

Prep Sports | updated: 9/1/2016 12:25 PM

Boys cross country: Scouting the Fox Valley



Geneva's Tyler Dau is the defending Upstate Eight River champ.

DAILY HERALD FILE PHOTO

By Mike Miazga
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Aurora Central Catholic Chargers Coach: Troy Kerber (31st season)

2015 finish: Fourth place Metro Suburban West Division

Top returning runners: Henry Feldhaus, Josh Jerwers, Sam Pawlowski, Caleb Minx, Matt Mendoza, Alex Wilkins, John Montelongo, junior Daniel McCully

Key newcomers: Junior Mac Doherty, sophomores Kennedy Cross, Tony Cepeda, Robbie McCarty, freshmen Tony LoPresti, Colin Dean

Outlook: Feldhaus will be out of the lineup until mid-September (medical leave). "We will be coming out of the gate slow," said Kerber. "With Henry back in the lineup, a strong senior class that also includes Josh, Sam and Caleb, and some talented underclassmen waiting in the wings, we feel by the end of the season we will be a surprise team in the

postseason. The underclassmen will stay down for a while to formulate their own identity before being pressed into varsity action. When this happens later in the season, we will have a whole new look from a team standpoint. The fun part is beginning the journey together and to see this evolve and happen. The potential is there and will also rely on where the IHSA sends us for the postseason."

Batavia Bulldogs Coach: Bronco Meeks

2015 finish: Third place Upstate Eight River

Top returning runners: Seniors Keaton Keller, Jack Gillerlain, James Imundo, juniors Sean Adams, Shane Knanishu, Nolan Evans

Key newcomers: Seniors Anthony Molina, Thomas Dohr, sophomore Reid Coyle, freshmen Adam Kennedy, Joe Knanishu, Damian Rodriguez, Chris Lynch

Outlook: Adams enjoyed an all-conference season as a sophomore. "We have a younger team with significant varsity experience," said Meeks. "We return five of our top seven from last year and four of our top five. Having this experience should help them to feel more comfortable at the varsity level. They are good kids and they work their tails off. They care for one another and hold each other accountable. They are a fun group to coach. We don't have one or two leaders on the team. Many of our older athletes have stepped up and taken ownership of the team."

Bartlett Hawks Coach: Jeremy Ruston (7th season)

2015 finish: Second place Upstate Eight Valley

Top returning runners: Seniors Dan Hayes, Andrew Pelster, Anthony Nicolini, Xander Apponi, junior Brandon Kim, sophomores Angelo Peters, Alan Michalek

Key newcomers: Andrew Matuszczwski, Luke Jennes, Sam Jennes

Outlook: Bartlett lost four of its top 7 runners from last year, but does return sectional qualifier Peters. "This season we want to gain experience and try to improve every week," said Ruston. "One thing the team needs to work on is being tougher and more confident. Our main goal will be to qualify as a team for the sectional meet. Even though we lost four of the top 7, I feel like this team can be even better. We have a good mix of senior leadership and young guys who are motivated to improve."

Burlington Central Rockets Coach: Vince Neil

2015 finish: 6th place Big Northern Conference

Top returning runners: Seniors Tate Hendrikson, Josh Teets, Mitch Roedel, junior Jack Zettl

Key newcomers: Junior Arnie Rodriguez, sophomore Cody Schrock, freshman Anthony Farmer

Outlook: Neil said a key to the season will be bringing the Rockets' pack together during meets. "We have been too spread out these last few years and it has cost our team advancement to the sectional," he said. "We have several guys who can be front-runners, but they all have to run together to give our team a shot at advancing." Neil likes the team's drive and work ethic. "The boys are all-in this season and there is a great excitement across all levels," he said. "Most of the boys put in some quality miles so we are expecting that will pay off this season." Central will compete in the new Kishwaukee River Conference. "We want to contend with the top of the conference," he said.

