

Around the Valley

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HIGH SCHOOL CROSS COUNTRY | CIF-SOUTHERN SECTION PRELIMINARY MEET

Knights advance to next meet

By ERIC SHANNON
Valley Press Staff Writer

WALNUT — For the second time in three weeks, Desert Christian's Scott Acton just barely managed to break the 17-minute mark at Mt. San Antonio College.

But that wasn't what excited Knights coach Andy Visokey.

"Thomas (Waters) and Brian (Curtis) were the stars today," Visokey said. "Scott is expected to do that well."

Desert Christian's boys cross country team finished in third place with 75 points in the second heat of Division 5 races of the CIF-Southern Section Prelims on Saturday. Sixteen total teams advanced in the three heats, which meant fifth or better would guarantee the Knights a spot in the Southern Section Finals next Saturday, again at Mt. SAC.

Acton finished the race in seventh place in 16-minutes and 59-seconds, but Waters' 11th place finish in 17:08 and Curtis' 15th place finish in 17:15 really made Visokey happy.

Desert Christian has struggled to find consistency behind Acton and Aaron Acosta, who came in 16th in 17:27.

When the team ran at the Mt. SAC Invitational on Oct. 24, Waters finished in 18:16 and Curtis

crossed the line in 18:17.

"Brian didn't have a good race at the Invitational either, and we were both pretty bummed about that, so we were determined," Waters said.

Acton's time on Saturday was two seconds slower than three weeks ago, but Visokey isn't worried at all.

"I'm not going to complain that he ran a 16:59," Visokey said. "He ran a 16:57 last time. In other words, he's consistent."

Now that the Knights' No. 3 and No. 4 runners have each cut their times by more than a minute, Visokey is just hoping one more runner can improve at the finals next week.

Zachary Pattan, Desert Christian's No. 5 runner, finished 28th in 17:55 on Saturday.

Dowling difference for Spirits

Andrew Dowling had one thing on his mind heading into Saturday's race at Mt. SAC.

"I didn't want to run my last senior race," Dowling said. "Me and Justin (Irey) were talking about it (before the race). This is the best time of our lives so we don't want it to be over."

Dowling may have only finished 48th in the second and final heat of Division 4 races, but his time of 17:42 was especially crucial for the

Spirits.

With Dowling's performance as the No. 5 Paraclete runner to cross the line, all five Spirit runners finished just 51 seconds apart, an impressive display of consistency across the board.

Dowling was in the lineup partly because, despite not always showing that consistency this season, he is a senior. Paraclete coach Andy Helme has a rule that if seniors are running in times to other potential runners on the team, the seasoned veterans get the edge.

"That's why we have the 15-second rule with seniors," Helme said. "They've got that senior gear in them."

The Spirits, who needed to finish at least eighth to advance to the Southern Section Finals next week, came in sixth place with 142 points.

Ricky Ruelas was the first Paraclete runner to cross the line in 16:51, good for 17th. Right behind him was Irey, who is also a senior. Irey came in 18th in 16:52, and felt that running with Ruelas benefitted both runners.

Melena qualifies for finals

Steven Melena's one complaint the last time he ran at Mt. SAC was that he wasn't challenged enough.

In crossing the line at the Division 2, heat 3 race in third in 15:29

on Saturday, that wasn't an issue this time around.

"He felt like he was in a good race," Lions coach Gil Gomez said. "Last time he was the one doing the pushing."

Melena needed to cross the line in sixth place or better to advance to the section finals next week, and by making it with relative ease, Gomez said we still haven't seen the senior go all out at the course.

"Didn't push too hard," Gomez said. "I think he didn't feel so well and mentally you just want to get in that sixth spot."

Next week will present an interesting situation for Melena, however. Because his team didn't advance, he has to make it in the top 20 at section finals, but also has to be one of the top five runners that qualified individually.

Guijarro breaks mark

It wasn't long after Saturday's race that Bryan Guijarro was getting in touch with former Knight cross country runner Ulises Aquino.

After coming within 5 seconds of breaking Aquino's Mt. SAC school record three weeks ago, Guijarro broke it this time around.

The sophomore came in fifth place in the Division 1 Heat 2 Southern Section Prelim race on Saturday. His time of 15:31 beat Aquino's school record by 10 seconds.

Spirits show depth in girls race

By **ERIC SHANNON**
Valley Press Staff Writer

WALNUT — The Paraclete High girls cross country team didn't come in first place at the CIF-Southern Section Prelims on Saturday.

But the Spirits still feel like they ran the best race.

Paraclete finished second at Mount San Antonio College with 77 points, 24 behind first-place La Reina. But with all five of their scorers in the top 21 — and with their No. 6 crossing 22nd — the Spirits ran one of the most complete races in the first heat of Division 4 races.

"This is as well as the girls could have done," Paraclete coach Andy Helme said. "We had the best No. 5 in the group."

Melissa Bauer was the first Paraclete runner to cross the line in sixth, with a time of 19 minutes, 52 seconds. Madison Grenier finished in 14th in 20:30, Ali Huerta was 17th in 20:55, Melanie Fujiwara came in 19th in 20:56 and Sabrina Huelga was 21st in 21:14.

One spot behind Sabrina was her sister Kristina in 21:17, giving Paraclete six runners in the top 22. La Reina was the only other team to have all five scorers in the top 30, as their No. 5 came in 29th.

"It was surprising, but I knew

they were capable of that," Helme said. "All week we had them convinced they were a great team and they came out running great."

"Cross country is a very psychological sport."

Absence doesn't faze Knights

When Emily Kennedy was declared academically ineligible for the postseason this week, it seemed like the worst piece of news the Desert Christian girls cross country team could hear.

The Knights entered the week as the No. 2 girls team in Division 5, but lost their No. 1 runner.

The Knights responded.

"All week they've been training knowing that that's something we're getting over this week," Knights coach Amy Spoelstra said. "They know that means they have to work harder for the goals that they've set."

"It's actually been a really good point for our team in a lot of ways. We miss having her around, but it's been a good challenge for our team."

The Knights proved their coming together without Kennedy, and finished in second place with 104 points in their division's second heat race on Saturday.

Desert Christian was led by Kristen Parsons, who came in 15th



ERIC SHANNON/Valley Press

HARD WORK — Paraclete's Ali Huerta makes her way to the top of Poopout Hill during a Division 4 race at the CIF-Southern Section preliminaries at Mount San Antonio College. Huerta finished 17th.

place in 20:29. Charity Schroeder crossed in 20th in 21:14 and Kylee Hall (22:09), Charlee White (22:14) and Kara Spoelstra (22:22) finished

close together, in 30th, 32nd and 36th, respectively.

The Knights were only three points behind race winner Woodcrest Christian.

"They ran a great race," Amy Spoelstra said. "They all improved over (the Mt. SAC) Invitational. I was really pleased with the pack."

Lopez advances

Coming down the final hill on Saturday, Highland's Vanessa Lopez heard some discerning news shouted at her.

Bulldogs coach John Johnston was yelling that Lopez was in ninth place, while the freshman needed at least sixth to qualify for next week's section finals.

After passing the first girl heading into the final stretch of her Division 1 Heat 3 race, Lopez started to think to herself.

"I thought, 'This is going to suck if I didn't make it,'" Lopez said. "I just had to pass two more girls. I just have to sprint from there to (the end), and then I can pass out afterwards, as long as I can make it to the end."

About a minute later, Lopez was crossing the line in sixth in 18:28, just good enough to guarantee her one more race on the season.

eshannon@avpress.com