



High school cross country: Boys, girls teams at Batavia, Geneva, Kaneland, St. Charles East, St. Charles North on paths to state meet

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The starting gun has fired on the 2016 cross country season, and both the boys and girls squads at Batavia, Geneva, Kaneland, Marmion, Rosary, St. Charles East and St. Charles North are loaded with talent. Four girls teams and two boys teams that qualified for the 2015 state championships are ranked in the top 20 in the state preseason coaches polls. Here are the outlooks for those teams as they start on the road toward the 2016 state meet:

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

Batavia Bulldogs

Coach: Bronco Meeks

Top athletes

Name Year

Sean Adams jr.

Nolan Evans jr.

Jack Gillerlain jr.

Shane Khanishu jr.

Outlook: The Bulldogs return five of their top seven runners from a team that placed third in the Upstate Eight River and 11th in their sectional meet last season.

Batavia opened the season with a fifth-place finish in an elite 13-team field at the Leavey Invitational at Leroy Oakes Forest Preserve on Sept. 3, an indication of what could be on the horizon this season.

“We look to be very competitive in the Upstate Eight Conference this season and be a team that can get itself to the state meet,” head coach Bronco Meeks said.

Geneva Vikings

Coach: Bob Thomson

Top athletes

Name Year

Tyler Dau sr.

Brian Kuehl sr.

Josh Rodgers so.

Outlook: The Vikings finished outside the top five in seventh place at their loaded sectional meet last fall and didn't advance to the state meet. However, this season they are ranked right behind St. Charles East in the state in the preseason coaches poll.

The Vikings lost three runners to graduation and another varsity runner moved with his family back to California, but Tyler Dau will be among the top runners in the talent-laden Upstate Eight Conference this fall, and Josh Rogers (who ran 9:36.17 in the 3,200-meter run on the track last spring) looks ready to step into a leading role. Brian Kuehl has elite-level speed.

Geneva placed second at the Leavey Invitational ahead of conference rivals St. Charles East, Batavia, and St. Charles North, led by Dau's individual win in 15:32. After a five-year absence from the state meet the team goal is simple.

"We are really determined to be on the starting line as a team this year," head coach Bob Thomson said.

Kaneland Knights

Coach: Chad Clarey

Top athletes

Name Year

Andrew Kantola sr.

Matt Richtman jr.

Outlook: The Knights opened the 2016 season on Aug. 30 by placing sixth at the 15-team Sycamore Invitational with a 150-point team score, finishing behind NIB-12 Conference rivals Dixon (96), Sycamore (97), and Sterling (121).

Matt Richtman was second at Sycamore but he set the pace at the Harvest Christian invite on Sept. 3, winning in 16:10. "I thought I may have gone out too hard," Richtman said, "But I stuck with it and started feeling better on the second mile loop, and then felt strong the rest of the way in."

Kaneland took second at Harvest Christian, and head coach Chad Clarey is looking to keep his team trending in the right direction.

"We haven't started the season firing on all cylinders, but we've done well enough," Clarey said. "Our group behind Matt still has a lot of maturing to do. I'm not worried about where we are in the state rankings right now, or if we are ranked at all."

“Our goals this season are staying healthy, continuing to improve race-by-race, building a good, tight chase pack, and trying make a good showing in the postseason to get back to the state meet.”

Marmion Cadets

Coach: Dan Klatt

Top athletes

Name Year

Jimmy Milder sr.

Mike Ronzone jr.

Charlie Zimmer sr.

Outlook: Marmion won the Chicago Catholic League title last year in its debut year in the conference and placed 14th at the 2015 Class 3A state meet. The Cadets have five of their top seven back from that team and should continue to be a dangerous team whose five scoring runners can finish within 30 seconds of each other.

They are ranked No. 20 in the preseason coaches poll, and placed third at the Leavey Invitational just behind Geneva and ahead of host St. Charles East and Batavia. The Cadets were led by Charlie Zimmer’s second-place individual finish.

St. Charles East Saints

Coach: Chris Bosworth

Top athletes

Name Year

Jake Beno sr.

Don Werner sr.

Anthony Zilla sr.

Outlook: The Saints placed 11th in the Class 3A state race last fall, but return only three runners from that team. Still, they are ranked No. 15 in the state preseason poll by the high school coaches. East placed fourth at its own Leavey Invitational with an impressive 20-second gap between their first and fifth finishers.

“There are no superstars on this team,” head coach Chris Bosworth said, “But we can run as a tight pack at the front of the race with a lot of guys. We’ve had a great summer of training and made a lot of progress. We might not start off the season fast, but all that matters is where we finish in November.”

St. Charles North North Stars

Coach: Kevin Harrington

Top athletes

Name Year

Seniors Brett Lee sr.

Bo Ruttens jr.

Luke Sullivan sr.

Outlook: The North Stars lost four of their top runners from last year to graduation, so they will be in a rebuilding mode this season. They placed fourth out of eight teams in the first race of the season at the Elgin City Classic, where they were led by 12th- and 13th-place individual finishes, respectively, by Brett Lee and Luke Sullivan. At the Leavey Invitational on Sept. 3, North was 11th in the field of 13 teams without an individual among the top-50 runners.

