

Staff Writer

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DELPHOS — Lincolnview's Bayley Tow won the varsity boys race and Spencerville's Karri Purdy the girls at the St. John's Cross Country Invitational Saturday morning at Stadium Park in Delphos.

The Lancers were the best finishers of the local boys teams by placing third (70 points), with Columbus Grove fourth (95), Crestview fifth (137), Van Wert eighth (248), Kalida ninth (293), St. John's 10th (307), Spencerville 11th (314) and Ottoville 14th (359) in the 16-team format.

Tow ran a 16:40 for the Lancers, while Colton Grothaus (17:06) was best for Columbus Grove at fourth, Charles Thornburg (17:20) for Crestview at sixth, Curtis Pohlman (18:19) for St. John's at 19th, Grant Zeller 28th for Kalida (18:43), Ryan Kerber 33rd for Van Wert (19:08), Matt Hurles (19:35) for Spencerville at 44th and Cody Kemper 68th for Ottoville (20:22).

After Purdy, the leaders for the local girls teams were Kalida's Katelyn Siebeneck (20:11.73) in second, Lady Blue Jay Megan Joseph (21:13) in 10th, Whitney Meyers 14th (21:44) for the Lady Cougars, Alexis Ricker 17th (22:05) for the Lady Bulldogs, Anna Gorman 22nd (22:38) for

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the Lady Lancers, Chelsea Hancock (22:38) 41st for the Lady Knights and lone Lady Big Green runner Elizabeth Luersman (25:23) in 79th.

Spencerville's team came in second (77), Van Wert third (113), Kalida fifth (146), Columbus Grove sixth (161), Crestview 11th (274) and Lincolnview 12th (289) out of 13 teams.

Due to an injury St. John's didn't have a fifth runner for a team score.



"It's a different feel to be coaching a team again after all these years. Before, it was all about individuals working for their best placing but now, running in a pack and trying to pass teams means different strategy," St. John's host coach Steve Hellman explained. "They — as well as I — have to adjust their thinking as well; passing people helps the team.

"The girls, because of an injury, only had four runners. We knew Megan would do well but Breece Rohr, for her first race, ran exceedingly well for a freshman, finishing 26th. Hopefully, we'll get the fifth girl back and finally run as a team."

Ottoville mentor Bob Kaple knows about the lack of numbers.

"We only have to one girl runner in Elizabeth (Luersman): all we're looking for from her is to be the best she can be, work hard and try to move up as we go on," he said. "On the boys side, we don't have the clear-cut or the outstanding number one, so we have to do it as a team. We're

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going to focus more on everybody pushing everybody else and try to move up as a group; if we do that, things will take care of themselves."

Lincolnview coach Matt Langdon had a lot of positives for his crews.

"Bayley won it on the boys side and we have a good idea that our top three will be solid in Bayley, Ben Bilimek (eighth) and Alex Rodriguez (11th). Our success will come from the development of our fourth through eighth guys," Langdon said. "We knew New Bremen and Anna would have good boys teams but we also knew Columbus Grove and Crestview were also here. We wanted to beat them but we will be facing them a few more times this year; it's good to come in third, which is where I thought we had a good shot of doing, but we know we have to improve.

"The girls didn't have enough for a team last year, so we have a full team this year, which is always better. Most of them are new to varsity and you could tell before the meet how jittery and nervous they were. As they got into the running and afterward, they felt better; they knew they'd be OK but they have to keep working. We'll get better."

Spencerville coach Brian McMichael always views the opener of the season in the same way: a measuring stick.

"Overall, we ran well as a team on both sides. Karri ran particularly well by winning the girls race but we expect her to be a quality runner," he explained. "Cierra (Adams) came in third, which is a nice 1-2 punch. What we were looking for today is see where we're at as far as understanding the strategy of running varsity cross country. For us, it's running in a pack and moving up as we go. You can tell them in practice and just talking but they have to see it for themselves.

"The boys are so young. They really have to learn quickly but considering their youth, they ran a good race as individuals and a team. We'll evaluate and go from here."

Kalida coach Scott Miller agreed about his units.

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"It was kind of what we expected from both sides. This is our first meet of the season and as a coach, you can only do so much in practice," he remarked. "The kids were ready to compete against someone else and see where they stood. We knew Katelyn (Siebeneck) would so well because of what she's done in the past. Jackie Gardner broke her foot in the summer and is not quite up to speed; she's slowly coming back. I'm happy for our teams overall but we need to take what we learned today and move on. Our veterans got back into the swing and our newcomers got their feet wet."

Columbus Grove head boys coach Terry Schnipke wasn't happy with his troops.

"We ran well at the Upper Sandusky Invitational Tuesday — we picked that up after the Early Bird fell through — and ran very well," he explained. "We got beat by Tiffin Columbian, a Division I school. Today was a different story. We knew Anna had everyone back but New Bremen surprised us. I don't feel we ran up to our capability for whatever reason."

The Lady Bulldog counterpart, Jason Jay, was pleased with his girls.

"We have 18 girls and 15 ran today. We knew Liberty-Benton and Spencerville would be strong and they were but I thought we ran where I thought we would," Jay added. "We'll see a lot of these teams, especially the NWC teams, a few more times, so those are good rivalries and good measuring sticks. We have a lot of newer girls that need to learn how to run a 5K race but all in all, they all did well."

Van Wert boys and girls coach Brandon Moody also has different strategies for this race.

"We wanted to use this meet to get our younger guys experience. We ran in the OHSAA Early-Season Invitational last week with our veteran guys and I felt it was important to get our younger guys in there and measure themselves," Moody commented. "We used this as a bridge between last week and next week's Greenville Invitational and I felt our young kids ran well against some good competition. I know they are disappointed with finishing eighth but they will move on and learn from this.

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"For the girls, we have a lot of younger participants on varsity to begin with. I know they have a long way to go but they all ran well today. Right now, you're looking to get them competitive and up to speed as quickly as possible."

Crestview coach Mark Bagley liked what he saw out of both teams.

"We always look at this meet as a chance to really see where we are as a group and individuals. I think we did that and I liked what I saw," he added. "We have the 22 guys on the boys and the 10 girls and I really like the attitude these kids have. We have a lot of runners that had their first varsity experience today and they learned what it takes to compete because this is such a good competition. There are a lot of good competitors and now the kids know what it will take to get better and get where we want to go, both physically and mentally."

St. John's, Ottoville and Lincolnview are in the Wayne Trace Invitational 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, while Spencerville, Kalida and Crestview are in the Columbus Grove Invitational 9 a.m. Saturday.