

# PREP CROSS COUNTRY

## Early race sets season stage

From Staff Reports

The cross country season is officially under way, and the surprises are few.

Walton's **Sam Bryfczynski** kicked off the year with a first-place finish at the Walton Stage Races on Saturday in Gainesville, posting a time of 10:08 to best second-place Jesse Marino from Collins Hill by 2 seconds.

On the girls' side, Kennesaw Mountain's **Katina Zuganelis** finished in 12:28 to take second behind Collins Hill's Jackie Drouin, who posted a 12:14 to easily take the stage.

KMHS teammate **Lindsey Pickens** also finished strong, taking second in stage four with a time of 12:46, while McEachern's **Ben Hubers** won stage three for the boys with a time of 10:28.

The most high-profile duel, though, was the one between Bryfczynski and Marino, ranked Nos. 2 and 3, respectively, in the preseason cross-country rankings for all classifications in the state.

Putting themselves out front showed the rest of the field that those rankings aren't to be taken lightly early in the year.

"I think it's important any time to finish strong," Walton coach **Tom Williams** said. "Both of them sent a message or the other kids that they're going to be on top of their game. Any time you finish on top, it's a good day."

In addition to the strong individual finishes, several teams posted scores low enough to make it near the top. Kennesaw Mountain was second on the girls' side, with Harrison taking sixth and Walton seventh.

For the boys, McEachern finished third, Walton took sixth, Pope was ninth and South Cobb rounded out the top 10.

The Indians had all five runners finish in the top six of their stages, and **Justin**

**Leach, Brian Potts and Ben Hubers** all ran almost identical times, giving coach **Travis Gowers** some positive signs to work with.

"It was a good start, but we know we've got a lot of work ahead of us," Gowers said. "Each one is there to pick the other one up on bad days or bad races. To have all three of them close together, that does wonders for your scoring."

■ **Taking a wrong turn:** In stage two at the Walton Stage Races, the coaches kept waiting for the leaders to come around to the mile marker and were surprised not to see them coming for a minute, then two, after they were expected.

And when the times began to come in at well over 12 minutes for the top boys, more than 15 for the girls' winners, everyone realized what had happened — the course couldn't hold them.

"It probably happens someplace almost every year," Williams said. "It's not the norm for every race, but it does occur."

The leaders went straight at one point on the course when they should have turned left, apparently, leading the entire field on a journey into a parking lot, then back onto the course again.

■ **Early rankings:** Several Cobb County runners are ranked in the top tier of the state in the preseason cross-country rankings, and a number of teams are receiving plenty of respect as well.

All-Classification Boys: 2. Bryfczynski, 9. Potts. All Classification Girls: 9. Zuganelis.

All-Classification boys teams: 3. Walton, 6. McEachern. All-Classification girls teams: 8. Pope, 9. Walton.

Class AAAAA boys teams: 3. Walton, 5. McEachern, 7. Pope, 10. KMHS. Class AAAAA girls teams: 4. Pope, 5. Walton, 7. Harrison, 10. KMHS.