Dundee-Crown Chargers Coach: Tyler Carlson (4th season)

2015 finish: Ninth place Fox Valley Conference

Top returning runners: Juniors Joey DeVita, Anthony Hurgoi, Danny Price, sophomore Mark Jensen

Key newcomers: Senior Jake Olsen

Outlook: Hurgoi is a returning sectional qualifier for the Chargers. "Our top four returning boys put in a great summer, but we are looking for we will step up and be our fifth runner," said Carlson. "Our pack was strong last year and should be even stronger this year. We have a hungry group of sophomores who had a pretty solid track season to end their freshman year. They definitely are in the hunt as well as some returning junior-varsity guys. We are setting the goal of being in the top half of the conference in October." Like another FVC coach mentioned, Carlson feels the FVC will come down to the back of teams' lineups. "A lot of it will come down to whose 4-5 guys can beat other team's 4-5 guys after the front-runners finish," he said.

Cary-Grove Trojans Coach: Layne Holter

2015 finish: Tied for third FVC Valley

Top returning runners: Seniors Alex Ratkovich, Jack Adams, Kyle Adams, Tommy Williams, sophomores Derek Warren, Alex Sepeczi

Key newcomers: Sophomore Juan Camargo, freshmen Nathan Kutok, Maxum Caesar, Adam Caesar

Outlook: Ratkovich was an individual state qualifier last year (ran 14:54 in Peoria). All five of the Trojans' top runners have varsity experience. "They are experienced and hungry," said Holter, who predicts Ratkovich will be one of the top runners in the area. The veteran coach sees the FVC as "up for grabs." "There are several good teams, but most lack depth. Never count Huntley or Crystal Lake Central out."

Crystal Lake South Gators Coach: Rich Eschman (24th season)

2015 finish: Seventh place Fox Valley Conference

Top returning runners: Senior Joe Prus, juniors Jack Becker, Ryan Foster, Miles Foydl, Alex Foydl, Matt VanWitzenburg

Key newcomers: Seniors Joe Kovack, Eugene Felix

Outlook: Prus took 28th in the state in Class 3A as a junior last year. Prus will be joined by Becker at the top of the Gators' lineup. "With Jon and Jack we have a very good start," said Eschman. "Both Jon and Jack have qualified for the state meet (Becker did it in 2014). As long as these two stay healthy, we should have a good start to our meets." Foster took 17th in the conference last season. "Ryan did really well during the track season this past spring," said Eschman. "We will need Miles and Alex to race well in order to round out our top five. Joe, Matt and Eugene will help to push those two guys and will round out our top seven."

Elgin Maroons Coach: Drew Smith (2nd season)

2015 finish: Fifth place Upstate Eight River

Top returning runners: Seniors Jakob Woerner, Max Troyke, Carlos Orduno, Christian Ulloa, junior Jon Porras

Key newcomers: Junior Cameron Carranza, sophomores Riley Keating, Enrique Delgado

Outlook: Elgin graduated a number of key runners, including top finisher Brandon Copeland. "Losing Brandon as our lead runner will be an obstacle for us, but I'm more confident this year in my 3-7 runners," said Smith. "This year we are looking to race as a pack. The main varsity pack is returning and has been committed in the off-season." Smith said the team is looking to improve its conference place finish and advance runners to the sectional level and beyond.

Elgin Academy Hilltoppers Coach: Migdalia Sepulveda

Top returning runners: Siyong Brian Leng, Prudhvie, Ben Simon

Key newcomers: Christopher Perez, Anthony Perez, Connor Jaworski, Haolin Liu, Arman Pabani

Outlook: Sepulveda takes over the Hilltoppers' squad and brings an extensive running background with, having competed in six full Ironman competitions and 3 ultramarathons. "I am looking forward to a promising season," said Sepulveda. "My goals for this team are to instill the love of the sport through the passion I bring to it as an endurance runner myself. I believe hard work does not enjoy mean they cannot enjoy what they are doing. On the contrary, if they do not enjoy running, they will not excel, even if they are top runners. This group of young runners has met my challenges and are eager to learn how to improve on their technique in order to do their best come race day. Our strengths lie in having a smaller team, which allows for greater camaraderie between each runner and providing moral support to their teammates as they cross that finish line."

Geneva Vikings Coach: Bob Thomson (15th season)

2015 finish: Second place Upstate Eight River

Top returning runners: Seniors Tyler Dau, Brian Kuehl, sophomore Josh Rodgers

Key newcomers: Sophomore Ryan Kredell

Outlook: Dau is the defending River individual champion and also won an individual regional title last year. Kuehl and Rodgers are returning all-conference runners. "The team's goal is to make improvements to places that we finished last season with an eye on qualifying to state as a team," said Thomson.

