

The cross country team had more freshmen and sophomores than upperclassmen, but the team still bonded. The season ended with freshman Addie Coppinger placing 51st at the State Championships.

It was a typical Tuesday hill workout for sophomore Mia Schloegel, the type of workout that leaves most of the team doubled over in pain. When she came to the top of the hill where coach Mike Egner was waiting, she noticed that he had built an interesting sculpture.

“He took branches and stuck them into the ground and put something on top of them and played music for us,” Schloegel said. “Everyone was in so much pain and right as you saw coach Egner, someone would laugh. I never laughed because I didn’t have enough oxygen but I did feel a lot better.”

Egner’s sculptures soon became a Tuesday tradition for the cross country team.

“I get bored when I’m at the top of the hill,” Egner said. “So I look around for things on the ground that I can build little sculptures of people and flags and things like that.”

Egner returned to the cross country team this year to help coach Karen Moran Redlich. This team was younger than in previous years with more freshmen and sophomores than upperclassmen.

“The coaches expect us to set a good example for the younger girls,” junior Emma Kate Callahan said. “I was used to looking up to the juniors and seniors and letting them lead the pack. This year, I was the one who was looked up to.”

The welcome from older teammates made it easier for incoming freshmen to transition to life at STA.

“I didn’t know anyone when I joined the team,” freshman Emily Robyn said. “Running with other freshmen gave me friendly faces to look for in the lunchroom.”

According to sophomore Natalie Kistler, the shortage of upperclassmen did not affect their ability to grow closer. Pasta dinners, hours spent together after school, and themed workouts created a strong bond between teammates.

“We bond so much through the themes,” Kistler said. “It gives us a chance to be funny and look stupid together. Since we do them the day before meets, it’s like a stress reliever to take your mind off the meet.”

The hours spent after school were not wasted. The team advanced to Districts, and Callahan, sophomore Mary Kate Armstrong and freshman Addie Coppinger qualified for Sectionals.

“The postseason team that did not advance to Sectionals practiced with us, and the coaches shared with us how to run and prepare for this difficult task,” Armstrong said.

Although Armstrong and Callahan ran strong races, they did not qualify for State. Coppinger finished in the top 30 runners, and qualified for the State meet in Jefferson City Nov. 7th.

“I was so excited that I had qualified, but I knew that it would be really tough to be alone at the starting line at State,” Coppinger said. “I was really sad when I found my other teammates and discovered that they hadn’t made it through.”

At State, Coppinger finished 51st out of 165 runners, and was the 6th fastest freshman in the Class 4 race.

“This is the 27th consecutive year STA has been represented at the Missouri state cross country meet,” Moran Redlich said. “That means every year that we have had a program, STA has been there.”

Many team members have already started to set goals for the 2016 season.

“I am planning on running next year because I have a good feeling that we are going to do very well as a team next year,” Coppinger said. “We decided that we are going to do everything we can in order to qualify [for State] as a team next year.”