

FOOT LOCKER HS CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPS

Solinsky & Nelson Supreme

by Mike Kennedy

With the backdrop of a large sign featuring a "Go Rocket Go" headline and a telling quote below extolling "Weakness is not my strength," Chris Solinsky (Stevens Point, Wisconsin) backed up those sentiments with a performance that equaled the most dominant boys' win in the 24-year history of the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships.

After a 5-year stint at Disney World the meet returned to its original home in San Diego's Balboa Park, where the runners were greeted by a clear, crisp morning and a 2-loop 5K course that included a very challenging hill.

Said Solinsky, "Originally I planned to go out and push, push, push and be under 4:35 for the mile and 9:20 for 2M, but once I saw the course I thought that might get me in a little trouble so I thought I should just let whatever happens, happen." What happened was a very pedestrian 4:43 first mile that had at least 20 runners in the lead pack.

The pace remained steady for the next quarter-mile, but Solinsky, Mohamed Trafeh (Duarte, California), Neftalen Araia (North Lawrence, Indianapolis), Bobby Curtis (Xavier, Louisville) and Wesley Smith (Hudson, Ohio) opened a small gap on the rest of the field.

At the halfway marker, on a gradual uphill grade, the Midwest quartet of Solinsky, Araia, Smith and Stephen Pifer (Edwardsville, Illinois) were running in a very tight group and had broken away.

At the 2M point, Solinsky, who finished a very close 3rd in last year's final and was undefeated this fall, exploded away from the field and finished in 14:41—winning by 20 seconds to equal the race's greatest margin of victory, set by the legendary two-time winner Dathan Ritzenhein in '02.

Solinsky's time ranked =No. 3 on the all-

time course list behind the 14:36 of Reuben Reina of San Antonio ('85) and the 14:38 by Mark Davis of San Diego ('86), and was equal to Adam Goucher of Colorado Springs ('93). Ritzenhein has the meet record of 14:29 set on Florida's much flatter—and faster—course.

Smith, who was 3rd behind Solinsky in the Midwest Regional, finished 2nd (15:01), followed by Curtis (15:07), Araia (15:07) and Matt DeBole (Mt. Tabor, Winston-Salem) at 15:13.

The Midwest (27) dominated the team race, followed by the South (44), West (71) and Northeast (84).

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At 5-feet-even and 93 pounds, Zoe Nelson (Flathead, Kalispell, Montana) sometimes seems to get lost in a crowd. That is, until she makes her move.

Going into the girls' race soph Nelson and senior Ariana Lambie of (Bromfield, Harvard) were co-favorites but word leaked out that Lambie had spent much of Friday with a cold and suddenly Nelson was the favorite.

So what was the youngster's race plan? "I was just going to stay with the leaders until the second hill but when I had the lead after the first halfmile I thought 'O.K., let's go.' "

Go she did, increasing her lead each time she charged up the hill until her lead stretched to 14 seconds at 2.5M, a margin she maintained



Running away from the field: Solinsky's margin of victory was 20 seconds; Nelson's was 14.

through the finish line in 17:30. "I just love the hills," said Nelson, who had won the West Regional on Mt. SAC's hilly layout.

Meanwhile, behind Nelson there was a great battle going on for places 2–10. In the early going Caitlin McTague (Niskayuna, New York), Sara Powell (Ames, Easton, Massachusetts), frosh Nicole Blood (Saratoga Springs, New York), Megan Kaltenbach (Smoky Hill, Aurora, Colorado) and Laura Cummings (Bay Shore, New York) all were in contention for the lead before Nelson made her move.

In the end Katy Trotter (Little Silver, Red Bank, New Jersey) moved up through the pack to finish 2nd (17:44) followed by McTague (17:47), Cummings (17:48) and a fast-closing Amber Smith (Westwood, Ishpeming, Michigan). Lambie, after maintaining contact for more than 2M, faded to 22nd.

Nelson, who was 20th last year, became only the second soph ever to win. Julia Stamps (Santa Rosa, California) accomplished that feat in '94 but then fell in each of the next two years.

Nelson now has a chance to follow in the footsteps of Erin Keogh (Langley, McLean, Virginia), Melody Fairchild (Boulder, Colorado) and Erin Sullivan (Mt. Mansfield, Jericho Center, Vermont) as a 2-time champion.

