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2021 2A boys preseason preview: #25 to #16 provides clarity

ILLINOIS XC 2021: PRESEASON PREVIEW SERIES

Carson Vittorio

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Hopefully, 2021 is the rebirth of "normalcy" in the cross country world when the dust settles. If you recall a year ago, there was a tremendous amount of uncertainty floating in the air whether or not a cross country season was possible. Coaches, athletes, and parents learned very fast about "hybrid" racing.

We will take a look at the opening 25 teams and some thoughts provided by us as well as participating coaches. Enjoy!

25. [Glen Ellyn \(Glenbard South\)](#)

Head Coach/Assistant Coaches: Doug Gorski / Chris Mactaggart

Last year's finish: Chicago Latin Sectional- 5th place

Key returners: [Caleb Walter \(Jr.\)](#), [Ethan Woods \(Sr.\)](#), [Jaden Frederick \(So.\)](#), [Matthew King \(Jr.\)](#),

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Ryan Chung (Jr.), Tim Jochum (So.), Ben Zima (So.)

-Had there been an official state championship a year ago, the Raiders would have advanced on. If all things are back to normal in the cross country world, look for Jaden Fredrick to step up and be one of the top runners on the squad. Coach Gorski acknowledged with five starters returning, Fredrick will fit right in.

The team goals are to repeat as Upstate 8 Conference champions and place well at state. It will be a challenge with South Elgin, Elgin, and Glenbard East standing in the way. Still, this proud program is ready to get things rolling and achieve its goals.

24. Sycamore

Head Coach/Assistant Coaches: Michael Lambdin / David Liszka

Last year's finish: Shazam Championship- 16th place

Key Returners: **Nick Kocher (Sr.), Naif Al Harby (So.), Ethan Solfisburg (Jr.), Caden Emmert (Jr.), Aiden Farrell (Sr.), Magnus Keswani (Sr.), Jordan Wilkerson (Sr.)**

-The future of Spartans cross country is now. Last year's middle school program won an IESA sectional championship and several of those then eighth graders are ready to supplant themselves at the next level. Phoenix Calabrese, Corey Goff, Landon Taylor, and Kaiden Von Schnase have been regular participants in the summer running program per coach Lambdin. "I would not be surprised to see any of these four boys challenge for a spot in the top seven," he added.

With only one significant loss to the team in sophomore Jacob Gramer who will focus on swimming, the key members are ready to show off their hard work. "I have no doubt that the boys are going to race well," said Lambdin. "The question is, how well? Hopefully, we can be a team that is racing in November."

23. Rochester

Head Coach: Bill Owens

Last Year's Finish: 2A ShaZam XC Championships- 21st place

Key Returners: **Adam Gribbins (Sr.), Ryan Gustafson (Sr.), Max Wilber (Sr.), Charlie Archey (Sr.), Jack Arends (So.), Cameron Fairbanks (So.), Spencer Loy (Sr.)**

Carson's outlook: After a great track season, the Rockets are prepping for a potentially great fall on the grass. Led by top runner Adam Gribbins, he will attempt to break the 16:00 barrier this season and be a very good #1 guy for his group. Following him should be a pack of 4 runners that consists of Ryan Gustafson, Max Wilber, and Charlie Archey who all were a part of a state-qualifying 4x800m team. As well as Jack Arends who had a great track season in the mile with a 4:46. This is a team with a lot of potential to grow as the season progresses.

22. Vernon Hills

Head Coach/Assistant Coaches: Steve Szabo / Bryson Taylor

Last Year's Finish: 2A Lakes Sectional- 6th place

Key Returners: **Brady Clegg (Jr.), Erick Herrera (Jr.), Charlie Blackmer (So.), Nathan Faitsch (Sr.), Christian Gitzinger (Sr.), Philip Back (Sr.), Ryan Kuczynski (Sr.)**

- Incoming freshman Brady Koetz has shown a lot of promise this summer and has the potential to crack the top seven. With just one loss in Owen Ray, the team is ready to perform well. "Our varsity guys have put in a lot of time together and I feel we are in a solid spot to pick up where they finished last year," said coach Szabo. "I can see us being a competitive team and really round into form by the end of October."

21. Washington

Head Coach: Tom Smith

Last Year's Finish: Metamora Regional- 7th place

Key Returners: **Jackson Ward (Sr.), Sam Tellefson (So.), Eddie Papis (Jr.), Milo Rinkenberger (So.), Noah Johnson (Sr.), Mitch Coughlin (Jr.), Alex Volk (Jr.)**

Carson's outlook: Returning all seven members from last season's top seven, the Panthers look to be a strong team this year. Led by Jackson Ward who didn't have the same cross country season last year as he did back in 2019. Failing to place All-ShaZam last fall, the 2019 All-Stater got to work and had a bounceback track campaign running 4:29 for the mile. He has run 15:26 before



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and may very well break the 15:00 barrier this season. Sam Tellefson qualified for ShaZam last season along with his teammate Ward. After a great track season in the 800m, running 2:05, expect the young sophomore to have a very good harrier season running right with Eddie Papis who ran 16:24 last season.

