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Published November 06, 2010

Less-dominant Navigators make it 5 in row

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PASCO - Northwest Christian of Lacey didn't dominate the 2B/1B high school girls state cross country meet Saturday the way the Navigators did a year ago.

That would have been a tall order, considering NWC put four runners in the top six and scored a minuscule 22 points in 2009.

No, the Navigators simply had to settle for becoming the first school in state history to win five consecutive team titles, winning by a comfortable 22-point margin over Northwest Christian of Colbert.

Sehome in 2A later joined Northwest Christian as a five-time winner, but that didn't diminish the Navigators' accomplishment.

"This year was much more competitive," said first-year coach Larry Weber. "They've had some challenges, some injuries this year, but I'm very proud of how they ran today. This was a real team effort. Each girl contributed greatly."

Leading the way was senior Joanna Sowers, who matched her sixth-place finish of a year ago – only this time, she was the team's No. 1, not No. 4, runner. Her time of 19 minutes, 37.8 seconds for 5,000 meters marked a 28-second improvement from last year.

"We definitely talk about sharing the pain," Sowers said. "We're all really good friends, so we encourage and support each other. Even our seventh-place runner has a big part in it."

The NWC boys weren't able to make it a championship sweep for a third straight year, finishing third behind first-time winner Tri-Cities Prep and Republic.

However, senior Justin Holden did make it back-to-back individual titles for the school, outkicking St. George's sophomore Maxwell Choka to win in 16:05.9.

"I had prayed for a challenge today, because my finish had been lacking," Holden said. "I said, 'Please make me fight for this.' "

And fight for it Holden did, overcoming Choka's charge that gave him the lead with about 400 meters to go.

"I was thinking at that point, 'This is my last race. Please, God, help me,' and I got this burst of power and strength," said Holden, who caught Choka with less than 50 meters to go before collapsing in the finish

chute. “For a second, I thought I was done.”

Elma senior Todd Jackson took second in the 2A boys race – albeit 31 seconds behind Coupeville’s Tyler King, who’d finished fifth in the 4A meet a year ago when running for Oak Harbor through a co-op agreement.

“I was hoping to push him, but I didn’t feel that great today,” said Jackson, who finished in 15:47.5. “The hills got me, so I sat on the two Port Townsend kids and waited for the last mile to take off.”

Olympia senior Nate Brennand finished seventh in the 4A boys race (and second among Westside runners) in 15:43. Brennand pushed the pace, leading at the mile mark, but even then wasn’t in a comfort zone.

“The first mile was too relaxed,” he said. “The best race I ran this season was the Stanford Invite, and we went out real fast. I’m pleased with seventh, but I’m not satisfied.”

Other area placers Saturday were Onalaska sophomore Stephen Bottoms (seventh, 16:18.9) and senior Frank Krause (15th, 16:33.2) in 1A boys; W.F. West senior Dakota Parker (eighth, 16:03) in 2A boys; and Montesano freshman Gabrielle Rudolph (10th, 20:15) and junior Allison Peterson (13th, 20:18) in 1A girls.