

State Champions!

Hodel, Romersberger turn in key performances as Titans run to victory

[OCTOBER 14, 2023] – Clouds skirted across the cool October sky on a gray breezy morning as the start of the Class 2A Boys State Championship Race approached. The muddy Maxwell course had already seen 670 runners traverse the 2-mile route, and 230 boys were completing their final runouts prior to their 11:30am start time. Undefeated El Paso-Gridley Middle School was assigned to Box 11, right next to the Elmhurst Visitation Vikings, who were slight favorites over the Titans in the 25-team race. The gun fired, and the charge up the grassy hill was accompanied by a cacophony of cheering spectators lining the course.

Individual qualifier Micah Weiss of Chicago Latin was battling Visitation's Joseph and Jacob McKillop up front, but the Titans had a trio of runners in the Top 25 early on to counter the McKillop pair – Finn Zeller Luke Hinthorne, and Alex Lartz.

Latin's Weiss cruised through the mile in 5.11, holding a comfortable 8-second lead. Flying down the long straightaway to the finish line, he barely held off a hard-charging Joseph McKillop (5.19, 5.17) who came up exactly one second shy of a stunning come-from-behind win. Next across was Jacob McKillop, placing 3rd overall, and with Weiss being an individual qualifier, the McKillops had earned 1-2 team placings for Vis XC. Things were looking good for the squad from Elmhurst with two runners in and only 3 points accumulated.

EPG's Zeller (9th, 11.17), clocked splits of 5.23, 5.53, dropping 3 spots in the final mile but holding strong for a Top 10 placing. Along with Zeller, Luke Hinthorne (12th, 11.21), and Alex Lartz (13th, 11.21) also turned in All-State performances, both running the exact same time down to the tenth of a second, requiring a video review to determine that Hinthorne had finished just a hair ahead of seventh-grader Lartz.

With two runners in for each team, the score was Vis XC 3, EPG 9.

Visitation's #3 runner Jake Brady ran splits of 5.59, 6.03 to move up 13 spots over the second mile. His team placing was 26 vs. Lartz's team placing of 6, shifting the advantage to the Titans, with the score now showing EPG 15, Vis XC 29.

However, it was Visitation's 4-5 runners that gave them a pre-race advantage based on PRs, so the outcome was far from certain.

Enter Titan Weston Hodel (27th, 11.47), having the race of his life. Hodel's final regular season Varsity race came on this very course back on September 9 when he ran 12 minutes 12 seconds, after which an injury sidelined him for the next 3 weeks. He stepped back into action at the Delavan Dare Classic in Delavan, with the intention of easing back into things in the Boys Open race. He promptly won that 192-runner competition with an 11.59 PR. He clocked 12.05 as EPG's #4 at the Sectional Meet six days later and hit the mile on the muddy State course in 5 minutes 47 seconds holding on to 30th place. He clocked a 6-flat second mile to move up 3 more spots and earn the only Titan PR in the race, running 12 seconds faster than his Delavan time, and 25 seconds faster than his Parkside Invite time. Furthermore, running as EPG's #4, he finished 10 places ahead of Visitation's #3 and 27 spots ahead of Vis XC's #4 Gavin Sullivan, who clocked splits of 6.04, 6.10.

With four runners in, the score was favoring the Titans. EPG 33, Vis XC 67.

Elmhurst's #5 runner Noah McKillop – yes, the third McKillop to cross the finish line for the Vikings – had run splits of 6.06, 6.09 to move up 19 spots in the final mile and finish right alongside his teammate, #4 Visitation runner Sullivan. This locked in a score of 106 for Vis XC.

With runners finishing at a rate of one or more per second at this point in the race, EPG's #5 would need to show up soon for the Titans to claim the Championship trophy. The next available team placing was 40, and EPG's #5 would need to earn a team placing of 72 to grab the win.

The twist? Braxton Romersberger.

EPG's #5 runner Romersberger (48th, 12.10) had already finished the race with a team placing of 35. Ahead of Vis XC's #5. And ahead of Vis XC's #4. Romersberger, having a sensational race, which seems to be his specialty, had come through for the Titans yet again. He's shockingly dependable – his last 3 races of the season were 12.07, 12.09, and 12.10 even though conditions deteriorated over the course of those 3 competitions. At Saturday's State race, Romersberger moved up through the mass of runners into 70th place at the mile (6:05.8), and then proceeded to blast a second mile faster than his first (6:05.0), the only Titan in the race to do so. He passed 22 runners in the final mile.

EPG's #6 runner Nate Kingdon (59th, 12.19) was also sharp during his final 3 races (12.17, 12.13, 12.19) and was the fastest #6 runner in Class 2A State.

Likewise for EPG's #7 runner Landon Feit (68th, 12.24), who was the fastest #7 runner in Class 2A State, and the only runner other than Hodel to drop time from Sectional to the sloppy State course.

Elmhurst Visitation made things interesting, but the Titan boys turned in seven outstanding performances to capture the State Championship, earning the first State trophy for EPG Cross Country (at the HS or MS level) and the first State Championship (for any sport) for El Paso-Gridley Middle School. They did so in spectacular fashion, preserving an undefeated season vs. Class 2A competition.

The Top 5 teams at State Finals were El Paso-Gridley (68), Elmhurst Visitation (106), Chillicothe (159), St. Joseph (168), Elmwood (187).

XC Girls Team 8th at State Nowark places 5th in championship race

[OCTOBER 14, 2023] – The Class 2A Girls State Championship Race was held at Normal's Maxwell Park on a chilly Saturday morning. Temperatures were in the mid-50s under cloudy skies, as a northwest breeze greeted the 230 athletes. As soon as the race was turned over to the starter at The 10:45am, he blew his whistle and fired the gun. The race was underway.

