

Sophomore has two years left to emerge as area's best.

4. Katarina Marjanovic, Urbana — Freshman plays with poise and confidence that belies her years.

5. Ameena Payne, Urbana — Senior doubles standout is wrapping up a stellar career.

Class A

boys' cross-country

(Playoffs start Oct. 21)

TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Georgetown-Ridge Farm/Chrisman — Vermilion County's dominant team has four strong runners.

2. Monticello — Sages' top three leaders have 3-mile times under 17 minutes.

3. Paxton-Buckley-Loda — Top five Panthers have times within 15 seconds of one another.

4. St. Joseph-Ogden — Spartans' veterans ready to make strong postseason run.

5. Unity — Youthful Rockets are making their move.

Class AA

boys' cross-country

TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Centennial — Chargers chasing fourth straight regional crown.

2. Champaign Central — Twenty of 23 squad members are underclassmen.

3. Danville — Vikings' top three are keeping pace with each other.

4. Mahomet-Seymour — Boys' program no longer trailing the girls' program at M-S.

5. Rantoul — Last year, Connor Millar was 220th at state but ninth among freshmen.

FYI

In the last five Class A state meets, one area boy has placed among the top 10. Schlarman's Scott Krapf was eighth in 2005.

PLAYER OF THE YEAR WATCH

1. Justin Jones, Oakwood/Armstrong-Potomac — Junior a natural runner who did limited summer training.

2. Connor Millar, Rantoul — Sophomore always competitive beyond his years.

3. Brent Rhodes, Monticello — Junior latest of coach Jeff Butler's quality distance runners.

4. Justin Sebens, Mahomet-Seymour — Senior part of potent 1-2 punch with Troy Pittman.

5. Nathan Warstler, Georgetown-Ridge Farm/Chrisman — Senior has posted the area's fastest 3-mile time.

Class A

girls' cross-country

(Playoffs start Oct. 21)

TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Argenta-Oreana — Bombers are consistently among the area's elite.

2. Hoopeston Area — Underclassmen provide Cornjerkers best team in years.

3. Monticello — Front-runner Kerby Waddell has been pulling along the pack.

4. St. Joseph-Ogden — Spartans close to full strength; close to being a factor.

5. Urbana Uni High — Illineks ranked as one of state's top five teams.

Class AA

girls' cross-country

TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Centennial — Chargers' leaders pack well but need to cut times.

2. Champaign Central — Youthful Maroons feature three freshmen among the team's top five.

3. Danville — Two seniors and a junior among Vikings' top four runners.

4. Mahomet-Seymour — Deep Bulldogs on verge of receiving a state ranking.

5. Urbana — Tigers hitting their stride as the season progresses.

FYI

Since the IHSA increased the girls' distance from 2 to 2½ miles (1998) and from 2½ to 3 miles (2002), one area athlete has placed among the top 10 in the Class A state meet, and there have been no all-staters (top 25 finishers) three of the past six years. The best placer since 1997 was SJ-O's Hannah Hogan (10th in 2004).

PLAYER OF THE YEAR WATCH

1. Cara Feeney, St. Thomas More — Junior and the 2005 recipient shouldn't be discounted yet.

2. Zita Hubler, Urbana — Freshman the latest ninth-grader to make an immediate impact.

3. Michelle Mehnert, Urbana Uni High — Junior's strength, endurance makes her a contender.

4. Kerby Waddell, Monticello — Senior is a veteran who has had an impressive prep career.

5. Jackie Waldman, Mahomet-Seymour — Senior and first-year cross-country runner enjoying a banner season.

Class A volleyball

(Playoffs start Oct. 23)

TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Arcola — Talented team has incentive to win regionals and sectionals. The super-sectional is in Arcola.

2. Bismarck-Henning — Blue Devils' three losses to Illinois schools are to teams with a cumulative 60-11 record.

3. CPCI — Timberwolves will need to get by either B-H, Schlarman or Westville to return to a super-sectional.

4. Schlarman — Hilltoppers unbeaten at home and that won't change with their home-court advantage for the regionals.

5. St. Joseph-Ogden — Spartans will be unchallenged in the regional, but two tough tests await in the Shelbyville Sectional.

Class AA volleyball

TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Centennial — Chargers host Big 12 power Normal Community on Thursday in preview of what could be regional title match at Centennial.

2. Champaign Central — A Champaign school is guaranteed a berth in the regional finals because Central and Centennial are semifinal opponents.

3. Mahomet-Seymour — To win a regional, the seventh-rated Bulldogs will need to beat No. 2 Bloomington on Bloomington's court.

4. Rantoul — The Eagles have a quality win against 19-7 St. Thomas More.