

HIGH SCHOOL NATIONALS

NXN & Foot Locker XC

by Rich Gonzalez

The bad news about having a pair of "national" championship high school cross country races only a week apart is that the best of the best don't always go head-to-head.

The good news is that more athletes get a chance to compete at the highest level.

NXN Boys: Lutz

For Craig Lutz (Marcus, Flower Mound, Texas), the last 100 at NXN provided his biggest challenge to date: run down favored Joe Rosa while staying off other stubborn rivals.

But just like the amazing stretch drive to his season, Lutz prevailed yet again. Timing his kick perfectly, the Lone Star junior reeled in the seemingly-in-control New Jersey star with 20 meters left to win in 15:09.2.

Rosa (15:09.8) was edged for 2nd by California's Elias Gedyon (15:09.8) over the chilled mud-packed course that measured 60-plus meters beyond 5K.

"Rosa almost pulled away but I went after him just in time," said Lutz. "And I knew Elias had to be closing right behind me as well." Lutz, who lost only the NXN South Regional this fall, added, "This was my biggest win ever, and these guys made sure it took everything I had."

NXN Girls: Flood

After finishing 2nd in '07, Iowa's Katie Flood was sidelined by a season-ending injury last year only to find a worthy challenger upon her return this year: teammate Ashlie Decker.

Flood credited Decker's continual support as key to her comeback as the Dowling Catholic senior claimed a career-defining victory by outkicking Virginia's Kathleen Stevens,

17:47.2–17:48.6.

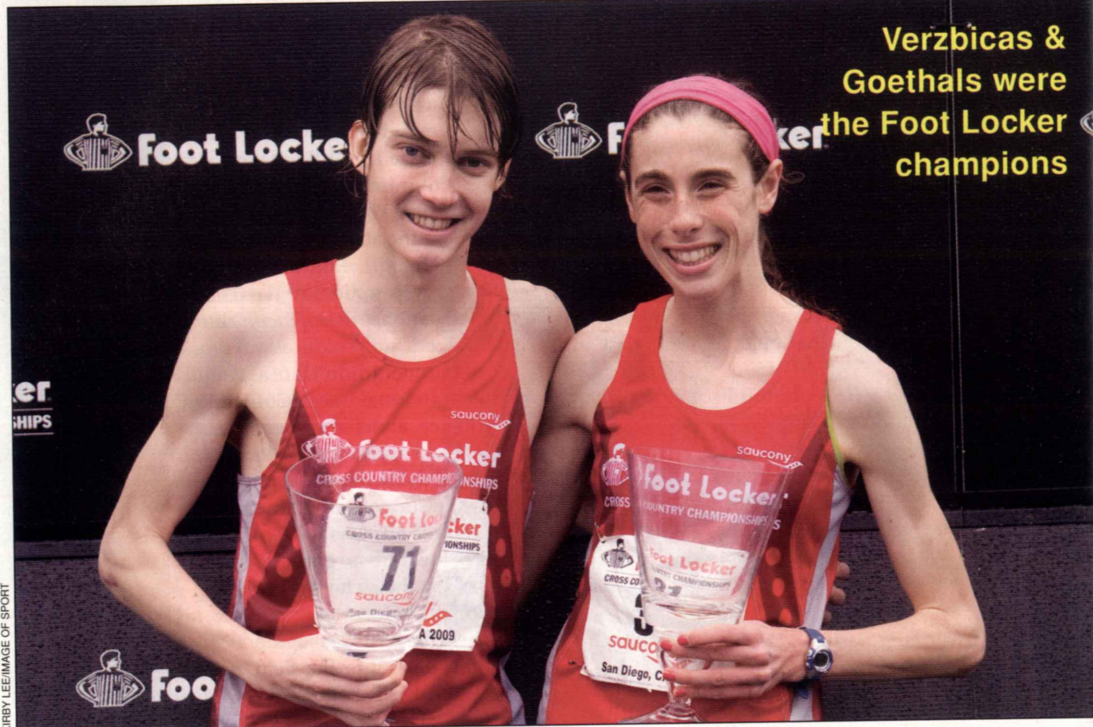
The pair dueled shoulder-to-shoulder over much of the final straight at Portland Meadows before the more experienced Flood finally broke

a postseason Achilles injury, but recovered for the FL Midwest Regional. Injury had ended his '09 track season early.

"This was a special victory after all that has happened," he said. "Next year, I hope to compete for the win at both NXN and here."

