**With Jack Aho graduated, who steps into the 2A top spot?**

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[**Mike Newman**](http://mike-newman.runnerspace.com/)  Aug 21st, 7:15pm



***ILXCTF Cross Country Season Previews***

Photo: Matt Richtman and Jacob Gebhardt are two of the top 2A Boys returning runners for the 2017 season (Laura Duffy Photo)

By Michael Newman

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The last two years at the top of 2A cross-country it has been Jack Aho as he won individual state titles in 2015 and 2016. With Aho graduated and now at the University of Michigan, which of this year’s 2017 group steps into the top spot?

It could be Matt Richtman and Jacob Gebhardt. Both are top returnees and both had standout track seasons.

It could be Stephen Poorten. The Sycamore senior was one of the top runners into the state after his sectional race. He found out after the race that he had a stress fracture and would not be able to run at Detweiller. He is running with focus right now.

It could be Jack Becker. He finished 20th in the 3A race last year. Now that his school Crystal Lake South is classified in 2A, he will be a runner to keep an eye on.

All four of these runners most likely will be in the same sectional at Kaneland. That could be a preview of the state race the following week.

Or…it could be one of the other runners that we have listed below.

Here is a look at some of the top 2A Boys runners in Illinois for this coming cross-country season.

**Top 10**

**1 Matt Richtman – SR – Maple Park Kaneland**

**2016 2A State Finish – 4th**

**Notes** – The top returnee from last year’s 2A State Meet. He will be one of the guys to watch in this classification this fall. He finished in the top six in every race that he competed in during the IHSA season. His time at state was 14:36. Richtman ran a great double last May at the state meet finishing second in the 3200 Meter Run and seventh in the 1600 Meter Run. He achieved personal bests after the state meet with 4:19.38 for the 1 Mile Run (4:17.92 for 1600-meters) at Magis Miles and 9:22.98 for 3200-meters at the Midwest Distance Classic. He was impressive in track.

**Coach Chad Clarey said:**

*Richtman had another good summer of training. He should be fresh and hungry for the season. He is interested in taking it one week at a time and looks forward to the chance to earn advancement in the State Series. Matt's extended track season of two extra weeks were fruitful in the 4:19 true mile he ran in Chicago, followed by another season's best at the MDC 3200 of 9:22. He took a small break then got back to training for this season. Matt is a very well-rounded individual who wears many hats. He took some special trips this summer and made it to the mountains of Colorado as well. He seems to love the hills as he had a terrific hill workout this week. We travel to Crystal Lake South for a new meet (for us) on Labor Day weekend.*

**2 Jacob Gebhardt – SR – Sterling**

**2016 2A State Finish – 7th**

**Notes** – Gebhardt had a break through junior season that started last fall. He finished in the top ten in every IHSA race including winning the 1A-2A race at the Peoria Invitational (14:46). He improved that at the state meet running 14:41. Gebhardt ran under 4:20 for 1600-meters four times during the season starting with a 4:14.51 second-place finish behind Jack Aho at Distance Night in Palatine in April. He finished second in the state finals at that distance. Five days later at Festival of Miles in St. Louis, he followed up with a fifth-place finish dropping his personal best for 1-miles to 4:10.09. He ended his season with another personal best running 9:18.11 at the Midwest Distance Classic. Some big things are ahead for this runner this fall.

**Coach Greg Hendrix said:**

*I think Jake is primed to make a run at the individual state title. As for flipping the switch, I think it started his Sophomore year at state in Cross Country. He believed he "choked" (his words, not mine) and didn't run as well as he would have liked to. Since then, he has never been satisfied, always hungry to improve and compete. He is always willing to work harder and not rest on what he has already accomplished. Mentally, he believes he belongs and he has proven it, numerous times.*

**3 Stephen Poorten – SR – Sycamore**

**2016 Finish – 4th 2A Belvidere Sectional**

**Notes** – This is the mystery runner in this classification this fall. He was diagnosed with a stress fracture in his tibia after his sectional race forcing him out of the state meet. I believe he would have finished in the top ten. He came back during the outdoor track season starting in May. His season finished with a sixth-place finish in the 3200 Meter Run running a 9:33.49 personal best. Missing the state race last November could drive him to some great performances this season.

