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

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

Morton and then the rest

By Michael Newman



[2021 IHSAA State Cross
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newman.ilxctf@gmail.com

I did not have to check my numbers when I finished up my research in this classification. There was a drop off in ratings scores like what we saw with 3A Boys. The one exception was with Morton.



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Morton returns all their runners from 2020 when they were crowned champions in the Division 2 race at the ShaZam Club Championships. A year later, they go after a real state championship at Detweiller Park.

The Potters had a decisive advantage in the rankings as we head to the start of the season. There are things to watch for. Morton excelled in flight racing. We return to a normal way of holding a cross country meet. How will they fare then? I think this is a great team that will have a target on their back with the start of their first meet.

There are several teams lined up ready to step into the favorite's role. No one has mentioned St. Francis, but the talent is there for the returning runners in the group. Chatham-Glenwood only has two runners back, but they have a chip on their shoulder for what happened with them at the end of last season. It seems like it is a rite of passage that some ignore Mahomet-Seymour. They finished second at the end of last year and return five of their top runners. Do they win their first state championship since 2017? Grayslake Central and Burlington Central represent the northern section of the state. Both have the runners up front that put themselves closer to the front.

Cheer up. We are back to normal. We will be running a championship race at a championship location with runners running against each other and teams running in seven runner packs. How nice that will be when we get going on August 23.

The rules changed for qualifying last year. It will take real effect this fall with four sectionals with seven teams qualifying for the state meet from each group. For that, ILXCTF.com will rank the top 30 teams weekly beginning with the first update on September 7. This preview includes the top 30 ranked teams to begin the season and 20 more teams that are close to making the next jump into the group.

2A Boys Top 30 Teams

1 Morton

Coach: Joe Zeller | Mid Illini Conference

Preview – You discover the character of a team after a difficult race. Will the team let it affect them for the next time they step to the line, or will they have that chip on the shoulder not to let that happen to them again? This was the case for Morton at the end of last season. They looked great in winning their conference championship and then winning the Metamora Regional by six points ahead of the host school. It was a different story the following week as the two teams tied for the sectional. The tie was broken with the sixth runner tiebreak which belonged to Metamora.

How did they respond the following week at the ShaZam Club Championships? They went out to score 104 points in winning the meet by 50 points. "I think the athletes had to transition their normal mindset from the typical large pack racing to a more head-to-head strategy like we see in track," commented their coach, **Joe Zeller**. "Racing in flights taught them how to pick their man and gave them a more straight-forward understanding of how their placement relative to their counterpart affected the team score."

Morton is the team to watch in this classification. There is no doubt heading into this season that the Potters have an eye on the state championship especially with their entire top seven returning. This team is a mix of four seniors, a junior, and two sophomores. They do have a freshman **Christian Harris** who is the strongest runner coming out of their middle school program according to Zeller. In normal, you could see a freshman join the starting line-up. It is not the case with this team in this season.

Sophomores **Josh Weeks** and **Yonas Wuthrich** stepped up to the top two spots at the end of last season as freshmen. Seniors **Keegan Anderson**, **Cade Zobrist**, **Luke Kunz**, and **Tristan Sturham** give the team the strength in their pack along with **Chase Sauder** (JR). The team averaged just over 55 seconds on their top five at the end of last year. The confidence that they have entering this campaign has their top five split projected to start the year at 44 seconds. That could be tough to beat if it lowers by the time of the state meet.

"The track season extending into late June definitely impacted our summer plans," added Zeller. "However, rather than limit our general prep phase we opted to push our base work further into the school year than what is typical. I don't anticipate this having a significant impact on our performance this year."

Unless this team is hammered with injuries, this is the team that we could see take the trophy a short distance back to Morton. It is possible they could have three all-state runners and possibly all seven runners in the top 50 on State Saturday. They return to normal racing this fall. The development of their pack should be exciting to watch for. "A solid core of our team took motivation from their success last fall into the track season and into summer training," said Zeller. "The boys know they'll have a target on their back, and they will be up to the challenge."

2 Wheaton (St. Francis)

Coach: Scott Nelson | Metro Suburban Conference

Preview – Morton is ahead of the rest of this classification by a wide margin. There are at least 10 schools that have a 2A state trophy within their reach to the start the season. The first team of this group is St. Francis. If you were surprised of the fourth-place finish from the Spartans at the ShaZam Club Championships, you should not have. This program progressed on a positive up turn as the year went on winning their conference championship and then finishing second at both their own regional and the Latin Sectional.

Three of their five returning runners from last year were in the top five. **Luke Orwig**, who was the team's top runner at ShaZam, has graduated. Juniors **Daniel O'Connell** and **Andrew Hernandez** are the runners will look to take the leadership roles in races. Seniors **Chris Spahn**, **Chris Covone**, and **Nate Rodriguez** are also back giving this team a solid top five. Fellow seniors **Joseph Coco** and **Thomas Kolker** along with sophomore **Joseph Kolker** will have their chance to get into the starting lineup.

St. Francis had a 62 second split at ShaZam but that was off Orwig's front running. With this team entering the year with no real front runner, the Spartans will need to rely on a tight split with some old-fashioned pack running. Their top five split is projected to be only 35 seconds. The key to watch for is to see how that pack moves closer to the front by the time we get to November.

3 Mahomet-Seymour

Coach: Neal Garrison | Apollo Conference

Preview – This is a team that you can never count out until their last runner crosses the line. The Bulldogs were counted out after a bad race at the Richland Count Sectional when they finished fourth. Mahomet-Seymour bounced back the following week to finish second at the ShaZam Club Championships.

"I think running was one of the main ways that our runners felt more normal during COVID-19," said their coach, **Neal Garrison**. "It was their chance to get to be with each other and be kids. I think that time really allowed them to see the value of friendships during tough times."

Mahomet-Seymour returns their top five runners from last year's team along with two runners that had experience running in either the regional or sectional. **Kyle Nofziger** (SR) was the top runner for the Bulldogs throughout the season and should be again. He will be in position for an all-state finish. The next four runners were interchangeable in the top five. That is a good problem to have as a coach. **Jonah Singer** (SR) was the fifth runner at ShaZam. He was the third runner in the races before that. **Joseph Scheele** was the team's second runner most of last year and will look to get closer to Nofziger.

Taylor Fan (SR) and **Hayden Grotelueschen** (JR) round out the team's top five. **Karsten Weisath** (SR) had a great summer of training and could find his way into their top five. **Ben Wallace** (JR), **Justin Straub** (SR), and **Gabe Difanis** (JR) along with freshman **Lukas Nykas** give this team the depth and challenges in practice to make this team a state title contender.

