

Panthers heading to PIAA meet in four events

By Michael Love

Sports editor

Ranked first all year, the Sewickley Academy boys 4 x 800-meter relay team wanted to climb to the top of the podium at the WPIAL Class AA track and field championships Tuesday at South Side Beaver High School.

TRACK AND FIELD

The quartet of Kenny Burgess, Matt Solter, G Patrick and James Hilliard did just that, setting a new school record and earning championship gold with a winning time of 8:17.71.

It was the first gold medal won at WPIALs by an individual or relay in school history.

"It is a great feeling," Burgess said.

"We are such a close team. We've worked so hard for this. Everyone ran their best. Now it's on to states."

Burgess, Solter and Hilliard were on last year's 4 x 800 relay that placed third at WPIALs (8:19).

On Tuesday, SA outdistanced second-place Washington by almost five seconds.

"The team has gotten better and better as the season has gone on," said Dave Long, Sewickley Academy head coach.

"There was a lot of pressure on them, but they came through."

Washington's 4 x 800 relay team was second at last year's WPIAL meet and all four members of the squad returned.

"The guys were excited to be able to beat Washington," Long said.

The Panther 4 x 800 relay was the top AA squad at the Mars Invitational. The top

three finishers in the event were AAA schools.

Individually, Burgess qualified for states after taking third in the 3200 run (9:50.28).

He bested his qualifying time by more than 16 seconds (10:06.4).

"Kenny felt he didn't run his best race," Long said.

"He is gunning for a state medal both individually and with the relay."

Shortly after the boys 4 x 800 relay team claimed Sewickley Academy's first WPIAL gold medal, senior Maggie Sutherland made it two.

She won the high jump with a winning attempt of 5 feet, 1 inch.

Riverside's Ashley Lotz also made that distance, but Sutherland won the title on fewest total misses.

Sutherland missed once at 4 feet, 11 inches, but Lotz missed twice at 5 feet, 1 inch before making it.

Last year's WPIAL winning height in the long jump was 5 feet, 3 inches by Greensburg Central Catholic's Lauren Donahoe.

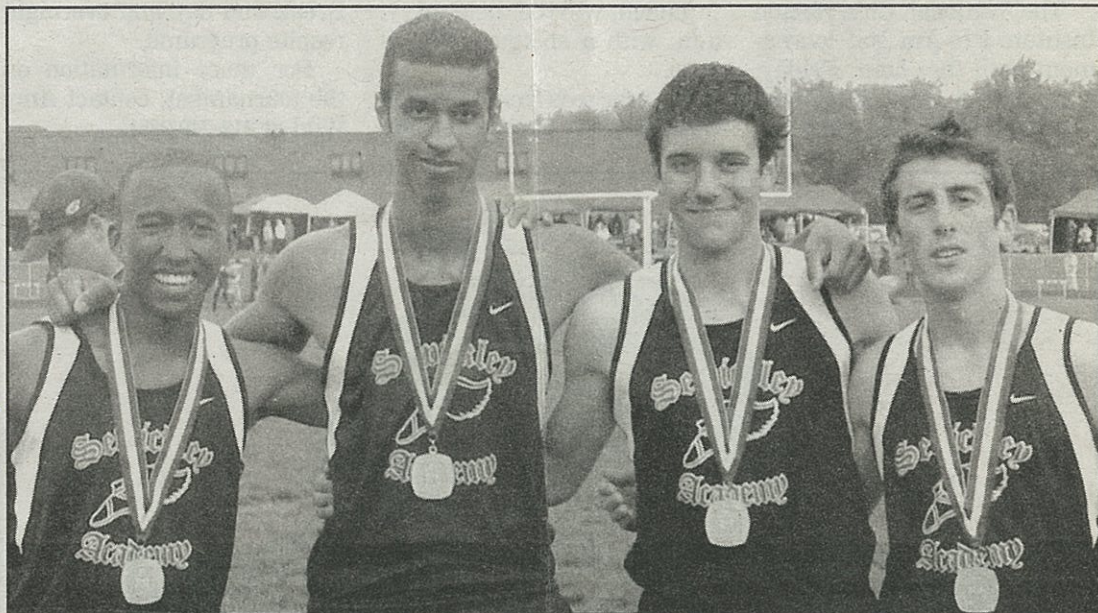
"Maggie has definitely jumped better before," Long said.

"The weather had a lot to do with the lower heights. Who has the best mental approach in the rain is the one that will do well."

Sutherland placed third (5 feet, 2 inches) in the high jump at last year's PIAA meet.

In the 100 hurdles, Sutherland qualified for states.

"Maggie was not rested for this meet," Long said. "She will be rested for states. She wants to add a state medal in the hurdles to the one she has for the high jump."



CELEBRATING THEIR WPIAL title in the 3200 relay are, from left, Kenny Burgess, G Patrick, James Hilliard and Matt Solter.