Hampshire Whip-Purs Coach: Dennis Wozniak

2015 finish: Fourth place FVC Fox

Top returning runners: Seniors Jacob Oury, Will Matuchek

Key newcomers: Senior Jeremy Horn, sophomore Cameron Reedy

Outlook: Oury finished 33rd in the state last year in Class 2A. He also holds the Hampshire boys' track school record in the 3,200, while Matuchek is the record-holder in the 1,600. "We have seniors with experience," said Wozniak. "I like this group's attitude, sense of humor and ability to achieve their goals. We want to get better every meet and stay healthy. If we can do that, we'll have the best team in school history." Reedy is back after missing last cross-country season due to injury.

Harvest Christian Academy Eagles Coach: Steve Bland

2015 finish: Northeastern Athletic Conference champions

Top returning runners: Seniors Riley Steiner, Michael Sisko, juniors Andrew Dobrescu, Mark Davila, Kyler Young, Connor Seals

Key newcomers: Sophomores Payton Kasper, Chris Dobrescu, freshman Erik Richter

Outlook: Harvest, which won a conference title for a third year in a row and qualified for state as a team, returns all but two runners from that Peoria squad. Sisko is back after not running in the state meet due to an injury suffered in the sectional meet. Kasper could find his way into the Top 7, despite it being his first year running cross-country at the high-school level. "Our strength is our middle," said Bland. "We run a very tight pack. This is our sixth season in IHSA

and we are looking to have our best year ever." Harvest was ranked No. 2 in the state in Class 1A by DyeStatIL and No. 5 by MileSplit IL. "We are hoping we can live up to those predictions," said Bland.

Huntley Red Raiders Coach: Matt Kaplan (9th season)

2015 finish: Second place Fox Valley Conference

Top returning runners: Seniors Matt Kapolnek, Raf Rivera, junior Joey Ozzauto, sophomores Jadon Conroy, Jeremy Rose

Key newcomers: Junior Derek Zimmerman, sophomore Dylan Nicosia, freshmen Ian Geisler, Hunter Dawson, Brice Klepfer

Outlook: Huntley is coming off a 2015 season where it took second in the FVC and won a regional team title. "Our goal is to continue the success our program has experienced in the last couple seasons," said Kaplan. "We will take the season one meet at a time and work to learn from our races moving forward. This team will be a work in progress, but our team goal is to see how good we can be. The team has a lot of youth. Our top seven for varsity will be a work in progress throughout the season. Jadon, Joey and Matt have shown the leadership to get the team where it wants to do. We are going to need some new student-athletes to step up."

Jacobs Golden Eagles Coach: Kevin Christian (10th season)

2015 finish: Fourth place Fox Valley Conference

Top returning runners: Senior Garrett Brenizer, sophomore Zach Albrecht

Key newcomers: Junior Lorenz Sapanhila, Jacobs Melgosa, sophomores Brett Bognar, Brandon Cole, Mark Lemke, freshman Zeke Valdez

Outlook: Jacobs lost 10 of its top 12 runners from a year ago and will have only 1 senior who will be a varsity contributor (Brenizer). Brenizer and Albrecht both are returning all-conference runners. "We will be young, but our young group works at a varsity level already," said Christian. "We will see how the sophomores and juniors react to being varsity athletes since none of them ran varsity last year. If they react well, we could be really good a year earlier than I thought. If they don't, we will have a decent season and be extremely solid next year."

Kaneland Knights Coach: Chad Clarey

2015 finish: Second place Northern Illinois Big 12

Top returning runners: Seniors Andrew Kantola, Noah Duffey, junior Matt Richtman, Sam Webster

Key newcomers: Juniors Henry Nosek, Peyton Heiser, Cristian Girolamo, sophomore Jacob Wielgos

Outlook: Kaneland finished 17th in the state in Class 2A last season. Richtman finished 18th and earned all-state honors. Kantola and Webster also ran in the state meet. Duffey, a senior, is back after a season-ending injury last fall. "If we are healthy, we hope to have a single-digit runner in all races this fall, coupled with a very formidable pack that could run 25-35 seconds apart," said Clarey. "The seniors have picked up where last fall's leaders left off. This team is so committed to one another and they hold one another accountable. They had a profitable summer and we hope to see the rewards in October." Clarey is expecting plenty of competition throughout the season. "The team realizes there are as many as 10 preseason ranked teams in the Top 17 in Class 2A cross country that will be vying for five qualifying spots at the Belvidere sectional," he said. "We have to develop some consistency this season, working harder and smarter on the first mile of races. With some luck on not losing athletes to injury, we hope to be in a place where we might sneak into the fifth qualifying spot in late October. While there is no pressure on this team to advance, we are a hungry group. This will be a fun year to see our team pack up and grow."

