

Prep Sports | updated: 9/2/2017 6:02 PM

# Girls cross country: Downers Grove South, Vernon Hills set the pace at Fenton

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Downers Grove South finished fourth in the Class 3A cross country state meet last season, and the Mustangs' expectations are just as high this season.

Vernon Hills, meanwhile, has captured back-to-back third place trophies in Class 2A, and Cougars return with their eyes set on another trophy run this season.

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Both teams offered a glimpse of their potential on Saturday at the 37th annual John Kurtz Earlybird Invitational at Fenton High School.

On a pleasantly cool late summer morning, Downers Grove South stormed to the title placing five runners in the top 10 to easily outdistance the 23-team field with 32 points.

Vernon Hills also looked impressive, placing five runners in the top 22 to take second place with 78 points.

Rockton Hononegah took third with 95 points, followed by Fremd (123 points), and Prospect (158 points).

Brenna Cohoon set the tone for Downers Grove South by pulling away for the individual title in 18:09.

Cohoon set the tone early in the race and didn't look back once she got separation from the chase pack in the final mile.

"It definitely sets the tone for the season," said Cohoon, the Mustangs' top runner at state last season after finishing 38th in Class 3A. "I didn't know if I went out too fast in the first mile, but I just focused on maintaining during the final 2 miles."

The Mustangs did a fine job in supporting their sophomore star with Junior Becky Versaskas (18:35), sophomore Erin Reidy (18:41), and sophomore Kennedy Warden (18:45) going 6-7-8. Junior Melissa Weidner (18:50) completed the scoring by taking 10th place.

Junior Olivia Duax (19:04) added a 15th-place finish for a Mustangs attack that only lost one senior from last year's state team.

"We're shooting for a top-three finish at state this year," added Cohoon, "We'll keep working with what we have."

Vernon Hills returns all seven runners that pushed the Cougars to that third-place finish in Class 2A last season, including two-time all-state runner Lauren Katz.

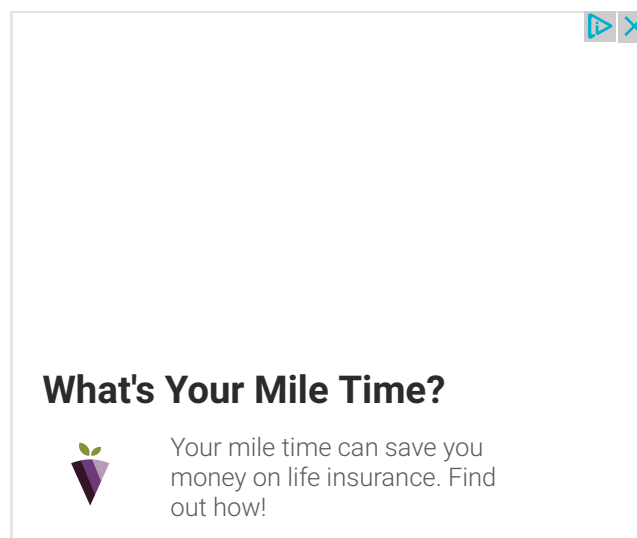
Katz and the Cougars ran to a first-place finish at the Lake County meet on Wednesday, and they were in fine form on Saturday, too.

Katz (18:22) led the effort by taking fourth place and was supported by sophomore Carly Sear (19:00) and junior Payton Makowskyj (19:07), who placed 13th and 16th.

Junior sisters Leah Wilkowski (19:16) and Katie Wilkowski (19:16) completed the scoring by securing 21st and 22nd place.

"Definitely the motivation is still there and we wanted to come out strong," said Katz. "I just want to keep getting better each year, and my goal this year was to come out strong for my last season."

Fremd has also entered the season on a strong note. The Vikings had a great showing in their opening dual meet victory against Prospect and continued that momentum on Saturday. A pair of sophomores led the way, as Marissa Ban (18:47) and Rebecca Markham (19:12) finished ninth and 18th.



"We're really happy with our start," said Ban of a Vikings approach that once again offered a nice pack. "We think we'll build from the beginning until the end."

Senior Nupur Pokharkar (19:24) and sophomore Julia Finegan (19:27) aided the Vikings by taking 24th and 26th place.

"We were able to stay together in the first mile," said Markham. "Now we have to continue to build on the final 2 miles."

Senior Mikayla Olsen (19:01) continued to impress, taking 14th and pacing Prospect team to a fifth-place finish. Junior Julia O'Grady (19:11) wasn't far off the pace in taking 17th place for the Knights, followed by senior Kaitlyn Rouse (19:38, 34th).

"We're trying to tighten our pack and we did a little bit better today," said Olsen, who was running up top early in the race. "We did a better job of pushing the middle mile."

Hersey junior Teagan Beckley (18:52) had a nice run on Saturday, closing hard to take 11th place.

The Huskies lost their top two runners to graduation, and Beckley has done a nice job pushing the pace early this season.

"I felt really good," said Beckley. "I started conservatively and I was able to push it harder at the end. I am really excited about the new challenges this year."

Senior Yailene Leon (19:38) took 35th place in pacing Wheeling to a 10th-place finish.

Conant finished in 17th place, with Leyden taking 21st.



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