The Northeast (26) dominated the team race, followed by the West (43), Midwest (54) and South (107 points).

— MEN'S RESULTS —

Individuals (5000m): 1. Solinsky (Stevens Point, WI) 14:41; 2. Smith (Hudson, OH) 15:01; 3. Curtis (Xavier, Louisville) 15:07; 4. Araia (Lawrence N, Indianapolis) 15:07; 5. DeBole (Mt Tabor, Winston-Salem) 15:13; 6. Heath (Winona, MN) 15:15; 7. Trafeh (Duarte, CA) 15:15; 8. Haji (Conard, W Hartford, CT) 15:16; 9. True (Greely, N Yarmouth, ME) 15:17; 10. Jespersen (Klamath Falls, OR) 15:17; 11. Mack (N Forsyth, Winston-Salem) 15:19; 12. Deak (MacLay, Tallahassee) 15:21; 13. Hassen (Vanguard, Ocala, FL) 15:21; 14. Pifer (Edwardsville, IL) 15:22; 15. K. Keino* (Ford Union, VA) 15:23; 16. Harper (W Plains, MO) 15:25; 17. Jones (Campbell County, Gillette, WY) 15:28; 18. Nelson (Liberty Christian, Redding, CA) 15:31; 19. Shepherd (Weber, N Ogden, UT) 15:32; 20. DeVries (Jay, Hopewell Junction, NY) 15:33; 21. Gottesfeld (Henderson, W Chester, PA) 15:34; 22. Poe (Etiwanda, CA) 15:39; 23. Simpson (Oak Glen, Chester, WV) 15:41; 24. Wall (Grant, Portland) 15:42; 25. Van Orsdel (Hopkins, Minnetonka, MN) 15:43; 26. Fennell (Pearl River, NY) 15:47; 27. Wagner (N, Columbus, IN) 15:48; 28. Gras (Belmont, MA) 15:56; 29. Tschirhart (Northport, NY) 15:59; 30. Pastore (Scranton, PA) 16:04; 31. Sullivan (The Woodlands, TX) 16:20;...dnf—Rupp (C Catholic, Portland).
Teams: 1. Midwest 27; 2. South 44; 3. West 71; 4. Northeast 84.

— WOMEN'S RESULTS —

Individuals (5000m): 1. Nelson (Flathead, Kalispell, MT) 17:30; 2. K. Trotter (Little Silver, Red Bank, NJ) 17:44; 3. McTague (Niskayuna, NY) 17:47; 4. Cummings (Bay Shore, NY) 17:48; 5. Smith (Westwood, Ishpeming, MI) 17:48; 6. Magill (Mtn View, Orem, UT) 17:51; 7. K. Kaltenbach (Smoky Hill, Aurora, CO) 17:51; 8. Owen (Killingly, Danielson, CT) 17:52; 9. Blood (Saratoga Springs, NY) 17:52; 10. Olding (Minster, OH) 17:53; 11. Geissler (Mead, Spokane) 17:54; 12. Graham (Gunn, Palo Alto) 18:00; 13. Harper (Orem, UT) 18:02; 14. Kiernan (Potomac, Vienna, VA) 18:03; 15. Sikes (Lakewood, OH) 18:04; 16. Bryan (Laguna Creek, Elk Grove, CA) 18:06; 17. Harrington (Carmel, IN) 18:08; 18. Dron (Home, Candia, NH) 18:11; 19. Forish (Lamar, Arlington, TX) 18:14; 20. M. Kaltenbach (Smoky Hill) 18:25; 21. Powell (Ames, Easton, MA) 18:33; 22. Lambie (Bromfield, Harvard) 18:34; 23. Schueler (SH, Louisville) 18:43; 24. Picchetti (Reagan, San Antonio) 18:49; 25. Wood (Los Alamos, NM) 18:50; 26. Chock (Granite Bay, CA) 18:51; 27. Lenn (St Paul's, Mobile) 18:54; 28. Honeyman (Scranton, ND) 18:56; 29. Blankenship (Wesleyan, Alpharetta, GA) 19:12; 30. Merrill (Jordan, Durham, NC) 19:42; 31. Bohnsack (Rockford, MI) 20:51;...dnf—Niehaus (Spring V, Columbia, SC).
Teams: 1. Northeast 26; 2. West 43; 3. Midwest 54; 4. South 107.