockets have taken a conservative approach thus far.

“The idea has been to get through these meets as easy as we can without stressing ourselves too much,” coach Dike Stirrett said. “We told them, you guys can go ahead and race the last mile or half-mile whatever you want to do, but keep it together for the first 2 miles and keep it under control, and yet they were running up front.”

On Saturday, that approach will change at the Spartan Classic at St. Joseph-Ogden, when they’ll compete against the No. 3 Spartans, No. 5 Monticello, No 13 PBL and No. 15 Uni, among

others.

“That’s probably one of the meets we’ve hyped a little bit, I guess you could say,” Stirrett said.

With five seniors in Unity’s top seven, Stirrett feels confident in his team’s contention for a state title after last year’s fourth-place finish with a similar top seven, as long as they approach their season in the correct way and stave off bad luck.

“My biggest fear is, we’ve got to stay healthy,” Stirrett said. “We have to avoid the injury and the illness, and if we can do that, we’ll be OK.”

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