Mahomet-Seymour won back-to-back state championships in 2016 and 2017. Their teams grew to the point where their top five was predominantly by seniors or upperclassmen. Such is the case with this team where senior leadership is all over the place on this squad. "Our summer training was really hurt by the length of the track season," added Garrison. To give them a chance to run well in track they didn't get in the training they often had in the past. This does worry me for the upcoming XC season. I also feel that the longer track season didn't allow our runners a chance to wind down during the summer as they had in the past."

Nofziger gives them an all-state runner in the front Scheele also has that chance to land in the top 25. What also will be good is this team should have a top five split under 55 seconds. The Bulldogs should be in contention for a state championship if their top five split drops below 46 seconds,

4 Grayslake (Central)

Coach: James Centella | Northern Lake County Conference

Preview – The 2A northern portion of the state on the Girls side has the makings of climbing up a mountain with obstacles along the way. The boys' side of the area is a little easier making a chance to make it to Peoria a little clearer. I would not be surprised if Grayslake Central is among the teams challenging for a state trophy. The Rams won the Antioch Sectional and then placed seventh at the Lakes Sectional. Five runners are back from that sectional team. Their finish at sectionals is not indicative of how talented they are.

"We changed from a 4-day Monday through Thursday program to a 3-day Monday, Wednesday, and Friday program," said their coach, **James Centella**. "This allowed us to go to Long on Monday, long repeats on Wednesday, and hills on Friday. We will have a very strong top 4 this year, possibly our second best top 4 in school history." It starts with two runners that could be in the top 15 at state this year **Bryan Vale** (SR) and **Trey Sato** (SO). Vale finished 17 at ShaZam and has the talent to finish in the top five. Sato was 21 in the same race only five seconds behind his

teammate. That could be great if that split is like that at the end of the year. They will miss potential top five runner **Chris Purgol** who moved out of state. They do have a good pack back with **John Vagnoni** (SO), **Kyle Bianchi** (JR), and **William Welty** (SO) who were all within six seconds of each other during their sectional race. **Zane Smith** (FR), **Camden Heavelyn** (JR), and **Kevin Atkinson** all can make this team stronger in their top seven.

Their three to six pack has the potential to be within 35 seconds of each other. The key will be getting that pack closer to Vale and Sato. Right, now it is projected to be at 52 seconds. Don't sleep on this team this fall. They will be in position when the time is right in October.

5 Burlington (Central)

Coach: Vince Neil | Fox Valley Conference

Preview – This could be a reloading year for the Rockets after finishing second in the Kaneland Regional, third in the Lakes Sectional and seventh at the ShaZam Club Championships. Four runners from their top seven are back from those teams. This team is deeper than people think.

"Our kids really stepped up despite a strange season," said their coach, **Vince Neil** about the 2020 season. "Distancing, mask wearing, limited resources etc. never stopped the boys from achieving their goals down the stretch. I am very proud of this Boys team."

Burlington Central will be strong in the front led by **Robert Perry** (SR) and **Yusuf Baig** (JR). Perry missed most of the track season due to an injury but appears ready to go for this fall. Baig improved during the track season and will be one of the top 2A runners in the state. Both Perry and Baig could finish in the top 20 in the state meet. **Zach Schmidt** (SR), who was one of the top 400-meter runners in the state, continues to get better and could be a strong cog in their top five machine. **Joseph Kowall** (SO), **Ryan Kries** (SO), **Adam Hinkleman** (SO), **Ethan Leegard** (SR), and **Kyle Farmer** (SR) continue to improve and will boost this team's top five.

Perry and Baig could be all-state. Schmidt also has the capability of finishing in the top 25. The pack behind these three runners needs to stay within 45 seconds of the trio for good things to happen in November.

6 Marion

Coach: Mykel Gary | South Seven Conference

Preview – Marion was a team in the shadows for most of the 2020 season. They could step into the statewide spotlight this fall. Six of the top seven runners that finished second in the Highland Regional, third at the Richland County Sectional, and 13th at the ShaZam Club Championships.

Dylon Nalley's emergence up front in his freshman season is one of the reasons why Marion is in this position entering this year. The sophomore ended his season finishing ninth at the ShaZam meet. Now in his second high school campaign, big things could happen for this runner. Seniors **Logan Morgan** and **Jack Gregory** lead the pack that could be almost a minute behind Nalley. **Cade Parks** (SO) and **Chris LaChiana** (SR) should again solidify the back end of this team's top five. **Noah Gilley** (SR) and juniors **Sean Hudspeth** and **Benja Stone** will play a part in the top seven for Marion as the year proceeds ahead.

The Wildcats are a good bet to make it to Detweiller Park in November. The key will be the pack behind Nalley which will need to be within 54 seconds of each other for this team to challenge for a trophy.

7 Chatham-Glenwood

Coach: Mike Garber | Central State Eight Conference

Preview – It could have been the pressure that the team had as one of the top 2A squads in that abnormal season. It did not help that before the state series began, the only races the Titans competed in were dual meets, triangular meets, and some quads. There was no conference meet to test this team. When they got to the regional meet, they did breeze through it at Jacksonville winning with 20 points. Then came the Richland County Sectional where they finished second to Mascoutah. They finished the 2020 campaign by placing third at the ShaZam Club Championships.

"I've always known our athletes are resilient, but they showed versatility and character all 2020 season," their coach, **Mike Garber** said. "It was tough to be stuck in Central Illinois at times, but we made the best out of a bad situation. The kids had fun, competed against one another, and looked to the future. I learned as much from them as they did from me. If you aren't moving forward as a coach, you are moving back. Perseverance is one of our big words in the Glenwood Cross Country program. They defined that term last season."

Having two runners from last year's top seven back would be defined by some schools as a rebuilding year. It is termed reloading by Chatham-Glenwood. **Drew Verenski** is geared up to have a strong junior season and will be one of the team leaders. **Samson Dessalines** (SR) ran a 1:55 on his team's 4x8 squad at state last June. That success could lead to bigger things this fall. **Lleyton Turk** (JR) should lead the pack behind their

front runners. **Caden Settlemoir** (SR), **Eli Morsch** (JR), **Dequan Page** (SR), and **Mateo Calderon** (JR) are some of the runners that will contend for a spot in the top five. **Carter Simmons** (FR) could make the jump from middle school to this team's top five. **Will Patzia** (FR) suffered a knee injury during summer training. He could be ready to help his team by the state series.

"We will be at our best at the end of the season," added Garber. "This group can absolutely be a Top 5 contender, but group growth is important and very necessary. I'm excited to see how things progress over the next two months." There could be some growing pains for this group early in the year. Those pains could grow to celebrations by the time they reach Detweiller Park.