Individual qualifier Molly Mocko of Glen Ellyn St. Petronille and Paityn Brady of Springfield Blessed Sacrament separated themselves from the field immediately and ran the entire 2-mile race together, with sixth-grader Mocko winning the individual title by a mere three-tenths of a second over Brady in a time of 11 minutes 41 seconds. No other girls broke 12 minutes.

El Paso-Gridley's Verity Nowark (5th, 12.16) got a strong start and found herself in a pack of runners at the half mile mark about a dozen places behind the leaders. Having moved up a few spots as she rounded the muddy turn towards the mile mark, Nowark had to adjust her stride when another runner stepped in front of her, slipping and almost falling. She regained her balance, charged ahead and caught three more runners before the 1.5-mile mark. She continued to chase after another couple girls, almost catching Chicago St. Benedict's Berrit Shure. Nowark was the 5th girl to cross the line – the highest placing Titan girl since Julie James' runner-up performance at the Class 1A Finals in 2008.

Audrey Roth (50th, 13.14) was feeling nervous at the start but wanted to stick with Normal Metcalf's #2 runner, and that she did, beating Tess Kendall by 3 seconds and 6 places, giving EPG a 7-point lead over Sectional Champion Metcalf with two runners in.

Emersyn Harms (66th, 13.24) had a great race for the Titans, running 86 seconds faster on the sloppy State course compared with her time on the same course in the Parkside Invitational five weeks earlier. She was sandwiched between two other sixth graders, and just 3 spots behind Metcalf's #3, preserving a 4-point lead over Metcalf with three runners in.

Avery Glacinski (69th, 13.27) followed closely as the Titan #4 runner, gapping Metcalf's #4 by 11 seconds and boosting the Titan advantage to 14 points over the Wildcats with four runners in.

Adalyn Solomonson (122nd, 14.02) had a strong race, running a course-best by 38 seconds, despite the conditions. Metcalf's #5 was 16 seconds and just enough places ahead of Solomonson to give them 7th place, only two points ahead of a tenacious Titan girls team who had made a big move in the last half of the season.

The EPG girls erased all but 2 points of a 215-point advantage Metcalf had held 5 weeks ago on the very same course. EPG also turned the tables on Tremont, a team they trailed by 41 points at Parkside, but handily took care of at State to the tune of 125 points, with all five Titan scorers ahead of Tremont's #4, Carly Whitcomb.

Running #6 and #7 on the eighth best team in 2A State were Sydney Davis (169th, 14.48) and Addison Smith (197th, 15.31). Davis had a strong second mile that propelled her to the only Titan PR in the race, setting a lifetime best by 3 seconds.

The Top 10 teams were Brimfield (83), Chicago St. Benedict (106), Chicago Sacred Heart (118), Shelbyville Moulton (135), Arlington Heights St. James (155), St. Joseph (186), Normal Metcalf (224), El Paso-Gridley (226), Springfield Blessed Sacrament (288), Elmwood (313).

Hinthorne, Zeller Lead Boys to Team Championship

Titan Boys advance to State Finals with a Sectional score of 34

[OCTOBER 6, 2023] – Normal Metcalf hosted IESA Sectional F on a windy Friday afternoon. Showers gave way to a late afternoon sun, which was then hidden at times by a few clouds as the 5:30pm Boys state-qualifying race approached. Ninety boys completed their warmups in the chilly air and were about to sprint off the starting line to navigate the grassy two-loop two-mile course at Eastview Christian Church.

The gun fired and several runners shot to the front. A lead pack of several runners, including Metcalf's JW Black, quickly gapped a chase pack of about half a dozen athletes, including Luke Hinthorne (1st, 10.59) and Finn Zeller (2nd, 11.00). As the runners chased the lead vehicle past the half mile mark, the chase pack slowly began to close in on the lead pack. Not much changed by the mile as the chase pack continued to incrementally close the gap. Things started developing with 1200 meters, as Zeller, who always seems to turn up the volume for post-season, was sensing the possibilities. With just over a half mile to go, Zeller had just about caught the tail end of the leaders; Hinthorne was laboring but holding strong and feeling confident just a couple seconds back from Zeller. 200 meters later Hinthorne had made a major move and inched ahead of Zeller as both Titans had caught the leaders. 300 meters later Zeller and Hinthorne blasted into an all-out finishing kick, gapping their competitors by several seconds to place 1-2 in a thrilling come-from-behind victory, Hinthorne claiming the individual Sectional Championship in 10:59.2 and Zeller right on his heels in a PR time of 11:00.7.

Lincoln West's Pierce King and Henry Stoltzenburg placed third and fourth, with Black fading to fifth.

Alex Lartz (7th, 11.26) showed some tenacity as he fought through some side stitches to earn a Top 10 medal.

Weston Hodel (14th, 12.05) proved that he was back and ready to compete, as he outpaced Metcalf's #3 runner by 4 seconds.

EPG's #5 Braxton Romersberger (16th, 12.09) turned in yet another strong performance, just two seconds off his Dare Classic PR as he matched Metcalf's #3 runner stride for stride, both Romersberger and Beau Kays crossing the finish line with a time of 12:09.6.

Nate Kingdon (19th, 12.13) had a big race as EPG's #6, earning a 4-second lifetime best despite the windy conditions, and finishing ahead of Metcalf's #4.

Landon Feit (28th, 12.30) wrapped things up for the Titan boys with a time that was the fastest #7 Sectional runner for the Titans in program history.

The Titan Top 5 also set the all-time EPG record for lowest score in a sectional meet, bettering the 2022 mark (41) by 7 points. The Titan boys defended their 2022 Sectional Championship and advanced to the State Finals for the eighth year in a row.

