

Coach's Corner, November 2014: High School Cross Country, Hits and Misses

Back in September I ventured how our southern Nevada teams and individuals would do this year, specifically who would make it to State. Using that as the guideline, let's take a look at the recent State Meet and how the season turned out.

Regionals and State were held at Sunset Park this year, for the first time since back in the 1980's and it worked out well. The 5K course that John Dixon and the high school coaches first devised back in August for the Legends Run was used, and it was much faster in November than it was in August (no surprise—shorter grass and cooler temps).

At first glance the results for the State Meet were a mixed bag as to North versus South. The South was stronger at the D-1 level while the North had the best of the results in the D-1A and D-3 races. Again, not a surprise since there are twice as many D-1 schools and runners representing the South, while the lower division races are either 50-50 (1A) or heavily favor the North (D-3) as to number of entries.

The best results from the South perspective came early, the first race of the day, when the Centennial and Palo Verde girl's teams went 1-2, with Douglas and Galena 3-4. Centennial's Kayla Roberts and Alexis Gourrier (a freshman) took it out strong early and it looked like an easy win for the Bulldogs, but the North's best runner—Lindsey Adams from Douglas—caught them both in the last mile and won her second state championship. Now a senior, Adams won state as a freshman back in 2011. Roberts and Gourrier finished 2-4, giving Centennial enough up front to hold off Palo by a score of 45 to 62.

How did I call that one?

Arbor View, Centennial, and Palo Verde all went to state in 2013 with Arbor View winning the title. All three teams are a lock for State again, despite graduating four Legends. I won't be surprised if Coach Roy Sessions works his magic and duplicates his state track success by winning it all in cross. Palo Verde will be without Marissa Suan, who heads off to UNR, but Coach Robert Davis brings back four of his top seven from 2013, who ran the Panthers to a 4th place at State, led by Samantha Reintjes who finished 20th.

I'll call that a "Hit" on balance. Centennial and Palo went 1-2 and Samantha Reintjes did lead the Panthers; she was 5th at State this time. I took a "Miss" on Arbor View, however. The Aggies had a terrible day at the Regionals and failed to qualify for State, edged out by Shadow Ridge.

None of the Sunrise girl's teams performed well at State but Foothill, Green Valley, and Coronado, the three Sunrise qualifiers were all "young" and return most of their runners next year. Coronado—sixth at State behind fifth-place Reno—had no seniors among their top five.

For the girls from the South, unfortunately, it went downhill from there. The D-1A race was totally dominated by the North. Tahoe-Truckee runners went 1-2 and the California invaders scored a low of 21 points with all five of their scoring runners in the top 10. In fact, Tahoe-Truckee's composite times were better than Centennial's. Spring Creek finished second with Elko third. The three Nevada entries—Boulder City, Faith Lutheran, and SECTA—trailed the field of six. It was so "ugly" that the first Nevada runner, Ingrid Zarate from Del Sol, finished 12th in a field of 51.

This was no surprise. The North's girls have totally dominated this division since its creation in 2012. The one pleasant surprise was the success of the Boulder City girls. I didn't see that coming. The Eagles top runner at State turned out to be a freshman, Sierra Selinger, whose father ran for me when I was coaching at Bonanza a few moons back.

The third race of the day, D-3 girls, produced an upset when The Meadows finished two points behind another California invader, North Tahoe. Coach Bernick's girls, the defending champions, were undone by a couple of things: Jink Heerema's injury in mid season that resulted in a gusty third-place finish at State, instead of first or second, and a bad day by frosh star Ellen Hirsberg, who was expected to be among the top five overall (she finished 16th as the Mustangs number five). North Tahoe's Quinn Lehmkuhl, the defending champ, and Tara Gallant went 1-2. It was enough in the small field of 45 to ensure the win for the Lakers.

The three boys races also produced mixed results: good individually, not-so-good team wise.

