

EPGXC Boys Team Places 8th at State

Sam Bushert runs sub-11 to place 5th

[OCTOBER 13, 2018] – The IESA Class 2A Cross Country State Finals took place on a cloudy and chilly October morning. 232 girls and 238 boys were competing on the Maxwell Park course in Normal. Wednesday and Friday rains had softened the course and resulted in several muddy and slippery sections, which only became sloppier as the six races progressed. A southwesterly breeze made the temperature feel cooler than the 45 degrees where the mercury was sitting. But the weather and the course did not dampen the spectators who were out in force to cheer for all the runners, including the 27 qualifying Girls and Boys teams.

Valerie Hamilton (71st, 13.01) was representing El Paso-Gridley in the Girls race as an Individual qualifier. She looked strong at the half mile and cruised through the mile at 6.19, right on her target pace and alongside Eureka's Laurel Munson. At 1.5 miles she was still moving well, but faded a bit in the final 800m, clocking 6.42 for her second mile. Nevertheless, Hamilton ran 17 seconds faster than her Sectional race and was just 3 seconds off her lifetime best. At Sectionals, she placed just in front of Germantown Hills' Callie Sturgell, and she matched that accomplishment at the State Finals, edging Sturgell by one place and half a second.

The Titan Boys Team lined up for the Class 2A State Finals race for the fourth year in a row looking for PRs and a Top 10 team finish. Their assigned starting box had them sandwiched between Mossville and Dunlap Valley, two teams they had faced several times this season. Sam Bushert had gone back and forth with Valley's Top 3 (Nicholas Sell, Josh Noll, and Henry Welsh) all season long. He finished ahead of all 3 of them at the EPGJH Invitational September 4. But on September 21 at the DMS Invite, the three Spartans all finished in front of Bushert, who was a distant 33 seconds behind Sell. Eight days later Bushert and Sell faced off once again. Sell won the race, but Bushert closed the gap to 6 seconds with his 3rd place finish. With the Dunlap Valley trio taking the Top 3 Spots at the rainy muddy Mossville Sectional and Bushert claiming the Individual Sectional Championship at Germantown hills, the stage was set for a showdown between EPG's Bushert and the three Dunlap Valley 8th graders.

Bushert ran through the half-mile mark in 32nd place trailing Dunlap Valley's top 5 runners, but looking relaxed and focused. He moved up significantly by the mile mark, hitting his target pace of 5.28 spot on, cruising across the timing mat in 13th place. But the trio of Spartans – Sell (5.22), Welsch (5.23), and Noll (5.25) – still had Bushert gapped. Bushert was relentless though, pushing up to Noll at 1.4 miles, moving around him and catching Welsch at 1.5 miles and moving into 9th place. At 1.6 miles he was challenging Sell, and with 300 meters to go he had surged ahead of Sell and into 5th overall. The pack chased him down the straightaway and across the finish line, Bushert (5th, 10.56) placing just ahead of Sell (6th, 10.58). Bushert's second mile matched his first at 5.28, as he became only the second Titan runner ever to break 11 minutes.

Payton Romersberger (54th, 11.33) ran to a three second PR by clocking 3-second negative splits of 5.48, 5.45. He looked incredibly strong as he sprinted down the final stretch with authority, becoming the #10 All-Time EPGXC runner as he crossed the line. TJ Supan (117th, 11.58) broke 12 minutes for the second time this season, running 19 seconds faster than at Sectionals.

Reed Newcomb (123rd, 12.00) ran splits of 6.03, 5.57 to run #4 for the Titans. He was racing the clock in down the finishing stretch, accelerating with a desire to crack the 12-minute barrier, but missing by just two-tenths of a second. But he matched Bushert's improvement, running to a 14-second lifetime best.

Kole Rigsby (139th, 12.07) ran to the biggest PR or the day for the Titans, clocking perfect splits of 6.03, 6.04 for a 17-second lifetime best. Rigsby jumped up to the #5 spot for the first time since September 14.

Dean Witzig (155th, 12.14) ran through the mile mark at 6.03 with Newcomb and Rigsby, finishing 9 seconds faster than his Sectional time and 59 seconds faster than his September 8 time on this course. Garrison Meyer (191st, 12.39) blazed through the Maxwell course 41 seconds faster than his Sectional time, earning the third 14-second Titan PR of the day.

Team scores showed EPG ahead of previous rivals by substantial margins. Heyworth was within 3 points of the Titans at the Clinton Invitational, and Mossville was within 2 points at the Eureka meet. At State Finals, EPG was ahead of Mossville by 148 points and ahead of Heyworth by 309 points. Williamsville posted a top 5 average that was 18 seconds ahead of EPG at the DMS Invite. At State, the 8th place Titans bested 6th place Williamsville's top 5 average 11.43 to 11.44.

Top 10 team scores were Chicago Latin (61), Lockport Oak Prairie (71), Dunlap Valley (172), Willowbrook Westview Hills (192), Kankakee Bishop McNamara (200), Williamsville (302), Tolono Unity (303), El Paso-Gridley (323), Glenview Our Lady of Perpetual Help (343), Johnsburg (353).

The 2018 Titan Boys Team ran to a Top 10 State placing for the 3rd year in a row.

Sectional Champions!

Boys XC Team wins Sectional Meet; Valerie Hamilton places 7th, qualifies for State

[OCTOBER 6, 2018] – Fourteen teams were competing at the IESA Class 2A Sectional Meet at Great Oaks Community Church Saturday morning. Three girls teams and three boys teams would advance to the State Finals. Runners would be competing on a mostly grass course with several turns, jumps, and hills. The originally scheduled 10 AM meet time was moved to 9 AM in order to get in both races before the rains came. It was a good call, as storms came just after the awards ceremony. Race time weather was 70 degrees and humid.

Ninety-two athletes were entered in a Girls race that was loaded with top area teams. Valerie Hamilton (7th, 13.19) came through the 800-meter mark in 13th place. By 1000 meters she had moved into 11th. She continued to move up in the field and placed 7th overall to grab the 3rd of 5 individual State-qualifying spots. The competition was intense, with the final individual qualifier just 6.1 seconds behind Hamilton.

