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Campo girls' cross country competes in nationals

By Jon Kingdon



From left: assistant coach Andy Lindquist, assistant coach Megan Gentes, Shea Volkmer, Rachel Moen, Sloan Pullen, Makena Weberski, Caroline McCool, Ellie Buckley, Kate Kabenina, and head coach Chuck Woolridge Photo Rosalind Pullen

It was another banner year for the Lamorinda Cross Country teams led by Campolindo whose boys' and girls' teams won the Division III NCS championships and the girls won the state meet which qualified them for an at large bid for the first time in the Nike Cross National meet Dec. 3 in Portland, Ore.

Under cold and windy conditions, Campolindo was represented by seniors Ellie Buckley and Caroline McCool, juniors Kate Kabenina, Shea Volkmer, Rachel Moen and Makena Weberski and sophomore Sloan Pullen, finishing 13th out of 22 teams, led by Buckley who finished 26th out of 197 runners.

Buckley, who will be running for Boston College next year, has had unmatched success at Campolindo having been on the three teams (one year canceled due to the pandemic) that won the state meet. "There is certainly no one in program history in any sport that can lay claim to such a feat," assistant coach Andy Lindquist said. "Ellie is an incredible athlete and has been a core part of this team for the last four seasons and it's very well deserved."

The Cougars, ranked 18th coming into the state meet felt they were underrated. "We wanted to run our best race of the season and we put it all on the line," Buckley said. "The whole time we had the mindset that we were running this race for everyone on the team including the frosh and JV athletes who supported us all season and played a role in getting us here. We knew that it was going to be hard, but we were prepared and nothing was going to shock us."

Coach Chuck Woolridge was excited and practical in the way everything turned out in 35-degree weather, according to Buckley: "He said, 'Wow. That was amazing. Get some gear on and get warm.'"

It was not a sure thing that Campolindo was going to get chosen to compete at the nationals. After winning six state championships, the seventh time was the charm. "With only the first two place finishers among all the divisions guaranteed to go to the national meet and having finished only 15 points behind second place, it was great to get an at large bid," Lindquist said. "The team has been working so hard since June to make this a reality and it was something that we talked about accomplishing last year at this time. This is the first time that we've won the state meet in consecutive years. The girls handled the pressure and did not get wrapped up in rankings and projections and just focused on themselves."

At the NCS meet, the five leading runners for the Cougars were Buckley, Volkmer, Weberski, Moen, and Kabenina, finishing with a combined score of 34 at the NCS and 63 at the state meet, the lowest ever by the team at the state meet, led by Buckley and Volkmer who finished 2-3 at the NCS and 3-4 at the state meet.

"To have two girls finish in the top five at the state meet has only been done one other time in Campolindo history and having that front end of the team did make things easier," Lindquist said.

Moen, Kabenina and McCool all came in with good times led by Moen who exceeded expectations. "Rachel had the race of her life to finish in the top 15," Lindquist said. "In only her first season running cross country and to finish that high was incredible. To see how much she improved and how well she ran was really exciting."

After winning the NCS tournament, the Campolindo boys' team finished second at the state meet. "We ran a very solid race, but we had some runners that struggled to finish the race though it spoke to their character that they gutted it out," Lindquist said. "To finish as a second-place team in the state of California is pretty impressive and to have both teams sweep our league, have both teams on the podium at the state meet, we felt really good about that."

Alexander Lodewick, who will be running for California next year, won the NCS and was third among the Campolindo runners at the state meet spoke of the culture of the team. "There has been a lot of support for every individual on the team and we looked out for each other," Lodewick said. "I had a difficult race at the state meet but with our team environment, my teammates came and hugged me after the race. My teammates have been very meaningful to me and have helped me figure out who I am, providing support, positivity, and enthusiasm when it was hard for me to find it."

Acalanes

The Acalanes girls finished in 19th at the state tournament. It was a non-senior group led by juniors Megan Yee and Nina Gehrig, sophomores Cameron Powell, Charlotte Sutherland and Sadie Poole and freshman Cate McCormick and Nevis Murphy.

"All of the girls were pleased with their overall team's performance despite Nina and Megan not running at 100%," Coach Jeff Hutson said. "What pleased me was how they supported each other and how happy they were to be there and not upset at the outcome."

At the NCS, the Acalanes girls finished in third, qualifying for the state tournament and the boys team finished in fourth, just missing state, but junior Logan Farzen and senior Tyler Hunt finished high enough to compete as individuals at the state meet.

Hutson spoke to the unity of the team that was brought together by so many of the runners: "Nina was a great leader for the girls and the boys. Nevis showed herself early on as a competitor along with Cate who also plays for the soccer team. Megan really helped to keep the team together and Charlotte was a real galvanizer and created a community on the team."

The team is looking forward to the return next year of sophomore Olivia Williams who sat out this season with an injury. Last year, Williams won the state meet with a time of 16:50.2 which beat the best time run this year (16:57.9) and finished in 17th in the national meet. "Olivia came to our practices and meets," Hutson said. "She has been a part of the team even though she was not able to compete."

The boys' team missed the state meet by seven points after coming into the NCS ranked eighth. "Our boys ran the third fastest time ever for Acalanes and just missing state by so little was hard for the team to accept," Hutson said.

Farzan and Hunt finished fourth and seventh at the NCS and in 15th and 24th at the state meet. "Logan ran the fastest time of all the Diablo Athletic League runners and missed a school record by only six seconds, running a very good, patient race," Hutson said. "Tyler closed out his career running a faster time than he did last year."

Miramonte

After graduating their top five runners, Miramonte's top six runners at the NCS was comprised of four freshman, Sasha Bevacqua, Alana Jardine, Inara Inesi and Teia Adler, sophomore Zoe Schmidt and junior Grace Bell. The team finished sixth and Bell finished seventh at the NCS tournament and 52nd at the state meet.

"With such a young team and so much turnover, this was a rebuilding year," Coach Andrew Lewis said. "They did extremely well; Grace Bell leading the way. She really improved her performance this year and she also took a big step coming into her own as a leader, taking the reins for all of the freshmen that were on our team."

Lewis is already looking forward to next season: "Our freshmen were a quality group of runners that wanted to work hard, earning their spots at the NCS," Lewis said. "We have a good number of upperclassmen next year that are extremely strong runners and good leaders. We showed a lot of improvement over the back half of the season with a number of the runners setting new personal records."

The boy's team was also a young group and finished in sixth at the NCS meet. "We're only losing two seniors this year and every runner on the team improved over their time from last year," Lewis said.

The boys were led by junior Asher Patel who was fifth at the NCS and 32nd at the state meet and freshman Logan Letulle who finished in 18th place. "Asher had a breakout performance over last year which was a carryover from his stellar track season where he ran a 4:18 mile," Lewis said. "Logan was the fastest freshman in all of the five divisions that competed that day. We're really excited to see what he will do next year."

For Lewis, this was a year to build on: "Every runner improved over their time from last year. We're returning most of our team and our goal next year will be to make it to state which would be the first time since 2016."



Campolindo cross country teams at State meet Photo provided

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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