8 Aurora (Marmion Academy)

Coach: Andrew Lifka | Chicago Catholic League

Preview – Andrew Lifka, a graduate of Marmion and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame last spring, steps in as the new coach replacing Paul McLeland who retired. Marmion ended last season finishing fourth in their league championships, and fifth in both the Kaneland Regional and Lakes Sectional. They concluded their season by placing 12th at the ShaZam Club Championships.

Four runners are back for the Cadets that have regional and sectional experience. **Mitchell Gratz** (JR) finished 47th at the ShaZam Meet and should be the team's top runner. There should be a close pack behind him with **Niraj Abraham** (SR), **Connor Carlson** (SO), **Jack Schokora** (SR), and **Tyler Sowers** (SO). **Lucas Chung** (SO) and **Nathan Brandon** (SO) are two more runners that will challenge for a top five spot.

Marmion will need to rely on pack running to make it to the state meet. They do have the talent to accomplish that. Their top five split is projected to be only 36 seconds to start this season. Keep an eye for this group to move up during races. They could move to a starting spot this November in Peoria.

9 Oak Park (Fenwick)

Coach: David Rill | Chicago Catholic League

Preview – Fenwick is a team that could possibly find themselves near the top five by the time we get to November. The Friars have the talent to make this happen returning their entire top seven that finished third at the St. Francis Regional, fourth at the Latin Sectional, and 17th at the ShaZam Club Championships. "During COVID-19, we as a team learned to be thankful for what was given to us as far as the seasons go," said their coach, **David Rill**. "We were happy for each meet and each practice we had together. The guys also stepped their training up a notch. It was impressive to see. They seemed to have a deeper desire to improve. We are really excited about what we are going to do this upcoming season."

A surprise happened for this team in Charleston as **Grayden Rill** (JR) and **Lee O'Bryan** (SR) earned all-state honors in the 2A State 800 Meter Run. That could translate to bigger things this fall. Rill will be challenged by **Zac Daley** (SR) and **Nate McKillop** (SO) for the #1 position. **Dean O'Bryan** (SO), **Carl Lukas** (SR), and **Chris Bajda** (JR) all have that big meet from last season which could be big for this squad. **Finley Huggins** (SR) should also be watched out for in the top seven.

Grayden Rill could be close to an all-state position. Fenwick will need to have a close pack on Rill with a 26 second split on the first four runners and 52 seconds overall on their top five. With St. Ignatius in 3A for the next two years, the Friars will challenge St. Francis for sectional supremacy.

10 Springfield

Coach: Dan Devlin | Central State Eight Conference

Preview – The Senators should be a team to watch in Central Illinois this season. Springfield finished third at both the Jacksonville Regional and Richland County Sectional. They bring back their entire top seven runners. **Ethan Sommers** (SR) was the team's top runner in the regional with Matthew Johnson (SR) leading the team in the sectional race. They should be within 10 seconds of each other in races. Three more seniors, **Jack Casey**, **Anthony Peralta**, and **Jacob Graham**, along with **Arnav Earne** (JR) and **Braden White** (SR) gives this team an experienced and strong nucleus in that top seven. Six of those runners are seniors. Springfield should challenge Normal University and Chatham-Glenwood for the conference title. They should also make it to the state with a tight pack of 25 seconds on their top three and a split of 62 seconds on their top five.

11 Deerfield

Coach: Scott Friedlander | Central Suburban League

Preview – Deerfield is one of those schools that is on the enrollment borderline switching from 2A to 3A and then back every couple of years. Now it is their turn in 2A where they could make some noise depending on which sectional meet they are placed in. The Warriors just missed making it into a3A sectional last fall placing sixth at the Loyola Regional. "Summer training has been good for the most part. We've made some adjustments to our training, but last year we ran better in September than October anyway, so jokingly a one-month delay might be exactly what we need," said

Coach Scott Friedlander. "But really, we're just approaching this season with extra patience. We won't be as ready for early season meets as usual, same as everyone else, and we need to be fine with that. And now that we're in 2A instead of 3A, our season may go later than usual."

Deerfield returns four runners from that regional team. A big concern for the Warriors is that their projected top runner Ryan Bernstein came down with an injury during his sectional track race and still is a question mark according to his coach entering this fall. This team is senior oriented up front with **Lucas Moscovitz**, **Cole Bernstein**, and **Eric Lakemaker** leading the way. Juniors **Lucas Goldenberg**, **Brandon Barber**, and **Drew Spiegel** are next in line along with **Ethan Blacher** (SR).

Even without Ryan Bernstein to start the season, the talent is still around for Deerfield to make it to the state meet. Some big pack running will have to be involved. "Expectations for this season are high. We've always been looking forward to this season because our fastest class in a long time is now seniors. And now that it coincides with a reclassification to 2A, we think we can make a real splash on November 6," added Friedlander. "When we met to discuss goals and create a plan for the season, I started talking about the gravity behind winning a state trophy, and the seniors shook me off and started talking about winning a state championship. However, despite being senior-heavy, we feel inexperienced as far as the State Meet goes since these seniors weren't even on the team the last time Deerfield had anyone in the State Meet. And missing out on meets at Detweiller last year hurts, especially when some of the top 2A contenders get to race there several times per year. These guys have run Detweiller at Dark more than Detweiller in the daytime. So yes, expectations are high, but there's a lot to overcome."

12 Maple Park (Kaneland)

Coach: Chad Clarey | Interstate Eight Conference

Preview – Kanleand finished on a high note in 2020 winning their conference meet and their own regional as well as finishing second in the Lakes Sectional. They do have four runners back from their state series teams as well as a strong freshman group. Big things can happen for this team in 2021.

"Christian Phillips, one of our seniors on the team this fall proposed a slogan for our season: "Drip or Drown," said their coach, Chad Clarey. "This slogan is a motto about overcoming adversity. You can either choose to adapt to life's changes, or not. I believe that our runners are going to have to continue to overcome adversity, as we are not out of the woods with COVID-19 or any of the variants. We will choose to "drip" a little bit and fill one another's cups along the way."

Any of three runners could step into the #1 spot for the Knights. It could be the three seniors, **Nolan Allen**, **Christian Philips**, or **Logan Cunz**, or it could be freshman **Evan Nosek** who ran 4:48 in middle school. We could see Nosek near the front by the time we get to the state series. **Brady Babka** (JR) continued to improve over the summer and could be in the top five. **Trevor Neal** (JR), sophomores **Collin Reuimann**, **Palmer Behrends**, and **Chase Brennan** along with freshman **Zachary Murdoch** could challenge for top seven spots. **David Valkanov** (SO) transferred from Oswego and could make an immediate impact in the top five.

"We expect to see our seniors grow into their new leadership role and try to keep their pack split 1-3 at about 20 seconds," said Clarey. "Depending on the health and development of a few other "pieces" to the puzzle, we hope to see a scoring pack of about :50-:60. Our juniors become key components to making that push toward the seniors. We've seen solid participation all summer from our junior class, and every class for that matter. We hope to see a hungry frosh soph level that is pushing hard toward the back of the varsity packs."

