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- [Featured \(118\)](#)
- [Misc News \(1310\)](#)
- [Athletes Blog \(49\)](#)
- [Cross Country \(0\)](#)
- [Track & Field \(0\)](#)
- [Misc News \(1\)](#)
- [All \(388\)](#)
- [All \(3964\)](#)



[2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 3A Boys Individuals](#)(Today, 9:36am)



[2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 3A Girls Individuals](#)(Today, 9:32am)



[2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 2A Boys Individuals](#)(Today, 9:29am)



[2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 2A Girls Individuals](#)(Today, 9:23am)

News

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2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 2A Boys Individuals

Wilson Georges goes after that illusive state championship

By Michael Newman

newman.ilxctf@gmail.com



[2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 1A Boys Individuals](#)(Today, 9:20am)



[2021 IHSA State Cross Country Season Previews - 1A Girls Individuals](#)(Today, 9:17am)

Wilson Georges of Limestone was the top 2A runner in the state last fall without a question. The same will hold true again this fall when he steps to the line in November. The 2020 season was a test run for what he will go through in the next couple of months. His preparation for the ShaZam race will have him ready for this November. The difference is he will have to earn his way to run for the state championship. 2020 was an invitation then the chance to run in a big race.

Georges is the class of this class. If there is a runner that could push him, it would be **Alex Partlow** of Carbondale who has track bests close to the Limestone senior. After that, there is a drop off. We can't sugarcoat the facts that the drop off is in Grand Canyon type of proportions. But after those two runners, it will be fun to watch to see who could step into the top 25 in November. There will be no surprises.

Search Here is a look at some of the top runners in Class 2A for the upcoming Illinois cross-country season.

1 Wilson Georges – Bartonville (Limestone) – SR

Preview – Is this the season that **Wilson Georges** does it? An injury slowed him down his freshman season, but he still finished 42. He was on the verge of great things his sophomore season before he came down with pneumonia just after his conference meet. Georges still came back, qualified for the state meet in his sectional, and placed seventh at state as a sophomore. He was undefeated last fall easily winning his regional and sectional races. The problem was due to COVID-19 guidelines, the IHSA did not have a state meet. Georges still went on to win the ShaZam Club Championships.

He just needs to stay healthy. Georges had to quarantine last February due to COVID-19. He came back in March to run 4:14.04 for 1600-meters and then two weeks later 4:14.34 for the 1 Mile Run at Gately Park. That was pretty good considering his training was minimalized in February. He came back to run outdoor personal bests of 1:56.12 for 800-meters, 4:19.09 for 1600-meters, and a fast 9:08.69 at Distance Night in Palatine for the 3200 Meter Run. He qualified for state in the 800 and 1600. He finished third in Charleston in the 800 Meter Run. He came back to finish fifth in the 1600 Meter Run. Georges ran two solid races after state running 4:13.88 at Magis Miles and then 4:14.32 the following week in Oregon. They were two solid runs preparing him mentally for this fall.

“Coaching Wilson the past four years has been an absolute treat, and I thank him for all he has done for me as a coach, for his teammates, and for Limestone cross country,” said his coach, **Brian Glaza**. “He is an amazing human being and an excellent student-athlete who has committed himself to his goals since day one of his freshmen year. Watching Wilson on his journey has been nothing short of exciting, and I know he is saving his best for last during his senior year. He hasn't lost a cross country race since the state meet his sophomore year, and I don't expect that to change this season. Outside of state competition, Wilson is wanting to race at both the Nike and Footlocker post-season meets, looking to prove himself against national competition.”

Georges is one of the premiere Boys runners in this state this season. He should be a BIG favorite to win his first state championship in November. He should be in one (or both) national meets when we get to December.

2 Alex Partlow – Carbondale – SR

Preview – One runner that I respect highly from what he has gone through. Big things are ahead for this season in the next couple of months. **Alex Partlow** missed most of his sophomore cross-country season due to injury. He ran strong all last fall going undefeated during the regular season including wins in his conference, regional, and sectional meets. His race at the ShaZam Club Championships was forgettable where he finished 102nd.

All Partlow did was brush himself off and move forward into the track season where he put up some fantastic times. That included running 4:16.28 for the 1600 Meter Run in the middle of May. The week before, Partlow ran a personal best of 9:18.77 for the 3200 Meter Run at Distance Night in Palatine. He qualified for the 2A State finals in both events. He led most of the 3200 Meter Run race before Drew Rogers took over and won. Partlow placed third in that race. He came back for the 1600 Meter Run. His momentum caused him to fall over the starting line before the start of the race. Partlow left the track after charged a false start with no emotion on his face. He will just use that moment to do something big this fall. If there is one runner that could push Georges, it is this guy.

