



Returns boost Northville's conference chances

Brad Emons 12:37 p.m. EDT April 12, 2016



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Coming off a third-place finish in the KLAA Kensington Conference meet and a fifth at the Division 1 regional, an even more balanced lineup should bode well this season for the Northville boys track and field squad.

The Mustangs feature a talented group of distance runners, who took a runner-up finish in last fall's state cross country meet, as well as some experienced sprinters and field event performers.

"Aside from their individual goals for 2016, a group of athletes on our team have set the goal to challenge for the conference championship this spring," Northville coach Tim Dalton said. "In order to do so, we will have to make individual sacrifices and be at our best for the conference meet. But this group realizes that and is up to the task. We have a strong foundation of multi-sport athletes that understands and values hard work and dedication."

First team All-Area performer Conor Naughton, a Central Michigan University recruit, leads that heralded distance crew after winding up 15th in the Division 1 state finals in the 3,200-meter run (9:25.94) after taking first at the regional (9:23.43).

Naughton contributed to that runner-up finish last fall for Northville's cross country team, which also included Ben Cracraft, Thomas Smither and Kenny Goolsby.

Meanwhile, senior Adam Ghabra, a second team All-Area selection, will anchor the sprints after capturing the Kensington Conference and regional titles in the 100 dash. Ghabra was also a conference runner-up in the 200.

Ghabra's best times last last season in the 100 and 200 were 11.1 and 22.39, respectively. He was also a member of Northville's school record 1,600 relay team that captured regional and conference crowns.

High jumper John Hamilton, who cleared 6-3 last year en route to a state qualifying berth, also made second team All-Area and returns, while senior Max DeDonna is back in the throwing events.

Novi optimistic

The Wildcats stumbled last year to a 10th-place showing in the Kensington Conference meet and an 11th-place finish in the Division 1 regional, but seventh-year coach Marsha Reid believes things can be turned around quickly.

The team's top individual returnee is junior Scott Sawyer, a state qualifier last year in both the high jump (6-3) and pole vault (12-10).

According to Reid, Sawyer is a threat to break school records in both events. He has already cleared 6-6.25 inches indoors this spring.

Meanwhile, senior Joost Plaetinck, a cross country all-stater, also earned second team All-Area honors by placing 19th in the Division 1 state finals in the 3,200 (9:32.06) after finishing third at the regional (9:29.0) and first in the Kensington Conference (meet record 9:32.14).

Junior Hunter Joy and John Stefan also give the Wildcats depth in the hurdles.

"Last year, we were in a little bit of a rebuild and, this year, I think, we've solidified some of those spots a little bit," Reid said. "We're definitely a stronger team than we were a year ago. We've tried to focus on being well-rounded and I definitely think we've filled some gaps and some holes and got some strengths where people are going to be able to tap into things where we'll be able to compete more in the sprint relays than we were a year ago."

CC rebuilding

One of the area teams hit hardest by graduation was Novi Detroit Catholic Central, which is coming off a third-place finish at the regional and a fourth-place effort at the Catholic League's A-B Division meet.

First team All-Area high jumper Lance Yassay and first team All-Area hurdler Donovan D'Amore both graduated, along with hurdler Ike Marchie, a second team All-Area pick.

The Shamrocks, however, boost a pair of strong throwers in Shane Joyce, a senior, and Chris Bradbury, a junior.

CC will also be strong in the distance events, led by seniors Scott Smith and Avery Felty, along with junior Ty Buckley.

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"2016 is our rebuilding year," said CC coach Tony Magni, now entering his 42nd season. "We lost some great seniors from last year. This year's team will have to step up and be the leaders."

Franklin Road

Novi Franklin Road Christian, under the direction of second-year coach Andrew Schmid, hopes to take a giant step this season after finishing 12th in the Michigan Independent Athletic Conference and 14th in the Division 4 regional.

The team's top returnees include senior Joey Robison (throws) and Erick Westphal (sprints), along with junior Nate Austin (distance-hurdles).

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