

Runners eye Corn Belt, Big 12 meets

By **RANDY SHARER**
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Evenly matched teams and individuals should make for exciting races in the upcoming Corn Belt and Big 12 conference boys and girls cross country meets.

Friday's Corn Belt Meet starts with a 2-mile girls race at 4:30 p.m. at Olympia High School. An open race is at 5 p.m. followed by the 3-mile boys varsity race at 5:30 p.m.

Saturday's Big 12 Meet begins at Parkland College in Champaign with a 3-mile boys freshmen-sophomore race at 9:30 a.m. A 3-mile open races follows at 10 a.m. with a 2-mile girls race at 10:30 and a 3-mile boys varsity race at 11:15.

Corn Belt Conference

Pontiac will be seeking its ninth consecutive boys title, but earlier this season lost to University High at the Peoria Notre Dame Invita-

tional. U High is ranked in a tie for second in the state in Class A.

"We'll do our best to defend our title," said Pontiac coach Keven Forney, who added that Matt Jordan, sixth in last year's conference meet, may be lost for the season because of an ankle injury. "We have a lot of respect for U High's program."

Mahomet-Seymour senior Dan Nielsen is the defending individual champion. He figures to get strong challenges from Pontiac junior Marc Balota and U High sophomore Barrett Moore.

Pontiac is also favored to win its second straight girls title. Pontiac's Tracy Eskesen won last year's title after several race leaders took a wrong turn. Teammate Michelle Myers, second a year ago, is this year's favorite.

Big 12 Conference

Decatur MacArthur is favored to

win the boys and girls titles.

"Realistically, we would have to run had not to get second (in the boys race)," said coach Tom Patten of defending champion Normal Community. "If our fifth man (Pat Taha) runs decent, we could give MacArthur a run."

The Ironmen trailed MacArthur by just 13 points at the recent Peoria Invitational when Taha was 40 seconds behind No. 4 man Jamey Whitlow. Champaign Centennial and Bloomington figure to round out the top four.

Individually, Patten said any of six runners could win including Bloomington sophomore Aaron Culbertson and Rantoul's Jason Gass.

For the girls, two-time Big 12 runner-up Deb Knieja of Champaign Centennial is favored to defeat three-time champion Amy Bersig of Rantoul.