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Bad luck, big finish for Wolfpak in Iowa race

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By Scott Adams (sports@morganhilltimes.com)

On a swampy patch of earth in West Des Moines, Iowa, the Junior Elite triathletes of team Wolfpak found a solid foothold in the national championship race.

The South Valley-based squad had three racers finish in the top 20 in the Junior Elite division, ages 16-19, of the Hy-Vee Triathlon on Saturday, giving the Wolfpak a solid start in the USAT Junior Elite Cup Series. Morgan Hill's Lance Wolfsmith led the way, covering the 750-meter swim, 20-kilometer bike ride and five-kilometer run in one hour, nine minutes, 20 seconds - good for fourth place. Teammates Tyler Rodgers of Coto de Caza and Gilroy's Matthew Sosa followed in 12th (1:14:03) and 19th (1:17:31), respectively.

Each of them scored much-needed team points for Wolfpak, which aims for its best series finish since taking second in the Youth Elite division in 2007.

"It was a really good weekend for us, a big steppingstone for the team," said Wolfpak coach Dave Wolfsmith, Lance's father. "Most of the guys competing there train for triathlon the whole year. Our guys are coming off of track season, so they're still getting to where they need to be condition wise.

"Our goal was to have four guys make the top 20, but three - that's okay. I'm proud of our guys."

The national-caliber field of 32 triathletes wasn't the only obstacle Wolfpak had to overcome. Sheer misfortune hampered the team from start to finish.

Lance got slapped in the face five minutes into the swim, and an ailing Kyle Benton of Morgan Hill had to withdraw from the race after being lapped.

Lance, a rising senior at Sobrato, also had a faulty bike seat.

"The setting was about an inch and a half off, so that burned up my legs for the run," he said. "That was frustrating for me because the run is where I make up ground. My swimming is still coming around. After I got popped in the face, my goggles didn't fit right. I could barely see."

In the end, Wolfsmith was out-kicked narrowly by Kevin McDowell and Ben Kanute of a rival team. McDowell, who placed second in May's Junior Elite Pan American Championship and last year's Junior Elite National Championships, took first place in 1:05:38.

Benjamin Steavenson followed in second at 1:06:10 and Kanute in third at 1:07:00.

"Kanute and McDowell were right with each other for the bike and run," said Lance, who clocked the third fastest time in the run. "Having your teammates around helps a lot because you can draft and push each other. That's our goal as a team. We definitely want to bridge our gaps and stay together."

Also competing Saturday for Wolfpak were Gilroy's Kooper Knutson and Morgan Hill's Dustin Benton, who competed in the 35-person Youth Elite division, ages 13-15. Knutson took 14th place (45:00) while Dustin, Kyle's brother, placed 22nd in 46:19.



From left, Dustin and Kyle Benton and Matthew Sosa, shown practicing two weeks ago, helped lead team Wolfpak to a strong showing in last weekend's Hy-Vee Triathlon in West Des Moines, Iowa.

Photo by: File Photo

"It was a great learning experience - the competition was really tough," Knutson said. "It was fun being there. We're going to do better next time out."

The Wolfpak continues Cup Series competition July 20 in Oxnard before traveling to Colorado Springs, Colo., for nationals.

"Our goal is to be more aggressive," Dave Wolfsmith said. "They're working together and they're going to make some big improvements. This race gave us a lot to look forward to."

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