

Four months ago the Statesmen Boys' team started the season with great promise and a chance at winning the conference team title. We had four seniors with great credentials and a group of young people who were hungry for success. The team numbers have grown to a new high with over 100 boys on the team. Last season was a great measuring stick in a much harder classification; the boys' competed very successfully against the much bigger schools in AAA. The new alignment divided the school by size and created six classifications from 1A to 6A. The Statesmen were placed in the 5A classification. All the years preparing and battling with the big boys were about to pay off as the team was ready and tested for the new conference made of teams from the old National District and old rival Thomas Jefferson and Lee High School.

The cross country season is usually a great indicator for the numbers of participants and the success of the track and field season. This year was no different, the cross country team had 80 athletes', so we usually double that for the track and field team (we underestimated by 20 – we got 180) and for the first time in a long time – both boys' and girls' team qualified for the regional cross-country championship. All great teams require great leadership and lucky for the boy's team we had a few seasoned senior leaders in all disciplines in the distance, sprints, hurdles and jumps and the relays. Senior Mackenzie Haight was the unconditional leader of the pack as a five times All-State Honoree and coming off his national Footlocker representation during the cross-country season. Senior Matthew Colwell was a great surprise in the hurdles last season making it to the winter and spring State championship. Senior Cristian Rice was the leader in the sprints and jumps. Senior Keaton Cintorino was the perfect balance for the team in the middle distance.

It was a season with some great performances and some ups and down. During the season, we broke a few indoor school records and stayed ranked as one of the best teams in state. The team travelled to Virginia Tech for a meet and it provided the most promising sign that the team was ready for the conference championship as the team qualified in many of their main events for the regional championship. Qualifying for the regional or state championship before conference was important for a team title because it took the pressure off of chasing times and focuses more on gaining points. It also freed up the better athletes to compete in more individual events to maximize points. Two more signs that point to a Statesmen championship were Milestat.com on the virtual prediction having Marshall winning by 3 points on 8 place scoring system. The second and better projection was completed after the conference performance list was sent out and the numbers had the Statesmen winning by 20 points (118 to 88) over Jefferson. However, like one coach famously said – championships are not won on paper.

So on to the championship we go, the field event took center stage to start and Senior Cristian Rice was the first man up, he was coming off a high after securing his regional qualifier at Virginia Tech in the triple, jumping three times over 41ft and three times over 19ft. Rice did not disappoint as he had to battle from start to finish and on his 4th and final jump - secured eight big points in the long jump with personal best in the event. The triple jump would provide some anxious moments as Rice wanted to try a new mark from a new board which wasn't successful but he made the adjustment as needed as he would come back later to jump a few more jumps over the 41ft mark to snap up another 8 points in the triple jump.

In the other field events, they were some surprising developments as junior Jordan Shumate who came in ranked 7th in the shot put and due for a breakthrough, he picked the right time to have it as he was out throwing everyone to take the lead going into the finals. He would bring his teammate and fellow junior Andrew Duenas with him to the finals. They battled it out with the other 7 competitors and when the chalk cleared the statesmen had gain secured seven (7) points that was not accounted for in the team scoring as Shumate placed 3rd and Duenas gained 6th. Shumate was not done with his breakout performances for the day as he strolled over to the high jump and displayed some exceptional skills not seen before. He was certain championship ready and while it took the max

attempts to clear each height – he keep making each height. Shumate would end his competition at 5ft 7in but not before securing 5th place and points for the team. In all, Shumate came in not ranked top 6 in any of his events but ended it with two regional qualifying performances and plus seven in championship scoring.

Sophomore Nimna Rodrigo decided to move from hurdling this year to focus on sprinting and jumping and it paid off big time as her speed has gotten faster and she is ranked as one the better 55m dash runners on the team. With the limited amount of chances to jump during the winter season – it was hard to gauge the progress in the long jump. So going into the meet – Rodrigo making the regional championship seem out of the question but that's why we have the championships. Nimna came out like a rocket and boom – she took off in flight and by the end of the meet – she had taken a bronze medal in the event and qualified for the regional championship. Rodrigo mark of 13ft 9.5 in was a personal best.