Of the fourteen teams competing, the following three teams qualified for State – El Paso-Gridley (34), Metcalf (61), Washington MS (124).

Titan Girls Qualify for State Finals!

Sectional Champion Verity Nowark wins by six-tenths of a second

[OCTOBER 6, 2023] – Normal Metcalf hosted IESA Sectional F at Eastview Christian Church on a blustery Friday afternoon. Showers earlier in the day gave way to sunshine as the skies cleared, but strong westerly winds persisted throughout the state-qualifying races as temperatures hovered in the low 50s. The grassy two-loop two-mile course was flat and well-groomed for the 79 girls competing.

The girls race got underway at 4:45pm and a lead pack broke away from the field within 400 meters. At the half mile Verity Nowark (1st, 12.03) was running to plan on the tail end of the leaders – Metcalf's Harper Funk, Lincoln West's Taylor Short, and Illini Bluffs' Audrey Dickinson. The battle became more intense during the second mile, and Short was dropped from the pack. With a half mile to go, Nowark had moved into second but then fell back to third. She shifted gears and moved back up to the leader. With a quarter mile to go it was Dickinson and Nowark making moves and counter-moves all the way to the finish line, when Nowark edged ahead to win the race by six-tenths of a second, earning the individual title of Sectional Champion.

Seventh-grader Audrey Roth (9th, 13.08) earned a Top 10 medal as she chased Tremont's #1 runner across the finish line.

Emersyn Harms (11th, 13.14) had the race of the day for the Titan girls. After back-to-back weeks of running 40-second PRs, Harms turned it up another notch and ran #3 for the Titans as she turned in yet another PR, slicing 20 seconds off her lifetime best in less than favorable conditions.

Avery Glacinski (14th, 13.23) ran the second fastest race of her life as EPG's #4, finishing six seconds ahead of Tremont's #2.

Adalyn Solomonson (19th, 13.39) battled the competition from start to finish and came within 5 seconds of the huge PR she set at the Dare Classic six days earlier.

Addison Smith (36th, 14.42) ran #6 for the Titans and two seconds ahead of Tremont's #6.

Sydney Davis (47th, 15.22) matched her Delavan time with a strong effort as she bested Dee-Mack's #4 runner by 2 seconds.

Solomonson's 19th place finish set the all-time mark for the highest placing EPGMS Top 5 pack at a Sectional Meet, previously held by the 2021 team with a 23rd place finish. It also marked the third year in a row that the Titan Girls have advanced to the State Championship Meet by virtue of a Sectional Team Runner-Up Placing.

Fourteen teams were participating in the Sectional Meet on Friday afternoon. The three state-qualifying teams were Metcalf (42), El Paso-Gridley (50), and Tremont (90).

Titans Take Home 2 Trophies and 21 PRs from Delavan Nowark runs 11:59.3 in Girls Varsity race; Hodel wins Boys Open

[SEPTEMBER 30, 2023] – For the 46th year, the Delavan Panthers hosted a 30-team meet on their iconic 2-mile “through the cornfields” course. The typical autumn chill did not arrive in time for the races, but it was still a pleasant race morning with temperatures in the low 70s. The cornfields were rustling in the breeze while waves of cheering crowds followed the runners as they sped along the grass paths.

Verity Nowark (2nd, 11.59) clocked an opening 5.57 and proceeded to move up through the field and take second overall in the Girls Varsity race as she closed to within 10 seconds of Julie James' EPGMS school record. It was the first sub-12 time recorded since Ruby Slightom's 11.55 at the 2017 State Finals.

Audrey Roth (16th, 12.40) and Avery Glacinski (19th, 12.45) both ran negative splits to earn Varsity medals in the 149-runner Varsity field. Adalyn Solomonson (42nd, 13.34) and Emersyn Harms (44th, 13.34) ran together for much of the race as they clocked respective PRs of 35 and 40 seconds. Addison Smith (127th, 16.09) battled through a mid-race ankle roll to finish as the Titans' #6.

The Girls team placed 2nd, 31 points behind #3 state-ranked Brimfield. The top six teams were Brimfield (84), El Paso-Gridley (115), Tremont (174), Pekin (181), Mossville (183), Eureka (197).

Alex Lartz (4th, 10.55) was in the hunt at the front through much of the race, while Luke Hinthorne (2nd, 10.53) made a late bid for the overall win but was edged out by Tyson Horn of Dunlap Middle who made a late surge just before the finish. Only one Titan runner – Asa Smith – has run faster than Hinthorne and Lartz, as the 2023 Titan duo are now chasing down the 10.40 school record.

Finn Zeller (6th, 11.08) was right on their heels, adding to his collection of PRs this season with an 11:08. Braxton Romersberger (34th, 12.07) and Landon Feit (37th, 12.14) had the biggest Titan PRs in the Varsity race, while EPG's #6 runner Nate Kingdon (39th, 12.17) crossed the line to make it 6 for 6 on PRs for the Titan Varsity boys.

The Titan Boys team placed 2nd, 31 points behind #2 Class 3A state-ranked Dunlap Middle School. The top six teams were DMS (48), El Paso-Gridley (79), Dunlap Valley (126), Tri-Valley (127), Eureka (160), Brimfield (179).

Sydney Davis (24th, 15.21) led the Titan girls in the Open race. Stella Meiss (44th, 16.25), Harper Hall (52nd, 16.35), and Paityn King (65th, 16.57) all run lifetime PRs.

Weston Hodel (1st, 11.59) opened with a 5.49 first mile, taking charge mid-way through the Boys Open race as he held off a pack of five DMS runners to claim the overall victory. Other Titan finishers in the Open were Chance Price (10th, 12.43), Will Miller (17th, 13.03), Lucas Watson (17th, 13.21), Rylen Moss (33rd, 13.31), Cooper Romersberger (38th, 13.44), Griffin Phillips (51st, 14.14), Drew Kingdon (70th, 14.49), Rush Wilkey (77th, 14.58), Grant McKee (80th, 14.59), and Logan Feit (143rd, 17.04).

