

Prep Sports | updated: 8/31/2017 1:57 PM

Girls cross country: Scouting Northwest

By Michael Eaken
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MID-SUBURBAN EAST Buffalo Grove Coach: Martha Kelly (third year).

Last year: 12th in MSL, 10th at Grant regional

Key losses: Sarah Prommer.

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Top returning runners: Kaylin Hellyer (so.), Alexis Opperman (sr.), Lauren Godsell (jr.), Rylee Bers (sr.), Jotie Kaur (sr.), Angela Apicella (sr.).

Top newcomers: Maritza Dominguez.

Outlook: Buffalo Grove offered a young team last year -- and one that is looking to get better this year.

Opperman and Hellyer will push the pace up front. Opperman and Bers will provide the leadership, with Godsell aiding the attack. Bers is hoping to convert a strong summer into a big fall. Dominguez, Kaur, and Apicella will push for the fifth spot. The upshot is the Bison should be taking a step forward this year. "We have a competitive group of girls and are looking to improve upon last year. As a team the girls have been working hard and coming together," added Kelly.

Elk Grove Coach: Mark Heintz (10th year).

Last year: 10th in MSL, 8th at Lake Park regional.

Key losses: Emily Stegmeier.

Top returning runners: Monica Casillas (jr.), Melissa Saettone (jr.), Samantha Wadas (so.), Nicole Ward (sr.), Tabitha Fabin (sr.), Taylor Danan (jr.).

Promising newcomers: Izabela Sewerynski, XiXi Myles, Doris Jiminez.

Outlook: Elk Grove will sorely miss the contributions of Stegmeier, who graduated last spring. She was a two-time state qualifier in cross country, and she finished 8th in the MSL last fall. Stegmeier then capped a brilliant career by winning the Class 3A state title in the 800 at the track state meet. She is now running for Washington University in St. Louis. Casillas is setting the early tone for the Grens, with Wadas and Fabin also looking to contribute. Heintz is also excited about a group newcomers that will provide energy. "Despite the loss of Emily, we had an amazing summer. We have a great pack and have a lot of new runners who are improving every day," said Heintz.

Hersey Coach: Danielle Freeman (second year)

Last year: 10th in Class 3A, 3rd in MSL, Hoffman Estates regional champions, 2nd at Waukegan sectional, MSL East division champions.

Key losses: Hailey Bowes, Sarah Harden, Claire Gritt, Hannah Mulroe, Lauren Grabos.

Top returning runners: Teagan Beckley (jr.), Katie Fredian (so.), Erin Barton (so.), Aubrey Hasley (so.), Veronika Makowski (jr.), Claire Durand (sr.).

Promising newcomers: Jane Stefaniak (fr.), Katie O'Brien (fr.), Erin Moran, Amelia Kitrys.

Outlook: Freeman could not have asked for a better first season as the Huskies' coach. Hersey had five runners make all-conference on a team which finished third in the MSL, won a regional title and then finished second at the Waukegan sectional to earn their first state qualification since 2009. So, will there be an encore? Hersey does have to replace its top two runners, and both were pretty special. Bowes finished by securing the fastest time on the state course at Detweiller Park in Peoria and Harden ended her career by securing a sixth-place medal in 1,600 at the Class 3A track and field state meet. But the Huskies do welcome back four talented young runners that gained valuable experience in the last season's state series. Beckley finished 12th in the MSL and kept things rolling by taking 13th at the sectional meet and securing 49th place in Class 3A. She enters the season as the Huskies' top runner but will be pushed by Fredian and Barton, who both seemed to feed off each other and seem primed for a big step forward this season. Hasley gained valuable experience during the state series and will be in the top five this fall. Keep an eye on Stefaniak, who has been running strong and could make a big impact late in the season. The Huskies will miss their 1-2 punch from last season but will offer a

tighter and faster pack that will keep them in contention for the MSL, and possibly a return to state. "We are happy to have the crew back. We are working hard and coming together. We had some bumps in early August, so we hope to be ur best when it counts in late October," said Freeman.

ProspectCoach: Pete Wintermute (fourth year).

Last year: MSL champions, 2nd at Hoffman Estates regional, 6th at Waukegan sectional.

Key losses: Brooke Wilson, Molly Leeney, Aileen White, Elizabeth Galloway, Molly Heil, Brittany Damerjian.

