

OREGON STATE MEET

7 NOVEMBER, 2009

LANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, EUGENE

Given Central Catholic's State Meet history in rain, wind, and cold, the Rams were almost disappointed during their morning run as the cool, sunny skies were in stark contrast to the forecast for this year's meet. Despite the mild disappointment, your Ram men were excited and ready to go after their fourth state title in five years and fifth in seven years. The only other team to win during that time has been rival Jesuit High - and the Crusaders came in to the State Meet primed to defend their 2008 title over the traditional Lane Community College layout. Others with high hopes were West Linn's almost-all-junior team, the North Medford team of defending individual champ Drew Jordan, and our MHC compatriot Reynolds HS.

All morning and through the first six of the day's eight races, the sun shone brightly with no rain. As the 5A boys finished - with another victory by Crater HS - the Rams headed out to warmup. At that point the clouds moved in - dropping the temperature about 15 degrees - and the skies opened up. While the team as a whole welcomed the weather, there was concern for two athletes, MUSA AHMED '10 and ANDY BENNISON '11. Musa has had lower back problems throughout his CC career while Andy had just recently - Wednesday - begun experiencing similar problems. Both had been treated extensively over the last few days, but it was likely that the cold and muddy conditions would exacerbate each runner's issues.

During the warmup Andy's back began to give him problems. Our Eugene physical therapist, former Oregon runner Mike Blackmore (currently the Churchill HS coach), was requested, and he quickly worked on Andy. While Andy wasn't 100%, Mike's work got him to the starting line feeling pretty good - like the rest of the group.

While this team has had an incredible spread throughout the season from our first man to our sixth - typically less than 30 seconds - it has not necessarily been by design. This group, given their mature understanding of their own strengths, has come up with their own individual race plans, rather than having a "team" strategy. With that in mind, they all had their own plan - with the expectation that they would like to work together whenever when the opportunity presented itself.

Bennison, Musa, EVERETT STILLEY '10, and WASIL AHMED '11 planned to get out aggressively and run with the lead group while PETER SLAUSON '10 and his All Saints classmate CURRAN CARLILE expected to run a bit more conservatively,

moving strongly over the second half of the race. Seventh runner GREG CRUZ '11 had a goal to get through two miles in the top 50 and move up from there.

At the gun - the second gun due to a false start - the rain was coming down in buckets, and the Rams got out well. Both Bennison and Musa were conspicuous at or near the front in the first 500 meters with Wasil and Stilley right where they expected to be. Slauson and Carlile were slightly back and looking comfortable. Cruz was also well placed early on, easily in that top 50 goal. By 1km, Bennison had made a decision that the easiest place to run was right up front, and he led the tightly bunched field down Poison Oak Alley through the mile. The Ahmed brothers and Stilley were still perfectly placed with Carlile just behind and Slauson lurking - as he had planned. Cruz continued to look strong only a few ticks back.

As the field ran parallel to 30th Avenue - into a strong wind - the Rams had six runners in the top 20, but the field was so tightly bunched that the outcome was anything but decided with another 3000m of racing still ahead. Into the ponds just before halfway Bennison still led a large group of talented runners. If his back was troubling him he was doing an incredible job of hiding it. Likewise, Musa looked very good, and Carlile had become a full-fledged member of the lead group of about thirteen runners. Wasil Ahmed, unbeknownst to the coaching staff, had earlier in the day experienced stomach problems, and he began to lose contact with the leaders. Stilley, in contrast to Wasil, experienced stomach problems during the race jettisoning his breakfast at five different locations over the final 1 ½ miles. As you can surmise, this is not the optimal situation for racing; while Everett did not finish in the top 15 as he'd hoped his 30th place effort was an incredible effort under the circumstances.

Exiting the ponds at two miles, the CC harriers looked to have a firm grasp on the race - but so much can change over the final mile that it would have been foolhardy to assume that it was over. With one mile to go Carlile and Bennison were on the lead with Slauson just behind the lead group. Both Ahmeds were still in the top 20 - ahead of any other team's 4th runner - despite Musa's back acting up just before the two mile mark. Cruz - the Rams' seventh runner - was running the race of his life inside the top 50.