The Titans earned 21 lifetime PRs on the day.

Girls Extend Quadrangular Winning Streak to 13 Years

Titan boys and girls sweep top 4 spots in each race

[SEPTEMBER 25, 2023] – The creeks were high as 74 runners splashed through the Furrow Farm course on a warm September Monday afternoon. El Paso-Gridley was hosting a home meet with Peoria Academy, Pontiac, and Tremont.

The Titan girls swept the top 4 spots, followed by Tremont's top five in 5th through 9th. EPG's #5 placed 10th, giving the home team a 20-35 victory over the Turks and marking the 13th year in a row that the Titan girls have won the Quadrangular. Peoria Academy and Pontiac did not field full teams.

Verity Nowark (1st, 13.23) led the way with a time that was just 11 seconds shy of her EPG course record set at the 2023 Invitational. She was followed by Avery Glacinski (2nd, 14.07), Audrey Roth (3rd, 14.31), Adalyn Solomonson (4th, 15.14), Emersyn Harms (10th, 16.03), Addison Smith (14th, 17.07), Stella Meiss (15th, 17.20), Sydney Davis (16th, 17.22), Harper Hall (20th, 18.06), and Paityn King (23rd, 18.48). Twenty-nine girls completed the hilly Furrow course.

The Titan boys followed suit in their race by sweeping the top 4 spots, missing a perfect score by one point as only one runner was between EPG's #4 and #5. Peoria Academy had only two boys in the race, so team scores were EPG (16), Tremont (42), Pontiac (82). The Titan boys claimed Quadrangular victory for the 6th year in a row.

The Titan Top 3 – Luke Hinthorne, Finn Zeller, and Alex Lartz – cartwheeled their way across the finish line together in 12 minutes 46 seconds. Braxton Romersberger (4th, 13.18) and Landon Feit (6th, 14.02) closed out the scoring, and were followed by Lucas Watson (11th, 14.31), Chance Price (12th, 14.31), Will Miller (13th, 14.52), Cooper Romersberger (16th, 15.00), Rylen Moss (17th, 15.19), Drew Kingdon (22nd, 16.17), Griffin Phillips (23rd, 16.47), Grant McKee (26th, 17.06), and Logan Feit (28th, 17.34). Forty-five athletes crossed the finish line in the Boys race.

10 Titan PRs on a Muddy Detweiller Course

Addison Smith clocks a 62-second lifetime best

[SEPTEMBER 22, 2023] – With Peoria receiving several inches of rain in the 48 hours prior to race time, the Detweiller course was sloppy in several spots, especially towards the end of the 1,800-runner meet. 50 teams were attending Dunlap Middle School's 2.1-mile Invitational, and the crowds cheered on the runners through all four races.

In the Girls Varsity race, Verity Nowark (4th, 12.57) and Audrey Roth (23rd, 13.42) both grabbed Top 25 medals as they ran lifetime bests – Nowark's 12.20 adjusted time was 4 seconds under her previous best, and Roth's adjusted time of 13 minutes 3 seconds knocked a dozen seconds off her previous best set in October 2022. Titan athletes Avery Glacinski (78th, 14.32), Emersyn Harms (111th place, 14.58), Adalyn Solomonson (129th, 15.06), Addison Smith (195th, 16.00), and Sydney Davis (203rd, 16.07) were next across for the Varsity team. Smith clocked a 62-second PR with her 15.14 adjusted time.

In the Boys Varsity race, Finn Zeller (20th, 12.02) and Alex Lartz (23rd, 12.08) led the Titan charge, each collecting a Varsity medal for their efforts. EPGMS Varsity runners Braxton Romersberger (90th, 13.06), Nate Kingdon (119th, 13.22), Landon Feit (144th, 13.37), Luke Hinthorne (163rd, 13.50), and Will Miller

(193rd, 14.06) followed, with Romersberger scoring the lone Varsity Boys PR on the day with a converted one-second lifetime best of 12 minutes 29 seconds.

The girls' and boys' teams both placed 11th.

Stella Meiss (145th, 17.31) and Harper Hall (172nd, 18.02) were the first Titans to cross the finish line in the Girls Open race, but it was Paityn King (177th, 18.08) coming through with a PR - her second of the week – with an adjusted time of 17.16, slicing 15 seconds off her lifetime best.

In the Boys Open race, with course conditions steadily deteriorating, five Titans came through with lifetime bests. Chance Price (41st, 13.52) ran a 13-second PR with his adjusted 13.12; Lucas Watson (42nd, 13.53) ran a 12-second PR with his adjusted 13.13; Rylen Moss (125th, 14.50) ran an 11-second PR with his adjusted 14.08; Cooper Romersberger (111th, 14.41) ran a 27-second PR with his adjusted 13.59; and Griffin Phillips (134th, 14.56) ran a 19-second PR with his adjusted 14.13. The final Titan runners in the 547-runner Boys Open event were Drew Kingdon (268th, 16.17), Grant McKee (281st, 16.25), and Logan Feit (415th, 18.10).

20 PRs on the 20th of September

Nowark Wins Corpus Christi Invite; Titan boys run to championship with 40 points

[SEPTEMBER 20, 2023] – Corpus Christi hosted a 10-team meet at Ewing Park Wednesday afternoon. Spectators cheered on 205 runners as they competed in the 2-mile race. The course featured several hills and bridge crossings as it wound through the grassy park and wooded trails.

The Girls Varsity race went well until one runner took a wrong turn near the end of the race, and the pack followed her. Due to this mishap, team scores were not officially recorded in the Girls Race. In addition, the Combined Championship trophy was also not awarded.

