Written by MITCH MAERSCH
Wednesday, 22 August 2012 16:54

Cross-country team starts year with strength in numbers; Dieringer will lead Ozaukee

The Cedar Grove-Belgium girls' cross-country team is entering the 2012 season loaded with talent.

Seniors Tammi Del Ponte, Chloe Paul and Maria Schueller have all returned, along with juniors Molly Ison, Jericho Duenk and Kiran Seghal and sophomores Lily Paul and Kelly Brochtrup.

Coach Les Paul, who guided the Rockets to the Central Lakeshore Conference title and fouirth place in the WIAA Division 3 state meet, said he expects Del Ponte to give the team strong leadership.

That will be crucial with the loss of Kiera Depies, the squad's top runner last year, to graduation.

"Tammi is the hardest-working athlete you can want. She had a very good spring track season and a great summer training season," the coach said.

"We are aiming for a very strong individual effort for her."

Del Ponte placed eighth in last year's conference meet.

The Rockets' other runners are also focused on improving their impressive 2011 season. Ison is coming off a fifth-place finish in the CLC meet.

"Molly has been a tremendous mid-distance track girl and is determined to push Tammi and the team to fast times," coach Paul said.

He also expects big things from several other runners, including his two daughters.

“Chloe is coming into the season in her best shape ever. She is an excellent racer and great leader,” he said.

“Lily is coming off a great start to last cross-country season. She will be making all of the girls run faster than they ever have.

“Jericho is coming off of a solid cross-country season. She hasn’t even tapped into it and is determined to find new limits.”

Coach Paul said Schueller, Seghal and Brochtrup are all working hard and will bolster the Rockets’ depth. Newcomers Sarah Kiskunas, Kaili Depies and Sami Weiland will also vie for roster spots.

“The team, in my opinion, is going to have a tremendous year,” Paul said.

The Cedar Grove-Belgium boys have five runners, led by senior Michael Merritt, a state qualifier last year. Paul said Merritt is recovering from surgery and could be a factor late in the season.

In the interim, the Rockets will be led by sophomore Derek Arendt, who had a solid freshman season. Newcomers Zach Riesselmann, Isaiah Garza and Peter Merritt round out the team.

Of the newcomers, Paul said Riesselmann got a good start on summer training, Garza is a fast track athlete with distance ability and Merritt will surprise people with his times.

Even so, the Rockets will have their work cut out for them.

“We have a very tough racing season in front of us. We’re hoping that it will prepare us mentally and physically for big time races,” Paul said.

This week, both Cedar Grove-Belgium teams will start competition with a preseason home meet at 4 p.m. Thursday on the Paul Course. Several other squads, including Oostburg and Random Lake, are expected to participate.

On Aug. 31, the Rockets will run at the Homestead Invitational in Mequon.

Dieringer to set pace for Warriors

The Ozaukee girls’ cross-country team returns four runners this season, including sophomore Jessika Dieringer, and has some high expectations.

Dieringer placed 13th in last year’s Central Lakeshore Conference race. Also back for the Warriors are juniors Devin Fowler, Brianna Leitzke and Jessica Wengel.

“Experience has definitely helped them prepare for the upcoming season,” Ozaukee coach Greg Mielke said.

“Knowing what to expect has allowed them to create realistic, yet high, expectations for themselves that they continue to work toward during practice.”

Newcomers Jordan Jacobs and Natalie Bares, both juniors, will also contribute.

“Both have displayed solid athletic ability and are a welcome addition to the team,” Mielke said.

The Ozaukee boys’ team is inexperienced but has ability. Senior Ian Hughes returns for his second season and “has taken the leadership role for the boys’ team during a promising first week of practice,” Mielke said.

Other team members include seniors Tyler Bares, Alex Dieringer and Wade Grosklaus, junior Taz Gottsacker and freshman Nathan Lesage.

“I’m excited about the level of athletic ability the new members have displayed during the first week of practice,” Mielke said.

“Nathan Lesage has shown a lot of promise in practice, and I have high hopes of seeing him medal throughout the season.”

Both Ozaukee teams will open the season at the Kettle Moraine Invitational at 4 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 23.

Image Information: THE CEDAR GROVE-BELGIUM girls’ cross-country team was led last year by (from left) Chloe Paul, Molly Ison, Lily Paul, Jericho Duenk, Kiera Depies, Maria Schueller and Tammi Del Ponte. All have returned this season except for Depies, the Rockets’ No. 1 runner, who graduated. Press file photo