



NIKE TEAM NATIONALS

Presented by *Eastbay*

Nike Team Nationals is the highest level of the sport of high school cross country. Getting to NTN means a reward for a season of hard work, extreme running, dedication and maybe even blood, sweat and tears. And the kids do this all for the promise of a fantastic weekend of fun, goodies, good times, camaraderie with the competition, making new friends and on and on..... This year, rather than rely on rankings, regional qualifying meets were held across the country, leaving little doubt who should be at NTN finals. Forty-four teams gathered in Portland to determine the champions for 2007.

John F. Kennedy was asked what his definition of success was in his first press conference after being elected President of the United States, and he stated that success was, "the full use of your powers along lines of excellence."

Lincoln Sudbury (Wicked TC) has established a tradition of proving the "experts" wrong, Wicked took eighth in the country, even though they had been projected by some to finish 15th. Nike does an outstanding job of making the national meet a fun and memorable experience for the athletes. On Thursday morning, the L-S girls flew at Nike's expense from Boston to Portland. Once there, they received tons of free Nike gear and had the opportunity to socialize with other qualifying high school teams and professional elite runners at Nike headquarters and the hotel at which all the teams were staying. The excitement of Thursday and Friday were only a buildup, though, to the main event on Saturday: the national championship race.

Because of the snow and rain, the course, though mostly flat, was very slow and difficult. There was no dry ground over the whole 5000 meters, and in some places the puddles were ankle deep. Also, the runners had to deal with hay bale obstacles and a series of very short, very steep hills. The conditions guaranteed that times would not be fast, but that fact simply underscored the emphasis of the meet; the focus was on team score, not individual times. When the gun, and accompanying fireworks, went off, the L-S girls got out fast. Each girl had a "T" painted on her cheek in honor of coach Chris Tarello, who had worked tirelessly for years in order to qualify the team for NTN but hadn't been allowed to accompany the team to Portland due to their coach proud.

As usual, Andrea Keklak positioned herself toward the front of the race, with Claire Arthur and Ellie Hylton not far off her. Following Arthur and Hylton, who were working together beautifully, were Dana Jamieson, Rachael Potter, Emily Mephram, and Holly Clarke. After the first mile, Jamieson steadily worked her way up to Arthur and Hylton. Then, toward the end of the race, Arthur took off, moving up a significant number of 20:27), and Hylton (46th, 20:29).

After moving up consistently throughout the race, Jamieson took advantage of her track speed to unleash an Potter turned in a great performance to finish fifth on the team, in 101st place overall in a time of 21:15. Clarke and Mephram, after working together throughout the race, finished right behind her in 105th and 110th places, respectively, with times of 21:20 and 21:27.

Overall, the Warriors totaled 250 points, good for eighth in the country. Even against national competition, L-S's depth was notable. Wicked's fourth runner had the second best place out of any team's fourth, behind only the fourth runner for the national champions, Fayetteville-Manlius of New York. The Warriors' seventh finisher was the fourth fastest seventh runner on the day, behind only those of the top three teams in the country.

This season, the Warriors accomplished basically everything they set out to do last June. Next year, they look to return to NTN, which they should be more than capable of doing. Five of the top seven are returning, and the team should have strong incoming freshmen and JV runners ready to step up. For now, though, the eighth best team in the country will enjoy this year's accomplishments, and then the runners will get right back to training for indoor track.