

Prep Sports | updated: 8/29/2017 9:52 PM

Girls cross country: Fremd packs a powerful start

By Michael Eaken
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Fremd's girls cross country team made quite the opening statement in Tuesday's Mid-Suburban League crossover at Prospect.

Yes, the Viking lost their top runner from last year with the graduation of Linda Varella, an all-stater.

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But it sure looks like they are going to be better this year.

Fremd used a tight pack to secure places 2 through 5 in powering past defending MSL champion Prospect 21-35.

"It's a different sense of energy this year," said Fremd coach Joe Marcin, whose team finished sixth in the MSL last season. "They have put the work in and they are doing all the right things."

Prospect lost three-time all-state runner Brooke Wilson to graduation, but senior Mikayla Olsen didn't seem to

miss a beat in cruising to the individual title in 18:51.

"After today I really feel like I know what I'm capable of doing," said Olsen of her nifty time.

But it was all Fremd after Olsen's impressive effort.

Senior Nuper Pokharkar (19:27), sophomore Rebecca Markham (19:29) sophomore Marissa Ban (19:30) and senior Hannah Ban (19:31) formed a nice wall in taking the 2-3-4-5 spots.

"It hurt losing Linda (Varella)," said Pokharkar, who was all-conference runner last season. "But we have a lot of depth and we have just kind of been feeding off each other's energy."

Prospect got off to a hard start, but Fremd hung right with them and started to move in the second mile -- and didn't let up.

"It feels good," said Markham who was also an all-conference runner last season. "Our coach told us to stay together and we packed it up."

Prospect took a hit when junior Marissa Valentini had to drop out of the race due to a sprained ankle. Last season, Valentini was the Knights' No. 2 runner and they missed her contributions on Tuesday.

"We just have to improve working together, staying in the race during middle mile," said Olsen.

Freshman Reese Lettow (19:33) gave the Knights a bit of a lift by taking sixth place, and she was followed by Fremd sophomore Julia Finegan (19:35).

"We don't really have a No. 1 runner," said Marcin. "The seniors are highly motivated this year and it's trickling down."

Senior Kaitlyn Rouse (19:56) and sophomore Emily Hubbard (20:07) aided the Knights' attack by going 8-9.

"It's not the way you want to kick off your season, especially when we have such high expectations," said Prospect coach Pete Wintermute. "Our pack kind of broke apart and we need to be running a tighter split."



