

Staying tough

All-Area runners save the best for last

By Chris McCosky
AND NEAL ZIPSER
STAFF WRITERS

Sometimes you have to see the whole picture to measure a team's or a coach's success.

North Farmington didn't win the Lakes Division boys cross country title. It finished third at the Western Lakes conference meet. But when you start sorting everything out at the end of the season, you would be hard-pressed to find a bigger success story than North Farmington.

"I was really pleased to see the way we came around at the end of the year," said North's Paul Welch, who is this season's Observerland Coach of the Year. "It's a credit to our kids, really, that we were able to peak at the right time."

North had qualified for the state meet only once in its history and never in Welch's nine previous years. So, after the near-miss at the league meet, few expected the Raiders to break the skid.

Surprise. The Raiders, led by seniors Tom Stamboulis and Brian Rajdl, placed second at their regional meet to win a ticket to the state meet. The Raiders were one of three area teams that competed: Catholic Central, led by the fourth-place finish of Joe Leo, was 12th; Plymouth Canton was 16th; North was 20th.

"This was a pretty competitive year in our area," Welch said. "I think it says a lot for our conference when the team that isn't the best in its division or league can still, on any given day, run well enough to make it to the state meet. There were five or six teams that had that ability."

Most of that talent is showcased here, as we present the 1994 All-Area Boys Cross Country Team:

FIRST TEAM

Joe Leo, junior, Redford Catholic Central: Easily the top runner in Observerland — and he will be back — Leo placed first at West Bloomfield, Haslett and Sturgis invitational; first at the Catholic League meet; and first at the regional.

1994 ALL-AREA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY FIRST TEAM

Tom Stamboulis/North Farmington
Brian Rajdl . . . North Farmington
Tom May . . . Farmington
Joe Leo . . . Catholic Central
Brian Crockett . . . Plymouth Canton
Scott Pengelly . . . Plymouth Canton
Dan Boynton . . . Redford Union
Brad Polkinghorne . . . Luth. Westland
Jared Bielecki . . . Plymouth Canton
Matt Sroczynski . . . Catholic Central
Paul Welch (Coach)/North Farmington

SECOND TEAM

Phil Camilleri . . . Catholic Central
Casey Mochter . . . Plymouth Canton
Andy McDonald . . . Plymouth Canton
Kurt Garcia . . . Redford Union
Chad Knoke . . . Farmington Harrison
Ian Bechtold . . . Plymouth Canton
Steve Chen . . . North Farmington
Mike Langdon . . . Farmington
Derrick France . . . Catholic Central
Brandon Mott/Westland
John Glenn
Rob Block . . . Livonia Stevenson

HONORABLE MENTION

Redford Union — Thomas Kessel; Canton — Sanjay Sharma, Colin Astley; Salem — Dan Hodges; John Glenn — Joe Wojtowicz; Redford CC — Mike Davis, Rick Stachura; Farmington — Jason Jager, Trip Adams, John Morris; Harrison — Justin Knoke, Todd Haney, Adam Hoe; North Farmington — Brian Kistali, Niraj Nair; Chevrolet — Brian Galindo, Steve DeLuca; Franklin — Tony Hayes; Stevenson — Steve Warner, Jason Heston; St. Kwaikowski, Jeff Backus; Thurston — Josh Wamser; Luthersville Westland — Sam Patterson, Jason Collins.

His season-best time of 15:34 placed him fourth in the state. He has a chance to accomplish a very rare feat: He could be a four-time All-Catholic and All-City runner, as well as a three-time All-Observerland and All-State.

"Joe has a great attitude and was very dependable and hard working," said CC coach Tony Magni. "He has led the team for the last two seasons."

Scott Pengelly, junior, Plymouth Canton: Even though the Rocks didn't qualify as a team for the state meet, Pengelly almost captured a championship of his own. He fell a mere 11 seconds

away of claiming the spot as the top runner in the state Class A individual race.

Pengelly finished his fantastic season with a second-place finish at the state meet as he crossed the line in a season-best time of 15:58. He can claim to be the top runner in the Western Lakes Activities Association, however, as he won the title in 18:15. He then placed third at regionals with a time of 16:23.

"Scott's hard work and determination pushed him the whole season to peak at the right time," Salem coach Geoff Baker said. "He set Salem's school record and we're looking forward to Scott's senior year."

