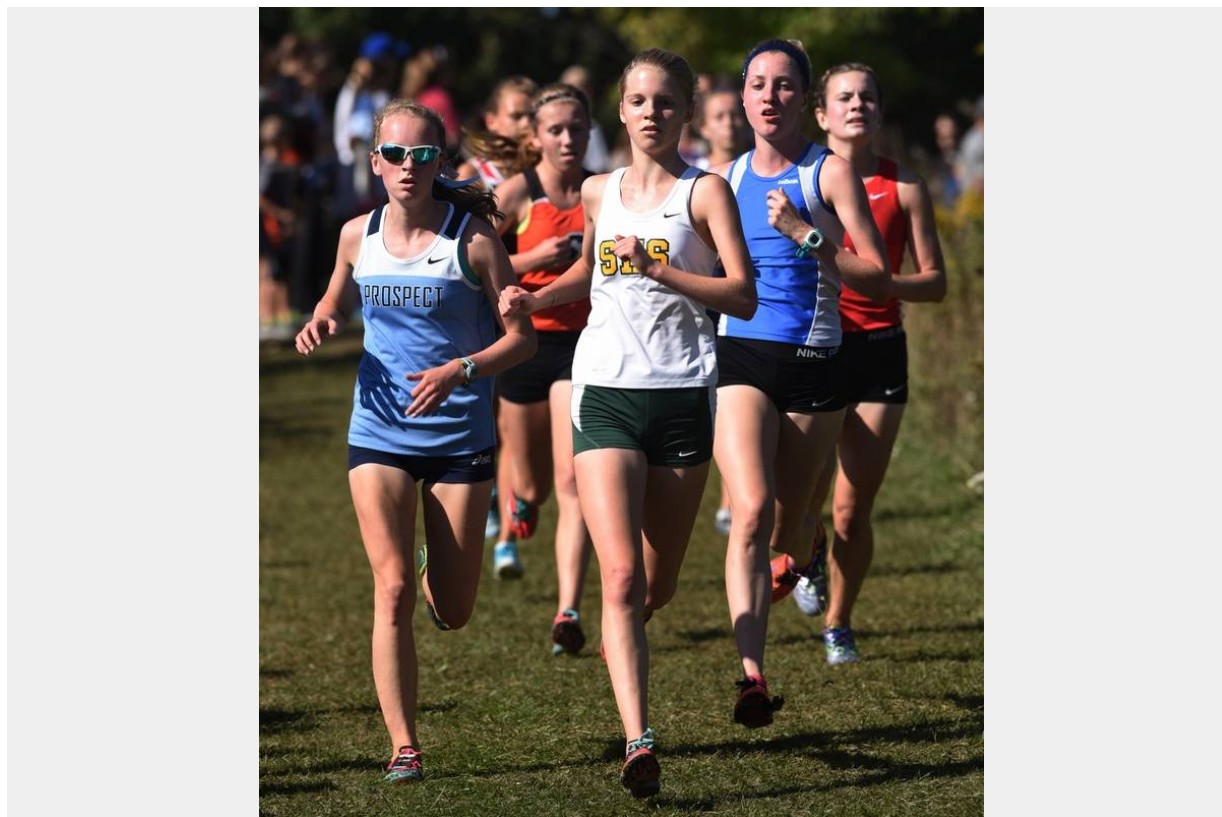


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Stevenson's Sparreo takes top honors at Palatine Invite



Event winner Isabelle Sparreo, middle, of Stevenson and second-place finisher Brooke Wilson, left, of Prospect are in front during the Palatine Invitational at Deer Grove East Forest Preserve on Saturday.

Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer

By Michael Eaken
Daily Herald Correspondent

Stevenson sophomore Isabella Sparreo entered the season under the radar, but the Patriots sophomore definitely moved into the spotlight on Saturday.

Sparreo finished 23rd at the Schaumburg sectional last season and missed qualifying for state.

But she sure hit her mark on Saturday at the 32nd annual Palatine Invitational, jumping to an early lead and hanging on in the final mile to secure the title in 17:06.9 on a warm and sunny Saturday morning at Deer Grove East Forest Preserve.

Sparreo pushed the pace in the opening 2 miles, then held off Prospect junior Brooke Wilson (17:10.4) in the final mile to secure an impressive victory.

It was quite a turnaround for the Stevenson sophomore, who'd finished 33rd at last year's Palatine Invitational in 18:38.3.

"It was definitely a surprise," said Sparreo, who has suddenly positioned herself among the state's elite runners. "I was really nervous coming into this meet, and I was hoping for a top-five finish. I knew I had to push myself today."

