

Sports News Writing - Antonia Boschult

Headline: *They've done it again*

Subheadline: *How the lady Mustangs secured back to back state cross country titles*

McCool Junction Girl's Cross Country made school history on Oct. 24, becoming the first team ever to win back to back state championships in school history.

The team defended its title after beating the Crofton Warriors by just one point. In cross country, the top three runners on each team score points while the other two runners are "pushers". Sophomore Kayleigh Betka placed fifth overall, scoring four points, Junior Leah Dawson placed 10th scoring seven points and Freshman Kayliana Kitto placed 27th scoring 19 points. Junior Natalie Clark placed 60th, while Senior Claire Brugger placed 90th.

Brugger, McCool's lone senior, wrapped up her cross country career. Clark, Dawson, Betka, Sophomore Nia Boschult and Kitto are just getting started. Kitto was a key asset to McCool's success, running a 20:29. Kitto stated that she was very nervous before running her race. She knew she had trained well and the whole team was hungry for another state title. After running her race, she said she was happy knowing she did everything she could for her team to win.

"I was nervous, but it eventually turned into happiness [because] I was super proud of our team," Kitto said.

Overall, Kitto said cross country had greatly impacted her this year. She added that she was overjoyed to be a part of a team who always gave their all.

"Cross country has definitely made me happier," said Kitto. "I love being with people who put in effort and want to be successful."

Kitto also said that she was going to put in even more training and effort for years to come.

The girl's team won their first state title back in 2020. Four years later, the Mustang girls' won the 2024 state title. Head Coach, Ryan Underwood, has been a big part of all the teams success over the years. On the day of state, Underwood said he knew that the team had put in lots of training, yet there was solid competition, compared to last year. The girl's team was ranked second, next to Crofton, all year. He added that in order for them to come out on top, Clark or Kitto had to run their best race yet. With plenty of personal records for each girl, they ended up as Class D Champions for the second year in a row. Overall, Underwood emphasized how resilient this year's team was. With injuries throughout the year, they still managed to fight through and came out as champions.

"I love their ability, when things were challenging, to push through that," Underwood said about this year's state champions.