Verity Nowark completed the 2-mile course in 12 minutes 24 seconds to score a convincing 10-second victory over Normal Metcalf's Harper Funk. Nowark's 4-second PR also earned her the Titan course record as she took down Ruby Slightom's 2017 mark by 32 seconds.

The Titan 2-3-4-5 runners finished with adjusted 2-mile times and unofficial placings – Audrey Roth (6th, 13.44*), Avery Glacinski (9th, 13.46*), Adalyn Solomonson (13th, 14.09*), and Emersyn Harms (15th, 14.14*). All five earned Top 15 medals.

Addison Smith (43rd, 16.16) and Stella Meiss (44th, 16.26) both set PRs on the 2-mile course, Meiss bettering her previous best by 8 seconds and Smith running to a 47-second lifetime best.

The Titans put their top 5 Boys Varsity runners in the Top 15 just like the Girls team. Up front was Luke Hinthorne (3rd, 11.23), Finn Zeller (4th, 11.26), and Alex Lartz (5th, 11.26). Zeller earned a 5-second PR as he edged teammate Lartz by six-tenths of a second.

Nate Kingdon (13th, 12.29) ran #4 for EPGMS, running to a 74-second season best time while tying his lifetime best. Braxton Romersberger (15th, 12.30), Landon Feit (17th, 12.37), and Will Miller (25th, 13.00) all turned all-time PRs.

The previous EPG team record on the Ewing course was set in 2017 when the top 5 boys averaged 12.10 per runner. The 2023 team now sits at the top of that list as they averaged 11.51 per runner.

Top 3 team scores for the Boys Varsity race showed the Titans with a big win – EPG (40), Metcalf (63), Tri-Valley (65).

The PRs continued in the Open races. All 3 girls in the Girls Open race ran gigantic lifetime bests. Sydney Davis (2nd, 14.51) cut 2 minutes 18 seconds off her PR, Harper Hall (14th, 16.36) ran to a 91-second best, and Paityn King (16th, 17.31) ran a PR by 2 minutes 46 seconds.

In the Boys Open race, Rylen Moss (42nd, 16.17) and Rush Wilkey (51st, 17.27) did not make the PR list, but the other 7 Titans all ran lifetime bests. Running negative splits and moving up in the field throughout the entire race was Chance Price (3rd, 13.25) and Lucas Watson (4th, 13.25). They finished with identical times to the tenth of a second.

Cooper Romersberger (16th, 14.26) missed a Top 15 award by one second, but didn't miss a PR, as he ran to a 62-second lifetime best. Griffin Phillips (20th, 14.32) sliced 74 seconds off his PR. Drew Kingdon (28th, 15.06), Grant McKee (32nd, 15.11), and Logan Feit (43rd, 16.17) were next across the line, running PRs of 13, 102, 76 seconds respectively.

Unofficial team scores for the Girls Varsity race showed the top two teams as Metcalf (39) and EPG (44). Had those scores been officially recorded, this would have resulted in a Combined Championship for the Titans – EPG (84), Metcalf (102), Tri-Valley (148).

Titan XC Takes Home 19 PRs from Parkside Invitational Top 10 for Hinthorne, Lartz, and Nowark at 2,000-runner meet

[SEPTEMBER 9, 2023] – Parkside Junior High hosted a 62-team meet on a sunny Saturday morning. Teams from across the state of Illinois were competing, many eager to get a glimpse of the IESA State Finals course. The two-mile course was in good condition, and a light north breeze with temperatures in the 60s greeted nearly two thousand middle school harriers.

Verity Nowark (7th, 12.28) was in 35th at the half mile, 22nd entering the wooded dirt path about 300 meters later, and 13th at the mile. She moved up to 8th with less than a half mile to go and picked up one more spot before crossing the finish line with a lifetime PR, 5 seconds faster than her 2022 State Finals performance. For the second straight meet—Furrow (6.36, 6.36) and Parkside (6.14, 6.14) Nowark put down perfectly even splits.

Audrey Roth (61st, 13.39) and Avery Glacinski (76th, 13.55) both ran negative splits and notched their best Maxwell Park time, with Roth slicing 5 seconds off her season best. Adalyn Solomonson (157th, 14.40) ran even splits of 7.20, 7.20 on her way to a two-second lifetime PR.

Emersyn Harms (178th, 14.50) cruised through her first mile on PR pace, and then dropped the hammer down and ran 20 seconds faster for her second mile to notch a 37-second lifetime best – the biggest PR of all the Titan Varsity girls – as she finished one-tenth of a second ahead of Tri-Valley's #4 runner.

Addison Smith (303rd, 17.03) and Sydney Davis (311th, 17.09) pushed each other to PRs of 25 and 34 seconds, respectively.

The Titan girls placed 15th of 53 full teams (5th among Class 2A schools) and dropped their previous season best average Top 5 time of 14 minutes 27 seconds down to 13 minutes 54 seconds.

Luke Hinthorne (4th, 11.05) chased Alex Lartz (7th, 11.12) through the first mile, with Lartz charging through his first mile at 5 minutes 26 seconds and Hinthorne following 4 seconds later. Both runners continued to move up in the field during the second mile, and with a final 200-meter surge, Hinthorne edged Normal Metcalf's JW Black by nine-tenths of a second. Lartz bested Metcalf's Greyson Ince by 2.5 seconds, as well as three runners who all clocked an 11.13.

Hinthorne and Lartz both set lifetime PRs, with Hinthorne becoming the #4 all-time EPGMS runner, and Lartz moving into a tie for #10 all-time with a monster 34-second PR.