Larkin Royals Coach: Nate Williams

Top runners: Seniors Eduardo Baltazar, Max Whitaker, juniors Evan Powers, Manny Fuentes, Josh Aros, Oscar Birungi, Gio Ruiz, sophomores Carlos Miranda, Alexis Alvarado, Alex Mercado, Keith Carver, Alonso Hernandez, Carlos Miranda, freshman Miguel Uriostegui

Outlook: Williams sees the Royals' Top 7 as Miranda, Uriostegui, Baltazar, Powers, Fuentes, Whitaker and Aros. The coach added the team's goals are to finish in the Top 5 in more competitions, average 18:59 or lower for the Top 5, qualify for sectionals, finish in the Top 2 in both city meets and finish the season with 10 runners going 19:00 or faster. Williams said St. Charles East is a favorite in the River Division.

Marmion Academy Cadets Coach: Dan Klatt

2015 finish: Chicago Catholic League champions, 14th in state

Top returning runners: Seniors Charlie Zimmer, Andrew Lifka, juniors Sean Galle, Jimmy Milder, Michael Ronzone

Outlook: Ronzone finished third in the conference as a sophomore and 50th in the state. "The strength of our team this year will be the group's mentality," said Klatt. "They are a competitive group and have bought into the process of becoming great. The men understand this process is not an overnight endeavor. Instead, it is a continuous 'yes' to the challenges presented by high-level training." Klatt said his group is ready to defend its CCL title. "Our conference is strong. Each team has a good level of talent, but we greatly look forward to the challenge," he said. "Our goal is to maximize the potential of each individual runner and consequently the team. Our focus, as with many other programs, is to get the most out of each day. The reality is there is much work to be done. Understanding the numbers and talent we compete against each week, we took some risks this summer. Ultimately the fate of our team rests with our ability to compete with extreme focus and purpose."

St. Charles East Saints Coach: Chris Bosworth

2015 finish: First place Upstate Eight River

Top returning runners: Seniors Anthony Zila, Jake Beno, Dan Werner, Tommy Olenek, JB Sunderlund, juniors Campbell Koch, Cole Adesso, Rohan Patel, sophomore Bennett Melone

Key newcomers: Sophomore Charles Murphy

Outlook: East took 11th in the state in Class 3A last season, in addition to winning a regional title and a UEC River crown. Sunderlund is an all-state performer in the 3,200 relay during the track season. Murphy is a transfer student from Louisiana. "The team philosophy is to pack run as much as possible," said Bosworth, who also noted team leadership emerged during the summer session. Bosworth has high praise for Beno. "Jake had a tremendous track season," he said. "He has a chip on his shoulder. He is determined to lead this team. He has learned a lot from the fellow seniors who graduated and he is now ready to make his own path." Bosworth sees a competitive landscape in the UEC River. "We would like to start racing at our best come the conference meet on all three levels," he said. "The team knows this year will be the most challenging of years to repeat as champions. Geneva, Batavia and North return really talented kids. We will need to be ready."

St. Charles North North Stars Coach: Kevin Harrington 2015 finish: Fourth place Upstate Eight River

Top runners: seniors Brett Lee, Luke Zanis, Luke Sutherland, Tim Leal, Joe Mascha, juniors Bo Ruttens, Jake Estlund, Thomas Wagner, Jaeden McIntosh, sophomores Jack Dorrance, Nic Gutierrez

Outlook: Ruttens and Lee figure to be at the front for the North Stars. "My goals are to be a competitive team by the end of October," said Harrington. "Although our program is growing quite a bit (more than 60 runners this fall), our

junior and senior classes have relatively few year-round distance kids. Our freshmen and sophomores have a significant amount of 'traditional distance kids.'" Sutherland and Zanis, two of the team's projected Top 5, are long sprinters during the spring. Both were part of East's sectional-championship 1,600 relay team. "This is one of the reasons it will take us a while to be competitive," said Harrington. "They need some time to get their distance lungs."

