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# 2015 IHSA Boys Cross Country Championship Preview Show

**RAYMOND LEWIS**

Illinois XC 2015: State Championship Series

Nov 6, 2015

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*Alex Keeble of top ranked Mahomet-Seymour (Dan Chamness photo)*

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A particularly messy weekend across the state of Illinois created a special set of memories for some teams during sectional competition--and nightmares for other teams. The image of most of the leading pack of the Girl's race at Hinsdale piling over each other in an overflowing creek is a dramatic representation of the excitement--and disaster--that filtered all but 25 teams in

each class. The early forecast for Peoria, IL says 55 and sunny--a cool but clear, dry day, and weather wise surely a lamb following the lion that was Halloween Weekend.

But a fantastic amount of depth across the state, depth that we at MileSplit have hyped for months, finally makes its full realization at Detweiller this week and will be anything but a lamb as several schools send teams achieving things never done before in their individual histories. Never before has the 2A level seen so many teams with multiple sub-15:00 runners, pack averages plummeting below 15:30, and strong programs left behind at the sectional level. Where 3A has key omissions from the meet due to injury, 2A features all of the main players running well at the right time. The gun will ring in the afternoon of November 7 in Central Time, and send us to a wonderfully competitive 2A Boys Race with stories all over the place.

### **Mahomet (M.-Seymour): Bulldogs have a Target on Their Back**

A Laissez-faire coaching approach left Head Coach **Neal Garrison** mostly in the dark during his team's summer training. Garrison, despite coaching at a public district school, does not oversee any formal summer training whatsoever and leaves the team in the authority of team leaders. Coaches may worry and express hesitancy conferring control over to the team, but Garrison's trust preceded the training sequence for the Bulldogs, and the season's results spoke of the merits from their summer. Mahomet-Seymour has been ranked #1 in the state from wire-to-wire, preseason to postseason, and their primary varsity team has not lost a race to a 2A opponent yet. What's more is that a 4th place finish at the Richard Spring Invite proved Mahomet-Seymour has the chops to challenge even 3A trophy contenders.

Alex Keeble's 14:36 was good for a sixth place finish at that meet and the one of the fastest individual times in 2A. Normal University's **Jack Franklin** has emerged and fended off Keeble in consecutive races entering state but Keeble is no less the leader of the strongest pack that 2A has to offer. **Andrew Walmer, Brian Butcher, Gabe Pommier, Ben Crow, Jack Hyde** and **Ryan Hodge** comprise this pack that offers 5 sub-15:16 runners.

Garrison, who engineers this all in a faint background, has been delighted with the team's success this year. "I am extremely pleased with how our runners ran this year," his praise reads. "They worked so hard and were rewarded with a lot of success in the meets. They have such great character and caring hearts. It is nice to see good young men succeed." He says the team's goal is to achieve just its second trophy in school history. But Mahomet-Seymour's ceiling lay far above even just a top three finish, and the self-gathering talent that trained without supervision throughout summer 2015 is now is favorite to win the 2015 Boy's 2A State Cross Country Team Championship.

### **The Same Powerhouses have Held the Top Spots All Year Long**

Movement was not plentiful at the top of the Team Rankings in Boy's 2A this year. Mahomet-Seymour was 1st wire-to-wire; as was Grayslake Central in 2nd, as was Yorkville in 3rd. Hinsdale South moved into 4th in the third week and stayed there until the final rankings. Some strong teams have shot up the rankings to the 5-8 spots towards the latter part of the year: Belvidere North, Normal University, Springfield and Chatham-Glenwood are running well in postseason competition. But the first three teams mentioned present special challenges to the favorite Bulldogs from Mahomet-Seymour.



*Jack Aho of Grayslake Central (Steve Bugarin photo)*

### **Grayslake Central-**

**Jack Aho** burst onto the scene last spring with a 3rd place finish in the 3A 3200 state final. Now, his brother Matthew has joined him on the Cross Country course and is the #2 runner for the Rams. A full pack off five runners under 15:30 has made Grayslake Central particularly, and consistently, dangerous, as well as competitive with strong 3A competition and nearly perfect against 2A competition. Possibly the highlight of the season for the Rams was October 17th, a dominant Fox Valley Conference Championship win over 3A Huntley, 65-98, led by Aho, the individual champion. The strong mid-Illinois competition that has, in part, eluded Grayslake Central throughout the seasons, can no longer hide from the Rams. A low, low stick will give Central a good starting point--a talented squad looking to finish a strong season can fulfill the team's destiny. Grayslake Central is a favorite to win a trophy.

