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Against The Wind

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Cross Country Kudos!

My final post about the [Tussey Mountainback 50 Mile Ultramarathon](#) is going to have to wait a few more days. Instead, this post will be devoted to recognizing some of the many outstanding performances at the [District 6 Cross Country Championship](#) meet this past weekend along with a special shout out to an up and coming junior high runner from the eastern part of the state.

As usual, [District 6](#) will be well represented at the [PIAA State Cross Country Championships](#) this coming weekend.

Without a doubt, the top male and female runners coming out of District 6 this year are [Jim Spisak](#), a senior at Bishop McCort and [Leah Anne Wirfel](#), a sophomore from Forest Hills.

Spisak clocked a 16:19 and ran away from the field on a rain soaked course that was badly chewed up from the two girls' races that preceded his AA boys' race. Mr. Spisak was well above average as a freshman and has steadily improved into one of the best distance runners ever to come out of District 6. Earlier this year, Spisak obliterated the course record at the [Altoona Invitational](#) with a time of 15:32. The previous record of 16:58 had been set by David Mock of Westmont Hilltop back in 2003. Mock was the PIAA State XC AA Boys' champion that year.

Leah Anne Wirfel crossed the line in 18:26, more than a minute ahead of the 2nd place runner. With better weather and a firm track she might very well have gone under 18 minutes. Her long strides and never-look-back front running style reminded me a lot of last year's District 6 AA Girls' champion.

Both Spisak and Wirfel should do very well in Hershey this weekend. Here's hoping they do!

Altoona will send its very solid AAA boys team consisting of Wade Endress, Chris Fischer, Jordan Liberman, Mike Harf, Tyler Lidwell, Ryan Trexler, and Steve Fox. The Mountain Lions scored an impressive 18 to 53 victory over second place State College. Altoona boys' coach Lee Baranik attributed their success in part to the work they did as a group over the summer. "They were meeting all summer long, and what was nice was they were waking up at 6 a.m. and riding bikes and meeting at one of the schools in Altoona and then go for a 6 or 7 mile run before coming back and having breakfast at someone's house, and what happened was they really started to gel as a unit." All of that sounds like a recipe for success to me. It will be very interesting to see how this young group stacks up against the best teams in the state this weekend.

State College took the team title on the AAA girls' side with a nice 1, 2, 3 grouping of Lucia Sofu, Chloe Schmidt, and Nora Adams, followed closely enough by Alyssa Cousins, Kellie Forziat, Dylan Kubina, and Jessica Hughes to secure their 24 to 39 victory over Altoona. For their part, Altoona will send Alexis Ebersole, Jane Hallinan, Sasha Peterman, and Lindsey Stacey to the PIAA State Meet. The trip to Hershey will be particularly sweet (pun intended) for Hallinan, a senior and first time state qualifier. Rounding out the PIAA State qualifiers from AAA girls is Alyssa Beyer, a sophomore from Hollidaysburg.

The [Central Cambria girls](#) defended their AA District 6 title in dominant fashion 47 to 103 over second place Bishop McCort. The field included 18 teams all together. The Central Cambria squad finished in this order: Kelsey Seymour, Annie Cekada, Kendall Seymour, Ashley Stump, Kaylee Collins, Brittany Tusing, and Emily Wright. The Bishop McCort team which also earned a trip to Hershey consists of Kristy Chovanec, Kelsi Yingling, Jill Spisak, Kristen Wood, Leah Yingling, Liz Winfield, and Megan Garver.

You have to hand it to the Penns Valley AA boys' team. To the best of my knowledge, they competed their entire season with just 5 runners, the minimum number required to score. Call them the "Iron Five". The Rams' squad consisting of Matthew Brooker, Peter Kistler, Ryan Brown (no relation), Will Lush, and Matt Fuller captured the boys' AA championship with a gritty 90 to 97 victory over Blairsville. Interestingly, Penns Valley and Blairsville are about as far apart geographically as you can get in the expansive District 6. The Blairsville boys' team includes Darryl Jones, Ben Clawson, Ben Kopchick, Andrew Kuntz, Dylan Dando, Zack Stemerick, and Alex Rocks.

Of course there can only be a very limited number of qualifiers for the PIAA State Meet. Each year, some very good runners narrowly miss the cutoff. Naturally, it's a big disappointment for them to work so hard, and come so close, but not quite close enough. So I want to take this opportunity to recognize the four runners from this year's D6 Meet who were the first finishers in their respective races after the cutoff: AA Girls – Susanna Bacci, 9th grade, Richland; AA Boys – C.J. Weimer, 11th grade, United; AAA Girls – Kelley Lepley, 9th grade, Indian Valley, and AAA Boys – Mark Yoder, 11th grade, Indian Valley. Mr. Weimer from United finished just one second behind the last AA Boys qualifier.

Finally, I want to extend special congratulations to Kara Funk from the Dover Area School District who took 1st place in a field of 187 runners at the Susquehannock Junior High Girls' Cross Country Invitational last week. Kara covered the 2 mile course in 13:13 and finished about 20 seconds ahead of the 2nd place runner. Kara's mother, Dawn (Rossman) Funk graduated (many years ago) from Penns Valley High School. So, maybe there's something in that Penns Valley well water that makes them run so fast or maybe its good genetics. Who knows?











In the interest of full disclosure I should add that Kara is my niece and the young lady standing behind the chain link fence in the photo up above is Kara's grandmother (and my mother-in-law), Sandra Rossman. There are way too many other Funks, Rossmans, Bentons, and Browns to name them all. Needless to say, we are all very proud of Kara.

Noteworthy: Dover has a good cross country program and a nice [website](#). The Altoona boys' XC team may recall that the Dover boys' team finished second at this year's Altoona Invitational.

Best wishes to all of the state qualifiers for an outstanding performance at Hershey this Saturday!

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