Finn Zeller (22nd, 11.31) had an impressive race as well, clocking an opening 5.37 mile on his way to a 20-second season best and 5-second lifetime PR. Of the 55 full boys' teams, Zeller was the second-fastest #3 runner, while his time of 11 minutes 31 seconds earned him a share of the #14 spot on the all-time EPGMS records board.

Weston Hodel (63rd, 12.12) continues to drop time as he cut another 13 seconds from his PR, finishing three-tenths of a second ahead of Yorkville's #2 runner. Braxton Romersberger (138th, 12.55) was just a couple seconds off of his season best.

Landon Feit (150th, 12.59) mentioned a goal of 12 minutes 59 seconds just before the start of the race, and then ran 12 minutes 59 seconds. That time earned him a Maxwell best by 46 seconds, a season best by 12 seconds, and a lifetime PR by 4 seconds. Nate Kingdon (266th, 13.59) crossed the line a minute later to close out the day for the Titan varsity runners.

The EPGMS boys team placed 4th of 55 teams. The Titans (228 points) were the top Class 2A team in the race, with the next 2A school (Metcalf, 532 points) placing 17th. The Titans' Top 5 average time of 11 minutes 47 seconds was 10 seconds faster than their Top 5 average at the 2022 State Finals.

In the 558-runner Girls Open race, Stella Meiss (134th, 16.34), Harper Hall (280th, 18.07), and Paityn King (406th, 20.17) all ran to PRs, with Meiss running to the biggest Titan PR of the day, cutting 84 seconds off her previous best.

The biggest race of the day was the Boys Open, with 684 runners. Will Miller (72nd, 13.47) placed in the top 11% of the field and was closely followed by teammates Chance Price (83rd, 13.52) and Lucas Watson (85th, 13.53). Price ran splits of 7.08, 6.44 to clock a 13-second lifetime best.

Rylen Moss (117th, 14.19) brought home the biggest PR of the day for the boys, running 83 seconds faster than his previous best. He has dropped over 2 minutes since the start of the season.

Drew Kingdon (231st, 15.19), Cooper Romersberger (246th, 15.28), Rush Wilkey (271st, 15.39), and Griffin Phillips (284th, 15.46) all set lifetime PRs. Romersberger clocked a time that was over 3 minutes faster than his 2022 Maxwell Park time. Wilkey ran to a 76-second PR. And Phillips' 88-second season best was also good for a lifetime PR, as he bettered his 2022 Delavan Dare Classic time by 3 seconds. The final Titan finishers at the Parkside Invitational were Grant McKee (475th, 17.40) and Logan Feit (508th, 18.12).

In all, the Titans grabbed 19 lifetime PRs, the most from any meet this season. With 11 days until the next meet at Ewing Park in Bloomington, the Titans will have time to prepare for what could be another parade of PRs.

Nowark Wins EPGMS Invitational Girls team, Boys team both place 2nd at Furrow Farm

[SEPTEMBER 5, 2023] – A record 678 runners competed at the 16th annual EPGMS Invitational at Furrow Farm on a cloudy Tuesday afternoon. Moderate temperatures, the breezy air, and a few sprinkles were all welcome surprises for the athletes who faced the usual challenging hills and creek crossings on central Illinois' toughest 2-mile XC course.

Verity Nowark (1st, 13.12) charged into the lead early. She was momentarily slowed when falling forward into the creek just before the half mile but regained her composure and forged ahead. After the second

creek crossing, a chase pack of five runners began to close the gap on Nowark, and at the mile she had company sitting right on her shoulder. Determined to maintain the lead, she began inching ahead, building a small gap as she came out of the W. With a final push to the finish, Nowark took the win by 3.1 seconds over Normal Metcalf's Harper Funk and set the all-time EPGMS course record, breaking Caroline Wettstein's 2021 mark by 8 seconds.

Audrey Roth (9th, 14.07) and Avery Glacinski (10th, 14.13) both ran negative splits and finished ahead of Normal Metcalf's #3 runner.

EPG's #4 Adalyn Solomonson (34th, 15.14) ran even splits of 7.37, 7.37 and was followed by #5 Emersyn Harms (54th, 15.55) who was the seventh 6th-grader to cross the finish line.

Addison Smith (98th, 17.28) turned in a memorable performance with a 117-second lifetime best on the hilly Furrow course. She was followed by Stella Meiss (108th, 17.58) who overcame some side stitch discomfort to also set a lifetime PR.

The Titans placed 2nd of 18 full teams in the Girls Varsity race. Scores for the top 5 teams were Normal Metcalf (83), El Paso-Gridley (104), Eureka (133), Bloomington Evans (194), Dee-Mack (195).

As the boys crossed the second creek and passed the three-quarter mile mark, the top 3 Titans looked strong up front, running 7th-8th-9th in the 137-runner varsity field. Luke Hinthorne (3rd, 11.55) crushed two sub-6 miles and passed two runners in the final 200 meters, becoming only the fourth Titan to ever break 12 minutes on this course. Alex Lartz (6th, 12.05) ran his fastest time at Furrow by 70 seconds and jumped onto the all-time Furrow list at #6. Finn Zeller (9th, 12.16) was the fastest #3 runner in the race.

Running #4 for EPG was Weston Hodel (18th, 12.41), clocking splits of 6.21, 6.20 to claim the fourth Boys Varsity medal for the Titans. #5 Braxton Romersberger (49th, 13.39) found his way into the Top 50 and was closely followed by #6 Landon Feit (52nd, 13.43). The final varsity boy to cross the finish line for the Titans was Lucas Watson (70th, 14.29).

Of 20 full boys' teams competing, Class 3A powerhouse Dunlap Middle scored a 1-point victory over the runner up Titans. Scores for the top 5 teams were Dunlap Middle (82), El Paso-Gridley (83), Clinton (119), Chillicothe (137), Normal Metcalf (163).

