

# FAST & FURIOUS

## Area's talent pool — team and individual — as deep as ever

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The last two years have been banner ones for area cross-country programs.

In 2011, both the boys' and girls' Class 1A individual state champions were area athletes. Monticello's Steve Schroeder won the boys' 3-mile race and St. Joseph-Ogden's Chelsea Blaase was the girls' 3-mile champ. On the team side, Unity boys' were the 1A runners-up.

In 2012, St. Thomas More's boys' team captured the state championship, led by third-place finishing Nick Hess. On the girls' side, Monticello was the 1A second-place finisher.

Early indications are that the 2013 season will feature more of the same.

A statewide website devoted to running lists three area boys' teams among the preseason's top seven in 1A. St. Thomas More was placed in the No. 2 position. Unity is ranked sixth and Monticello seventh.

In the girls' division, three area teams are ranked among the top six, led by Monticello, the top-rated team, according to [il.milesplit.com](http://il.milesplit.com). St. Joseph-Ogden is ranked fourth and Unity sixth.

The website is lavish in its recognition of area individuals, too.

Hess is regarded as the top-ranked 1A boy. Tuscola junior Eric Ponder is ranked seventh. Two other Sabers are listed among the top 25, Sam Powers at 19th and Brendan Remington at 24th.

In Class 2A, Danville's Johnny Leverenz — a Class 3A all-stater as a junior — is ranked second in 2A, five spots ahead of Mahomet-Seymour senior Forrest Smoes.

Among girls, Urbana Uni High freshman Annemarie Michael — who had big-time success as a middle-school runner — is ranked fifth among all Class 1A individuals. Jess Clarke, a senior from LeRoy who runs with the Tri-Valley co-op, is ranked 14th. Monticello senior teammates Hannah Houska and Emily Foley are listed at 17th and 24th, respectively.

In 2A, Danville sophomore Mercedes Elliott was listed as an honorable mention selection.

Michael was the IESA cross-country state runner-up last fall and followed with a first-place state finish in track for the 800 meters (including a state record time) and a second-place effort in the 1,600.

### Sages ready for breakthrough

Monticello ran an all-underclass girls' lineup last year at state and the team's five scoring runners were all timed in 18 minutes, 55 seconds or less. The split between the top five was

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48 seconds.

"They've been to the puppet show and they've seen the strings," first-year Monticello coach David Remmert said. "They know what it takes to compete at a certain level."

The leader is Hannah Houska, a two-time all-stater, but another senior, Emily Foley, and junior Maddie Tutich are hot on her heels.

"The girls' team, returning all of the girls making up our second-place team from a year ago, is especially exciting," Remmert said.

Maggie Utgaard and Audrey Duncan are others who helped the Sages to their highest state finish in November.

### Sabers not backing down

St. Thomas More's trio of state-ranked runners is a group that coach David Behm expects to see out front.

"Our front end (runners) should be one of the toughest in the state," Behm said.

It's what will be behind frontrunners Nick Hess, Sam Powers and Brendan Remington that the coach finds especially appealing.

"Our Nos. 4 through 9 guys have really put in the work and look pretty good going into the season," Behm said. "With six or seven guys fighting for a varsity spot, our No. 4 and 5 runners could end up very similar to last year's places and times."

Among those seeking berths in the top seven are Connor Aubry, Jack Bolger, David Horn, George Pennacchi and Josh Stricklin.

The Sabers have their largest turnout (18 boys) during Behm's tenure. Newcomers include Brendan Bohac, a junior transfer who has attended Mahomet-Seymour and Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin and is new to the distance sport.

Two sophomores who participate in other sports are running cross-country for the first time in high school, wrestler Matt Cinnamon and soccer player Matthew Jones. Cinnamon ran cross-country at St. Mathew and Jones was

on the track and field team last spring.

Powers is one that Behm said was "the catalyst to our summer running program and looks stronger than I have ever seen him."

### Going down Memory Lane

When Greg Walters evaluates his current Centennial cross-country team, it brings him memories of the past.

"We have much more depth than we've had since 2003-04, when we won back-to-back conference titles," Walters said.

There's also a commitment that hasn't been present for some time. The team's top two runners, senior Reis DeSantis and junior Alec Shedelbower, each logged more than 500 training miles during the summer.

Freshmen standouts Carter Ware and Alex Miller were in the 400-mile range.

"In 30 years, I've never had incoming freshmen record this kind of mileage," Walters said. "Haven't had the varsity do this kind of work since the 2003-04 group either. We had a great summer."

Other lettermen being counted on as contributors are Sam Blissett, Dominic Corso, Evan Peirce and Riley Skube.

### The 'Wright' way

Champaign Central senior Hannah Wright has been an individual state-qualifier for three consecutive years. She also holds the school's 3-mile cross-country record, 18 minutes, 47 seconds. In preparation for her final prep season, Wright ran more than 400 miles in the off-season.

### Notebook items

Bismarck-Henning's Maddie Winkler is a volleyball-playing cross-country runner. When she is available, the Blue Devils will have enough runners to be scored as a team. ... Central's roster includes freshmen twins Faith and Hope Llewellyn, who are also BMX riders. ... School records could fall at Danville and Mahomet-Seymour. Danville's 3-mile mark (14:32) has stood since 2002, when Ricky Alvarez was a senior. The M-S record of 14:41 has lasted since 1974 when Mark Johnson was a senior. Danville's Johnny Leverenz and M-S' Forrest Smoes are runners within reach of records in their senior years. ... At Prairie Central, sophomore Caitlyn Ifft has tied the school record (19:44) set in 2011 by Sam Groce. ... Few area girls ran as many miles this summer as LeRoy's Jess Clarke, who competes with the Tri-Valley co-op. She logged nearly 500 miles.