Top returning runners: Mikayla Olsen (sr.), Kaitlyn Rouse (sr.), Sydney Kitzmiller (sr.), Marissa Valentini (jr.), Julia O'Grady (jr.), Cori Drew (jr.), Jenna Baltes (jr.), Emily Hubbard (so.), Lia Skoufos (so.), Gabriella Piagari (so.).

Promising newcomers: Reese Lettow, Annika Erickson, Paige Runkle, Sara Michelini, Hope Wasowicz, Samantha Prempas, Allison Zakula.

Outlook: Prospect has won back-to-back MSL titles, but in both years the Knights missed qualifying to state as a team. Wintermute and his squad are hoping to change the ending this season. Yes, the Knights had a big chunk of seniors leave -- including Wilson, who earned 7 combined state medals in cross country and track. Last year Wilson finished fifth in Class 3A at the cross country state meet, and she is now running for South Carolina. But even with key departures, Prospect is still dangerous. The Knights return four runners that ran at the sectional last season, including Valentini, who was the No. 2 runner for Prospect. Olsen has come on strong during the summer training and could be a key. Baltes, O'Grady and Drew all provide experience. Just behind this group is another wave of runners. Without Wilson providing a low score, the Knights will depend on a tight pack. The graduation losses will hurt, but this team still has plenty of talent and still should be the team to beat in the MSL and advance to the state meet. "There are big shoes to be filled, but the girls have jumped at the opportunity and I am proud of the summer they put in. They are hungry to earn a trip to state and we are working on tightening up our team splits as this will be a focus all season," said Wintermute.

Rolling MeadowsCoach: Lisa Kollias (third year).

Last year: 9th in MSL, 8th at Hoffman Estates regional.

Key losses: Anna Czulno, Maeve Moran.

Top returning runners: Elizabeth Clark (jr.), Kate Quick (jr.), Andrea Vera (jr.), Milena Suzuki (jr.), Abby Cullen (sr.), Melissa Hernandez (jr.), Emily Schmidt (jr.).

Promising newcomers: Dana Lapinski (jr.), Dayana Flores (jr.).

Outlook: The Mustangs are a relatively young team that will have to make up for the void left by last year's seniors. Clark had a pretty strong season last year and will set the pace this year. She was the Mustangs' No. 1 runner and advanced individually to sectionals, where she finished in 48th place. "Clark should be leading the way for us and has been stepping up during workouts," said Kollias. Quick and Suzuki have been working hard this summer to overcome injuries from last season; they should be in the top five. Schmidt and Cullen both got a taste of postseason running at the Hoffman regional. Lapinski is looking to crash the top five, and Flores is a strong athlete who could contribute. "We are still finding our footsteps on working together towards a common goal," added Kollias.

WheelingCoach: Tim Nowicki (sixth year).

Last year: 11th in MSL, 9th at Hoffman Estates regional.

Key losses: Hannah DeGraff, Sydney Johnson.

Top returning runners: Yailene Leon (sr.), Christina Pierini (jr.), Saleta Anda (sr.), Lizeth Leon (so.), Fifi Ghiorsi (sr.), Taylor Gutt (jr.), Nikki Ferraro (jr.).

Promising newcomers: Karen Pliego.

Outlook: The Wildcats welcome back six of their top seven runners from last season and are hoping to take a step forward. That means landing the sectional berth that has eluded them the past two years. Yailene Leon will lead the way; she was the team's top runner last season and was part of a talented core of runners that helped Wheeling take second in the MSL for girls track. Leon had a disappointing conference meet last season but bounced back to finish 13th at the Hoffman regional and qualify for the Waukegan sectional. She also has been a state qualifier in girls track the past two seasons, so she is used to the big meets. Look for her to take a step forward. Pierini is also on the move after putting in a big summer of training and should be the Wildcats' No. 2. Lizeth Leon and Anda will follow, with Ghiorsi, Gutt, and Ferraro also in the mix. "With many of our top runners returning we are looking to move up. Our main goal will be to advance our team out of regionals on to sectionals," said Nowicki.

MID-SUBURBAN WESTBarringtonCoach: Deb Revolta (27th year).

Last year: 4th in MSL, 3rd at Grant regional, 7th at Waukegan sectional.

Key losses: Sammie Samaryczew.

