

Gutsy Lions race to state meet

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 24 October 2013 22:50 - Last Updated Thursday, 24 October 2013 23:32



MARSHALLTOWN - The Linn-Mar girls cross country team wrote its own version of "Profiles In Courage" Thursday afternoon at the Class 4A state qualifier in Marshalltown.

Amber Decker passed two runners with a terrific kick to win the race, draining herself to the point of exhaustion, and a little later Maddie Saville crossed the finish line and dissolved in tears after running the 4K course with stabbing pain in her left foot.

"It really hurts," said Saville, "but I don't know ... Sometimes you have to suck it up."

Saville is normally one of Linn-Mar's top runners, but she finished 20th overall with the foot injury and did not count in the team standings. Nonetheless, she wanted to race and try to help the Lions make the state meet.

The Lions did qualify for the state meet Nov. 2 in Fort Dodge by finishing second behind Urbandale in the team standings.

There was little drama in the boys race as Josh Evans, Tanner Rathje and Michael Mather finished 1-2-3 as Linn-Mar won the title and led the parade to Fort Dodge.

Decker trailed Elyse Prescott of Urbandale and Grace Coen of Newton by about 40 yards as

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they came around a corn field and toward the finish line. It looked like Decker might have to settle for third place, but she found a burst of energy at the end.

"I kind of got a little scared, but then I had to regain composure," she said. "When it came down to 200 to go, I kicked it in and did what I needed to do.

"I've been working on staying confident and not letting people in front of me psyche me out, because I had trouble with that at the beginning of the season," she said. "I'm happy with what I did today. I had to dig a little deeper."



Decker collapsed onto her hands and knees after the race. She stayed on the ground for several minutes, got up for a minute, then laid down on her back in the cold grass.

Her mother and aunt helped Decker slip into her sweatsuit on a chilly, blustering 42-degree day in Marshalltown. Brett, her 5-year-old brother, leaned down and gave his sister a kiss, which seemed to help revive her spirits.

Despite her own troubles, Decker found Saville and rubbed her teammate's back in appreciation of Saville's courageous performance.

Saville is not sure what's wrong with her foot, but a family member said last week it could be a stress fracture. She doesn't want to visit a doctor until after the state meet, and in the meantime the Linn-Mar trainer has cleared her to run if she can stand the discomfort.

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"Every time I push off, every time I take a step, my foot aches with a sharp pain," she said.

Saville dissolved in tears after the race for two reasons. "My foot hurt," she said, "and I was disappointed in myself."

Saville might have helped Linn-Mar overtake Urbandale for the team championship if she had been at full strength, but Coach Todd Goodell was proud of the sophomore's effort.

"She toughed it out," he said. "She doesn't want to sit out or miss practice. She just gutted it out. She's got a lot of courage."

Saville said she was proud of her teammates for their performance. Urbandale finished with 38 points and Linn-Mar had 51. The top-3 teams and top-10 individuals qualify for state. Iowa City High claimed third place.

Goodell was equally proud of Decker for her strong finish.

"She's got quarter-mile speed," he said. "She stayed in contact until it was time to turn it over. She showed her speed, she showed her guts."

Unlike the girls, the Linn-Mar boys were able to conserve some energy in the cold conditions and not drain themselves in Marshalltown. Evans finished in 15 minutes, 56 seconds for a three-second victory over Rathje. Mather finished eight seconds later in third place and Daniel Murphy placed fifth in 16:12.

Cedar Falls took second place with 36 points. Iowa City High placed third with 78 in the boys race.

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Evans, who missed a major chunk of the season with an Achilles heel injury, is nearing top form again and did not mind the blustery conditions. "I didn't even notice it a whole lot," he said.

Evans is the top-ranked runner in Class 4A and the Lions are the top-ranked team heading into the state meet, where there could be a fierce fight for top honors among Linn-Mar, Johnston, Prairie and others.

"I'm looking forward to it so much," said Evans. "It's just going to be a good battle either way. I've been training for state and I feel like I can get even stronger."

CLASS 4A STATE QUALIFIER

At Marshalltown

GIRLS RESULTS

4K

Team Standings

(Top 3 Qualify For State)

1. Urbandale 38, 2. Linn-Mar 51, 3. Iowa City High 96, 4. Southeast Polk 106, 5. Cedar Falls 133, 6. Marshalltown 154, 7. Newton 171, 8. Mason City 221, 9. Des Moines East 286.

Top 10 Individuals

(Qualify For State)

1. Amber Decker, Linn-Mar	14:48
2. Elyse Prescott, Urbandale	14:49
3. Grace Coen, Newton	14:54
4. Sierra Mitchell, SE Polk	15:12
5. Ashley Norem, Urbandale	15:14
6. Morgan Garcia, Linn-Mar	15:16
7. Kaitlyn Walker, SE Polk	15:16
8. Molly Shepherd, IC High	15:26
9. Julia Noah, Urbandale	15:28

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10. Trina Morena, Urbandale 15:28

Linn-Mar - 1. Amber Decker 14:48, 6. Morgan Garcia 15:16, 13. Rachel Perry 15:42, 14. Sydney Johnston 15:44, 17. Maddie Mann 15:55, 20. Maddie Saville 16:06, 26. Katie Sommer 16:23.

BOYS RESULTS

5K

Team Standings

(Top 3 Qualify For State)

1. Linn-Mar 23, Cedar Falls 36, Iowa City High 78, 4. Urbandale 128, 5. Mason City 165, 6. Southeast Polk 174, 7. Marshalltown 197, 8. Newton 213, 9. Des Moines North 271, 10. Des Moines East 293.

Top 10 Individuals

(Qualify For State)

1. Josh Evans, Linn-Mar	15:56
2. Tanner Rathje, Linn-Mar	15:59
3. Michael Mather, Linn-Mar	16:07
4. Timothy Sevcik, Cedar Falls	16:08
5. Daniel Murphy, Linn-Mar	16:12
6. Dylan Southall, Cedar Falls	16:14
7. Jared Failor, Cedar Falls	16:16
8. Jonathon Smith, Cedar Falls	16:22
9. Chris Ohrt, IC High	16:29
10. Michael Eppink, Urbandale	16:31

Linn-Mar - 1. Josh Evans 15:56, 2. Tanner Rathje 15:59, 3. Michael Mather 16:07, 5. Daniel Murphy 16:12, 12. Greyson Dolezal 16:34, 14. Ryan Murphy 16:44, 22. Jay Halverson 17:05.