

Prep Championship Phase To Start With Districts

By JOE MILLAS

News-Gazette Sportswriter Illini coach Gary Wieneke calls it the championship phase of the season — the tournament portion of a team's competition in cross-country running.

Local and area teams will take a big step in the "championship season" this Saturday when district meets are held for Class A and Class AA schools.

Local Class AA teams will travel to Bloomington, where 16 schools will vie for five berths (plus five places for individuals not on the top five teams) in next week's Peoria Sectional.

Area Class A teams will make their bid for a berth in the Effingham Sectional at the Mahomet-Seymour District, where the Bulldogs will serve as the host school for 16 other teams. The race is scheduled to begin at 11 a.m.

Qualifiers from the sectionals advance to the state meet at Peoria's Detweiler Park Nov. 10.

All four AA schools will compete in Bloomington with entries from as far away as East Peoria and LaSalle-Peru.

According to Champaign Central coach Dike Sterritt, East Peoria will enter

as the favorite with strong challenges expected from Big 12 runner-up Danville and Ottawa. Central, as well as Centennial, Urbana and Rantoul, will be looking for a spot among the top five teams or a place for some runners among the other five available spots.

Central's chances will be markedly improved if junior Craig Detamore can recover enough from an intestinal infection to be somewhere near top form. But Stirrett is hopeful, even if Detamore can't compete.

"Even if he can't run, if our other people run like they're capable of running, we can still make the top five. We just want to go to the sectional," he said.

Top individuals in the meet figure to include Danville's Mike Neff, the top finisher in the Big 12 meet, and Morton's Curt Carius, No. 15 at the prestigious Peoria Invitational earlier this season.

At Mahomet, the battle for team honors center on the host Bulldogs, who are ranked No. 6 in the state in Class A, and No. 12 St. Joseph-Ogden. Mahomet-Seymour edged the Spartans in a dual meet this week and beat them in the Okaw Valley Conference meet last week. But M-S

coach John King warns that other teams could figure prominently.

"I'd like to think it might come down to the two of us, but Georgetown is tough and capable of winning and Oakwood is pretty good, too," King said.