

# Providence runner races by competition

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All the right people say all the right things about Providence senior Justin Niedzialek.



Niedzialek

The N.C. Cross-Country Coaches Poll ranks him sixth best among boys high school runners.

East Mecklenburg cross-country coach Larry McAfee calls Niedzialek (pronounced Need-za-lick)

Mecklenburg County's top runner.

"He's had an outstanding career so far," McAfee says. "And I expect him to have an outstanding senior year."

His time of 16 minutes 13 seconds in the 5,000-meters race is the fastest reported time in Mecklenburg County and is 24 seconds better than his closest competitor, Sun Valley's Ryan Adams.

Ironically, Niedzialek's mother, Sandra, is Sun Valley's principal.

Saturday morning at Charlotte's McAlpine Park, Niedzialek, Adams and the region's other top runners will compete in the Wendy's Invitational, one of the country's top high school meets. It starts at 9 a.m. and admission is free.

McAfee said 1,750 high school runners, from Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee and New York, will compete. Boys and girls runners will participate in four divisions (open, championship, 3A and individual).

Winning Wendy's is one of Niedzialek's goals, as is capturing a state title and adding to the Panthers' rich tradition with such former stars as Ami Herrman and Bryan Calloway.

Niedzialek, who is tall and has blond hair, also is a weight-lifter. In addition to swimming and computers, he's also into music — "I like Nine-Inch Nails and Pearl Jam and Nirvana," he says.

## Cross-country elite

Following are the state's top cross-country teams and runners, according to the latest N.C. coaches cross-country poll:

■ **Top boys runners:** 1. Buddy Priest (Roxboro Person); 2. Chad Pons (Franklin); 3. Corby Pons (Franklin); 4. Robby Cochran (Jamestown Ragsdale); 5. Andrew Pearson (N. Forsyth); 6. Justin Niedzialek (Providence); 7. Michael McKay (Rocky Mount); 8. Bill Jackson (SW Guilford); 9. Tim Gautreaux (Northern Nash); 10. Josh Morgan (S. Mecklenburg); 11. 11. Pen Perry (E. Mecklenburg).

■ **Top boys teams:** 1. Franklin; 2. Watauga; 3. W. Henderson; 4. E. Mecklenburg; 5. Providence; 6. Northern Nash; 7. Durham Academy; 8. Wilmington Hoggard; 9. Char. Country Day; 10. Cary; 11. Durham Jordan; 12. Mt. Tabor; 13. Pinecrest; 14. Myers Park; 15. Sun Valley.

■ **Top girls runners:** 1. Meredith Faircloth, Ral. Broughton; 2. Sara Day, Ledford; 3. Lauren Escott, Mount Tabor; 4. Jennifer Wiggins, Franklin; 5. Jody Redage, Leesville; 6. Erin Musson, Wilkes Central; 7. Chelsea Wright, Leesville; 8. Corrie Fuchs, Franklin; 9. Erin Howard, Sun Valley; 10. Julie Smith, W. Forsyth.

■ **Top girls teams:** 1. Franklin; 2. W. Forsyth; 3. Hayesville; 4. N. Mecklenburg; 5. W. Mecklenburg; 6. Leesville; 7. Chapel Hill; 8. Mt. Tabor; 9. Cary; 10. Apex; 11. Providence; 12. Myers Park; 13. Watauga; 14. Murphy; 15. Wilmington Hoggard. ?!

Why cross-country?

"I'd been swimming for (the Mecklenburg Aquatic Club) year round since the second grade," Niedzialek says, "and I wanted to try something different."

He started running in seventh grade after his father, Donald, suggested he try it. By ninth grade, he was undefeated, running the mile for Carmel Junior High's track team. He made all-conference.

Niedzialek stopped competitive swimming in 10th grade.

And as a sophomore, he made all-conference in cross-country and track (1,600- and 3,200-meters). He ran in the cross-country and track state championships.

As a junior, Niedzialek was again all-conference in cross-country and track. He was second to Garinger's Robert East in the 1,600-meters race at N.C. 4A state championships. ?!

"Running has always been fairly easy for me," Niedzialek says. "Swimming has helped me out as far as endurance."

Whatever it is, it seems to be working.