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Naperville N. wins tight race

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Sydney Stuenkel of St. Charles North during the Wheaton North girls cross country sectional at St. James Farm Saturday.

PAUL MICHNA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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By [John Lemon](#)

Not much separated the top three teams Saturday morning at the Class 3A Wheaton North cross country sectional at St. James Farm in Winfield.

Naperville North put its top five runners in the top 25 to finish with 73 points, edging Wheaton Warrenville South's 80 and St. Charles East's 81 for a team trophy that coach Dan Iverson said wasn't that important to win.

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"Wheaton Warrenville South is an excellent team, so is St. Charles East," Iverson said. "The results could easily be flipped around next week (at state). We're going to run as hard as we can next week, that's the focus."

Those three teams — plus fourth-place St. Charles North (173) and fifth-place Benet (186) — all advanced to the state meet next Saturday at Detweiller Park in Peoria.

"We ran very well today, I was pleased," Iverson said. "We wanted to

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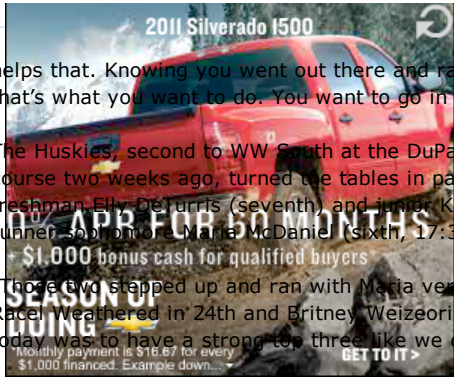
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go to Peoria with momentum. Winning I suppose helps that but just running well helps that. Knowing you went out there and ran hard and took a step forward as a team, that's what you want to do. You want to go in on an upswing and we feel we are."

The Huskies, second to WW South at the DuPage Valley Conference meet on the same course two weeks ago, turned the tables in part because second and third runners freshman Eli DeTurris (seventh) and junior Kimber Meyer (11th) stayed so close to lead runner sophomore Maria McDaniel (sixth, 17:37).

"Those two stepped up and ran with Maria very well," said Iverson, whose team also had Rachel Weathered in 24th and Britney Weizerick in 25th. "That was a big deal for us today was to have a strong top three like we did. I was impressed with that."

McKenna Kiple led WW South taking fifth in 17:35.9. The Tigers ran a tight pack with the next four coming in 16th, 17th, 19th and 23rd, respectively — Kayla Kightinger, Hope Schmelzle, Lauren Mordini and Katie Popejoy.

St. Charles East originally thought it had tied WW South for second place and won the tiebreaker with sixth runner Maddie Westerhoff.

But finishing a point behind the Tigers wasn't that big of a deal to coach Denise Hefferin who, like Iverson, just wanted to see her team run well and build momentum for the state meet next week.

"The big thing today was a big team performance and moving on to next week," Hefferin said. "We did both of those things well. Excited to be on to next week. Everyone steps to the same starting line next week and we're looking forward to our final race and what we've been looking for and training for all year."

As they have the last three weeks at conference and regionals, freshman Torree Scull and senior Mallory Abel ran together all the way into the chute. Saturday Scull finished in 17:33.9 to Abel's 17:34.8 for a third- and fourth-place finish, respectively, after Abel had won the regional championship the week before.

"Senior and freshman seems to be a good trend we have going here every three years we get another one," Hefferin said. "We're excited Mallory can mentor Torree. We tell them every week I don't care each week which one of you comes across first as long as you come across together. This is the third week in a row they have been able to do that. Hope they continue one more week."

The Saints' Sarah Hill finished 15th, Jess Evans 20th and Kristin Sheehan 39th.

St. Charles North's Sydney Stuenkel found herself in another battle with the Saints' top two runners. This time she edged them to take second place by .5 seconds in 17:33.4.

"Syd, she was solid, she's been running solid all season," North Stars coach Shari Hayes said. "Running with the two East girls, she was just stronger today."

St. Charles North sophomore Ashley England, fourth at regionals last week, finished 13th.

"Ashley is underestimated by everybody," Hayes said. "She ran really well."

Benet, led by Audrey Blazek in 18th, placed four runners in the top 37 to grab the final state spot.

Naperville Central senior Amanda Fox led the seven individual qualifiers by winning the race going away in 16:57.9. She held a commanding lead throughout a race she won by 35 seconds.

"I wanted to go out hard the first mile and go from there and just race hard and keep strong throughout the whole race," Fox said. "I've seen the other girls before and I knew what was expected. I wasn't going to count anyone out, I just wanted to stay strong."

Fox has raced at St. James Farm four times this year and won three of the races, losing only to Lake Park's Kaylee Flanagan at Wheaton North's Falcon Classic flight meet.

After finishing 34th last year at state, Fox has her sights set on an all-state performance.

"Just really excited to get back to the state course and hopefully run my PR there and stay with the front pack and do the best I can," Fox said. "I'd love to be all-state and maybe top 10."

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Other individual qualifiers were Waubonsie Valley's Ashley Bruner, Batavia's Lexi Slome, West Aurora's Rachel Cavender, Metea Valley's Kendall Cast, Harlem's Leah Raffety and Hononegah's Courtney Clayton.

Among the tough-luck stories Saturday were Batavia's Rachael Spalding and Jacobs' Lauren VanVlierbergen, the next two individuals who would have qualified. Naperville Central (201), Geneva (230), Metea Valley (234) and Batavia (236) finished sixth through ninth to miss out on that fifth team spot.

"Alexi ran phenomenal and Spalding ran phenomenal," Batavia coach Chad Hillman said. "We all ran well. Jen Muehlbauer, first time in the lineup in a few weeks and she was our fourth girl. Jessica Roach was sick last week, she ran very good considering. I can't say anyone didn't run well."

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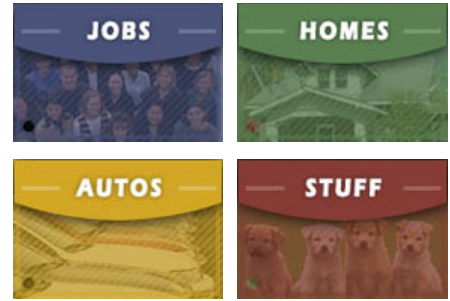
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