Foot Locker Girls: Goethals

Despite pre-meet internet hoopla of a meeting between several big names, intangibles and mental focus pointed to a duel in the



ahead to stay. California soph Rebecca Mehra (17:54.9) bested Decker (17:55.8) for 3rd.

"I didn't give myself much chance to win with all the talent here and my time away," said Flood. "I had nothing to lose so I just went after it and everything fell into place beyond my best expectations."

Foot Locker Boys: Verzbicas

We've likely seen the future of U.S. prep distance running and it's like nothing we've seen before.

Illinois's Lukas Verzbicas became the first soph winner in Foot Locker Cross Country Champs boys history by blowing away the field on the second circuit of the dual-loop 5K course to best runner-up Matt McElroy, 15:07.8–15:22.6, the widest victory margin in seven years.

Verzbicas' leg strength from all his biking miles—he is the World Junior duathlon and Pan-Am Junior triathlon champ—served him well on the hills of rain-soaked Balboa Park.

Unbeaten this fall, he skipped NXN qualifying with

Foot Locker's girls race between '08's 3rd- and 4th-placers, Michigan's Megan Goethals and Texan Chelsey Sveinsson.

The dope sheet played true to form as the duo dropped all other challengers and traded their best punches over the last 600. Goethals perfectly negotiated the small mound over the final 80 meters to edge ahead right before the tape, 17:06.9–17:07.1.

"Honestly, I thought she had me," admitted Goethals. "But once I started to drive near the finish, it seemed like she was in the same gear and I realized I was closing on her."

Said junior Sveinsson, "I thought I had the win but those last few strides almost seemed like slow motion. She ran great."

— NXN RESULTS —

Portland, Oregon, December 5—

Boys Teams: 1. Boerne, Texas 195; 2. South Spokane, Wash-ington 201; 3. The Woodlands, Texas 207; 4. Wilmette, Illinois 208; 5. Albuquerque 236; 6. Dana Point 238; 7. North Spokane 239; 8. American Fork 247; 9. Manlius 270; 10. Rhode Island 284.

Boys Individuals: 1. Lutz (Tx) 15:09.2; 2. Gedyon (Ca) 15:09.5; 3. Rosa (Nj) 15:09.8; 4. Moussa (Ca) 15:17.6; 5. Wills (Oh) 15:18.5; 6. Hardt (Az) 15:18.7; 7. Osborn (In) 15:19.6; 8. Johnston (Wa) 15:22.3; 9. Vilhauer (Ca) 15:24.6; 10. Thorne (Wa) 15:25.5.

Girls Teams: 1. 1. Manlius 74; 2. Kinetic 147; 3. Ft. Collins 161; 4. Newhall 191; 5. Rocky River 195; 6. Blacksburg 223; 7. Adirondack 284; 8. Clifton Park 285; 9. Pikes Peak 291; 10. Newport Beach 313.

Individual Girls: 1. Flood (Ia) 17:47.2; 2. Stevens (Va) 17:48.6; 3. Mehra (Ca) 17:54.9; 4. Decker (Ia) 17:55.8; 5. Fulton (Co) 17:56.3; 6. Johnson (Tx) 17:58.7; 7. Pierce (De) 17:59.2; 8. Chambers (Oh) 17:59.8; 9. Stevens (Va) 18:00.8; 10. Andrews (Tx) 18:01.9

— FOOT LOCKER RESULTS —

San Diego, California, December 12—

Boys Individuals: 1. Verzbicas (Il) 15:07.8; 2. McElroy (Ca) 15:22.6; 3. Meddles (Nv) 15:24.0; 4. Lutz (Tx) 15:29.6; 5. Shrader (Az) 15:30.9; 6. Hurysz (Nc) 15:31.9; 7. Byrne (In) 15:33.1; 8. Erassa (Ga) 15:34.2; 9. Moskowicz (Wa) 15:34.5; 10. Mizereck (Fi) 15:36.8.

Teams: 1. West 31; 2. South 42; 3. Midwest 49; 4. Northeast 94.

Girls Individuals: 1. Goethals (Mi) 17:06.9; 2. Sveinsson (Tx) 17:07.1; 3. Sisson (Mo) 17:18.8; 4. Cuffe (Ny) 17:21.4; 5. Ferowich (Tn) 17:31.0; 6. Lakowske (Co) 17:32.6; 7. Chelsea Ley (Nj) 17:37.2; 8. Flood (Ia) 17:42.0; 9. Decker (Ia) 17:43.8; 10. Frazier (Nc) 17:44.2.

Teams: 1. Midwest 27; 2. South 44; 3. West 71; 4. Northeast 72.