Fremont Ross Athletics
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Fremont Ross Girls Cross Country Caps Historic Season with Fifth-Place Finish at State Championships: Lily Kiser earns First Team All-Ohio honors, Julia Norris named Second Team All-Ohio, and Bentley Lopez represents Little Giants in boys state championship.

The Fremont Ross cross country program put the finishing touches on one of the most remarkable seasons in school history this past weekend at the OHSAA Division II State Cross Country Championships at Fortress Obetz in Obetz, Ohio. The Lady Little Giants capped their historic season with a fifth-place finish in the state, scoring 234 points against Ohio's best competition, while boys individual qualifier Bentley Lopez delivered another strong performance on the state's biggest stage.

For first-year head coach Mark Sheidler, assistant coach John Elder, and the entire Fremont Ross cross country program, the weekend represented much more than a final race. It was the culmination of months of preparation, dedication, sacrifice, and a season that rewrote the record books.

The Lady Giants entered the state championships as undefeated regional champions, having already accomplished several program firsts throughout the fall. Despite challenging weather conditions and facing the best Division II runners in Ohio, the girls battled their way to the highest state championship team finish in Fremont Ross girls cross country history.

Leading the way was junior standout Lily Kiser, who delivered an outstanding performance, finishing sixth overall with a time of 17:55. Her remarkable effort earned her First Team All-Ohio honors, along with Academic All-Ohio recognition. Kiser's performance was especially impressive considering her improvement from last season, when she finished 96th at the state championships with a time of 19:51. In just one year, she climbed an incredible 90 places to establish herself among Ohio's elite runners.

Julia Norris continued her tremendous season with a 30th-place finish in 19:02, earning Second Team All-Ohio and Academic All-Ohio honors. Brooklynn Eisenhauer followed with another strong showing, finishing 50th in 19:16.

The Lady Giants received valuable contributions from their entire lineup. Senior Kennedy Walker finished 121st in 20:09, followed by fellow senior Sophia Metcalf in 145th with a time of 20:22. Metcalf also earned Academic All-Ohio recognition. Senior Malaya Hughes placed 173rd in 20:45, while senior Ariana Hinojosa-Williams rounded out the Ross lineup with a 190th-place finish in 21:04.

Together, the seven runners delivered a performance that secured Fremont Ross a place among the top five Division II girls cross country programs in Ohio.

On the boys side, Bentley Lopez represented the Little Giants as an individual state qualifier, finishing 76th overall with a time of 16:29. Like Kiser, Lopez demonstrated tremendous year-over-year improvement. After finishing 96th at last year's state championships in 16:51, Lopez returned this fall to improve both his time and placement against Ohio's best runners.

Lopez's individual success was part of an outstanding season for the Fremont Ross boys program. The Little Giants captured numerous invitational championships, finished as district runners-up, and qualified as a team for the regional championships. His state appearance provided a fitting conclusion to a season filled with progress and accomplishments for the boys.

For Sheidler, the emotions surrounding the state championships were difficult to put into words.

"What an absolute fairytale ending to a truly historic season for our program," Sheidler said. "Watching our girls' team line up against the best in Ohio as undefeated Regional Champions is a moment I will never forget. Lily Kiser proved exactly why she belongs on that podium by taking sixth overall. The way Julia Norris, Brooklynn Eisenhauer, and the entire pack battled out there in less-than-ideal weather conditions shows just how consistent they've been all year."

Sheidler was especially appreciative of the four seniors who helped establish a new standard for the program.

"Our senior girls—Kennedy Walker, Sophia Metcalf, Ariana Hinojosa-Williams, and Malaya Hughes—brought another great effort, just as they have twelve times before," Sheidler said. "We will miss them greatly next year and wish them the absolute best."

The list of accomplishments from the 2026 season is nothing short of extraordinary. The Lady Giants completed an undefeated regular season, captured the program's first district championship, and won the first regional championship by any Fremont Ross girls team in school history. They climbed as high as No. 4 in the Division II state coaches poll and ultimately recorded the best state championship finish in program history.

Individually, Kiser established a new school record with a time of 17:51, while Norris and Eisenhauer joined her among the four fastest runners in school history.

For Sheidler, those accomplishments were the product of a team that bought into the process from the very beginning.

"Their improvement is a direct result of their attitude, belief, preparation, and execution, from summer training all the way through the championship season," Sheidler explained. "It has been remarkable to watch. There are no magical workouts—just a progression of daily hard work and championship-level training over time, and they all reached that level."

While the girls had hoped to finish even higher than fifth, Sheidler emphasized that their accomplishments should be celebrated and remembered for years to come.

"This group didn't just qualify for state—they set a brand new standard for Fremont Ross cross country, and I couldn't be prouder of their grit," Sheidler said. "I look forward to working with them in the future and during track this spring. Remember: 'It's your time!' Take advantage of your opportunities—and we certainly took advantage of ours this year."

Beyond the competition itself, Sheidler wanted to recognize the overwhelming support the program received throughout its championship journey.

From the special sendoff as the team departed Fremont Ross for Obetz to the encouragement from school staff, parents, teammates, cross country alumni, and community members, the support was felt by every athlete and coach. The fans who traveled to the state championships and the countless individuals who celebrated the team's accomplishments throughout the season helped make an already memorable experience even more meaningful.

Sheidler also expressed his heartfelt appreciation for assistant coach John Elder, the program's longtime head coach, whose dedication and commitment continued to make an enormous impact despite transitioning into a different coaching role this season.

Elder's years of experience, tireless work ethic, and continued investment in Fremont Ross cross country were instrumental in helping the program reach new heights. Sheidler credited Elder for continuing to do whatever was needed to support the athletes and coaches, describing him as a true difference-maker whose contributions to the program extend far beyond this historic season.

As the 2026 cross country season comes to a close, the Fremont Ross athletic department could not be prouder of these student-athletes and their coaching staff. What this group accomplished was truly special, but perhaps even more impressive was the way they represented Fremont Ross, their teammates, their families, and the entire Fremont community throughout the journey.

For the four graduating seniors, this season leaves behind a legacy that will be remembered for years. For the returning runners, the standard has been raised, and the future of Fremont Ross cross country has never looked brighter.

An undefeated regular season. District champions. Regional champions. A fifth-place finish in Ohio. Multiple All-Ohio honors. And a season that will forever hold a special place in Fremont Ross athletic history.

Congratulations to Coach Mark Sheidler, Coach John Elder, the Lady Little Giants, and Bentley Lopez on a truly unforgettable 2026 cross country season. **See less**