Top returning runners: Jocelyn Long (sr.), Caitlin Feely (sr.), Eve Hoeltgen (jr.), Sophie Hoeltgen (jr.), Shelby Petersen (jr.), Alyssa Norris (so.).

Promising newcomers: Anne Berquist (fr.), Molly Fitzpatrick (fr.), Katherine Shein (fr.).

Outlook: Barrington has a very solid team that will challenge for the MSL title. The Fillies finished fourth in the MSL last season but missed qualifying for the state meet after taking seventh at the Waukegan sectional. This year's effort starts with Long, who is one of the top runners in state after earning state medals with a pair of top-10 finishes in Class 3A the past two seasons. Last year, Long took seventh place in Class 3A, second in the MSL and took first at the Waukegan sectional. She hit some solid times in track during the spring and will push the pace for the Fillies this season. Barrington also welcomes back Sophie Hoeltgen, who missed all of last season due to a hip injury; she was the Fillies' no. 3 runner at state in 2015. She's not back to 100 percent yet but should round into form as the season progresses and be ready to make an impact during the postseason. Norris had a tremendous freshman year, qualifying to the Class 3A state track meet in the 800. She was the Fillies' no. 2 runner last season and made all-conference, along with Eve Hoeltgen. Those two should improve this season. Feely is also looking to make an impact this season and has been looking strong during the summer. Also keep an eye on Petersen, who was in the Fillies' top five last season. A trio of freshman also may provide a jolt, too. Barrington seems a bit deeper this season and is highly motivated to return to state. "I'm cautiously optimistic. We have good core group that should get better as the season progresses, we are just looking to improve from week to week," said Revolta.

ConantCoach: Ron Theberge (ninth year).

Last year: 8th in MSL, 7th at Hoffman Estates regional.

Key losses: Sydney Davis, Michelle Meister, Anne Stanislawski, Maggie Hutchison, Emily Lakomski.

Top returning runners: Brooke Peterson (sr.), Kyla Chalmers (sr.), Amanda Wrona (sr.), Jessica Meister (jr.), Lainey Morris (jr.).

Promising newcomers: Katie Serrano (sr), Gracie Palomo (so.), Jasmin Mundi (fr.), Ava Miltz (fr.).

Outlook: Conant lost three of its top runners to graduation, including Davis, a state qualifier in 2015. The Cougars do return four runners from their regional-qualifying team, including Jessica Meister, who advanced to the Waukegan sectional. Meister, Peterson, and Chalmer are pushing for the top spot and will pace the Cougars this season. Serrano, Palomo, Mundi, and Miltz have made a nice early impression and are making a move for the top seven. "The girls are working hard and have a great attitude. They are improving each and every day and I'm looking forward to see how they progress during the season," said Theberge.

FremdCoach: Joe Marcin (fifth year).

Last year: 6th in MSL, 4th at Hoffman Estates regional, 9th at Waukegan sectional, tied for MSL West division title.

Key losses: Linda Varela.

Top returning runners: Hannah Ban (sr.), Marissa Ban (so.), Julia Finegan (so.), Jordyn Iannuzzelli (jr.), Fiona Jordan (sr.), Rebecca Markham (so.), Clare Oehler-O'Sullivan (sr.), Nuper Pokharkar (sr.).

Promising newcomers: Norah Odle (fr.).

Outlook: Fremd has all the pieces to be a very dangerous team. Sure, the Vikings will miss Varela, who ended an outstanding senior campaign by securing all-state honors with a 24th-place finish. But they return six runners that ran to ninth place at the Waukegan sectional. Marissa Ban and Markham ran strong as sophomores, finishing as the Vikings no. 2-3 runners. Pokharkar was an all-conference runner, and Hannah Ban, Iannuzzelli, and Jordan all gained valuable experience at the sectional meet. Finegan had a strong track season and should contribute this fall. Fremd won the frosh/soph MSL title last season, and the varsity squad tied Schaumburg and Palatine for the MSL West Division title. This year the Vikings will be in contention for the MSL title. If the group improves like it could, a state berth is a possibility. "Our young, talented runners from last year's MSL frosh/soph championship team are now experienced and add tremendous depth to our already experience varsity team," Marcin said. "The order of our 1-8 runners is just too close to call and could vary week to week. We are highly motivated this season."

