Daily Herald

Girls cross country: Scouting Northwest

By Michael Eaken
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MID-SUBURBAN EAST **Buffalo Grove** Coach: Martha Kelly (1st year)

Last year: 11th in MSL

Top returning runners: Kaitlyn Ko (sr), Alexis Opperman (so.), Natalie Lezama (sr), Dani Bleicman (sr.), CJ Kaplan (sr), Carly Egan (sr.)

Promising newcomer: Angela Apicella

Outlook: Ko enters her final year and is looking for big things. She was one of the best runners in Illinois in 2013, winning an MSL title and earning her second consecutive all-state honor with a seventh-place finish in Class 3A. The 2014 season was a bit more of a struggle. Ko injured her hip and knee during the preceeding track season and never quite got into gear last year; she ended up missing qualifying for state by one spot. Despite the injury issues, Ko did win the Libertyville regional title and also finished seventh in the MSL. The Bison welcome back a strong core of seniors that will add experience. Opperman had a strong freshman season, finishing as the Bison No. 2 runner at the MSL meet. Kelly takes over the coaching reigns from Sarah Farrell, who guided the Bison attack for seven years.

Elk Grove Coach: Mark Heintz (eighth year)

Last year: 10th in MSL

Key losses: Anneliese Schulz, Becky McDonough

Top returning runners: Emily Stegmeier (jr.), Amy Haderspeck (sr.), Cassie Slattery (sr.), Hannah Olson (sr.), Abbey Casey (so.), Grace McDonough (jr.),

Sabra Morton (jr.)

Promising newcomers: Monica Casillas, Karolina Koziarski

Outlook: Stegmeier had a vey strong sophomore season. She just missed earning all-MSL honors, finishing 28th at the cross country meet. She then qualified for the state track meet in the 800, hitting an impressive 2:17.05 in the state preliminaries. Stegmeier will be looking to take another step forward this season. Casey also showed promise as a freshman and will aid the Grenadiers' attack. Haderspeck, Slattery, and Olson give the Grens plenty of experience.

HerseyCoach: Jim Miks (13th year)

Last year: 12th in the MSL

Top returning runners: Hailey Bowes (jr.), Claire Gritt (jr.), Sarah Harden (jr.), Hannah Mulroe (jr.), Jane Kannokaden (jr.), Sara Nalepa (jr.), Kelly Valladeres (jr.), Lauren Grabos (jr.), Alanna Ratusz, Kristin Farrell (sr.)

Outlook: Bowes returns to lead an experience Huskies squad this season. Gritt, a starter for the Huskies basketball squad, also will add to the talent pool. Hersey has some seasoned runners that will add to the mix and help elevate the attack.

ProspectCoach: Pete Wintermute

Last year: Sixth in MSL, 11th at Schaumburg sectional.

Key losses: Hannah Getschman, Ellen Siefke, Caroline Hempleman

Top returning runners: Brooke Wilson (jr.), Aileen White (jr.), Molly Leeney (jr.), Veronica Holloway (sr.), Cassidy Selep (sr.).

Promising newcomers: Sydney Kitzmiller (so.), Jenna Baltes (fr.), Cari Drew (fr.), Julia O'Grady (fr.), Marissa Valentine (fr.), Suzanne Harms (fr.), Aryana Horton (fr.)

Outlook: Prospect is looking to rebound this season after not qualifying for the state meet last season, breaking a five-year state run. Wilson will lead the charge; the junior finished 24th in Class 3A last season and also added two state medals in track, including a second-place finish in the 3,200. She is primed for a big season. White is also a key member. The junior has flashed plenty of talent and will enter the season as one of the Knights' top runners. Prospect returns 5 of 7 runners from its sectional lineup and offers plenty of experience and leadership. Wintermute also is excited about an incoming freshman class that could make an impact by the end of the season.

Rolling Meadows Coach: Kevin Young

Last year: Eighth in MSL

Key losses: Leslie Rosiles.

Top returning runners: Gaby Sanchez (sr.), Natalie Brady (sr.), Anna Czulno (jr.), Maeve Moran (jr.), Megan Martin (so.)

