

Ridgewood's Kurt DeLong continues racing in spite of knee pain



Ridgewood junior Kurt DeLong race at the Bartlett Flying Hawk Invite at Sunrise Park on Sept. 24. (Beth Hanses / HANDOUT)

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All week before the Class 2A Fenton boys cross country sectional, Kurt DeLong's knees, especially the left one, were hurting and tough to bend. The Ridgewood junior was worried but told himself he was pretty sure he could still go through with the race. He wanted to get a good time.

A couple days of rest would have helped, Ridgewood coach Tony Guagenti said, but you can't really do that in the postseason.

"He didn't let that stop him," Guagenti said. "He didn't use it as an excuse."

DeLong, a Norridge resident who in his second year on the team, had high expectations going into the race, though with the injury those didn't pan out like he wanted them to, he said. DeLong finished with a time of 20 minutes, 36 seconds on Oct. 29. He placed 105th.

As far as his knees, he said he needs to get them checked out to see what exactly is wrong. His knees feel weak and he feels more pain when he runs.

DeLong was chosen as last year's most dedicated runner on the team. This year, his coaches determined he was the MVP. Guagenti saw the improvement from DeLong as he turned into a much more consistent runner this year.

DeLong knows it, too. He often alternated between running good and bad races last year, he said.

"Honestly looking back, I had some really bad times (last year)," DeLong said. "I knew I should have been better. This year I started out really good, and then I just slowly picked away time from each race."

His personal-record time last season was 18:25. He improved his personal record to 18:10 this year. He also ran under 19 minutes four times this year, according to Guagenti.

"He was just really strong and always finishing near the front of the pack for our team," Guagenti said.

DeLong's training wasn't much different this year, with the exception of a little more mileage this year, Guagenti said.

DeLong said his turning point occurred at the Elmwood Park Invite on Oct. 8.

He missed two meets earlier in the season because of shin pain that kept him out about a week. DeLong competed at Elmwood Park after the injury and set his PR.

"It's one of those moments that you could tell he might have been taking the next step as a runner," Guagenti said.

Next year will be DeLong's final high school season, and he'll have the chance to set another personal record.

"I have to make use of that chance," DeLong said.

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