20. [Geneseo](#)

Head Coach: Todd Ehlert

Last Year's Finish: 2A ShaZam XC Championships- 20th place

Key Returners: [Justin Johnson \(Sr.\)](#), [Gavin Allison \(Jr.\)](#), [Tyler Gehl \(Jr.\)](#), [Isaac Kuster \(Sr.\)](#), [Cooper Schaad \(So.\)](#), [Josiah King \(Jr.\)](#), [Bode Neff \(Sr.\)](#)

Carson's Outlook: The Maple Leafs had a great step in the right direction last year qualifying to compete at the ShaZam XC Championships, now we will have to see how they build off that. Led by a potential top 50 runner in the classification in Justin Johnson, this squad has a solid #1 runner that pairs nicely along with teammate Gavin Allison who may close the gap a bit on his teammate this year after a good track season. Tyler Gehl enters as the 3rd runner and will be looking to be sub 16:30 by the end of the season. The thing that can make or break this team is whether track standouts Brayden Combs and Eli DeBrock join their squad this fall. If they do it adds depth to this squad, something they will desperately need.

19. [Peoria \(Notre Dame\)](#)

Head Coach: Dan Gray

Last Year's Finish: 2A ShaZam XC Championships- 15th place

Key Returners: [Jac Couri \(Sr.\)](#), [Trey Socha \(Sr.\)](#), [Andrew Elward \(So.\)](#), [Brian Coutler \(Sr.\)](#), [Joey Cave \(Jr.\)](#), [Eliot Lynch \(So.\)](#), [Owen Magner \(So.\)](#)

New Additions: Brady Culp (Sr.)

Carson's Outlook: For the last few seasons Coach Dan Gray has produced some excellent teams ranked in the mid-teens, could this be the year that this squad takes a leap into the top 10? Coming off a great track season, the Irish will have some very intriguing pieces to its squad this season. Led by their #1 and #2 two returners, Jac Couri and Trey Socha will try to break 16:00 this year, possibly a little under. Andrew Elward may be up with these two this year after a great track season for the youngster, running 4:57 and 10:33. Then with the closing trio of Brian Coutler, Joey Cave, and Eliot Lynch, they will have to try and close the gap as much as possible between them and their front three.

18. [Chicago \(Marist\)](#)

Head Coach/coaches: Jon Gordon/Dylan Allingham, Brandon Davis

Last Year's Finish: 3A Whitney Young Sectional- 12th place

Key returners: [Jake Phillips \(Sr.\)](#), [Andrew Kerlin \(Sr.\)](#), [Brendan Geary \(Sr.\)](#), [Vince Moreno, Michael Golden \(Sr.\)](#)

Newcomers: Matthew McKee (Fr.), Jake Frederking (Fr.), Danny Walczak (Fr.), Cristian Lopez (Fr.), Aidan Bennett (So). Juniors Walter Fleming and Frankie Wagner will also contend for Varsity spots this year

-A key runner Danny Olsen returns back to soccer this fall but a senior dominant crew led by all-Shazam performer Jake Phillips is ready to assert themselves in 2A. Coach Gordon believes this could be a special year for his team.

Carson's thoughts: A late addition to the 2A classification, the Red Hawks bring a lot of intrigue into both the team and individual race. Led by Jake Phillips who looks to come into the classification as a top-three runner, he will challenge for a state title. Following him will be teammate Andrew Kerlin who is coming off a sub 16:00 campaign last XC season. Going 4:36 in the 1600m in the spring showed that there is a lot of potential for him this season. Now the key for the Redhawks is getting their 3-5 as close to their top 2 as they can.

17. [Crystal Lake Central](#)

Head Coach: Bill Eschman

Last Year's Finish: 10th at 2A ShaZam XC Championships

Key Returners: [Karson Hollander \(Jr.\)](#), [Daniel Hamill \(Sr.\)](#), [Aiden Shulfer \(So.\)](#), [Will Foster \(Sr.\)](#), [Nathaniel Peyer \(So.\)](#), [Elliot White \(Jr.\)](#), [James Perkins \(Sr.\)](#)

Carson's outlook: Coming off a great track season, the Tigers return with another great team. Led by their star runner, Karson Hollander who looks to be a top 10 runner in the classification this year. Daniel Hamill follows closely behind his counterpart as he enters the season as a top 20 runner in the state. With a duo like that, it's all about your final three runners and where they place. Expect a breakout season from Aiden Shulfer, he had a breakout track season running 10:39 for the 3200m. If the Tigers can get their final two runners under 16:50 they should be in good shape.

16. [Burlington Central](#)

Head Coach/Assistant Coaches: Vince Neil / Dan Palmiter

Last Year's Finish: 7th at 2A ShaZam XC Championships

Key Returners: [Robert Perry \(Sr.\)](#), [Yusuf Baig \(Jr.\)](#), [Zac Schmidt \(Sr.\)](#), [Ryan Kries \(So.\)](#), [Adam Hinkleman \(So.\)](#), [Kyle Farmer \(Sr.\)](#), [Robert Anderson \(So.\)](#)

-Last year was a good one for the Rockets who made the most out of an unusual season and finished in the top 10 among the best teams in the state. Now, how will they cope with the loss of Joey Kowall who returns to football? A good summer training was had by the group and dividends will be expected to be paid in full later in the season. In the meantime, Yusuf Baig and Zac Schmidt will carry the load but it's the back end of the pack that needs to do their part. "I believe that we have the makings for a strong team this fall," said coach Neil.

Carson's outlook: With the Rocket's top three runners in the positions that they are right now, it will be a very hard task to not put them into trophy talk. They already have three sub 15:45 runners for them, now they need to finalize those final two positions. Ryan Kries is a young runner but had a breakout track season running 10:44 for the 3200m. He will look to help bring down that 1-5 split. They are still looking to solidify that number five runner, if they can get them in the 16:30 range, this will be a trophy contender.

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