

1997 Regional meet...

Odd couple ready for regionals



News-Messenger/Steven Garner

JON FRAMSTAD, left, and Eric Gabel will represent the Fremont Ross boys cross country team Saturday at the regional tournament in Tiffin.

Framstad, Gabel had different seasons for Giants

By BRIAN SPIESS
Sports editor

Jon Framstad and Eric Gabel of Fremont Ross will run the same trail Saturday when they compete in the Division I regional cross country meet at Tiffin's Hedges-Boyer Park.

The path each took to get there, however, was far different.

Framstad, a junior, expected to make first-team All-Great Lakes League and qualify for regionals. And he believes he may make the state meet.

Gabel, a senior who was talked into running this season by a friend, had no plans of running in late October.

Runners need to finish in the top 15 Saturday to advance to the Nov. 1 state meet.

"Eric's a longshot at best," said Ross boys coach John Elder, drawing a nod of agreement from Gabel.

"At the beginning of the year, I knew that I wouldn't make it out of districts," Gabel said. "But the workouts

got me going and kept me going."

Actually he almost did not run at all. Gabel and fellow senior Eli Semer were deciding whether to run this year when they made a pact to go out together.

"If he wouldn't have come out I wouldn't have ran," Gabel said.

But he did run, improving his times enough to earn a spot on the GLL team at the Oct. 11 league meet in Findlay. Saturday he ran Oregon's Pearson Park in 17 minutes, 17 seconds for 14th place in districts.

"It's something new going on my own without the entire team," Gabel said, referring to the 1994-96 Ross teams which qualified for regionals.

His goals are modest: finish in the top 20 and run in 17:00 or less.

"I want to have some fun, like when teams get to state, that's their week of fun," Gabel said.

Framstad wants more.

CROSS COUNTRY

Destination Tiffin

Hedges-Boyer Park in Tiffin is the site of regional cross country meets for area schools. The following teams or individuals will compete at the following times Saturday:

10:05 and 10:45 a.m.—

Div. III Girls

Woodmore team; St. Joe team;

Sarah Hilt (Gibsonburg)

11:25 a.m.—Div. II Girls

Bellevue team; Oak Harbor

team; Jennifer Staats (Clyde)

12:05 p.m.—Div. I Girls

Fremont Ross team

12:45 and 1:25 p.m.—

Div. III Boys

Old Fort team; Gibsonburg

team; Mike Chapman (St. Joe);

2:05 p.m.—Div. II Boys

Josh Cook and Jason Hill

(Clyde); Phil Clapp and Laramie

Spurlock (Bellevue)

2:45 p.m.—Div. I Boys

Jon Framstad and Eric Gabel

(Fremont Ross)

course was a 16:58 in last year's regionals.

"Yes, I did expect," to get to regionals, Framstad said.

"But I didn't run what I should run at districts. I was too tired. I need to get lots of rest, eat as much as I want, do what coach says."

The surprise appearance of Gabel in regionals is a benefit to Framstad.

"It helps a lot," Framstad said. "I certainly don't want to run by myself."

Nearly as familiar as his purple-clad teammate will be the course itself, which the Little Giants run at the Tiffin Carnival and in regional meets.

"We run this course more than our home course," Elder said.

Elder will take both runners to Tiffin today to practice on the course, but that will be the only change from the runners' usual routine.

"If you have to change what you are doing now, you have gotten lucky to get here," Elder said.

Ross girls earn trip to state meet

News-Messenger reports

TIFFIN — Fremont Ross has a team headed to a state event for the first time in four years.

The Little Giants' girls cross country team took second Saturday at the Division I regional cross country meet at Hedges-Boyer Park, earning one of three qualifying spots for next Saturday's state meet in Columbus.

"It's a great feeling," Ross coach Cathy Esposito said. "It was probably one of the happiest days of my life. And the girls were real emotional when they found out."

Lindsay Frontz led the way, finishing 14th in 20 minutes followed by Alison Kelly (16th, 20:26), Jami Toeppel (21st, 20:21) and Abby Cominski (38th, 20:51). Ross earned 97 points, second to Ashland's 88.

Anthony Wayne was the third-place qualifier with 106.