Nellie Melick (25th, 14.00) weaved her way up through the competition to run #2 for the Titans for the second meet in a row. Lauren Shaffer (37th, 14.13) had the race of the day for the Titan girls, running #3 for the Titans for the first time since the Parkside Invitational. Hillary Gramm (41st, 14.20) celebrated her 14th birthday by running her final EPGJH cross country meet in a time that was just 9 seconds off her lifetime best, the closest any of the Varsity girls would come to a PR. Lizzie Uphoff (47th, 14.28) ran #5 and finished with a strong kick. Joci Nelson (61st, 14.51) and Annabelle Younse (62nd, 14.53) finished 2.2 seconds apart to wrap things up for the Titans.

The Girls team placed 7th, just 20 points behind 4th-place host Germantown Hills. The Titan Girls also surged even further ahead of Eureka (8th place), a team they had beaten for the first time this season at Delavan last weekend. Head to head, EPG put every position runner ahead of Eureka's runners - #1 ahead of #1, #2 ahead of #2, #3 ahead of #3, #4 ahead of #4, #5 ahead of #5, #6 ahead of #6, and #7 ahead of #7. That resulted in the Titans 4-second per runner average advantage increasing to 7 seconds per runner, and an 11-point gap at Delavan increasing to 23 points at the Sectional Meet.

East Peoria Central won the Team Championship by putting 4 runners in the Top 10 and their #5 at 19th. Addy Elwell of Metamora came from behind to claim the Individual title in 12 minutes 45 seconds.

In the Boys Varsity race, Sam Bushert (1st, 11.36) ran to plan, following the leaders but within contact of the front pack at 800 meters. He moved into 3rd at the 1K mark, and had taken the lead by the mile. But the race was far from over, with the chase pack staying close – Bushert had no breathing room to let up his pace or the pack would pounce. The outcome was still unknown as the top 5 runners charged down the final straightaway, with Bushert crossing the line to become the individual Sectional Champion by a mere 2.6 seconds. Runner-up Matthew Gray of East Peoria led the chase pack of four runners, who finished with times of 11.39, 11.39, 11.40, and 11.41.

Payton Romersberger (12th, 12.12) led the #2 – #6 pack of Titan runners. TJ Supan (17th, 12.16) recovered from crashing into a metal utility box 200 meters into the race to run #3, with Dean Witzig (19th, 12.23), Reed Newcomb (20th, 12.23), and Kole Rigsby (22nd, 12.32) coming through with big races for EPG – key performances that were needed to secure the Sectional Championship for the Titans over runner-up Olympia, as the Spartans boasted a 28-second pack time. Garrison Meyer (55th, 13.20) clocked his second best time of the season in the 96-runner race.

The Titans won their second Sectional Championship in three years, and qualified for State Finals for the fourth straight year.

Top 3 Boys teams advancing to next weekend's State Finals posted team scores of El Paso-Gridley (69), Olympia (97), Metamora (118).

The IESA State Finals will take place at Maxwell Park in Normal on Saturday, October 13. Races begin at 9:30 AM. Hamilton will run in the Class 2A race at 11 AM. The Titan Boys Team will compete in the Class 2A race at 11:45 AM.

Record-Setting Day at Delavan Dare Classic

Titan XC runs to 23 PRs, collects 4 medals and a trophy

[SEPTEMBER 29, 2018] – Under partially cloudy skies and temperatures in the 50s, the Titans lined up for a 2.04-mile cross country race around softball fields and cornfields behind the Delavan Junior High building. 27 teams and 600 runners were competing. The Titans turned in some dazzling performances, running to a season-best 23 individual PRs.

Valerie Hamilton (26th, 13.14) missed a Top 25 medal by 3 seconds and was 5 seconds behind Eureka's #1 runner. But she did crack the 13-minute barrier, her 12.58 2-mile adjusted time moving her up to EPG's #16 runner of all-time.

Nellie Melick (51st, 13.53) had the race of the day for the Varsity girls, running 19-second negative splits on her way to a 2-mile adjusted time of 13.37, a 63-second PR. Her time makes her the #24 Titan runner of all-time. Lizzie Uphoff (55th, 13.57) missed the Top 25 All-Time list by 2 seconds, but clocked a 16-second lifetime best and finished ahead of Eureka's #3 runner by 7 seconds and 8 places.

Through 3 runners, EPG (120) was 10 points behind Eureka (110), a team the Titans have not been close to all season, but who the girls team was targeting today.

Joci Nelson (68th, 14.10) stepped up to a 43-second lifetime best with her 13.53 adjusted 2-mile time. Lauren Shaffer (72nd, 14.15) ran #5 for the Titans, clocking a 36-second PR of her own. Eureka's #4 (14.13) placed between Nelson and Shaffer, but the Hornets' #5 was 18 team places behind Shaffer, and the Titans edged Eureka by 11 points. Just 8 days after the Titan girls got their top 5 under 15 minutes for the first time, they rose to the next level and put their top 5 under 14 minutes. The Titan Girls averaged 13.37, ranking as the #15 all-time performance in EPG history.

Annabelle Younse (79th, 14.22) opened with a strong 6.47 before rolling an ankle on a crowded turn at 1.3 miles. She still managed to finish with a 31-second lifetime best. Hillary Gramm (87th, 14.38) wrapped things up for an impressive Titan team showing.

In the Boys Varsity race, Sam Bushert (3rd, 11.23) ran a perfectly patient race. At a half mile he was in 20th place but looking focused. Over the next mile, he just kept moving up through the field little by little, clocking splits of 5.37, 5.33 on his way to a 3rd place finish. His 2-mile adjusted time of 11.10 makes him the seventh-fastest runner of all-time for EPG.

Payton Romersberger (20th, 11.50) and TJ Supan (22nd, 11.54) employed a similarly smart racing style, moving into medal position near the end of the race. Rosenberger and Supan clocked PRs of 25 and 33 seconds, respectively, and moved up to #12 and #13 All-Time for the Titans.

Dean Witzig (45th, 12.25) came up with a big race, surging up through the field while clocking splits of 6.11, 5.59. Witzig was right on the heels of Metamora's and Olympia's #4 runners. With #5 Reed Newcomb (50th, 12.29) finishing ahead of Metamora's and Olympia's #5 runners, the Titans brought locked up the 3rd place trophy.