Two time State representative Senior Matthew Colwell was the first to step on the track and made sure the competition knew who was the cream of the crop and #2 ranked hurdler in the regional by being the only competitor to dip under nine seconds in the prelims. Junior Tarek Saoud followed Colwell's lead and secured his place in the finals by qualifying in the fifth position. Senior Benjamin Zelkin during most of the winter track and field season competed with injured ankle which restricted him to only straight races. Therefore, Zelkin became a 55m dash specialist and running with the pain and determination he was able to secure himself a place in the finals.

The boy's 4x800m returned all members from the record setting outdoor school record team but did not have the opportunity to compete today thus far this year. So, this meet provide the perfect showcase for them to go after the indoor school record, win a conference title and keep the team on track for huge points. Senior Keaton Cintonino was the lead off leg and he put the team in the lead, he next hand off to junior Brendan Baker who kept the team rolling as they battle Edison side by side. Sophomore Alexander Haight had a tough time as he and the Edison runner battle stride by stride and he had to endure some pushing and elbows but he hand off the baton to his big brother and senior Mackenzie Haight and he knew it was all but secure that the title would be the Statesmen. They only thing left to accomplish is the school record and the state qualifier. MacKenzie did was expected as he run to a sub two minute anchor leg and put the team again in the record books and secure the auto state qualifier.

The girl's 4x800m relay team last year did not like the boys having all the fun – so they had some fun of their own last year, breaking the ten minute mark for the first time this spring in qualifying for the regional championship last year. They progression continued during the cross-country season as the girls were joined by some awesome freshman to propel the team to the regional championship. The indoor conference provides the team another chance to showcase their talents as a team and show they did with a beautiful run. The team of junior Anna Thillairajah, senior Zoe Scopa, freshman Jeanna Robbins and sophomore Sarah Smith running against one of the fastest teams' in the state achieved one the best time's in school history with a 10:25.04.

Senior Jordon Crockett's road to the championship has been a steady climb upward. Last year was a learning experience but this year has produced some better results including h hitting the conference championship auto qualifier a few times during the season. Jordan's next step in her progression naturally were the regional championship, she felt that dream will have to wait until spring after missing her final attempt at 4ft 6in – her entry mark. However, the dream will still keep on going for this winter season as her clearance at 4ft 4in, along with her count back – placed her 5th and advance her to the next round. Her sister sophomore Hamilton Crockett just missed moving on too after finishing 7th.

The final act of the night drew the attention of the whole field house as sophomore John (Jack) Gieseler battled the athletes' from Falls Church High School for the high jump title. Gieseler had a great summer including meeting the invention of the Fosbury flop – Mr. Dick Fosbury, so he was pumped up and looking forward to the season. The season was not going as expected but he was due for a big one and what better time for it to happen but at the championship. Jack did just that, he came in ranked tied for 6th and needing a big performance for a chance to making the regional championship. Gieseler from the start looked great and had clearance on his first attempt on all his jumps. Five jumpers would clear 5ft 7in include a surprise in teammate Jordan Shumate, they had all secured berths to the regionals and Jack found himself in first place. The bar was raised to 5ft 9in and only two competitors remain competing for the title. . Jack would go first and miss his first attempt and his competitor would clear on his first attempt. Jack sailed over the bar on his second attempt and it was in competition for first and the title at 5ft 11in. The competitor would clear the next height on his 2nd attempt and left Jack with just one attempt to keep the competition going. He took his long strides and race down toward the mat and the bar, he would curl his long frame up and over the bar.....for a moment he was clear and headed to the mat and then his long legs clipped the bar on the way down to the groan of the crowd. There was no disappointment as Gieseler has made the improvements, secured a medal at conference, secured eight points for his team and looked ready to make that next step in his progression.

After day one, the boy's team was in control of the meet leading the competition by 12 point and seven points ahead of projection. It would be a three day wait to claim the first ever conference title. Those three days seem to take forever but finally Friday was here. Even with three additional days, the bus still did not show up on time but it didn't seem to bother the team on the first day, so they took it in stride the second day too.

