

pitching prospects. At 5-8 and 180 pounds, no one will ask him to pose in his underwear.

But Consuegra is a baseball player. He's proved it throughout his career at Damascus. And yesterday afternoon in the Class

So in the final game, the school career, Consuegra pitched the game of his career. He limited Fallston of Harford County to three hits and two walks and fanned 12 as Damascus won its second state title in three years, 3-2.

Long Reach tops WJ for state title

Coaches attribute success to the leadership of their seniors

By VINCENT PULUPA
Journal staff writer

CATONSVILLE — When Laura Shaw of Walter Johnson hit the ground in the 300-intermediate hurdles, each of her teammates' mouths dropped wide open. At the fourth hurdle, Shaw's foot landed in a puddle of water and slipped out from under her. But Shaw didn't stay grounded for long. She jumped up and raced after the girls who were now ahead. Only seconds later did Shaw and her teammates realize that she salvaged a fifth-place finish with her amazing recovery.

The 300-intermediate hurdle event symbolized the good fortune WJ endured last weekend. In the dominating fashion they've displayed all season, the Walter John-

son girls tore through Maryland's best schools and came up just short of a state title.

Unfortunately for the Wildcats, their bid fell short to the leg strength of Long Reach's girls. In the four big relay events, Walter Johnson won only one and fell to the Howard County school in two others. WJ counts on its relay teams to stack up points, but on a day when its greatest challenger won two critical matchups, the tone was set for the meet.

Long Reach amassed 89 team points and won the 3A state title. Walter Johnson finished runner-up with 64 points and Damascus took

third with 46.

As for Shaw, she was distraught she fell during the state final. While teammates, including senior Debbie Fromstein, consoled Shaw, she knew a grand opportunity just passed her by.

"My first thought was, 'Oh my gosh, this can't be happening,'" said Shaw. "But I couldn't give up, so I kept going and went for it. I was really surprised when [the announcer] said I got fifth place."

Shaw, a freshman, was the No. 2 seed in the event, behind Fromstein. And although a state title opportunity may have slipped past, Shaw said her goal next year is simple. "I'm going to train over the summer and win the 300 hurdles next year."

Fromstein finished second to Bladensburg's Angela Bowling, 46.27 to 46.57. Arike Ogrundipe of Damascus took fourth in 48.36, edging Shaw's time of 48.97.

"Once you stop, it is very hard to get going again," said WJ assistant coach Tom Rogers. "She was right there at the front when it happened. It was a real shame but a great recovery for her to fight back like that."

Shaw is a competitive ice skater off the track and coaches said that may have been difference in her getting right back up immediately like she did.

"When you fall in ice skating, you still have to finish the program,"

Please see TRACK, B2

Els off tending to business

WJ seniors lead by example

TRACK from B1

said WJ head coach Greg Dunston.

Rogers concurred. "It probably never dawned on her to stay down," said Rogers. "As a skater, she's used to getting right back up when she falls. It was remarkable."

Shaw is now more embarrassed than anything else and said her teammates helped her to get over the mishap as soon as the race ended.

"Debbie came up to me and said, 'What happened? Why weren't you with me?'" said Shaw. "But they all kept telling me I'm a freshman and I'll get another shot, so everything's fine now."

The distance relays proved to be one difference this weekend between Long Reach and WJ. Although Long Reach placed in only two events, it won those events to make up the point differentials. Walter Johnson placed in all four but came away with only one title in the 3,200 relay.

Freshman Sarah Calderone and seniors Kim Milans, Mave Payton and Jenny Bodine ran the 3,200 relay and took the state championship in 9:34.86. Paint Branch finished runner-up in 9:49.81 and Damascus took fifth in 9:58.7. The victory in the 3,200 was WJ's fifth in a row at states, and eighth in nine years.

"By the time we got here, all we could do was make sure the steps were down and their handoffs efficient," said Rogers. "We didn't want to make any big mistakes, but we also trimmed it down and ran a little more on the edge."

Rogers explained at the regional meet, the goal is simply to qualify for states. Once the team was in, coaches expected WJ girls to push the envelope and take calculated risks.

