

Comstock Park's Witte gets fifth place in Class C race

By Alan Babbitt

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Slippery conditions at the Class C meet Saturday brought back some unpleasant memories for Wes Witte.

As a junior last year, the Comstock Park cross country runner fell down in the mud twice and could not rebound in time to earn one of 15 All-State medals.

Witte did not let the elements bother him this time though as he participated in the individual race at Lowell High School. He finished fifth among 75 competitors with a time of 16:32.

"(Wes) thought he had a shot last year, but he just could not do it," Comstock Park coach Jerry Hopkins said. "He came back and ran his best race ever in high school."

With his strong-willed effort, Witte became only the second male runner in school history to be named All-State. Jim Gilbert is the only other Panther to do so.

Witte was joined on the All-State team by three other local competitors, including two from his own O-K Silver Conference.

Allendale's Kurt Laansma successfully overcame his recent battle with a leg injury to take sixth

place. The O-K Silver champ crossed the finish line 10 seconds behind Witte. Derek Thomasma of Kelloggsville grabbed the final spot for a medal by one second. His 15th-place time was 16:50.

Representing the Newaygo County Athletic Association, Hesperia's Jim Harrington earned All-State recognition when he ran a 13th-place time of 16:47.

In the girls' race, Rachel Laansma of Allendale, Kurt's sister, led a contingent of five local runners who medaled in the individual race. She finished third overall with an effort of 20:02. Teammate Sara Riker also ran a strong race as she came in 14th (20:39).

Three competitors from the NCAA finished among the top 15. MacKenzie Woodring of Holton took sixth place as she completed the course in 20:23. Five seconds behind her was Morley Starwood's Melissa Culver, who came in eighth overall. Culver's teammate, Heather Anderson, had the 15th-fastest time (20:41).

In the team race, Newaygo totaled 326 points to take 15th place out of 21 teams. Freshmen Maggie and Crystal Shafer led the Lions by finishing 21st and 42nd respectively.