

# The Regionals Dream Team

By Alex Taft

Four and a half months of almost daily running has produced the fruits of victory for the OHHS Girls' Cross Country team. At the Districts meet, where the top four teams running qualify for the Regionals meet, the team got an astonishing second place overall, earning the Girls' Cross Country team one more 5k and the honor of being able to represent the Highlanders at the Regionals meet in Troy. The Girls' Cross Country team is arguably the strongest sports team that Oak Hills has, with the team having qualified for Regionals numerous times in recent years and regularly proving itself to be one of the best Girls' Cross Country teams in the entirety of the Southwest Ohio Cross Country region; a region that stretches from the Kentucky and Indiana borders, past Dayton, and all the way north to Troy. The indisputable greatness of this team was made more evident than ever at the Regionals meet, with the team as a whole placing seventh out of seventeen of the top teams in the region, and two runners, Eva Hensley and Alyssa Hammond, individually qualifying for the State meet at Fortress Obetz in Columbus by placing top twenty in the race of one hundred twenty-eight runners. Albeit the team falling short of its goal of making it to state as a team by placing top six overall, finishing seventh, just one spot away from a state-qualifying team, is still no small feat, and demonstrates the astonishing skill of the OHHS' Girl's Cross Country team. To get first-hand accounts on the Regionals meet, spotlight a few of Oak Hills's zealous runners, and exemplify the achievements of the OHHS Girls' Cross Country team, I have conducted five interviews with athletes who ran in the Regionals race. I have interviewed Anna Price (Sophomore), state qualifiers Eva Hensley (Junior) and Alyssa Hammond (Senior), conducted a spontaneous double interview with Caitlyn Wunderlich (Junior) and Annabelle Hageman (Sophomore), and interviewed the Girls' Cross Country head coach Michele, or "Shelly", Hageman.

## **Interview With Anna Price**

**Me:** "Do you consider Troy to be a good course or a bad course? Why or why not?"

**Anna:** "I would consider it to be a pretty good course but also bad because the footing is not very great but it is pretty flat which is nice."

**Me:** "Usually Regionals is cold and rainy. Did you prefer running in the warm and sunny weather or would you have rather it been cold and rainy?"

**Anna:** “Honestly, I would rather it have been cold and rainy because it’s just more iconic and with the warm and sunny weather it was just so hot. I would rather it have been colder.”

**Me:** “I don’t know if it’s just me but it also felt more menacing. Without the rain and bad weather it just felt eerily quiet.”

**Anna:** “I agree.”

**Me:** “Troy seemed to be a slow course for everyone who ran it. What about the course do you think made it slow and difficult?”

**Anna:** “I feel like the footing honestly and that one really steep hill honestly just takes the wind out of me. The footing is just not the greatest.” (Interviewer note: The steep hill on the course is actually the worst.)

**Me:** “Although the team didn’t make it to State as hoped, the OHHS Girls’ Cross Country team has still had multiple great seasons in a row. Do you believe that this momentum could carry Oak Hills to State by the time you graduate?”

**Anna:** “I really hope so. I feel like we have a pretty good team and we were really close to making it this year, so hopefully we will make it.”

**Me:** “As an athlete with two years left to go, do you have any personal goals that you’re hoping to accomplish by your Senior year?”

**Anna:** “I want to break 20:00 at some point because my current PR (personal record) is 20:15. And I also want to stay on varsity for the next two years.”

**Me:** “Are you satisfied with your personal time or placement at Regionals?”

**Anna:** “I was hoping to place higher to hopefully get my goal place and make us to state. I think that I did the best I could on that day, but I wish I could’ve run better that day.”



**Me:** “Regionals suck.”

**Anna:** “Yeah Regionals suck.”

**Me:** “I’m still sore from it.”

**Anna:** “Me too.”

**Me:** “What’s your favorite part about Cross Country?”

**Anna:** “I’d say honestly the team. I just really like our team and I feel like it’s fun going to all these dinners and stuff (the Cross Country teams have team dinners), and it’s fun spending time with them during the fall.”

**Me:** “Are you satisfied with your Cross Country season overall?”

**Anna:** “Yes I am satisfied with my Cross Country season overall. I feel like I’ve had a lot of ups and downs and I’m not very consistent compared to last year, but I’ve had a lot of improvements so yes.”

Even though the conditions for Regionals weren’t ideal: sunny and warm weather, a bumpy course, the dreaded steep Troy hill that gives every Cross Country nightmares. Anna Price still gave her best effort at Regionals, and will surely accomplish gargantuan feats in her remaining two years of running.

### **Interview With Eva Hensley**

**Me:** “How did the regionals meet at Troy compare to the Troy night race earlier in the season?”

**Eva:** “It honestly felt the same. I felt tired in both of them but this one was a little bit more competitive. Obviously there were more people and I think I got stuck a little but overall basically the same.”

