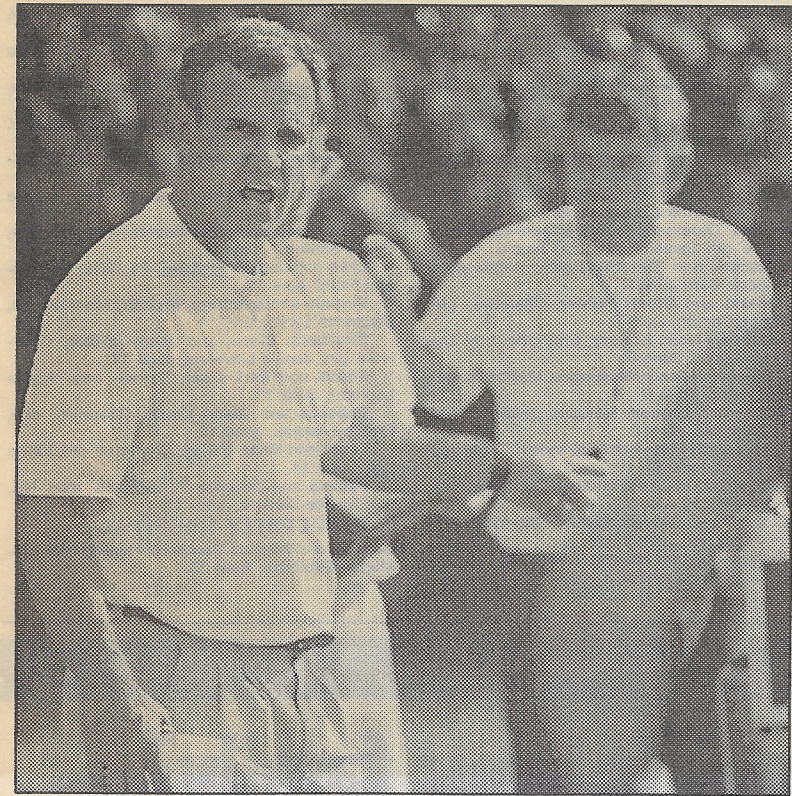


HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS



You've got to want it! Gil Murdock, Providence Day cross-country coach, urges a runner home during a cross-country meet.



Photos by GARY O'BRIEN/Staff

Going for the gold

This year, Ben Hovis thinks he can take home the top spot

The man to beat: Ben Hovis (right) has been named to the all-conference team three times. This year he wants to cap his high school career with a first-place finish in the state final.

Providence Day cross-country runner Ben Hovis has finished third and second in N.C. Independent Schools state finals in his career. You might think of those as the bronze and silver medals.

This year, his senior year, Hovis wants the gold.

"This year feels like my year," he says. "It really does."

Hovis spent two weeks over the summer in Mexico, on a church mission.

Thirty-four youths and seven adults made the trip, Hovis said. The group provided Bible study and church service and helped to start construction of a small church extension.

In his ninth- and 10th-grade summers, Hovis went on similar church missions to West Virginia, but says this year's experience had a bigger impact on him.

"It made me not take as much for granted," Hovis said. "These places were so small. They didn't have much and you couldn't drink the water. There were huge vans that brought in bottled water."

"The first Bible study we had about 50 kids, and nine days later there were more than 200. I guess it was just the word getting out that kids had fun, and parents wanting to see what Americans were like."

When he returned, Hovis got right back into running.

He attended running camps at Brevard College and Appalachian State University, which have bolstered his confidence, convincing him he can attain faster times.

In last year's state final, Hovis ran a time of 16 minutes 35 seconds. In his first meet this year, he ran a 16:35 at a meet in Spartanburg competing against 4A schools like Spartanburg High and Northwestern of Rock Hill. He finished third. Hovis said he feels by year's end he can run a time of 15:45.

In his freshman year, Hovis finished third at the state meet. As a sophomore, he had strep throat before the state meet but ran anyway. He finished 20th. This

year, Hovis wants to be No. 1.

"He has a chance of winning it all," says Providence Day coach Gil Murdock, whose team is the defending N.C. Independent Schools Athletic Association champion, "and if he's not the top runner in (Mecklenburg County) this year, he'll be right there at it."

■ Providence Day junior soccer player Carson Porter was all-region and all-state last year. This year, he sees a very familiar face on the field with him.

Carson's brother, Grant, also is playing for the Chargers' varsity.

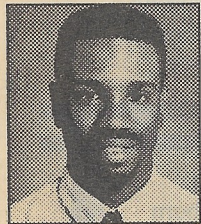
Grant, though, is an eighth-grader.

■ As of Tuesday, Charlotte Latin volleyball player Megan Lew had 363 assists in 18 matches. She began the season needing 875 to tie a national record for assists. With tournaments, Latin (16-2) could play as many as 40 matches this year.

So far Lew is averaging 20.1 assists per match. If Latin plays in 40 matches and she continues at her current pace, she'll finish the season with 805 assists.



Heavy metal: Ben Hovis stretches before a meet while listening to a band called Nailbomb. He says he likes to listen to "something real heavy" before he competes.



LANGSTON
WERTZ JR.