

# First Clatsop County cross country team to win since 1992

By Gary Henley  
EO Media Group

EUGENE — “Perfect and gettin’ better.”

That’s the greeting you get any time you meet Seaside cross country coach Neil Branson.

Now, however, Branson can shorten that to just “perfect,” because his Gulls can’t get any better. They are No. 1.

“Branson’s Boys” won their first-ever state championship Saturday, Oct. 31, in Eugene, as the Gulls — with no seniors among their top five runners — finished with 49 points to top the field of Class 4A teams. Phoenix was second with 65, with Tillamook (78) third.

And while he’s heard his last name pronounced more than a few different ways when he’s on the awards stand, there’s no denying the fact that Seaside junior Bradley Rzewnicki is a winner.

Rzewnicki led the charge for the Gulls, crossing the finish line as the individual state champion, finishing the 5,000-meter course in 16 minutes, 13 seconds, well ahead of Sisters senior Tony Hooks (16:18).

Seaside’s next finisher was junior Hunter Thompson (fifth, 16:34), followed by junior Jackson Januik (ninth, 16:40) and sophomore Rafi Sibony (12th, 16:59).

“We had the same plan we did at districts, with Bradley going out and setting the pace,” Branson said. “We knew he could contend at districts, and at state there was no reason for him not to be up there. He has run better races each week. Each week he’s learned more and more about the art of racing.”

Rzewnicki went out strong, and was either leading or running with the lead pack right from the start.

“At 1,000 meters, we were in superb position, with Bradley right there with the leaders,” Branson said. “And he never fell back. He was always within a meter or two.”

“Just after the two-mile mark, he was still right there, running smooth and looking good. And when he got on the track, he was not to be denied. He took off

with about 400 meters left. He just pressed it when he got on the track, and worked that sucker. A heck of a kick.”

Rounding out the points for Seaside was sophomore Colton Carter (31st, 17:39). Junior Juneau Meyer was 33rd (17:46), and senior Jack Whittle was 89th (19:06).

“The other boys were all in position at the 1,000-meter mark, and they held it,” Branson said. “Hunter has some wheels, and he got within sniffing distance of the leaders; Jackson is just plain tough; and Rafi was spent after the race, but he recovered quickly.”

“We told Colton and Juneau, ‘You’re not a fifth and sixth runner,’” Branson said. “They had to push each other and help each other out. And they did.”

Watching Rzewnicki, he said, “was amazing. He takes his talents and maximizes it. That’s what it’s all about.”

## North Coast champs

The Seaside boys are the first from Clatsop County to win a cross country state championship since Carl Dominey’s Astoria boys won a state title in 1992.

“A long time coming,” Branson said. “This state championship is really a reflection of the district meet, and everybody showing courage. From the kids who had never competed in a 5K, to battling injuries, they all stepped up.”

In the Class 4A girls’ race, Seaside junior Josie Smith finished 16th out of 108 runners, in 20:42. Freshman teammate Katie Zagata was 30th in 21:21.

“Josie was 17th her freshman and sophomore year, so she moved up a spot,” Branson said. “This is her third year of being all-state, and that doesn’t happen a lot.”

## Soccer elimination

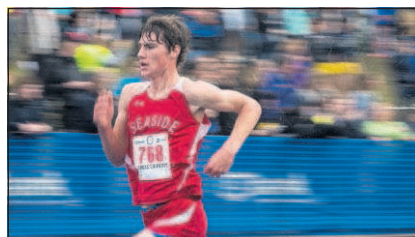
Battling in the chilly night air under the bright lights of Broadway Field, the Junction City and Seaside boys soccer teams had to put in a little overtime to come up with a winner Tuesday, Nov. 3, in a first round game of the Class 4A state playoffs. Eighty minutes just wasn’t enough, as a goal with a little under eight minutes left in



Seagulls  
**FLY**  
to a state  
championship

Seaside’s Bradley Rzewnicki crosses the finish line to win the 4A boys OSAA Cross Country State Championship.

Seaside’s Bradley Rzewnicki, center, won the 4A boys OSAA Cross Country State Championship.

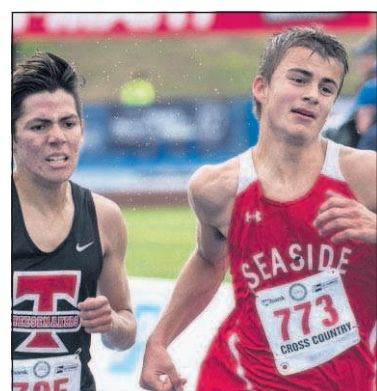


Seaside’s Colton Carter competes in the 4A boys OSAA Cross Country State Championship.