"I never left the coaches' room," Esposito said. "The girls were standing outside."

Even when the runners completed the races they were not assured of a spot at state. They had to wait for Esposito to come out with the official results.

"They were ecstatic," she said. "The girls from Ashland and

CROSS COUNTRY

Anthony Wayne were there and it was just a big celebration."

Though individual runners have advanced, the girls have never qualified for state as a team. The boys qualified in 1993.

Nearly three hours after the girls excitement Jon Framstad made sure the girls would not be the only ones in purple in Columbus, winning the 15th and final individual qualifying spot in the boys race.

Framstad, a junior, ran in 16:44.

"The girls can't go gown by themselves, they need a male influence," joked Ross boys coach John Elder.

"I think (the girls' win) got him fired up," Elder said of Framstad.

Senior Eric Gabel also ran but finished 44th to finish his Ross career.

Though Framstad was tired by race's end, Elder said he expected him to make state.

"That's what we had planned on," Elder said.

A year ago Jeremiah Smith finished sixth at state.

■ **Cross Country roundup, B3**

Outrunning injuries

Toeppe headed back to state with her team

By BRIAN SPIESS
Sports editor

The left ligament which was part of Jami Toeppe's second-place finish at the 1994 state cross country meet is gone, but the rest of her is intact and headed back to Columbus.

Toeppe, a Fremont Ross senior who in March had reconstructive surgery to replace the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee, will be among seven Little Giants running at the state meet Saturday at the Scioto Downs course.

The first-ever appearance by a Ross girls team in the state meet made it possible for Toeppe to fulfill an improbable goal.

"I was hoping to come back my senior year and make it to state," said Toeppe, The News-Messenger's Athlete of the Week. "I never thought I would be able to run like I have."

Neither did her coaches or teammates.

"It's incredible how she can just come right back," said Alison Kelly, who finished just 15 seconds ahead of Toeppe in Saturday's regional meet at Tiffin. "I even told her (previously) that I never thought she'd be able to come back and run."

Toeppe first earned recognition as a freshman in the fall of 1994, when she was the only Ross girl to make state and finished second. A year later she took third at the state meet, again after qualifying individually.

But that winter, midway through the 1995-96 basketball season, Toeppe literally hit the wall.

During a basketball game against Toledo Waite, Toeppe attempted to save a ball which was going out of bounds near the stage beside the Purple Pit gym floor. Her left foot slammed into the wall and Toeppe suffered a stress fracture in her leg.

Toeppe was back for the team's tournament play and competed for the track team in the district meet in the spring of 1996. But by the time her junior cross country season started, Toeppe was not available.

"She ran a couple of weeks

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Jami Toeppe profile

School: Ross; **Class:** Senior; **Sports:** Cross country, track; **Family:** Parents Jan Balderama and Mark Toeppe; brother Jeremy, 23; sister Jackie, 19.

last year but the pain was too intense," Ross girls cross country coach Cathy Esposito said. "The frustration level

JAMI TOEPPE of Fremont Ross is returning to the state cross country meet after missing more than a year of competition because of injuries. Toeppe, a senior, qualified for state in her freshman and sophomore seasons.

