

Programs are making a mad dash to the top

COLIN LIKAS highlights 10 area cross-country teams — five on the girls' side, five on the boys' side — keeping an eye on as this fall's season progresses toward state at Detweiller Park in Peoria:

GIRLS



Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

Uni High's Kate Ahmari running by herself a lot this season.

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stands out at M-S, as do those of fellow seniors **Klein Powell**, **Grace Lietz** and **Emily Bednar**. But it's actually some younger runners who are pacing the Bulldogs lately. Sophomore **Ava Boyd** was M-S's top finisher as it won last week's Charleston Invitational. Junior **Callie Jansen** and freshmen **Chloe Bundren** and **Ava Jansen** rounded out the Bulldogs' top four in that meet.

ST. JOSEPH-OGDEN

As always, it's impossible to overlook **Jason Retz's** Spartans. SJ-O finished third last week at Chrisman behind Illini Prairie Conference rivals Unity and Monticello, and they'll try to overtake them when it matters most. And the Spartans have thrived on the big stage, winning Class 1A state titles in 2014 and 2016 and securing other state trophies in 2015 (third place) and 2017 (runner-up). Senior **Ava Knap** and freshman **Savanna Franzen** are leading SJ-O. Seniors **Kailyn Ingram**, **Addie Allen** and **Taryn Sexton** and sophomores **Chloe Burkhalter** and **Maddison Clampitt** also represented SJ-O's top seven at Chrisman.

UNI HIGH

Care to guess who ranked fourth as a team at Chrisman last week? Yes, it was **Rachael Brewer's** Illineks, who have an individual capable of dethroning Monticello's Bruhn as All-Area Runner of the Year. Junior and two-time All-Area first-teamer **Kate Ahmari** is a special talent, and she won the Cow Chip Classic with a 3-mile time below 19 minutes. Plenty of seniors back up Ahmari: **Cadi Hu**, **Madeleine Keenan**, **Maxine van der Donk**, **Stefania Dzhaman** and **Erin Smith**. Junior **Kara Mathias** rounded out Uni High's top seven at Chrisman, and this team could squeeze its way into the Class 1A top 10 at state.

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BOYS



Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

Josiah Hortin is one of several promising young runners Tuscola has this season.

ST. JOSEPH-OGDEN

The Spartans dominated the Chrisman Cow Chip Classic last week and — like Monticello's girls — presently are rated second in Class 1A by MileSplit IL. Balance is the name of the game for SJ-O, as **Jason Retz's** program has numerous runners who can hang tight with one another across 3-mile expanses. Seniors **Luke Stegall**, **Charlie Mabry** and **Elijah Mock** should play a big role in the Spartans' postseason aspirations, which likely include vying for SJ-O's first state championship since 1992. Juniors **Ethan Blackburn** and **Peyton Wendell** and sophomores **Carson Maroon** and **Aiden Armstrong** also will need to come up big, too, as the Spartans appear to be one of the area's toughest teams.

MAHOMET-SEYMOUR

Speaking of teams ranked second by MileSplit IL, that's where **Neal Garrison's** Bulldogs find themselves in the organization's Class 2A poll. After a brief reloading period, M-S seems poised to regain the state supremacy it showed in the mid-2010s (2A runner-up in 2014 before the Bulldogs won three straight state championships from 2015 through 2017). That starts with seniors **Kyle Nofziger** and **Joseph Scheele** — former N-G All-Area first- and second-teamers, respectively — who led the Bulldogs to last week's Charleston Invitational team crown. Seniors **Jonah Singer** and **Karsten Waisath** and juniors **Hayden Grotelueschen** and **Ben Wallace** also will be key to M-S's efforts.

ARTHUR-LOVINGTON-ATWOOD-HAMMOND

Lyle Dorjahn's Knights claimed second place in last year's unofficial Class 1A state meet. Though led by the now-graduated

Layton Hall, ALAH hasn't tailed off in the wake of his departure to run in college at Indiana State. The Knights placed third at the Charleston Invitational that was filled with much bigger schools in the field. Junior **Logan Beckmier** is the new No. 1 runner for the Knights, while seniors **Jace Green** and **Jacob Duzan**, juniors **Jacob Adcock** and **Lyle Adcock** and sophomore **Jesús Corona** also star in Arthur.

MONTICELLO

Dave Remmert's boys' team doesn't appear quite as strong as their female cohorts. That's not to say Monticello is in a bad spot — far from it. The Sages just looks a little different from in years past. Senior **Ed Mitchell** is the top dog and a remnant of the Sages' 2019 Class 1A state championship team. Freshmen **Caleb Wood** and **River Derby** have worked their way into the top seven, and the junior trio of **Logan Sikorski**, **Jacob Elston** and **Liam Sokolowski** will try to help Monticello back to the state stage. Expect them to do just that as Detweiller Park becomes like a second home to Monticello in early November.

TUSCOLA

It's not just football in the fall that can garner attention in Tuscola. **Lacy Diaz's** Warriors don't have the abundant post-season history so many of these other programs possess. What Tuscola does have is a boatload of young, talented athletes. The sophomore group of **Josiah Hortin**, **Jackson Barrett**, **Will Foltz** and **Bryce Graves** is one that can make waves for years locally. With the senior leadership and quick feet of **Logan Wallace** and **Riley Nolan** thrown in, the Warriors certainly can crack the Class 1A state field.