



COULD BE SPECIAL YEAR FOR KNAPPA'S PIÑA-MORTON



KNAPPA CROSS-COUNTRY

SCHEDULE

Sept. 7 at Ultimook Race,
Tillamook

Sept. 10 at Amity Invite

Sept. 14 Logger Elk Run

Sept. 17 at Warrenton Wreck
Race

Sept. 21 3 Course Challenge,
Rilea

Sept. 28 at Nike Portland XC

Oct. 4 at Fred Berkey XC Invite

Oct. 12 at Rainier Invitational

Oct. 24 NWL Championships,
Vernonia

Nov. 1 District 1 Championships

Nov. 9 OSAA state meet, Lane CC

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Knappa's Robert Piña-Morton runs the track in the rain during cross-country practice.

By **GARY HENLEY**
The Astorian

To borrow a line from a “Star Wars” movie, there’s a “new hope” for Knappa cross-country in 2019.

The Logger boys will have one of the state’s top individuals, while a young group behind him is already good, and getting better.

Meanwhile, the Knappa girls will enter the season with just one freshman runner, who has already posted some good times in practice runs.

“Our team goal (for the boys) is to get some top finishes, and be a top three team at district,” said Knappa coach Stan Sporseen. “It’s a great group. They do exactly what I tell them to do, and Robert (Piña-Morton) is a good leader.”

“We have some pretty good freshmen right now,” he said. “In three years, they’re

going to be strong.”

Piña-Morton, a senior, will be in the mix for the top spot in the state among 2A/1A runners, “and we’ve got three other kids who can give us some depth,” Sporseen said. “If we can get them to break 20 (minutes), we’ll be tough.”

The new runners will eventually have their day, but the spotlight is definitely on one runner for the Loggers.

Of the 45 runners competing in the District 1/2A/1A race last year, Piña-Morton finished second in 16 minutes, 31 seconds — just two seconds behind Valor Christian senior Jacob Suarez (16:29).

Suarez dropped off the pace and finished 14th in the state meet the following week, finishing in 17:35, while Piña-Morton ran a 16:47 and placed seventh.

In the district race, “Robert led for 4,500 meters, and the kid (Suarez) just made a good run,” Sporseen said. This year, Piña-Morton “wants to win a state

championship. Cam McChesney (fourth), Seth Bergeron (sixth) and Robert (seventh) are the three returning guys in the top 10. So if he wants to be a state champion, I don’t think there’s any reason he can’t be.”

“And he’d like to see his team go to state,” Sporseen said. “I don’t know if that’s in the cards. It depends on how these freshmen come along.”

The group of newcomers includes Finn Corcoran (“has come on like gangbusters the last 12 months,” said the coach), Clay Keyser (“loves to run and has improved weekly”), Moses Peitsch, Isaiah Rodriguez (“has come along like nobody I’ve ever seen. His 3K time as an eighth-grader was better than Robert’s”) and Ethan Smalley.

Knappa’s other runner is returning sophomore Shane McMahan, who “was top 10 in the league in ‘18. I expect him to go sub-19 this year at some point.”

With young runners, “it’s going to take

awhile,” Sporseen said. “With six freshmen, none of them have run a 5K race, since they all ran 3K at the middle school level. So it will take us a couple months, which is fine.”

For the girls, Larson “was in the top seven or eight last year in the districts for the junior high girls,” he said. “She’s battled some injuries, but she works hard. Her first run this year, I timed it and she would be top 10 in our league.”

And league-wise, with all the private schools — schools that generally only have cross-country, track and golf — “We’re up against it,” Sporseen said. “It’s now just 1A/2A for the boys, which is nice. But last year, the 1A/2A meet was more competitive than the 3A meet. The best returning team in our district is St. Stephen’s, and they will be the best by a mile.”

“Honestly, by the end of the year, we’ll have a shot at being near the top of the league.”