

CROSS COUNTRY | Manatee County Championship

# Unusual start inspires Falcon

By NICK WALTER

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**BRADENTON** — Of the places to be stuck — home, traffic, maybe a grocery line — Saint Stephen's cross country runner Chris Cover trapped himself in an unlikely destination Wednesday afternoon — a G.T. Bray Park bathroom.

Once claustrophobic feelings passed, Cover figured the jammed dead bolt wouldn't be fixed from the inside. Alone with a couple toilets, a sink and mirror and an unpleasant odor, Cover evaluated the Manatee County Cross-Country Championship race he soon hoped to run.

The senior, one of the Falcon's top runners, would be stalled for about 15 minutes.

"I really just sat and thought," Cover said, "I thought, 'This is my last year. This is my last race at this course, our home course.' " After fiddling with the dead bolt and with help from a reporter's stomp and a motivated middle-schooler, Cover darted from the bathroom and ran a 19:59 in the 5-kilometer race. He placed 33rd, but smashed his personal best

time by 2:51.

The Great Escape inspired teammate Hannah Howell to win the girls race with a time of 18:17. The eighth-grader won by 47 seconds over second place Devin McDermott of Lakewood Ranch.

"I heard about him being stuck just before the race," Howell said. "I thought it was funny. I ran relaxed."

But it was Lakewood Ranch that won the girls division with 22 points, followed by Manatee (46) and Palmetto (76). Lakewood Ranch had five of the top 10 finishers — McDermott, Megan Reuss (fourth), Hailey Stoffel (sixth), Ayla Allen (seventh) and Tracey Spronatti (eighth).

Churning the 3.1-mile course that periodically went from dirt to concrete, Howell utilized the uncommonly cool and dry conditions, not to mention humor, to run the best race of her life. As she ran, Howell's mind sometimes drifted to the bathroom.

"I kept thinking about him pushing on the door," she said, "and trying to break out."

Although Cover managed to do so, the Manatee boys domi-

nated, taking the top four places and the team title by 44 points over Palmetto. Christopher Owens took first (17:18) for the Hurricanes, followed by Jordan Washer (17:24), Sean Fahy (17:27), and Matthew Sanchez (17:45).

Howell and Owens won the 22nd annual Bill O'Brien Outstanding Cross-Country Runner award.

"My mind was everywhere," Owens said. "Who's behind you? Will I get my time? And I going out too slow? I tried to push that out of my mind and just go as fast as I can."

In the end, a 12-year-old was the race's hero. Eric Roberts of Saint Stephen's briefly fiddled with the bathroom door handle until the door finally opened for Cover.

"I said, 'Let's see how this works,'" Roberts said, "and I opened the door."

**MANATEE COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIPS**

At G.T. Bray Park

Boys team scores

1. Manatee (Man) 16, 2. Palmetto (Pal) 60, 3. Southeast (SE) 73, 4. Saint Stephen's (SS) 95, 5. Lakewood Ranch (LR) 122, 6. Braden River (BR) 129, 7. Bayshore (Bay) 187.

Top individuals

1. Chris Owens (Man) 17:18, 2. Jordan Washer (Man) 17:24, 3. Sean Fahy (Man) 17:27, 4. Matt Sanches (Man) 17:45, 5. Hunter Rayl (Pal) 17:56, 6. Nick Algozzine

- (Man) 18:00, 7. Joey Rebella (Pal) 18:02, 8. Loren Gregor (SE) 18:06, 10. Richard Reyana (Pal) 18:26.

Others team by team

- Palmetto — 17. Andy Mullins 18:47, 21. Dakota Cahill 19:09.

- Southeast — 11. VanHorné 18:27, 12. Jake Mullery 18:28, 19. Billy Huddleton 18:53, 23. Diego Corza 19:21.

- Saint Stephen's — 13. Spencer Nora 18:30, 18. David Hatcher 18:48, 27. Chad Tolentino 19:33, 28. Nate Garr 19:33.

- Lakewood Ranch — 15. Erick Navarrete 18:35, 16. Evan Dipsiner 18:42, 22. Kevin Papac 19:18, 32. Justin Young 19:53, 37. Brandon Jones 20:20.

- Braden River — 20. Dan Lerow 18:59, 24. Cody Pyle 19:22, 25. Kyle Pauley 19:22, 29. Chris Leandres 19:46, 31. David Apple 19:51.

- Bayshore — 30. Devin Melcher 19:47, 34. Nathan Whitehead 20:09, 40. Wayne Cochrane 20:34, 41. Ethan Skeim 21:21, 42. Michael Young 21:37.

Girls team scores

1. Lakewood Ranch (LR) 22, 2. Manatee (Man) 46, 3. Palmetto (Pal) 76, 4. Bayshore (Bay) 102, 5. Saint Stephen's (NS), Bradenton Christian (NS), Southeast (NS), Braden River (NS).

Top individuals

1. Hannah Howell (SS) 18:17, 2. Devin McDermott (LR) 19:05, 3. Jessica McKinnis (Pal) 19:38, 4. Megan Reuss (LR) 20:33, 5. Jessica Pate (Man) 20:34, 6. Hailey Stoffel (LR) 21:01, 7. Ayla Allen (LR) 21:02, 8. Tracey Spronatti (LR) 21:26, 9. Shelby Raye (Man) 21:46, 10. Kelsey Grimaldi (LR) 21:54.

Others team by team

- Manatee — 11. Nicole Iglesias 21:56, 12. Emily Schnering 21:57.

- Palmetto — 21. Mayanne Thelusma 24:58, 22. Caitlin Campbell 25:05, 23. Andrea Kluppel 25:05, 24. Aysha Strawh 26:02.

- Bayshore — 13. Neme Samad 22:03, 25. Jessica Hill 26:05, 28. Kiersten Kreitzer 26:38, 29. Jessica Giard 26:52, 30. Lazeth Alfaro 27:00.

- Saint Stephen's — 27. Victoria Williams 26:32.

- BCS — 15. Emily Egan 23:11.

- Braden River — 20. Morgan Lopez 23:50, 26. Tessa Ummel 26:26, 33. Jamie Keesler 29:47, 34. Ashley Phillips 30:12.

- Southeast — 16. Kathy Schaufelberger 23:15.

PREP GOLF | State tournaments

# ODA's Balit Class 1A tou

HERALD STAFF

How close to the hole was Out-of-Door Academy junior Zach Balit hitting his ball during the final round of the state Class 1A tournament Wednesday at The Golf Club at Bridgewater in Lakeland?

"I made a 15-foot putt for birdie on No. 12," said the Montreal, Canada native, who made five birdies in his 1-under par 71. "That was probably the longest putt I made."

"He actually could have been three or four shots lower," said Thunder coach Shelley Stone. "He had a lot of 2-inch tap-ins. He was really steady."

So steady, Balit claimed the state individual title with a 143 total, four strokes ahead of runner-up Aldo Amianto of Plantation American Heritage.

"This is pretty big, because it's the whole state and there were a lot of good players in the field," said Balit, who won an American Junior Golf Association tournament during the summer. "It gives me a lot of confidence."

Balit, 16, actually finished two strokes behind his playing partner, senior Phillip Choi of Orlando Circle Christian. Choi shot rounds of 70-71 to lead Cir-

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PREP VOLLEYBALL | Class 5A-District 12 Tournament