**Punxsy Boys Cross Country places 17th in team standings at PIAA State Championships**

Returning to the state meet for the first time since 2014, the Punxsy boys cross country team placed 17th overall out of 20 teams in the AA classification with a total of 374 points. Pre-meet favorites Dallas and York Suburban placed first and second, respectively, followed by South Fayette, Harbor Creek and Quaker Valley to round out the top five.

“The guys competed well against the best AA teams in the state,” said boys head coach George Wehrle. “On a perfect day I think we could have picked off a couple more teams, but this result is pretty close to what we were capable of for this season. I was pleased to see we improved our team score from 533 points at the mile to 440 at the two mile before ending up at 387. That shows we were moving up throughout the race. Another nice statistic was our 1-5 spread was only 58 seconds, our best of the season and the 5th best of all 20 teams in our race.”

A total of 238 individuals took to the starting line at 12:30 pm on an ideal day for running, set to tackle the challenging 3.1 Parkview Cross Country course that was altered somewhat this year due to construction at nearby Hershey Park. “It’s unfortunate that the course had to be changed again since most people like to compare times and see how they stack up against runners who’ve preceded them, but it was beneficial that we ran on this new course in late September and were familiar with the new layout,” said Wehrle.

Owen Bartlebaugh led the Punxsy contingent with an 86th place finish in 17:57. “Owen was the 2nd freshman to finish in a sport where upperclassmen tend to dominate, so it’s reasonable to expect him to be a medal contender down here in the near future,” said Wehrle.

Ethan Brentham was just five places and three seconds behind his teammate as he improved his finishing place by 32 spots from a year ago. “Ethan ran well, perhaps not quite as well as he did at districts but he had an excellent sophomore season and will have higher goals and expectations for next season I’m sure,” said Wehrle. “Both Owen and Ethan really did a nice job of fighting their way through traffic against a field of very good runners.”

Senior Jake Dinger improved 31 places from 2015 with a time of 18:27, finishing 151st overall. “Jake capped off his final season with a strong race despite having an injury to deal with during the week,” said Wehrle. “He was a big reason we made it to states and he hung in there to get the job done today.”

Corbin Heitzenrater placed 182nd overall in 18:55, with teammate Alex Eberhart one place behind in the same time. “Corbin and Alex were the only guys to run their fastest time of the season on this challenging course, and both were almost a minute faster than what they ran on this course in September,” said Wehrle. “Both Corbin and Alex are extremely coachable and improved steadily throughout the season to finish with a fine result today.”

Liam Storms came within one second of his district performance as he placed 198th in 19:18. “Liam made a big jump this season as he basically improved his average time by about 90 seconds from 2015,” said Wehrle. “He ran within his capabilities today and finished off his year with a nice performance.”

Ethan May ran his fastest time in a month as he placed 203rd in 19:23. “Ethan has definitely had a tougher go of it the last few races, but he really looked good today as he moved up significantly after a slow start,” said Wehrle. “I’m happy he ended his season with a satisfying result.”

Wehrle would like to again thank the school administration and athletic department for the send-off on Friday, as well as the Booster Club, parents and alumni for their support throughout the weekend. “It was very nice to have the students outside as we left the school on Friday, and some parents and friends gathered downtown for us as well,” said Wehrle. “Several alumni checked in to wish everyone luck and all in all we had a lot of support for the team, which was greatly appreciated. I’m sure I speak for the rest of the team when I say that we hope to return to Hershey next season and come away with an even better result.”