**Coach Michael Lambdin said:**

*It's difficult to imagine Stephen being more motivated. He's always been a driven individual. But that's exactly what has happened. The stress fracture that ended last fall's cross-country season, and the prolonged recovery, have left Stephen extremely focused on the upcoming season. Look for Stephen's dedication to result in a strong performance come November.*

**4 Jack Becker – SR – Crystal Lake South**

**2016 3A State Finish – 20th**

**Notes** – Crystal Lake South moves down to 2A this year putting Jack Becker into position as one of the top runners this fall in that classification. He ran 14:46.2 at the Peoria Invitational in October and duplicated that time at state. Outside of the state race, he finished in the top ten in every IHSA race during the season. His personal bests in track included 4:19.16 for the 1 Mile Run (4:17.50 for 1600-meters) at Magis Miles as well as 9:24.51 for 3200-meters at the Fox Valley Conference Meet.

**Coach Rich Eschman said:**

*Jack Becker had a good summer of training, he did increase his mileage from past summers. He has done some longer tempo runs then in the past. He is excited about the opportunity of competing in the 2A state cross country meet. He understands that it is a long season and that he wants to be at his best at the end of the season.*

**5 Jared Schuckman – SR – Normal University**

**2016 2A State Finish – 11th**

**Notes** – His successful track season should catapult Schuckman to some fast times this fall. He was the second-man behind Jack Franklin most of last season and will take over the top spot for U-High this fall. Shuckman ran under 15-minutes for 3-miles last fall including 14:52 at the Peoria Invitational and 14:53 at the state meet. It was the track season where he shined. He led off his team’s 3200 Meter Relay in the IHSA State Finals that won the state title. He came back to finish third in the 1600 Meter Run. The week before at the Macomb Sectional, he ran a personal best of 4:13.06 to win the 1600 Meter Run. He ran under 4:20 for 1600-meters during the track season.

**Coach Lester Hampton said:**

*Simply put Jared is the most complete runner I’ve had the pleasure of coaching, he is a combination of J.D.LaFayette(2014) and Jack Franklin who just graduated.  He can cover anything from the 400 to the 3 mile. I see him being able to run with just about anyone in the State this year at any distance! When you combine his running ability with his leadership, academic prowess, and being the great kid, he is you get a Coach’s Dream!*

**6 Riley Fortune – SR – Mahomet-Seymour**

**2016 2A State Finish – 13th**

**Notes** - The #2 man from last year’s state championship team. Fortune was Mahomet-Seymour’s anchor man on their quartet that finished fourth in the 3200 Meter Relay at the IHSA State Meet. He ran a personal best of 1:56.91 for 800-meters at Distance Night in Palatine.

**Coach Neal Garrison said:**

*Riley also was an important member of the 3200 relay that placed in State the past two years.  He was the clear physical leader on the 3200 relay throughout the season and I think this helped his confidence.  He is an intense racer which is always great to have on the team.*

**7 Eli Minsky – SR – Grayslake Central**

**2016 2A State Finish – 12th**

**Notes** – Minsky started out slow last fall but came on strong during the state series when it counted. One of the reasons why Grayslake Central finished second at state. He will be the top runner on this team now that Jack and Matt Aho have graduated. After finishing 20th at the Belvidere Sectional, he bounced back at state to run 14:54 to place 12th overall. He achieved a personal best of 4:24.57 for 1600-meters at the 3A Fremd Sectional.

**Coach Jimmy Centella said:**

*Eli has been one of the most consistent and talented runners that I have coached in my 9 years at Central.  He has run at every state meet since his freshman year and (barring injury) there is no doubt that he will go 4 for 4 this fall.  Coming off back to back all-state performances, Eli has been working harder than ever to come back at another level for his senior year.  Unfortunately, he severely sprained his ankle in July and his running has been interrupted.  However, his training has not.  Eli has been swimming, biking, and gradually building back his running over the past month.  He has stepped up to be our top leader and hardest worker.  Eli does everything right: sleep, rehab, prehab, cross-training, rolling, stretching, etc.  He will be one of the most dedicated runners in the state.  This should translate to another incremental improvement this year.  Expect him to challenge for another high finish as state and (hopefully) lead our team to another trip to Detweiller.*

