

Record

DCC Invitational 5th place, score 140 Pleasant Valley 1st place, score 33 Marshalltown Community College 1st place, score 40 Ballard Golf & Country Club 10th place, score 261 Wartburg College 1st place, score 47	Fort Dodge Invitational 1st place, score 26 S.E. Polk 2nd place, score 40 4A SQM Council Bluffs Lincoln 1st place, score 33 4A State Championship 1st place, score 64
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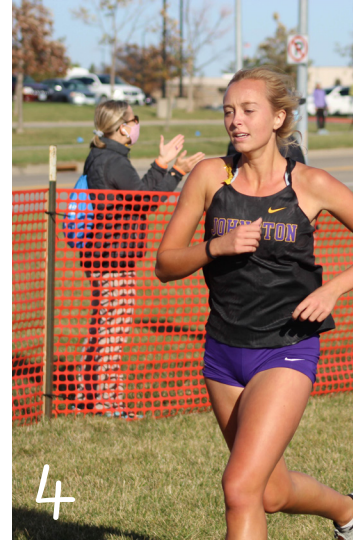
Junior Aleah Tenpas runs the second mile of the Iowa Western State Qualifying meet. Tenpas finished in 19:40. She finished ninth at state, one of three placing in the top 10, the other two being freshman Olivia Verde in sixth and senior Bella Heikes in third. Photo by Victoria Verde

1. Senior Ashley Faber places 17th in her first state cross country meet. "I was super excited but also super nervous, I had never been to the state cross country meet so I wasn't sure on what to expect," Faber said. "The team part made it so much more fun and is unlike any sport I had done. Everyone is so supportive of one another." Photo by Victoria Verde

2. Running her first ever State Cross Country meet, freshmen Olivia Verde strides to the finish. Verde placed seventh in 18:27. "My goal through the season was to make it to State!" she said. "Knowing that we all worked so hard through the season and then kicking butt out there was very exciting." Photo by Victoria Verde

3. Striding down the hill, senior Sam Strauss runs a 20:42 at the CIML Conference Meet at S.E. Polk High School. "My favorite part of the season was the Wartburg meet," she said. "It was the first time our entire team was able to race together this year and I loved competing at a new course." Strauss was a University of Iowa commit. Photo by Victoria Verde

4. Finishing her final race of the season, senior Addy Franklin pushes herself and gets a 22:18. "I will miss the people in cross country and how fun some of the workouts could be," she said. "I'll miss how much fun it was to travel for meets." Photo by Victoria Verde



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Girls take state again

It's hard to be ranked #1.

It was a spot the girls' cross country team found themselves in again after winning the team state championship the year before.

Just like all defending champions, someone was on their heels. For the Dragons, it was West Des Moines Valley.

A sign that Valley was drawing closer came during a regular season meet at Fort Dodge. The race was split into two groups. Valley in one and Johnston in the other. When all the places were added, Valley came out ahead.

Weeks later, the Dragons took on the conference meet at S.E. Polk. Losing their first conference meet in five years, Valley officially beat them by five points. Valley's Lauren Schultze and Addison Dorenkamp took first and third. The Dragon's senior Bella Heikes and freshman Olivia Verde took second and fourth. "It was stressful," junior Aleah Tenpas said. "We didn't know what to think."

Before leaving the course, the team met and talked. Coach Pat Hennes talked about refocusing and positioning themselves for the state qualifying meet and state meet.

"Probably the only hiccup was at the conference meet, where we ended up losing against Valley," Hennes said. "That was just kind of a good wakeup call for us."

Tenpas agreed. "We are really going to have to want this to win it."

They had done all the training and put in the work over the summer and during the season. "It wasn't a matter of working harder at that point," Hennes said, "more a matter of getting refocused, and making sure we knew what we were capable of. Getting everyone dialed in."

Back at practice they trained for the mental aspect of racing, by acting out the first kilometer of the state meet. They stopped at different points and talked through what should be happening and what they should be thinking.

"Hennes kept on saying we didn't need anything magical to happen, we just needed to do our best," junior Bailey Vaughn said.

The team headed up to the state meet in Fort Dodge on Oct. 30. Moments before they took the course they replicated that practice, reviewing mentally and physically. With the course weaving around they were able to focus on different parts of it. Near the end runners cross a mini bridge and face a large hill before reaching the finish. By the bridge, runners can see the awards podium. Hennes told them to look up as they crossed the bridge and to imagine themselves up there. Then, power up the hill.

"We focused on the girls ahead of us," Tenpas said. "Worked on staying around them and beating everyone we could."

The team landed their spot on the champions' podium beating second-place Valley 64 to 87. Heikes placed fourth, Verde seventh and Tenpas 11th.

"I was so thankful that we were able to compete this year and to wrap up our season on the podium in Fort Dodge, made it so special," Heikes said.

Sprinting the last 400 of the Iowa Western State Qualifying meet, junior Bailey Vaughan runs a 20:29. She liked the course. "It had some tough parts but also went by super quick," she said. "The course changes a lot and has a section that goes through the woods which makes it super interesting." Photo by Victoria Verde



Senior Bella Heikes competes at the Lakeside Golf Course in the State Cross Country meet. Heikes finished in fourth place running a 18:20. "Prior to state we had talked a lot about not putting pressure on ourselves, so during the race I didn't worry about the possible outcomes and stayed calm," she said. "I just focused on doing my best and enjoying my last high school race." Photo by Victoria Verde

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065 girls XC

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