

West's girls' cross-country team wants to win for fallen teammate

A MEMORIAL

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Jamie Arton was running in Boone on Saturday when she was boosted by the memory of a departed friend.

Arton, a key member of West Forsyth's cross-country team, was competing in less-than-ideal conditions at the Appalachian State Invitational. Eight days before the race, sophomore Elizabeth Windsor — Arton's friend, teammate and anatomy-class partner — was killed in a one-car accident in Lewisville. Windsor was 15.

Arton, whose team wore yellow ribbons on their jerseys to honor Windsor, said she felt Windsor's presence while running alone through the woods. The temperature was a chilling 38 degrees.

"All of the sudden a big gust of wind came up from behind me," Arton said. "It kind of pushed me forward and made me go. I was thinking, 'That was Elizabeth.' It made me run faster."

Arton, usually West Forsyth's third or fourth runner, finished second among the Titans and helped them win the meet. She ran 3.1 miles in 20:38, her second-best time of the season.

Coach Lynn Hottinger said that her team, already close, has come together more since Windsor's death.

"That incident, as unfortunate as it is, has brought the team together," said Hottinger, who is in her second season. "For a lot of them, it was a huge emotional loss."

Arton and other runners have dedicated the season to winning the state title for Windsor, and the Titans have the talent to do it. Whitney Weber, a sophomore, is the team's No. 1 runner, and one opposing coach — Randy McDonough of Watauga — said that Weber has a shot at winning the state 4-A crown. McDonough and Coach Mike Esposito of Mount Tabor said that the Titans are among the favorites for the team title, which West Forsyth won in 1994.

"They are a great team. I look at them as one of the favorites," McDonough said. "They're strong

from one through seven. They could lose any one of those top girls and still have a state-contending team."

Freshman Kathryn Jenkins has been running at No. 2 much of the season. Others in the top seven are seniors Sara Tussey and Elizabeth Dyer and sophomores Katie Whitlach and Michele Lynch.

Weber, a sophomore, leads the way. Hottinger said that Weber, who gave up soccer to focus on running, already has heard from Division I colleges. Weber, the Titans' No. 2 runner last year, ran a personal-best 19:34 earlier this month.

She finished fourth Saturday in Boone, but two runners ahead of her will not be in the Class 4-A state meet Nov. 16 in Charlotte. Marina Chase, a sophomore at Watauga, edged Weber for third. Hottinger and McDonough said that the race for third could have gone either way.

"I think it could be a good race for them at the state (meet)," Hot-

tinger said.

West Forsyth will have its final home meet today at 4 p.m. The City-County meet will be Nov. 4 at Tanglewood, and the West Central Regional meet will be Nov. 8 at West Forsyth.

"As far as what makes (the team) so good, I don't know exactly how to put it," said Hottinger, who ran at North Forsyth. "They're not fragile. They're so tough. They've all run through pain."

Lynch said she has gotten stronger since Windsor's death. Lynch and Windsor became friends their freshman year. Lynch said that Windsor always made her laugh.

"It's been really hard, but I think back about all the happy times," Lynch said. "It's just made me stronger. I think she's a part of me always. . . ."

"She was the most hilarious person I've ever met. Seeing her smile would cheer me up. . . . She'd imitate *Saturday Night Live* characters. I used to tell her she'd end up on *Saturday Night Live*."

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