Promising newcomers: Milena Suzuki (fr.), Dakota Stewart (fr.), Andrea Vera (fr.), Elizabeth Clark (fr.), Kate Quick (fr.)

Outlook: Rolling Meadows' 2014 season ended on a disappointing note when the Mustangs did not advance out of the Hoffman Estates regional, but the Mustangs are looking to improve upon their finish this season. Sanchez will lead the attack. Last year, she finished 20th at the MSL meet and then had a super strong track season, hitting a 5:08.14 in the 1,600 at the Class 3A state meet preliminaries. Sanchez will be a threat for a state medal in cross country season this season. The Mustangs return five of seven runners from last year's squad, and Young is excited about a strong freshman class that could contribute by season's end.

WheelingCoach: Tim Nowicki (4th year)

Last year: Ninth in MSL, 16th at Schaumburg sectional.

Key losses: Hailey Dammeier (North Central College), Aurora Mala (Wisconsin-Parkside), Ana Figueroa (UIC), Jessie Sanford, Maria Bedoya

Top returning runners: Melissa Rodriguez (Sr.), Daniella Pierini (Sr.), Liset Garcia (Jr.), Saleta Anda (So.), Ann Gutierrez (Sr.).

Promising newcomers: Yailene Leon (So.), Christina Pierini (Fr.), Violet Apaez (Sr.), Nikki Ferraro (Fr.), Taylor Gutt (Fr.)

Outlook: Wheeling's distance squad has taken a few big steps the last two seasons under the direction of Nowicki. Wheeling's 3,200 relay team has qualified to the state meet in back-to-back years, and last fall the Wildcats advanced to the Schaumburg sectional for the first time since 2006. Wheeling lost five of the seven runners that competed in the sectional meet, but Nowicki is hoping to keep the Wildcats' attack alive. Rodriguez and Danielle Pierini add valuable senior leadership. Leon was part of the Wildcats' 3,200 state qualifying relay team and is looking to make an impact in cross country this fall. Nowicki is also excited about the incoming freshmen, including Christina Pierini, who has cracked the varsity top seven.

MID-SUBURBAN WESTBarrington Coach: Debbie Revolta (25th year)

Last year: Fourth in MSL, Sixth at Schaumburg sectional

Key losses: Lauren Cropsey, Theresa Nepomuceno

Top returning runners: Lauren Conroy (sr.), Jocelyn Long (so.), Samantha Samaryczew (jr.), Arushi Agarwal (sr.), Cailin Feely (so.)

Promising newcomers: Sophie Hoeltgen , Eve Hoeltgen , Julia Piotrowski , Kelsey Recinas, Meaghan Lozzio

Outlook: Barrington finished in sixth place at Schaumburg sectional and missed qualifying for state meet by one spot last season. Look for the Fillies to rebound this season and make a return to Detweiller Park this November. Barrington should be one of the stronger teams in the MSL, and it starts with Conroy and Long. Conroy was MSL champ in 2012 and rebounded last season from an illness that slowed her during her sophomore campaign to earn her second all-state medal (17th in Class 3A). She had a strong postseason last year, finishing third in both the MSL meet and Schaumburg sectional. She will be one of the top MSL runners this season and could make a push for a top 10 finish at state. Long started strong last season but was slowed in the postseason. She rebounded with a strong track season, breaking the school record in the 3,200 (10:44) and finishing fourth at state in the 3,200 in helping the Fillies to a second-place finish in Class 3A. The two will give the Fillies a strong 1-2 punch in cross country. Saryczew, Agarwal, and Feely also return, giving the Fillies plenty of big-meet experience.

ConantCoach: Ron Theberge (sixth year)

Last year: Sixth in MSL, 15th at Schaumburg sectional.

Key losses: Abby Tripp (Lewis University), Michelle Marasigan (Cal Tech), Zoe Shoro, Lauren Caputo, Kelsey Cirone.

Top returning runners: Sydney Davis (jr.), Natalie Lakomski (sr.), Jessica Bruscemi (sr.), Heather Cizek (sr.), Sheena Patel (sr.), Allie Gade (sr.)

Promising newcomers: Kelsey Glennon (jr.), Brooke Petersen (so.), Amanda Wrona (so.), Katie Serrano (so.), Makenzie Jackson (fr.)