Long Reach, however, was the team that took those risks at UMBC, and came away with the 400 and 800 relay titles. Long Reach edged Walter Johnson in both events, 48.23 to 49.54 in the 400, and 1:42.37 to 1:44.48 in the 800. While WJ came close to coming back in the 400, the Wildcats could not muster enough speed to catch the faster Long Reach runners, despite strong performances by sophomore Julie Brant, Shaw, Fromstein and junior Regina Rice. The rainy conditions didn't help the Wildcats' efforts either.

"It makes a huge difference," said Rogers. "Without the rain, we were expecting our fastest time of the year. With the rain, we just wanted to be in the race. We still went for the win, but the time wasn't going to be relevant. However, it is the same for all runners and Long Reach beat us pretty clearly."

The most exciting of the relays was the 1,600 event. Walter Johnson and Bladensburg stormed to the front early on as Calderone gave the Wildcats a blistering start. But by the time Calderone handed the baton to freshman Leigh Rivlin, WJ had 10 meters to make up.

Rivlin took WJ from 10 meters back to five meters ahead by the time she handed off to Milans. Bladensburg's third leg and anchor, however, were its "studs" and they poured on the speed to catch — and eventually — beat WJ to the finish line. Fromstein ran anchor for the Wildcats and caught up slowly, but the lead difference was too much to bridge in 400 meters.

"It was a fun race," said Rogers. "It was our fastest time

of the year, which is pretty amazing considering the conditions."

Recording the fastest times of the year caught on in the individual events, also. Milans ran a smart 1,600-meter race and finished third in 5:13.38. Katie Poole of Damascus finished ahead of Milans in 5:10.45; Erin Masterson of Annapolis took the title in 5:07.29.

"Kim put herself into the position she needed to be in," said Rogers. "She paced herself and didn't get sucked out too fast by faster girls. What can I say, she ran her best time this year and there's nothing wrong with that."

Bodine, however, got jammed in the 800-meter run. She broke from the pack and led after 400 meters. But as one girl passed her and got in front, another came up along side and boxed her in. Bodine usually likes to make her move with 300 meters remaining in the race, but was forced to wait until she broke free from traffic with only 100 meters left.

"She wanted to control the race a little more," said Rogers. "It happens. She got boxed in and couldn't make the move when she wanted to."

What next for WJ?

With Milans, Bodine, Payton and Fromstein graduating in a week, Walter Johnson's track team will suffer. Or will it?

"There's a lot of talent and leadership in those senior girls," said Rogers. "But they taught these freshmen well, and this freshmen class is awesome. Most people expect us to be like, 'Oh God, we're losing our four big studs, it'll be a rebuilding year next season!' But it really won't be."

So, what keeps WJ coaches so optimistic? Rogers said it revolved around one man. Coach Greg Dunston.

"His passion and enthusiasm is matched by few people," said Rogers. "For 29 years, he's instilled this pride and passion and innate leadership in the kids. So, why worry when that tradition has already been instilled in them?"

WJ coaches believe kids reflect their coaches' philosophies. Walter Johnson's freshman class saw how the seniors handled themselves both on and off the track this season, and results have already proven the fact.

"I try and make them feel good about themselves," said Dunston. "I won't ask them to do something I wouldn't do. And I won't ask them to do something if I didn't think they were ready. The kids bought into the program and they've hung in there [this season]."

Because the bulk of the current seniors' work are long-distance runs, Dunston realizes next year he'll have to prepare his girls as a sprint-oriented team. "We look at all the events and we fit the events to the kids," said Dunston. "The joke here is that I make everybody an 800-meter runner because you can move up or down from there."

All kidding aside, the coaching staff around Dunston is what he considers the biggest difference. Dunston said he's only as good as the people who surround him, and they need to hold similar viewpoints. A "team-first, individual-second" mentality is the key.

"The kids who live it are the ones who become your leaders," said Rogers. "Three years from now, it'll be Sarah Calderone, Leigh Rivlin and Laura Shaw. For everyone who wants to know why you're good year after year, this is why. If you have fun and work hard, success will follow."

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