

Oct. 28 MCT Cross Country Championships



Steinert juniors Steven Ridge (left) and Larissa Strycharz both head across the finish line with the top times among township runners at today's Mercer County Cross Country Championship Meet at Washington Crossing Park (Photos by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).

Walsh is feeling good about Nottingham's boys and girls teams

By Rich Fisher
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Oct. 28: For a coach whose girls' squad finished 14th out of 15 in the team standings and whose boys were 15th out of 19, "Irish" Mike Walsh was wearing a pretty satisfied look after today's Mercer County Cross Country championships at Washington Crossing Park.

That's because today's meet was about progress more than prosperity, and Walsh felt his teams prospered by their improvement.

Starting with the girls, Walsh was thrilled that Melissa Bauerle (21:55), Rosa Colon (22:12), Sam Williams (22:25) and Theresa Henry (22:49) all broke 23 minutes.

"For four girls to run under 23, that's great for us," said Walsh, who never even had a team at this race in his first few years as coach. "I would have liked to have been a little closer to beating the 22 minute mark for a couple of the girls but I think injuries got in the way a little bit with training and we weren't able to do more work as much as we wanted to.



Melissa Bauerle is the first Northstar through the chute at today's Mercer Meet (Photo by Dennis Symons/www.dennissymons.com).

“I think a couple of the girls would have been able to beat 22 minutes if they did more workouts. But four girls under 23 is great for us.”

Sarah Hackman (24:32) and Lian King (27:10) rounded out the girls.

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Walsh was equally pleased with his boys' squad, which finished just three points behind Steinert.

“We had three guys in the 18s, and all seven of our runners are in the 22 mark, which is great for us,” the Irish One said. “These kids really made a stride the past year. It's the first year for our summer program, and they started meeting at Veterans Park on July 5 and logged miles Monday through Thursday.

“So when the first day of practice came on August 15, they had been running for a month-and-a-half, that was big. It wasn't like they were just starting out.”

Eric Cougan (18:11) was the first Northstar in, followed closely by Michael John (18:13) and Zach Helm (18:24).

“Michael John was frustrated all year,” Walsh said. “He wanted to get into the 18s, he started at 19:01 the first weekend and couldn't do it, but today he did it.”

Rounding it out for Nottingham were Ryan Struble (20:26), Darnall Jean Louis (21:07), Frank Gonzalez (21:09) and Nabil Jamil (21:33).

“I told the kids, let's set our goals a little lower today (lower times), because this race by nature is going to be faster,” Walsh said. “A lot of top runners don't run as hard coming into the season but they ran hard today. So the times were going to blow away what they think their goal is. So we cut it by 30 seconds, and they did a great job.”

Steinert's Ridge and Strycharz top township finishers in each race

The most consistent runner in the township this fall has consistently been Steinert's Steven Ridge, and he maintained that stature today.

Larissa Strycharz would most likely have been right there as far as consistency until injuries delayed the start of her season until three weeks ago, but she showed flashes of her potential today.

The two juniors were Hamilton Township's top finishers in their respective races, as Ridge was 34th for the boys in 17:34 and Strycharz was 27th for the girls in 20:58.

“Larissa ran well for being hurt all year,” said coach Ron “Yak” Yacyk. “This is her third race of the year so she's just starting to really get back in shape. It's a pretty good effort for her to go into the sectionals (next weekend) with.”

Strycharz was followed across the line by teammates Dominique Michalec (22:03), Kelsey Harshman (22:31), Carolyn McClure (22:37), Lauren Matrisciano (22:48), Katie Gaffney (23:50) and Adrianna Graziano (26:32). Steinert was 11th as a team.

“We're proud of all our seniors,” Yacyk said. “Dominique, Carolyn, Katie, they all did a great job. They had four great years and did a lot for us, that's all we could ask for.”

“I was impressed with what the girls did today. All we ask them to do is work hard and they did. During the year, Larissa being hurt basically hurt our team record. The other girls stepped up, did what they could and we're happy.”

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As for Ridge, he's hoping for a better race at sectionals next week.

“I feel like I probably could have done better today,” he said. “We haven’t raced in two weeks. We’ve been training, the first week we went hard the second week we tapered.”

“I feel like I could have done better, although the sprinting finish with this one Lawrence guy really led me to go as far as I could, like I had nothing left.”

His time was five seconds off his PR Washington Crossing, and he was hoping to stay with West Windsor-Plainsboro North’s Eddie Cunningham. That was Ridge’s measuring stick to see if he can get out of sectionals next week.

“I was able to stay with him for the first mile,” Ridge said. “I lost him after that, he was too fast. I feel like I have a week’s time to see if I can catch up to him again.”

“I’m hoping to get into the mid to late 16’s next week. My strategy is not to go as hard the first mile, rather pick it up the second or third mile.”

Coming in after Ridge were Brendan Harshman (19:22), Matthew Mohl (19:41), David Heether (19:48), Sean Munkascy (20:14), Joe Ondersin (20:17) and Matt Fink (20:22). The Spartans finished 14th as a team.

Baldasari satisfied with Hamilton boys and her freshmen girls

Lauren Baldasari continues to fight the good fight as she tries breathing life into the Hamilton West program, and she saw some good things today despite the boys finishing last and the girls not having enough to compete as a team.

“I’m happy with the guys, disappointed in the girls’ team,” the coach said. “A lot of them don’t practice as hard as they should. They don’t listen as well as they should. They kind of need some of that runner’s spirit going on.”

Two girls who did show some spirit were freshmen Mercedes Mendoza-Dye (27:18) and Rebecca Compagnucci (28:19), who comprised the entire West female contingent.

“Our girls struggled a lot,” Baldasari said. “We had a lot people sick on our team, I guess it was spreading around. A couple dropped out.”

“The two that finished were freshmen and they both PR’d, so that’s something. They’ll be with us the next few years and hopefully help us start a base. Mercedes just started running with us a few weeks ago.”

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In the boys meet, junior Ryan Meckel continued as Hamilton’s No. 1 man with a time of 19:40.

“He’s been under the weather too, so he’s about a minute slower than he has been,” Baldasari said.

Following Meckel were Calvin Rowe (20:15), Isaac Gonzalez (21:37), Ross Talbot (22:20), Harold Ordenez (23:33), Andrew Rockal (24:20) and Billy Markley (26:45). None are seniors.

“They’re doing well,” Baldasari said. “We have a lot of freshmen, we’re not losing anyone next year, hopefully. So again, it’s something to build on.”