

1997 State meet...

Saving best for last



KRISTYN WARNER and the Ross cross country team warm up before practice Monday.

News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

Ross girls cross country team ready for state meet

By BRIAN SPIESS
Sports editor

Fremont Ross's girls cross country runners were scheduled to run their fastest race the weekend of the state meet — whether they made it there or not.

Coach Cathy Esposito, gambling at the start of the season that her team had the potential to make state, set up a training regimen which allowed for the Little Giants to peak this Saturday when they run against the state's best in Columbus.

"They haven't run their best race yet," Esposito said of her team. "Some people are set up to peak too soon. Then they would not be able to run better times (at state)."

*"They haven't run
their best race yet."*

— Ross coach Cathy Esposito

The team ran 30 minutes Monday, followed by 25 minutes Tuesday, a series of 400- and 800-yard runs Wednesday and 25 minutes today. Tonight the coach said the runners will go to the Esposito house for "a carbo party and Rocky movies."

The runners knew all season that their coach was gambling on them to make state. But will it give them confidence?

"I hope so," Alison Kelly said. "Coach knows what she's

doing, we trust what she says."

The Scioto Downs course the seven Little Giants will run is not difficult, Esposito said. But the competition is.

"The difficulty comes in it being state, and the people that are down there," Esposito said.

Three of the runners have been there before. Jami Toeppe made state in 1994 and 1995 and Lindsay Frontz and Kelly qualified in 1996. But no Ross girls team had ever qualified.

"It was really exciting last year just going," Kelly said. "But going with the team is a totally different story. A lot more fun with the whole team there."

Joining Frontz, Kelly and

Toeppe, in order of their regional times, are Kristyn Warner, Abby Cominsky, Jenny Gabel and Molly Gocke.

The school will give the team a 10 a.m. sendoff Friday, ending a wild week for the distance runners and their coach.

"(Monday's) been busy," Esposito said earlier in the week after handling a barrage of letters and phone messages from well-wishers. "It's really exciting for me. I told my husband Sunday, 'I almost want to be with my girls.'"

"We're still kind of celebrating."

And if the training schedule works, the team may celebrate again Saturday.

By MARK GRIFFIN
Staff writer

"I wasn't really thinking about anything at the start; I felt good. I thought I was going to have a good race," Chapman said. "I went out at my normal pace,

Old Fort sophomore Jeremy Riehm placed 49th in 17:06 and

"My legs really got to me," he said. "I felt tired right at the beginning, at the half-mile mark. That did me in. Being in the middle around the half-mile mark

"The meet itself was overwhelming," he said. "All the compliments, all the attention, I wasn't used to it. It was a great experience. I hope I can experience it again."

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Toeppen leads Ross to 11th place in her final race



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

JAMIE TOEPPPE leads Ross teammates Alison Kelly (behind Toeppen) and Lindsay Frontz, third from right, in the Division I race. Toeppen finished 66th in 20:00, Frontz 79th in 20:17 and Kelly 81st in 20:18.

By MARK GRIFFIN
Staff writer

COLUMBUS — Call it the end of an era for Fremont Ross senior Jamie Toeppen and the beginning of a new one for the Little Giants' girls cross country team.

Toeppen competed in her third, and final, Division I state meet Saturday but in the process led the Little Giants' team to its first-ever appearance in the state meet at Scioto Downs.

Ross had 258 points to take 11th out of 16 teams. Cincinnati Colerain easily won the meet with 56 points, followed by Kent Roosevelt (127) and Rocky River Magnificat (130).

Seventh-year Ross coach Cathy Esposito said the Little Giants were hoping for a top-10 finish.

"We knew the teams we had to run against are traditionally the strong, awesome teams," Esposito said. "It's very tough to run against these teams that tradi-

tionally have five 18-minute runners. We can't compete with that because at Fremont, you get what you get.

"When you're looking at some Cleveland teams, these kids go to schools because it's a good running school. Our kids go to Fremont because they live in Fremont. It's a big difference. For our team to make it to state with what we have, that's a great honor."

Toeppen, a runner-up at state her freshman year and a third-place finisher as a sophomore, took 66th Saturday in an even 20 minutes.

Toeppen was asked about her thoughts as she lined up for her final state cross country meet.

"This is it," she said. "This was my last race ever so I might as well give it my all.

"The pace was a little fast at first, but I felt good the whole way. I wanted to be in the top 50, but I'm happy with my time. I dropped 20 seconds from last

week (at regionals). It just feels good to be here."

Junior Lindsay Frontz, who was 28th at last year's meet, finished 79th in 20:17 for Ross. Alison Kelly was 81st in 20:18 followed by Abby Cominsky (105th, 20:41), Molly Goecke (114th, 20:51), Kristyn Warner (133rd, 21:25) and Jenny Gabel (140th, 21:44).

Frontz said this year's experience at Scioto Downs was satisfying because she had the entire Ross team running with her.

"You get to prepare with other people and warm up with your team," Frontz said. "Last year it was just another teammate (Kelly) and I and we had to be in separate (starting) boxes.

"I didn't feel that good today. It was a good start for me, I just couldn't hang on. I was coming back from an injury last track season, so I was just happy to come here. I wasn't expecting it at all."

Esposito's strategy all season

was to prepare the Little Giants to peak at the state meet. The coach said the Ross runners "ran real well" Saturday.

"They ran what they needed to run," she said. "They were in the middle of the pack, where I thought they would be. They ran exactly like I planned and like I thought they would."

The three runners who had been here before (Toeppen, Frontz and Kelly) did a very nice job today. Experience down here is No. 1."

Esposito added that she became "very emotional" while watching Toeppen run the final race of her career.

"I've been through a lot with her, with her injury and her ligament tears and her surgery and wondering if she was even going to get to be able to walk real well again," Esposito said. "To see her come out and turn in a gutsy performance like this, it's very emotional for me."

"I'm going to miss her a lot."

Old Fort's Riehm paces area individual runners

By MARK GRIFFIN
Staff writer

COLUMBUS — Keri Oxley's heart was in Saturday's Division III state cross country meet at

about a 5:05 mile. The hills, you don't think they're big but they build up and you just get tired. I just couldn't hold on to my normal pace."

senior teammate Dan Haugh finished 54th in 17:10 in the Division III race.

Clyde junior Josh Cook was 53rd (17:09) in the Division II

kind of got me down. I saw so many people ahead of me and it really got to me."

Ross coach Jon Elder said Frametad ran a solid race.