In the Girls Open race, Sydney Davis (27th, 17.43) made a strong two-mile debut with splits of 9.13, 8.30. Haper Hall (49th, 18.57) ran a 91-second lifetime best and placed in the top third of the 170-runner field. Paityn King (128th, 23.46) crossed the finish line to complete the day for the Titan girls.

In the 244-runner Boys Open race, Nate Kingdon (7th, 13.43) started strong and held on to earn a 23-second season best. Will Miller (21st, 14.28) collected the 9th Top 25 medal for the Titans, while Rylen Moss (42nd, 15.42) earned a 19-second all-time PR. Chance Price (70th, 16.29) and Cooper Romersberger (84th, 16.54), were next across the line for EPG, with Romersberger slicing over a minute off his previous Furrow best. Wrapping up the day for the Titans were Grant McKee (100th, 17.31), Drew Kingdon (102nd, 17.38), Rush Wilkey (103rd, 17.39), Griffin Phillips (105th, 17.46), and Logan Feit (174th, 20.20).

The next meet for the Titans is the Parkside Invitational on September 9, which is run on the IESA State Finals course at Maxwell Park in Normal. The first race begins at 9:30am.

Three Sisters Park = 15 EPGXC Season Bests

Nowark wins 155-runner race; Boys earn team championship

[AUGUST 26, 2023] – The Mossville Warriors hosted a 32-team meet on a Saturday morning filled with sunshine. A surprise rain shower during the last race of the day cooled things off a bit, but the Titans were

on fire all day long, scorching 15 PRs by the conclusion of the four heats at the Michele Stewart Invitational held at Chillicothe's Three Sisters Park.

Verity Nowark (1st, 12.57) started strong, moving into second place before reaching the mile in 6 minutes 29 seconds. She was right on the shoulder of Glasford Illini Bluffs' Audrey Dickinson with three-quarters of a mile to go, when Dickinson made a move and started extending her lead. But with just less than a half mile to go, Nowark decided not to give in, and started a long push to reel in Dickinson. Nowark was still giving chase all the way to the finish line before edging Dickinson at the line by two-tenths of a second to claim the win.

EPG's #2 Avery Glacinski (6th, 13.41) and #3 Audrey Roth (7th, 13.44) were running strong and smart, and by the finish both had moved ahead of every other team's #2 runner. They each sliced off nearly 20 seconds from their respective season-best times.

Adalyn Solomonson (35th, 14.42) opened with a 7.30 first mile, then crushed her second mile, clocking a 7.12 to find herself as the fastest #4 in the 155-runner field. Solomonson sliced 45 seconds off her lifetime best set 5 days earlier at Eureka. Emersyn Harms (114th, 17.47) closed out the scoring for the Titans, followed closely by Stella Meiss (117th, 17.59) who notched a 23-second PR. Addison Smith (136th, 19.25) ran to the biggest PR of all Titan girls, improving on her previous best by 53 seconds.

The top 5 teams for the girls were Brimfield (105), Metcalf (109), Mossville (127), EPG (133), Tremont (157). Twenty full teams were competing in the Girls Varsity race.

The boys were blazing through the course as well. Alex Lartz (4th, 11.51) led the Titan charge with Finn Zeller (5th, 11.56) right on his heels. Luke Hinthorne (8th, 12.11) and Weston Hodel (13th, 12.25) followed, with EPG's #5 runner Braxton Romersberger (20th, 12.53) running splits of 6.31, 6.22 to earn the final Varsity medal of the day by 3.7 seconds over Normal Metcalf's #4 Bowen Ince. Lartz (19 seconds) and Romersberger (38 seconds) collected season best times, while Hodel ran to a 36-second lifetime best, clocking even splits of 6.13, 6.12.

Landon Feit (53rd, 13.51) soldiered through a rolled ankle after finding a stump hidden under the sand mid-way through the race. Will Miller (65th, 14.13) was the final Titan to cross the line in the 146-runner field.

The Titan Boys scored a convincing team victory over their 17 varsity opponents. Scores were EPG (46), Metcalf (80), Chillicothe (97), Dunlap Valley (145), Glasford Illini Bluffs (183).

Paityn King (55th, 20.28) and Harper Hall (59th, 20.49) competed in the 104-runner Open Girls race with King setting her PR by 50 seconds.

Lucas Watson (4th, 13.43) was firing on all cylinders, running splits of 6.52 and 6.51 as he pushed himself through the 177-runner Open Boys field to earn a fourth-place medal with his 29-second lifetime best. Chance Price (10th, 14.05) also set a PR, backing up his 7.15 opening mile with a closing 6.50. Nate Kingdon (20th, 15.01), Rylen Moss (41st, 16.01), Drew Kingdon (59th, 16.44), Grant McKee (66th, 16.53), Rush Wilkey (68th, 16.55), Griffin Phillips (77th, 17.14), and Logan Feit (123rd, 18.34) were the final Titan finishers on the day, with Moss, McKee, and Wilkey running lifetime bests.

The Titans are looking forward to competing on their home course at Furrow Farm in the 24-team EPGMS Invitational on Tuesday, September 5.

Two Titan Wins at Eureka

Nowark, Hinthorne run course records at Eureka Lake

[AUGUST 21, 2023] – The Eureka Hornets hosted a small meet on a hot August afternoon. The temperatures were pushing 90 degrees as the Titans faced off against Eureka, St. Jude, and Peoria Christian in their first 2-mile event of the season.

In the Girls race, it was Verity Nowark (1st, 13.17) looking strong and confident as she notched a convincing win, breaking the Titan course record by 13 seconds.

