

SPORTS



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Menlo School's Lacy chases a CIF state title in cross country

by Keith Peters

The top runners in California, many of whom also rank among the best in the country, will converge on Fresno this weekend for the annual CIF State Cross Country Championships at Woodward Park.

For a select few, only one thing is on their mind Saturday: winning a state title.

Include Menlo School senior Lizzie Lacy in that special group. She was sixth in the Division IV state finals last year with a 18:31 over the 3.1-mile course. This season, she has run 17:58 for 5K at the Stanford Invitational.

While that ranks her No. 21 overall in the state, Lacy's 17:21.91 from winning the Central Coast Section Division IV title two weeks ago over a three-mile layout at Toro Park in Salinas ranks her No. 2 in the state in Division IV behind Malibu's Caroline Pietrzyk, whose 16:58 from winning her division at the Southern Section finals converts to 17:16 for Fresno.

"But, it's OK," said Menlo coach Jorge Chen. "It'll come down to either of them at the (state) finish."

Chen is high on Lacy after her time at CCS ranked her No. 2 all-time on the course and left her No. 1 in all divisions for CCS.

"Lizzie was off the charts," Chen said after the CCS race. "I credit this all to Lizzie's own hard work during the offseason and building from there during the season. Also, Lizzie is extremely coachable as she constantly gives me feedback on how she's doing and thus making it easier for me to proceed. Lizzie continues to write her name in the record books and it'll be fun to see how she does in the state meet."

Lacy is one of six runners, who finished in the top 10 in her division last year, who return for the state finals. Lacy has that mindset to win heading to Fresno.

"The whole season, that has kind of been my goal," Lacy said of possibly winning a state title. "It was out there before Crystal."

Lacy began shouldering big expectations after she ran 17:00.8 over Crystal Spring's 2.95 miles to win the West Bay Athletic League title. At CCS, on the slightly longer course, her 17:21.9 converted to the time she ran at Crystal.

"I'm just as motivated now as I was then," Lacy said.

So, a state title is possible?

"If I have a good race, it's definitely doable," she said. "I have to go in thinking that I can (win). Being a senior . . . that makes it that much sweeter. This is it for me; this is my high school experience."

Gunn junior Gillian Meeks, meanwhile, also has to be considered in the running for state honors, in Division I. She was 46th last season in 18:37, but ran 17:42 for 5,000 meters (same distance as Woodward Park) and ranks No. 9 overall in the state this season.

Meeks won the CCS Division I title in 17:59. She and Lacy were two of three local girls win CCS individual titles two weeks ago. The other was Pinewood senior Nicole Colonna in Division V. She finished eighth at the state finals last season in 19:17 and looks to move up on Saturday after running 18:58 in the section finals.

"Today truly was amazing," Paly coach Kelsey Feeley said at the CCS meet. "I can't describe how proud I am of the boys. We set the goal to make it to the state meet at the beginning of the season and the boys rose to the occasion. The boys all had a game plan for the race and executed it perfectly."

The Vikings were led by Matison in 15:39.9 clocking. He was Paly's first individual champion since Phillip MacQuitty won Division II in 2007.

"Lucas finishing first in the race was obviously the biggest factor in us taking second, but all seven of the boys are responsible for this feat," said Feeley. "Again, I am so very proud of the work the boys put into this season and am so happy they are being rewarded for it by moving on to the state meet."

Matison continued his excellent season he also won the SCVAL El Camino Division title by posting a seven-second victory. Paly sophomore Kent Slaney really came through with a ninth-place finish of 16:06 after being seeded only 21st. Slaney had been running for only 3 1/2 weeks after breaking a toe at the start of the season.

The Sacred Heart Prep boys, meanwhile, qualified for the state meet for the first time by finishing third. SHP senior Daniel Hill led his team in seventh (16:07) with Garrett Mack taking 13th (16:26) and August Howell 15th (16:30).

Hill was 30th in the state meet last year in 16:32.

"The team was very excited," said SHP coach Ken Wilner. "They established the goal of qualifying for the state meet this spring during track season. We were seeded third going into the race. I did not think we could get King City and knew we would have to have all five scorers peaking to challenge Scotts Valley.

"The battle for the third slot was among Seaside, Half Moon Bay and us. We were confident that if we ran as a team like we had all season, we would be going to Woodward Park Thanksgiving weekend. Our goal is to crack the top 10 at the state meet."

Also headed to the state meet to run as individuals will be Menlo School freshman Robert Miranda, Gunn senior Emily Alken, Pinewood's Helena Merk plus Priory's Ross Corey and Robert Screven. Alken, Corey and Screven all ran in the state meet last year.



Menlo School senior Lizzie Lacy will be among the Division IV favorites at the CIF State Cross Country Championships on Saturday in Fresno. Photo by Ken Wilner.