13 Cary-Grove

Coach: Layne Holter | Fox Valley Conference

Preview – **Cary-Grove** is another one of those schools that has been moved by the IHSA from 3A down to 2A for the next two seasons. The Trojans were fifth in a tough Fox Valley Conference last year. They finished fifth in the 3A Grant Regional before placing 15 at the Cary Grove Sectional. Four of their top five runners are back for what could be an interesting year for the team.

Ian Barnes (SR) steps in as the top runner for this team. He could be on the cusp of making it into the top 25 by the time we get to November. Fellow seniors **James Grant** and **Dominic Garrard** will lead the group behind Barnes. **Kyle Nordengren** (SO), **Anthony Zamudio** (JR), **Logan Hubka** (SR), and **Videt Dureja** (SO) are projected to be in their top seven. Their top five split is projected to be near 100 seconds. Their second through five spread could be near 50 seconds. Keep an eye on those splits for this team as the season goes on.

14 Washington

Coach: Tom Smith | Mid Illini Conference

Preview – The Panthers could make some noise first in their conference and then during the state series. Washington missed out on the sectionals last year finishing seventh at the Metamora regional one point behind Dunlap. They still would not have advanced if we were using the normal rules of six teams out of regionals. This could be a different year for this group as their entire top seven returns.

Jackson Ward (SR) is primed to have a big season. He could be among the top 25 runners in the state. **Eddie Papis** (JR) and **Sam Tellefson**

(SO) give their team a solid 2-3 behind Ward. **Noah Johnson** (SO) and **Milo Rinckenberger** are also projected to be back in the top five. Papis and Tellefson need to stay within 30 seconds of Ward. Considering Ward will be up front getting low numbers, this would be big. Their top five split at 81 seconds would need to come down to 66 seconds for good things to happen for this team at state series time.

15 Belvidere (North)

Coach: Ken Husser | NIC-10 Conference

Preview – This is one of those schools that it will be interesting to follow this season just to see how much they improve. Belvidere North could be one of those teams to challenge for a top spot in their sectional. All seven runners are back from the team that won the NIC-10 Conference Meet, finished third in the Belvidere Regional, and then ninth at the Lakes Sectional.

"We had a good summer of training with a core group that included runners at all levels," said their coach, **Ken Husser**. "Summer training started a little later due the late ending of the track season and there have been a couple of minor changes, but we have stuck to what we feel is important. We want to be better than last year and expand the size of the team. We will have to see how everything plays out with some of the new runners, but we would like to qualify for state, we may have the ability to be a top 15 team and if everything falls into place maybe sneak into the top 10."

This team has the potential of having a tight pack with a split close to 35 seconds. It could mean different runners take over the #1 spot like last year when **Nick Lenzen** (SR), **Caden McNulty** (SR), and **Orlando Hernandez** (JR) were at or near the front. Seniors **Brandon Massman**, **Luke Smith**, and **Caden Lindman** will all be part of the top five. Freshman **Jesse Kramer** who had foot surgery at the beginning of summer. Husser thinks he might be in the top seven by state series. **Evan Horgan** (JR) and **Braedon Brown** (SO) both ran track last spring. They could possibly also contribute. Belvidere North should have a tight pack. A goal is moving that pack up in races.

16 Geneseo

Coach: Todd Ehlert | Western Big Six Conference

Preview – This is a squad that could be on the verge of doing great things this fall. The Maple Leafs took home the Western Big Six Conference title, finishing second at the Morris Regional, and then placing fifth at the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional. Things look good for Geneseo with five of their top seven runners coming back.

"I loved the small meets last year," said **Todd Ehlert** reflecting on last year. "We are going to try the old schedule one more time and then maybe go to a dual triangular set up next year and limit the larger meets. Last year was exciting and the guys want to build on their awesome year."

Geneseo will miss their #1 runner **William Plumley** who graduated. **Justin Johnson** (SR) and **Gavin Allison** (JR) could step into that first spot. **Tyler Gehl** (JR), **Isaac Kuster** (SR), and **Cooper Schaad** (SO) will be in the hunt for the next three spots. Geneseo has a good group of freshmen entering the school. The best could be **Dylan Gehl** who could crack into the team's top seven.

17 Chicago (Mather)

Coach: Joe Sullivan | Chicago Public League

Preview – Mather has a good shot of making it out of the Chicago area 2A sectional. Their improvement over the past year justifies the statement. The Rangers finished fifth in the Chicago Public League Meet and were the second 2A team to finish behind Senn. Mather then finished third in their own regional and seventh in the Latin Sectional. Five runners from that sectional team are back. "Our senior captains **Kevin Gee** and **Yasir Hirsi** set a great example of the dedication we are looking for. They pushed the rest of our team to be more invested," said their coach, **Joe Sullivan**. "We had a drop in numbers with COVID, but the small group that stuck with it became more dedicated at the end of last season and into the winter. The results started to show on the track this spring with some big PRs. We began to understand as a group that if you commit to something bigger than yourself, you can achieve things together that would never have been possible on your own. Though it continues to be a struggle at times, our team culture has kept moving in the right direction. What we achieve this season will be a direct result of the level of commitment the members of our team make to each other."

Hirsi and Gee give Mather a strong du in the front. Hirsi came on strong last fall until another injury forced him to slow it down during track. He should have a strong senior season. Gee ran 4:21 for 1600-meters last spring and should be right with Hirsi. **Leo Camargo** (SR), **Emmanuel Nwatu** (SR), and **Muhyaldin Ali** (JR) give the Rangers a strong top five. A healthy Hirsi makes it a guarantee that this Chicago school makes it to Peoria.

"We had a pretty slow build up this summer," added Sullivan. "With track going later this year we did not really get going until July and we have had a lot of guys with various commitments (camps, jobs, family visits etc) that prevented us from training as a group. But in the last few weeks our varsity group has started to put in good miles and round into form. Our focus will be on improving over the course of the season. We have a senior heavy team with a lot of guys who want to make the most of their final seasons. We plan on running for each other and having a lot of fun."

18 Metamora

Coach: Gene Jones | Mid Illini Conference

Preview – It could be a rebuilding year for Metamora with their top three runners including **Ian O’Laughlin** all graduated. The Redbirds had a great 2020 finishing second in their conference, finishing second in their own regional, winning the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional on a sixth-r tiebreak, and finishing fifth at the ShaZam Club Championships. Three runners are back from their state series top seven. Metamora still will among the top 20 schools and will challenge for their conference title because that is what that program does.

