

Swede runners racing to the top

Written by Deb Egenberger
Wednesday, 02 September 2009 21:18 -



State's coaches rank Gothenburg boys at No. 1.

With five of the six runners back from last year's Class C state runner-up team, Gothenburg boys open the cross country season with high hopes and high expectations.

"We went into last year a virtual unknown," said coach Steve Reeves. "The kids are a year older, a year stronger and a year more experienced."

They are also bringing a reputation into the 2009 season.

In a statewide poll conducted with high school cross country coaches, Gothenburg's boys rank at the top of Class C, tying 2008 state champion Norfolk Catholic for the No. 1 spot.

The Knights had four of six team members earn individual medals at state last fall and all but two return.

"I think Norfolk Catholic still has to be the favorite to win the class," Reeves said. "A pre-season ranking doesn't do anything except create interest and motivation."

Still, the Swedes should compete well at state and every meet leading up to it.

Senior Andrew Collins, who has already made three straight appearances at state, is expected to lead the Swedes.

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Collins and junior teammate Luke Rehmert are returning medalists.

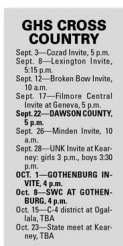
Sophomore Brett Dockweiler crossed the finish just outside a state medal and classmate Joshua Clark was a solid contributor all season.

“What we really want to do is get our top runners as close together at the finish as we can,” Reeves said. “That’s how you win meets.”

Depth will be a luxury Reeves hasn’t always had. There are 21 boys to challenge for varsity positions that could go eight or nine deep. Only six are scored toward the team total.

“When you have competition at practice like that it builds the team and makes us better as a whole,” the coach said.

On the girls side, the number is small but the quality is there.



Reeves has six Swede girls on his roster.

“The main thing is we can field a team,” he said. “We’ve never not been able to field a team and I always tell the kids whether you place first or eighth isn’t as important as school representation.”

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Four of last year's state qualifying team members return, including district medalist Tabitha Paul, a senior.

Letter winners Ashlee Bruntz, Lauren Schmiett, Emily Hult and Theresa Richey add to the experience. Freshman Morgan Kowalewski, who had a strong junior high career, brings a fresh face to the field.

"It will be an interesting year," Reeves said.

Reeves said he expects Broken Bow and Minden to be solid girls teams in the Southwest Conference.

The state's coaches agree ranking the Indians at No. 2 and Whippets No. 10. Gothenburg falls in between at No. 9.

Reeves said Ogallala and Broken Bow boys could dominate.

"I think both those teams are underrated," he said.

Ogallala, which drops to Class C in cross country this fall, is also in Gothenburg's C-4 district.

The Indians took the state title in Class B last season and graduated two team members. They will have the home meet advantage for districts as the C-4 meet is at Ogallala.

Gothenburg opens the cross country season at the Cozad Invite beginning at 5 p.m. on Thursday and the Swedes will travel to Lexington for a meet at 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday.

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Members of the 2009 Gothenburg girls and boys cross country teams are (*denotes letter winners):

Seniors—Tabitha Paul*, Andrew Collins*, Eric Stevens*.

JUNIORS—Ashlee Bruntz*, Emily Hult*, Lauren Schmiett*, Coltin Bebensee, Chris Block*, Jonathon Clark, Brennan Costello*, Luke Rehmert*.

SOPHOMORES—Theresa Richey*, Bryan Benash, Joshua Clark*, Jade Clement, Brett Dockweiler*, Bryce Eggleston*, Justin Larson, Alix Meisinger, Ryan Ostendorf, Josh Portiner, Brandon Wlasiuk.

FRESHMEN—Morgan Kowalewski, Marcos Avalos, Jon Rehmert, Ray Ramirez, Alex Spencer.