### **Yorkville-**

The Northern Illinois Big 12 Conference champion Yorkville Foxes did not start the season firing on all cylinders- rather, a heavy workout load may have kept the visible progression on the slow side. "I feel as though our team has been finding an identity for most of

the season," explains Coach **Chris Muth**. "They have trained very hard and consistent throughout the season, but have yet to reach the level in races that match that training." The results may not have perfectly correlated throughout the season, but the pack indicated that the team trained together, and trained together well. **Trevor Wills, Alexx Nauman, Thor Hester, Cody Hornyak, and Zack Price** have determined a pack unlike almost any other in the state.

The conference championship was highlighted by a 19 second difference between first runner Wills and fifth runner Nauman. **Jake Firrantello** supplied help to contribute to a 13 second split, leading Yorkville to a dominating 43 point sectional win over Hinsdale South. A tight, tight pack team like Yorkville always has similar needs and the Foxes are no different- the lack of a definite single digit scorer could be dangerous for the Foxes. However, the pack is strong enough that they may find themselves near the front of the pack anyways, which means danger for every other team in the race. Yorkville knows the teams in front are strong, but they are strong as well. They are two time defending champions for a reason.

### **Hinsdale South-**

Hinsdale South has shown a special kind of dominance in the southwest suburbs of the city. A duo touted as possibly the best 1-2 punch in the state delivered meet after meet in 2015. Both **Charlie Nodus** and **Roman Drabchuk** can produce top-10 places for South. "We came in with high expectations both from within and without," says Coach **Jim Dickerson**, "and have performed pretty much on par with those expectations." A pleasant surprise for South has been sophomore transfer **Brett Haffner**, breaking up the Yorkville pack to provide a third top-10 finish at the Wheaton Academy Sectional.

A major place drop-off after these three, however, exists not unbeknownst to Dickerson, who says "The key for us will be the rest of the team. They all have run some good races and some not as good races. Sectionals was a little rough after our 3rd runner, but we definitely can make some corrections and I'm not worried about that carrying over to State. Our last two races at Detweiller have gone very well and I see no reason why Saturday will be any different. When our 4th and 5th runner run as well as they can, we are a very good team." South has run with the best all season long. The star-powered Darien squad will now show its mettle at Detweiller at noon this Saturday.

### **The Field Is Deep and Brings an Array of Storylines to Detweiller**

Can Wheaton Academy's pack catch up to their strong 1-2 punch and be a force?

How will CPS team Lindblom fare at state during this historic season, led by Walmer Saavedra?

How will the momentum of Glenbard South's incredible late-season surge carry into the state meet?

Can 2A newcomer Fenwick establish itself as the best private school in 2A with young frontrunners?

Will Deerfield's stud sophomore class perform at a high-level, despite inexperience?

What mark will an energetic Elmwood Park make at state? How will the headlining story of Tyler Starnes' season continue?

Will Mather's strong top 3 be enough to make them competitive with the pack of other state teams?

Is St. Viator's tight pack going to move forward

together towards the front of the meet?

How can the emergence of Jack Franklin energize a red-hot Normal University team and better their odds at a trophy?

Will Peoria Notre Dame bring a fifth runner closer to the pack and be the best private school in the state in 2015?

Can Jake Gillum make a run for the state title, and give Metamora the boost they need to crack the top 5?

Will a Danville team, currently stuck at a plateau, make the time drops necessary for a top 10 finish?

Can Belvidere North finish in trophy range, and how will **Eryk Yunk** cap a long and successful career?

What statement will 2A newcomer Rockford Christian make, in a year they expected to compete for the 1A state title?

How has incredible Northern Illinois competition sharpened Crystal Lake Central for the state meet, and what role will **Cole Barkocy** play on the individual level?

Can Kaneland's pack recover from some sectional falls to make an impact at the state meet?

Springfield has improved more over the course of the season than most other teams--will that trend continue?

Can Chatham-Glenwood's end of season run, led by **Landon Skelly**, continue with fervor?

How will a Charleston squad, flying under the radar most of the year, use its strong top three to break into the first 10 teams of the meet?

How will **Atlantic Green** and **Micah Cherry** lead far-south Carbondale- can they finish all state?

Will a surprising Mattoon team continue to defy expectations and challenge the pack at Detweiller?

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