Punxsy Boys Cross Country battles the heat again but stay cool enough to place 7th at Big Red Invitational

The Punxsy boys cross country traveled to the Big Red Invitational at West Middlesex for the first time ever on Saturday and came away with a solid 7th place team finish in what were once again stifling conditions for running. A total of 32 team participated in the Invitational.

“The heat and humidity were a factor for all the runners, which seems like a common theme lately,” said boys head coach George Wehrle. “The medical staff pretty much made the officials cancel the final two junior varsity races when their services were being pushed to the limit with runners needing attention from the earlier races.”

Grove City dominated the team competition with a low total of 67 points, well ahead of New Castle’s 161. Strong teams from Cranberry, North East, host West Middlesex and Cochranton also placed ahead of Punxsy’s 273 point total. “Grove City place five runners in the top 22 to claim the convincing win,” said Wehrle. “Programs such as theirs are the model for high school cross country teams in the state and something to aspire to for our guys.”

Individually, frosh phenom Owen Bartlebaugh placed a fantastic 10th place overall out of 205 varsity runners with his seasonal best time of 18:06. “Owen actually started out a bit more conservatively than usual despite being on 16:40 pace at the mile and managed to pick off quite a few runners in the closing stages of the race,” said Wehrle. “He has the potential to be one of the best freshmen in the state as Owen was one of only two rookies in the top 20 here today.”

Second-year runner Ethan Brentham secured another medal for Punxsy by placing 26th overall with a time of 18:28. “Ethan ran well once again, moving up steadily throughout the race to finish as the fifth sophomore in the field,” said Wehrle.

Senior Jake Dinger finished strongly to claim the last medal for Punxsy by placing 44th with a time of 19:05. “Jake looked really good today in my opinion and I fully expect him to move up closer to Owen and Ethan to give us an even strong 1-2-3 punch,” stated Wehrle.

Ethan May, Alex Eberhart and Corbin Heitzenrater all finished within six seconds of one another, with times of 20:20 for both May and Eberhart and 20:26 for the freshman Heitzenrater. “It was great to see these three guys so close to one another at the finish, and we’re hoping they can all continue to get closer to our top three to give us a more formidable pack,” said Wehrle. “There was about a 1:15 gap between Jake and Ethan May, and in that time over 50 runners came across the line to inflate our score. On the bright side Alex ran his fastest time by a minute and Corbin had his best by 35 seconds.”

Sophomore Evan States turned in a fine run to improve his season’s best by 39 seconds, placing 118th with a time of 21:00. “Evan is an extremely capable runner and came through with a good race today,” said Wehrle. He’s working hard to secure a varsity spot and he helped his cause today for sure.”

Kevin Ingros, Jacob Good and Copeland Whitfield were scheduled to run in the junior varsity race but will have to wait until Tuesday to compete again due to the jv cancellation. “It was disappointing to say the least, but the guys all handled it well and took it in stride, said Wehrle. “They can cut loose a bit more than the other guys when we travel to Saint Marys to face the two local teams, Saint Marys and Elk County Catholic.”