

Lindstrom sizzles at NAIA race

Written by Jim Ecker

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James Lindstrom took a bow, raised his arms in celebration and hugged everyone in sight.

It was a fitting conclusion to a near-perfect day for the talented senior from Apple Valley, Calif.

Lindstrom became the first runner from Mount Mercy to earn All-American honors when he finished sixth at the NAIA national cross country meet at Seminole Valley Park on Friday.

Nobody else from Mount Mercy had ever finished in the top-30 until Lindstrom ran the race of his life, slashing more than 82 seconds off his previous-best with an astonishing performance.

"I can't believe I did that," he said after taking another curtain call before teammates and friends. "It's still going through my head. But it feels amazing, I can tell you that right now."

Nobody from Mount Mercy had ever cracked the top-30 at an NAIA national meet until Lindstrom came along.

"For the first Mount Mercy All-American to be sixth is crazy," said Tad Hultz, the assistant head coach for cross country at the school. "Honestly, I thought 30th was a shot, but it was an outside shot. I would have been happy if he was 50 or 60."

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"So for him to finish sixth just blows my mind. But it couldn't come to a more deserving guy."

Lindstrom got off to a fast start and grew more confident as the race unfolded.

"I just wanted to hang with the top group," he said. "I figured they'd carry me the whole race. And the last two miles I really wanted to make a big move and that's exactly what I did."



"This is my last day of cross-country racing in my career, so it was 'Let's just give it all I've got.' That was in the back of my head. I just kept going and believing in myself."

Colin DeYoung of Cornerstone won the men's race in 24 minutes, 12.4 seconds. Lindstrom finished 26.2 seconds behind the winner, but was only 11.5 seconds out of second place in an elite field of 330 runners.

"I don't know what to tell you," said Lindstrom. "I still can't believe it right now."

Mount Mercy finished 26th out of 36 teams in the men's race for the best showing in school history, topping a 28th-place finish at the NAIA meet last year.

Colton Forster placed 70th for the Mustangs in 25 minutes, 31.0 seconds for a personal record.

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Other Mustangs ran personal-bests as well.

The meet began with the Mount Mercy women finishing 24th out of 36 teams, matching the best performance in school history in 2001.

Vanessa Cortes, a junior from Bakersfield, Calif., led the Mustangs by placing 74th out of 339 runners in 18 minutes, 31.3 seconds, the first time she's cracked 19 minutes in her career.

The Mount Mercy women were hoping to finish in the top 25 and were delighted to learn they placed 24th in an elite field.

"We did?," said Cortes, beaming. "Oh, that's awesome! Nice."

It was quite a sight to see more than 300 runners all break from the starting line at 10:30 a.m.

"It was definitely crazy," said Cortes. "A lot of pushing and shoving, like I expected. It was cold the first mile, but after that I felt pretty good."

The original forecast was for temperatures in the low 40's under partly sunny skies, but in reality the temperature was in the low 30's on a gray, windy day in Cedar Rapids.

Hulst called it perfect weather for a cross country race, and was not kidding.

"It was awesome to have it here and see our team take advantage of it," he said. "This was a day of perfection. It was fun to see. I'm looking forward to doing it again in 2020."

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Mount Mercy will host the NAIA meet again in two years.

Anna Shields of Point Park won the women's race in 17 minutes, 15.9 seconds. Oregon Tech claimed the women's title in a tight race with Madonna and Taylor.

Oklahoma City won the men's competition.

WOMEN'S TEAM STANDINGS

Top 10

1. Oregon Tech 126, 2. Madonna 132, 3. Taylor 134, 4. Southern Oregon 192, 5. SCAD Atlanta 241, 6. Aquinas 244, 7. Embry-Riddle Arizona 257, 8. St. Francis (Ill.) 260, 9. Wayland Baptist 289, 10. Lewis-Clark 371, 24. Mount Mercy 597.

TOP 6 WOMEN

1. Anna Shields, Point Park, 17:15.9
2. Emily Kearney, SCAD Atlanta, 17:19.4
3. Lydia Mato, Oklahoma City, 17:29.8
4. Susie Garza, Oregon Tech, 17:36.1
5. Cindy Reed, Oregon Tech, 17:37.0
6. Alexis Miller, Aquinas, 17:37.3

MOUNT MERCY WOMEN

74. Vanessa Cortes 18:31.3, 112. Alexa Zamora 18:49.5, 197. McKenna Johnson 19:26.2, 204. Andrea Ertz 19:29.0, 224. Emily Erickson 19:39.2, 279. Kelsi Huhndorf 20:17.7, 299. Samantha Croghan 20:38.3.

MEN'S TEAM STANDINGS

Top 10

1. Oklahoma City 116, 2. Indiana Wesleyan 143, 3. St. Francis (Ill.) 162, 4. Southern Oregon 181, 5. St. Mary (Kan.) 218, 6. Embry-Riddle Arizona 241, 7. College of Idaho 257, 8. Aquinas 265, 9. Cornerstone 337, 10. Dordt 375, 26. Mount Mercy 593.

TOP 6 MEN

1. Colin DeYoung, Cornerstone, 24:12.4
2. Jesse Saxton, Indiana Wesleyan, 24:27.1
3. Tony Floyd, Madonna, 24:28.7
4. Philip Lagemann, St. Mary (Kan.) 24:32.4
5. Alex Martin, College of Idaho, 24:35.9
6. James Lindstrom, Mount Mercy, 24:38.6

MOUNT MERCY MEN

6. James Lindstrom 24:38.6, 70. Colton Forster 25:31.0, 198. Aaron Golding 26:24.7, 227. Michael Marshall 26:39.3, 279. Cameron Steffens 27:13.8, 301. Sayed Opeyany 27:53.7, 306. Jacob Blackmon 28:23.8.