wiregrass ranch cross country runner nikita shah could barely finish a 5-kilometer race in less than 20 minutes, a far cry from her performance this year.

the junior ran a 17:53.96 at the class 3a girls state meet on nov. 19 at little everglades ranch in dade city, the third straight week she has cracked the 18-minute mark and the fastest time of any girl from pasco or hillsborough counties at the event.

the performance was good enough for fourth place overall, the best finish of any bulls runner in the school’s six-year history.

shah’s time would have made her the individual state champion in any of the other three class final races.

‘i was aiming for fifth place because i was seeded sixth, but fourth is good for me too,’’ shah said with a smile.

last year shah placed 27th at states, ten spots worse than how she ran as a freshman.

the slowdown was caused by a bout of anemia that zapped her strength during the second half of her sophomore season.

after diagnosing the problem, shah started taking iron supplements and her speed returned to the point where she brought wiregrass ranch its first state medal.

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but the new girls just came on so well that we exceeded what we did last year,’ howard said.

wiregrass ranch picked up a couple of girls from other sports. berlin waters was only a soccer player last school year, but decided to give cross country a try as well.

the story was the same for savannah goode, who was focusing on cheerleading at this time last year.

the bulls boys took sixth by scoring 200 points, matching their best place at states.

‘we were pushing to be the best team in school history,’ howard said. ‘we were seeded ninth and we thought between sixth and fourth was a possibility.

we were less than 10 points out of fourth place, and we’re happy with that. our top three, ermias, sam, and david, had outstanding races. ermias finished better than any other boy in school history. outstanding exclamation mark to the end of a great season.

like the girls, the bulls boys had to replace four of their top seven runners from last year.

‘i told our principal at the beginning of the season that this was a rebuilding year for us, but the new girls just came on so well that we exceeded what we did last year,’ howard said.

wiregrass ranch was led by ermias bireda, who placed 67th. the performance was good enough for 67th overall. wildcats junior ashley smith’s 20:30.98, good enough for 20th, respectively.

the squad finished as the 2a state runners-up last year but could muster only 12th place in 3a this year by scoring 308 points. land o’ lakes’ 517 points made it 21st.

the bulls senior sam hippely ran a 16:22.14 to take 26th in his final high school race.

this course has been tough on sam the last couple years, and he was able to redeem himself today.’ loth said. ‘it put a great end to a great career — a hall of fame career.’

steinbrenner had a bit of a disappointing day. the squad finished as the 2a state runners-up last year but could muster only 12th place in 3a this year by scoring 308 points.

bireda’s 16:06.1 finish in 16:09.1, one spot and 1.64 seconds better than land o’ lakes’ travis nichols.

‘travis has beaten me most of this season, so this time i really wanted to win,’ said shah.

wiregrass ranch cross country runner nikita shah, far right, runs with the lead pack during the second mile of the class 3a girls cross country meet. (photo by kyle lojacono)

horne frogs take flag football title

the u14 tcu horned frogs won the wesley chapel athletic association flag football championship on oct. 30.

the squad finished with a 9-0 record while outscoring its opponents 154-18. tcu defeated the georgia bulldogs 21-0 to claim the title.

the horned frogs’ players include nicky hanna, jordan hanna, connor nixon, gigi almaraz, james thomas, jovan fyock, doug armstrong, charles nyberg, louis souza ii, sean bartell, caden corrao and coaches tom nixon and paul bartell.

division winners include:

u17 washington state cougars
u9 jacksonville gators
u9 jacksonville gators
u11 florida gators

arizona

the u14 tcu horned frogs won the wcaa flag football championship on oct. 30. (photo by louis souza)