

Mount Paran girls, Whitefield boys complete championship conquests at area meet

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Whitefield Academy's boys track team celebrates after winning the Area 4 meet April 19, 2018. Staff - Carlton D. White

MABLETON — It was the same old song for the Mount Paran Christian girls and Whitefield Academy boys teams Thursday in the Area 4A track and field championship at Whitefield.

The Lady Eagles defended their title from last year, scoring 147.5 points to beat runner-up Whitefield (113 points), while the WolfPack (123.5) captured their fifth straight crown, beating Darlington (109.5).

With the team titles decided, training for the top four finishers in each event shifts to next week's Class A sectional at Landmark Christian.

The Mount Paran girls led the team standings following seven completed events from Tuesday's action at Darlington and held on for the victory. North Cobb Christian (76.5) was third among the nine-team field, and Walker (51) placed eighth.

"That's two in a row now, so it's good to see the girls stepping up," Mount Paran coach Wes Anderson said. "This is crazy for them. We thought we were good last year, and now we've brought more people in this year, and we're even better. It's nice to have so many gifted athletes on the team."

Whitefield came from behind to win the boys championship after trailing Darlington by 12 points entering Thursday's races. Mount Paran (97) finished third overall, with North Cobb Christian (78) fifth and Walker (24) seventh.

"We had some injuries, but it was a team effort as guys filled in and responded," Whitefield coach Tim Unsicker said. "The consistency and depth of our boys team is great, and there's more talent coming. Our middle school coaches are doing a fantastic job getting these kids ready. It's about the team."

Abby Gardner's win in the girls 3,200-meter run (13 minutes, 5.51 seconds) and Devin Wade's win in the boys 3,200 (10:45.34) punctuated their teams' respective championships.

Gardner beat Darlington's Emily by 2 seconds to win the race, while Wade finished roughly 45 seconds ahead of his closest competitor.

“I wanted to stick behind (Edwards), especially on the back stretch because of the wind, and use my kick at the end,” Gardner said. “The group went out slow, but I wanted to set the pace my last two laps and then pull it out. It feels really good to win.”

Although Wade ran the majority of his race well out in front, he said it will get more difficult to the closer it is to the state meet.

“I knew I wouldn’t (set a personal record), so I just tried to get first and run a decent race,” Wade said about the windy conditions. “I like having people around to push me, so it was harder to run by myself, but you do what you have to do.”

Mount Paran’s other girls state qualifiers from Thursday were Angel Ferary (100, 200), its championship 400 relay team (51.31) and the 1,600 relay.

Renee Dockins won the 100-meter hurdles (15.5) and placed second in the 300 hurdles (48.14). Freshman Anna Katherine Hambrick outsprinted Whitefield’s Emily L. Little to win the 800 in a personal-best 2:26.76.

“I lost to Emily in seventh grade and held that in my mind,” Hambrick said. “She’s an amazing runner and like a legend to me already, so to beat her is amazing. This is my best moment so far, and Emily just pushes me to do well.”

Whitefield’s other female state qualifiers from Thursday were Shelby Wingate (100, 200), Mi Mi Little (200), Annie Edwards (800), Emilie Grand’Pierre (3,200), Cha Cha Hamilton (100 hurdles) and both relay squads.

North Cobb Christian’s Synclair Savage won the 100 (12.38), 200 (25.30) and anchored the Lady Eagles to the 1,600 relay title (4:25.96). The 400 relay also advanced.

“This is a major improvement for me from last year,” Savage said. “I really had to work on moving my arms to get my times lower and step my game up. It’s really exciting to sweep the 100 and 200.”

In Thursday's boys' action, Jordan Johnson (400), Nicholas Harris (800), Chip Goldsmith (110 hurdles, 300 hurdles), the 400 relay and the championship 1,600 relay (3:39.55) joined Wade in qualifying for the sectional from Whitefield.

North Cobb Christian's Robert Mathis (100, 200), C.J. Ayers (400), Connor Constantine (800), Nick Love (3,200) and Bailey Armstrong (300 hurdles) advanced, along with the 400 and 1,600 relay squads.

Mount Paran's Jonathan House won the 800 (2:02.14), while Michael Coffee edged Jordan Johnson at the line by .01 seconds to win the 400 (53.19).

"I just wanted to keep up with the fastest guy in the region and push at the end," House said. "I got him (Harris) at the 200 and kept going. This is my first year running the 800, and my goal was to win (area), and I did that (Thursday)."

Ben Keller (3,200), Grant Pulley (110 hurdles, 300 hurdles) and Mount Paran's 1,600 relay also qualified.