Avery Glacinski (2nd, 14.00) had a breakthrough race of her own, crushing her lifetime best by 46 seconds and marking her fourth PR in a row dating back to October 1st, 2022. Audrey Roth (3rd, 14.02) was right with Avery, knocking some time off her 2022 Eureka race and giving the Titans a 1-2-3 finish.

Eureka took the 5th, 6th, and 7th positions, but EPG's #4 Emersyn Harms (8th, 15.27) and #5 Adalyn Solomonson (9th, 15.27) shut the door on the competition, working together throughout the race to steadily move up through the field and into the Top 10.

Stella Meiss (20th, 18.22) and Addison Smith (27th, 20:18) were next across for the Titans, followed by Harper Hall (29th, 20.28) and Paityn King (34th, 21.18) in the 41-runner field.

Team scores were EPG (23), Eureka (40), St. Jude (71), Peoria Christian (100). The Titan girls bested the previous Top 5 Titan course record set in 2016 by 9 seconds per runner.

The Titan boys also ran well, with Luke Hinthorne (2nd, 11.34), Finn Zeller (3rd, 11.51), and Alex Lartz (4th, 12.10) following boys' winner Luke Fady (11.21) of Peoria St. Jude across the line before Eureka's #1 crossed 17 seconds later. Hinthorne broke Asa Smith's 2017 Titan course record by 4 seconds.

Weston Hodel (6th, 13.01), Landon Feit (8th, 13.11), and Braxton Romersberger (10th, 13.31) found their way into the Top 10 in the 47-runner boys' field. Feit was just 8 seconds off his lifetime PR, while EPG's #7 Will Miller (12th, 13.44) managed to clock an all-time personal best by 2 seconds.

Nate Kingdon (16th, 14.06), Lucas Watson (17th, 14.12), and Chance Price (19th, 14.37) were all in the top half of the field, followed by Drew Kingdon (25th, 15.30), Cooper Romersberger (33rd, 16.24), Rylen Moss (34th, 16.25), Grant McKee (39th, 17.25), Logan Feit (40th, 17.33), and Rush Wilkey (41st, 17.54).

Team scores were EPG (23), St. Jude (52), Eureka (58). The boys' team beat the previous EPG course record set in 2016 by 8 seconds per runner.

Next up for Titan XC is the Michele Stewart Invitational at Three Sisters Park in Chillicothe on August 26.

EPGMS XC Claims Two Team Trophies at Opener Titans shatter records at 19-team meet

[AUGUST 14, 2023] – Peoria St. Jude hosted a 19-school meet at Donovan Park on a breezy August afternoon. Temperatures hovered in the low 70s for the 320 middle school runners at the 5th Annual Hokum Karem Relays. Each athlete paired up with a teammate and then alternated running an 800m hilly grass loop three times each, handing off a baton at the exchange zone in front of a boisterous crowd.

El Paso-Gridley's Avery Glacinski (9.56) led the Titans through the first leg in 9th place, followed by Audrey Roth (9.48) in 15th and Adalyn Solomonson (10.13) in 16th for a team score of 40 after the first of six loops. Verity Nowark (9.19) took the baton from Solomonson and opened with a 2.54.

Nowark/Solomonson would go on to claim 4th place overall with Nowark running the 3rd fastest combined time – averaging 3 minutes 6 seconds for each half mile loop – in the field of 144 girls. Glacinski and Emersyn Harms (10.31) placed 8th, while Roth and Addison Smith (11.33) placed 17th of 72 pairs.

Stella Meiss (11.26) and Sydney Davis (11.40) combined to place 31st, with Harper Hall (13.16) and Paityn King (13.37) running to a 61st place finish.

Nowark, Roth, Glacinski, and Solomonson are now among the Top 7 fastest EPG runners ever at Donovan Park. In addition, Nowark and Solomonson grabbed the all-time course record as the fastest Titan pair (19.32), besting the 2021 mark set by Piper Zimmerman and Caroline Wettstein by 7 seconds.

The Top 3 Girls teams, separated by just 3 points each, took home trophies – Limestone (23), Mossville (26), and EPG (29).

It was 3 Titans leading the 88 pairs of boys through the first exchange, with Luke Hinthorne (7.51) blazing the trail in a 2.29 split. He was followed by Finn Zeller (8.12) in 2.36 and Alex Lartz (8.16) in 2.41. The Titans held strong with Lartz handing off to Weston Hodel (8.44), as that pair battled back and forth with Hinthorne and Nate Kingdon (9.15). Zeller and Landon Feit (9.25) stayed in the mix up front as well. When it was all said and done, each of those 3 teams were over a minute faster than the previous EPG course record set in 2021 by Drew Cooper and Jack Gramm, with Lartz/Hodel claiming the current record and a runner-up finish in a time of 17 minutes flat. Hinthorne/Kingdon placed 3rd in 17.07, with Zeller/Feit combining for 6th place in 17.37.

Braxton Romersberger (9.20) and Will Miller (10.15) teamed up for a 17th place finish. Drew Kingdon (10.17) and Lucas Watson (10.10) combined for a 28th place finish. Griffin Phillips (11.03) and Rylen Moss (12.31) placed 60th. Cooper Romersberger (11.57) and Grant McKee (11.55) ran to a 64th placing. And Rush Wilkey (11.18) and Logan Feit (12.36) earned 65th place.

Hinthorne had the fastest combined time of all 176 runners by one-third of one second over Luke Fady of host Peoria St. Jude. Hinthorne, Zeller, Lartz, and Hodel all bested Zeller's previous EPG record on the Donovan Park course.

The EPG boys took the team championship with a score of 11 points, easily outdistancing team runner-up Peoria St. Jude (23). Corpus Christi placed 3rd with 34 points.

Next up for Titan XC is a smaller meet at Eureka Lake hosted by the Hornets on Monday, August 21.