As the leaders entered the soccer bowl with 1300m to go, Franklin's Ian Burgess (the brother of 2007 champ Bryce) made a bold move, splintering the lead pack. Carlile, while not able to match that move, still looked strong in 6th with 1km to go. Slauson was making his way through the pack, but still was 15th with just 1000m left. Bennison, after 12 minutes of fighting through the mud, ultimately had his back stiffen significantly. Knowing that the team clearly needed him, Andy gallantly finished 18th, simultaneously an incredible effort and a disappointing outcome.

Emerging from behind the baseball fence with 700m left, Carlile was 6th, and Slauson was moving like a hot knife through butter in 12th. The Ahmed boys

were hanging on and would finish 19th and 23rd. Cruz, with a fantastic effort, crossed the line in 39th place - and ran a PR 17:04 in a race where most athletes were 30 seconds from their best marks.

Onto the track Carlile moved into 5th and opened up a gap on West Linn's Taylor West, but West responded over the final 100m to nip Curran. Slauson was moving beautifully on the track and overtook three more runners for his second consecutive 7th place finish. In 8th place was Barlow's Ben Foubert, the MHC Champ ten days ago.

While the race did not go exactly as planned - and the Rams encountered significant obstacles in their quest for the Blue Trophy - it was clear that they had won the race. West Linn had run fabulously well through four men, but their fifth was well back. Jesuit's front three were in the top 15, but the Central men had much greater depth on this day - with their seventh runner (Cruz) ahead of every other team's fifth man! The Rams' #6 (Stilley) was just two seconds behind West Linn's third and fourth men - and ahead of every other team's fourth man. Oh, and remember, Stilley threw up five times over the last 1 ½ miles!

The final scores were:

63	Central Catholic
88	Jesuit
99	West Linn
121	North Medford
125	Reynolds

This is a group of young men that cares greatly for each other. They run for each other. They understand that they are part of a much greater community of current Central Catholic students, faculty, and parents. They understand that alumni - runners or not - look to them as a source of pride in their school as they open the Sunday Oregonian. They see and appreciated their place with regard to the men who ran before them, all the way back to the teams of the 70s with Lattig and Bomber and Manning to the more recent teams led by Rupp, Klotz, and Morgan. And they see their responsibility to the young men who will follow them, the responsibility to prepare these Rams to be champions as runners and as humans.

This has been a fantastic stretch for the Central Catholic Cross Country Team with five titles in seven years, and it can be easy to get caught up in the

"business as usual" chatter. It is important to remember that each of these young men is part of a truly special day and spectacular accomplishment; while they're part of the history and legacy of the program, 2009 is their championship - and for this group it is truly special.

Coming up for the Rams is next weekend's Nike Cross Regional Championships in Boise. The top two teams automatically qualify for the Nationals in Portland the first Saturday in December. The Rams are currently ranked #5 in the NW Region and, given that four did not have what would be considered their best day in Eugene, there would appear to be sufficient motivation for these boys to come back next week with fire in their bellies to get "back" to Portland.

Full results from the race can be found at:
<http://osaa.org/crosscountry/2009/6abresults.asp>

A short race video and some photos can be found at:
http://www.runnerspace.com/eprofile.php?do=videos&event_id=118&video_id=17309&folder_id=-2

Tom Stilley's photos from the meet can be found here:
<http://picasaweb.google.com/orhookem/2009OregonStateXCMeet?feat=email#>

Many thanks to our current parents. At the risk of leaving some folks out, we must publicly acknowledge Lynne and Dan Slauson who have done, well, anything and everything for this group. Mike Cruz has been invaluable as well. Truly, though, all that we accomplish is a result of our entire community's support, and it is GREATLY appreciated.

Hope to see you somewhere soon.