



## Not much margin for error in Tri-Cities area cross country teams

By John Lemon | Daily Herald Staff

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If anyone can appreciate how strong the area boys cross country programs are, it is Kaneland and Knights' head coach Chad Clarey.

Kaneland has built a standout team, one that finished eighth last year in the Class 2A state meet. Eighth in state, yet the Knights still have yet to finish in the top half of the Western Sun Conference the past three years.

"Our Western Sun Conference is loaded with great teams in both the 3A and 2A divisions," Clarey said. "Top to bottom, it's one of the toughest leagues in the state. A team really has to run well to place in the top half."

Kaneland returns several seniors that Clarey hopes will peak down the stretch. Matt Reusche leads the group after taking 20th at the Class 2A state meet last fall. Clarey said Reusche "had a great summer of training."

Reusche be joined by seniors Logan Markuson, Dominic Furco, Edgar Valle and Tyler Howland - all with state finals experience.

Junior Trevor Holm is the sixth runner of seven returning from the state team.

"We expect the seniors to pick up where they left off, as far as being hungry for more," Clarey said. "They've had a great summer collectively, and have been doing a superb job of leading by example in practices."

Senior Joe Levita is coming off a strong track season and is ready to move into the top seven after ending last fall as the eighth runner.

"He will make his presence felt immediately," Clarey said.

Others who are going to compete for a spot in the top seven include juniors Tommy Whittaker and Grant Alef, sophomores Clayton Brundige and Jake Ginther, and senior Jemmar Parrenas.

"This team will see different lineups each week, with the hopes of putting together the best performances during the state series," Clarey said. "Our primary focus will be developing our younger runners at the frosh-soph level, closing the pack split for both levels, and staying healthy. The seniors on this team have had some varying experiences at the state level, positive and negative, in track and cross country. These experiences provide both confidence and motivation for a successful campaign."

The Knights are far from the only team with high expectations. At Geneva, the Vikings are coming off a third-place finish at the state meet last year.

Geneva graduated several key runners from that team. They return Kevin McDowell who will miss the first three invites while competing in an international triathlon in Australia.

Seniors Kevin Sparks, Eric Blake, Justin Rodriguez and Dylan Crawshaw along with juniors Connor Bartel, McDowell and Ryan Ahern give coach Bob Thomson several quality runners, while they also hope to get help from some sophomores and maybe a freshman or two.

Batavia had a lot of seniors on last year's roster. Some of their top returnees this year include junior Matt Lash along with seniors Charlie Phillips, Scott Wloszczyński and Kevin DiVerde.

Veteran coach Mike DiDomenico is looking for some young runners to emerge from a group that includes sophomores Mike Redmond, Zach Leonhard and Joe Knight.

St. Charles North is another of the elite area programs. The North Stars finished eighth in the state last year and have a senior nucleus back who can return the team to a similar level.

"It all starts with our five varsity seniors," North Stars coach Steve Imig said. "Each year they have made large strides because of their love of the sport, team approach and consistent training. We will rely on them to help set the tone from a performance and leadership standpoint."

Senior Kyle Zankowski placed 60th in 15:20 as a junior in the state; he also was having a strong indoor track season before suffering a stress fracture outdoors.

Imig said Zankowski is healthy again and poised for a breakout fall.

Three more seniors - Brad Wheeler, Will Novorolsky and Kyle Kuczynski - are back from the state team after finishing 109th, 111th and 153rd, respectively. Novorolsky had a knee injury during track but like Zankowski is feeling better.

"(Wheeler) has tremendous varsity experience running on the 2007 and 2008 state teams. If Brad can stay healthy he is ready to have a great senior year," Imig said.

"(Novorolsky) has a monster work ethic and has made himself into a very good runner. He will be a key member of the varsity team."

Kuczynski, "displayed great growth during the past track season," according to Imig.

Senior Peter Johnson and junior Ryan Senci - who won the Upstate Eight's JV 1,600 and 3,200 last spring - were alternates on the state team last year.

Imig likes what he's seen from sophomores Billy Clink, Declan Duggan, Grant Markowicz, Clayton Schmitt and Kevin Kilroy, giving the team depth. Sophomore Zach Heuer has transferred from Geneva, while freshmen Spencer Gray and Nick Borger also will contribute.

St. Charles East also has several seniors among its top seven. Jake Zahn, Tim Johnson, Mike Faith, Mark Hayes and Jared Eads join junior Mike Rykoskey and sophomore Steven Decker for first-year coach Chris Bosworth.

"It has been going great," said Bosworth, who works in the Wellness Department. "Everyone has been really helpful."

The Saints want to improve on last year's 18th-place finish at sectional and run in the top three at conference. Bosworth has been pleased with what he's seen so far.

"They all had much better summers than last year, putting in more miles," Bosworth said. "I expect that they can run under 16:20 by the end of the year."

At Marmion, the Cadets look to be strong again even after graduating three Division I athletes. They'll also make the move from the 3A state meet to 2A.

"I am pretty sure that we will float under most people's radars this season, but I can assure you, come the state series, Class 2A will get to know us pretty well," Marmion first-year coach Dan Billish said.

Marmion is making that move down after graduating a large senior class with an undersized freshman class coming in.

Ben Kanute, who like Geneva's McDowell recently qualified for the World Triathlon Championships, gives the Cadets a solid top of their lineup. He joins captain Zach Young and Bennett Marsh, who return after all placing top five in the conference and top 20 at regional.

Others to watch include junior Matt Wenzel coming off a stress fracture, and sophomore Rich Parilla. Billish said he should have a pack of about seven competing for the last few spots in the lineup.

"The team looks strong and is ticking off workouts at the level we were last summer," Billish said. "We have set high, yet attainable, goals for the fall."

The Cadets are aiming for regional and sectional titles and to bring home a trophy in November.

"We will need to be hitting on all cylinders for this to happen, but in comparison of teams I have coached in the past, they are near the top in talent," Billish said. "We are a young team, but hopefully the experience from last year will pay dividends when championship season arrives."

Elsewhere in the Suburban Christian Conference, Aurora Central coach Troy Kerber starts his 23rd season with a team that finished 12th last year at the Class 2A Belvidere regional.

Senior Manuel Saucedo leads the returnees, along with junior Jimmy Spencer, senior Dan Kott-Kamp, senior John Cisneros, senior Ben Garcia, senior John Jochum, sophomore Alex Duncan, junior Adam Miller and senior Allan Maddock.

Freshman Matt Meyers is one to watch out of a group of seven newcomers.

"This could be the strongest team we have had here at ACC in 10 years," Kerber said. "We feel that by season's end we can go about 15 deep."

The Chargers are 2A again - the fifth smallest school in the state. They hope to place in the top three of the SCC and qualify for state.

Aurora Christian is aiming for its first state team in school history. Senior captains Spencer Johnson and Nate McNamara and sophomore Sam Schuette are back in the top five, along with sophomores Jake Wert and Jared Osika.

"These boys have all logged the miles and are ready to begin the 2009 season strong," Eagles coach Priscilla Copple said.

West Aurora got off to a great start Saturday by winning the Aurora City Meet. Junior Matt Muth won the race and Steve Loren was second, giving the Blackhawks quite a 1-2 punch.

Ryan Bartell (fourth) and David Herrera (10th) both placed in the top 10 Saturday, while Josh Robinson will be another key for the Blackhawks.