Outlook: Conant qualified to the Schaumburg sectional last year, and the Cougars seem to have the pieces to keep progressing. Davis established herself as the No. 1 runner and is hoping to pick up where she left off. She qualified for the state track meet in the 3,200 and will look to keep developing this fall. Cizak also had a strong spring, qualifying to state in the 800, and will be key runner for the Cougars this season. Lakomski and Bruscemi also will add experience to the Cougars' attack.

FremdCoach: Joe Marcin (third year)

Last year: Third in MSL, third at Schaumburg sectional, 14th in Class 3A

Key losses: Ayako Higuchi, Katie Escobar, Anita Grudzien, Jes Peterson, Lauren Ciardiello

Top returning runners: Nora Finegan (sr.), Clare Oehler-O'Sullvan (sr.), Monica Zawisza (sr.), Linda Varela (jr.), Fiona Jordan (so.), Megan Benka (sr.), Nuper Pokarhar (so.), Bell Moroney (sr.)

Promising newcomers: Jorden Iannuzzelli (fr.), Hannah Ban

Outlook: Fremd's distance crew has been on a steady upswing. The Vikings have secured consecutive state medals in the 3,200 relay in track, including an impressive third-place finish last season. The Vikings also finished third in the MSL last year in cross country. But Fremd lost a large chunk of it talent from last season, including Higuchi and Escobar, who finished second and ninth, respectively, at the MSL meet. Now Marcin is looking for the second

wave to provide support. Finegan will push the attack this season; the senior has been a key part of the Vikings' resurgence and had a leg on the medal-winning 3,200 relay. Oehler-O'Sullivan will also be a key. The Vikings are young but Marcin has them heading in the right direction and they should show progress throughout the season.

Hoffman Estates Coach: Kirk Macnder (12th year)

Last year: Fifth in MSL, tied for fourth at Schaumburg sectional, 16th in Class 3A

Key losses: Alondra Aguirre (West Alabama), Yazmin Nunez (North Central College)

Top returning runners: Allison Schrader (so.), Carly Dagen (sr.), Misbah Baig (jr.), Reena Prabhu (sr.), Stef Pulido (sr.), Meagan Biddle (sr.), Jill Prigge (jr.), Katie Boney (jr.)

Promising newcomers: Bella Alansari (fr.), Megha Ramanathanan (so.), Giselle Benitez (jr.), Argelia Morales (jr.), Crystal Delgado (jr.), Jenni Claudio (jr.).

Outlook: Biddle had strong junior season. She helped the Hawks qualify for the state cross country meet and then took off in the spring. She hit career bests in the 3,200 (10:42) and 1,600 (4:59.48) on her way to an eighth-place finish in Class 3A. She has become a very confident runner and will be one of best in state this season. A top 10 state finish is not out of the question. Dagen has been solid for Hoffman, and keep an eye on a fast-improving Schrader, who is looking to make an impact this season. The Hawks will miss the contributions of Aguirre and Nunez, but Baig and Prabhu lead a deep second wave that will be looking to push the Hawks back to Detweiller.

PalatineCoach: Joe Parks (7th year)

Last year: 2nd in Class 3A, MSL champion, regional champion, sectional champion, MSL West Division champs.

Key losses: Amy Kieliszewski (St. Louis), Megan Beach (Northwestern), Kara Burton (Colorado Mines), Kelly Ocock (Hope)

Top returning runners: Kelly O'Brien (sr.), Sam Lechowicz (sr.), Sabina Yosif (sr.), Anna Buckstaff (jr.), Lauryn Simons (so.), Izzeh Sstankiewicz (jr.), Stephanie Burciaga (jr.), Rebecca Duran (sr.)

Promising newcomers: Erin Oleksak (fr.), Jamie Henning (fr.), Esther Kim (fr.).