Once we got to the Thomas Jefferson Community Center / Middle School – the boys got focus and get prepare to win a title. Senior Matthew Colwell and Junior Tarek Saoud was up first and they made it interesting as number one ranked Colwell literally stumble across the line into the first place and Saoud secure the 6th spot. They grab 11 big points to add to the team's lead.

Junior Martha (Dany) Chaillo was supposed to be the next top sprinters on the team in the 55m dash and the 300m. The hurdle coach is always trying to steal the better athletes away from the other parts of the team and one day, Dany was noticeably missing from sprint practice and we wondered where she went, we didn't have to look far! Across the track on the other side, there she was hopping over the hurdles, four months later – there she goes now gliding over the hurdles to a 2nd place finish in the conference championship and into the regional championship. Chaillo was the leader of a group of girls that from day one was on point, during the season they automatically qualified for the championship including fellow junior Ariana Zukergood who placed 6th in the 55m hurdle finals.

Junior Katrina Uher returned to winter track and field and was a welcoming site! The expectations were that she was going to part of the 4x400m relay team because last time she ran two years ago was at the regional championship in the 500m dash. At the beginning of the season, Uher showed quicker and faster in the shorter event and thus she end up competing in the 55m dash at the conference championship. She came in ranked #3 on her own team and she won a photo finish versus her teammate Chaillo to advance as the heat winner to the championship finals. Katrina had to wait a few days but running at the TJMS track for her last three meets paid off as she rocketed down the track to a bronze medal in the event for a return trip to the regional championship.

Senior Benjamin Zelkin was up next in his 55m dash finals and he came in ranked 6th but he knew this track very well. Zelkin had a running style that suit the slippery no spikes floor of the TJMS, he excel out of the blocks and motor to a 4th place finish, picking up 4 more points for the team and qualifying for the regional championship.

Every event going forward was going to be around the track and that makes for interesting competitions because the track is very slippery and no spikes are permitted. The only shoes allowed are rubber sole shoes and not everyone had those, so we had to pool resources. So, for the limited amount of shoes we had – everyone had to share, some people wear shoes a half size too big or half size too small – because we need to do our best to ensure we win the team title.

The boy's 4x200m relay team started the battle and they handled the conditions well and the team of Seniors Cristian Rice, Matthew Colwell, Dirk Edison and anchor by Junior Francisco Flores speed around the track and collected 8 points and qualified for the regional championship for the first in 14th year. The last time we the championship at the venue, we had a team finished 2nd but they were not happy with their performance and threw the baton and was disqualified, so the performance and achievement of this team was first in a long time.

Senior Olivia Martin has had an interesting season to say the least but when it comes to championship, you can expect her to show up and be ready to go. This championship was going to be no different as Martin in her unorthodox and unique running style motor around the track and showed the form from the spring season and roar to a bronze medal in the 1600m run and into the regional championship.

Next on the track was the premier event of the meet with 5-times All State Honoree MacKenzie Haight, 4-times school record holders sophomore Alexander Haight and junior Brenden Baker in the 1600m run. The race started with a slower pace than expected with Mac controlling the race from the start, Alex and Brenden were tucked in the middle and kept the battling with a the bunched up group of runners. With four laps to go, Mac stretch the field out and extended his lead, his brother and teammate continued the battle with the bunch. Mac would pull away from the field and win comfortably and Alex and Baker battle the field and finished 5th and 10th.

Senior Keaton Cintorino over the years has had his share of setback in his quest to secure a berth in the 500m dash but did not have to worry about that aspect of this race this time around as he achieved the regional auto qualifier at the Virginia Tech invitational. He shot out from the start and had the event in control from the start and gradually pulled away to win the event easily to collect his first conference title and extend the team lead.

Junior Anna Thillairajah has showed wonderful range from her freshman year and can compete in any event from the 55m dash to the 3200m, so she had the choice to compete in any event at the championship. With a regional qualifier already in the bag for the 500m dash, she ran the 1000m as her individual event choice for the meet. Competing against some of the best competitors in the state at the conference meet is a tough task and Thillairajah knew she would be battling. The top three ran neck and neck for most of the race with Anna holding her own against the two athletes from Falls Church HS and the race to come down to the last 10 meters as the three fought to the finish line. Thillairajah would finish the fight in the bronze medal position in a tough fought race against some of the best in the region.