Kole Rigsby (62nd, 12.39) and Garrison Meyer (87th, 13.08) made it 7 for 7 on lifetime bests for the Varsity Boys Team. Witzig dropped the most time, running to a 41-second PR. The Top 5 all found their way into the EPGXC All-Time Top 25 record books, with Rigsby just one second behind #25.

Heidi Hunsinger (10th, 13.58) cruised through the mile in 7.00 before finishing with a blistering 6.42 final mile. Her adjusted 2-mile time of 13.42 was an 88-second PR and ranks her as the 27th fastest Titan girl all-time.

Elise Morrison (75th, 16.28) ran to her 2017 season best on this course, and nearly duplicated that 16.19 effort with her 2018 season best time. Callie Whitcomb (83rd, 16.42) clocked a season-best by 23 seconds, while Nickelle Cummings (88th, 16.54) ran to a jaw-dropping PR of 2 minutes 19 seconds. Aubrey Phillips (105th, 17.37) closed things out for the girls in the 134-runner field.

Jack Erwin (39th, 13.41) led the EPG boys in the Boys Open, running to a 30-second lifetime best 13.25 for his 2-mile adjusted time. Chris Staton (82nd, 14.35) and Dylan Moss (83rd, 14.35) ran within a step or two of each other for the entire race. Staton earned a 47-second PR; Moss ran to a 92-second PR. Keegan Ruppe (94th, 14.50) earned a PR, as did Josiah Meade (111th, 15.08) who ran to a 54-second lifetime best. Waylon Melick (120th, 15.18) ran a 2-mile adjusted time of 15 flat, his fastest by 61 seconds.

Girls Varsity team scores showed the Top 10 as Dunlap Middle (21), Pekin Broadmoor (81), Elmwood (129), Olympia (153), Dunlap Valley (190), Metamora (209), El Paso-Gridley (248), St Agnes (249), Eureka (259), Delavan (291).

Boys Varsity team scores for the Top 10 were Dunlap Middle (63), Dunlap Valley (84), El Paso-Gridley (140), Brimfield (174), Metamora (187), Olympia (189), Mossville (211), Elmwood (233), Franklin (255), Eureka (264).

EPGXC heads to Germantown Hills on Saturday, October 6 for a Class 2A Sectional Meet at Great Oaks Community Church. The Girls will race at 10 AM and the Boys will race at 10:45 AM. Fourteen teams will be competing, and the top 3 teams will advance to the IESA State Finals.

Titans Take Individual and Team Titles at Furrow

EPG Girls win Quadrangular for 9th year in a row

[SEPTEMBER 24, 2018] – On a cloudy Monday at Furrow Farm, 101 athletes faced off at the annual EPG Quadrangular Cross Country Meet. Heyworth, Pontiac, and Tremont joined El Paso-Gridley runners for a 2-mile tour through the creek, up and down hills, and along the recently harvested cornfields. Temperatures were in the low 70s, nearly 20 degrees cooler than the EPGJH Invitational 20 days earlier. The Titans came ready to race.

Valerie Hamilton (1st, 14.16) led wire to wire and won by 12 seconds. Tremont's #2 was one second in front of EPG's #2 Hillary Gramm (5th, 14.50), but EPG's #3 and #4 were right there for the Titans – Annabelle Younse (6th, 14.56) and Nellie Melick (7th, 14.57). Tremont's #3 was next, but the EPG girls shut the door on the Turks as Joci Nelson (9th, 15.07) and Lizzie Uphoff (10th, 15.13) were next across the line. EPG's #7 Lauren Shaffer (12th, 15.22) charged up the final hill ahead of Tremont's #4. Shaffer improved her Invitational Furrow time by over a minute, while Younse, Melick, and Nelson ran to a Furrow best by over 2 minutes. Melick's splits were 7.28, 7.29.

Heidi Hunsinger (17th, 16.50) ran 5 minutes 40 seconds faster than 20 days earlier, essentially getting faster at a rate of 17 seconds every day. She ran splits of 8.40, 8.10. Elise Morrison (22nd, 17.46), Callie Whitcomb (26th, 18.28), and Aubrey Phillips (29th, 19.14) also ran Furrow best times, while Nickelle Cummings (31st, 19:37) cranked out a sub-20 for her Furrow debut.

The Girls Team won the Quadrangular for an unprecedented 9th year in a row. Team scores were EPG (24), Tremont (40), Pontiac (73). Heyworth did not field a complete team. In just 20 days, the Titan girls Top 5 average dropped from 16.01 per runner to 14.49 per runner, and marked the 5th fastest time ever run on the Furrow course, sandwiched between the 2014 (14.44) and 2015 (14.51) State-Qualifying teams.

Next up was a Boys field that was twice as large as the Girls field, featuring a rematch of EPGJH Invitational Champion Alex Maas of Heyworth and runner-up Sam Bushert. EPG's Bushert (1st, 11.36) came across the second creek crossing one step ahead of Maas. But Maas took the lead back at 1.3 miles and held the advantage over Bushert as the leaders came out of the "W". With about 500 meters to go, Bushert made a move, but Maas stayed close as the runners cruised through the apple trees and down to the flat. Bushert then opened a gap, charged up the hill, and came away with a 7-second victory over Maas.

Bushert's 11.36 tied the EPG Furrow Course Record set by Asa Smith in 2017. His splits were 5.48, 5.48.

Despite Bushert's success, Reed Newcomb (4th, 12.20) might have turned in the race of the day. He clocked splits of 6.15, 6.05 to earn his Furrow-best time by 72 seconds. After running 12.35 at 3 of the fastest courses in the previous 3 meets, his Furrow time earned him a 15-second lifetime

best on the toughest course in central Illinois. He ran strong from start to finish edging Tremont's #1 runner at the top of the finishing hill by one-tenth of a second.

Payton Romersberger (6th, 12.36), TJ Supan (7th, 12.39), and Dean Witzig (10th, 13.02) all ran big Furrow PRs, with Witzig just 11 seconds shy of his lifetime best set 3 days earlier at Detweiller. Kole Rigsby (11th, 13.13) and Garrison Meyer (21st, 14.16) ran over a minute faster than 20 days earlier, while Jack Erwin (25th, 14.37), Keegan Ruppe (34th, 15.12), Waylon Melick (41st, 16.11), Dylan Moss (42nd, 16.12), Chris Staton (45th, 16.20), and Josiah Meade (48th, 16.30) all ran to Furrow best times. Ruppe's splits of 7.35, 7.37 brought him within 15 seconds of a lifetime best, while Melick missed a lifetime PR by just 10 seconds.

