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2020 Illinois High School Cross Country Individual Previews - Class 2A Boys

Drengenberg and Georges lead another wide-open Class 2A

By Michael Newman

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We started last fall at the same place that we are in now. Who will step up to be the top runner in Class 2A?

For a while in the 2019 season, it was Sam Lange that was the runner to watch. He had run under 14:48 three times at Detweiller Park before the state meet. Charlie Smith started out slowly due to an early season injury but came on to win the state title.

Brock Drengenberg of Dixon starts out slowly to begin the season because he participates in a swimming club during the summer. In the end, he will be right in the front. Wilson Georges of Limestone is the one runner that we may need to watch for. He ran at the end of the season after coming down with pneumonia. Some though he would not run. He did finishing seventh in that state race. He will have a chip on his shoulder and could take his running up another level.

There are 11 runners that were in the top 25 that are back. All of those runners will be seniors except Georges and Jackson Ward of Washington.

The main thing is that these kids get to run with their friends and race. That is what this sport is all about. It might not be invitational meets. It might be just dual meets and that is okay with me.

The previews that have been written are focused on IF we have a state series and IF we have a state meet. As of this time, that is yet to be determined.

There was never the chance that these would not be written for the upcoming season. It is more of a tribute to the student/athletes that did not get a chance to compete this spring and now have that opportunity this fall. This preview is for all of you.

2A Boys Top Five

1 Brock Drengenberg – SR – Dixon

Comments – Drengenberg enters this season as the top returning runner in Class 2A. He ran 14:58 to finish fourth in the Class 2A race at Detweiller Park. He came on strong towards the end of last season starting with third in the Big Northern Conference, running 15:46 to win the Sterling Regional, and then finishing sixth at the Belvidere Sectional. Drengenberg earned all-state honors as he ran 15:12 to finish 16th in 2018. He also participates with a swim club in Clinton. "As like other summers, Brock Drengenberg spends his time with a club swim team out of Clinton," said Dixon Coach Simon Thorpe. "He indicated that he's been running the most out of any other summer and is excited for the season."

2 Wilson Georges – JR – Bartonville Limestone

Comments – One of the most inspirational things that I saw at last year's state meet was the performance by Wilson Georges. He entered last year as one of the runners to watch when he finished 42 as a freshman. Georges did not run his best race at conference running 50 seconds slower than he had run earlier in the year at Detweiller Park. He was diagnosed with pneumonia. He did not run in his regional meet. At sectionals, he gutted it out to finish sixth and qualify for state as an individual qualifier. He followed that at state by running 15:09 to finish seventh overall. He will be one of the favorites in Class 2A if we have a state meet.

"Wilson is more fit than I've ever seen him, and if there's a state meet in late fall, I know he'll be gunning for the win. While I know he was ecstatic taking 7th in last year's state meet, especially considering his bout with pneumonia, I know, like me, he left wondering how he would have finished had he been healthy," said Limestone Coach Brian Glaza. "Since COVID-19 shut down the track season, Wilson has stuck to the plan, continuing to train and work hard through uncertain times. I know more than ever he wants to race and prove himself as one of the best in the state. If and when that opportunity comes, he will be ready. Wilson continued to train for track until the scheduled state meet weekend in May, running a few TTs along the way, most of which were solo. While he had some races he was happy with, others did not go as planned. What impressed me most, though, was his resolve during those tough time trials. He kept his head up and continued to train, never getting too high or low off one race or workout. Just recently, we finished our summer training with a two mile time-trial, and I felt he ran great considering where we are at and the race situation."

3 Chris Cherry – SR – Taylorville

Comments – Cherry is a two-time all-state cross country runner. He finished 25 (15:18) as a sophomore in 2018. He followed up with that last fall running 15:12 to finish 10th overall. That state time was a personal best. He was champion in three invitationals in 2019 winning the Rochester Invitational, the Springfield Invitational, and the Apollo Conference Meet. Cherry did have good races in the two state series meets finishing second at the Jacksonville Regional and third at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional behind Eli Ward and Brooks Harlan.