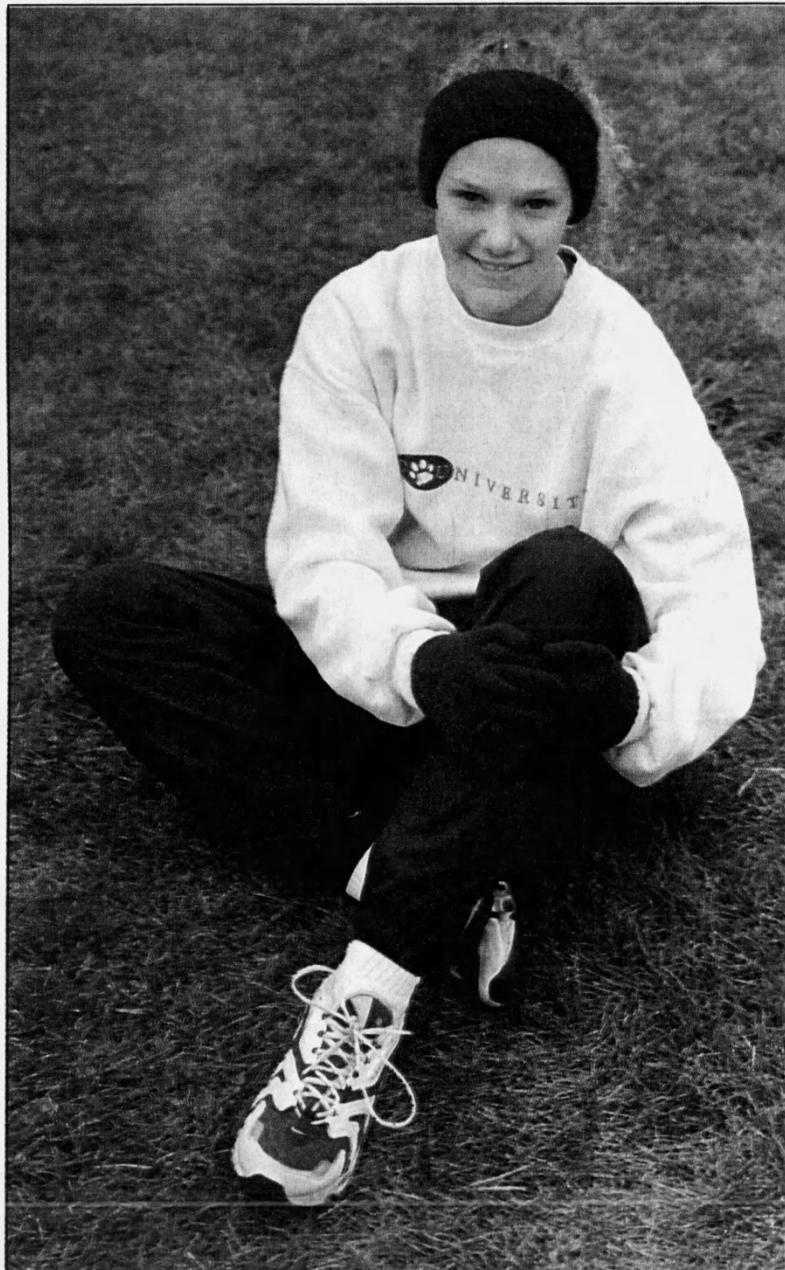
was really high. I knew we needed her on the team, but there was nothing she could do to help us out."

By winter Toeppe was back on the basketball court until she tore a ligament in her left knee trying to fake out a

defender. Though just a junior, it was her final high school basketball game.

"I just love playing basketball, I always have," Toeppe said. "But I'm just not doing it

See TOEPPE, B3



Toeppe returns to state

Continued from B1

this year because there is too much risk."

On March 31, 1997 Toeppe had surgery to repair the knee. Because the ACL was totally torn, a ligament taken from a dead person was placed in Toeppe's leg.

"I just wanted her to be able to get through everyday life," Esposito said. "Then in May she started talking to me about different things she wanted to do. She still wasn't going to give up."

By summer Toeppe was still limited physically, but she attended the Malone College Cross Country Camp with her teammates and began to form a bond with them.

"We ate together, slept together, did everything together for a week," Esposito said.

Earlier this fall, with nearly half the season gone, Toeppe ran a junior varsity race. Esposito then decided Toeppe was ready to start varsity.

First she finished in more than 22 minutes. Then in the 21s. Now she is in the low 20s and wants to run in college next

year.

"She amazes me," Esposito said. "I missed the way she prepares for meets. And she goes after people. It's great to be able to watch her hit goals she sets out for."

Had she been running as an individual, Toeppe's 20:21 would not have gotten her to state. But combined with Lindsay Fronts's 20:00, Kelly's 20:06, Kristyn Warner's 20:23, Abby Cominsky's 20:51, Jenny Gabel's 21:16 and Molly Gocke's 21:40, the Little Giants were the region's second best team.

Yet those times are all slower than the 18:30 Toeppe ran as a freshman at the Clay Invitational, challenging her will.

"I really went from good to nothing ... I couldn't run at the time," Toeppe said, recalling a time she nearly gave up during more than a year of injury woes. "It's been tough, but I just wanted it."

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