The EPG Boys Team scored a decisive victory with team scoring of EPG (28), Heyworth (55), Pontiac (58), Tremont (94). The Top 5 ran to the 3rd fastest time ever run by a Titan team on this hilly course, averaging 12.27 per runner. Only the State-Qualifying teams of 2017 (12.18) and 2016 (12.26) have run faster at Furrow.

Next up for EPGXC is Saturday morning's Delavan Dare Classic. Races begin at 9 AM.

Times and Temps Dip Nicely at DMS XC Invite

PR parade led by Lizzie Uphoff and Annabelle Younse

[SEPTEMBER 21, 2018] – More than 1500 cross country runners representing 47 schools found their way to the finish line at Friday's Dunlap Middle School Invitational. The weather was beautiful, with temperatures around 74 degrees for the 4 PM start. The 2.1-mile course was in great shape, although clouds of dust were drifting across parts of the course as the pack of runners scampered along during the fourth and largest race.

Valerie Hamilton (112th, 14.32) got the Titans off on the right foot in the 274-runner Girls Varsity race, clocking a 6.37 for her opening mile, with Lizzie Uphoff (124th, 14.39) just six seconds back. The Titan duo held a similar pace for the final 1.1 miles, with Hamilton seven seconds and 12 places ahead at the finish. Uphoff ran to her lifetime best by 45 seconds with a 2-mile adjusted time of 13.57.

Running #3 for EPG was Hillary Gramm (166th, 15.07), over one minute faster than her 2017 Detweiller time. The #4-5-6-7 pack looked great for the Titans, with Lauren Shaffer (179th, 15.19) holding on to the #4 spot by half a second, followed by #5 Joci Nelson (181st, 15.19) and #6 Annabelle Younse (182nd, 15.20) a half step later. Nelson and Younse ran the entire race together, pushing each other to big PRs of 28 seconds and 42 seconds, respectively. Nellie Melick (189th, 15.24) picked up 12-second PR of her own by running her trademark negative splits, 7.19 and 7.17.

Friday's race marked the first time the Girls Varsity team put all 5 runners under 15 minutes, and they did it in style by getting all 7 in at 14.40 or under, with a #1-#5 pack time of just 45 seconds.

Sam Bushert (29th, 12.15) ran to his second-fastest time ever in the Boys Varsity race, a 2-mile adjusted time of 11.40, good for the 6th fastest EPG time on record for the Detweiller course. Payton Romersberger (54th, 12.37) climbed his way up to the #17 EPG runner of all-time with his 12.01 adjusted time, an 11-second lifetime best. TJ Supan (79th, 12.50) ran splits of 5.59, 6.11 and found himself with a 6-second season best at the end of the day. Reed Newcomb (117th, 13.13) tied his PR again as he clocked a 2-mile adjusted time of 12.35 for the third meet in a row.

The Boys Varsity race of the day went to #5 runner Dean Witzig (151st, 13.30) whose splits of 6.16, 6.33 were good for a 22-second PR. Kole Rigsby (169th, 13.38) and Garrison Meyer (223rd, 14.08) were the final EPG runners to cross the line in the 290-runner field.

In the Girls Open race, Aubrey Phillips (254th, 17.26) led the way for the Titans as she ran negative splits after getting temporarily buried in the back of the pack by the mass of runners at the start. Phillips was followed by Heidi Hunsinger (292nd, 17.52), Elise Morrison (295th, 17.54), Callie Whitcomb (312th, 18.09), and Nickelle Cummings (402nd, 19.54) in the 482-runner race. Cummings missed a PR by 4 seconds.

All told, EPGXC came home with nine PRs, one tied PR, and six runners less than ten ticks away from season PRs. The Girls ran to their fastest team time this season, while the Boys made the Top 25 All-Time Titan Team times for the third straight meet.

Next up for EPGXC is the EPGJH Quadrangular at Furrow Farm on Monday. The Girls Race is at 4:30 PM and the Boys Race is at 5 PM. The EPG Girls have run to victory at this four-team meet 8 years in row, 2010-2017.

Titan Cross Country Brings Home 2 Team Trophies

Hillary Gramm and Sam Bushert lead EPG Runners at Corpus Christi Invite

[SEPTEMBER 14, 2018] – Thirteen teams and 267 runners were competing at Friday afternoon's Corpus Christi Invitational. A September sun was shining brightly, and the temperature was near 90 degrees at the start of the first race. The 2.0-mile course features a one challenging hill climb, two shorter hills, open grassy areas, wooded trails, several twists and turns, and two bridge crossings. The football field finish is reliably intense.

Hillary Gramm led the EPG Varsity Girls (12th, 14.11), opening with a 6.55 mile and closing with a 7.16 to earn a 12th place medal. Gramm not only collected an 18-second season best time, but also earned a lifetime best with a performance that was 5 seconds faster than her time at the 2017 State Finals.

Sixth-grader Lauren Shaffer (23rd, 15.22) ran #2 for the Titans, followed by Lizzie Uphoff (27th, 15.33). Both finished strong to edge out other runners, with Uphoff clocking even splits of 7.44, 7.49.

Joci Nelson (29th, 15.37) ran #4 for EPG with a time that was over 3 minutes faster than her 2017 Ewing Park time. Nellie Melick (32nd, 15.48) was the only Varsity girl to run negative splits with her 7.58, 7.50 clocking and closed out the scoring for the Top 5. Annabelle Younse (36th, 16.01) crossed the finish line just 13 seconds later. There were 63 girls in the race.

With Corpus Christi putting their entire team in the Top 25 and St. Matthew scorers placing between 8th and 17th, only the 3rd place trophy was up for grabs, and it looked like it would go to either Dee-Mack or EPG. Both teams had only one runner in the Top 20. Dee-Mack put their #2 in front of EPG's #2, their #3 in front of EPG's #3, and their #4 in front of EPG's #4. But with the Titans' #5 and #6 runners placing ahead of Dee-Mack's #5, El Paso-Gridley secured a 5-point margin to earn the 3rd place trophy. Top 5 teams were Corpus Christi (21), St. Matthew (54), EPG (109), Dee-Mack (114), Heyworth (146).

