

WHS XC Has Stellar Day At Carnival

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga High women's cross country team has picked up right where it left off last fall.

The Pioneers turned in a solid season in 2010 as Darby Middlebrook became WHS's first state champions in women's cross country in 16 years (Addie Bower was the last to do it in 1994), and the Pioneers turned in a second-place finish at the Class 4A state meet. Well, in two meets this season, Middlebrook has continued her torrid pace.

After winning the women's junior race at the Pioneer Clash of the Classes August 20, Middlebrook followed that up by winning the women's championship race Saturday at the Western North Carolina Cross Country Carnival in Asheville. Middlebrook completed the three-mile course in 18:25.34. Teamwise, the Pioneers finished second with 76 points; Broughton won the meet with 60 points.

"Darby sat back for the first half of the race, and then she turned it on," said WHS coach Randy McDonough. "She looked very good. Darby is running with a lot of confidence right now." The Pioneers had four runners in the top five. Hannah Barbour was third (18:26.02), Madison Harmon was 15th (20:07.52) and Hailey Middlebrook was 19th (20:12.59).

"And Hailey really ran a strong race," McDonough said. "It was a great effort on her part. Confidence has been a problem for her in the past, but today, she was real confident. And Madison turned in a good effort. She's been bothered by a hip injury since last winter (at the state indoor track meet last February), and at times she's fine, and other times, she's had a tough time. But today, she ran a strong race. She's slowly getting healthy."

Broughton bested WHS by 16 points to win the meet, but the Pioneers finished 64 points ahead of T.C. Roberson.

"Broughton really came out of nowhere today," McDonough said. "They must have really stepped things up this summer. They ran a super race, and (T.C.) Roberson is breaking in a lot of young girls. They're not rebuilding, they're reloading. But I have a lot of confidence in this team. If Hannah (Barbour) can stay healthy and run like she did today, she can be a top five runner in the state.

"But we have a lot of girls that can be in the top ten (in the state). It's still early. We've only run two meets. We still have improvements to make. Finding a number five runner is our biggest challenge right now. But we have the talent. That second-placed finish last season has really motivated this team. They've worked very hard this summer."

The WHS women haven't won a cross country title since 1995.

The men's team finished eighth in the championship race on Saturday with 180 points. They also had two runners in the top 20---Peter Vandenberg was eighth (16:27.94) and Josh Anderson was 13th (16:50.20). Broughton won the meet with 80 points.

"Our boys are still coming along," McDonough said. "They're still on the way up, and they won't graduate a senior from this group. We have a lot of depth. There's 14 guys that can crack our top seven. If it doesn't happen this year, next season could be their year."

The WHS boys won the open race by besting the field with 64 points. Providence Day School finished a distant second with 100 points. Former home-schooler Jesse Chasteen, a senior who will play basketball for the Pioneers this winter, paced WHS by finishing sixth in 19:21.41. WHS had four runners in the top 20; Brian Brackney was 11th (19:31.81), Drew Boyette was 12th

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(19:32.86), and Noah Allain was 14th (19:36.95); Mitch Howell was 21st (19:57.04).

"That shows our depth with the boys," McDonough said. "Winning the open race was a big accomplishment for them. They ran a great race."

Julia Roberts led WHS to a second-place finish in the women's invitational race. She finished 15th in 22:15.18. Anna Shultz-Coulton was 17th (22:23.56) and Riley Dobbins was 21st (22:30.53). The Pioneers had 116 points; T.C. Roberson led the way with 89 points.

Dylan Lewis was 43rd in the men's invitational race; Megan Critcher was 36th in the girl's open race. The Pioneers will host a Northwestern 3A/4A Conference relay meet Wednesday. It will be a non-scoring meet. The Pioneers will compete at the Caldwell County Meet, Tuesday, September 6.