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The Colony sweeps 5A titles; other cross country news

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GRAND PRAIRIE — Nick Benton, cross country coach at The Colony, chose to give his boys and girls teams more late-season ownership.

After The Colony's sweep of Class 5A Region II boys and girls titles Saturday at Lynn Creek Park, Benton is not regretting his decision.

"I've known we were capable," Benton said, "but we could never put it together. So this time, before our district meet, I told them it was time for them to take over. That, for the first time, it was on them."

With runners like Victoria Avila (fourth) and Andrew Tuma (seventh) coming through with high finishes, the sweep was on.

"We've never had a team go to state, let alone two," said Benton, in his fifth season.

Six weeks before regional, The Colony boys finished first and the girls second in a meet at Lynn Creek. Benton wanted to change as little as possible from that day, including driving the team to the meet himself in a school bus rather than the charter bus that was offered.

"We were just hoping to qualify for state," said The Colony sophomore Ashton Burton. "We had no expectations about winning."

The state meet will be Nov. 8 at Old Settlers Park in Round Rock.

Revenge for Blunt: The fastest time of the day in any division — 14 minutes, 53.3 seconds for 5,000 meters — belonged to Frisco Independence junior Carter Blunt in Class 5A.

On the way to winning a state title last year, Blunt was third at the regional race at Lynn Creek.

"I don't know what happened last year," Blunt said. "Other guys ran great races. But I was really out for revenge this time."

With a sizable lead on runner-up Alex Fernandez of Adamson, Blunt's goal shifted to breaking 15 minutes, a feat no one else could accomplish on Saturday.

4A sweep: For the second straight year, Kaufman swept girls and boys regional team titles, this time in Class 4A.

Kaufman and Sanger tied in the girls division, so first place was decided by a comparison of the team's sixth runners. Kendall Pearson's time won it for the Lions.

"I knew it was going to be a tight one," Kaufman coach Denver Stone said. "For seven runners, I thought we were better but I wasn't sure about five. There isn't a lot of difference in my girls from top to bottom."

Stone, in his eighth year, attributes Kaufman's success to its work ethic. "We start in June and nobody is going to outwork us," he said.

HP boys to state: In its first year competing in Class 6A, Highland Park's boys qualified for state with a third-place finish.

"We just came out and ran our hardest," said Scots senior Rico Lara, seventh in 15 minutes, 40.85 seconds. "We ran this course last year and I think that helped us."

Four Highland Park runners turned in personal bests.

"The guys stepped up and did it," said coach David Ripley. "We knew 6A would be tough."

The Highland Park girls qualified Hope McLaughlin individually for state, keeping alive a streak of having a team or individual at state every year since 1975. McLaughlin was sixth in 18:33.10. The girls team finished four rungs below state qualification.

Finishing strong: Forney junior Caylon McMillan ran a patient race to victory in Class 5A with a time of 18:32.31, a couple of seconds ahead of the runner-up and teammate Lauryn Barrientos. McMillan, regional champion as a freshman, was fifth after a mile.

"I could tell the others were getting tired," McMillan said. "I felt stronger today. I've cut back a little lately because I've felt worn down."

Good company: In a Class 6A field littered with top runners from the Houston and Austin areas, Jesuit sophomore Connor O'Neill knew enough about his competition to employ a strategy of staying close to the top people. It worked. O'Neill's personal best 15:37.18 earned fifth place and a state berth.

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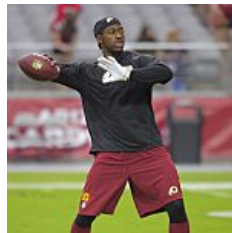
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