**8 Austin Ohm – SR – Lansing Illiana Christian**

**2016 3A State Finish – 41st**

**Notes** – In Illiana Christian’s final year competing in Illinois before their school moves to Indiana, Ohm could put himself in position to finish in the Class 2A top five. He ran 14:59 last year at state. His track season was better as he ran 9:30.73 to finish third at the 2A State Meet. Earlier in the year, he achieved a personal best of 9:30.73 for 3200-meters at Distance Night in Palatine. He also ran 4:21.22 for the 1 Mile Run (4:19.76 for 1600-meters) at Magis Miles.

**9 Adam Gilbreath-Glaub – SO – Metamora**

**2016 2A State Finish – 20th**

**Notes** – You don’t see a freshman finish in the top 25 that often at the IHSA State Meet. Gilbreath-Glaub did that finishing 20th but also running the ninth fastest time ever for a freshman at the state meet at Detweiller Park. He ran personal bests of 9:29.36 for 3200-meters and 4:30.5 for 1600-meters. He earned all-state honors by finishing fifth in the 2A State Meet.

**Coach Gene Jones said:**

*Adam Gilbreath-Glaub had a great Track Season to "tack on to" the Cross-Country Season.  I feel that he had a productive summer and will be ready for a rewarding Cross-Country Season.  He has looked good in the "half week" of workouts that we have had thus far.  He will have some meets to test himself as the season progresses (First to Finish first part of September -- Peoria High Meet end of September & U-High and Mahomet Seymour Runners at our "RUNNIN' RED INVITE")  Of course the Regional & Sectional leading up to the State in November will be quite interesting.*

**10 Mathias Powell – JR – Mahomet-Seymour**

**2016 2A State Finish – 18th**

**Notes** – The third runner of Mahomet-Seymour’s state championship team. He has the talent to finish among the top ten this fall. He earned all-state honors this spring by finishing fourth in the 3200 Meter Run at the IHSA State Meet. He ran a personal best this spring of 9:30.19 for 3200-meters.

**Coach Neal Garrison said:**

*Mathias placed in the 3200 at State.  He was able to beat out several of his strong teammates to earn a top two spot on the track team in the 3200 which gave him the opportunity to be a State placer.  He is a confident runner that enjoys racing.*

**Runners to Watch**

**(In Alphabetical Order)**

**Austin Ames – JR – Charleston**

**2016 2A State Finish – 41st**

**Notes** – Ames should be the top runner for the Trojans this fall. He achieved personal bests of 10:08.09 for 3200-meters and 4:43.72 for 1600-meters. His best cross-country time was at state (15:24).

**Kyle Boughter – SO – Springfield**

**2016 2A State Finish – 34th**

**Notes** - Boughter was the second freshman finisher in last year’s state meet and has the potential to finish in the top 20 this fall. He was one of the top runners from the Senators last fall. He should step this year into the top spot. Boughter’s best race during the track season is when he ran a personal best 9:48.92 at Prospect at the end of April.

**John Bruce – SO – Marion**

**2016 2A State Finish – 48th**

**Notes** – Bruce ran some good races down the stretch as a freshman last fall finishing third at the Triad Regional and third at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional. He ran 15:29 at state to finish 48th overall. He ran personal bests of 9:57.41 for 3200-meters and 4:33.83 for 1600-meters during the track season. A runner to keep an eye on at the end of October / beginning of November.

**Coach Eli Baker said:**

*John Bruce is going to be that strong front runner for us. He has worked very hard this summer to separate himself from the competition. He is very healthy and thirsty for success.*

**Daniel Chen – JR – Aurora IL Math & Science Academy**

**2016 2A State Finals – 43**

**Notes** – IMSA was one of the big surprise teams last year making it to state. Chen was the team’s top runner for the squad. He caught everyone’s attention when he ran 15:23 at Katherine Legge Memorial to finish second at the Hinsdale South Regional. He attended Dunlap as a freshman running 4:27.44 for 1600-meters. He improved on that last spring running 4:24.67 to finish eighth at the IHSA State Meet.

