

Cross country teams take on all challenges

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Rutland junior Brady Geisler competes in a race last fall.

Provided photo



Mill River's Annika Heintz pushes toward the finish during a race in 2019.

FILE PHOTO

They run through all kinds of conditions. Vermont's high school cross country runners sail through the woods in the heat of early September, consistently improving their times for the rigors of the State Championship Meet in Thetford in late October, frequently on a crisp, cool (maybe even cold) day.

They run on trails colored by bright leaves and later on trails decorated with frost or snow.

The runners' goals are as varied as the elements. Some just want to shave seconds off their time, running at the front of the pack a bit beyond their reach.

Then, there are the runners like Rutland High's Brady Geisler or Mill River's Annika Heintz who have loftier goals like league championships. Maybe even state championships.

The Vermont High School State Championships for all divisions will be contested on Oct. 30 on the state-of-the-art course at Thetford Academy.

It is a sport for anyone and everyone who loves to run. Here's a look at some of the area teams.

FAIR HAVENFair Haven coach Randy Shutter is working with a small group. He has five runners combined between the boys and girls teams.

Wearing the Slater blue on the trails this season will be Ian Barber, Ava Shull, Nikolai Wood, Caleb Barrows and Alexandra Williams.

Barrows comes into the season with some credentials. He placed sixth in the SVL Championships and was the only Slater to make the All-SVL Team.

"Caleb is fighting shin splints right now but we are taking care of that. I think he is going to have a big year," Shutter said.

He also sees Wood, a freshman, as "turning some heads."

Shull could be the headliner for the girls. She is coming off an outstanding track and field campaign in the 800.

Shull was a soccer player but decided to dive into cross country.

"She went to a camp in the Northeast Kingdom and loved it," Shutter said.

She also went down to Virginia where she ran a 19:05.

"She's ready to go," Shutter said.

The girls might get a lift from a couple of runners who have transferred from Colorado. They are not on the team yet but "have shown interest" according to Shutter.

The Slaters open the season at Rutland. They also make three trips to Thetford, something that has Shutter extremely excited.

“We go there for a regular meet, then on Oct. 2 for the Woods Run and back on Oct. 30 for the State Meet.

It is not out of the question, Shutter said. that Barrows and Shull could be making a fourth trip to Thetford for the New England Meet.

“They have a shot. It is going to be a fun year,” Shutter said.

GREEN MOUNTAIN

Coach Scott Renfro's cross country team is getting a late start so he is hopeful of picking up some more runners when classes begin.

Now, he has Greta Bernier as his lone girl and Miles Garvin and Mitchell Rounds as the male runners. Garvin and Rounds are both seniors.

Rounds has always been a dual sport athlete in the fall, playing soccer and running cross country but this senior season he will be concentrating on cross country.

‘He’s a pretty good runner,” Renfro said.

The Chieftains begin the season on Sept. 7 at Bellows Falls.

MILL RIVERBrandon Ryan replaces Peter See as the Mill River Union High School cross country. See will continue to coach Mill River’s runners at the middle school level.

Ryan is a Castleton University student where he has competed for the Spartans in cross country and track and field.

Annika Heintz is back for her last hurrah and she has put MRUHS girls cross country on the map.

Last season, she finished second to White River Valley’s Anita Miller at the SVL Meet and placed eighth in the Division III state championship meet.

“She is a very gifted runner and a great person,” Ryan said.

Ryan coached her in track and field this spring when she achieved the “triple crown” by winning the state championship in the 800, 1600 and 3000 meters.

Heintz is surrounded by some talent on the girls squad, something she was not accustomed to last year, running as the lone member of the team.

One of those is Olivia Haley, the returning SVL middle school champion in cross country.

Another freshman with promise is Willa Seo and a senior out for the team is Faith Murray who did compete on the track and field team in the spring.

Boys include Ethan Foley, Lucas Jensen and Taylor Patch.