The key this fall is to find a front runner on this squad. It could be **Nathan Haines** (SO) was their fourth runner last year as a freshman. It could be either **Andy Foster** (SR) and **Carson Cowling** (JR) who have big meet experience. **Zeke Metcalfe** (SR) is out for the team after playing soccer. He could contribute. **Nate Theiler** (JR) and **Carter Grantham** (SR) could also fight for top seven spots. Freshmen **Trae Helwig**, **Oliver Truelove**, and **Yishak Weinman** could all be in the top seven by the time Metamora gets into the state series according to their Coach **Gene Jones**.

19 Dunlap

Coach: Chris Friedman | Mid Illini Conference

Preview – The Eagles just missed out on sectionals last year placing sixth at the Metamora Regional. Five teams made it out in the COVID-19 year. This season it is again six. Five runners are back from that team. Two of their projected top seven will not be on the team with #2 runner **Nick Sell** returning to soccer and **Sam Blasczyk** moving to Minnesota. **Henry Welsh** (JR) had a strong sophomore season and should again be the team’s top runner. **Noah Hopkins** (SR) rebounded in track after a sub-par cross-country season and could be close to Welsh according to their coach **Chris Friedman**. **Brandt Adreon** (JR), **Braden Cox** (JR), and **Aiden Mohr** (JR) could be among the top seven. **Andrew Luebbers** (SR) did not run last fall but had a good track season and could be a plus this fall. Freshmen **Josh Mu** and **Jacob Gladstone** could be a part of their top seven by mid-October.

20 Arlington Heights (St. Viator)

Coach: Wayne Edelman | East Suburban Catholic Conference

Preview – St. Viator has made it to the state meet nine of the past possible ten years. This could be another trip back to Peoria. The Lions won the Mather Regional and then finished sixth at the Latin School. Five runners are back from their team in 2020. **Michael Schumacher** (SR) should emerge as one of the top Class 2A runners this fall and will be the team’s top runner. **Lucas Doland** (SR) was the team’s #2 runner last year. He had a good track season and should close the gap on Schumacher. **Alex Marchese** (SO) and **Peter McLeod** (SO) along with **Ryan Li** (SR) give this squad a good top five. Ignore the top five split o this group especially with Schumacher up front. The team top five split is projected to be near 150 seconds. That should come down during the year.

21 Vernon Hills

Coach: Steve Szabo | Central Suburban League

Preview – The Cougars lost their top two runners from last year to graduation. Vernon Hills returns five from the team that finished second at the Antioch Regional and sixth at the Lakes Sectional. **Brady Clegg** (JR) has continued to improve over the past year and could step into the #1 spot. The pack should be good behind Clegg with **Charlie Blackmer** (SO), **Erick Herrera** (JR), **Igor Manduziuk** (SR), and **Nathan Fajtsch** (SR) part of that group. You could possibly see freshman **Brady Koetz** in their top seven by the state series meets. This team should have a tight pack with a split just under 40 seconds.

22 Lemont

Coach: Jon DeGuzman | South Suburban Conference Blue

Preview – Lemont would have qualified for the state meet last season finishing sixth at the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional if there was a state meet. They won the Morris Regional the week before. We could get a better indication of how good this team is with a normal routine of meets. The Indians return five runners from last year’s sectional team.

“With the IHSA Summer Season ending in June, we wanted to hit the ground running, for lack of a better expression,” said Lemont coach Jon DeGuzman. “Our summer days were limited and so the attitude was to attack our distance training along with our speed workouts and strength conditionings. Our newcomers stepped up to this mentality very well, and we hope to see our veteran and Varsity runners embed this approach, not only as the season begins, but as it progresses as well.”

TJ Polen (JR) will step up as the team’s top runner. “TJ continues to show improvement and dedication to his training and race performance,” said

his coach. "He has shown focus and desire to become one of the elite runners of the State." **Andrew Tilly** (SR) and **Jack Davey** (SO) have showed improvement over the summer. **Liam Carey** (JR) and **Evan Schiffman** (SR) could step up into the next two spots. Polen could get into the top 25. Keeping their top five split under 70 seconds is something to keep an eye on.

23 Sycamore

Coach: Michael Lambdin | Interstate Eight Conference

Preview – The Spartans ended last season finishing fourth at the Kaneland Regional and then placing tenth at the Lakes Sectional. Only three of their sectional runners are back. This team should have confidence from their 4x8 win at state last June. They may need more than that to make it to Peoria.

"Our summer running program did not begin until July, requiring some adjustments to mesh with the upcoming cross-country season," said coach Michael Lambdin. The boys have made the off-season preparation a priority, regularly attending team runs and running on their own when schedules conflicted. I'm confident the boys will run well this year. It's just a question of how well? We will look to be at our best when the championship meets arrive. Hopefully we will be in position to race in November."

Nicholas Kocher (SR) was the team's second runner in their final two races and should step up to the #1 spot. **Naif Al Harby** (SO) and **Ethan Solfisberger** (JR) are the two other runners back. **Aidan Ferrell** (SR), **Magnus Keswani** (SR), and **Jordan Wilkerson** (SR) are the next runners that will be in the top seven mix. Sycamore's Middle School won the IESA Sectional for the first time. Lambdin believes that **Phoenix Calabrese**, **Corey Goff**, **Landon Taylor**, and **Kaiden Von Schnase** could help the team by the state series. Any of those freshmen could be in the top seven.

24 Crystal Lake (Prairie Ridge)

Coach: Judd Shutt | Fox Valley Conference

Preview – Prairie Ridge may be ranked during the season. It does not mean that they will make it to state considering how deep in talent that their sectional area is. The Wolves placed fourth in the Antioch Regional and then 11th at the Lakes Sectional. Five runners that got experience in the regional and sectional meets are back.

"The Covid-19 season filled with duals and triangulars allowed our youngsters to work with teammates and take risks in a less overwhelming racing environment," said Prairie Ridge coach **Judd Shutt**. "I'm excited to see the large step forward our team, and particularly our sophomores, can take with Saturday invitationals."

Will Gelon should emerge as one of the top sophomores in the state and the top runner again on this team. **Ian Mahon** (JR), **Daniel Janquiman** (SR), **Kevin Koch** (JR), and **Will Green** (SO) will be some of the runners that you could see in the top five for this team.

25 Lincoln

Coach: Andrew Hite | Apollo Conference

Preview – Could the Railsplitters make it to the state meet this fall? Call 2020 a practice session as they gear up to make that effort. Lincoln ended their season finishing fourth in the Jacksonville Regional and 14th at the Richland County Sectional. On paper, it seems like a long way off. Maybe it is closer than they think especially with six runners back from their sectional team.

