

November 9, 2010

## East Aurora girls expect battle in bid for sixth straight state title

*Blue Devils are top-ranked cross country team in Class B*

*By Mary Jo Monnin, News Sports Reporter*

(Photo below) Sarah Anstett, Megan Hulton and Marta McLaughlin lead East Aurora's pursuit of a sixth straight state title.  
James P. McCoy / Buffalo News



If Walt McLaughlin is looking a little shaggy these days, that's a good sign.

The somewhat superstitious and bearded East Aurora cross country coach is letting his hair down as well as letting his hair grow.

"Normally I don't get my hair cut during the season, so they [his male runners] just took it a step further," he said. "It's bad luck to get your hair cut, and it's really bad luck to shave, so nobody [on the team] is shaving until after states."

The New York State Cross Country Championships are Saturday at Lakeside Park in Pawling of Section I. And if the races are as close as expected, EA will certainly accept winning by a hair.

"States could even come down to one or two points, so every runner counts and they know it,"

said McLaughlin, now in his 10th season. "It's really hard to win a state title. There are only five boys and five girls state champions crowned each year out of all the schools in New York State. It will be fun to be in the mix again this year."

East Aurora's boys and girls are both in the running to bring titles back to Section VI. The first of 10 races starts with the Class AA girls at 9 a.m.

The EA girls have been ranked No. 1 in the state all season in Class B. McLaughlin said he expects the toughest challenge to come from Pearl River and Nanuet, both of Section I.

East Aurora will be chasing its sixth consecutive state title. The state record is seven held by V-Honeoye Falls-Lima.

The Blue Devils are coming off an effort at Friday's sectionals that should make HF-L and the rest of the state stand up and take notice.

The girls scored a perfect 15 points, the first time ever for any team since Sectionals began for girls in 1976. And they did it without their No. 4 runner, senior Sarah Mars, who sat out with some soreness (she will run at states). It was the Blue Devils' 10th consecutive Section VI title.

The merged results that combine times from all five races, showed EA winning by over 100 points.

EA's top runner all season has been freshman Marta McLaughlin, who won her second straight Section VI Class B title Friday. Close behind are senior Megan Hulton, junior Sarah Anstett, Mars, junior Paige Anderson, senior Amanda Westfall and sophomore Megan Baritot.

"It would be really discouraging if we didn't win states, but we definitely have to keep working. It doesn't come easily," said Hulton. "Our team this year is really close and I think that has a lot to do with us doing better. We seem to run in groups of two and we work off each other."

McLaughlin said this is one of his most talented teams but the 2007 team was faster, led by Jenna Hulton and Catherine Lusardi. "This year's team hasn't matched up well time-wise, but the courses were much drier in '07 than they are now," said McLaughlin. "That's the team we kind of measure our success against."

### **EA boys in mix**

The East Aurora boys have been somewhat overshadowed by the girls, but they are deep and talented. They are ranked No. 2 in the state behind Bayport-Blue Point of Section XI.

At states they were runners-up in 2007, third in 2008 and have been the only boys team from Western New York to qualify for the Federation Championships twice since 2007.

The team's strengths include solid front-runners and a really tight team on which any combination of the top seven routinely scores in the top five.

"This season our boys have worked very hard and have continued to stay focused on their team goals to win ECIC's, sectionals and states," said McLaughlin. "So far they have reached two of their team goals, dominating the ECIC Championships and coming back this past weekend to not only win the Class B title, but also won the merge by over 50 points."

At sectionals, senior Kevin O'Connor had the second-fastest time and helped his team to the fastest team time of the day.

Running at states along with O'Connor will be senior Alex Weberg, sophomore Branden Keaney, junior Larkin Bohanan, junior Elliott Martynkiewicz, sophomore Gene Baritot and sophomore Sean Phillips.

The EA boys have won their ECIC Division each of the last 10 years and have won eight of the last 10 Section VI championships.

### **Fredonia off and running**

East Aurora isn't the only school that qualified both its boys and girls teams for states. Fredonia teams earned spots on the bus as well.

It will be the third trip in a row for the girls, who placed fourth last year and fifth the year before.

"We lost four of our top seven last year so we weren't quite sure what to expect," said Mark Fitzgerald, who co-coaches with Carol Zirkle. "You see all the hard work that goes in and in sports you don't always get that reward, but both our groups got it on Friday [at sectionals]."

Eighth grader Lauren Reyda goes to states as the Section VI champion. Her teammates are: sophomore Brittany Campaign, senior Alyssa Goot, eighth grader Jillian Kowalski, seventh-grader Maitland Langworthy, senior Jessica Swoyer and freshman Michaela Tramuta.

The Fredonia boys are making their first trips to states since 2006 when they went in Class B. Joining junior Josh Szukala, fourth at sectionals, will be sophomore Jacob Brown, junior Alex Crise, junior Mark Dudek, senior Vince Ippolito, junior Chaz Mancino and senior Matt Meredith.

### **Barker to defend title**

The Barker boys are the defending New York State Class D champions. The Raiders will have trouble shaking Geneseo of Section V this year, but will at least battle for runner-up with III-Beaver River and II-Mayfield.

"My goal is to have three guys finish in the top 20 and be on the all state team," said Barker coach Paul DerSarkissian. "They're like a three-pack and then there's a four-pack. We need that four-pack to close the gap. It's a pack mentality."

The Raiders will run sophomore Jordan Bender, freshman Bryce Moeller, junior Marc Delemarter, junior Michael Lantinen, senior Ryan Levy, junior Jedediah Platt and junior Tyler Scheving.

The Maple Grove girls, like the East Aurora girls, are favored to win the state title. The Red Dragons have owned the state's No. 1 ranking in Class D all season.

Freshman Carolina Benson enters states as the Section VI champion. She'll team with junior Katelyn Benson, senior Kathleen Carolus, seventh-grader Megan Marsh, freshman Taylor Norris, seventh grader Hope Pietrocarlo and freshman Abby Sirwatka.

[mmonnin@buffnews.com](mailto:mmonnin@buffnews.com)