



Mustangs' Kenny runs to victory

By Ed Flink
STAFF WRITER

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EAST HARTFORD -- Immaculate High senior Moira Kenny gave her father exactly what he wanted for his birthday.

Starting fast and finishing strong, Kenny captured the State Open girls race by 11 seconds, completing the 5,000-meter course in 18:45 Friday at Wickham Park.

"It feels awesome," she said. "And then I gave my dad a huge hug at the end because it's his birthday today and he told me for his birthday he wanted me to win the race. I've had this as a major goal all season. So when I found out it was actually on his birthday it just gave me extra motivation to win the race."

Along with making Joe Kenny an extremely proud father, she became only the second area girl to win the Open, following Ridgefield graduate Heather Stephens' victory last fall. Ever since, the bulls-eye was on the Sherman resident because her fourth-place finish was the best among underclassmen.

"All season people were telling me I'm the top returner. Finally actually winning the race made me really excited," she said.

Kenny knew it wouldn't be easy, however, due to the presence of Glastonbury senior Kristen Malloy, who beat her by 13 seconds at the Hartford Riverfront Festival in mid-September and ran 10 seconds faster than her (competing in a different class) at the state meet last week.

Nevertheless, Kenny found a way to prevail in the biggest race of the season. Darien senior Caroline McDonough, the Fairfield County Interscholastic Athletic Conference champion, was the runner-up in 18:56. Nonnwaug sophomore Jackie Nicholas took third (19:01); Bunnell junior Lauren Sara was fourth (19:05).

Malloy wound up fifth in 19:06, after posting a meet-best time of 18:34 last week en route to the Class LL title. For whatever reason, she wasn't a factor in this race.

"I was a little surprised (Malloy wasn't in contention) but I like to go out fast," Kenny said. "I know that's not everyone's favorite way to go out. I just didn't see her."

She did see McDonough, however. Eight minutes into the race, they were side by side. But as they trudged up the steep hill, Kenny took a 5-meter lead. Slowly but surely she began to pull away. Despite a comfortable cushion coming up the final straightaway, Kenny never broke stride or looked back, pushing herself with the determined look of a champion.

"I actually felt really good. I went out hard. I think that helped me, just to get my head clear and get me into my own race," she said.

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"Usually when I run somebody else's race it doesn't help me and I don't do too well. But when I get out there and do my own race it helps me the best."

Crossing the line, she ended a week of anxious anticipation with another stellar performance and put an exclamation point on a scholastic cross country career that didn't begin until she quit field hockey following her freshman year.

"The nerves were building up all week and now that I'm done it dust feels amazing. I can't even describe it. I'm so excited," Kenny said.

Ridgefield junior Katie Howley was 10th in 19:28. She ran 14 seconds slower than last week, when she was third in Class LL and shared the fourth-fastest time of the meet.

"I felt really good even though my time wasn't as fast. Everyone's time was a little off from the class meet," Howley noted. "I think it's because it's maybe a little bit hotter."

Last week's performance caught her a bit by surprise.

"When I discovered that I was placed that high I was not expecting that at all," she said. "I realized that I should just do what I did the week before, keep training as hard as I did and not get too cocky or get too scared. Just do my best and stay calm."

Howley, who passed several runners down the stretch, got off to a rough start and was 14th

going up the hill.

"I think she got boxed in behind some people," Ridgefield coach Sandy Hoddinott said. "I think she got caught in traffic at the beginning."

"I did not want to go out too fast. I didn't want to win the first or second mile. I wanted to do my best at the end," Howley said. "I picked people off and then just kicked it in. I'm very happy I'm 10th. Last year I didn't even make it onto the stage (at East Hartford High for the post-race ceremony) and get All-State so I'm very happy with my place and I'm happy I could represent my team this way."

Howley helped the Tigers finish fifth with 183 points and earn their eighth consecutive trip to the New England championship meet. Also scoring were senior Kelly Holmes (62nd), junior Kori Krichko (74th), sophomore Jenna McClane (75th) and freshman Jenna Ventrella (102nd).

Ridgefield pulled it off even though co-No. 1 scorer Isabella Corso struggled to finish.

"Izzy's quads cramped up. She ended up walking," Hoddinott said.

"I'm very pleased. We lost essentially our No. 1 and yet we're still able to go to New England's. I think that's pretty good," he added.

Glastonbury, the top-seeded team in the coaches' state poll, easily defended its title by putting four girls in the top 18 and scoring 38 points. Runner-up Guilford had 94

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Joining Kenny, Howley and the Tigers at the New England meet will be Pomperaug senior Jeanne Theleen (23rd, 19:52) and New Fairfield freshman Allison Thoms (25th, 20:00).

Also competing as a team at the Open were South-West Conference champion Newtown (9th, 285 points), Class M champion New Fairfield (16th, 355 points) and New Milford (17th, 365 points).

The top 25 individuals and the top six teams qualified for the New England championships Saturday at Derryfield Park in Manchester, N.H.

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