



Sparks paces Geneva to second place

By Kevin McGavin | Daily Herald Correspondent

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Kevin Sparks' normal running mate was literally in a different hemisphere on Saturday.

The Geneva boys cross country team was missing its anchor; Kevin McDowell, top ten at the Class 3A state meet last fall, was in Australia preparing for an international junior triathlon competition.

In the male division of the St. Charles East Leavey Invitational at Leroy Oakes Forest Preserve, Prairie Ridge was the class of the field, storming to the team title as the only squad in double figures.

But Sparks was the dominant area individual on the slopping 3-mile layout in St. Charles, taming the demanding run in 15 minutes, 16.7 seconds to place third overall.

"I usually start off a race pretty slow," said Sparks, who returns from the Vikings' third-place state outfit from a year ago. "I tied my (personal record) from the state meet from last year, which is a good start (to the season)."

Sparks' time was nearly a minute faster than any of his teammates, who placed seventh overall behind contributions from Justin Rodriguez, Connor Bartel, Eric Blake and Ryan Ahern.

"Some pluses and some minuses," Geneva coach Bob Thomson said of the Vikings' collective showing. "It's our first meet, so we had some cobwebs to work out. You have to race with the kids who are here."

St. Charles North was a distant second to Prairie Ridge in the team standings. The North Stars' Brad Wheeler, Kyle Kuczynski, Peter Johnson, Ryan Senci and Billy Clink finished between 14th and 33rd in their home town.

Wheaton North edged the host Saints for third place, with Downers Grove North settling for fifth. Benet was 10th, followed by area squads from Jacobs, Waubonsie Valley, Bartlett, Batavia and Wheaton Academy.

Jake Zahn, Tim Johnson, Mike Faith, Mike Rykoskey and Jake Osborne helped the host Saints improve by 10 positions from a year ago.

"The team is heading in the right direction," said St. Charles East coach Chris Bosworth. "Considering we were 14th last year, I am very pleased."

Zahn and Johnson had a lone runner between them with their top 17 results. Batavia senior Sam Stoner paced the Bulldogs' squad with his 16:36.9 effort.

Wheaton North senior Jake Waterman made a stunning debut in finishing behind Kevin Jacobs, the Rockton Honenegah senior who barely missed breaking the 15-minute barrier in winning the individual title. Waterman played soccer his first three years for the Falcons, and his shade-under 15:15 time anchored a third-place team result.

"I was just looking to get a feel for (the sport) and move up for the rest of the season," Waterman said. "I figured it would be a good chance (to showcase my ability)."

Caleb Philbrick also medaled for Wheaton North with his top-22 run. Benjamin Silver was fourth overall for Downers North, and Benet senior Jerry Olp was ninth to lead the Redwings. David Groeber was the top gun for Waubonsie Valley.

There can little doubt as to the top runner at Wheaton Academy; Kent Smith was more than three minutes faster than any of his teammates in snaring the last local medal. Nick Ellingson paced Jacobs, and Joey Salatino did likewise for Bartlett.