3 Michael Schumacher – Arlington Heights (St. Viator) – SR

Preview – There will be at least 10 runners that could legitimately finish second behind Georges if nothing weird happens. One of them is Michael Schumacher. The senior finished last fall strong finishing fourth in the ESCC Championships, winning the Mather Regional, and then placing fourth at the Latin Sectional. His big race came when he finished third at the ShaZam Club Championships last November.

He ran a personal best indoors at Gately Park in the 3200 Meter Run where he ran 9:36.08 in the 2 Mile Run. Schumacher concentrated on the 1600 Meter Run most of last outdoor season running between 4:28 and 4:31 in most of those races. He was part of St. Viator's quartet in the 4x800m Relay in the final three meets that finished third in the 2A State Meet finals. Schumacher also qualified in the 160 Meter Run for state where he placed 10th. Class 2A is wide open this fall. Schumacher could be one of those runners that finishes in the top five in Peoria.

4 Josh Weeks – Morton – SO

Preview – **Josh Weeks** is one of those runners that we could see finish in the top five this fall. Not bad for a sophomore who was his team's top runner as a freshman. Weeks finished no worse than sixth last fall and that came as the team's top runner at the ShaZam Club Championships. He finished fourth in the Mid Illini Conference Meet, third in the Metamora Regional, and fourth at the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional.

His track times were not mind boggling but good for a freshman. He ran personal bests of 10:06.90 for 3200-meters and 4:35.08 for 1600-meters. "Simply put, Josh is a hard worker," said his coach, **Joe Zeller**. "Josh has put in a solid summer of work and looks forward to picking up where he left off last year."

5 Dylan Nalley – Marion – SO

Preview – One of two South Seven Conference runners that will be among the Class 2A best this fall. **Dylan Nalley** had an amazing freshman season as one of the top runners in his class. Nalley ran a personal best of 15:10 in lacing third in his conference meet. He followed that up by placing second in the Highland Regional and third at the Richland County Sectional. Nalley concluded last fall by finishing eighth in the ShaZam Club Championships. Nalley put up some solid times on the track running 9:55.78 for 3200-meters and 4:43.43 for 1600-meters. He did not race since May 19 possibly due to injury. A healthy Nalley should do big things this fall.

2A Runners to Watch (In Alphabetical Order)

Yusuf Baig – Burlington (Central) - JR

Preview – A runner that stepped up last spring in track that could catapult him to bigger things in the next couple of months. **Yusuf Baig** was one of the top three runners for his team last fall. He finished sixth in the Kaneland Regional and 13th in the Lakes Sectional before finishing 26 at the ShaZam Club Championships. He will improve from there this fall. Baig dropped his time in the spring running personal bests of 9:40.16 for 3200-meters and 4:29.33 for 1600-meters. He qualified for both events for the 2A State finals. Baig was all-state finishing eighth in the 3200 Meter Run. He came back to finish 12th in the 1600 Meter Run. "Yusuf had a great spring track season and a fantastic summer of training," said his coach, Vince Neil. "He is as strong as I have ever seen him and is just a workhorse. Yusuf brings energy to the Boys team and will be a major impact on the team scoring. Look for him to be at the front of the pack in Class 2A."

Ian Barnes – Cary-Grove – SR

Preview – The move from Class 3A to 2A for Cary-Grove puts **Ian Barnes** in a position to finish in the top 25 in his new classification. Barnes finished third in the Fox Valley Conference. Two weeks later, he finished third in the 3A Grant Regional and then 26th in the Hoffman Estates Sectional. Barnes went to the track last spring and recorded personal bests of 10:00.44 for 3200-meters and 4:42.58 for 1600-meters.

Brock Davee – Mattoon – SR

Preview – **Brock Davee** did not have the finish that he hoped for last fall. He hopes his senior year is the finish that he has trained for. Davee had a good end to the 2020 state series finishing third in the Taylorville Regional. He finished 11th in the Richland County Sectional. He did not have his best race at the ShaZam Club Championships where he placed 62nd. His times dropped in the spring on the track with personal bests of 4:34.37 for 1600-meters and 10:01.7 for 3200-meters. "Brock continues to improve," said his coach, **Troy Haacke**. "I know he is looking forward to this season after a great junior season. He is very competitive and has high hopes for this season."

Armani Diaz – Grayslake (North) – SR

Preview – A name you may not recognize now. **Armani Diaz** could be a face that you recognize at Detweiller Park in November. He should have high hopes this season after finishing fifth in the NLCC meet, fourth in the Antioch Regional, and third in the Lakes Sectional. Diaz had a good track season including personal bests of 4:36.34 for 1600-meters and 10:25.18 for 3200-meters.