**Coach Paul McLeland said**:

*I expect Daniel Chen to do very well this season.  He had a bad race at State last year but is still the 13th returner.  I am hoping a top 10 finish and under 15 minutes.  He was an All-Stater in track, which will help his confidence.  He should be among the leaders in each race this season.*

**Matt Gold – SR – Deerfield**

**2016 3A Finish – 20th 3A Waukegan Sectional**

**Notes** – Gold gets a break as Deerfield moves from 3A to 2A for this cross-country season. He ran a personal best 15:22.3 to finish sixth at the Central Suburban League Championships last October. He achieved personal bests during the track season running 4:27.81 for 1600-meters and 9:43.27 for 3200-meters.

**Coach Scott Friedlander said:**

*Matt has very high expectations for this season. His individual goals include repeating as CSL North Conference individual champion, running sub-15, and getting 2A All-State. I absolutely think all those are within reach. The big question for him is health. He has been dealing with constant injuries for the last two years. He has always been on-again-off-again with training based on how his injuries are feeling each day/week. Despite never being able to train at a high level or as consistently as he would like, each season he seems to stay on his feet just long enough to run some good times and win some big races. He deserves a ton of credit for this because he puts serious work into rehab/prehab, whereas a normal runner would have probably lost those seasons completely. Mentally, Matt is as strong as I've seen. I like to compare him to a caged dog who is itching to be let loose and would outwork everybody if nobody was holding him back, but we often do have to hold him back. So, if he keeps the injury bug away, or at least enough that he minimizes training hiccups, I think he will be a very dangerous runner this fall.*

**Brett Haffner – SR – Darien Hinsdale South**

**2016 2A State Finish – 39th**

**Notes** – Haffner ran his best race at the end of last year recording a 15:23 time at the state meet. He also finished third at the WSC-Gold Championships and a fourth-place finish at the Hinsdale South Regional. Haffner ran personal bests of 4:29.56 for 1600-meters and 9:43.32 for 3200 meters. He has the talent to be among the top 25 at this season’s state meet.

**Coach Jim Dickerson said:**

*Brett is literally like having another assistant coach with his maturity, responsibility, and knowledge of the sport. Brett has struggled at times keeping strong and healthy for a whole season, but is going into this season in fantastic shape with a great summer behind him and tons of confidence. He thinks he can run with the best runners in the state and I agree with him. He tried going out fast at Detweiller at Dark and faded a bit, but his 15:42 is still way ahead of where he’s been at the beginning of the last couple seasons, and that was after shutting it down a bit the last mile (and the day after returning from a vacation in Colorado).*

**Ryan Hodge – SR – Mahomet-Seymour**

**2016 2A State Finish – 19th**

**Notes** – One of the six all-state runners for Mahomet-Seymour’s state championship team. He could be in the top ten this fall. Hodge was a part of the quartet that finished fourth for Mahomet-Seymour last May at the IHSA State Meet in the 3200 Meter Relay. He also qualified for the 1600 Meter Run missing the finals by one place. He recorded a personal best of 4:23.37 for 1600-meters at Distance Night in Palatine.

**Coach Neal Garrison said:**

*Ryan had a nice season in track and lowered his mile time.  He has been disciplined in his training so I think you will see great things out of him.  He was also part of the 3200 meter relay that placed in State the past two years.  His reliable personality was important for their success as a relay.*

**Blake Jones – SR – Lincoln**

**2016 2A State Finish – 45th**

**Notes** – We could see some great times by Jones this fall. He has competed in both cross-country and soccer for the past three years. He is just concentrating on running for his senior year. His best time came at state when he ran 15:27 on the Detweiller Park course. Jones qualified for the state meet in the 800 Meter Run with a 1:58.95 personal best. Jones ran 4:31.59 personal best for 1600-meters.

