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Marmion's Ronzone shines at Batavia

By Kevin McGavin
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Michael Ronzone and Tyler Dau did not disappoint the attendees in the final race of the Batavia Distance Madness indoor track meet on Friday night.

In the championship flight of the 1,600-meter run, Ronzone, a Marmion junior, took the lead at the bell lap and ran a blistering final 200 meters to edge the Geneva senior.

"At one point in the race I wanted to be leading," said Ronzone, who was timed in four minutes, 20.3 seconds to defeat Dau by .47 seconds. "I found myself in the lead with a lap to go. I have always thought of my kick as the biggest part of my race. It hasn't been there the last year or so. I have been injured and up and down with my training."

Dau is a metric mile specialist for the Vikings and returning Class 3A state qualifier.

"I felt really good about my performance," the Geneva senior said. "I relied on my kick."

The win was extra special for Ronzone.

"I'm actually from Batavia," the Cadets' junior said. "I envisioned myself crossing the finish line. I am thankful to God and my teammates for the opportunity."

The coed meet was littered with returning all-staters from all three classes.

Nowhere did the confluence of talent emerge in greater force than the girls fast heat of the 3,200 run.

Naperville North cross-country and track stalwarts Sarah Schmitt and Claire Hamilton paced the field for the first half of the race.

"They ran very even, they controlled the pace very well," Naperville North distance coach Dan Iverson said of the Huskies' duo.

But the field also included defending state runner-up Ashley Tutt of Minooka and South Carolina-bound all-stater Brooke Wilson of Prospect.

The quartet was engrossed in an epic encounter over the last 800 meters.

But Schmitt held off a late surge by Wilson to win in 10:43.08.

Hamilton denied Tutt for third with a time of 10:46.37.

"I knew (Wilson) was a great competitor, very talented," said Schmitt, who was one spot behind Wilson with her

sixth-place result last spring in Charleston. "I knew she was coming up and just went for it."

"I'm really happy we decided to come to this meet," said Wilson, who ran a 10:43.55.

"This early in the year (the competition) is awesome," said Hamilton, a relay state champion from two years ago who has committed to Indiana in both sports. "We knew coming in it was going to be a good, fast pace. I got to run with a teammate, which is always so much fun."

"Allison (McGrath) ran an 11:07 -- and was eighth," marveled Wheaton Warrenville South coach Rob Harvey.

In the boys 3,200 run, Geneva ace Josh Rodgers edged Kaneland junior Matt Richtman for fourth place.

"It's a really big meet for me," Richtman said. "Coming into the season, this is a one of the meets I look forward to. There is so much elite competition."

There were only three distances raced Friday night in Batavia.

Geneva senior Brian Kuehl unleashed a devastating kick over the last lap to overtake Chicago Jones' Arthur Santoro to record the fastest time among the multiple heats staged for boys at 800 meters.

Familiarity was critical for Kuehl.

"We come here basically three times a year," Kuehl said of the perennial Upstate Eight Conference host school during his career. "It's kind of a little bit like a home course as it's only 15 minutes from our school. I was pretty happy with that last lap."

In the girls 1,600 championship flight, Hannah Ricci offered yet more compelling evidence there is seemingly never a shortage of weapons in the Naperville North distance arsenal.

"A lifetime best by a lot," Iverson said after the junior raced past Minooka junior Emily Shelton to win in 5:05.54.

"(The strategy) was to stick to the pack," Ricci said. "I felt good going in and just saved my move for the end."

"Our (distance) team is so deep," Schmitt said.

WW South senior Sara Atkins led for much of the early part of the race before settling for fifth place.

In the opening race of the night -- the girls championship heat at 800 meters -- Class 2A cross-country champion Jenna Lutzow (Belvidere North) denied defending Class 1A state runner-up Audrey Harrod of Hinckley-Big Rock to establish the tone of excellence that was to follow.

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