Sam Bushert (2nd, 11.55) ran a patient and disciplined race. St. Matthew's Ryan Hendrickson took an early lead on his way to a 20-second victory. Bushert was at the back of the chase pack in 6th as runners crossed the bridge shortly before the 1200m mark at the base of the big hill. By the

time runners crossed the bridge at the 1.3-mile mark, Bushert had moved into second. His perfect splits of 5.57/5.58 helped him become only the fourth Titan to break the 12-minute barrier on this course.

EPG's #2 runner TJ Supan (6th, 12.19) tied his season-best by matching Bushert's perfect pacing, clocking mile times of 6.09 and 6.10. Payton Romersberger (8th, 12.25) and Reed Newcomb (10th, 12.35) both ran superb splits as well (6:10/6:15 and 6:15/6:20, respectively). Newcomb tied his lifetime best.

Kole Rigsby (14th, 12.38) ran strong and smart as the Titans' #5, clocking 6.16/6.22 splits, while Dean Witzig (36th, 13.29) managed to run 3-second negative splits at 6.46/6.43 while finishing in the top half of the 87-runner Varsity field.

It was a strong showing by the Titan Boys Varsity team, as their team average of 12.22 was the second fastest ever run on the Ewing Park course. Their team effort also marked the second week in a row that they made it into the record books as one of the Top 25 EPG team efforts ever. Their pack time was the best this season at 43 seconds. Top 5 teams were EPG (40), Corpus Christi (104), Heyworth (105), Dee-Mack (110), St. Matthew (114).

Heidi Hunsinger (3rd, 15.26) had the race of her life in the Girls Open, clocking a 30-second PR, the biggest Titan PR of the day for the Titans. Callie Whitcomb (12th, 16.45) also picked up big PR of 26 seconds, as well as a Top 15 award. Other EPG runners in the Girls Open were Elise Morrison (24th, 19.04), Nickelle Cummings (28th, 19.31), and Aubrey Phillips (31st, 19.43). All three ran negative splits in the 54-runner race.

Garrison Meyer (1st, 13.50) clocked splits of 6.45, 7.05, taking the lead just before the mile mark and running to victory in the Boys Open race. Jack Ewing (2nd, 13.55) almost chased down his teammate while running 6.53/7.02 splits on his way to his second lifetime best in as many meets, breaking the 14-minute barrier for the first time.

Keegan Ruppe (12th, 14.57) looked strong as he picked up a 27-second lifetime best and a Top 15 award by running splits of 7.44, 7.13. Chris Staton (28th, 16.09), Waylon Melick (32nd, 16.19), and Josiah Meade (41st, 17.07) were also competing in the 63-runner field. Melick's splits were 8.09/8.10 and Meade's time was 9 seconds faster than his 2017 clocking on this course.

Next up for EPGXC is the Dunlap Middle School Invitational at Detweiller Park in Peoria on Friday, September 21. Races are scheduled for 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, and 5:30.

EPGXC Runs 21 PRs at Rain-Soaked Maxwell Park Bushert takes 19th; Phillips cuts 107 seconds off her best

[SEPTEMBER 8, 2018] – Forty-nine hours of intermittent rain showers tapered off just in time for forty-nine teams to run the Parkside Invitational at Maxwell Park on a cool Saturday morning. Just under 1,800 runners were competing, with a variety of Class 1A, 2A, and 3A schools from across the state in attendance. There were some slippery spots on the saturated course as a few raindrops continued to fall. Titan PRs fell all morning long as well.

Valerie Hamilton (74th, 13.19) got things rolling for the Varsity Girls by clocking 6.35/6:44 splits to earn her way onto the All-Time EPGXC records board at #19. It was a sparkling 49-second PR for Hamilton.

Hillary Gramm (164th, 14.29), Lauren Shaffer (178th, 14.34), and Nellie Melick (206th, 14.52) all ran negative splits and all earned season PRs by 23, 47, and 56 seconds, respectively. Gramm ran 46 seconds faster than last year despite course conditions, and closed to within 13 seconds of her lifetime best set at State 2017. Lizzie Uphoff (211th, 14.58) finished #5 for the Titans, marking the first time this season that the EPG Girls Team has put 5 runners under 15 minutes.

Joci Nelson (220th, 15.03) ran to yet another lifetime best, and has dropped over 3 minutes so far this season. Annabelle Younse (235th, 15.18) ran #7 and clocked a 57-second PR.

There were 304 Varsity Girls competing, with Alex Reinhart of Parkside JH leading her team to victory while winning the 3200-meter race in 11 minutes 27 seconds. The Titan girls (820) placed 29th, between St. Philomena (28th, 814) and Metamora (30th, 832).

Sam Bushert (19th, 11.27) opened with a 5.48 mile and kept moving up through the field, closing with a 5.39 mile to become the 9th fastest runner ever at EPGJH. Four days earlier, Heyworth's Alex Maas had beaten Bushert by 2 seconds at Furrow Farm; today Bushert finished 48 places and 39 seconds ahead of Maas.

Payton Romersberger (80th, 12.12) ran 6.11/6.01 as EPG's #2, climbing to #20 on the EPGXC All-Time list. TJ Supan (95th, 12.19) found his way into the Top 100 despite catching a hard elbow from another runner with about 600 meters to go. Reed Newcomb (124th, 12.35) and Kole Riggsby (129th, 12.36) finished #4 and #5 for the Titans, whose team average dropped from 12.52 to 12.14, good for a share of the 15th fastest EPGXC team average ever.

Dean Witzig (197th, 13.13) clocked a 37-second PR, while Jack Erwin (254th, 14.11) clocked a 40 second season best while also earning a lifetime best by 2 seconds. All 7 Varsity boys ran to PRs, led by Bushert's 44-second drop.

The EPG Boys team (447) placed 13th, finishing as one of the highest placing Class 2A schools in the meet. Only three Class 2A schools finished ahead of the Titans – Westview Hills (2nd, 146), Dunlap Valley (8th, 262), and Tolono Unity (11th, 387). The 328-runner Varsity Boys race was led by Grant Miller of Westview Hills in 11 minutes 4 seconds.

