

Two Harlan County High School seniors won regional championships on Saturday in the Class 2A, Region 7 meet.

Kim Miller captured the girls race with a time of 22:19.52, just ahead of two Letcher Central runners, senior Alison Holbrook and sophomore Keisha Balthis.

"This is a redemption story for Kim, much like the Area 9 meet," said Harlan County coach Ryan Vitatoe. "She was the best runner in the region all season last year but was injured late in the season and wasn't able to finish as strongly as she hoped. She came out today and slayed a dragon, in a lot of different ways. I'm proud of her, and happy for her to leave the program as a region champion."

Letcher Central and Harlan County tied for the team title with 40 points each, but Letcher won due to the tie-breaker. Johnson Central was third and East Ridge finished fourth.

"We're obviously disappointed for the girls finish, knowing they were the favorites coming into the race," Vitatoe said. "You have to tip your cap to Letcher County's girls. They came in and battled for the title, and they were the better team today. The key now is to try and respond at the state meet this weekend.

David Lee was the winner in the boys race with a time of 17:30.18. Powell County's Mark Ventura was second.

"I'm incredibly proud of both David and Kim. Both are great talents, and I knew they'd have the opportunity to win the race," said Vitatoe. "I've been telling David for three years he'd get here, and I'm really happy to see him accomplish the goal he set for himself. He came to run, and to win, for himself and his team."

Another Harlan County senior, Hunter Middleton, finished near the top with a time of 18:08.80 to place third.

"My raceplan for David and Hunter nearly backfired, but they both ran great races and finished hard and did exactly what I asked them to do," Vitatoe said.

Four other HCHS runners placed in the top 20 as Jacob Carroll was 11th, follow by Corey Hornsby (13th), Josh Wynn (16th) and Josh Hamlin (17th). Caleb Bailey placed 25th.

"I'm very proud of Jacob Carroll," Vitatoe said. "He ran one of his best races of the season today. He has been a constant for our program the last three years, and hasn't gotten the recognition that he has deserved. I believe he gave a very good effort to try and win a regional team title for Harlan County." Letcher Central won the team title with 35 points, six ahead of Harlan County. Powell County was third with 79 points, followed by Perry Central (113), Johnson Central (129), Leslie County (171), Breathitt County (192) and Magoffin County (202).

Rebecca Middleton, a seventh-grader at Black Mountain Elementary School,

had the second best time for the Lady Bears at 23:35.77 to place fourth. Jennifer Graham, a junior, was sixth at 23:44.47.

Other Harlan County runners included Miranda Epperson (17th), Kassie Rouse (18th) and Cassidy Ball (22nd).

"I appreciate my seniors — David, Hunter, Jacob, Josh, and Kim — for their contributions to our program," Vitatoe said. "They are the foundation for the future of our program, and they've laid a good foundation for the younger kids to build on. I hope to continue our tradition we're building, and keep recruiting kids to come out and be part of it. These five have accomplished a lot during their time at HC. I love, and will miss them, next year."

Both teams will represent Harlan County at the state meet on Saturday at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. The boys run at 11:30 a.m. and the girls at 12:30 p.m.