

Tough competition awaits Central harriers in regional

By DAVID CAMPBELL
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All season long, the Champaign Central High School boys' cross-country team has pointed to Saturday's Illinois High School Association regional meet as its most important race.

But getting out of the 11 a.m. race at Rantoul's Brookhill Golf Course and into the sectionals isn't going to be easy.

The 10-team meet will feature five schools from the Big 12 Conference — Normal Community, Champaign Centennial, Bloomington, Rantoul and Danville — who beat the Maroons at last Saturday's Big 12 meet at Parkland College.

The top five teams from the regional advance to the sectional, along with the first five individual runners who are not members of the qualifying teams.

Central's top runner all season has been sophomore Jason Sempstrott, 12th at the Big 12 meet in 16 minutes, 38 seconds for the 3-mile course.

Brian Calhoun (21, 17:00), Matt Wise (30, 17:23), Josh Wyatt (33, 17:36) and Andy Deponai (53, 18:45) rounded out the Central scoring.

Maroon coach Dike Stirrett said

that the key to nailing down a spot in the top five will not be holding Sempstrott back to try to pull the rest of the team through the race.

"The way to improve your squad is to get some of those back markers up there with Jason," Stirrett said. "It's not fair to your lead runners (to ask them to stay back).

"The way he's going to help us is by going and getting whatever he can get. If they want his help they're going to have to go get his help."

With his win at the Big 12, Jason Gass became the second straight Rantoul runner to win the meet's individual title.

Gass ran a time of 15:57 in edging Bloomington's Aaron Culbertson, who crossed in 16:06.

Enos Ross, currently a cross-country runner for Parkland College, was the 1989 champion.

The Rantoul streak has a chance of reaching three in 1991, when Gass returns as a senior to defend his title.

A Class A rematch of sorts will be taking place Friday at 4 p.m. at Chrisman's Cow Chip Course, site of the Chrisman Regional.

Two of the top teams in the field, Chrisman and Georgetown-Ridge Farm, will go head-to-head just like they did at the Cowchip Classic on Sept. 1.

In that meet, G-RF held off Chrisman 21-25 for first place, with St. Joseph-Ogden taking third at 35.

The individual winner on the 3-mile course was G-RF's Barry Pearman, who ran a 15:14.

A lot has changed since that meet. St. Joseph-Ogden is now the highest-ranked team in the area, at No. 6 in the latest poll. Chrisman is ranked ninth and Georgetown-Ridge Farm 16th.

All the teams at Chrisman will keep close watch on the results from Friday's 4:30 p.m. Mahomet Regional, where SJ-O heads up a 10-team field.

One of the individual favorites in that race is Mahomet-Seymour's Dan Nielsen, winner of the M-S Invitational on his home course earlier this season.

As in AA competition, the top five teams and the top five runners not on those teams advance to the sectional, which will be at Paxton on Oct. 26.

The Herscher and Normal regionals also will send runners to Paxton.