

Young Airline cross country teams gaining experience, enjoying success

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Airline cross country coach Mark Hamiter has young boys and girls teams that are gaining experience as next month's state meet in Natchitoches approaches.

Earlier this month, the boys team finished runner-up in the NSU Pre-State Invitational on the 5K course that will host the state meet.

Junior Jack Wilkes, one of the state's top 800-meter runners last spring, finished second.

Matt Henry also posted a top10 finish.

Wilkes also finished 27th in the Arkansas Chili Pepper Cross Country Invitational in Fayetteville, Ark. The top-ranked teams from Arkansas and Texas both competed in the meet.

Sarah Lawhorne and Carly McIntosh led the Airline girls with 58th and 73rd finishes, respectively, at NSU.

Hamiter expected great things out of runners like Wilkes and Henry this season, but he's especially pleased with the way his younger runners have come along.

Among those on the boys team are Jase Thaxton, Jack Jordan, Kaleb Sahlie, Dylan Custer, Walter Haacker and Clifton Haacker.

Earlie this month, Airline hosted the Showdown at Sundown meet which was meant to showcase the younger runners.

"We ran our JV teams, trying to offer our guys and girls the chance to be 'bumped' to varsity," Hamiter said.

The challenging 2.2-mile course course in Plain Dealing consisted of multiple loops, hills, uneven terrain and hay bales for the athletes to jump.

Airline sophomore Briona Richards finished eighth and freshman Maya Randle was 10th. Sophomore Nick Bourgeois led the Airline boys with a 21st-place finish.

Jordan and Henry recently made running history at Airline by becoming the third and fourth members of the Viking 500 Mile Club.

To qualify for the 500-Mile Club, a runner must log at least 500 miles in training from July to November for cross country or from January through May for track.

Thaxton has qualified the past three seasons and Wilkes for the past two.

The District 1-5A meet is Saturday. Parkway is the defending boys and girls champions.