

Prep Sports | updated: 10/3/2015 3:40 PM

Batavia bests field at St. Charles North invite



Batavia's Emma Stephens takes fourth place in the girls varsity run with a time of 17:57. 2 at the St. Charles North cross country invitational at LeRoy Oakes Saturday.

Laura Stoecker | Staff Photographer



John Lemon

It's a sign of how far the Batavia girls cross country team has come not just that they won the 23-team St. Charles North Invitational Saturday at LeRoy Oakes, but how the Bulldogs reacted to it.

Batavia scored 69 points to win over its closest challengers Lyons (99), Hinsdale Central (129), Geneva (137) and Metea Valley (150).

Yet the Bulldogs, ranked third in the state by Dyestat, knew they can run even better.

"A couple weren't all that happy individually," Batavia coach Chad Hillman said. "I just think their expectations are pretty

high which is great. Any time you beat some good teams like Lyons and Hinsdale Central, Schaumburg and Geneva, if you walk away beating teams like that you feel pretty good."

Sophomore Emma Stephens led Batavia in fourth in 17:57. Senior Dakota Roman followed in 11th, two of the Bulldogs who weren't thrilled with their times.

"It was OK," Stephens said. "I wanted to be in top 3. Everybody (in the top 3) had a really good race. My start, I think went a little too hard for a little too long."

Stephens did move up from sixth place by passing two runners in the final 400.

Sophomores Daphne Kolody and Marygrace Golden were right with Roman finishing 12th in 18:36 and 14th in 18:41, respectively.

"Dakota wasn't happy, but the rest of them pulled through, the rest of the crew did their job," Hillman said.

That includes the work by Batavia's fifth and sixth runners to close the gap with the top four. Anna Marie Malay was 28th in 19:21, and Erika Mansfield took 35th in 19:34.

"They are chipping away at it," Hillman said. "It's still not where it needs to be. But to their credit they understand what needs to happen. A few of the girls in that position are the same as last year trying to do the same thing. They know what needs to happen. There's enough time for them to get it where it needs to be and we can do some great things."

"The team is doing really great this year," Stephens said. "I'm really proud of them. We're making efforts to stay closer together and close that gap between all our runners. I'm looking forward to the state series and seeing what all our team can do."

Both Hillman and Stephens said they were big fans of the new layout at LeRoy Oakes, and Geneva senior McKenzie Altmayer also fared well on her first look at the course.

"Parts of it were fun. Parts of it I wanted the old course back," laughed Altmayer. "Everyone has to deal with it. Running along the creek was cool because it was pretty. It was definitely a lot harder of a course."

It didn't look like it watching Altmayer separate from the field. She won the race in 17:44, making her move at the two-mile to pull into the lead.

"I know a lot of the girls in the race and a lot of them like to go out hard," Altmayer said. "I figured I would test to see where my strength was at this point in the season."

Lake Zurich senior Caitlin Shepard finished second in 17:52 and Schaumburg's Maddie Marasco was third in 17:56.

Altmayer also won at Wauconda earlier this season.

"Today was definitely a confidence booster," Altmayer said. "It was nice to see where I was, where our team was, nice to see where our competition is and size them up before the state series."

Geneva freshman Sophia McDonnell finished 10th in 18:32. Vikings coach Bob Thomson rested his team last week at Sterling and liked how they responded Saturday.

"McKenzie did awesome," Thomson said. "To win this race is phenomenal against this competition. I think she was smart in the beginning."

Shepard overcame a fall when she tripped on a rock at the one-mile mark to almost win the race. She also fell last year in the track sectionals.

"I just thought I have to get back up and finish this race," Shepard said. "I can't stop and quit."

Shepard said the fall cost her "5 to 10 seconds." She made up that gap in the second mile and tried to make one last push to catch Altmayer with 800 meters left.

"I tried to pick it up," Shepard said. "If I wouldn't have fallen I think I probably would have gotten her."

Shepard has finished fourth this year at Peoria Notre Dame and also took fourth last week at Palatine. She was encouraged by her runner-up finish Saturday.

"We didn't know what to expect," Shepard said. "I wanted to go out and stay with the top pack of girls. Just seeing I can keep up with these girls who are going to be in the 3A state meet it gives me confidence going into state and being able to keep up with them because I'm hoping to be top 10 at state. I think it was a really good chance to get to race against these girls."

Elk Grove junior Emily Stegmeier took fifth in 18:04. After winning last week at Bartlett, St. Charles North's Audrey Ernst finished seventh in 18:12 despite spraining her ankle Friday and having strep throat earlier this week.

Other area finishes included Lake Zurich in eighth, St. Charles North 10th and Jacobs 12th.

Allie Chen and Ally Suyak came in next to each other in 43rd and 44th for the North Stars who were missing a couple of their top five.

"We're not full strength," North Stars coach Shari Hayes said. "Still very proud of Audrey, didn't quit. Allie is normally our sixth runner, she moved up today."

Chloe Walsh led Jacobs in 22nd in 19:11, and Alexandra Lorenz finished 39th in 19:40.

"We only had two girls attack it from the beginning," Jacobs coach Kevin Christian said. "Everyone else went out way too slow and just got caught. That made it a tough race for us."

"Chloe and Alex ran great. She (Walsh) finished about what she went out in. She's ready to go, she just needs to put one together."

Burlington Central junior Megan Safranski finished 19th in 18:56, and freshman Kasey Moreno led Elgin in 31st in 19:28.