

# 5 ILLINOIS ALL-AMERICANS AT NIKE CROSS NATIONALS - DYESTAT ILLINOIS



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Portland --- Illinois athletes had a great day at the 13<sup>th</sup> Nike Cross Nationals at Portland's Glendoveer Golf Course as 3 boys and 2 girls earned All-Americans honors. **Anna Sophia Keller** (St. Anthony IL) finished 15<sup>th</sup> while freshman **Katelynne Hart** (Glenbard West IL) placed 18<sup>th</sup>. **Danny Kilrea** (Lyons Township IL) led the Illinois Boys finishing 13<sup>th</sup>. **Jack Aho** (Grayslake Central IL) finished 17<sup>th</sup> ahead of **Dylan Jacobs** (Sandburg HS IL) who finished 19<sup>th</sup>.

For the first time in recent memory for this meet, there was no rain in the forecast as the temperature crept to near 50 degrees. The conditions on the course were far from perfect. Rain had hit the Portland area for the past ten days. There were some bad conditions that made the footing extremely tough. Take a step and your foot would sink almost a half a foot into the turf. It was energy zapping for the runners. There was a consensus after the race that it was the toughest conditions both mentally and physically that they had ever run.

The five Illinois teams that made the trip to Portland finished off the season on a good note. If you are running in a national meet as your last meet of the year while other teams have already concluded their seasons, then anything you do in this race is simply great. In the Girls race, 3A state champion Naperville North scored 272 points to finish 10<sup>th</sup> overall. Minooka scored 353 points along with Keller TX. Minooka finished 16<sup>th</sup> on the 6<sup>th</sup> runner tie breaker.

3A state champion Neuqua Valley was one of seven schools that was thought to challenge for the Boys national title. The Wildcats ran their best race of the season to finish 5<sup>th</sup> scoring 181 points. They were only 1 point behind 4<sup>th</sup> place Davis UT. Downers Grove North scored 316 points to finish 12<sup>th</sup>. Mahomet-Seymour ran a courageous race moving up in the second half of the race scoring 382 points to finish 17<sup>th</sup>.

The story of the Girls race was the story of two freight trains that dominated both the individual and team races. **Brie Oakley** (Grandview CO) took the lead just for the mile and never looked back, by the time she crossed the finish line in 17:10.1, she had a 28 second advantage over her nearest completion. Sophomore **Ember Stratton** (Sunset OR) thrilled her hometown fans by finishing second (17:38.2) a little more than a second ahead of **Lauren Gregory** (Fort Collins CO).

The freight train in the team race was Fayetteville-Manlius NY who completely dominated the race placing all 5 scorers in the first 15 team places. The New York captured their 10<sup>th</sup> NXN National title scoring 41 points. It was 2 California schools that were next on the podium. Davis CA scored 181 points to finish second for the second year in a row. Great Oak CA duplicated their third place finish from a year ago with 185 points. Carmel IN finished fourth (194 points) missing the podium by nine points.

**Anna Sophia Keller's** race was an amazing one considering the road that she took to get to Portland. Keller has spent half the season battling a half injury and was under the weather in winning her fourth straight 1A state championship. After finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in the NXR Midwest Regional three weeks ago, she took some time off from training. No running. No work in the pool. That strategy paid off for this meet. Keller usually likes to push the pace early take command the race lead. By the time she got to the first mile, she was in 50<sup>th</sup>. She worked her way through the pack in the final half of the race to finish with All-American honors. Quite a way to end her Illinois prep career.

It was a fitting way to start the prep career of **Katelynne Hart** with her 18<sup>th</sup> place finish even though she seemed disappointed after the race. Hart put herself in good position in the first mile as she was near 30<sup>th</sup> place. She slowly moved up towards the front to cross the line with All-American honors. Add that to her 3A state title that she won a month ago, the future is extremely bright for this freshman.

Naperville North ran their race plan like they have all through the season building through the race. **Sarah Schmitt** led her team once again finishing 53<sup>rd</sup> overall but scoring only 16 points for her team. The individual race was crazy as 19 of the first 21 places were all individuals. **Alex Morris** was the team's second runner (75<sup>th</sup>) followed by **Hannah Ricci** (92<sup>nd</sup>), **Claire Hamilton** (119<sup>th</sup>), and **Gabby Champion** (144<sup>th</sup>).

Minooka did not get out to a great start in their race but rebounded to move up to their 16<sup>th</sup> place finishing position. **Emily Shelton** was the team's top runner placing 36<sup>th</sup> overall and only scoring 6 team points. **Ashley Tutt** did not have her best start in this race being boxed in for the first 800 of the race. By the time that she got to the mile, she was near 190<sup>th</sup> place. She looked strong the second half of the race to finish 102<sup>nd</sup> as the team's second runner. **Mackenzie Callahan** was next in (105<sup>th</sup>) followed by **Vivian Van Eck** (138<sup>th</sup>) and **Julia Dames** (182<sup>nd</sup>).

