

Hinsdale Doings — Nov. 10, 2005

Devils hit new heights with fourth at state

BY BILL STONE, SPORTS WRITER

As senior Ashley Soltwisch and her Hinsdale Central girls cross country teammates envisioned an historic Class AA state meet Saturday, their postseason decision to switch uniforms reflected what got them there.

"We go to black (for regionals and sectionals) and it's kind of like strong, powerful. Then we switch back to the red (regular-season uniforms) to kind of go back to the team and because our school colors are red and white," Soltwisch said.

In fitting fashion, the Red Devils only wanted to perform at Peoria's Detweiller Park the way they had all season. When they did, the reward was the best showing in program history.

With freshmen all-staters Lauren Zumbach and Roey Hines leading the way, the Red Devils were a resounding fourth (224 points) to surpass their seventh-place finishes of last year and 2000. The Red Devils just missed a trophy for third place by finishing eight points behind Palatine, but they also were eight points ahead of fifth-place Sandburg and Lincoln-Way East. Naperville North won its second straight title (105), and Lockport was second (188).

Zumbach (17 minutes, 35 seconds for 3.0 miles) and Hines (17:40) were 20th and 24th for all-state honors with top-25 finishes, followed by Soltwisch (46th, 18:17), freshman Heather Stevens (111th, 18:51), junior Jenny Laser (122nd, 18:57) and seniors Megan Gleason (178th, 19:28) and Kristina Truedson (215th, 19:54).

The Red Devils were making their fourth straight state appearance with Laser in her third straight meet and Soltwisch and Gleason their second. The Red Devils were third at regionals to Naperville North and Lockport, and fourth at sectionals behind them and Sandburg by five points.

"Third would have been the best, but fourth is still great. We were so close -- eight points. You're kind of like, 'My gosh, I wish we could have gotten it, but at the same time we were that close so next year we definitely have a chance to win the trophy, get first,' Laser said. "In past years, we've kind of had to run a great race to get a trophy, whereas this year it was like just do the same thing we've done and we can be the best team in Hinsdale Central history."

Still, the Red Devils were quite impressive. Zumbach and Hines became only the sixth and seventh all-staters in program history and the Red Devils' first multiple all-staters in one state race. They and Soltwisch had season-best pace times, and the other four girls were close to their season bests.

"When you go down and all seven kids do that, you have to be happy," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "We figured there were seven teams in the hunt for trophies, and we were

one of them. When it comes to the regionals and sectionals we were in, and our schedule the whole year, we felt like we were prepared for the state meet. While we were very, very happy with our finish, we weren't surprised, and we're always talking about next year and setting our goals higher and higher."

Zumbach and Hines were prepared before and after their races. After working off each other throughout the race, they had pitchforks, courtesy of sophomore Emily Cleary's mother, and devil horns for the all-state awards presentation.

"It's amazing. I never expected to do quite this well, and it's just a great feeling," Zumbach said. "I had certainly hoped to do this well (at state), but I didn't know if I would. It's very helpful to know that there's someone close by (like Hines)."

"When there was like 800 meters left, people were saying, '25th person,' and I was in 26th so I was telling myself I better start picking it up," Hines said. "It feels so good (to be all-state), my first year. It's been like all of the races -- so exciting and so overwhelming. I never could have imagined that I'd come this far, but I'm so happy."

Cleary, a 2004 all-stater recovering from injury this regular season, appeared ready to compete in the postseason after winning the sophomore race at the conference meet, but then she was diagnosed with a stress fracture in her foot. The Red Devils then lost junior Gina Kapusta, their No. 3 finisher at state in 2004, after regionals to mononucleosis.

"If you would have said, even a month ago, that we were not going to have Emily and Gina at the state meet but we were going to get fourth, it would have been crazy," McCabe said. "The great thing about this group was nothing fazed them. This is the way it is, but you have to overcome it, and they did."

"We all went through a lot with Emily and Gina, and it seemed like everyone pulled together," added Soltwisch, who improved 90 places from last year's state meet. "I feel like everyone came together when it counted. At the beginning of this year, I wanted to be part of the varsity and to help the team and just do the best I can in order for the team to do well. I'm happy that it all worked out."