Brendan Heitzig (JR) had a breakout sophomore season that included qualify for the 3200 Meter Run at the state meet. He again will lead this team and could make it individually to state if the team does not. **Garrett Slack** (SR), **Jake Bivin** (JR), and **Drake Rutledge** (SR) should be the next three runners separated by close to a minute. Either **Dylan Gowin** (SO) or **Aidan Gowin** (SO) could step into the fifth spot. A top five split of 76 seconds or faster could make it possible for a state trip for this team.

26 Bethalto (Civic Memorial)

Coach: Jake Peel | Mississippi Valley Conference

Preview – The Eagles are a little of a surprise making it into the 2A Top 30. Civic Memorial placed fifth in the Jacksonville Sectional followed by placing 12th at the Richland County Sectional. It is not a surprise that a team with six runners back from their sectional team is in this position.

"I think this is going to be a very interesting fall," said the BCM Coach **Jake Peel**. "With the season going into late June, it's been a blessing in a way to be ahead of where we were this time last year. The boys were able to hit higher summer mileage and have a better base heading into the season. Our expectations for this fall are very high. We have some big team goals to achieve, things that CM boys have never done before. How

well we handle our own expectations and navigating uncharted territory will be the key to our success this fall."

Jackson Collman (JR) became the first distance runner since 1991 to qualify for the state meet from this school in the 3200 Meter Run. He will lead this team in races. Aslan Henderson (SR) and DJ Dutton (SO) could get closer to Collman in races. Sophomores **Justice Eldridge** and **Lucas Naugle** will be some of the runners to watch in their top five. This team will need to keep their top five split off Collman at 50 seconds or lower to achieve their goals and make it to the state meet.

27 Bartonville (Limestone)

Coach: Brian Glaza | Mid Illini Conference

Preview – Limestone has the top runner in Class 2A and top hopes that they can make it to the state meet as a team. The Rockets finished fifth in the Metamora Regional and then came back to finish ninth at the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional. Four runners from the sectional race are back along with a group of freshmen to give this team a boost.

"With spring sports ending late, training was quite a bit different than previous years, mainly because I felt everyone, including myself, needed some rest after the season," the Limestone Coach **Brian Glaza** said. "We haven't quite progressed in workouts to where we would normally be at this time of summer, but the boys are getting better each week. I expect the group to perform better once the school year starts and they get their routines down. Hopefully, with commitment to consistency, this group will continue to elevate themselves and leave their best races for the end of the season."

It does help when you have **Wilson Georges** as your top runner. The favorite to win the 2A title will make it easy for their fans to score their team: add the four other runners plus 1. Reese Dusek (JR) should lead the pack behind Georges along with **Clay Bell** (JR) and **Lloyd Perannet** (SO). Freshmen **Jack Manley** and **Caiden Bell** could give a boost to the team's top seven along with Seniors **Max Chrestensen** and **Clay Schneider** out for cross-country for the first time.

28 Champaign (Central)

Coach: Steven Kesler | Big 12 Conference

Preview – Seven of the eight returning runners for the Maroons are underclassmen. Central will look to improve on their third-place finish at the Taylorville Regional and ninth-place finish at the Richland County Sectional. **Peter Smith** (JR) looks to be the #1 runner on this team followed by **Cooper Sweet** (JR) and **Fynn Bright** (SO). **Nick Bonn** (SR) and **Victor Smith** (SR) are projected to be in the next two scoring positions. The Maroons will rely on pack running with a top five split at 42 seconds. The key is moving that pack closer to the front to better what they did a year ago.

29 Mattoon

Coach: Troy Haacke | Apollo Conference

Review – The Green Wave is on the border starting their season of making it to state or finishing in the top 10 of their sectional. Coach **Troy Haacke** learned before the start of their season that two of his returning top five runners **Quincy Hamilton** and **Trent Hettinger** will return to soccer this fall instead of cross-country. Mattoon finished fourth in the Taylorville Regional and 13 at the Richland County Sectional. They now return three runners from that team. **Brock Davee** (SR) will be their featured runner this fall. Dave continues to show improvement in his running. He should make it to Peoria individually. Davee would rather have his teammates around him. There could be close to a 90 second drop off before a pack led by **Sam Ferrar** (SR) and **Tyler Warner** (SR). Work will need to be done on that pack that has a projected split of a 68 seconds from their second to fifth runners. They have time to get that split down.

30 Lake Villa (Lakes)

Coach: Travis Shepherd | North Lake County Conference

Preview – Lakes will have some work to do to get into one of the top seven teams in their sectional. The Eagles finished third last year at the Antioch Regional and then 12 at their own sectional. Five runners that ran in the state series meets are back. "Athletes were on their own for the first half of the Summer. We had camp from July 12 to 29. It's clear that some athletes have put in some great miles while others have clearly not," said their coach, **Travis Shepperd**. "Having a late track season slowed the beginning of our training, but we had a really nice camp. Overall, I would say the Summer was a mixed bag. Going into the season we have yet to have some athletes take the lead and really give our team a sense of identity. I anticipate we will struggle a little until we gel more."

Micah Lind (JR), **Travis Whitehead** (SO), and **Gavin Murrie** (SR) should be the top runners for this team separated by less than 10 seconds. Juniors **Quin Maloney** and **Zack Wigginton** should lead the next pack. The northern sectional area is talented but at the same time wide-open. Their pack will need to get closer than 55 seconds on which they are projected at right now to be in the hunt for one of those seven sectional

finishes.

Teams to Watch (In Alphabetical Order)

Champaign (Centennial)

Coach: Jeremy Owen | Big 12 Conference

Preview – The Chargers missed making it to the sectionals by nine points finishing seventh at the Taylorville Regional. Four runners are back from that regional team. They will miss a top five runner from last year **Payton Wendell** who transferred to 1A St. Joseph-Ogden. **Aaron Hendron** (JR) should be the team's top runner. **Jose Beuschlen** (JR), **Taten Ludwig** (SO), and **Andrew Hemming** (JR) are their returning runners. This team looks young with no seniors projected in their top seven. This season getting into sectionals could be a primer of bigger things for this team in 2022.

Chicago (Brother Rice)

Coach: Tom Wazio | Chicago Catholic League

Preview – The Crusaders could be in the hunt to qualify for the state meet. Brother Rice won the Agricultural Science Regional in 2020 before finishing eighth at the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional. It might take a little rebuilding for Brother Rice with three of their top runners having graduated. "We took our usual 2 weeks off and began the first week of July," said their coach, **Tom Wazio**. "I feel like we've had a 'normal' summer of training albeit shorter. I'm hoping the success that these guys had during the track season will carry over and keep the momentum going into the fall. The team has set what I believe to be realistic goals. After a disappointing sectional performance in 2020, they want to continue the regional win streak & qualify for the state meet. It will not be easy, but if they trust each other and commit to giving their best in all aspects of their lives, the sky's the limit." It could be pack running to start the season led by **Connor Melean** (SR), **Charley Duggan** (SO), **Charlie Walsh** (JR), **Sean McNally** (SR), and **Jack Antonsen** (SR). The split is projected to be around 42 seconds. It could be a Peoria trip maker if that pack moves towards the front during the season.

