

Linn-Mar boys claim state track title

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Ken Hopkins had a plan when he became the Linn-Mar boys track coach five years ago.

It came to fruition Saturday.

The Lions rolled up 72 points and won their first Class 4A state title by a comfortable margin over Iowa City West, Waukee and Kennedy on a warm day at Drake Stadium.

"When I took over, I felt we had great kids and great talent," said Hopkins. "Just give them the mindset, they can win."

Distance runner Josh Evans led the surge for Linn-Mar, but the Lions scored points in numerous events and had too much depth for their challengers.

"What a great team, how our distance runners and sprinters and hurdlers all came together. A great job," said Hopkins. "That's what makes it so great and special."

Kennedy began Saturday in first place, but the Cougars could not match Linn-Mar's overall talent and slipped to fourth place with 51 points. Iowa City West climbed into second place with 57 points and Waukee placed third with 53.

Linn-Mar did not win any events Saturday, but the Lions picked up valuable points in a variety of races.

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Evans placed second in the 1600 meter run and finished third in the 800, complementing his first-place showing in the 3200 on Thursday and his sizzling anchor on the triumphant 1600 medley on Friday.

"This is awesome. This is so much fun," Evans said after the Lions collected their championship plaque and banner. "It's cool winning it with all these guys."

Sophomore sprinter Perrion Scott took second in the 200 meter dash and finished third in the 100 to score important points. He also ran the opening leg on the 4x100 relay that placed third with Tristan Freese, Brandon Jeffries and Austin Flieder.

"It's great. It's really great," said Scott, soaking up the championship. "I love these guys with all my heart. I'm with these guys more than I'm with my parents."

"It's a blessing, man," he said. "I love these guys. It's great to win a championship with them."

The Lions finished sixth in the 4x400 relay, which was the meet's final event. Freese, Ryan Wirth, Duggan Trenary and Chase Grabau formed that relay. A few minutes later, they were being introduced as the state champions.

"It hasn't hit me yet," said Grabau, one of the most valuable seniors on the team. "Going into this meet, I knew we had a shot. I knew we had to give everything we had."

"It means everything," he said.

Kennedy stayed in the hunt for part of the day and nearly won the shuttle hurdle relay, but Famiek Cook clipped one of the final hurdles and momentarily lost his balance when it appeared he might overtake the Waukee anchorman for the title.

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Waukee and Kennedy both eclipsed the state meet record, but Waukee won the race by 18-hundredths of a second.

"I'm kind of disappointed in myself right now," Cook said after wiping away a few tears. "I tried running as hard as I could. My team wanted it real bad. I didn't get him this time."

Cook battled shin splints this season and limped from one event to another, but answered the bell each time and helped the Cougars score points in the three-day meet. "We all battled injuries," he said, "but we managed to get through them and work hard together."

John Koelling placed fourth in the 200 meter dash for the Cougars. At one point Saturday, Linn-Mar had 47 points and the Cougars were right behind with 46, but the Lions pulled away from there.

The Prairie Hawks finished 15th in the team standings, Washington was 18th, Jefferson 23rd and Xavier 27th.

Linn-Mar won the state title with a relatively young team and could be strong again next year with Evans and Scott returning along with a bunch of other top performers.

"It looks happy for next year, I'll tell you that," said Hopkins. "We're going to soak this up and celebrate. But yeah, we already know next year looks pretty special, too."

Jordan Houdeshell performed well in the wheelchair events for Linn-Mar. He finished second in the 200, second in the 400, third in the 100 and fifth in the shot put.