



THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Members of the Dallas cross country team run past Mountaineer Stadium.

DALLAS XC

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Lady Mountaineers entered last season with high expectations. But instead of capturing its second consecutive state championship, Dallas finished fourth

"Last year taught us all a lot about how to deal with pressure," said Samuels. "We learned from mistakes we made last season. You have to be lucky to win a state championship. Things have to go the right way at the right time."

The Lady Mountaineers have the talent to make another run at the WVCCL, District 2 and state championships. Seniors Lisa Giacometti and Hillary Adams join junior Kenslie Kerestes as three of the top runners in the region.

On the boys side, the Mountaineers are looking to make a run at the WVCCL title. Dallas is loaded with young, but experienced talent. Eight runners are back from last year's team that finished with a 5-1 league record.

The Dallas cross country program has blossomed during Samuel's three-year reign. In 2003, the Lady Mountaineers had only 10 runners on its roster. This year, the girls and boys teams combine for approximately 35 runners, while another 45-50 are members of the middle school team.

"Those numbers are unprecedented for a school our size," said the former Dallas and University of Pittsburgh standout. "I think having something like a state championship really helps a program reap the benefits. When there's that kind of an interest, you'd like to think that we're doing something right."

Here's a look at the two teams.

GIRLS

With Giacometti – the two-time defending district champion – Adams and Kerestes leading the way, the Lady Mountaineers are the overwhelming favorites to capture a fourth consecutive league and district championship. Adams and Kerestes finished fourth and sixth, respectively, at the district championship meet last year.

"To have three runners like that up front is a tremendous advantage," Samuel said. "All three have the ability to become all-state or even win a state championship."

Although it's the beginning of the season, Samuel isn't shying away from discussions of a possible state championship.

"We talk about everything," he said. "We train in a way that we want to be at our best when it counts. We want to get better with every meet. You have to talk

about end-of-the-season goals. If not, there's much more pressure toward the end of the season."

BOYS

Despite the youth surrounding the team, Samuel is optimistic about the Mountaineers' chances for success. And winning a league championship.

"We were young last year," he said. "A lot of the guys have been with me for a full year now. They'll benefit from being our training for a whole year. They have experience and they know what (the sport) is all about. They've put in some serious summer workouts."

"Winning the division championship is our primary goal, but we also have a goal of going to states," he said. "It's been a long time since that happened with our boys team."

Dallas will be led by junior Adam Singer, senior Sean McMahon and sophomore Eric Danko.

Singer nearly qualified for the state meet last season, despite never having competed in the sport before last year. Mike Strasser, a sophomore who transferred to Dallas last year from Tennessee, is one of several very good young runners, says Samuel.

"It's a tight-knit group," he said. "They're very close to each other."

And in cross country, that's a very important ingredient to team success, said the head coach.

"This might come as a surprise to many people, but cross country is not an individual sport," Samuel said. "We don't do it that way at Dallas. We're always focused on the team first and it's important that we're one big happy family. Camaraderie is of the utmost importance. This group is very good at getting along with each other and helping each other out."

KNIGHTS

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seniors, four are sophomores, and three are competing in the sport on a part-time basis.

There is good news, however, as junior Justin Amy, sophomore Justin Mazur and freshman Mike Ryan should be among the top finishers in each race. Ryan, a transfer from Wyoming Seminary, placed in the top five at junior high districts last year.

Youngsters Neil Dierolf, Greg Heindel and Tom Perry – all sophomores – are loaded with potential and should get better as the season progresses.

"We're very solid at 1, 2, and 3," said Sobocinski, referring to Amy, Mazur and Ryan. "Those kids should be fine, but we just don't have the depth." Amy, Heindel and Perry are also members of the Lake-Lehman soccer team and occasionally miss cross country practices to compete in that sport. "It's tough. Selfishly speaking, I'd like to have them there all of the time," Sobocinski said. "But I appreciate their effort and for coming out for our team. In cross country, if you don't have five guys, you lose the meet."

"Our boys will give everything they have this season. We'll have to see what happens."

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