**Me:** “This will be the third time you’ve run the state meet. What has the state meet been like in the past?”

**Eva:** “It’s been really fun basically! It’s been really fun to just bond with my friends and just do everything. Honestly I feel like people would feel like it’s very nerve-racking but once you’re there it’s fine. I’ve gone so many times so I’m used to it now, and it’s just

such a fun experience seeing your name everywhere and everyone talking to you, so it's always a great time." (Interviewer note: Eva gives very descriptive answers)

**Me:** "What's the secret to your success?"

**Eva:** "To not really care. I know I care but like, to not really be stressed out. If you can stay calm as long as you can then that's the way to go."

**Me:** "Do you have any goals for the state meet?"

**Eva:** "I want to be top twenty. Every year I keep getting like 22nd or 21st and if I'm top 20 I can go on the podium so that's my goal."

**Me:** "How do you plan to achieve that goal?"

**Eva:** "To start out fast because I always get stuck on the turn. There's like a really bad turn if you've ever been there. It's just a straight turn and it's pretty bad so I normally get stuck, but if I get out fast enough I think I'll be ready to be top twenty."

**Me:** "Is there anything in particular that motivates you to run hard?"

**Eva:** "College. Basically that always comes in my head, like 'If I don't do good this certain college won't want me.' I also don't want to disappoint myself, so yeah college and myself."

**Me:** "Are there any colleges that you're looking at running for specifically?"

**Eva:** "Yeah but I don't know if I'm allowed to share them; it's just not official yet. I'm too young!"

**Me:** "You're currently seated to finish 31st out of one hundred seventy-four runners at Fort Obetz. How many places do you plan on moving this number up?"

**Eva:** "I'm hoping at least eleven but if we can go top fifteen that would always be fun."



**Me:** “What makes Cross Country unique as a sport?”

**Eva:** “How bad it hurts and how everybody has to do the same thing. In other sports not everybody has to do the same thing or compete the same way, but in Cross Country, everybody has to run the same amount of miles and everybody’s dying, so I like how everybody does everything the same.”

Being a seasoned veteran of the State meet, Eva Hensley will surely slay at the State meet. The third time’s the charm, and twenty is just around the corner!

### **Interview With Alyssa Hammond**

**Alyssa:** “The Wonderful Investigations of Alex Taft?”

**Me:** “Yes.” She laughed at my investigative notebook title :(

**Me:** “What were you feeling going into Regionals?”

**Alyssa:** “I was excited because we had a good chance at going to state as a team and also individually.”

**Me:** “Had you not outrun the two runners next to you at the end of the race you would not have qualified to state. With the stakes so high, what was going through your head during the final stretch of the race?”

**Alyssa:** “I was like ‘Ok I feel awful but I’ll feel more awful if I don’t go to state.’ The pain is temporary but State is forever.”

**Me:** “What are your plans for State?”

**Alyssa:** “Haven’t really thought about that yet. Just planning on running so far.”

**Me:** “What’s something you would tell your Freshman self when it comes to running high school Cross Country?”



**Alyssa:** “Don’t give up. Just keep going.”

**Me:** “Do you plan on running for any colleges after you graduated?”

**Alyssa:** “Yes.”

**Me:** “What colleges?”

**Alyssa:** “To be determined.”

**Me:** “Your current 5k PR of 18:32.70 is over one minute faster than your PR from last year. Why do you think you got so much faster so quickly this season?”

**Alyssa:** “Two things. One: that’s not my PR (my bad!) And two: last year I was just done and gave up, but this year I have confidence.”

**Me:** “What’s one word you’d use to describe your past four years of high school Cross Country?”

**Alyssa:** “Exciting.”

**Me:** “Why?”

**Alyssa:** “Maybe I need a new word?”

\*Junior Boys’ Cross Country runner EJ Schneider slams a foot-long wooden ruler on a desk\* **“WHY!?”**

**Alyssa:** “Because it’s exciting when your teammates do good in a race and you do good by yourself too!”

“Just keep going” is what Cross Country is all about. Running multiple miles at such fast paces takes a toll on the body and causes the mind to doubt itself, but as Alyssa Hammond would tell her Freshman self, “just keep going.” Alyssa’s marvelous Senior season will absolutely end with a bang at the state meet tomorrow.

Also, special thanks to EJ Schneider for his assistance in this interview.

**Interview With Caitlyn Wunderlich and Annabelle Hageman**

**Me:** “Do you consider Troy to be a good course or a bad course? Why or why not?”

**Caitlyn:** “I consider it to be bad because of all of the hills and it has awful footing.”

**Annabelle:** “I did not like Troy’s course I thought it was bad. I hated the weather the day we ran it! It was too hot.” (Interviewer note: Nice and sunny weather sucks for Cross Country.)

