

Grafton runners get out fast

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

Wednesday, 04 September 2013 15:22

Ruona, Weinhold lead Hawks' teams in opener that shows cross-country depth

After battling a depth challenge for several years, the Grafton High School cross-country teams appear to be gaining in the numbers game.

Bolstered by a blend of veteran and new talent, the Black Hawks are poised for strong seasons from their boys and girls.



"We have pretty good groups," Grafton coach Kevin Kriegel said. "If we stay healthy, we should be able to do well."

Both Grafton squads got off to strong starts Aug. 29 by racing to third-place finishes at the Shorewood Early Season Invitational at Kern Park in Milwaukee.

Led by Rachel Ruona's second-place performance, the Hawks scored 126 points among nine teams. They trailed only Muskego (38) and Shorewood (55).

Ruona, a junior, had a 4,000-meter time of 15 minutes, 59 seconds, in a field of 165 runners. Shorewood's Morgan Florsheim was first in 15:28.

Grafton's other scoring finishes were Elise White in 12th (17:18), Chloe Lichosik in 18th (17:40), Sara Zimmermann in 44th (18:50) and Monica Corner in 50th (19:28).

Also for the Hawks, Catherine Lundgren placed 54th (19:53) and Ella Aspenson was 56th (20:46).

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In the boys' meet, Grafton finished third out of nine teams with 103 points. Shorewood took first with 33 points, and Milwaukee Marquette was second with 80.

Pacing Grafton was junior Alec Weinhold, who took sixth with a 5,000-meter time of 17:29.

The Hawks' other scoring efforts came from Parker White in 11th (17:43), Jacob Woolf in 23rd (18:37), Patrick Tobianski in 29th (19:14) and Joe Docter in 34th (19:31).

Rounding out Grafton's finishes were Max Jensen in 35th (19:33) and Jonathan Wollner in 41st (19:55).

Wauwatosa West's Taylor Floyd-Mews won the boys' race in 16:19.

Kriegel was pleased with his runners' work in a challenging meet.

"They did very well for the first time out against some tough teams," he said.

Among the girls, Kriegel singled out Ruona, a junior who has wasted no time grabbing the No. 1 spot in the lineup.

"Second place in the first meet was a phenomenal finish," he said.

The Grafton girls are also counting on steady performances from Lichosik, a sophomore, and White, a senior. Lichosik reached the Division 2 state meet last year.

The Hawks will miss 2012 state qualifier Amber Ducheny, who has graduated, and Katie Boehm, a 2011 state qualifier who chose not to run this season, Kriegel said.

"But we still have a good group back from last year," he added.

Other members of the girls' squad are seniors Lundgren and Corner; sophomores Zimmermann, Aspenson, Jeni Woolf and Juliana Galarza; and freshman Lindsey Drescher.

After taking second in last year's North Shore Conference meet, the Grafton girls may be hard-pressed to match that effort.

"I could see us finishing in the middle of the pack. We have to find a way to close that gap," Kriegel said.

With 16 runners on their roster, the Grafton boys could have one of their strongest lineups in years.

"We have seven or eight that are varsity-type runners and four top-level kids," Kriegel said.

Woolf, the team's lone state qualifier last year, is part of a senior group that also includes Tobianski, Erick Huertas, Wollner, Brendan Kennedy and Nathaniel Fischer.

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Among their underclassmen, the Hawks' top runners include juniors Weinhold and Docter and sophomores White and Jensen.

Kriegel singled out Weinhold and Parker for strong season debuts. Weinhold has bounced back from an injury late last year, and White "is in phenomenal shape" and had a personal-best time in the meet, he said.

Huertas is better known as a sprinter — having won the Division 1 state 400-meter title last spring — but should help the Hawks keep pace in the conference and beyond.

"Our goal is to be in the top three of the conference," said Kriegel, who picked defending champion Port Washington as the team to beat.

The next meet for both Grafton teams will be the Bulldog Invitational in West Allis on Friday, Sept. 6.

Image Information: SENIOR JACOB WOOLF is back to help lead the Grafton boys' cross-country team after qualifying for the state meet last season.

Photo by Sam Arendt