Hoffman EstatesCoach: Kirk Macnider (14th year).

Last year: 7th in MSL, 5th at Hoffman Estates regional, 10th at Waukegan sectional.

Key losses: Misbah Baig, Giselle Benitez.

Top returning runners: Allison Schrader (sr.), Vanessa Bonilla (sr.), Vanessa Peinado (sr.), Meghan Ramanathan (sr.), Bella Alansari (jr.), Michelle Diaz (jr.), Anna Miller (jr.), Mikkaela Palmer (jr.), Nikki Rong (jr.), Jenna

Cochran (so.).

Outlook: Hoffman is a very interesting team. The Hawks had a tremendous track season, earning a fifth place state medal in the 3,200 relay and a sixth place medal in the 1,600 relay. They are hoping to use that momentum as a springboard this fall. Count on a very balanced attack. Pienado was the Hawks' No. 1 runner last fall and is back to aid the attack this season. Miller had a breakout sophomore track season, earning medals in the 1,600 relay and 3,200 relay. Keep an eye on her progress this season. Schroeder offers plenty of experience and should make an impact this fall. Ramanathan and Alansari will also aid the effort. If the Hawks run with the same type of urgency as they did in the spring for track, they will definitely have an impact on the MSL race, and berth to state is not out of the question. "This group is energized by earning all-state honors in track; additionally this team is focused on performing when it matters the most," said Macnider.

Palatine Coach: Joe Parks (ninth year).

Last year: 12th in Class 3A, 2nd in MSL, Grant regional champions, Waukegan sectional champions, tied for MSL West Division title.

Key losses: Danya Lloyd, Anna Buckstaff, Izzeh Stankiewicz, Nadya Lloyd.

Top returning runners: Liz Lechowicz (jr.), Kate Lechowicz (jr.), Lauryn Simons (sr.), Jacklyn Frank (sr.), Daniela Casillas (so.), Holly Van De Cotte (so.), Nicole Sobkowiak (so.), Fiona Metzko (so.).

Promising newcomers: Anne Marie Jordan (fr.), Ellie Roy (fr.), Jennifer Lopez (fr.), Kelsie Fletcher.

Outlook: Hats off to Parks on what he and his team accomplished last year. Palatine started the year with plenty of questions and finished in sixth place at Hinsdale Invitational to open the 2016 season. From there, the Pirates kept getting better and better, capping their season with a sectional championship and a 12th-place state finish in Class 3A. Sure, the Pirates lose four runners that ran at the state meet, including Danya Lloyd, an all-stater who finished 22nd. But Parks is excited about the potential of this year's team. Kate and Liz Lechowicz are both back, and after running cross country for the first time last fall should be even better this season. Simons, who has dealt with plenty of injuries during her first three years, had her best summer of training. Those three should push the pace for Palatine this fall. Also joining the fun will be Casillas who won the MSL frosh/soph title. And then there is a promising group of freshman that should contribute by the end of the season. Jordan leads the promising group; her mother, Kristen Abrahamsen, was a two-time all-state runner for the Pirates. The Pirates may take some time to get going once again this season, but by October they will be in the conversation for the MSL title as well as a state berth. "I don't see us running with the very best teams from day one," said Parks. "We don't have the fire power or experience to do that just yet. But I think, like last year, we can be very good by the end."

Schaumburg Coach: Kristen Zillmer (second year).

Last year: 22nd in Class 3A, 5th in MSL, 3rd at Hoffman Estates regional, 5th at Waukegan sectional, tied for MSL West Division title.

Key losses: Lauren Kubinski, Valerie Schackelton, Ellie O'Connell.

Top returning runners: Madison Marasco (sr.), Rachael Vaccaro (sr.), Mikeelie Jensen (jr.), Katie Smith (so.), Victoria Treni (so.), Maggy Centeno (sr.), Elizabeth Sodimu (jr.).

Promising newcomers: Bea Frondoso (so.), Ashlee Jenks (fr.)

