

1988

A special thanks to Greg Linhares for this account.

1988 saw a SLUH team that could finally call itself experienced looking firmly at a state meet berth not as a longshot, but as an expectation. For the first time in recent memory, SLUH returned all of its top runners, and all had improved their stature since the 1987 campaign. Junior Mickey Luna burst out of the gate as SLUH's #1 runner at the dual meet with eventual state champion Parkway West, running right with a host of 4 eventual all-staters to finish in a blazing then-personal best of 16:44. Senior Brian Lawler followed up a strong track campaign with a solid summer and became the early-season #2, running in the 17:30s and medaling at major invitationals including the large Hazelwood Invitational.

The team's promise of past years finally became reality when the team won its first Varsity invitational in recent memory, the 10-team Eureka Invitational, which featured perennial area power Lafayette, among other strong teams. As the season progressed, senior John Sadlo and junior Jerry Kester joined Lawler and supplanted him on occasion, giving SLUH 4 runners who could be at or below 17:30 on any given day, a strong formula for success come tournament season. The team even began to make ground on rivals DeSmet and CBC (who unfortunately had been their superior for some years at the time) by finishing 3rd to the Spartans (featuring all-staters Terry Ryan and Ryan Nicholson) and the Cadets (featuring all-staters Dan Munz and Bill Dauphinais) at the DeSmet Invitational. Prepared as they could be, the team easily qualified through District in 2nd place, with a team of Luna, Sadlo, Kester, Lawler, Jamie Cummings, Angelo Directo, and up-and-coming sophomore Jim Spies (who rose to #6 on varsity in only his first season out for the sport), all able to cruise through district without any fear for the first time in memory. Sectionals at Jefferson Barracks proved to be an even tougher test than expected, however, with a district from southeast Missouri providing perhaps its best representation ever. This fact was best evidenced by the fact that not even team #2 John Sadlo was able to qualify for state despite running a personal-best 17:17, which was only 27th place in this speedy sectional. The remainder of the top five, including Kester, Lawler and Cummings in order, ran respectably in the 17:30s and 17:40s, but it was not enough as SLUH missed the state meet by twenty points, with only Luna (7th overall) making the state meet. Luna then set his goals on an all-state top 15 performance, but fell just short of this difficult goal in a still-impressive and once again improved 27th place finish.

On the JV and C levels, both units steadily improved the winning SLUH tradition. With the dominant freshman teams from 1986 and 1987 now mature juniors and sophomores, the JV team was both one of the deepest and most talented in the area. Part-time Varsity runner and multi-sport performer, junior Scott Franklin, often led the JV in only his first cross country season, and was followed by other part-time varsity runners, including junior Greg Linhares and sophomore Shawn Halley. Sophomores Kurt Moellering and Pete Leutchmann also ran with the front of the talented JV group. Injuries prevented juniors Curt Miles and John Rotter from fulfilling their potential, but when healthy, these two could also be seen with the best of the JV runners. Once again, though, it was the SLUH freshmen who shone brightest. Chris Schmidt, John Miles, and John Brooks led a large and talented group to several invitational victories, with others such as Steve Brockland, Mike Kenney and Jeff Bierling medaling on several occasions as well.

Despite the disappointing sectional finish, it could truly be said that, as of that time, this was the greatest SLUH team since Jim Linhares had taken over the program. Finally emerging as an area power on all three levels while garnering a #8 St. Louis Post-Dispatch metro area ranking throughout the season, the 1988 team can clearly be pointed to as the foundation of the tradition, class and pride that is now known as SLUH XC.