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A smorgasbord for runners

By *Mary Jo Monnin* - News Sports Reporter

Runners get going in last year's Section VI Class A race at Elma Meadows, a local favorite.
Mark Mulville/Buffalo News



High school runners have their favorites when it comes to T-shirts, sneakers and energy drinks, so why not their favorite cross-country course? Western New York offers plenty to choose from whether they are flat, hilly, scenic or double as golf courses.

The Elma Meadows Golf Course has been the site of the Section VI Championships for all but three years since 1965. It

is considered one of the finest courses in the state and will get to showcase itself as the scheduled host of the 2012 New York State Cross Championships.

Spectators can see the start, watch the runners as they tame the gradual hills, and then make the easy walk to the finish line. It's a course runners only see once a year at sectionals, but it leaves a lasting impression.

"Definitely I would have to say Elma Meadows," Williamsville North senior Don Seitz said of his favorite course after Saturday's East Aurora Invitational. "That course, we just know how to run it so well. By the end of the year our legs are all fresh and we're ready to go for that race. It's just all out for us. The beginning is a slight uphill and then you have to settle into it so you don't want to burn out. It's a real quick course."

East Aurora senior Megan Hulton has run Elma Meadows at three sectional meets and said she likes it because a more difficult course pulls out the stronger people.

The McQuaid Invitational offers a unique experience as one of the largest scholastic meets in the U.S. Approximately 6,000 runners from 245 schools are expected to compete in Saturday's 47th running at Genesee Valley Park outside of Rochester.

The course is deceptively difficult with 80 percent grass, some hardtop and moderate hills. The course is a favorite of senior Nick Orłowski of Alden, who already this season has won the West Seneca West, East Aurora and Byron-Bergen invitationals. "Probably McQuaid. It's relatively flat, but the hills in there give you a good workout. There's a long straightaway to the finish, is a good adrenaline rush too."

Courses don't get much more scenic than Long Point State Park, a portion of which runs along the eastern shore of Chautauqua Lake. It's the site of the annual Chautauqua County league meet.

Falconer junior Shannon Murphy has been around the block as a varsity runner since seventh grade, and she's a fan of Long Point for its trails. For that same reason she also enjoys Sunken Meadow State Park on Long Island. "The course

[Sunken Meadow] is ridiculous. There are huge hills. It was a crazy course that was definitely a challenge," she said. "And it was something we don't always see around here."

Beaver Island State Park on Grand Island runs along the Niagara River and is fairly flat with some trails. But the winds there can be tough. For the last 12 years, Western New York's Track and Cross-Country Officials have sponsored a popular high school invitational, known the previous 19 years as the Evening Optimist.

The course at St. Bonaventure offers a big section of woods, and is home to the annual Southern Tier Invitational. But some of the trails are lined with trees and runners have to wait to pass.

Senior Chad Maloy of Springville likes the course at JFK. His logic is simple. "I guess I'd have to go with JFK because I've won there two times in a row," he said. "It's real fast and I like running a flat course. The real reason is it's in the woods a lot. If I run in the woods, it makes me feel like I'm running faster."

Akron Falls Park, Delaware Park in downtown Buffalo and Alden all offer their own set of challenges, but when it comes to a training venue, Chestnut Ridge Park in Orchard Park has no equal.

Erie County's oldest park was the one-time host to the ECIC Championships (1956-59, 1960-1981, 1983) and Section VI Championships (1958-64, 1982). The race begins with runners climbing a toboggan run and then it gets difficult.

Eventually both of the postseason races were moved out of Chestnut Ridge, the feeling being the course was too difficult. Today, Hamburg runs its home meets at the Ridge using the site of the old ECIC course.

"I guess the thinking was toward the end of the year you didn't want the kids to run such a hard course before sectionals," said Hamburg coach Ron Fortuna. "We like running hills, it makes our kids stronger."

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