Heidi Hunsinger (175th, 15.56) led EPG's Open runners in the third race of the day, clocking a 32-second PR. Aubrey Phillips (196th, 16.15) ran to the biggest Titan PR of the day, smashing her previous best by 1 minute 47 seconds despite less than ideal course conditions. Elise Morrison (217th, 16.30) ran to a 23-second season best while closing to within half a minute of her lifetime best. Callie Whitcomb (305th, 17.25) and Nickelle Cummings (413th, 18.53) turned in strong performances in the 498-runner field with Cummings knocking 33 seconds off her previous best time.

Garrison Meyer (61st, 13.20) charged through the Maxwell course with determination, running to a 74-second season best, just ten ticks off his lifetime best. Keegan Ruppe (314th, 15.24) and Josiah Meade (352nd, 15.44) ran to all-time PR's, as did Waylon Melick (379th, 16.01) who continues to cut huge amounts of time, today running to a 54-second lifetime best. Dylan Ruppe (500th, 17.25) was the final finisher for the Titans in the largest race of the day – 650 runners.

Next up for EPGXC is the Corpus Christi Invite at Ewing Park on Friday, September 14. Races are scheduled for 4:00, 4:30, 4:55, and 5:20.

Titan Boys 3rd at 25-Team Home Invite

Bushert runner-up; Hamilton leads EPG girls with PR performance

[SEPTEMBER 4, 2018] – The 12th Annual EPGJH Invitational saw some big numbers: 585 runners, 25 teams, and a sunny 90 degrees at the start. Teams came to run the popular 3200-meter Furrow Farm course from as far away as Ottawa (60 miles), Knoxville (70 miles), and Athens (80 miles). The hills were steep, the creeks were muddy, and the conditions were challenging.

In the Girls Varsity race, Valerie Hamilton (13th, 14.08) put down a spectacular performance, clocking 7.01 for her first mile and maintaining that pace as she caught runner after runner to move up through the field throughout the hilly course. She earned a coveted Top 25 Varsity medal with her 1-second PR on a hot day, dismissing the axiom that “Nobody PRs at Furrow.”

Hillary Gramm (34th, 15.08) cut 70 seconds off her 2017 clocking despite the heat. Lauren Shaffer (68th, 16.31) moved up to the number 3 spot for the Titans, with Lizzie Uphoff (77th, 16.57) running #4. Varsity runner Joci Nelson (83rd, 17.19) ran 52 seconds faster than last year to find herself in the Titan Top 5 for the second meet in a row.

Nellie Melick (84th, 17.22) was one place behind Joci, followed closely by #7 Annabelle Younse (88th, 17.28) making her Varsity debut.

The Titan girls placed 10th with 259 points, just one point behind Dunlap Valley (258) but well ahead of Delavan (319) and Dee-Mack (329). Peoria St. Jude’s Maria Stedwill (1st, 12.38) ran 20 seconds faster than last year to win for the second year in a row.

In the Boys Varsity race, Sam Bushert (2nd, 12.26) was locked in a battle with Heyworth’s Alex Maas (1st, 12.24) and Dunlap Valley’s Henry Welsh (3rd, 12.30) for much of the race. Bushert took the lead 0.75 miles into the race at the second creek crossing, but Maas and Welsh both reeled him in. With Bushert on the verge of falling further back at 1.6 miles, he summoned up the will to hang tough, and with 200 meters to go he caught and passed Welsh. He then put the hammer down, kicked up the final hill, and closed to within 2 seconds of Maas before crossing the line in the 6th fastest EPG time at Furrow on record.

Payton Romersberger (13th, 13.14) and TJ Supan (15th, 13.15) both ran smart and strong, moving up through the field much like Hamilton had done in the Girls Varsity race. Both boys clocked faster times than last year on this course, Romersberger running to the biggest Furrow Best (FB) of any Titan, slicing 80 seconds off his 2017 time.

Reed Newcomb (26th, 13.32) had a great race despite missing out on a medal by one second, while Kole Rigsby (46th, 14.14) finished ahead of every #5 runner at the meet, excepting two athletes from Dunlap (Dunlap Middle and Dunlap Valley). Dean Witzig (58th, 14.26) was within 36 seconds of his lifetime best, and was followed by #7 runner Garrison Meyer (92nd, 15.41).

Class 3A Dunlap Middle took the Boys Team title with 56 points, followed by Dunlap Valley (76). El Paso-Gridley (102) claimed the 3rd place trophy, well ahead of 4th place Pekin Junior High (169).

Titan athletes competing in the 143-runner Girls Open race included Callie Whitcomb (48th, 18.55), Elise Morrison (86th, 21.25), Heidi Hunsinger (99th, 22.30), and Aubrey Phillips (120th, 24.31).

Jack Erwin (25th, 15.16) nabbed the final Top 25 medal as he turned in a 25-second FB. Waylon Melick (84th, 18.04) ran strong on his home course, and was followed by Josiah Meade (90th, 18.20), Keegan Ruppe (102nd, 19.01), Dylan Moss (103rd, 19.02), and Chris Staton (142nd, 23.58) in the biggest race of the day, 168 boys.

Next up for EPGXC is the Parkside Invitational at Maxwell Park on Saturday, September 8. Races are scheduled for 9:30, 10:00, 10:30, and 11:00 with awards at noon.

EPGXC Girls Win 7-Team Meet at Metamora Titans run to 22 PRs at Black Partridge Park

[AUGUST 30, 2018] – Seven teams faced off at Black Partridge Park for a Thursday meet hosted by the Metamora Redbirds. The 2.1-mile grass and trail course featured some mostly flat grassy paths with some wooded hilly trails between 1.1 and 1.5 miles. It was sunny and pleasant, with temperatures just a shade under 80 degrees.

Valerie Hamilton (4th, 14.51) placed fourth for the second meet in a row to lead the Titans. Lizzie Uphoff (7th, 15.32) was EPG's #2 while Hillary Gramm (8th, 15.37) notched a 2-mile adjusted season PR of 61 seconds.

Joci Nelson (13th, 16.02) ran the race of her life, looking strong and determined from start to finish while clocking a season best time by more than 2 minutes and earning a lifetime best converted time of 15.16. Lauren Shaffer (15th, 16.07) was right with her as EPG's #5.