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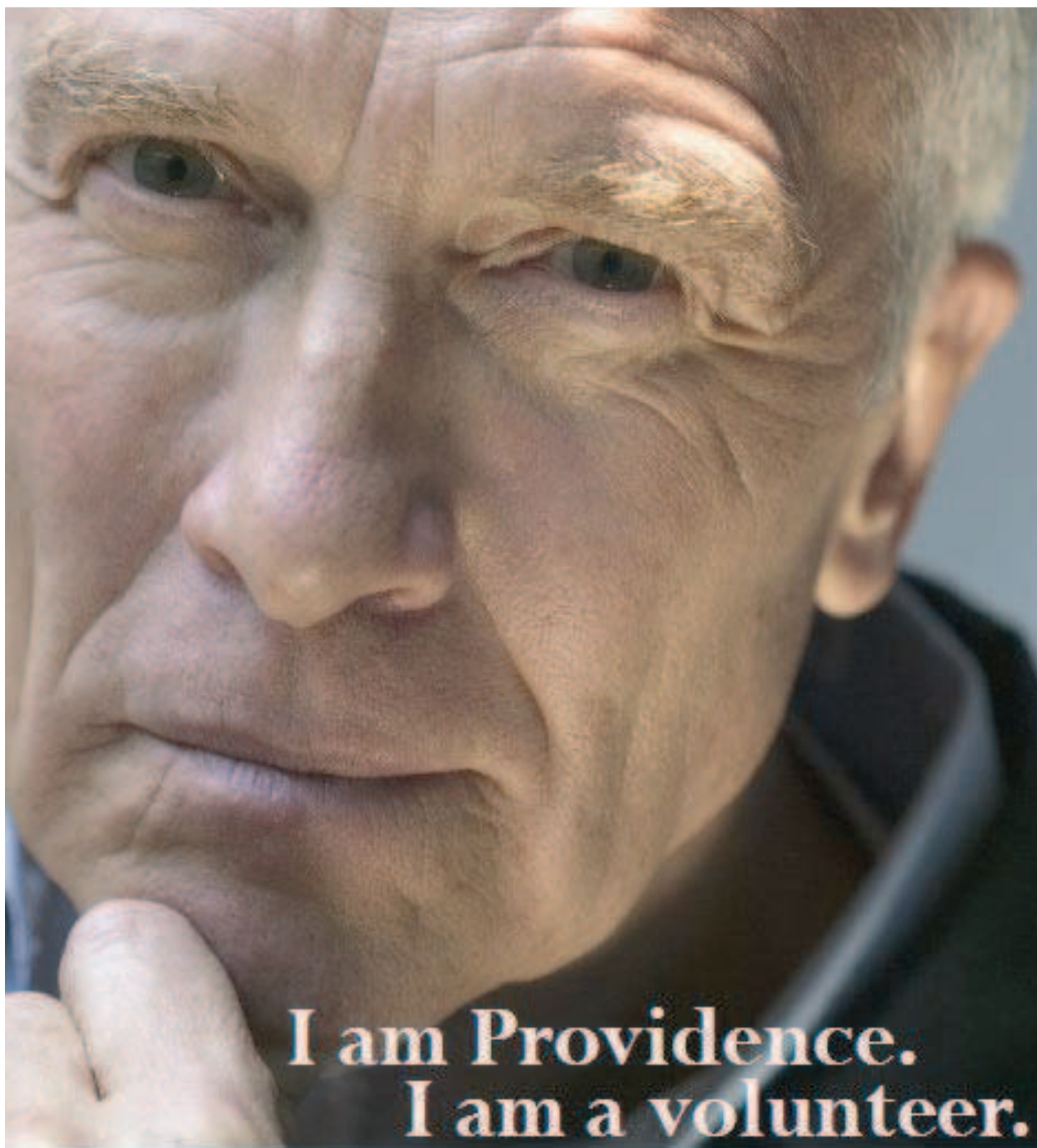


Seaside’s Katie Zagata competes during the OSAA 4A girls Cross Country State Championship at Lane Community College in Eugene.



Seaside’s Hunter Thompson races Tillamook’s Ayrtton Ledesma to the finish.

a second overtime period — the 92nd minute — gave the Tigers a dramatic 2-1 victory. Junction City senior Davide Zeminian scored the goal with 7:15 remaining. The No. 9 seed Tigers were the only road team to win in the eight first-round state playoff games. While the Junction City players enjoyed the win and a long bus ride home, the Gulls also left the field feeling pretty good about their 2015 season. A Cowapa League championship, with 11 overall wins and 13 players returning next year? The Gulls will take their lumps now to build an even better team next year. The semifinal game was well-played on both sides. Chapman called it “the best game of the season for Coughlin. Perfect way for a senior goalkeeper to finish. That was by far his best game in goal all year.”



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