MacKenzie Haight did not get much rest and he was back on the track and his third and final event and this wasn't going to be easier because he knew the fresher athletes would be gunning for him. One Falls Church HS athlete did just that as he shot out in front of the race and was set on going as hard as he can to try and break Mac. The athlete must have forgotten to read MacKenzie resume from Milestat.com because he should have known that his range is from 400m to 5000m and 30 minute of rest is more than enough for him to refuel his tanks. So, it was a big shock to the athlete when he could not shake Mac but he got shaken instead and ran over and left behind as he was left to fade from 2nd to 4th place as he himself got broken. MacKenzie closed out the meet with three gold medals for the meet and put his team up by 30 points.

Freshman Thando Muchemenyi is a high energy athlete and sometimes it hard for her to control her excitement and competitive edge or her constant questions about her races. It is that same passion and competitive spirit that she exhibits on the track where she is ask to run the 500m dash or a leg on the 4x800m relay team. Thando's favorite event is the 200m dash, unfortunately that event is not in winter track, so the closest thing is the 300m dash. Muchemenyi seem to have adapted very well and came ranked in the event and in the fast section. In the race were some of the best girls in the state from Mount Vernon, so the race was very fast and the track did not seem to make a difference. Thando held her own placed 4th in the event with a super-fast time on that track.

Senior Cristian Rice had a tough time in the 4x200m relay with the track but he was prepared and ready to defeat the track in the 300m then it would mean a great race for him. From the start, you can see the results were going to be different as Rice has a better handle of the conditions and were motoring around at a much better pace. He would deliver a better race on a tough track and placed 2nd and put his team up by 39 points going into the last two events.

Freshman Jenna Robbins has been having a wonderful year starting back in cross-country and her success continued into the indoor season with some solid performances in the 1600m and in the 1000m run. Robbins only ran one 3200m run but it was after running on the DMR and getting sick. So, she was a wild card into the 3200m conference championship race. Running the race fresh for the first time, Jenna was ready and showed off her awesome form that made her a cross-country outstanding freshman of the year. She was running with the number one 3200m runner in the state and they pulled everyone into a very competitive race. Jenna would need the photo finish to be declared her the 4th place winner (12:16.53 to 12:16.54) with 12:16.78 finishing 6th and out of the regional championship.

Rise of Sophomore Justin McFaul start back in the spring of 2013 season when he had a break out performance at the TJ Penultimate Invitational when he broke the sub 11 minute mark. He continued his success into the cross-country season and was a key member of the team that qualified for the regional championship. His winter season started great with his first sub 5 minute mile of his young career, he would followed it up the next week with his first sub eleven 3200m run at the PR Invitational and dipped under 4:50 at the Virginia Tech invitational. So, Justin was looking great for his first chance to make the regional championship in an individual event. While the athlete from Lee HS dominated the event and ran away from the field, Justin was left to duke it out with the other athletes via for the last four spot to the regional championship. McFaul ran side by side with the competitors for rest of the way but with three laps to go, he took the lead and pushed the pace creating a separation with the other three. The race with come down to the wire and he would finish 4th and booked his place in the regional championship and increase the team advantage.

With the points total too much for anyone to catch up with only one event, all the relay alternates got a chance to show their skills and they truly did. They showed the character of the team with their hard work each member gave everything they had and left it on the track. The team of junior Victor Agbara, Senior Nicholas Hillard, Sophomore John Gieseler and Sophomore Kyle Sandlin placed 5th and provided the final tally for the team.

It was a total team effort as all parts of the team (distance, hurdles, sprints, jumps, throwing) contributed to help the team secure the first ever Capitol Conference title the first for the boy's team in school history. The team defeated Mount Vernon by 37 points, Thomas Edison by 40 points and Jefferson by 44 points. The team will go after a regional title next week at George Mason University on Saturday, Feb. 15th at 7:30AM. The girls team would finish 4th – the highest since 2008 with 59 points.