Dajour Braxton led wire-to-wire in winning the D-1 race while setting a new course record of 15:34.2. By comparison, Ryan Ripley won the Legends Run over the same course and couldn't break 16 (16:07). The fastest girl's time—by Adams of Douglas (18:43.3)—was also well under the 19:27 Sydney Badger posted in her win at Legends.

It was a dominant win for Braxton, the Centennial senior, but not enough to slow down the victors from the North, McQueen. The Lancers from Reno scored only 21 points with all five scoring runners in the top 11 overall. Green Valley finished a credible second with their top runner, Austin Rogers, fourth behind two McQueen runners.

How did I do there?

Green Valley should be the team to beat (in Sunrise)... even stronger this year since their two best runners last year—Austin Rogers and Lenny Rubi—were both underclassmen. Centennial is again the team to beat (in Sunset). Braxton and Roberts have state experience.... Palo Verde should also be very strong, returning four runners from the team that qualified for state last year, including their two top runners: Noah Landers and Andrew Goldsmith....

Indeed, Green Valley was the strongest boys team in the South all year, led by Rogers and Rubi (15th) and Palo Verde finished third at State, behind the Gators, with Landers (12th) and Goldsmith (22nd) the first two Panther runners across the finish line.

The next boy's race this day was for the D-1A championship. The individual title was expected to come down to a battle between Faith Lutheran's Chase Wood, Garrett Meyer of SECTA, and one or two runners from the North.

The Crusader prevailed. Chase pulled away in the final stretch, as he usually does (his finish in the 1600 last spring reminded me of "Wottle with the throttle" (for those of you who go back that far...1972 Olympics) when Wood won both the 1600 and 3200 on the track at State last spring (sans hat). Garrett was up with the leaders early but faded to sixth. Pahrump Valley freshman Bryce Odegard finished a strong fourth behind two northern runners.

The team race was won by Spring Creek, with Clark second and Elko and Faith Lutheran three-four.

As I see it, two of the best runners in the South this fall, regardless of division, will be Chase Wood of Faith Lutheran and Garrett Meyer of SECTA. They will attempt to lead their teams back to state. Of the two, SECTA was hit hardest by graduation, so I'm predicting Boulder City, who qualified for state in 2013 but graduated their top two runners, and SECTA will finish two-three behind the Crusaders.

I had mixed success on calling this one, as you can see. I underestimated Clark and overestimated Boulder City. I was spot-on with Chase Wood and a bit off with Garrett Meyer, although Chase and Garrett were one-two at the Regional. No way to predict how good Odegard would be. (He's the Pahrump coach's son by the way.)

The final race of the day was the D-3 boys matchup. The South's only hope here was that Cutty Zanghi from Adelson would prevail individually over his northern counterparts. There was no way the two team entries from South—West Wendover (You have got to be kidding? West Wendover is 365 miles from Las Vegas; closer to Salt Lake City than Vegas....) and The Meadows could best North Tahoe, Incline, and Whittell. (At least Incline and Whittell are in Nevada.)

He didn't and they didn't.

Cutty was the first finisher from the South, but he finished eighth. And only other runner from the South who finished in the Top 15 was Jimmy Hood from The Meadows in 14th place. For the team title, the only legitimate South school, the Mustangs, finished last (sixth). The race winner was a kid from Silver Stage, Brandon Perez. (Since you asked... Silver Stage is in Silver Springs, just east of Carson City.)

To wrap things up, kudos to our two newest Legends, state champions Dajour Braxton and Chase Wood. And congratulations to Centennial coach Roy Session, who finally got his state cross country team championship to go with multiple titles in track. And, grudgingly, congratulations to the North, runners and coaches, for their success in winning five of the six team titles and four of the six individual titles. That's not supposed to happen when the meet is held in the South and does not bode well for 2015 when the meet is held in Reno. I do expect, however, our kids down here will fare better in track next spring when the meet is held in Las Vegas.