Sparreo opened a few eyes last weekend in taking fourth place at the Peoria Notre Dame Invitational, and she continued that trend Saturday.

"It's not a surprise in my eyes," said Stevenson coach Maureen LaVanti, who said Sparreo turned a corner during the spring in track. "She realized what she was capable of doing and that fueled her training during the summer. She has just been really motivated, and her work ethic is amazing."

Wilson found her comfort zone in the opening 2 miles and hung close to Sparreo for the entire race before the Stevenson sophomore made her decisive move with 200 meters remaining.

"She really took off," said Wilson, who also made a huge jump from her 13th-place finish at last year's Palatine Invitational. "I expected more last year, but I feel like I have rounded the corner and I'm headed in the right direction."

Four time defending Class 2A champion Yorkville placed five runners in the top 21 in cruising to the title with 82 points, easily outdistancing second place Lyons Township (135 points).

Wheaton Warrenville South (155 points) continued to impress, nipping host Palatine (156 points) for third. Barrington (181 points) took fifth place.

Barrington sophomore Jocelyn Long (17:14.2) finished third. Gardner South junior Daly Galloway (17:15.9), who finished second in Class 1A last season, took fourth, with Lake Zurich senior Caitlin Shepard (17:31.3) rounding out the top five.

Junior Sarah Atkins (17:55.9) and junior Allison McGrath (17:57.6) powered Wheaton Warrenville South, taking 11th and 12th place for the Tigers.

"Everyone has stepped up," said Atkins. "We continue to get closer in races and use each other; it's giving us a lot of confidence. We feel like we now know we belong and we should be up there."

Wheaton Warrenville South, which had finished second at the Peoria Notre Dame Invite, continued to push forward at Palatine. Senior Mary Erdman (18:30.2) and freshman Sarah Kulkarni (18:39.1) helped out by finishing 35th and 43rd.

"I feel like we gave 100 percent today, but we can give even more," said McGrath.

Palatine is also starting to come together. The Pirates lost a close dual meet to Barrington on Thursday but came back strong on Saturday in taking fourth.

Defending Palatine Invitational champion Kelly O'Brien (17:32) led the charge in sixth place. The Pirates also got a big finish from senior Sam Lechowicz (17:53.7) in 10th.

O'Brien hung with the lead pack until the final mile but could not switch gears in the home stretch.

"I was more poised at the beginning than I've been in previous races," said O'Brien, "Last 800 meters I was still in it, but I couldn't maintain, kind of shut down."

Palatine's Senior Sabina Yosif (18:17.4) finished 23rd, followed by junior Anna Buckstaff (18:29.6) in 33rd.

"We went in with nothing to lose and we were relishing the fact that we were underdogs," said Lechowicz. "We wanted to prove ourselves and I think we did a good job of that today."

Long gave Barrington a huge lift up front with senior Lauren Conroy (18:01.1) supplying a 14th-place finish.

But Barrington had a setback to start the race when freshman Sophie Hoeltgen fell. The Fillies freshman recovered to finish 55th.

"Collectively it wasn't our best effort today," said Long of the Fillies' attack that had been humming coming into the meet off a big dual meet victory over rival Palatine. "But we're still excited and we have a lot left of the season."

Long jumped out with the lead pack and moved in the middle mile to secure her third-place finish.

"I started to find my sweet spot," said Long, who has emerged among the state's elite this season. "I'm definitely feeling much more comfortable up front."

Vernon Hill senior Vivian Overbeck (17:37.2) finished sixth and helped the Cougars place ninth as a team with 282 points. Sophomore Lauren Katz (18:25.4) added a 28th-place finish for VH.

Overbeck has earned two state medals in Class 2A, and the senior showed on Saturday she's ready to add another.

"It was a good checkpoint," said Overbeck, who hit a 17:18.8 at the First to the Finish Invitational at Detweiller Park in Peoria in early September and is looking to continue to lower her mark. "I'm shooting for something under 17:00 and now I just have to keep improving."

Shepard powered Lake Zurich to a 12th-place team finish with 380 points. The Bears senior made a final surge at the finish in securing fifth place.

"I felt like I went out a little too fast and I may have suffered at end," said Shepard, who finished fifth at Peoria Notre Dame Invitational is eyeing all-state honors this season. "Running against this type of competition is preparing me for post season and I'm really excited about for what's ahead."

Libertyville sophomore Melissa Manetsch (18:23.3) aided the Wildcats with a 26th-place finish.

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