“My goal is for us to be a competitive team by the end of October,” head coach Kevin Harrington said. “Although our program is growing with more than 60 athletes this season, our junior and senior classes have relatively few full-time distance runners.”

While the ranks of upperclassmen are relatively thin, Harrington said the freshmen and sophomore classes have plenty of talent. Senior track standouts Luke Sutherland and Luke Zanis came out for cross county, but North will still have a long way to go to contend for conference.

“Conference-wise, we have been stuck behind St. Charles East, Geneva and Batavia,” Harrington said. “They are high-quality programs, so we have our work cut out for us again this year.”

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

Batavia Bulldogs

Coach: Chad Hillman

Top athletes

Name Year

Marygrace Golden jr.

Daphne Kolody jr.

Anna Malay jr.

Emma Stephens jr.

Outlook: The Bulldogs were third at last year’s Class 3A state meet, they return six of their top seven runners from last season, and they are determined to mount a charge towards another state trophy this fall. Despite already being very deep in talent, freshmen Mia Giafrancesco and Audrey Pellico could make a run at being regulars in the varsity lineup.

Batavia opened the 2016 season on Sept. 3 by placing second to meet champion Geneva, at the Leavey Invitational without star Emma Stephens in the starting line.

“We are looking to improve upon last year’s success—which will be a tremendous challenge considering with how well our 2015 season went,” head coach Chad Hillman said. “It will be exciting to see if we can put it all together for a great postseason.

“There is no question we have a group of individuals who could become a great team and make this another special season. It will be a fun journey to see how that all develops.”

Geneva Vikings

Coach: Bob Thomson

Top athletes

Name Year

Emily Belanger so.

Taryn Christy jr.

Emma Ehrhard sr.

Sophia McDonnell so.

Outlook: Geneva returns five of its top-seven runners from a team that placed ninth at the 2015 Class 3A state meet. Ranked No. 8 in the latest state coaches poll, the Vikings will need to avoid injuries to make it back to the state meet.

They started the season by winning the team title at the Leavey Invitational, topping arch rival Batavia 58-64.

“Our goal is to battle Batavia for the conference title,” head coach Bob Thompson said. “Our West Aurora sectional is loaded, but we’ve been on the state meet starting line for eight of the past nine seasons and we expect to be back there again in November.”

Kaneland Knights

Coach: Doug Ecker

Top athletes

Name Year

Grace Purcell so.

Becca Richtman sr.

Andrea Wells jr.

Outlook: Kaneland’s absence from the 2A girls state cross country rankings lasted all of one week, as the Knights were recently listed at No. 15 following their win at the Morris Invitational on Aug. 24.

On Sept. 3, the Knights continued to gain momentum with a dominating performance at the annual Oregon Open, an early-season meet that has no team scoring.

Running on a challenging, hilly course, freshman Rachel Richtman won her second invite title with a time of 19:32 to set the pace for the Knights. Behind her, teammates Andrea Wells (second, 19:56), Grace Purcell (seventh, 20:20), and Becca Richtman (eighth, 20:43) ran well.

Rosary Royals

Coach: Vic Mead

Top athletes

Name Year

Brooke Delahanty jr.

Claire Hengesbaugh jr.

Megan Ronzone so.

Outlook: Rosary was a state qualifier last year, where they finished 15th in Class 2A. Although they lost their top two runners from that team to graduation, they still return five that ran at state and are ranked No. 14 in the latest state coaches poll.

The Royals have already had three varsity meets this season, which started with a fifth place finish in the Yorkville Invitational on Aug. 22, then a fourth place finish behind three 3A schools in the Aurora City Championships on Aug. 27, and an excellent third place finish on Sept. 3 at the St. Ignatius Invitational. Claire Hengesbaugh, who won the St. Ignatius invite in 19:22 (a 22-second margin over second place), has led the way so far this season.

St. Charles East Saints

Coach: Mike Arenberg

Top athletes

Name Year

Anna Arrick sr.

Emma Battin sr.

Hannah Ewald sr.

Lauren Woelffer sr.

Ashley Stepien so.

Outlook: The Saints have just three runners back from last year's top-seven, plus senior Hannah Ewald, their top runner starting last season before she suffered an injury that forced her to miss the rest of the 2015 campaign. Finally healthy again, Ewald will be challenged this season by talented sophomore Ashley Stepien.

East recorded an encouraging fifth place team finish at its own Leavey Invitational on Sept. 3, with Stepien running to third place in the frosh-soph race and Ewald on the sidelines.

“Our conference and sectional are loaded with ranked teams this year and we just want to move up the ladder,” head coach Mike Arenberg said.

St. Charles North Stars

Coach: Shari Hayes

Top athletes

Name Year

Audrey Ernst jr.

Madison Kaufmann sr.

Outlook: The North Stars return their entire top-seven from last year’s team that finished eighth in the tough West Aurora sectional, where only the top five teams advanced to the state meet.

Led by junior Audrey Ernst, who finished eighth individually at the state meet, this year’s team is deep and ready to run. The key to the season will be closing the gap between Madison Kaufmann, another 2015 state qualifier, and the rest of the pack behind her and Ernst.

North opened the season by winning their sixth consecutive Elgin City Classic meet, with Ernst also winning her third consecutive individual title in 17:53. Ernst was second overall and the North Stars eighth at St. Charles East’s Leavey Invite on Sept. 3.

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