Will Gelon – Crystal Lake (Prairie Ridge) – SO

Preview – One of the super sophomores in Class 2A. **Will Gelon** has already started this season finishing third in the McHenry County Championships. Gelon's freshman cross country season included a fourth-place finish at the Fox Valley Meet, second in the Antioch Regional, and eighth at the Lakes Sectional. Gelon ended his season by finishing 48th at the ShaZam Club Championships. Gelon's track season was superb qualifying for the 3A State Finals in the 1600 Meter Run. He ran a personal best of 4:29.58 to finish 28. He also ran a personal best of 9:58.99 for 3200-meters. "Will Gelon continued to work on taking charge of his own tempo with the hopes of controlling races at times this year instead of relying on the veterans," said his coach, **Judd Shutt**. "He was healthy and consistent throughout the summer. As a sophomore coming right off state track, he maintained a modest mileage progression, but I know he is excited to take another step forward this season."

Daniel Hamill – Crystal Lake (Central) – SR

Preview – One of two Tigers that could earn all-state honors this fall. **Daniel Hamill** finished his junior cross-country season finishing seventh in the Fox Valley Meet, fifth in the Belvidere Regional, and 16th at the Lakes Sectional. He also finished 29 at the ShaZam Club Championships. Hamill qualified with his Crystal Lake Central teammates in the 4x800m Relay in the 3A State Finals where they finished 20th. He ran a personal best of 2:02.01 for 800-meters.

Yasir Hirsi – Chicago (Mather) – SR

Preview – I would keep an eye on this runner especially after he finished 97th in 2019 in the 2A State Meet. **Yasir Hirsi** last fall finished second in his own regional, third at the Latin Sectional, and 13th at the ShaZam Club Championships.

“Yasir is an honor to coach. He is a two-year captain for us. His commitment and leadership are tremendous, and he is also a great student. On the racecourse, he has a special ability to stay calm under pressure and always get the best out of himself,” said his coach, **Joe Sullivan**. “Yasir’s results last year were very impressive considering he did not have a full buildup of training. He was able to race well off limited running, a lot of cross training and sheer will. When another injury popped up during this past track season, we decided to shut things down completely and really address the movement issues he was having. He has worked a lot on his rhythm and timing to allow him to utilize the strength he developed through all the rehab he has done. Over the course of the summer Yasir has been able to slowly progress his mileage and workouts. His confidence is coming back, and I believe he is ready for a strong senior season. Our plan is to be patient and try to avoid major setbacks. If he can do that, Yasir can be up near the front at Detweiller in November. No matter what happens this fall I am extremely proud of the resilience of this young man. I could not ask for a better role model for our team than Yasir Hirsi.”

Karson Hollander – Crystal Lake (Central) – JR

Preview – The second of the two Crystal Lake Central runners in this preview. Hollander started his season on Saturday winning the McHenry County Meet. **Karson Hollander** was tough at the end of last season finishing second in the Fox Valley Meet, second in the Belvidere Regional, and fourth at the Lakes Sectional. He competed in the ShaZam Club Championships where he finished 12th. Hollander qualified for the 3A State Finals last June in the 3200 Meter Run where he finished 23rd. He achieved personal bests of 4:36.05 for 1600-meters and 9:55.51 for 3200-meters. It will not surprise me if he finishes among the top 10 this November in Peoria.

Lance Miller – Mascoutah – SR

Preview – **Lance Miller** was one of the top runners for Mascoutah last fall and could be among the 10 best in Class 2A this fall. He started this fall by finishing second at the Mascoutah Kickoff Meet. The end of last season finished with fourth in the Highland Regional, sixth in the Richland County Sectional, and 25th at the ShaZam Club Championships. Miller ran personal bests of 2:04.36 for 800-meters, 4:39.64 for 1600-meters, and 10:17.23 for 3200-meters. He was part of the Mascoutah quartet that finished second in the 2A State Finals in the 4x800m Relay. He was part of Mascoutah’s 2A State Track Championship team.

Kyle Nofziger – Mahomet-Seymour – SR

Preview – A runner that keeps on improving each season. **Kyle Nofziger’s** best season maybe yet to come as he leads the Bulldogs to a chance of a state team championship. He ran strong last fall finishing second at the Apollo Conference Meet, second in the Taylorville Regional, and seventh at the Richland County Sectional. Nofziger helped Mahomet-Seymour finished second as he finished 18th at the ShaZam Club Championships. He helped Mahomet-Seymour’s quartet in the 4x800m Relay finish seventh in the 2A State Meet Finals. Nofziger also ran personal bests of 9:53.73 for 3200-meters and 4:39.55 for 1600-meters. “Kyle is a very determined runner,” said his coach, **Neal Garrison**. “He is consistent in his running and enjoys the sport. He is coming into the season with experience of running at State a couple times which hopefully will help him this year. Our younger runners look up to his leadership both as a runner and as a person. He has been so important for our team the past three years. We were fortunate to have him on our team and I hope he has a great season.”

