

Still running

Local runners gearing up for state meet

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OBSERVER File Photos

Fredonia will send both the boys' and girls' cross country teams to compete at the NYSPHSAA's cross country championships in Pawling, on Saturday, while Alex Gonzalez, left, will represent Dunkirk. Fredonia will race in the Class C meets with Gowanda representatives Emily Steves and Kevin Brown while Gonzalez will race in the Class B meet. Also, Silver Creek's Hannah Seiders and Jarrid Ringer will compete in the Class D meets.

The local area will be well represented this weekend at the New York State Public High School Athletic Association's cross country championships, being held at Lakeside Park in Pawling.

Fredonia will send both the boys' and girls' teams to compete in the Class C race while Dunkirk (Class B) will be represented by Alex

Gonzalez, Gowanda (Class C) by Emily Steves and Kevin Brown and Silver Creek (Class D) by Hannah Seiders and Jarrid Ringer.

After losing to Gowanda two years in a row at the Section 6 meet, the Fredonia boys beat the Panthers this year by 12 points to win their trip to states. The girls won the sectional meet for the third year in a row and so, for the first time in school history, both teams will be traveling to compete at states as a team.

"That's a super huge deal and we're just amazed that it happened," Fredonia coach Carl Zirkle said.

"I'm thrilled with how the boys performed," Zirkle added, noting that after losing to Gowanda again last season, Fredonia said it did not want to let that happen again. "This team did the extra work in the offseason to back up their words," she said.

The Hillbillies are ranked fifth as a team in the Class C race behind Holland Patent, Fonda Fultonville and host Pawling, who are all tied for first and Port Jefferson who is ranked fourth. Individually, junior Josh Szukala is ranked 27th, senior Matt Meredith is ranked 70th, junior Alex Crise is ranked 85th and junior Chaz Mancino is ranked 101st.

In 2008, Fredonia's girls team finished fifth at the state meet and last year it was fourth. However, it graduated a big part of the team from last season, but the young team found a stride of its own this year.

"This year was fun to see this group develop," Zirkle said. "To bond as a team, that has been fun to see."

On top of winning as a team, Fredonia's Lauren Reyda finished first at the sectional meet beating Falconer's Shannon Murphy (junior) and Kirsten Holmberg (freshman), the first time in over 15 years that a runner from Fredonia has done so and to do it as an eighth grader makes it even more impressive.

"Cross country is a sport where it doesn't happen every year," Zirkle said. "But we have a lot of great competition in this section. You know those girls (Reyda, Murphy and Holmberg) are going to go back and forth (for years)."

The Lady Hillbillies are ranked fifth as a team in the Class C race with last year's Class D champion Greenwich ranked first, defending Class C Champion Bronxville ranked second and Tully and Wayland-Cohocton tied for third. Individually, Reyda is ranked 10th, senior Jessica Swoyer is ranked 70th, freshman Michaela Tramuta is ranked 72nd, seventh grader Maitland Langworthy is ranked 147th and sophomore Brittany Campaign is ranked 150th.



As far as preparation for Saturday's race, Zirkle said it was done in August, September and October, but that her runners are just sharpening, working on finishing speed, doing faster speed workouts and doing hill work in preparation for the big hill on the state's figure-8 course.

"You're still trying to train to get your athlete to do their best," she added.

Not only are Fredonia's 14 athletes competing for a team title, they are also trying, on an individual level, to finish in the top 20 which would make them All-State and medal winners.

"Cross country is a unique sport where you are trying to get an individual award and a team award," Zirkle said. "As an individual, you're just trying to go in and run the best race of your life."

The forecast for Pawling on Saturday calls for 58 degrees Fahrenheit and sunny.

"It's a very positive forecast for us," Zirkle said. "It's a great running temperature. We're just looking forward to running in the sun."

Meanwhile, Gowanda has two individual runners in the state meet, seniors Kevin Brown and Emily Steves, as the boys team failed to repeat as champions at the county meet which they had done the past two years, instead losing to Fredonia.

"They definitely had a chance at beating Fredonia for a third time," Gowanda coach Pete Palmer said, adding that after last season, the Panthers graduated their number one, three of four runners. "We knew we had the potential to beat them and they also had the potential to beat us. It only takes just a little bit better team. All you have to be is 15 seconds faster than someone. (Fredonia) really wanted to win this year. I think they might have had a little more motivation, they were a little hungrier."

"That's the cycle," Palmer added. "Everyone gets their chance."

