

Siuslaw from 1B

"I think a lot of programs in schools are struggling with COVID to get kids out," said Johnson. "The seasons are super short, and it's tough with cross country because you have to get fit, and it takes time. I'll give my kids credit, the day we could start meeting in November, we've been meeting nonstop six days a week — so they're fit. And it's tough to go up against people who've been running year-round when you haven't been."

While Johnson gives his runners a great deal of credit, he also says there are other factors. "While we're pretty good," Johnson admitted, "the competition right now isn't putting up much of a fight just because of the situations people are in with not being able to see kids, not having kids at school and [other] COVID problems. We're doing okay with the COVID part, we're just trying to stay healthy and go from there."

As for last Saturday's league preview meet, Siuslaw looks to be a dominant force in the league. Despite some of its own team members having difficult days health-wise, both Siuslaw teams came out on top — by a lot.

The final score for the women's race was Siuslaw 19 and Marist 36, with none of the other four schools who competed having enough runners to officially place. While Junction City had a runner who placed first, Siuslaw had the most runners in the top 10, with all five girls placing.

Rylee Colton came in second with a time of 20:01.57, followed in fifth place by Gracie Freudenthal (21:22.27.)

One of the Vikings' runners who typically

finishes in the top five, Brea Blankenship, still placed eighth in the race (22:05.54) despite running with a minor injury.

"Brea was a little bit banged up," said Johnson, "and her Achilles was a little bit sore, so she wasn't running in racing shoes and wasn't feeling that great. So, the girls would have been better off, and we'd have scored fewer points. We're hoping she's getting worked on today, so she'll be healthy again."

Jane Lacouture and Corduroy Holbrook finished ninth and 10th, respectively, with times of 22:23.00 and 22:36.26.

On the men's team, Siuslaw scored 16, with Marist being the closest at 53. Marshfield was third with 80, followed by Junction City (101) and Cottage Grove (139.)

Elmira did not have enough runners to place.

Siuslaw had six runners place in the top 10 during the men's race. Chad Hughes placed first with a time of 17:02.28, and Samuel Ulrich placed second in 17:27.46. Chad Hughes and Ulrich were closely followed by Kyle Hughes (17:34.35) and Ryan Jennings (17:45.91), who placed third and

fourth, respectively.

Johnson noted that his three teammates who also play for the soccer team this season had a tough time this week.

"Those guys are banged up a little bit," said Johnson. "Jaxson had to sit out of a soccer game, so we're hoping he can stay healthy for these next two soccer games. I'll give credit to the other two soccer players. Dylan Jensen and Brayden Linton ran great, so that's awesome that those guys are able to pull double duty and do two different things, it's pretty impressive."

Jaxson Jensen finished sixth with a time of 18:05.56, and Dylan Jensen finished ninth with a time of 18:19.83. Linton did not place in the top 10 but was Siuslaw's next runner to place, coming in 12th with a time of 18:38.72.

Johnson said he was very pleased with his teams' performances at the meet. "The boys almost had a perfect score," he explained, "which doesn't happen very often in cross country, especially not when you're looking at an entire league."

"This is a team that was no-nonsense from the beginning, and [they] have gone after it."

Currently, the team is undefeated — something Johnson said has never happened before. "We've gone through years and never lost to a 4A team, but to go the whole season and never lose, that's pretty neat," said Johnson, who added that the team has its sights set on finishing the season on top.

"That's on their mind," he said, "and that's what we're focusing on in this last couple of weeks. We're just trying to stay healthy and get rested up, and then hopefully we have two more good performances, and we can see what happens after that."

After this week's low pressure Run for the Brownies tomorrow (March 25) at the Florence Golf Links, the Vikings will face off against the other teams in the Sky-Em League once again for districts. The race will take place at Marist instead of Lane Community College (LCC), the normal venue for district championships, because LCC does not allow spectators at this time.

If Siuslaw places in the top two teams at

the district meet, they will compete at the state meet. Johnson also explained the plans for the state meet.

"Right now, it is supposed to be in Tillamook at the Alderbrook Golf Course," he said. "If for some reason the numbers in Tillamook County go from moderate to high, then we would move the meet to Marist — so we're set. We have a plan in place."

The Vikings have a couple more workouts this week to prepare for

district.

"Then we'll go to the district meet and try to get a couple of championships," said Johnson. "And then after that, we'll take our chances against the state."

The Run for the Brownies takes place at 5 p.m. tomorrow, and the Sky-Em League championship races will take place next Thursday, April 1, beginning at 4:30 p.m.

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