Chicago (Payton Prep)

Coach: Daniel Dziubski | Chicago Public League

Preview – The Grizzlies are on the verge of making it to the state meet after finishing third at the St. Ignatius Regional and ninth at the Latin Sectional. They return five from that sectional team. "We had 62 men on the team last year because of Covid-19. A significant crew for a 2A CPS school, some soccer transplants, and a few guys just looking to get out of the house from lockdown," said their coach, **Dan Dziubski**. "The guys are rebuilding the team and the team culture is growing, the men are bonding, dedicated, and have raised the bar for achievement as a team. The men learned that they're capable of greatness! We had 18 men on our roster for the state track meet including 2x1600, 1x3200, 4x800, 4x400. The third biggest roster of any IL 2A school. We eliminated the myth of the state meet being an unachievable accomplishment for a city school! The guys got a taste of the state meet experience in track and are hungry to run at Detweiller this Fall."

Ritvik Vinek (JR) again should be the top runner for this team and is within reach of an all-state finish. **Griffin Braunreiter** (SR), **Mark Zhu** (SR), **Elias Wilken** (SR), and **Koen Powell** (SR) appear to be the top five runners on this team. The split needs to be come on the top five (projected at 103 seconds) for this team to make a Detweiller appearance in November. **Adam Palumbo**, who was a member of York's 1999 state championship team, joins the Payton Coaching Staff this fall.

Crystal Lake (Central)

Coach: Bill Eschman | Fox Valley Conference

Preview – It should be a rebuilding year for the Tigers after winning their conference meet, Belvidere Regional, and Lakes Sectional before finishing 10 at the ShaZam Club Championships. **Karson Hollander** (JR) and **Daniel Hamill** (SR) are the only returning runners from those teams. That is a good duo to build from. Hollander could emerge as one of the top runners in Class 2A. He finished 12 at ShaZam. Hamill finished 28 seconds behind his teammate in that race. The senior could also earn all-state honors. **Will Foster** (SR) will lead the pack behind those two runners and will lead the pack that could be more than a minute behind with a split in the group just the same.

Darien (Hinsdale South)

Coach: Jim Dickerson | West Suburban Conference Gold

Preview – The Hornets ended last year finishing fifth at the St. Francis Regional and then placing eighth at the Latin Sectional. A key to this team is finding a new #1 runner to replace graduated **Julian Watson**. Three runners are back from their top seven. "Our varsity group was very

consistent, and we will likely be able to utilize some good pack running this season," said their coach, **Jim Dickerson**. "Because none of this year's returners had an eye on competing past Sectionals in track, and some didn't even run track, we got right into summer training after track but shifted dramatically from mid-distance training for most of the guys into base training, or what I referred to as "just running," which they love to do. Some needed some rest and took it, but we start the season fresh and in good shape. My expectations are high for a tight 1-5 or 1-7 split, and tons of improvement. It is a very young but somewhat experienced group, with literally one senior on the roster."

It could be more reloading for this team. **Leyton Mueller** (SO), **Quartus Rassi** (SR), and **Kayden Miller** (JR) all missed last season due to injuries. **Andrew Peterson** (FR) is a newcomer that could be in the top seven by the end of October. **Adam Fournier** (JR) and **Aaron Koehler** (JR) return and will challenge for that top spot. **Mason White** (SO) is also back and could be in the top five. This team is young and will take their lumps early. Hinsdale South could be tough when we get to state series time.

East Peoria

Coach: Brandon Shaver | Mid Illini Conference

Preview – The Raiders return their entire top seven that finished ninth last year at a tough Metamora Regional last year. There are only two seniors back in their top eight and there could be some growing pains early in this season. **Matthew Gray** (JR) again should emerge as the team's top runner. **Bailey Webster** (SR), **Seth Bellinger** (SR), and **Zach Alt** (JR) lead that pack behind Gray. A tight split of under 50 seconds should benefit this team this fall.

Freeport

Coach: Shane Orlow | NIC-10 Conference

Preview – The Pretzels finished fifth at the Belvidere Regional and 14 at the Lakes Sectional to end last season. All their runners that were in the sectional race are back led by **Bayley Pierce** (SR) and **Tyler Brooks** (SR). **Elias Lassandro** (SR), **Andrew Weisenberg** (SR), and **Aiden Brobst** (SO) were the team's other scorers in that race and return. The team had a tight pack last year which they hope to continue and move up in races.

Glen Ellyn (Glenbard South)

Coach: Doug Gorski | Upstate Eight Conference

Preview – The Raiders ended their 2020 season finishing fourth in the St. Francis Regional and fifth at the Latin Sectional. Prospects look good that they could make a trip to Peoria with five runners from that sectional team back for 2021. "With 5 of our top runners returning, we hope to repeat as the Up State 8 Conference Champions," said their coach, **Doug Gorski**. "South Elgin, Elgin and Glenbard East will be tuff to beat but the guys have a goal of defending their title this year. Most likely we will be in very changeling 2A Regional and Sectional meets this year, but the goal is to qualify for the State Meet as a team again this season." **Caleb Walker** (JR) should be the team's top runner followed by **Ethan Woods** (SR) and **Ryan Chung** (JR). The team split needs to go under 70 seconds for their top five to make it out of their sectional.

Grayslake (North)

Coach: Anthony DeStephano | North Lake County Conference

Preview – The Knights missed being one of the five teams to advance out of sectional last year by seven points finishing sixth at the Antioch Regional. Things should change this fall with six teams advancing. Grayslake North returns five runners from that regional team including their top three runners. **Armani Diaz** (SR) and **Sergio Janneau** (SO) advanced to sectionals and should be the team's top runners. Diaz has a good chance to qualify for state individually if the team does not get there. **Owen Davies** (JR) gives the Knights a strong #3 runner.

Jacksonville

Coach: Brock Van Bebber | Central State Eight Conference

Preview – It could be close if the Crimson advance into the sectional meet. They did not a year ago finishing eighth in their own regional. All their top seven runners are back led by **Nathan McCombs** (SR) and **Braylon Overton** (JR). This team should have a top five split under 60 seconds perhaps near 50 by the time they get to the state series. **Kellen Overton** (SR) leads that group behind the top three.