Outlook: Schaumburg is coming off a pretty solid season last year which finished with the Saxons taking 22nd in Class 3A. They lose three athletes from that state run, including No. 2 runner Kubinski, who decided not to run this year to focus on school. But Marasco is back, and that will make a big difference. She has developed into one of top runners in state, having earned back-to-back state medals after an impressive eighth-place finish last year. She also earned her first individual state medal in track by taking fifth place in Class 3A in the 800. Marasco and Vaccaro also have earned back-to-back state medals in the 3,200 relay. Vaccaro offers plenty of experience and will combine Jensen to key the team's second wave. Keep an eye on Jensen, who has had a strong summer of training and seems ready to make an impact. Smith also gained valuable experience last season, with Treni adding depth. The Saxons are missing a few of the moving parts from last season, but Zillmer is looking to develop some of the younger runners. "We did lose a couple of key runners from last season," she said, "but the team is ready to step up to achieve its goals. We have put in a lot of hard work during the summer and we are ready to roll."

CENTRAL SUBURBAN NORTHCoach: Greg Regalado (20th year).

Last year: 12th in CSL, 9th at Loyola regional.

Key losses: Brooke Gorski.

Top returning runners: Jocelyn Pantoja (jr.), Sarah Magnoni (jr.), Jenny MacDonald (sr.).

Promising newcomers: Brianna Hernandez (fr.), Dylan Van Fleet (so.), Marissa Murillo (fr.).

Outlook: Magnoni was the Warriors' top runner at the Loyola regional and qualified to the Niles West sectional. She is back to set the pace this season. Pantoja also offers experience for Maine West. "The runners are coming off a strong summer program, which will benefit the regular season. We are looking to be competitive in a strong conference," said Regalado.

EAST SUBURBAN CATHOLICCoach: Kelli Wosick (third year).

Last year: 6th in the ESCC, 3rd St. Viator regional, 7th at Fenton sectional.

Top returning runners: Payton McDonnell (jr.), Claire Bottcher (jr.), Loreta Dugo (sr.), Julia Hornberger (jr.), Megan Lifka (sr.), Maddie Fitzpatrick (jr.).

Promising newcomers: Katie Castelli, Zophia Perez, Sophie Limberakis.

Outlook: The Lions return the entire group that finished seventh at the Fenton sectional. Leading that group will be McDonnell, who qualified for the Class 2A state meet for the second consecutive season. McDonnell also finished 11th in the ESCC and is primed for a big year. Bottcher and Fitzpatrick were the Lions' 2-3 runners last season. St. Viator has been on the bubble for qualifying to the Class 2A state meet for the past two seasons. This veteran group once again has its eyes set on that goal. "Our season is looking very positive, the girls are strong and continue to support and motivate each other as we once again aim to qualify to the state meet as a team."

WEST SUBURBAN GOLDCoach: Emily Schader (17th year).

Last year: 5th in WSG, 9th at Lake Park regional

Key losses: Jasmine Salvador-Diaz, Jazlyn Zavala.

Top returning runners: Jazmin Santoyo (jr.), Adriana Olvera (jr.), Brenda Bolivar (so.), Nikola Slowik (so.), Julie Cruz (so.), Elyse McLaughlin (so.), Alexis Weiner (so.).

Promising newcomers: Katlin Crane (so.), Nicole Virzi (fr.), Molly Kasch (fr.).

Outlook: Leyden took a hit losing Salvador-Diaz and Zavala, who ran 2-3 for a team that finished fifth in the WSG and ninth at the Lake Park regional. But Santoyo returns, and she was the Eagles' top regional runner and qualified to the Niles West sectional. Santoyo will set the tone for the Eagles this season, and it will be fun to see the progress the young runner has made. McLaughlin was also part of the Eagles' regional run. Schader is looking for some support from a group of young runners which could push Leyden to a successful season. "We are very young, and the majority of our talent lies within these young runners. I am hoping to build off that and create a core group that not only performs well together, but stays with us through their senior year. We have the potential to be really decent this year and in the years to come," said Schader.

NORTHEASTERN ATHLETIC **Christian Liberty Academy** Coach: Taylor Stafford Bauer

Key losses: Isabella Wolke.

Top returning runners: Sephora Ducrozet (so.)

Promising newcomers: Megan Schuster.

Outlook: Christian Liberty Academy will certainly miss Wolke, who set the standard for the Chargers in girls running. She finished her career having earned five state medals, combined in cross country and track. But Ducrozet does return and will lead this year's group. She finished third at the Lisle regional, added a 12th-place finish at sectionals and qualified with Wolke to the Class 1A state meet.