Robert Perry – Burlington (Central) - SR

Preview – **Robert Perry** joins **Yusuf Baig** up front giving Burlington Central a powerful 1-2 in the front. Perry missed most of the track season due to an injury. Perry ran great last fall finishing fourth in the Kaneland Regional, ninth in the Lakes Sectional, and 20th at the ShaZam Club Championships. “Coming off an injury that limited his participation in the spring, he is gearing up to have a major impact in the fall,” said his coach, **Vince Neil**. “Robert is the leader of the Boys team, and we will rely on his experience and leadership to take the boys team deep into the postseason.”

Trey Sato – Grayslake (Central) – SO

Bryan Vale – Grayslake (Central) – SR

Preview – Two of the reasons why Grayslake Central will be challenging for a state trophy. “Bryan and Trey both focused very heavily on the 4x800 this past season,” said their coach, **James Centella**. “We almost set a school record and finished 13th in 3A. The 4x800 group developed a real bond and coming out of COVID this was such a fun group of guys. Vale went 1:59 for us and Sato went 2:01 as a Freshman. After coming off 2nd place and 5th place sectional finishes respectively, I must say that their combination of speed and endurance places them at the top of 2A in

cross country. Vale is ready to run in the top pack at Detweiller in the fall. He ran 9:56 in April and could have gone 9:30 by June but was not the focus. Sato can be right with Vale or just a bit behind. He is a great competitor will challenge for a top 20 finish this fall."

Bryan Vale had a strong fall season winning the NLCC Conference Meet, winning the Antioch Regional, finishing second in the Lakes Sectional, and placing 17 at the ShaZam Club Championships. Vale has improved this past year and should be among the top 10 in Class 2A. **Trey Sato** is another one of a great group of sophomores in Class 2A. Sato finished fourth in the NLCC Conference Championships, third in the Antioch Regional, fifth in the Lakes Sectional, and 21st at the ShaZam Club Championships. The two runners give the Rams their best 1-2 punch in the front since the Aho brothers.

Drew Verenski – Chatham-Glenwood – JR

Preview – Drew Verenski should be the team's top runners as Glenwood stays in the hunt for another trophy. Verenski finished seventh in the Jacksonville Regional. He did not have his best two races to end last fall placing 40th at the Richland County Regional and 71st at the ShaZam Club Championships. He is better than those performances. Verenski was part of Glenwood's quartet that finished 11th in the 4x800m Relay in the 3A State Finals last June. He ran personal bests of 2:00.93 for 800-meters and 4:42.4 for 1600-meters. "Drew is in a great position entering his junior season," said his coach, **Mike Garber**. "He is focused and very driven. I expect him to follow up his great track season with a big season of cross. He is one of the runners I shut down for a longer period this summer. He is working on cardio and leg strength currently and is making big gains already. I expect him to join **Samson Dessalines** as our 1-2 duo at the front of races throughout the fall."

Jackson Ward – Washington – SR

Preview – Jackson Ward started his senior season finishing ninth last Saturday at the Normal West Invitational. Ward's junior cross-country season included fifth place finishes at the Mid Illini Conference Meet and Metamora Regional, sixth in the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional, and 36th at the ShaZam Club Championships. He stepped last spring qualifying for the 3A State Finals in the 1600 Meter Run. Ward ran a personal best of 4:29.14 to finish 26th in that state race.

Yonas Wuthrich – Morton – SO

Preview – Yonas Wuthrich had a great freshman season last fall along with his teammate **Josh Weeks**. Wuthrich could be among the top 10 at state in November. He started this season finishing seventh last Saturday in the Normal West Invitational. He was part of Morton's pack where he finished eighth in the Mid Illini Conference Meet, sixth in the Metamora Regional, fifth in the Notre Dame Sectional, and 15th at the ShaZam Club Championships. "Yonas had a big track season as the anchor of our 4x800," said his coach, **Joe Zeller**. "Some newfound confidence should lead into a strong cross-country season for him."

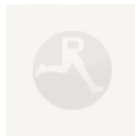
Wuthrich was part of Morton's quartet that finished fifth in the 2A State Finals last June. He also ran personal bests of 2:03.47 for 800-meters and 4:42.49 for 1600-meters last track season.

Cade Zobrist – Morton – SR

Preview – Cade Zobrist started his senior season finishing 11th at the Normal West Invitational. Zobrist was part of the Morton team that won the title last fall at the ShaZam Club Championships where he finished 37th. He did finish sixth at the Mid Illini Conference Meet and seventh at the Metamora Regional. Zobrist was also a part of Morton's quartet that finished fifth in the 2A State Final 4x800m Relay. He ran a personal best of 4:35.36 for 1600-meters last track season. "Cade hopes to build on success from last year," said his coach, **Joe Zeller**. "As a senior, Cade has some big goals in mind and will be an important leader for us."

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