4 Peter Walsdorf – SR – Woodstock Marian Central Catholic

Comments – A runner that some of you have not heard about. When the season ends, you will probably know him. Walsdorf earned all-state honors last year as a junior when he ran 15:12 to finish 11th at Detweiller Park. What makes this performance remarkable is that he finished seventh the week before at the Belvidere Sectional. His schedule has more than 3A schools giving the advantage to toughen up before the state series. He finished second in five meets including the East Suburban Catholic Conference Meet and the Lakes Regional Meet.

"I was not a track coach at Marian this past spring. The only athlete that reached out to me was Peter Walsdorf," said Marian Central Catholic Coach Murray Domich. "I put together a regular training sequence for Peter during the winter and spring months. With no regular tracks meets, progress was not as good as it could have been. I did take Peter to an indoor meet in Indiana where he ran a 9:49 personal best for the 3200-meters. Towards the end of May we got together with Ian Geisler from Huntley and ran a 3200 Meter Run Time-Trial. Peter ran a 9:46 personal best. An interesting side note Peter's and Ian's dads were college roommates. It is really sad that COVID-19 took away Peter's shot at medaling in the 3200 at state this past spring. Huge credit should be given to Peter who trained religiously despite of the current racing situation. Peter Walsdorf the coaches' dream athlete, intelligent, highly motivated, competitive, and most importantly understands life's priorities."

5 Brooks Harlan – SR – Centralia

Comments – If we have a state meet, this is one of the runners we would see in the front. He has run in the state meet at Detweiller Park twice. He finished 49th as a sophomore in 2018. Harlan ran a personal best 15:16 to finish 13th last November. Harlan had a great junior season that included wins at the Freeburg Invitational, Centralia Invitational, South Seven Conference Meet, and then state series wins at the Mattoon Regional and Decatur MacArthur Sectional. Harlan ran a 9:25.35 winning time for 3200-meters at Southern Illinois University in February. He also ran 4:20 twice for the 1 Mile Run in two indoor meets before track was cancelled for the season. Good things are ahead for Harlan in the 2020-2021 school year.

More 2A Boys Runners (In Alphabetical Order)

Alex Ahmari – SR – Champaign Central

Comments – Ahmari ran a personal best 15:42 to finish 35th in his first state race at Detweiller Park. He had some big races at the end of the year before state including finishing sixth at the Big 12 Championships and then 13th at the Bloomington Sectional.

"Alex Ahmari is an outstanding worker and leader," said Champaign Central Coach Steven Kessler. "No one logs more miles in the offseason, and often he recruits his younger teammates to join him on those runs as well. His experience last year at State did a world of good for his confidence coming into this season, and his younger teammates who watched him run at State are clearly also motivated to get there one day themselves. He sets the standard for the intensity of our workouts and luckily he brings 100% every day."

Drake Bleier – SR – Troy Triad

Comments – Bleier earned all-state honors last fall as the #1 runner for Troy Triad. He ran 15:26 to finish 19th last November at Detweiller Park. It was his best race of the season especially after finishing 11th at the Highland Regional and then 12th at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional. Bleier also finished seventh in the Mississippi Valley Conference Meet. "This summer has been his most consistent with training," Triad Coach Andrew Brendel said. "His workouts are stronger than ever, and he has a young gun (Drew Pace, freshman) to really push him this season."

Isaiah Dallal – SR – Maple Park Kaneland

Comments – Dallal should be the top runner for the Knights this season after being fourth runner on Kaneland's state championship team. He finished 24th running 15:27 in last year's state race. He had finished 20th the week before at the Belvidere Sectional. He ran in the state meet as a sophomore running 16:18. He improved 51 seconds from his sophomore to junior year.

"Isaiah has been working himself back into shape since the spring," said Kaneland Coach Chad Clarey. "He is learning on the fly how to be a leader of the program. He is somewhat soft-spoken but is getting reps every day at being the kind of leader that he is capable of being. From a running standpoint, we are eager to get a few competitive experiences under his belt. While not being one who has been a front-runner in the past, he certainly has the guts and skillset to score some Top 10 points for us in meets. He will gain confidence with each meet and hopefully get some race experiences within our conference and Region that allow him to test his own limits. It will be new for Isaiah, but it will also be a positive thing for him to experience."

