

# SPORTS

## Walts picks up the pace

■ East Meck runner is practicing more and getting faster.

As a sophomore a year ago, East Mecklenburg High cross-country runner Shane Walts didn't qualify for the N.C. 4A finals.

That probably will change this year.

"I think he'll be a factor," said East Mecklenburg coach Larry McAfee. "I'd say right now, individually, he's one of the top half dozen in the state."



LANGSTON WERTZ JR.

Walts has steadily gotten faster this season. He finished fifth in the Wilmington Invitational and fourth in the Wake Forest Invitational,

both big high school meets.

Last Saturday, Walts ran a time of 16 minutes 41.9 seconds and finished first in the Sun Valley Invitational, which featured Mecklenburg County's top teams.

Providence's Brian Lesesky was second, nearly 12 seconds slower. In cross-country terms, that is equivalent to a 20-point blowout



BOB LEVERONE/Staff

**Gaining speed:** Cross-country runner Shane Walts of East Mecklenburg High finished first in the Sun Valley Invitational with a time of 16 minutes 41.9 seconds.

win in football or basketball.

Last year, Walts was his team's top runner, McAfee said, but didn't do well at the cross-country regionals. So he didn't qualify for the state championships as a sophomore, which, McAfee said, "is hard to do."

Walts worked hard to improve during track season, reducing his 1,600-meter time to 4:33. "That was 27 seconds better than what he did in junior high," McAfee said.

Last summer, Walts continued working hard.

He ran 45 miles each week, did speed work and ran with a city track club team. He likes to draw abstracts in his spare time, and friends have asked for some of his work. In the winter, he plans to dive for East Mecklenburg's swim team. For now, however, he's concentrating on the running, on continuing to improve.

"I feel strong now," he said. "I'm not afraid to not go for someone who I know did well in the state last year. This is this year and I've already beaten people I didn't last year."

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### East Meck runner is pulling away

Cross-country runner Shane Walts didn't qualify for the state finals last year — but now he's running in front of the pack. .... 22M

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Someone to know ..... 22M

