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EA sweeps first Knox Invitational

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Marta McLaughlin races to the finish line in winning the Knox Invitational for East Aurora. Photo by Harry Scull Jr. / Buffalo News



It was going to take more than one wrong turn to rattle Sean Phillips.

The East Aurora senior missed a flag, but not the opportunity to finish first at the KnoX-C Invitational held at historic Knox State Park in East Aurora.

Despite losing an estimated five seconds, Phillips won the race in a season-best 16:30.18 to outkick Justin Bender of Clarence (16:35.33).

"When people started screaming my name, at first I thought they were just cheering for me,

and then I realized I was going the wrong way," said Phillips. "But we recognized it in time and luckily I did not get disqualified."

Another East Aurora runner, sophomore Marta McLaughlin, won the girls race in 19:17.58, 10 seconds ahead of runner-up Kaitlin McCadden of Clarence. "I've never even been close to her before," said McCadden, whose 19:27.26 was a personal record. "I tried to run with her because I know she's really strong, and she can run a good pace."

McLaughlin said the course was tougher than she thought and the gradual uphill climbs were challenging.

All seven EA girls placed in the top 15. Paige Anderson was third and Megan Barritot was sixth.

The inaugural race was held on a sunny, warm afternoon. Ten boys teams with 77 runners and 10 girls teams with 71 runners competed. The event matched the Clarence boys and girls, ranked No. 1 among Western New York large schools, against East Aurora, the top-ranked boys and girls in small schools. Bigger was not better.

East Aurora won both the boys and girls varsity races with Clarence coming in second. The EA boys scored 27 points with four runners in the top 10. The Blue Devils' Elli Martynkiewicz was third, Gene Barritot was fifth and Brendan Keany was seventh.

Knox State Park is a 633-acre state park known for its trails for hiking, cross country skiing and wildlife. Perhaps one day it will be a top cross country venue.

The Knox family helped Buffalo land a National Hockey League franchise in 1970.

"This is a great course," said Phillips. "The bottom loop was pretty tough because the ground is a little squishy right now, but the wood trails are really great up there. I really love running up there."

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