Sean Donnelly – SR – Lisle Benet Academy

Comments – The top runner for Benet Academy entering this season. Donnelly ran 15:48 to finish 45th in last year's state meet. He ran 15:51 to finish 6 sophomore in 2018. He also finished in the top five in the Eastern Suburban Catholic Conference Meet, the Bremen Regional, and Thornridge Sectional. Teammate Niklas Anderson should be mentioned. Anderson finished seven seconds behind Donnelly at state (55, 15:55), but recently finished ahead of Donnelly in a team time-trial.

"Both have run almost every day together and they are incredibly consistent in their miles, pacing, communication with one another," said Benet Academy Coach Kevin Renicker. "Their relationship lends itself for the perfect training partners: challenging each other to be the best version of themselves. When it is a hard day, they push each other and when it is an easy day, they hold each other back. These two are going to be fun to watch on the course. And because of these two, the next group has been motivated."

Cory Fleeman – SR – Centralia

Comments – Fleeman gives Centralia a solid 1-2 punch up front with Brooks Harlan. Fleeman just missed all-state by one spot when he finished 26th at state running 15:31. He finished in the top 10 in 12 of the 13 races before the state meet including third at the South Seven Conference Meet, third in the Mattoon Regional, and 10 at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional. Fleeman also ran in state as a sophomore finishing 72nd.

Cadyn Grafton – SR – Dixon

Comments – He could be one of the most improved runners in the state this fall. Grafton was Dixon's third runner when he finished 33rd (15:39). He ran 15:38 a month earlier at the Peoria Invitational. Grafton finished fifth in both the Big Northern Conference Meet and Sterling Regional. He ran in the state meet as a sophomore placing 107 while running 16:13. He improved 34 seconds in one season.

"From June 1 - August 1, he logged 550 miles," said Dixon Coach Simon Thorpe. "Each workout we've had is rather tempered in intensity, as it should be during this time of the year, but he is a pace-machine and a progressive monster. Last week we had a 1600 time trial and he ran a 4:25.5; that is a 13 second PR. He was our 2nd leg for the 2019 4x8 state title team, in which he ran a 2:05. At the beginning of that indoor season, he ran 2:12 three different times. During his time trial, he ran splits of 66 high, 67 high, 65, 65 (~2:15, 2:10). I love what the sport of running can do for adolescent runners."

Thomas Herbst – SR – Chatham-Glenwood

Comments – Herbst could be one of three runners to be the top runner for a deep Glenwood team. He was on Glenwood's state team in 2018 when he ran 16:16 to finish 112. He improved 29 seconds in a year while running 15:47 to finish 43rd. He was the Titans top runner in that race.

"Thomas Herbst is a young man on a mission," said Chatham-Glenwood coach Mike Garber. "His summer was a balance of work and running. He may not have as many miles as some on the team, but his physical presence has changed. He is a leader and is ready to put it on the line for success. Thomas was the difference maker (in many ways) on our 2018 State Championship team, and he could be exactly that again. He is going to push every member of our team to

be their best and I cannot wait to see it."

Matt Herren – SR – Rochester

Comments – Herren should be one of the top runners not only in the Central State Eight Conference but also in Class 2A. He just made all-state last November when he ran 15:30 to finish 25th. Herren will be the defending champion in his conference meet and the Jacksonville Regional. He also had top five finishes in the Jacksonville Invitational, Rochester Invitational, Carlenville Invitational, and the Decatur MacArthur Sectional where he placed fifth. Herren also ran in the state meet as a sophomore where he finished 27th.

Gavin Kirby – SR – Olney Richland County

Comments – Kirby has run in the Class 2A State Meet twice. He finished 57 running 15:48 as a sophomore in 2018. Kirby bettered that last year when he ran 15:27 to finish 23 and earn all-state honors. He won races last year at the Fairfield Invitational, Olney Invitational, Mattoon Invitational, and the Little Illini Conference Meet. He finished in the top five at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional placing fifth.