St. Edward Green Wave Coach: Katie Beckett

2015 finish: N/A

Top returning runners: None

Key newcomers: Freshman Alex Garcia

Outlook: St. Edward has no returning runners from a year ago, but the roster size has increased from the 2 seniors of a year ago. "We have a larger team than we have had in recent years and there is a lot of potential growth in many of the boys," said Beckett. "I like that we have an entirely new group of boys. They are having to learn and work together as they get sued to this sport. Since it is a young team, we really are not sure what they will bring to competition, which is exciting as we prepare for our first meets. Our goals for the season are to keep seeing times drop and then evaluate how far we believe we can take the team this year."

South Elgin Storm Coach: Kari Turcan

2015 finish: Sixth place Upstate Eight Valley

Top returning runners: Seniors Jack Mainellis, Jake Harris, juniors Brady Tolva, Owen Sirridge, Hector Rodriguez, sophomore Jace Warrick

Key newcomers: Freshmen David Galanes, Ryan Harvey, Derryl Barnes

Outlook: South Elgin advanced to sectionals as a team last year, while its frosh-soph team finished first in the UEC Valley. Warrick was seventh in the frosh-soph conference meet, while Rodriguez was ninth and Sirridge was 10th. Tolva was 19th. "We only graduated one of our top seven regional runners, everyone else is returning," said Turcan. "We also have a batch of freshmen that are real go-getters who really want to be at the front of the pack. This group is hopeful of another successful season, but I would like to see a little stronger work ethic from some of the runners. They are soon going to find out just how hard other teams and runners have worked this summer. We are hoping to transfer that first place from the frosh-soph Valley Division into something on the varsity side this year." Turcan has been pleased with Warrick's progress. "He is running much better than he was this time last year and has a deep desire to be the best," she said. "He's currently in a very secure position as our No. 1 runner and I know he would like to keep it that way. He also has the kind of work ethic and sportsmanship all coaches want from their athletes."

Streamwood Sabres Coach: Weert Goldenstein (11th season)

2015 finish: Sixth place Upstate Eight River

Top returning runners: Seniors Andres Rosiles, Dylan Munoz, sophomores Marcos Villarreal, Carlos Ramirez

Key newcomers: Junior Richard Garcia, freshman Andrew Valdovinos

Outlook: Goldenstein was pleased with the team's commitment during the off-season. "We had a number of guys participate in this year's summer camp and return this season with a decent amount of summer mileage under their belts," he said. "Our goals this season include improving our position in the conference, advancing runners in the state series and improving as a team and individually. We have good team leadership."

West Aurora Blackhawks Coach: Anthony Rizzo

2015 finish: Fourth place Upstate Eight Valley

Top returning runners: Seniors David Castillo, Griffin Morrill, juniors Patrick Reilly, Zach Thorell, Joel Ramos, Erik Sanchez, sophomores Reagan McCue, Will Nicholas, Calvin Watts

Key newcomers: Freshmen Jackson Morrill, Michael Schlitz

Outlook: Castillo is a returning sectional qualifier and one of only two seniors on the team with Griffin Morrill. "We have an outstanding pack and we have been focused on team running all summer," said Rizzo. "With David leading from the front, I am confident our guys will find each other in races and challenge many teams. This group of young men is extremely dedicated and they remind me of the 2011-2012 team. We do not necessarily have the names, but we are fighters and will fight through races in order to prove ourselves."

Westminster Christian Warriors Coach: Adriana Armstrong

2015 finish: Sectional qualifier

Top returning athletes: Senior Tom Danner, junior Jason Yaccino, Ben Bertsche

Outlook: Danner finished fifth in the Northeastern Athletic Conference in 2015, while Yaccino was seventh -- both earned all-NAC honors. Westminster advanced to the sectional level as a team for the first time since 2008. "We are starting the season strong," said Armstrong. "Their strength will be working as a team and motivating the newer and younger teammates during the regular-season meets. I like the energy of this group of boys. Each day at practice they come in with excitement and enthusiasm to get going. There is a strong camaraderie among them and it's hard not to feel motivated and excited around them. I am really optimistic this team will go far this season. I feel as if we have been getting primed for a couple years and this is the year we charge ahead and see great things and set our sights on competing at state."

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