

UNDERCLASSMAN ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

KENT SLANEY

by SAMUEL DESRÉ

Drop the arms Kent!" Boys cross country and track head coach Kelsey Feeley screams at Kent Slaney ('17) at the Central Coast Section Top 8 Invitational, as Slaney competes in his 1600 meter race. She has screamed these words many times before, and will continue to repeat herself many more times during this season and the upcoming ones. Slaney's form is so out of the ordinary that his teammates have nicknamed him "Baby Dinosaur" because he holds his arms like a T-rex when he runs. Luckily, for both the Boy's Track and Cross Country teams, Slaney's running abilities are also out of the ordinary.

After a promising freshman year, in which Slaney ran the 9th fastest freshman time in the nation in the 1600 meters, at 4:24.44, Slaney and his teammates had high hopes for the cross country season. However, those expectations were drastically changed when Slaney broke his big toe just one day before the start of the cross country season. Their ambitions may have been challenged, but they were not lost.

"As a team we wanted to make it to states from the beginning, and I still believed that was possible even with Kent missing a large part of the season," Varsity runner Naveen Pai ('17) said. "I just kept training and running my races and I had hope [that] things would come together when they needed to."

During the early stages of the season the team was hurt by Slaney's loss, finishing 17th at the Stanford Invitational and 11th at the Lowell invitational. Only three weeks before Central Coast Section (CCS) playoff meet, Slaney received the doctor's approval to run again. Few people thought that it was enough time to get into competitive shape.

"I knew he would do well, because he's Kent," teammate and CCS division 1 individual champion Lucas Matison ('15) said. "But I didn't know he would do that well. It just shows how much potential he has."

Slaney started relatively slow, with a win at the Frosh-Soph city championship against Gunn. However, he quickly stepped it up, finishing 7th at Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL) playoff meet in a time of 16:19 on the dreaded Crystal Springs Course, helping the team win its first SCVAL title since 2007.



photo by Malcolm Slaney

Although Slaney's performance at SCVAL was impressive, it was not enough to compete with the best times at CCS, as he was predicted to finish 21st. However, against all odds, Slaney managed to finish 9th at CCS in a race that saw the Boy's Cross Country team qualify to the State Division One cross country meet.

Many believe that Slaney was able to recover and get in shape quickly due to his passion and love for running.

"Kent's greatest strength as a runner is his passion," Pai said. "He loves running and never fails to give it his all. It's what allows him to bounce back from injury like he did this cross country season and it's the reason he is able to push himself to perform at the level he does."

Slaney is currently running three varsity events in the 2015 track season. Slaney finished 9th at the CCS top 8 Invitational in the mile and has a season personal best of 4:22.64. "I'm hoping to break 4:20 in the mile this season, and place in CCS finals," Slaney said.

During the track season, Slaney had to sacrifice running the 3200 meters in order to run the 800 meters and the 4x400 meter relay. These races help the team during dual meets and require Slaney to develop his speed, which contributes to having a stronger kick at the end of the mile.

"It was hard to sacrifice the two mile for races like the 800 and the [4 by 400 meter relay] because I like the two mile better," Slaney said. "Even if it was a hard sacrifice it was definitely worth it for the team and my times."

Pai's long distance runners will be able to benefit from Kent's passion and extraordinary abilities for another two years. All of his teammates, including Matison, believe that Kent has a bright future in front of him.

"Kent is incredibly talented. I know that he'll be able to make it far, especially with his perseverance ... it's possible that he could represent the USA in the future," Matison said. <<<