

Campolindo Girls Cross Country team wins state championship

Acalanes and Miramonte reload

By Jon Kingdon



Jenna Miles 12th place - top campo girls finisher

Photos provided

With much of the focus in the athletic world on the major sports, it is very easy to overlook the accomplishments of the other less recognized athletes. There have been numerous books written about football, basketball, baseball and any number of other sports. What do cross country runners get? "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner."

Over 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) on a smog-filled, 75-degree day at Woodward Park in Fresno, this past Nov. 25, under the leadership of head coach Chuck Woolridge, the Campolindo Girls Cross Country won their third state Division III Championship (2010 and 2013 previously). Competing against 28 teams that qualified for the finals, the Cougars came out victorious.

Running in the state tournament requires a different approach to other meets. How does one approach such a competitive meet? According to senior Jenna Miles: "The pace was not what we were used to. Our first mile was 15 seconds faster than in any other race. In the first part of the race, we wanted to start quickly and all of us got ahead of the pack. In the second part of the race, we wanted to pass other runners that were not in as good of shape as we were. The last mile, we just tried to hold on and keep our position."

It's not unusual to have muscle and shin issues, but Campolindo's injury list throughout the season

looked more like a MASH unit. Four-year letterman Hannah Ruane battled through what she thought was tendonitis until being diagnosed in mid-October with a stress fracture in her leg, ending her season. Her teammates confronted tendonitis, abdominal pulls, hip ailments and oddest of all, Miles, who missed two weeks with a concussion after hitting her head on a locker room door.

Woolridge had to feel jinxed after so many injuries: "It was a really difficult year to have so many different runners on our team to be on the sidelines. Cross country takes a special type of athlete. These girls were driven by an internal will rather than the extrinsic rewards."

Jessie Foxworthy's consistency became more and more important as the season progressed. Said Woolridge: "Jessie was always the runner we could rely on to run to her potential and she served as a true barometer as to where we were as a team."

"We were fortunate to have great leadership from Chao and Ruane, both four-year lettermen," said Woolridge. "They took on the responsibility for continuing the legacy, keeping spirits up and reminding the girls what the goals of the team were."

All teams were faced with the air quality problems during the Napa fires, having practices and events canceled for four days. Said

Woolridge: "The girls on their own went to fitness centers or found friends with a treadmill and worked out on their own."

Ironically, Woolridge feels that it was the hurdles that his team had to overcome that directed them to their ultimate success: "The challenges we faced this season provided the tests and shared experiences that allowed us to become a real team. Once we overcame these obstacles, the girls really began to connect with each other. From a character building perspective, it really brought the girls together. It

became more of a collective effort to achieve the goals that they set for themselves."

Coming off a very successful 2016 season, where Miramonte High School won the Division 4 Northern Coast Section Title, head coach Brian Henderson, knew it was going to be difficult to match that team's success: "We graduated six of our seven runners and then one returning starter. Senior Sarah Vurnick was a phenomenal leader on a young team. She did a great job in getting the girls together and facilitating the bonding process. It really facilitated the process of having our young runners transfer to the varsity level."

Junior Cassy Haskel, who was the individual section champion last year, suffered a hip injury. Haskel was unable to get back into "race fitness." Henderson looks forward to Haskel's return next season: "I'm glad to see that she is back running and I look for her to have a strong track season."

Henderson had to rely on a lot of new runners, many of whom were sophomores and were new to racing the Varsity three-mile races. Stepping up for the Matadors was sophomore Beatrice Whitaker. Henderson was effusive in his praise: "Beatrice had a fantastic season for a first timer. She finished 12th in the NCS section meet, just missing going to the state meet by two places."

Sophomore Colette Kimura

and another influx of underclassmen will be counted on to fill out the squad next season.

Acalanes head coach Michael Maloney described last season as "a transition one for the program. We had a lot of new and young talent."

The top runner for the Dons was freshman Nicole Frigon, who was the number one finisher for Acalanes in every race this season. Frigon went on to win the league championship in the frosh-soph division. Another freshman, Lena Johnson, also displayed the potential to be a runner that Maloney will count on next year.

Maloney cited Caroline Kelly and Sidney Zimmerman for their role as captains of the team: "They did a great job managing their teammates and leading by example with effort and attitude."

Acalanes will be graduating three seniors but will returning two sophomores and five freshmen.

It is going to be important for Maloney to have his runners to step up their game next season:

"There was a lot of consistency among the runners on our team. We had good depth but not a lot of consistency. It was hard to pick out who to choose each week but the girls did a good job in pushing each other. We did a lot of rebuilding this year and we should be set to compete next year."



The team with the State Championship trophy.



Getting off on the Right Foot

LMYA

believes it is important to teach beginning basketball players the right way to dribble, pivot, shoot, etc., the first time they take to the court, so that they don't develop bad habits. To accomplish this, LMYA brings in trainers from the **National Academy of Athletics** to help these young players at their first practices.



Photography by Lauren McSorley

Looking to keep your child's skill improving, over the holidays, the **National Academy of Athletics**, used by LMYA, is offering a Winter Break Camp, December 27-29 in the Wagner Ranch Gymnasium. Full and half day programs offered. To Register call (925) 254-2445 or, online, at www.orindaparksandrec.org