

Escott sets her sights on relaxing runs, wins

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■ Spartans standout favored in City/County

By Neil Amato
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The object of a race is to finish first.

For Lauren Escott, a cross country standout at Mount Tabor, the object has been enjoying races her senior season and not worrying about where she finishes. If she "enjoys the ride," as Coach Mike Esposito says, she has the ability and fitness to win a state title.

In previous seasons, Escott would spend time by herself before meets. She would listen to music and tune out her teammates. Instead of relaxing her, the time spent in concentration made her more tense.

Starting with track season last year, Escott has changed her routine and her results. She is among the best runners in the state.

"This spring and this season, I've really just been hanging out with my team before the race, and I think it's helped me a lot," Escott said. "I think when I go off by myself and listen to music, I just psyche myself out. It's great when we're all together because everybody's joking and having fun before the meet."

This season, when the team isn't stretching or warming up before a race, it is deciding on a team hairstyle. "We've been changing it every race, and we've all been doing our hair the same way," Escott said.

Mount Tabor's hairstyle for today's City/County Meet is unknown. It is known that the Spartans and West Forsyth will challenge for the girls title in the meet, which is at West Forsyth. The boys will run at 4 p.m. and the girls at 4:30. The Mount Tabor and West Forsyth boys are also favored.

ESCOTT HAS the state's best time (19:23) on the 3.1-mile course at McAlpine Park in Charlotte — where the state meet will be run Nov. 12 — but she has not won a

City/County title. One of her goals is to win today, and she says she's capable of crossing the finish line first at the state meet.

Esposito is more confident.

"She's prepared as well as she can," Esposito said. "You prepare and then see what happens. If somebody beats her, it's going to be a better girl."

Part of that preparation came last summer, when Escott went to a running camp at Dartmouth, which is on the Connecticut River in Hanover, N.H. She trained hard (two runs a day and a race at the end of the week) and sat in on a class. The weather at Dartmouth was to her liking — then.

"I'm supposed to go up this winter sometime, and I may decide it's too cold," she said.

Escott said she is interested in Dartmouth, Princeton, Virginia and Vanderbilt. They are interested in her for her grades (she's an A student taking four Advanced Placement courses) and her running. She will not be going to Wake Forest, where her father is a history professor, or other nearby schools.

"I want to 'go away' to school," she said. "I think that's part of the whole point of going to college."

ESCOTT BECAME interested in cross country after one of her teachers at Cook Middle School organized a run around the school building. The teacher helped Escott get in touch with Esposito, and Escott decided to run cross country in the fall. Her improvement has been steady, Esposito said.

"She just kept inching up, inching up, inching up," he said.

Escott, who finished third in the two-mile at the state track meet last year, finished fourth in the City/County her freshman year — behind three teammates. She finished third as a sophomore and junior.

Last season in the state cross country meet, Escott says, she "got too keyed up about the whole thing" and finished 44th. She will try to relax more this year despite being one of the favorites.

"That's one of the problems I had for a while — just handling races mentally," she said. "I think I've started handling it a lot better, and it shows. I'm running a lot better."



LAUREN ESCOTT