"Gavin is a talented runner who can be a top state runner this year," Richland County coach Rob Kirby said. "He loves to compete and that has always been his strength. He loves competing in the big races especially against the runners he knows. He is not a typical top runner. For example: he still will not wear a watch and loves just being with his teammates."

Liam Linnen – SR – Chicago St. Ignatius Prep

Comments – Third runner on St. Ignatius' third-place trophy team at state last season. He should be the team's #1 runner heading into this fall. Linnen finished 39 running 15:44 in last year's state meet. Linnen did not run in the state series meets leading into state. He had proved himself before that finishing fifth in the Latin Prep Classic and ninth at the Chicago Catholic League Championships.

"Liam has done some physical therapy work this summer on strengthening his weak side," said St. Ignatius Prep Coach Ed Ernst. "He has picked up his mileage later in the summer. He is ambitious for the season, and our team needs him to be a low stick."

Nick Mies – SR – Mahomet-Seymour

Comments – One of two Mahomet-Seymour runners in this list. Mies is one of the reasons why Mahomet-Seymour will be one of the top teams in Class 2A this fall. Remember, this is only his second year of cross-country running. Mies was the team's top runner at the state meet when he ran 15:49 to finish 47th. He peaked at the end of the season first finishing seventh in the Apollo Conference Meet, eighth in the Metamora Regional Meet, and then 11th at the Bloomington Sectional. His first year experience should benefit him this fall.

"Nick is heading into his second year of high school XC," said Mahomet-Seymour Coach Neal Garrison. "His experience from last year ought to help him run stronger from the start this year. He is a talented runner. Nick has more confidence this year. He has the potential to be strong at State if we have a state meet."

Kyle Nofziger – JR – Mahomet-Seymour

Comments – The second runner for the Bulldogs at last year's state meet. Nofziger has been in his team's top seven since his freshman season. He ran 15:54 to place 53rd last year at Detweiller Park. Nofziger finished in the top 10 in both state series meets leading into state. He finished 4th at the Metamora Regional and then 10th at the Bloomington Sectional. He could be one of the top runners in Class 2A in 2021.

"Kyle has really put his heart into his running this past year," said Mahomet-Seymour Coach Neal Garrison. "He has always been a very tough competitor. I think he is now at the age where he is physically stronger and has put the work in to be a top runner in any invitational he runs if we get to run in any larger meets this season."

Ian O'Laughlin – SR – Metamora

Comments – O'Laughlin had a huge junior season after a breakout sophomore year in 2018. It will be interesting to see him race this fall. He earned all-state honors placing 16th while running 15:22 last November. He finished 46 as a sophomore in 2018. If we have a state meet, he should be among the top 10 runners. O'Laughlin was near the front in most races last season. He finished third at the Mid Illini Conference Meet, third at the Metamora Regional, and fourth at the Bloomington Sectional.

"Ian is in great shape," said Metamora coach Gene Jones. "He seems to be stronger than he has been in previous years. I am pleased with him heading into this season. I hated for him to miss his junior year in track, but he is focused."

David Olmos – SR – Oak Lawn Richards

Comments – Could be a surprise runner in Class 2A. Richards was a part of Class 3A in 2018. Olmos ran a then personal best of 16:19 at the Marist Sectional. He improved his time last year. That improvement happened to be at the state meet when he ran 15:47 to finish 42nd in the Class 2A race. Olmos finished third in his final three races before state at the South Suburban Conference Red Division Meet, the Bremen Regional, and the Thornridge Sectional.

"David Olmos has been training hard this summer to hopefully make a statement in conference and in the state series at the end of the season," said Richards Coach Bob Peck. "After a 42nd place finish last year, all state is definitely on his mind. David began to see huge gains in fitness at the beginning of track and ran 10:02 in his first indoor race of the year for 3200. David was definitely ready to run fast during outdoor season. He continues to be a leader for our program and has been a great example to our younger runners on how hard work pays off."

