



By Russ Pankonin
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Going into the Class D state cross country meet at Kearney, Coach Carl Zuege felt a top five finish would be a realistic goal for his team.

After the race was run and points tallied last Thursday, the Chase County Longhorns finished sixth overall.

The Longhorns finished just 15 points out of third, nine points out of fourth and eight points out of fifth. "That's not a huge difference," Zuege said.

In a field like that, with 18 teams and nearly 150 runners, a lot can change point-wise if a runner or two improves by just five seconds.

While it wasn't a fifth place finish, Zuege said he was pleased and proud with the Longhorns' race.

Assistant Jonathan Beverly said they boys ran a solid race but probably peaked at districts the week before.

Zuege agreed, noting they went into districts with a competitive edge. Everything came together at districts, he added.

It's a different atmosphere at the state meet, Zuege noted. The only team member that had participated in a state meet before was Garret Thompson as a freshman.

In addition to the state pressure, Zuege said some team members had to overcome some sickness prior to the meet. Not to mention some small nagging injuries. "But everyone has those at this time of the year," he said.

Sophomore Indy Smith led the Longhorns Thursday with a 25th place finish. He was followed by district champion junior Holden Dreiling who came in 33rd.

Seniors Andrew Vaverek and Garret Thompson, who have paced each other much of the year, finished 54th and 65th respectively, to round out the scoring.

Freshmen Ike Maxwell and Stephen Welsh finished in 75th and 89th in the 147-man field. Maxwell was sick the day before the meet and Welsh lost his shoe along the way and finished with it in his hands.

That's not the first time a Longhorn has lost a shoe at state.

In 2002, it was Brett Berry who lost his shoe during the state meet and ran much of the race without it, in slick muddy conditions.

Zuege noted this year's team went into the state meet ranked seventh in Class D and finished one better. "Not bad," he said.

In addition to qualifying for state this year, the team won the Cambridge meet, brought home the SPVA conference title and a district crown.

Zuege said that all represents a really good season for the team.

Experience coming back

Zuege loses just two varsity runners off this year's squad, meaning he'll bring back a lot of

experience next year.

Just getting the team to state this year, and the experience they gained there, will be invaluable next year, Zuege said.

In addition to this year's runners, Zuege said they will add some junior high runners to the team next year.

Zuege praised Beverly for his help throughout the season and especially in grooming the junior high runners.

"You won't find another coach with the expertise in running and training like Jonathan," Zuege said.

He said they complement each other well.

Zuege said Beverly has a great rapport with the kids. He could tell the kids that while their effort at state was great, he challenged them to raise the bar even further next year.

Class D state cross country

Boys' varsity team scores—1st, Crofton, 69; 2nd, Nebraska Christian, 71; 3rd, Yutan, 89; 4th, Stanton, 95; 5th, Ainsworth, 96; 6th, Chase County, 104; 7th, Ord, 126; 8th, Kenesaw, 136; 9th, Dundy County/Stratton, 145; 10th, McCool Junction, 164; 11th, Thayer Central, 171; 12th, NP St. Pat's, 206; 13th, Johnson County Central, 213; 14th, West Holt, 220; 15th, Aquinas Catholic, 227; 16th, Laurel-Concord/Coleridge, 241; 17th, Bertrand/Loomis, 269; 18th, Ravenna, 318.

Boys' individual results—1st, Hans Epp, NE Christian, 16:26.6; 25th, Indy Smith, CCS, 18:17.6; 33rd, Holden Dreiling, CCS, 18:34.2; 54th, Andrew Vaverek, CCS, 19:05.5; 65th, Garret Thompson, CCS, 19:13.5; 75th, Isaac Maxwell, CCS, 19:24.2; 89th, Stephen Welsh, CCS, 19:42.7.