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Campolindo girls and boys win state Division III Cross Country Championships

By Jon Kingdon



The Campolindo girls and boys cross country teams celebrate with their state championship trophies. Pictured: Dylan Mitchley, Jack Pieper, Emma Smith, Zoe Theulier, Ellie Guthrie, Sophie Webster, Ellie Buckley, Cayden Hein, Quinn Guthrie, Dylan Gunn, Dylan Cronin, Owen Lekki, Alicia Hober, Paloma Hancock, Alex Lodewick, Rhys Pullen Courtesy of Hector Chao

in this 5K meet, which was held at Woodward Park in Fresno. In the team competition, Dylan Gunn finished in fourth, Dylan Cronin finished in seventh and Alexander Lodewick, Cayden Hein and Owen Lekki finished in 11th, 12th and 13th respectively. Despite having the first two finishers in the race, the final three runners for Maria Carillo placed 10th, 15th and 36th, landing them in second place.

It was a team concept that led to the victory, said Woolridge: "We used a pack strategy to counter Maria Carillo's top runners. Our boys fed off the momentum of the group and worked as a team. All five of our runners were in the top 20 for the entire race with only a 29 second margin between our No. 1 runner and our No. 5 runner, which at this level is pretty incredible."

The teams were running under ideal conditions, according to Woolridge: "It was cool with overcast skies with the course being dry but packed which made for fast times. Our boys understood what each of their roles was going to be and we really got great performances out of our No. 4 and No. 5 runners, Hein and Lekki. Cayden showed great improvement from his NCS time as he was more conservative in the first mile and was able to hold up in the last mile."

"The state meet was more like a dual meet between us and Maria Carillo," said Hein. We were not the favorites because we had lost to them at the NCS but we ran hard with passion and peaked at the right time. As a team we positioned and executed well and I really pushed harder because it was the last meet of my last season. Coach Woolridge and (assistant) coach Andy (Lintquist) did a great job in training and motivating us through the season and kept reminding us that we had never won the boys state title."

The qualities of each of the victories for the boys and girls were different, said Woolridge, who has been the head coach for four of the girl's state titles: "The girls went in as the favorite to win the meet and they performed like the favorite having their best race of the season with the margin of victory being one of the largest the state meet has ever seen (74 to second place Cathedral Catholic's 154) and that was a thrilling and gratifying thing to watch because I know how hard they worked, and the pieces that had to come together took the entire season."

Like the boy's team, all of the Campolindo girls set personal records led by senior Paloma Hancock who finished in fifth place and set a personal record of 18:04.7, bettering her previous best time by 41 seconds (ninth fastest in Campolindo history). Freshman Ellie Buckley 18:19.1 (11th fastest in Campolindo history) placed ninth, senior Alicia Hober 16th, senior Emma Smith 19th and Zoe Theulier 25th.

It was the first year running cross country for Smith and her performances all season were crucial to the team, said Woolridge: "Emma was a catalyst for the team. Knowing that we had another legitimate point scorer coming into the season as the fifth athlete that we could count on, really made a difference for the girls." Not to be overlooked was the leadership by the team's seniors, Hancock, Hober and Ellie Guthrie.

For the fifth time, the Campolindo girls have won the state cross country championship while the boys team made it a clean sweep with their first state title. In the Division III state meet, the girls came in as one of the favorites to take the title while the boy's team was seen in more of an underdog role. Still, it was a goal that the Cougars had been pointing toward all year, said head coach Chuck Woolridge: "This is the first year where we started with the understanding that both teams had the opportunity to win the section and state titles and that is very rare. I can't think of the last time that I had a squad that started in July and already thought about the state championship as a realistic goal."

Despite coming in second to Maria Carillo (28-53) in the North Coast Section, which qualified Campolindo for the state meet, the boys team had their best performance of the year at the state meet, competing against 25 teams, said Woolridge: "The boys team really performed beyond our expectations. We knew that we would have to have a magical performance to win and that's what they did."

As much of an individual sport as cross country is, a team can only be as strong as its lowest qualifying runner. Each of the Cougar runners set personal records

Acalanes head coach Jeff Hutson saw his boys team finish in 13th place in Division IV in the state tournament after having finished in second place at the NCS tournament. Still it was cause for celebration, said Hutson: "I believe it's been about five years since a whole squad of boys or girls from Acalanes went to state and it was a big accomplishment for us. We had pointed to the NCS meet and going to state was the icing on the cake. We just missed putting the candle on top of the cake."

Sam Roth led the team finishing 23rd, followed by Andrew Owens 48th, Loic Windfuhr Durand 72nd, Nick Hutson 89th and Dominic Balsaldua 89th.

With five of the seven Dons runners being underclassmen, Hutson is very optimistic for next season. Junior Sam Ross who finished in 37th will be a key on the team next season, said Hutson: "Sam's becoming one of the leaders on our team and I'm very proud of how he's stepping up. Loic finished at 16:55.1 and that was a good accomplishment, going under 17 minutes. Andrew, who will be graduating this year, ran very consistently and had a good run."

Junior Nicole Frigon was the only qualifier for the state tournament from the Acalanes girls and finished in 66th place, competing against 211 other runners. Frigon qualified for the state tournament by finishing in 11th place at the NCS tournament, just beating out sophomore teammate Lauren Yee by 1.6 seconds. "Nicole did well running a personal best time of 19:41.9," said Hutson. "She got consistently faster during the season and we're pleased with that."

The Miramonte girls team finished in 12th place in Division IV at the state meet. The team was led by junior Audrey Allen who was first team all NCS finished in seventh followed by sophomore Kate Riley in 41st place, sophomore Clare Nolet in 72nd place, senior Jamie Say in 84th place and sophomore Nathalie Green in 130th place.

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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