

Small team ... big in talent

McKay has strong cross country runners but team lacks depth

By Bill Poehler - Statesman Journal, September 16, 2008

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080916/PREPSPORTS/809160323/1018/SPORTS>

The McKay High School boys cross country team received a vote in the latest Class 6A coaches poll.

It is understandable why people would figure the Royal Scots to be among the state's elite.

McKay features three of the top runners in the Central Valley Conference — Devin White, Thomas Goodwin and Nick Rhein — and all are good bets to place in the top 10 in the district.

The problem is that McKay has yet to field a full team of five runners for a meet this season.

"We've definitely got depth already," said Goodwin, a junior. "If we can get a few more people out who are willing to give it all they've got, it would definitely be a lot to help us make a good varsity team."

The boys have picked up a few runners, but none have competed on a regular basis.

On the girls side, the numbers game is worse.

The girls have two runners who have competed regularly in the sport: sophomore Steffani White and junior Sarah Jabin.

At the start of meets in which most teams have comparatively huge teams of 10 runners, and McKay has two, the Scots can get lost in the mix.

"We kind of make a joke about it," Steffani White said. "There's like Jesuit or there's North with a huge team or there's West by us, and they're doing all these cheers.

"We're just standing there, 'Two of us from McKay, let's go.' "

McKay's boys team placed second in the district the past two seasons and qualified their team of runners — including Devin White, Goodwin and Rhein — to the state cross country meet.

This season, McKay's runners likely will have to qualify for the state meet individually.

They have to place in the top four in the district among runners who are not on the top two placing teams.

"Some people might think it's intimidating, but we kind of look at it as a sense of pride," McKay coach Dan Kaplan said. "We may have the smallest group, but dang it, we're going to do something with it.

"Last year we had the second-smallest team in all of 6A. The last two years, we've been less than half



McKay High cross country team members Thomas Goodwin (clockwise from left), Devin White, Autumn Eberlei, Nick Rhein, Dmitriy Rozov and Steffani White gather together at a recent training session. The Royals Scots have some of the top runners in the Central Valley Conference, but they don't have enough members to compete as a team.

the size of the roster of the rest of the league. The last [two] year we've sent more runners to state than any team in the state [league, actually]."

Outside of a few runners, who have competed only at the JV level so far, McKay has five runners in total.

"We'd field enough for just one varsity team if it was co-ed," said Devin White, Steffani's brother. "That's how small our numbers are. It would be a great co-ed team."

McKay's boys team had three athletes graduate from last year, and the girls had two graduate: Twins Janelle and Megan Everetts, who both qualified for the state meet individually.

The team had no incoming freshman who competed in cross country last year from Waldo and Stephens middle schools, which feed into McKay.

The team also had some runners from last year choose to play other sports or do other things.

There are a few other athletes at McKay who might be candidates to compete in cross country, but they are participating in other sports such as soccer and volleyball.

The Salem-Keizer schools have a rule prohibiting participation in multiple sports in one season.

The athletes have taken to recruiting friends at the school to come out for the sport and it not unusual to have a new face come out for their first practice in the middle of September.

"We've definitely all been doing our part to get more people out here and interested in cross country, but it's hard (because) people don't like to run that much," Goodwin said, clearing his throat. "Not as much as you'd think."

The smaller group has made the athletes closer with each other and made team gatherings outside of competition or practice easier.

But it's also made it more difficult for the athletes.

"Cross country is a very difficult sport just from the mental side of it," Kaplan said. "There's not really a skill component. It's all about how hard you can push yourself on a regular basis."

With fewer athletes, it's harder to get them to keep pace with each other, especially the newest athletes.

A times, runners will be by themselves while training.

"We like to have more people running with us and not just talking with the regular old people," Rhein said. "We like to have some new faces around here."

Still, McKay has three athletes with the potential to compete for individual district championships and five with the potential to earn individual berths into the state cross country meet.

McKay's boys team, which has bright new yellow uniforms, is often lost among the masses of runners.

But when one of its runners wins a meet, as Devin White did Thursday at the Darrel Deedon Invitational, people are forced to take notice of McKay.

"We just make the noise while we run," White said.

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