“I am still trying to recruit,” Ryan said.

The Minutemen open the season on Sept. 7 at a meet hosted by Rutland in Rutland Town's Northwood Park.

OTTER VALLEY

The Otters have some decent numbers and juniors Kelsey Adams and Zoe Elliott return to serve as captains of the girls team.

They will provide solid leadership for the OV team of first-year coach Cameron Perta.

Perta is also looking for big things from freshman Sara Loyzelle.

Other members of the girls team include Jade Flanders, Elisha Bagley and Shannon Watson.

Sarah Calvin, a 2021 OVUHS graduate is running on the cross country team at Emerson College but little brother Luke Calvin is carrying on the family tradition of running for Otter Valley.

Calvin is expected to be one of the top point-getters as is Dillon Ladd.

Joining him on the boys squad are Kevin Odell, Isaiah Bagley, Baker LaRock, Calvin Ladd and Jackson Marks.

The Otters will be opening the season on Sept. 7 in a meet hosted by Rutland. OV will host its one home meet on Sept. 14.

POULTNEY Last year, Poultney coach Johanna DeKalb had three boy runners. They have gone their own way, either to West Rutland to play soccer or they are playing football at Poultney.

She had no girls last season but this year she has two. The good news is that they are both freshmen so that bodes well for the future.

Hennessy McPhail is serious about running. She ran at the middle school level and is poised to make a splash on the varsity trails.

Alexis Crandall is new to running but DeKalb said that McPhail has taken her under her wing.

There won't be enough runners to score points for a team but the beauty of cross country is that it is also an individual sport.

"They just want to keep improving their times," DeKalb said.

The Blue Devils open the season on Sept. 14 at Otter Valley.

RUTLAND There is a lot to look forward to at Rutland where the Ravens return six of their top seven runners from a team that won the Southern Vermont League Championships.

Brady Geisler was the individual SVL champion. Teammates Karver Butler and Owen Dube-Johnson finished 2-3 in that race so the Ravens look like the team to beat with their impressive depth.

Samuel Kay is another to watch. He followed up a solid cross country campaign by doing Nordic and then track and field in the spring.

"He has shown some growth," Rutland coach Tom Geisler said.

Helen Culpo made a big splash for the RHS girls team last year., She won the individual SVL crown in her first year running.

Annabelle Mahar is another to keep an eye on as are a couple of new runners, freshmen Erin Geisler and Evan Taylor.

Rutland will continue to use Northwood Park as its home course.

Last season, Rutland hosted the SVL Championships but this year they shift to Bellows Falls.

Rutland will travel to more big invitational meets this year including the Woods Run in Thetford. The Woods Run always attracts more teams in a year when the New Englands are run on the gorgeous Thetford course as is the case this season. The Woods Run will be Oct. 2.

Some of the Rutland runners will travel to big stages like the Queensbury Invitational and another invitational in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Seniors on this year's team are Deirdre Lillie, Max McCalla, Jade Mitchell, Callum Smathers, Abed Alawi, Owen Dube-Johnson, Brady Geisler and Emily Wigmore.

The remainder of the roster is comprised of Calle Alexander, Cheyenne Braley, Karver Butler, Helen Culp, Erin Geisler, Bobby Giordano, Samuel Kay, Annabelle Mahar, Sierra McDermott, Collin Minard, Logan Mormando, Lila Oquendo, William Sabatano, Lane Shelton, Finian Smathers, Svoren Marko and Evangeline Taylor.

SPRINGFIELD

Steven Lawrence is pretty excited about the potential of the Cosmos on the boys side.

"It is looking like we will have seven to 10 boys," Lawrence said.

Some of those who have looked strong in the preseason are Damian Stagner, his brother Christin Stagner, Dylan Magoon, Connor Young, Owen Miller, Thomas Czwakiel and Spencer Cobb.

Things are a bit leaner on the girls team where Lawrence expects only two or three runners. Alicia Ostrom could be the headliner.