Tucker Poshard – SR – Carbondale

Comments – Poshard should show more improvement this fall especially that teammate Alex Partlow is healthy after missing last year due to an injury. Poshard finished 32nd at last fall's state meet running 15:39. He ran 15:26 earlier in the year at Detweiller Park at the Peoria Central Invitational. Poshard looked strong at the end of last season finishing second behind Brooks Harlan at the South Seven Conference Meet, third at the Highland Regional, and sixth at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional. He made it to state as a sophomore running 16:02 to finish 88th.

"Tucker was hungry this summer after the breakout season he had last fall," said Carbondale Coach Greg Storm. "He was so close to that All-State recognition and it has seemed to motivate him this summer. His mileage has increased as well as his focus for this season. With having Alex (Partlow) back for this season it will hopefully help in dropping some quality results. Last season he trained a lot by himself for workouts and I believe with Alex they are capable of having much better training sessions."

Paul Proteau JR – Riverside-Brookfield

Comments – Showed dramatic improvement running 17:43 as a freshman to 15:49 last year at the state meet. He finished 48th in that race. The sky could be the limit for him this fall. He did not run in his conference meet last year but did finish second at the Riverside-Brookfield Regional and then seventh at the Thornridge Sectional.

"Paul had a breakthrough year in 2019, from a skinny freshmen running 17:43 to a solid #1 man running 15:49 at State," said Riverside-Brookfield coach Anthony Enright. "Paul was out 2 1/2 weeks with a leg injury late in the season and missed conference and came back strong. If not for that lay-off, Paul could have dropped more time. He's had a solid summer, while also putting in walking miles as a veteran caddy and has been a great influence on our promising freshmen."

Keaton Vandel – SR – East Peoria

Comments – Vandel has run in two state cross-country meets. He ran 16:02 to finish 89 as a sophomore in 2018. Vandel improved that time last fall when he ran 15:32. He missed all-state honors by two spots placing 27th. He should be one of the top runners in the central region in the state. He was the seventh and state qualifier at the Bloomington Sectional when he finished 14th

Jackson Ward – SR – Washington

Comments – Ward had a solid sophomore season last year which should turn into something bigger this fall. He has run in the state meet in both years of high school. Ward ran 16:22 to finish 129th in his freshman year. He earned all-state honors last fall when he ran 15:26 as he finished in 20th place. His time dropped by almost a minute in one year. It will be interesting to see what kind of improvement he has in 2020. He had top five finishes in the Mid-Illini Conference Meet, Metamora Regional, and the Bloomington Sectional where he finished fifth overall.

Julian Watson – SR – Darien Hinsdale South

Comments – Watson started running cross-country as a sophomore. He has qualified for the state meet twice. He ran 15:42 to finish 47th in 2018 as a sophomore. Watson was close to an all-state finish last fall when he ran 15:33 to finish 28th. Look for more improvement for him in his senior season.

"Julian is a coach's dream," said Hinsdale South Coach Jim Dickerson "He is consistent, hard-working, positive, and an overall incredible leader and role model. I wish I were in the shape I was years ago so I could give him a training partner. Adam (Fournier) is getting closer, but when we really work out Julian is solo, but he handles this well. He had an excellent talk with Chris Derrick about the challenge of this. He is much improved and will be one of the top 2A runners in the state."

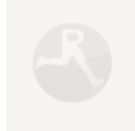
Cade Zobrist – JR – Morton

Comments – Zobrist will step into the top position now that last year's 2A state runner-up Sam Lange has graduated. Zobrist was the second runner for the Potters at last year's state when he ran 15:47 to finish. That is not bad for a sophomore in this classification. He dropped his 3-mile personal best from 16:50 as a freshman down to his state race time, a 63 second improvement.

"It is always enjoyable to see a young runner begin to realize their potential," said Morton Coach Joel Zehr. "I think Cade will continue to learn through the fall what he is actually capable of doing. The beauty of the team we currently have, is that Cade has a core group of young men that he will be training with and relying on this fall. I am really looking forward to watching him develop along with the rest of our men."

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