**Me:** “What’s your favorite part about Cross Country?”

**Annabelle:** “The team.”

**Caitlyn:** “My favorite part about Cross Country is my friends. All of my first friendships from high school are from Cross Country.”

**Me:** “Are you satisfied with your personal time/placement at Regionals?”

**Caitlyn:** “At Regionals I was very proud of my placement because I placed eleven spots ahead of where I was supposed to place. And my time was just my time; it was okay.”

**Anabelle:** “No I was not proud of my time. I was two minutes slower and my place was not where I wanted it to be.”

**Me:** “If you could describe Cross Country in one word what would it be?”

**Annabelle:** “Determination.”

**Caitlyn:** “I would say chaotic, but in a good way. Final answer is chaotic.”



Being on the Cross Country team, you get to meet so many amazing people that you call friends, as clear from the comments of Caitlyn Wunderlich. This comradery is one of the many things that makes Cross Country so great in all of its chaos. Through determination, Caitlyn managed to pull eleven spots ahead of where she was seated to place. And even though Annabelle Hageman didn't run quite how she had hoped, it's undeniable that she put forth her best effort for her team. Like Caitlyn said: Cross Country is chaotic. One week you might run a PR, and the next you may run the worst race of your life, but as long as you have the determination to give your all to every race, you'll always win, even when you lose.

### **Interview With Coach Hageman**

**Me:** "How many years have you been coaching?"

**Mrs. Hageman:** "Twenty-three."

**Me:** "The OHHS Girls' Cross Country team has seen great success over the past few years. In your years of coaching, have you ever had a year with a team comparable to the current Cross Country team?"

**Mrs. Hageman:** "Yes. I had a team win Regionals and place sixth at the state meet. BUT! This is the best team since 2008, which is my team that went to state."

**Me:** "What do you think can be best attributed to the Girls' Cross Country team's current success?"

**Mrs. Hageman:** "I think I have a lot of dedicated athletes who get along really well with each other."

**Me:** "What training methods have you employed to ensure the success of the team?"

**Mrs. Hageman:** "Over the last few years we've increased our mileage more, but these girls are very dedicated and because they've been training for years they can handle the mileage."

**Me:** “As a former high school and collegiate Cross Country runner, is there anything from your own personal running experience that influences your coaching strategy?”

**Mrs. Hageman:** “Absolutely! I took a lot of what I learned in high school and college and I brought it here. Although I haven’t been in high school for a long time, so a lot of things have changed since I was in high school; a lot of training methods have changed. So I’m always adapting what I do from year to year to try to figure out what works and what best fits the athletes that I currently have.”

**Me:** “What are your overall thoughts on how the Regionals meet at Troy played out?”

**Mrs. Hageman:** “We knew that we could finish anywhere between 4th and 7th, so 7th was kind of bittersweet. We were definitely hoping for a 4th or 5th place finish. Although, we also know that at the Regionals race anything can happen, and there are a lot of good teams in our region. I mean we have Mason who’s ranked number one in the State, Loveland is currently ranked number six in State, so we knew it was going to be a tough race. I’d be lying if I didn’t say I was a little disappointed because we were only eighteen points away from State. But then again, with that said our seventh-place finish is the best since 2008, so when we look at it as a whole I feel like it was a good finish.”

**Me:** “In the next Cross Country season the team will be losing Seniors Alyssa Hammond and Julia Hageman. With these losses, do you believe that the Girls’ Cross Country team will still have a shot at making it to State next year?”

**Mrs. Hageman:** “Our goal is always to make it State, so although they are a huge loss to our team, I think that we have some underclassmen that will be able to step up and fill in those roles. And we’re always looking to recruit other athletes to help us out, so our goal is always State.”

**Me:** “Is there anything you’d like to say about Cross Country as a sport?”

**Mrs. Hageman:** “I think that Cross Country is one of the most amazing sports. Not only is it a team sport, but it is an individual sport also. You can make it to State and Regionals as a team, but you can also make it as an individual. The girls that run Cross



Country are always very dedicated, they get along with each other, they're always very motivated to do their best, and so it's just an amazing group of girls. They're always like the nicest, kindest people to coach."

Despite falling short of state, the Girls' Cross Country team has proven itself to be a team of determined and dedicated individuals. Whether it's the sheer will of the team to succeed, the prodigious coaching of coach Shelly Hageman, or a mix of both, one truth is evident: Oak Hills has a dream team on its hands. The OHHS Girls' Cross Country team often takes the back seat behind other sports at Oak Hills in terms of recognition, but this team puts in an insurmountable amount of effort into shining in the name of Oak Hills all the same. Speaking on behalf of every Highlander, I'd like to say thank you to the entire Girls' Cross Country team for proudly waving the banner of OHHS to Troy and beyond. Now it's time for runners Eva Hensley and Alyssa Hammond to carry the flag to Columbus, and show the state what we've got!

