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Prepared for outdoor season

Miller wins 800 to lead North Stars to 4th place

ST. CHARLES – Both St. Charles North and East tried to put a positive spin on the results of the Upstate Eight Conference Boys Indoor Track Meet.

Neuqua Valley nearly doubled its closest competitor – Waubonsie Valley (82) – in the team standings, scoring 162 points.

Still, the North Stars (65) and Saints (24) – who finished fourth and sixth overall, respectively – viewed this final indoor meet as a stepping stone toward the outdoor season.

“We have a lot of young kids running today,” East coach Ben Provencher said, “so this is a great education for them.”

Two of those Saints getting an education were juniors Tim Johnson and Andrew Gomez. Johnson placed fifth in the 800-meter run at 2:04.9.

“Tim in the 800, he learned a lot about running a race today,” Provencher said. “He saw a couple of things happen in front of him that he didn’t expect.”

And Gomez placed sixth in the shot put, earning a point for the Saints with a 44-02 throw.

“It’s really nice to see Andrew get in the finals,” Provencher said. “This is his first year throwing in varsity, and this is his first time getting to the finals in a big meet.”

Joe Vitali also did well for the Saints, placing sixth in the 55-meter low-hurdles in 8.13 seconds.

The North Stars fared better in team points thanks to a few big wins. Senior Steven Miller outpaced his competition in the 800-meter run, winning the race in 2:01.98.

But one of the more exciting races resulted in a second place for North. Senior Todd Vankerhoff kept pace with Neuqua Valley junior Aaron Beattie, pulling ahead of him for a few laps of the 3,200-meter run.

But Beattie found another burst of speed in the final turn and won in 9:41.15, nearly 4 seconds faster than Vankerhoff.

“I knew he was very capable of taking it very fast,” Vankerhoff said of his nearest competitor. “Toward the end I saw I had a chance to challenge, and I wanted to go for it because why not? It’s a race. ... Between the two of us, we probably got a faster time that way.”

“Todd ran a really smart race,” North coach Kevin Harrington said, “He had really even splits and he can grind out a lot of distance right now. ... And that’s good because Todd hasn’t done much speed work yet.”

Harrington also expressed pride in junior Kyle Zankowski, who finished right behind Vankerhoff with a time of 9:53.4.

North also showed confidence in the high jump as senior Andrew Carlson and junior Jake Whitehead took first and second place, leaping 6-1 and 6-0, respectively.

But in keeping with the spirit of improvement, the two came out of the event more critical than celebratory. Carlson had hit 6-4 the meet before, but he says a bruised hip held him down.

Whitehead sang a similar tune, happy for the placement, but looking for a higher jump,

“I had a good day, but I want that 6-2,” Whitehead said. “I barely missed it.”

Harrington said that despite some setbacks like his two best sprinters, Eric Battle and Tim Rowley, missing the meet because of injury, he mainly wanted to get a good start on the outdoor season.

“Our goal today coming in was whatever we did, do it well,” he said.

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