



ERIC SHANNON/Valley Press

**RUNNING TOGETHER** — Desert Christian teammates Thomas Waters, front, and Bryan Curtis compete during the Division 5 race Saturday in the CIF-Southern Section finals, with teammate Zac Patten just behind him to the right.

# Moving on to state

## Melena, Knights advance

By **ERIC SHANNON**  
Valley Press Staff Writer

WALNUT — With less than a mile to go on Saturday, Steven Melena knew he was in a likely position to advance to the CIF State Championship.

But the Eastside senior wanted to make certain.

Knowing the top five individual qualifiers advanced from his Southern Section Division 2 final, Melena found himself in seventh place, immediately behind three

other runners. Although all he needed to advance was for two of those runners to move on to state with their teams, Melena took things into his own hands.

Heading up Mt. San Antonio College's Reservoir Hill — the last big hill before an 800-meter finish that is almost entirely downhill — Melena passed all three runners and maintained fourth place in 15 minutes, 15 seconds to clinch a spot at Woodward Park in Fresno next Saturday.

"I knew if I beat those guys I would have made it," Melena said, "and I didn't want to leave it to chance so I just told myself to power up Reservoir and then take the downhill fast."

He was able to hold off all three runners with a kick that Lions coach Gil Gomez said he didn't possess a year ago, and that seemed to be the difference.

"I was shooting for the top five, but I knew it was going to be hard

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## Knights grab last state spot

From C1

to do," Melena said. "When I got fourth, I was surprised and happy I did that well."

Because four of the top seven runners advanced with their teams, Melena would have advanced if he finished in ninth place or better. But he was happy he didn't have to run around at the finish line to figure out exactly who came in ahead of him.

"Right after the race, I automatically knew I made it," he said. "I didn't have to worry about looking at other people or who's on a team or who's an individual."

Melena cut 14 seconds off his time at Mount San Antonio College a week earlier, when he finished third in his heat at prelims and was eighth overall the four Division 2 heats.

Even though he said he was surprised with his finish Saturday, he did feel like he had room to improve leading up to finals.

"This week I felt good and coming into the race, I knew I hadn't run my fastest time yet," Melena said. "I knew I could run faster, but I didn't know how much faster."

Now Melena faces the same course where he struggled two years ago. As a sophomore he advanced to the state championships, but inexperience caused him to go too fast out of the gate, and he finished 90th in 17:02.

"I didn't do good because I went out too fast," he said. "This year I know how to start off, how everyone's probably going to run it and I think I'll do a lot better."

The Desert Christian boys team will also return to state, although the Knights' absence has been for much longer.

Desert Christian just barely squeaked in by grabbing the seventh and final Division 5 team spot with 196 points. It will be the first time the school's boys team races at the state championship since 2002.

"Our goal was to get to state," Knights coach Andy Visokey said. "That's what we established as a team when we knew we were going to be in Division 5 this year."

Now that the team has made it that far, Desert Christian is just going to go out and see where it can finish.

"Now we'll establish the goal of beating one of the teams in Southern Section that beat us today," Visokey said. "We're not expecting to finish in the top three, but you never know."

It isn't that Visokey is pessimistic about his chances, he just knows his team is young and has plenty of time to grow. Six of Desert Christian's seven varsity runners are sophomores, with the only upperclassman being senior Aaron Acosta.

Visokey said the team wanted to make state for their lone senior, and Acosta is thrilled he gets to experience it before he leaves.

"It's been four hard years of work, and finally I get to go to state," he said. "It's huge."

Scott Acton led the Knights in 18th place in 16:40, which was 19 seconds better than his time at prelims. Acosta was 41st in 17:18, one spot and second ahead of teammate Thomas Waters.

Ray Biggerstaff, missed the previous week with a stress fracture, was 51st in 17:36 and Zac Patten was 54th in 17:38.

Back in July, Desert Christian assistant coach Neil Small agreed to shave his head if the team qualified for state, while Visokey said he would shave off his mustache for the first time in 27 years if they advanced. Less than an hour after the race, the Knights had an electric razor in hand.

"I've never shaved it off since it's grown out," Visokey said. "I'll see until after the holidays to see if I keep it. My wife will be happy about it."