Jared Bielecki, junior, Plymouth Canton: Bielecki recovered from an early-season injury to finish strong. A healthy Bielecki in 1995 could make the Pengelly-Bielecki combination one of the state's most dangerous one-two punches.

His time of 16:56 was good for 31st place at the Class A individual meet. Prior to that, he took 10th at the WLLA meet (17:11) and placed 12th at regionals (17:19).

"Jared was injured the first month of the season, but his hard work and strong attitude helped him train and prepare for the late-season races," Baker said.

Brad Polkinghorne, junior, Luth. Westland: Even though a late-season injury and muddy conditions forced him to finish 13th at the Class C state meet with a time of 18:20, Polkinghorne had a sensational season.

In addition to placing second at regionals (16:58), he was the runner-up in the Metro Conference meet (16:25). Earlier in the season, Polkinghorne won the Huron, Gabriel Richard and Whitmore Lake Invitational — the final win in a season-best time of 16:17.

"Brad was unable to train for the last three weeks of the season due to a hip injury," Westland coach John Gerlach said. "The muddy state-meet course — three-quarters of which was ankle deep — aggravated the injury."

Tom Stamboulis, senior, North Farmington: The senior capped his illustrious career by leading the Raiders to a 20th place finish at the state meet. His time of 16:09, which was 21st fastest in the team meet, shattered North's record.

"It's been a pleasure coaching Tom over the past four years," North coach Paul Welch said. "He worked very hard and it was great to see it all pay off in his final cross country meet."

The All-Conference runner crossed the line in 16:41 at the WLLA meet to take fourth place and finished in 17:05 at regionals, as he was named to the All-Region team.

Brian Rajdl, junior, North Farmington: The junior finished the season on a high note as he finished 44th in the team meet with a time of 16:30.

"Brian had a slow start this year, but when it came down to the important races, he always came through for us," Welch said.

Rajdl's 16:37 was good for third place at the conference meet. He then went on to post a 16:52 at regionals.

Matt Sroczynski, senior, Redford Catholic Central: The Shamrocks' 12th-place finish at the state meet wouldn't have been possible without Sroczynski, who finished in 16:54.

"Matt was a pleasant surprise all season," Margis said. "He worked hard to stay consistent. He ran his best races at the end of the season."

His best time of the year came at the Holy Invitational, where he finished 21st in 16:39. He later ran a 16:39 at the Sturgis Invitational to take 10th, before finishing fifth at the Catholic League meet (17:15). The All-Catholic and All-City performer finished 11th at regionals (16:48).

Dan Boynton, senior, Redford Union: Boynton ended his career as the top runner in the Mega Conference-White Division, and as the Panthers' most valuable runner.

Prior to finishing fourth at regionals (16:48), he won the Redford Union Invitational, took third at the DeLaSalle Invitational, and placed ninth at the West Bloomfield Invitational.

"Danny was a warrior who will bleed for you day in and day out," RU coach Tobin Jones said. "There is nothing he does slow — it's full-throttle always."



Tom Stamboulis
v. Farmington



Brian Rajdl
v. Farmington



Tom May
Farmington



Brian Crockett
Canton



Scott Pengelly
Salem



Dan Boynton
RU



Brad Polkinghorne
Luth. Westland



Matt Sroczynski
Redford CC



Jared Bielecki
Salem

Tom May, senior, Farmington: According to Farmington coach Chip Bridges, the impressive performances turned in by May this season only mark the beginning of his success.

"Tom's best races are still in front of him," Bridges said. "Tom was a fine team leader who related well with everyone on the team. He had his best races at the most important meets."

After taking second at the conference meet (16:32) and eighth at regionals, May posted a 16:21 to place seventh at the Class A individual meet. He excelled off the course as well by accumulating a 3.75 grade-point average.

Brian Crockett, senior, Plym-

outh Canton: Crockett stepped up in his final season to become Canton's top runner and lead the Chiefs to a 16th-place finish at the state meet.

His time of 16:45 at the state meet was his season best and good for 62nd overall. He also finished seventh at the WLLA meet and at regionals. Crockett carries a 3.4 GPA.

"Brian worked hard to achieve the level of success he enjoyed this year," Canton coach Mike Spitz said. "He is a smart, tough, competitive runner. He was our sixth man last year and met the challenge to keep improving our team."

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