Punxsy Boys Cross Country gets preview of state course amid top competition in Hershey

The Punxsy boys cross country team traveled to Hershey to take part in the 10th annual PIAA Foundation Invitational, essentially a pre-state meet on the same course that the championship races will be held on November 5th for those who qualify. Races were separated into 3 classifications, with the Punxsy boys team placing 22nd out of 31 AA teams with a total of 576 points. York Suburban won the AA division with just 116 points, followed by Greensburg Salem with 120 and York Suburban at 128 in third. A total of 223 individuals took part in the AA competition.

“This was an excellent opportunity for us to run on the newest version of the state meet course against some of the best AA teams in the state,” said boys head coach George Wehrle. “Due to construction they had to alter the layout fairly significantly, so this gave us a chance to preview it before states if we happen to have any individual or team qualifiers.”

District team favorite Bradford attended the meet as well, finishing one place and 52 points ahead of Punxsy. “We will see Bradford again at Ridgway in two weeks and hopefully we can narrow the gap a bit each time we face them, as we did today.”

Sophomore Ethan Brentham led the charge for Punxsy as he placed 65th overall with a time of 18:08. Freshman Owen Bartlebaugh was four places and four seconds behind his teammate. “Ethan ran a very strong race, as did Owen, with both of them moving up significantly in the second half of the course,” said Wehrle. “They took 1-2 against Bradford as well, which is quite impressive.”

Seniors Jake Dinger and Alex Eberhart placed 131st and 166th, respectively, posting times of 19:02 and 19:43. “I wouldn’t have expected Jake to be at his best today as he’s had a lot going on this week, but he competed well after having to miss our dual meet on Tuesday,” said Wehrle. “He will be there when it matters most, I’m sure. Alex actually ran a seasonal best today, one of only four of our guys to accomplish that feat. Both runners know that they have to get ahead of Bradford’s number three and four runners eventually, but today they came up a bit short.”

Freshman Corbin Heitzenrater came through with a fine performance, placing 171st with a seasonal best time of 19:49. “Corbin and Alex performed well today to make up for Ethan May, who is normally our fourth man to finish but was struggling a bit,” said Wehrle. “Corbin is extremely reliable and thinks about the team before himself, and I really feel as if he knew we needed him more than usual today and he made sure he came through.”

May placed 188th with a time of 20:25, with fellow sophomore Evan States 201st in 21:02. “Ethan and Evan gave it a valiant effort out there but were not showing their usual form and ended up about a minute behind their seasonal bests,” said Wehrle. “Both guys are exemplary teammates and will be ready to put this one behind them and prove their mettle once again.”

Punxsy had five athletes lace up their spikes in the junior varsity race, which combined all three classes into one huge field of 345 runners. A total of 40 teams had enough runners to field a junior varsity team, with Punxsy besting only Delone Catholic in the final standings. “There were a lot of talented runners in the jv race, many of whom would easily make our varsity,” said Wehrle. “A team of hungry junior varsity runners will often make the varsity squad better by challenging them for one of those top seven spots.”

Kevin Ingros ran the 3.1 mile course in 22:09, placing 279th. “Kevin wasn’t quite as sharp as usual but still managed to accomplish some good things with his race today,” said Wehrle.

Jacob Good placed an even 300th with a time of 22:50, followed by freshman Sam Rodgers six places and 26 seconds later. “Jacob actually ran pretty well, posting his second best time of the season, and Sam notched a seasonal best by 10 seconds with his effort.”

Newcomer Luke Poole had the performance of the day for Punxsy as he slashed his career best by over 2 ½ minutes to place 323rd in 24:23. “Luke looked sensational out there today and for good reason-he was running about 55 seconds per mile faster than his previous best,” said Wehrle. “This was a huge breakthough for him, and I told him that now the expectations are going to quite a bit higher.”

Copeland Whitfield placed 341st by posting a time of 32:38. “Copeland is making progress and will hopefully keep striving to become more competitive with each race,” said Wehrle.

Punxsy hosts its first home meet of the season on Tuesday when DuBois, Hollidaysburg and Kane are all expected to compete. “We should do well against all these teams on Tuesday and hopefully run well enough to come away with a clean sweep for our parents and fans at home,” concluded Wehrle.