Outlook: Palatine is definitely the team to watch in the MSL. The Pirates cruised through the postseason in 2014, picking up an MSL, regional, and sectional championships before taking second in Class 3A. Palatine also qualified for the Nike Cross National in December to cap a special season. O'Brien is back to lead the charge; she earned her second top ten finish in Class 3A with a third-place finish, she also won the MSL title last season. She also has earned four state track medals the past two springs. O'Brien has definitely elevated herself into one of the top runners in state and will contend for a state title this season. Palatine lost all-state runner Kieliszewski (22nd in Class 3A), along with Beach and Burton, but the Pirates have plenty in reserve. Lechowicz was a main cog for the Pirates last season, with Buckstaff and Yosif offering plenty of experience. Simons made a big contribution as

a freshman, but she will be slowed in the early part of the season due to an injury. Palatine offers a deep team that will be in contention for its second consecutive state trophy.

SchaumburgCoach: Courtney Smith (second year).

Last year: Sixth in Class 3A, second in MSL, Hoffman Estates regional champions, second at Schaumburg sectional

Key losses: Ali Gutt, Erin Falsey, Caroline Kurdej

Top returning runners: Madie Marasco (so.), Lauren Kubinski (so.), Valarie Schackelton (jr.), Ellie O'Connell (jr.), Rachel Vaccarro (so.), Maggy Centeno (so.)

Outlook: Schaumburg has finished in the top 10 in Class 3A the past two years including a sixth-place finish last season. The Saxons took a big hit with the graduation of Gutt, Falsey, and Kurdej. But Smith has plenty to work with, including a young core of sophomores that could key the next Saxons wave. Kubinski established herself as one of the Saxons' top runners last fall but was injured at the Class 3A state meet. She is a talented runner that has a lot of potential. O'Connell was all-state (13th Class 3A) in 2013, and was the Saxons' No. 2 runner at state. She will be key during the Saxons transition. Marasco is hoping to carry the momentum from a strong track season. Yes, the Saxons are young, but they also have some experience and figure to be in the hunt for a top finish in the MSL along with a state berth.

CENTRAL SUBURBAN NORTHMaine West Coach: Greg Regalado (18th year)

Last year: 10th in CSL

Key losses: Cathleen Cu, Sharin Ellickal, Kate Madden, Tess McDonald

Top returning runners: Richa Patel (sr.), Ashiya Thomas (sr.), Lesley Bux (jr.), Brooke Gorski (jr.)

Promising newcomers: Jocelyn Pantoja (fr.), Monica Mendoza (jr.)

Outlook: Regalado is optimistic about his team taking a step forward this season. Thomas has experience and will push the Warriors' attack.

EAST SUBURBAN CATHOLICSt. Viator Coach: Kelli Wosick (first year)

Key losses: Kelly Kompanowski, Maria Dugo

Top returning runners: Julia Burgstrom (sr.), Megan Lifka, Zoe Dunlap, Loreta Dugo, Brianna Mastrodomenico

Promising newcomers: Payton McDonnell, Claire Bottcher, Maura Hogaboom

Outlook: Wosick takes over the Lions program; Lifka, Dunlap, and Dugo all gained valuable experience last season and will be key to the Lions attack this season. Burgstrom provides the leadership.

WEST SUBURBAN GOLDLeyden Coach: Emily Schader (15th year)

Last year: 4th in WSG.

Key losses: Miriam Hernandez, Autumn Hankins

Top returning runners: Estefani Ramirez (sr.), Katherine Hinojosa (sr.), Misia Szelazek (sr.), Leslie Palacios (sr.), Jasmine Salvador-Diaz (jr.)

Promising newcomers: Anmar Cabral (so.), Salma Rodriguez (so.). Jazmin Santoyo.

Outlook: Leyden returns five of its top seven runners from last season, including Ramirez, Szelazek and Salvador-Diaz, who were the Eagles' top three runners from 2014. It will give Schader a strong base to build on as the Eagles look to move up in the WSG. Cabral has been coming on strong and is running in the top five for the Eagles this season.

NORTHEASTERN ATHLETICChristian Liberty Academy Coach: Taylor Stafford Bauer

Key returning runners: Isabella Wolke (jr.), Lindsey Butz.

Promising newcomers: Emma Wolke (fr.)

Outlook: Isabella Wolke will be one of the top runners in Class 1A. She had a breakout sophomore campaign, earning a ninth-place finish in Class 1A state meet. She continued her momentum in the spring, taking fourth in the 3,200 for Class 1A.

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