Nellie Melick (19th, 16.36) clocked a huge adjusted PR of 1 minute 50 seconds, while Annabelle Younse (21st, 17.05) sliced over 2 minutes off her lifetime best, running #7 for EPG.

The other five girls running for the Titans were Heidi Hunsinger (23rd, 17.18), Elise Morrison (29th, 17.44), Callie Whitcomb (31st, 18.03), Aubrey Phillips (36th, 18.56), and Nickelle Cummings (20.24). Cummings clocked a 2-minute lifetime best, while Phillips ran to a 3 minute 25 second PR.

All 12 girls ran to season PRs.

The girls strong pack of 5 in the top 15 enabled them to earn the team victory with the top 3 team scores showing EPG (47), Metamora (51), Blessed Sacrament (54).

The boys were led by TJ Supan (4th, 13.06) and Payton Romersberger (5th, 13.08). Romersberger ran to an adjusted 2-mile lifetime best 12.30 to give him a share of the 25th best All-Time mark with Josh Larson (2009). Reed Newcomb (7th, 13.18) and Kole Rigsby (8th, 13.28) ran to big PRs as well. Dean Witzig (20th, 14.31) ran to his best time ever, despite losing about 20 seconds when he inadvertently went off course.

Garrison Meyer (15.26) and Jack Erwin (16.00) ran #6 and #7 for the Titans, with Keegan Ruppe (16.23), Chris Staton (16.25), Dylan Moss (17.16), Josiah Meade (17.04), and Waylon Melick (17.46) following. Meade broke his lifetime best from last season by over a minute, while Ruppe, Moss, and Melick all sliced about 2 minutes off their previous best times. Staton dropped the most time of all ten EPG boys who ran to season PRs by cutting 2 minutes 49 seconds, running a 2-mile adjusted time of 15.38.

The boys were missing top runner Sam Bushert, but still managed to place second in the 7-team field. Top 3 boys teams were Metamora (34), EPG (47), Blessed Sacrament (64).

Next up for EPGXC is the 12th annual EPGJH Invitational at Furrow Farm on Tuesday, September 4. Twenty-five teams and 681 runners are registered and races begin at 4 PM.

EPGXC Girls 2nd, Boys 1st at Eureka Lake

Titan boys edge Mossville by 2 points

[AUGUST 21, 2018] – The Eureka Hornets hosted a 5-team meet at Eureka Lake Tuesday afternoon. Other than some scattered hickory nuts and a mud pit on the trails courtesy of recent rains, the 1.93-mile course was in good shape.

Valerie Hamilton (4th, 14.50) followed up her Saturday debut in the Open race at Clinton by leading the Varsity girls at Eureka. She was followed by Hillary Gramm (10th, 15.31), Lizzie Uphoff (12th, 15.51), and Lauren Shaffer (15th, 16.33). Cassidy Bergquist (17th, 16.38) ran to a lifetime best as EPG's #5 runner, crossing the line five seconds after Shaffer.

Joci Nelson (21st, 16.49) had the race of the day for the Titans, running to the biggest PR of the day with her converted 2-mile time of 17.26. Nellie Melick (25th, 17.21) was EPG's #7.

Callie Whitcomb (26th, 17.29), Chloe Atkins (30th, 18.03), Annabelle Younse (31st, 18.04), Elise Morrison (37th, 18.52), Aubrey Phillips (48th, 20.42), Nickelle Cummings (50th, 21.26), and Heidi Hunsinger (51st, 22.06) all finished strong in the 54-runner field. Whitcomb and Phillips ran to lifetime best times.

Girls team scores were Eureka (43), EPG (58), Delavan (72), Mossville (82), Tremont (100). Mossville's Ella Hill won in 13 minutes 59 seconds.

In the Boys race, Sam Bushert (3rd, 12.42) was 17 seconds off the winning pace set by Gabe Ross of Mossville. Things were looking good for the Warriors as their #3 runner crossed the finish line with EPG's #2 yet to be seen. But then the Titan pack rolled in, and after TJ Supan (8th, 13.11), Reed Newcomb (9th, 13.14), and Payton Romersberger (10th, 13.14) concluded their races, the Titans had pulled within 3 points of Mossville.

Now it was up to the #5 runners, and Dean Witzig (16th, 14.00) blazed past some competitors in the final 600 meters to place 8 seconds in front of Mossville's #5 runner. Kole Rigsby (18th, 14.05) also sneaked in ahead of Mossville's #5 who placed 21st. Six runners finished between 14.00 and 14.08 and EPG had earned a narrow two-point victory.

#7 runner Billy Holt (23rd, 14.16) ran to the lone lifetime-best for the boys with his converted 2-mile time of 14.47.

Other EPG athletes competing in the 74-runner boys field were Garrison Meyer (28th, 14.53), Jack Erwin (51st, 16.55), Keegan Ruppe (53rd, 17.23), Chris Staton (62nd, 18.46), Dylan Moss (63rd, 18.47), Waylon Melick (64th, 18.47), and Josiah Meade (67th, 19.28).

Boys team scores were EPG (46), Mossville (48), Delavan (76), Tremont (78), Eureka (103). The EPG boys have won all three of their meets this year.

Next up for EPGXC is another 5-team meet Monday afternoon at Pontiac. Races are scheduled for 4:15 PM (girls) and 4:45 PM (boys).

Boys Win Maroon Invite by 3 Points

EPGXC runners bring home 19 PRs

[AUGUST 18, 2018] – Clinton Junior High hosted its annual invitational cross country meet at Little Galilee Christian Camp a few miles southwest of Clinton on a humid Saturday morning. Much of the 2-mile course winds through wooded trails. Wood chips had replaced the bridge at the base of the finishing descent, but the challenging uphill at 1.5 miles was still standing tall.

Seven teams were competing in the Girls Varsity race, as Heyworth elected to put all their runners in the Open. The Titans started patiently in the back and moved up nicely through the 43-runner field. Just after the hill climb and with less than a half mile remaining, EPG's front three girls were running together in the top half of the field.

At the finish line it was Lizzie Uphoff (18th, 15.33) leading the Titans, followed by Hillary Gramm (21st, 15.53), and Lauren Shaffer (24th, 15.58). All 3 girls turned in season-best performances.