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# Schroeder leads Knights to state

By ERIC SHANNON  
Valley Press Staff Writer

WALNUT — Before her CIF-Southern Section Finals race on Saturday, Charity Schroeder knew it could easily be her last race as a member of the Desert Christian High girls cross country team.

So the senior responded by having one of her best races during her high school career.

Schroeder finished her Division 5 race at Mt. San Antonio College in 27th place in 20 minutes and 56 seconds. She was the first Knight to cross the line, and helped the team advance to the state championship by finishing fifth with 174 points.

"I was thinking about it this week, and this was my last race in high school, so I really wanted to just have fun and enjoy myself," Schroeder said.

As her and her teammates warmed up and headed to the line on Saturday, Schroeder noticed the team wasn't responding like they normally do. And that's when Desert Christian coach Amy Spoelstra said she took over.

"Before the race, all the girls were saying they were nervous, but she said, 'I'm not nervous, I'm excited,'" Spoelstra said. "She's got so much drive herself, that she can't help but be contagious."

Schroeder's race was even more surprising because she isn't known for leading the charge.

"She's never been our No. 1 before, not even in freshman year or anything," Spoelstra said. "I wasn't expecting it, but I'm not at all surprised that she stepped up and did something like that."

The performance guaranteed Schroeder the chance to race one more time with the Knights next Saturday at Woodward Park in Fresno.

With two other seniors — Kylee Hall and Kara Spoelstra — also on the team, the team's coach is just happy the team fulfilled a goal it set a year ago when it didn't advance out of prelims.

"They kind of set that goal last



ERIC SHANNON/Valley Press

**MAKING PROGRESS** — Desert Christian runners Kylee Hall, left, and Kristen Parsons travel up a small hill in the first mile of Saturday's Division 5 race in the CIF-Southern Section finals.

year," Spoelstra said. "We had Charity last year saying, 'OK, we didn't make it to finals this year, but let's train this summer, let's make it to Fresno next year.' So she was kind of the driving force behind that."

Desert Christian hasn't been to the state championship since 2003, and it will be the first time any of the team's runners compete at the course.

"None of them have run at the state meet before, so it's going to be a completely new experience for them, and I think they're going to enjoy it a lot," Spoelstra said.

Kristen Parsons crossed the line second for the Knights in 21:05, good for 30th place. Hall was 46th in 21:50, Charlee White was 48th in 22:03 and Kara Spoelstra was

54th in 22:17.

Parsons, who has been Desert Christian's most consistent runner this season, fell back when the race opened at a fast pace. But she doesn't think that was the reason for her finishing 50th.

"It was just a weird race," Parsons said. "I tried to just run my own race."

Highland freshman Vanessa Lopez also got caught in the middle of the pack in her Division 1 race, but unlike Parsons, she was only going to advance with a top finish.

Lopez, who qualified without her team at prelims, needed to finish as one of the top individual qualifiers, which turned out to be 14th place or better. Unfortunately for her, she couldn't make up the lost positions

early, and crossed the line 32nd in 18:40.

"I don't think I went out fast enough, because when I started the race, I was in 50th or so," Lopez said. "I felt I could have done better."

Lopez usually is able to make up time on hills, which benefits her at a course like Mt. SAC. But after falling so far behind, there was only so much she could do.

"Usually they tend to go out really fast and then slow down once they get to the hills," she said. "My strength is the hills so I tried catching some people, but I think I should have started out a little faster."

Earlier in the week, Lopez said if she doesn't make it to state championships this year, she isn't concerned because she still has three more years, and she isn't changing her tone.

"My goal is to go by my senior year," she said. "I at least want to go once."

The Paraclete girls team also didn't make the cut, but just barely.

The Spirits finished with 226 points in eighth place, just one spot away from the seventh-place finish required to qualify. But Paraclete coach Andy Helme knew it would take an excellent performance for the second consecutive week to advance.

"We scored the meet from prelims, and eighth is exactly where we were according to the week before," Helme said. "We knew we'd have to run a great race and have help."

The Spirits were led by Melissa Bauer, who finished fourth in the state championship as a sophomore last year. On Saturday, she finished in 19:11 in 17th place, six spots from qualifying individually.

"She ran as best as she could," Helme said. "We were running against some loaded teams."