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Port boys' team edges Homestead to grab first conference title since 2007

The Port Washington boys' cross-country team wasn't about to let sloppy weather rain on its parade last Saturday.

Overcoming wind-driven rain and a strong challenge from Homestead at Tendick Park in Saukville, the Pirates raced to their first North Shore Conference title since 2007.

Led by senior Jason Marhal's second-place finish, Port scored 45 points, five fewer than the runner-up Highlanders.

Cedarburg was a distant third with 77 points, followed by Whitefish Bay (94), Germantown (132), Grafton (161), Milwaukee Lutheran (193) and Nicolet (237).

"I'm really happy with how things worked out," Pirates coach Mark Pasten said.

"Going in, I thought we would be favored, but I also thought Homestead would have a chance to win. Our guys came through really well."

Marhal continued his season-long role as Port's top runner, posting a 5,000-meter time of 16 minutes, 17 seconds. He trailed only Whitefish Bay's Nate Gomoll, who successfully defended his conference title in 16:03.

"Jason ran an outstanding race," Pasten said. "Gomoll won again, but Jason closed the gap on him."

The Pirates' other scoring finishes were Eagan Norman in sixth (a personal-best 16:51), Jack Skelton-Miller in ninth (16:55), Nick Michalowski in 11th (17:05) and Billy Ernest in 17th (17:16).

Also for Port, Taylor Godersky took 10th (17:23), Alex Balister was 23rd (17:25) and Joe Bortolotti was 27th (17:36).

The top eight runners in a field of 60 runners received all-conference first-team honors, with the ninth through 16th finishers making up the second team.

Pasten said he was impressed by his squad's response to the inclement conditions, singling out Norman's effort as "a huge difference" in edging Homestead.

"The weather really wasn't that big of a factor. Our times were pretty close to where they have been," Pasten said.

The conference team title was only the Pirates' third in the last 55 years. Most recently, they won back-to-back crowns in 2006 and 2007.

Grafton was paced by junior Jacob Woolf, who earned first-team honors with an eighth-place time of 16:53.

The Black Hawks' other scoring finishes were Alec Weinhold in 26th (17:32), Parker White in 38th (18:00), James Haessly in 40th (18:02) and Patrick Tobianski in 49th (18:19).

Teammates Joe Docter (18:37) and Jonathan Wollner (18:41) were 53rd and 54th, respectively.

"Jacob ran great. That was the first time we've had a boy break 17 minutes at Tendick Park," Grafton coach Kevin Kriegel said.

The Hawks were without one of their best runners, Erick Huertas, who missed the meet due to a family commitment.

Grafton secures 2nd in girls' race

Bay had little trouble defending its girls' team title at the meet, though Grafton finished a solid second.

The Blue Dukes had all five of their scoring runners place in the top nine and finished with only 25 points.

Grafton had 58 points, well ahead of third-place Cedarburg's 113. Rounding out the standings were Germantown (117), Nicolet (125), Homestead (145), Port Washington (176) and Milwaukee Lutheran (190).

The Hawks were led by sophomore Katie Boehm, who took eighth with a 4,000-meter time of 16:18.

Grafton's other scoring finishes were Amber Ducheny in 10th (16:19), Chloe Lichosik in 11th (16:21), Elise White in 12th (16:29) and Heidi Bauer in 17th (16:37).

Also for the Hawks, Ella Aspenson (16:58) was 31st and Megan Pawlak (17:51) was 46th.

Kriegel was pleased with his team's ability to place second even though its best runner, sophomore Rachel Ruona, was unable to finish the race.

"The other five girls stepped up and did the best they could. Bay is pretty tough to beat," he said.

Port's top finish came from senior Bianca Benkley, who was 14th (16:36).

The Pirates' other scoring runners were Maggie Kotecki in 34th (17:00), Abby Kotecki in 37th (17:05), Brenna Russell in 41st (17:19) and Alexa Brown in 50th (18:48).

Mikayla Schowalter (20:27) placed 54th, and Simone Wittlinger (20:32) was 55th.

Port girls' coach Joe Adamak said several of his runners did well despite the weather, singling out Russell and Brown.

"We really didn't put a lot of emphasis on this meet," Adamak said, noting the Pirates are more focused on WIAA competition that starts this weekend.

Both Port teams will run in a Division 1 sectional meet Saturday at Arrowhead High School. The boys' race starts at 10:30 a.m., followed by the girls at 11:15 a.m.

Grafton will participate in a Division 2 sectional meet Friday at Kern Park in Shorewood. The boys will run at 4 p.m., followed by the girls at 4:45 p.m.

The top two teams and first five individuals from nonqualifying teams in each sectional will advance to the state meet in Wisconsin Rapids on Saturday, Oct. 27.

Image Information: MEMBERS OF THE Port Washington boys' cross-country team broke from the starting line during a rain-soaked North Shore Conference meet at Tendick Park last Saturday. Port edged Homestead to win won their its conference team title since 2007.

Photo by Sam Arendt