

Billies send both teams to states along with other local runners

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ELMA - For the first time in school history, Fredonia will send both their boys' and girls' cross country teams to the New York State Public High School Athletic Association's championship meet, as each won Section 6 Class C titles Friday at Elma Meadows Golf Course.

"As a coach, you know what needs to happen," Fredonia coach Carol Zirkle said. "You just don't know how the kids are going to perform, but all 14 kids came out today and just ran their hearts out and ran great races. And they ran it for each other. Both teams are very close and they knew they were running to get their teammates to states, they weren't just running for themselves. And it was a very exciting day."

The boys, who were paced by Josh Szukala's fourth place finish (17:48), scored 59 points on the afternoon, 12 better than two-time defending Section 6 champion Gowanda (59). Roy-Hart finished third with 85 points and were followed by Wilson (105), Falconer (142), Akron (152), City Honors (186), Allegany-Limestone (194), Southwestern (198) and Cleveland Hill (203).



OBSERVER Photo by Sean Pecuch
Fredonia's Chaz Mancino competes at the sectional meet Friday at Elma Meadows.

"It's where we hoped we would be," Zirkle said. "But Gowanda is the two time defending sectional champion. They're a very good team. We knew coming in that we had a chance at winning, but we knew in order for that to happen that we had to run good races, each of the seven guys had a job to do. Josh (Szukala), Alex (Crise) and Chaz (Mancino) pretty much ran where we expected them to run, but the seniors Matt Meredith and Vince Ippolito, ran outstanding races.

They moved up quite a few places and that was the difference in the race for us. Matt Meredith passed five guys in the last mile of the course and really just ran an outstanding race. Vince, he just ran an awesome race. He beat some people he hadn't beat before and that was really the key to the race for the boys."

Also finishing in the top 10 for the Hillbillies was Matt Meredith, who took seventh in a time of 18:08 while teammates Alex Crise (14th, 18:50), Chaz Mancino (16th, 18:52), Vince Ippolito (18th, 18:53), Mark Dudek (22nd, 19:37) and Jake Brown (37th, 20:25) also helped Fredonia claim the Section 6 title.

"I think that both teams knew it was going to be a tough race," Zirkle said. "But our boys last year came in second to Gowanda for the second year in a row and they didn't want that to happen (again), so they put in a lot of miles in the summer. They put in the most training I've seen any of the teams I've coached in cross country in the offseason. And I think that that's one of the reasons we had success today. A year ago today they made that decision that they didn't want to be in second. A lot of teams say that on that day, but they don't follow through. This team followed through and did the extra training that was necessary for them to improve.

"Gowanda is a very good team and they've got some great kids out there," Zirkle continued. "We give them a lot of credit and we knew that we had the opportunity to win and they knew they had the opportunity to win and it just came down to we had some guys run some outstanding races today."



For Gowanda, Kevin Brown is heading back to the finals for the third time.

The past two years, Brown has finished the sectional meet in second place behind then teammate Cliff Nielson. "He would have liked to win it for a change, but I think he is happy with his place," Palmer said. "I think not having Cliff to push him makes a difference. He had to work harder and felt he was a little behind last year. Not having Cliff as someone to chase and push him makes a difference. I think he was steady all the way through. He was fourth for a majority of the race. His time was good for the conditions."

For the Dunkirk Marauders, Alex Gonzalez punched his ticket into the state meet with an eighth-place finish. Gonzalez finished the muddy course in 17:28.

East Aurora's team took first place, allowing the entire team to go to states next week. Three members from that team finished in the top eight. Therefore, the next five runners qualified for states. As Gonzalez placed eighth, it allowed him to be eligible for states.

"Alex was the last kid in, but that's all it takes," Dunkirk coach Kurt Warmbrodt said. "It doesn't matter how you get there. I believe Alex as in the most competitive boys race of the day. From what other kids did time wise, I believe this was the toughest. I am just very happy to see him finish there and take another ride to states next Saturday."

The Marauders placed 12th out of 19 teams with 308 points.

Tom Warmbrodt was 70th overall with a time of 21:07 while Jeremy Kozlowski was 77th with a time of 21:35. Jon Fountain took 81st place with a time of 21:46 and Ray Tarnowski took 85th, crossing the finish line in 22:20.

In the girls' race, Lauren Reyda continued her impressive season, taking first place in a time of 19:53.

"She ran a phenomenal race," Zirkle said. "She beat two very good Falconer girls."

The Lady Golden Falcons' Shannon Murphy finished second in a time of 20:08 while Kirsten Holmberg finished third in a time of 20:19.

"Our girls were two-time defending champs going into this race," Zirkle noted. "Falconer was favored and once again we knew, like with the boys, we had the opportunity to win if we ran great races."

"We knew that Falconer was a very good team," Zirkle continued. "They had three very good runners who are all going to states. And in order for us to win, certain things had to happen and Lauren beating their two top girls was key. They beat her last week and her beating them was a major thing for us. Another key was Maitland Langworthy moving up. She ran a great race. All of the girls ran great races, but Jessica and Michaela had to beat (Falconer's) third girl and they did. This was a team win. It was the same with the boys. Every person had to come in in their position. There wasn't one person who could dominate the team. We needed all seven runners to place in certain places for us to have that opportunity."

The Lady Hillbillies finished with a meet-low 36 points and were followed by Falconer (40), Gowanda (104), Wilson (125), Akron (142), Allegany-Limestone (155), Southwestern (212), Roy-Hart (218), Lionardo da Vinci (223), City Honors (269), Charter School of Applied Technology (285) and Cleveland Hill (291).

"Only three of these girls had raced sectionals before," Zirkle noted. "So you don't know how that inexperience is going to play (out), but they ran very well and it was awesome for them to be able to defend their sectional title."

Also finishing for the Lady Hillbillies were Jessica Swoyer (fifth, 21:21), Michaela Tramuta (sixth, 21:25), Maitland Langworthy (22:04), Brittany Campaign (13th, 22:21), Jill Kowalski (16th, 22:47) and Alyssa Goot (20th, 23:15).

Emily Steves is making a return trip to the state meet with a fourth-place finish. She crossed the finish line at 20:37.5.

"We looked at the Internet and figured the competition she had at Counties would be the same at Sectionals," Gowanda coach Peter Palmer said. "She went out with those top three girls. She went last year, so it was her goal to repeat as a senior. There was not one place where she fell off during the race. Her time was good for the conditions.

"I am extremely happy and pleased with how team did in general," Palmer continued. "We've never finished third in sectionals as a team. I wouldn't have said we would be that high at the beginning of season. Everyone improved."

For Silver Creek, eighth grader Hannah Seiders qualified for the state meet with a seventh-place finish as she finished with a time of 21:42.7

"We are very impressed with the tremendous progress she made through the year," Silver Creek coach Mike Janisch said. "The future looks very bright for her. She ran a very intelligent race. She followed our instructions and finished where we thought she would. Being such a young runner, we thought it was a long shot for her to make states. She obviously surprised us tremendously."

Also for the Black Knights, senior Jarred Ringer placed seventh to make it to states. His time was 18:52.1. Making Ringer's accomplishment so astonishing is the fact this year is his first year running cross country.

"To see his tremendous progress in the past month is outstanding," Janisch said. "We are so proud of his effort and dedication and success he is now getting. Our boys' team ran the best race they did all year and some girls had (personal records)."

For the Lady Marauders, Manon Huetter took 56th at 26:01 and Nicole Bannister was 76th at 34:33.