

Saturday sprinkled with surprises for runners

By Rich Cooper
Staff Reporter

NORMAN, Okla. — Halloween was a day full of surprises for Nebraska cross country coach Jay Dirksen.

First, Nebraska women's cross country runner Sam Resh finished second to lead the Cornhuskers to a second-place finish behind Colorado at the Big Eight Cross Country Championships.

Then, Dirksen's No. 6-ranked men's team was upset by No. 8 Iowa State. The Cyclones finished with 47 points. Nebraska finished with 51. Colorado finished third with 92 points, followed by Kansas and Kansas State with 115 points each, Oklahoma with 142 points, Oklahoma State with 155, and Missouri with 177.

Dirksen said the weather played a major role in the loss. In 75-degree weather, winds whipped at 25 mph.

"We're the type of team that doesn't go out real hard but we move through the pack later in the race," Dirksen said. "And because of the wind there were a lot of people up in there that shouldn't have been there, and when our guys wanted to move up they were too far back and they couldn't run as fast late in the race."

"There were a lot of large gaps between each group of runners, and with the strong winds it was impossible to catch up to those packs."

Huskers led by seniors

The Huskers, who had three runners finish in the top eight, were led by seniors Jean Verster and Bryan Clark. Verster finished second and third to Iowa State's Barnaba Korir.

Korir, a junior from Eldoret, Kenya, covered the 10,000-meter course in 31:59.6. At one time during the race Korir led the first

pack of runners by as much as 30 seconds.

Verster, who finished with a time of 32:09.5, challenged Korir during the race's first 4,000 meters, but fell off the pace during the race's final 6,000 meters.

Warm weather sickening

Verster said he attributed the drop to the heat. He said at one point in the race, the warm weather caused him to feel sick.

"I felt really good the first 4,500 meters, but when Korir started to pull away, my body just couldn't take the fast pace anymore," Verster said. "Korir is used to running in the heat because where he comes from is a very warm climate."

"When I dropped back to ninth I really felt like my head was going to burst because the heat was getting to me."

Verster, who fell as far back as ninth, showed his speed during the race's last 1,500 meters by finishing second.

Dirksen said it took a lot for Verster to come back.

"Jean showed a lot of guts after falling back to ninth," Dirksen said. "I knew he could come back because he has so much natural speed."

Iowa State runs better

Dirksen said Iowa State won the championship because their five runners ran better than Nebraska's runners. All five Cyclone runners finished in the top 20, and Nebraska placed four. Jody Fischer, Nebraska's No. 5 runner, finished 24th.

Iowa State coach Bill Bergan said he thought Nebraska had the edge going into the meet because of their experience.

"I really thought Nebraska would win the meet because of

their experience, and that really concerned me," Bergan said. "But our guys were confident, more than I was, and they really wanted to win."

Dirksen said although the Huskers didn't run a bad race, they didn't run well enough to win.

"There were some guys on the team today who just didn't run the kind of race they're capable of," Dirksen said. "Our first four runners ran a great race, but Jody Fischer, Our No. 5 runner, didn't have a good race."

"And he really feels bad about it, but we either win as a team or lose as a team, and I don't blame him for what happened," he said.

Championship Nov. 14

Dirksen said Fischer will come back in Nebraska's next meet because he'll have something to prove. The Huskers will travel to Columbia, Mo., Nov. 14 for the Region Five cross country championship.

"Last year, Jody didn't run well at this meet and he came back and did a great job at districts," Dirksen said. "I suspect he will come back with fire in his eyes in two weeks because he'll have something to prove."

Dirksen said he was pleased with the second- and third-place finishes of Clark and Verster. He said he is looking forward to the Huskers' next meet because Nebraska traditionally runs better at districts.

Team unhappy

Clark, Nebraska's team captain, said the team is unhappy with its second-place finish because it didn't run the race it was capable of.

"We should've won, I think we're still the best team in the

conference. We just didn't prove it," Clark said. "The pace of the race was exactly what we as a team didn't want; we ran very slow into the wind while everybody else ran fast."

"We're the type of team that likes to run a good hard 10k (kilometer) race. Today's race was shorter with periods of rest in between and surges in the wind."

The Huskers let Iowa State control the tempo of the race, Verster said.

"Iowa State used the wind to their advantage," he said. "They have a lot of middle distance runners, so they would slow down when they were running against the wind and speed up when they were with the wind."

"We should have taken control of the race right at the start, but something like this is going to help us in two weeks because I think we're better than Iowa State."

Dirksen said he was a little surprised the women's team wasn't challenged more by Kansas State, the third-place team.

Women finish second

The Husker women finished second to Colorado with 57 points. Kansas State placed third with 70 points, followed by Iowa State, 98; Missouri, 118; Oklahoma State, 125; Oklahoma, 184; and Kansas, 199.

Oklahoma State's Jackie Goodman was the individual champion as she covered the 5,000-meter course in 16:57.9. It was the fourth consecutive year a Cowgirl runner has won the individual championship. Christine McMiken held the title for the last three years.

Resh, a junior from Shelton, was in position to win the race with 800 meters to go, but Goodman pulled away and opened up a 15-

second lead.

Dirksen said he told Resh not to chase Goodman because he didn't think she could stay with the sophomore from Nelson, New Zealand.

Nebraska placed three runners in the top 10. Resh finished second with a time of 17:15.6, and sophomores Juliet Prowse and Michele Marthaler finished fifth and ninth with times of 17:38.6 and 18:00.

Women's race 'fantastic'

Dirksen said all five of Nebraska's women's runners ran a great race.

"The women ran a fantastic race, probably the best of the season," Dirksen said. "If they run like that in two weeks they will stand a good chance of going to the NCAA Championships."

Dirksen said this year's team has improved quite a bit since the beginning of the season.

"I think we're getting maximum efforts from everybody on this year's team," Dirksen said. "And with everybody coming back next year we are going to be pretty good. Both Sam and Juliet should be even better next year."

Winds slow times

He said the wind made the times in both the men's and women's races a lot slower.

"Traditionally the Big Eight Conference is one of the toughest conferences in the country," Dirksen said. "If a team does well in the conference meet, then they're going to do well on the national level. Everybody in the country is going to look at the times and wonder what happened."

Dirksen said now that both his teams have the talent to contend for

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