Elise Morrison (33rd, 17.25) ran over a minute faster than just 4 days earlier at Crescent City, clocking the biggest time drop of all Varsity Girls. Annabelle Younse (34th, 18.30) and Nellie Melick (36th, 18.33) were the final two Varsity girls crossing the finish line for EPG, as Heidi Hunsinger suffered a twisted ankle mid-race and was unable to finish.

Team scoring for the girls was tight with St. Agnes (50) just edging Olympia (53) and Monticello (54). El Paso-Gridley (130) placed 6th, just three points behind Christ the King, whose top athlete Kaitlyn Lee ran to the individual victory in a time of 12 minutes 38 seconds.

Sam Bushert (1st, 12.13) led the Varsity Boys, capturing his second win in two races by besting Heyworth's Alex Maas by 8 seconds. It was the fifth-fastest time ever run on this course by a Titan athlete.

TJ Supan (6th, 12.45), Reed Newcomb (13th, 13.31), and Payton Romersberger (14th, 13.35) grabbed Top 15 medals, and Kole Rigsby (19th, 14.04) closed out the scoring as EPG's #5. Dean Witzig (25th, 14.16) and Billy Holt (38th, 14.57) rounded out the Varsity Boys squad.

Six of seven EPG boys ran to season-best times, and it was just enough to edge Heyworth for the team trophy. Top 3 teams were EPG (53) placing 1-6-13-14-19; Heyworth (56) placing 2-4-15-17-18; and Taylorville (68) placing 8-11-12-16-21.

In the Girls Open, Valerie Hamilton (2nd, 14.54) showed she was ready to compete in her first-ever XC competition. At a quarter mile she was in 5th, with a half mile to go she had moved into 3rd, and with a quarter mile to go she moved into the runner-up position to capture second place.

Cassidy Bergquist (15th, 17.28) set a lifetime best by 3 minutes 15 seconds, passed two runners near the end of the 2-mile race, and grabbed the final Top 15 award. Joci Nelson (23rd, 18.10) returned from a few days of illness to make a strong 2018 debut. Callie Whitcomb (31st, 18.43) ran to a 63-second PR, and Nickelle Cummings (37th, 21.26) slashed 26 seconds off her previous best.

In the Boys Open, Garrison Meyer (3rd, 14.34) set a 50-second season best and matched his 2017 third-place finish. Jack Erwin (8th, 14.53) clocked a huge 71-second season best and is quickly closing in on his lifetime best. Keegan Ruppe (36th, 17.30) ran to a PR, Dylan Moss (41st, 18.18) set an appropriate PR on 8-18-2018, Josiah Meade (18.46) ran over a minute faster than last year on this course, Chris Staton (18.54) survived the hills and helped Waylon Melick (19.01) to the biggest PR of all the boys. Melick ran 83 seconds faster on the hilly Clinton course than he did four days earlier at Crescent City.

EPGXC will head down Route 24 to a 5-team meet at Eureka Lake on Tuesday afternoon. There will be a Girls Race at 4 PM and a Boys Race at 4:30 PM.

Titan XC Girls and Boys Win at Crescent City

EPG Girls win by 9; Bushert leads boys

[AUGUST 14, 2018] – Crescent City hosted an 8-team meet at the Iroquois County Fairgrounds on a sunny August afternoon. The 3200-meter grass course looped around the perimeter of the fairgrounds twice, crossing several narrow gravel drives along the way.

The Girls Race got underway at 4:15 p.m. The top two places went to the Wrobel sisters of Rantoul St. Malachy, with 6th-grader Angelle winning in 12 minute 54 seconds. Clifton Nash's Marquis sisters took the next two spots. But the Titans put 7 runners in front of St. Malachy's #3 and Nash's #4, sealing a 9-point victory at their first meet of the year. Team scores were EPG (43), Nash (52), St. Malachy (62), Crescent City (82), Manteno (116). Individual runners from three other schools were competing as well.

Top 7 runners for the Titans were Hillary Gramm (8th, 16.07), Lizzie Uphoff (10th, 16.13), Lauren Shaffer (12th, 16.28), Nellie Melick (13th, 17.38), Heidi Hunsinger (14th, 18.21), Annabelle Youse (15th, 18.22), and Elise Morrison (17th, 18.33). Uphoff and Melick had the best splits for the girls, running 30 and 31 seconds positive, respectively. Gramm ran 3 minutes 51 seconds faster than her first meet in 2017, while Morrison opened her season nearly 6 minutes faster than last year.

Next across the line for the Titan girls were Callie Whitcomb (24th, 19.46), Cassidy Bergquist (29th, 20.43), Aubrey Phillips (35th, 21.48), and Nickelle Cummings (36th, 21.52).

The Boys Race saw Sam Bushert take the lead just before the 800-meter mark. He hit the mile mark at 5 minutes 46 seconds, then cruised in for the victory with a lifetime best time of 12 minutes 11 seconds, moving up to #19 on the EPG all-time list. TJ Supan (2nd, 13.01) and Payton Romersberger (4th, 13.18) were next across the finish line. Romersberger ran 2 minutes 2 seconds faster than his 2017 opening meet.

The 7th-grader foursome of Reed Newcomb (7th, 14.08), Kole Rigsby (8th, 14.25), Dean Witzig (9th, 14.46), and Billy Read (10th, 15.05) rounded out the Top 7 Titan runners. Witzig had the best splits of the first seven boys, following up his 7.15 with a 7.31.

The second half of the Titan squad included Garrison Meyer (11th, 15.24), Jack Erwin (14th, 16.04), Keegan Ruppe (19th, 17.40), Josiah Meade (20th, 17.43), Dylan Moss (22nd, 18.25), Chris Staton (23rd, 18.27), and Waylon Melick (27th, 20.24). Ruppe ran smart splits of 8.48, 8.52, while Meade ran the only negative splits of the day, running his second mile 3 seconds faster than his first mile, and clocking a time that was 9 minutes 11 seconds faster than his opening meet last season.

Runners from 5 schools were competing, but just EPG and Clifton Nash were fielding full teams. EPG won the matchup 19-42.

EPGXC travels to Clinton for a Saturday morning invitational on August 18. Races begin at 9 AM.