**Coach Kaitlin Mason said:**

*Lincoln Community High School allows athletes to participate in two sports during the same season as long as there is not a substantial about of conflict with competition. Therefore, something unique about Blake is that he was on both the soccer and cross-country team during the fall season for the past three years. Since soccer was his priority at that time, he participated in a handful of cross country meets when there wasn't a soccer conflict and only practiced with the cross-country team if we made it to the post season.*

*Between sophomore and junior year, Blake just grew a bit more physically but not much more mileage was added. He just naturally got faster. Now coming up on his senior year, Blake has decided to quit soccer and is 100% focused on running. He has logged a lot more miles this summer and is already running times right around where he left off last year. Blake runs about 35 miles a week when he has a big run or 5k and around 50 miles a week when he has a couple weeks off.*

*Going into his senior year, Blake should have the biggest year yet, especially since this is the first year that he has been logging miles in the offseason. With a 15:30 at Detweiller at Dark last weekend, as his coach, I'm more than ready and excited to see what he can do this season. He has an outstanding mindset this year and a lot of confidence after his deep post season runs in XC and an impressive track season last spring. Blake is going to be one to watch this season! He is unstoppable!*

**Mason Jones – JR – Mt. Zion**

**2016 2A State Finish – 44th**

**Notes** – Jones was somewhat of a surprise during the cross-country season especially at the end of the season where he won the Apollo Conference and Danville Regional in back to back weeks. He finished seventh at the Decatur MacArthur Sectional. Jones qualified in track for the IHSA State Meet in the 800 Meter Run. He recorded personal bests of 9:52.39 for 3200-meters, 4:34.59 for 1600-meters, and 1:59.36 for 800-meters.

**Mark Skaggs – SR – East Peoria**

**2016 2A State Finish – 49th**

**Notes** – Skaggs could surprise some this fall after finishing in the top 50 at the state meet. Skaggs had good races leading up to state finishing sixth in the Mid Illini Conference Meet and 11th at the Metamora Sectional. He ran a personal best of 9:59.28 for 3200-meters at the Macomb Sectional this spring.

**Coach Brandon Shaver said:**

*Mark Skaggs was an individual state qualifier last season, running a season best of 15:33. He had a great track season, dropping his PR in all his events. He ran the Detweiller at Dark Race and completed the course in 15:40, mere seconds off his PR, at a time of year where speed and racing are not a focus. Mark had a tremendous summer, has increased mileage, and put in time with core and weights. He should have a competitive season.*

**Eddie Slack – JR – Chicago Marist**

**2016 Finish – 49th 3A Marist Sectional**

**Notes** – Slack had a good sophomore season but should have a better junior year now that the Marist Boys’ team is now in Class 2A. His best finish was when he finished third at the East Suburban Catholic Conference Championships. Slack ran a 4:48.83 personal best for 1600-meters during the track season.

**Charlie Smith – SO – Antioch**

**2016 2A Finish – 16th Belvidere Sectional**

**Notes** – Smith was one of the big surprises during last fall. It did not help that he did not run his best race of the season in the toughest 2A sectional in the state. We should see him at Detweiller Park in November. He finished sixth in the North Lake County Conference Championships as well as a fourth-place finish earlier in the year at the ACC Classic. Antioch was in 3A for the track season but Smith put up some good times for a freshman. He ran a personal best of 9:56.06 for 3200-meters and 4:40.11 for 1600-meters. His 3200-meters personal best happened at the end of the season. Like I said, keep an eye on him this season.

**Coach Chris Bailey said:**

*Charlie is excited to start the 2017 season.  He has put in a solid summer of running and is motivated by the fact that he missed qualifying for the state meet as a freshman by 1 spot.  He always puts the team first and wants success for everyone...he's a total "team" guy.*

**Derek Van Prooyen – SR – Lansing Illiana Christian**

**2016 Finish – 46th 3A Niles West Sectional**

**Notes** – Van Prooyen did not have his best race of the season at the Niles West Sectional. It will help that Illiana Christian will be in 2A for its final school year competing in Illinois. His best finish was at First to the Finish Invitational when he finished 39th overall. He ran within 20 seconds of his teammate Austin Ohm most of last year. Expect him to be closer at the end of the year especially in the 2A state series. He did make it to the 2A State Meet this spring in the 1600 Meter Run finishing 16th in the prelims. Van Prooyen recorded a 4:26.73 personal best during the season for 1600-meters.