As far as getting ready for states, both Brown and Steves have been doing easy runs of four to five miles, hill work and speed work.

"By this time of year, you can't do too much to prepare," Palmer said, adding you just have to make sure the runners do not burn out.

Brown is ranked 36th out of the Class C runners while Steves is ranked 21st. For Brown, who was ranked 28th last year and finished 16th, Palmer said he would like to finish near 20th place in his third year at states.

"He's definitely got the experience," Palmer said. "It's just a matter of if he's got the peak of his form or not and you can't tell until you finish the race. He's got confidence, he's got experience, he's not going to be surprised by how fast the pace is or how good everybody is."

For Steves, this will be her second year at states, recording a personal record at the meet last year, and Palmer said, "She told me, 'I don't care where I finish, I'm just going to have fun.' I'm sure she's looking to do as well as she can. If you can medal, that's fantastic, but if not, she's just going to enjoy the experience. I think she's in good shape for this week."

"You have to enjoy it and then you can force yourself to do it," Palmer added.

For both his runners, Palmer said one of the things they look forward to this time of year is getting to see friends that they have made through the sport from other schools.

"They look forward to traveling with them and talking with them and rooting for each other," Palmer said.



Having been as productive as he has been the past year, it is no surprise to his coach Kurt Warmbrodt that Gonzalez is in the position he is in.

"I sure did," Warmbrodt said of whether he thought Gonzalez would be as successful as he was this year. "After the way he ran last winter and last spring ... He should have went to states in the spring in the 1-mile and 2-mile. He just missed out. He worked for it."

Warmbrodt attributed much of Gonzalez's success to the work he puts into his craft.

"He's dedicated himself the last four years to get to this point," Warmbrodt said. "It's more his dedication than it is my coaching.

"He's very easy to coach," Warmbrodt continued. "He works out outside of practice. He runs outside of practice, he watches his diet all the time. So, that's what it takes to get to that level. The key is, at sectionals last Friday, out of five races, Alex was eighth in his race, but he was 11th overall on the day. That just goes to show how tough the Class B race was this year. He would have won Class C and D outright."

Like many of the other runners, Gonzalez is sticking to what has got him this far.

"He's doing the regular workout," Warmbrodt said. "Thursday they'll all run in Binghamton when we get to the hotel. And Friday we'll run the course to see it. It's a typical end of the week routine before a meet."

Although Warmbrodt expects the course to take on some wear and tear before Gonzalez takes to the starting line in the eighth race Saturday, he knows his senior runner will be prepared.

"I think we're as tough as anybody across the state," Warmbrodt said of Section 6. "I would hopefully look for him to be in the Top 20. I think that's kind of what he's shooting at."

Seiders, a seventh grader competing at the varsity level for the first time, has out-performed her coach's expectations.

"When she started out you saw that there was a lot of potential," Silver Creek coach Mike Janisch said. "But you never dream of a kid taking off as well as she has, or to be as successful as she has. She really has been something special."

As for Ringer, Janisch had similar sentiments.

"Jarrid came a long way this season," Janisch continued. "This is his first varsity season as a senior and he has truly exceeded all of our goals and expectations. He ran a near perfect race at sectionals as we had laid it out. He did everything necessary to get himself on the bus (today)."

Seiders and Ringer have been sticking to their usual routine this week as they prepare for the course at Lakeside Park, which Janisch had a chance to walk back in August.

"It is a very flat first mile," Janisch said, "which takes off in the second mile and gives you about a quarter-mile hill and then the last half of the race is loopy up and down with a fairly flat finish. A lot of runners will go out very fast in the beginning and have some problems when they get to the hill and after the hill."

Janisch, who knows his runners better than anyone else, has a good idea how they may finish Saturday.

"We feel that she has an opportunity, whether good or bad, to be in the top 25 or 30 (finishers) in the state in Class D," Janisch said. "Jarrid we hope is in the top 50. We think that maybe he can be a little better than that."



"The girls' (field) doesn't look to be real strong," Janisch continued. "The boys looks to be stronger. The teams for Section 6 in Class D are both very strong, so that should help to pull our athletes along."

The order of the races on Saturday have the Class C girls race starting at 10:15 a.m., which will include Fredonia and Gowanda while the Class D girls' race starts at 10:45 a.m. for Silver Creek. The Class B boys' race will start at 12:15 p.m., for Dunkirk, the Class C boys' race starts at 12:45 p.m., for Fredonia and Gowanda and the Class D boys' race starts at 1:15 p.m., for Silver Creek.