LaSalle-Peru

Coach: John Beatty | Interstate Eight Conference

Preview – The Cavaliers are a good bet to make it out of their own regional in 2021 but it could get tough to advance out of the sectional. LaSalle-Peru finished fourth in their regional last year and placed 11th at the Peoria Notre Dame Sectional. This is a solid team with their top five runners from sectionals all back. **Ryan Hartman** (SR) will be the team's top runner. He is a good bet to make it to Peoria after qualifying for state last June in the 3200 Meter Run. **Matt Beard** (SR) is a solid #2 runner behind Hartman. **Erik Garcia** (JR) leads the pack behind the two runners. Their top five split could be over two minutes off the lead from Hartman. That will need to come down especially with the three through five pack moving closer to Beard.

Lisle (Benet Academy)

Coach: Kevin Reinecker | East Suburban Catholic Conference

Preview – The Redwings had a good conclusion to the 2020 season winning the St. Francis Regional, placing third at the Latin Sectional, and then finishing ninth at the ShaZam Club Championships. They do lose their top runner **Niklas Anderson** to graduation along with two other runners from the top five. Three other runners are back. Benet could have a solid two in the front as **Dominic Ullmer** (SR) and **Ryan Amedi** (SO) were only separated by one second in their regional race. **Sean Kingston** (SR) is the other runner back and should be 40 to 45 seconds behind their top two. There have been several runners waiting for their moment in the top seven including juniors **Logan Osborne** and **Ben Farrell**. Their three to five pack should be near 30 seconds. It just needs to get closer to Ullmer for Benet Academy to have a chance at the state meet.

Mascoutah

Coach: Darren Latham | Mississippi Valley Conference

Preview – It would have been the perfect year for Mascoutah had there been a state meet. The Indians won their conference meet and then their regional meet. They then won the Richland County Sectional over pre-race favorite Chatham-Glenwood. They ended their year by finishing sixth at the ShaZam Club Championships. Things changed for this year with only two runners back from those teams. They will build off #1 runner **Lance Miller** (SR) and #2 runner **Sam LaJoye** (SR). Both could end up as individual all-state runners. There is more than a minute gap before projected third runner **Trystn Hammer** (JR). The split could be huge between three and seven near two minutes. A new group of freshmen could help with that split to put this team in contention for a state berth.

Niles (Notre Dame)

Coach: John Barrett | East Suburban Catholic Conference

Preview – A team to keep an eye on especially with nine of their top ten scheduled back. The Dons finished second in the Mather Regional and followed that up by placing tenth at the Latin Sectional. **Brady Verdon** (JR) and **Liam Newton** (SR) lead this young group. **Luke Davey** (JR), **Jack Armour** (SO), and **Ryan McPhillips** (SR) are next in the top five. The top five split is projected to be near two minutes to start the year. Cutting that time down by 30 seconds as the season goes on could be a god thing for Notre Dame.

Olney (Richland County)

Coach: Shannon Hough | Little Illini Conference

Preview – The team that can be the most dangerous is the squad that has no expectations and goes out and hammers it on the course. This could be one of those teams. The Tigers ended last season finishing second at the Taylorville Regional and then fifth at their own sectional. Four runners of their sectional team are back. "It's been a crazy summer, but it's the same for everyone with the late ending to track season," said their coach, **Shannon Hough**. "We haven't changed in how we've handled summer training. We don't want to rush the process. We feel that we have a solid team, not high numbers, and we hope to stay injury free and running our best during the state series." Brooks Julian (SR) emerged as the team's #1 runner at ShaZam which should continue in 2021. **Jarret Doll** (JR) is the only runner back from their top five. **Drew Blank** (SR) leads the next pack with possibly freshmen **Carson Bissey** and **Kadyn Cooley** a part of it.

Peoria (Notre Dame)

Coach: Dan Gray | Big 12 Conference

Preview – It could be a rebuilding time for the Irish with three runners back that ran in the state series. Notre Dame placed third in both the Metamora Regional and then their own sectional in 2020. **Jac Couri** (SR) appears to be the runner that could step into the #1 spot followed by **Trey Socha** (SR), **Brian Coulter** (SR), and **Joey Cave** (JR). There are six to seven runners that could possibly challenge for the next three spots. The team is projected to have a two-minute top five split to start the season. That should come down by the time they reach the state series.

Rochester

Coach: Bill Owens | Central State Eight Conference

Preview – The Rockets are a team that we could see at Detweiller Park in November. Rochester finished second at the Jacksonville Regional and sixth at the Richland County Sectional. There is a good group of six runners back ready to take the next step up. "All the boys trained pretty steady this summer," said their coach, **Bill Owens**. "We are excited to be back to a normal schedule and compete against a few more teams than just our conference."

Seniors **Adam Gribbens** and **Ryan Gustafson** look to be the top runners on this team. **Charlie Archey** (SR), **Spencer Loy** (SR), and **Max Wilbur** (SR) give the team good leadership in the pack. **Jack Arends** (SO) could be the runner that leads the group behind their top two.

Sterling

Coach: Greg Hendrix | Western Big Six Conference

Preview – The Warriors just missed a sectional appearance last year finishing seventh at the Kaneland Regional. They would like to better last year's finish with five runners back from that team. **Thomas Holcomb** (JR) was the team's second runner last year and should jump not the #1 runner position. Seniors **John Cid** and **Cameron Taylor** should lead the pack behind Holcomb. A top five split of 70 seconds or lower can be expected from this team.

Urbana

Coach: Forrest Farokhi | Big 12 Conference

Preview - The Tigers ended last season finishing fifth at the Taylorville Regional and then 15th at the Richland County Sectional. This team has some good returning runners along with a freshman who could be a difference maker. "Our expectations remain in line with a typical season. We hope to train hard, build a sense of family within the team, and enjoy the fruits of our labor when it matters most in the post season," said their coach, **Forrest Farokhi**. "Urbana has made a name for themselves over the last several years. Our goal is to remain competitive, with the intention to send a full team to state (something that hasn't happen for Urbana for decades). We are close." **Sam Lambert** (SR) gives the team a solid leader in the front. I would not write him out of finishing in the top 25 in the state meet. **Parker Mitchell** (SR) should be close to Lambert giving them a solid first two. Freshman **Dereje Jahiel** has picked up quickly to high school running according to his coach and could be a pivotal member of this team.

Woodstock

Coach: Jay Fuller | Kishwaukee River Conference

Preview – Four runners are back from the team that finished second at the Belvidere Regional and eighth at the Lakes Sectional. **Dylan Hanson** was the team's third runner but should step u as their team's top runner. **Alex Wickersheim** (SR), **Max Hodory** (SR), and **Jakob Crown** (SO) were on the team's top seven last year and give this team a good top five. "The boys are looking to win their 3rd conference title in a row," said their coach, **Jay Fuller**. "The Covid-19 season was hard on the development of the younger runners. Basically, we had individual races (time trials) and they didn't get that feeling of competing against a big field of runners."

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