**Punxsy Boys Cross Country places 3rd at Ridgway Invitational**

 A total of 18 complete teams and 195 runners competed in cool, drizzly weather on Saturday, with the Punxsy boys faring better than all but two of them at the 13th annual Ridgway Cross Country Invitational. The race was a 3.1 mile layout held on the exact course that will host the district 9 championships on October 29th.

 “Pretty much all the district A and AA teams were there, along with a few other teams sprinkled in as well,” said boys coach George Wehrle. “It was an excellent opportunity to see how we measure up against the other teams we will be competing against for the state qualifying berth in three weeks.”

 Punxsy managed to secure a third-place finish in the team standings, coming through with 150 points. Their total trailed an impressive low score of 35 by Elk County Catholic and rival Bradford’s tally of 130. Cranberry placed fourth with 151 points and Kane rounded out the top five with 162. “Our chief competition at the district meet will be Bradford, with Clearfield also in the mix,” said Wehrle. “If you remove all the single A runners from the field, Bradford would have won with 32 points, four points ahead of us. Clearfield had 62 points without their top runner, so they can’t be overlooked.”

 Freshman Owen Bartlebaugh and Sophomore Ethan Brentham again paced the Chucks as they placed 13th and 14th, respectively. Bartlebaugh ran a seasonal best by one tick to finish in 17:44, while Brentham raced the course 34 seconds faster than at last year’s invitational to clock 17:52. “Owen was in the top 20 most of the race, while Ethan passed about 20 runners in the last couple miles,” said Wehrle. “Only one other district AA runner placed ahead of them today, and they both received awards for placing in the top 15.”

 Senior Jake Dinger placed 25th over in 18:27, a full minute ahead of his performance from a year ago. “Jake ran very well today with a time just a couple seconds off his seasonal best,” said Wehrle. “I look for him to play a significant role if we are to be successful at districts later in the month.”

 Alex Eberhart placed 48th in 19:21, followed closely by freshman Corbin Heitzenrater seven places later in 19:33. “Alex is definitely capable of running faster than he did today, but he still managed to come in ahead of Bradford’s fifth runner,” said Wehrle. “Corbin stepped up as our fifth man today and was only a couple seconds behind Bradford’s final scorer. It could come down to a place here or there and I’ll look for our guys to move up a bit in the standings next time.”

 Liam Storms ran 1:25 faster than a year ago at this meet as he placed 70th in 19:56. “Liam is fitter and more physically mature than last year, and his running is indicative of that,” said Wehrle. “He probably has some more in the tank that we hope to see before seasons end.”

 Kevin Ingros ran his fastest of the year at 20:53 to place 111th, over a minute better than his 2015 Ridgway invitational time. Ethan May came across 124th at 21:17. “Kevin has strung together three solid races in a row and is running well at the right time,” said Wehrle. “Ethan was in nice position at two miles before getting a side stitch that relegated him to pretty much jogging the rest of the way. We’ll need him up where he belongs and I feel certain that will be the case when we race here again.”

 Jacob Good was 139th in 22:02, with teammate Sam Rodgers close behind at 22:10 for 141st. “Jacob and Sam pushed each other the last few minutes of the race, with both guys close to their best times of the season,” said Wehrle. “Jacob ran 47 seconds faster than his time here from a year ago.”

 Sophomore Luke Poole scored the biggest improvement on the day as he ran 22:55, placing 160th with a time nearly 90 seconds faster than his previous best. “Luke just goes about his business without a lot of fanfare, but he’s now improved over five minutes in just about two months,” said Wehrle. “He’s been a welcome addition to the team with his quiet determination.”

 On Tuesday, Punxsy will host a Brockway team that placed 15th at Ridgway with 370 points. “We’ll try to come away with a win at home but we can hopefully accomplish that goal with a more conservative race approach,” concluded Wehrle. “I’m sure the guys are tired and a bit nicked up, so rest and recovery are going to be a priority in the next couple weeks for sure.”