The Boys race had a Midwest feel in the first mile as Aho, Kilrea, and Jacobs were all towards the front of the pack. That was not by design. "The pace felt so slow the first mile," Aho said. "Nobody really wanted to take the lead. The action started in the second mile as **Seth Hirsch** (Millard West NE), **Casey Clinger** (American Fork UT), and **Brodey Hasty** (Brentwood TN) started to push the pace moving away from the pace. Clinger made a definitive move just after 2

miles that made the difference in the race. Clinger defended his national title crossing the line in 15:28.4. He was seven seconds ahead of **Sam Worley** (Comal Canyon TX) and another two seconds ahead of both Hasty and Hirsch.

Bozeman MT had flown under the radar most of the season but most of the cross country purists knew that this squad was tough. Even though American Fork UT had the lead at 2 miles and finished with 3 runners in the first 20 overall, it was the pack of Bozeman that was the difference. They had a 25 second split on their top 5 and a 10 second split between their second through fifth runners to capture their first national championship with 105 points. American Fork UT scored 141 points to finish second. Brentwood TN scored 163 points to finish third.

Kilrea displayed his new found kick moving up in the final 400 to finish 13<sup>th</sup>. The junior will be the third returning runner in this meet heading into next season.

Aho and Jacobs ran side by side for the last mile of the race pushing each other home with All-American honors.

"I just wanted to stay in the mix with some of the good runners. That was the main goal that was running through my mind," Kilrea said. "I know it was wet last year. This year it was so muddy. I know I tried to pick it up with 800 meters to go. Every time I tried to speed up the mud said no."

"That race was awesome," Aho added. "No one wanted to take the pace out and I found myself in the lead. I thought why not and I kept it going. The course being muddy is not easy. It was tough but I just tried to hang on the best that I could."

"It was pretty fast to the first turn at the beginning of the race. After that, everybody started to slow down," Jacobs said. "

There was disappointment around the Neuqua Valley camp immediately after they found out that they were not among the top three teams in the field. There was nothing to be disappointed about. The Wildcats ran their best race of the year with only a ten second split on their five scorers. **Jackson Jett** led the way finishing 65<sup>th</sup>. **Zach Kinne** was next (67<sup>th</sup>) followed by **Jake McEneaney** (70<sup>th</sup>), Matt Milostan (77<sup>th</sup>), and Scott Anderson (82<sup>nd</sup>).

"You guys executed well. You got in position and went for it. 5th in the nation is nothing to sneeze at," Coach **Paul Vandersteen** said in a text to his team after the race. "I know you wanted more, but now it is time to have some fun and reflect upon what a great season you had. I am very proud of you and thank you from the bottom of my heart for such a memorable season."

"I think we got out right where we wanted to," **Jake McEneaney** said. "We did everything that we could do in our power. It just did not come out in our favor."

Downers Grove North took an aggressive approach to the race getting out hard as they were in fourth place after the first mile. That early pace along with the soft conditions of the course seemed to pay a toll on the team as they finished 12<sup>th</sup>. **Jacob Ridderhoff** led his team finishing 66<sup>th</sup> overall followed by **Alec Danner**(95<sup>th</sup>), **Andrew Marek** (118<sup>th</sup>), **Ryan Birkmeier** (119<sup>th</sup>), and **Nick Chudzik**(124<sup>th</sup>). Five runners return next year making Downers North one of the top teams to watch nationally.

"I would say we got out the way we wanted," **Alec Danner** said after the race. "We just got in position and tried to make moves throughout the race. It was a really tough day. I wish it were ideal conditions. This is one of the greatest experiences of my life running with these guys and putting it all out on this course. It couldn't be a better way to end my cross country career."

Mahomet-Seymour did not get out the way that they wanted to in this race as they were the 22<sup>nd</sup> of 22 teams after the first mile of the race. The Bulldogs never quit moving up through the field the second part of the race. They ended up finishing 17<sup>th</sup> overall. Considering that most of the nation had not even thought of this school of 958 students at the beginning of the year as a cross country power, people do know now of the Illinois 2A state champions. **Riley Fortune** led the team placing 104<sup>th</sup> followed by **Ryan Hodge** (116<sup>th</sup>), **Ben Crow** (121<sup>st</sup>), **Gabe Pommier** (126<sup>th</sup>), and **Andrew Walmer** (131<sup>st</sup>). There was only a 14 second split on their top 5 runners.