

Boys start season with #3 ranking in Class D

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Cross Country Coach Carl Zuege can count at least 13 reasons why he's excited about the prospects for this year's boys' and girls' cross country teams.

The boys' team comes into the season ranked third in Class D after finishing as the state runner-up last year.

Of the six members on that team, five are back this season. With the addition of one more runner, this year's team is back at a full squad.

Last year, only three girls competed in cross country for the Longhorns. This year, the squad includes seven girls.

"We're super excited about that," Zuege said.

That means the girls' team will be able to compete in team competition instead of just individual competition.

In each meet, six varsity runners will compete, with the top four being used for scoring.

Expectations high

Zuege holds high expectations for this year's season.

On the boys' side, four team members, juniors Tyler Talbott, Tom Sullivan, Kyle Bottom and Shane German, come into the season after logging 300 miles this summer.

Zuege said senior Alec Spady has really stepped up his performance this year and newcomer junior Joel Fisher is making great strides in the first two weeks of practice.

Team speed represents another factor for Zuege to be excited about.

He said all of his returners are running at least 30 seconds faster this season than they were last year.

That edge should make an impact as the season progresses.

Zuege said the #3 ranking doesn't seem to bother his boys. "They know what's in front of them," he noted.

Despite finishing second at state last year, the Longhorns finished the district meet behind Kimball.

The Longhorns outdistanced Kimball at state but they want to make sure they take the district title this year.

Girls show promise

Zuege looks for good things from his girls this season as well.

He said senior Jilanne German comes into the season after logging 250 miles this past summer and is providing some good leadership.

She is being joined by senior Shanna Carter, who is running cross country for the first time after playing softball for the past three years.

Zuege said Carter ran well on the track team in the spring and feels she will adapt quickly after logging more miles this fall.

Sophomore Devon Vaverek and junior Hannah Harmon come in with a year of experience, along with sophomore transfer Breanna Krutsinger, who ran at Dundy County last year.

Zuege also expects first-timers sophomore Kacia Smith and freshman Lydia Harmon to

contribute as the season progresses as well.

He said a full girls' squad provides depth not experienced last year. They are getting better everyday and like to compete, he added.

He said the success of the boys' team is rubbing off on the girls' team, fostering good comradery and competition.

First meet Friday

Zuege will get a good evaluation of his runners' progress Friday when they travel to Cambridge for a 1 p.m. MT meet.

He said they will see some teams they don't normally see in their other meets.

Last year, the boys won the meet so this will serve as a good early season mark.

Next week, the Longhorns come home for their own meet at the Imperial Country Club. The meet will begin at 3:30 p.m. MT on Thursday, Sept. 10.