

Parkway boys, girls look to repeat as 1-5A cross country champs

Written by Russell Hedges

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Last year, in the school's first year in the state's highest classification, the Parkway Panthers swept the boys and girls titles in the District 1-5A cross country meet.

Parkway will be looking for a repeat performance Saturday morning in the 2012 1-5A meet at Camp Forbing.

It's already been a banner season for both Parkway teams.

The boys have won two meets and finished runner-up in two others. The girls also have two first-place finishes and two runner-ups.

"It's going pretty good," Parkway coach Kent Falting said. "I was hoping that we'd be in the hunt at the end of the year in district and state. I feel pretty good about where we're at."

Last Saturday, junior Alison Ringle and sophomore Hayden Kingfisher set course records in the Ruston Bearcat Invitation-al.

Ringle ran an 18:14 over the three-mile course and Kingfisher ran a 15:59.

Ringle has had an exceptional season. She set the course record with an 18:43.25 5K in the Lake Hamilton meet in Hot Springs, Ark. She has won three meets and finished second in another.

In her first meet of the season in September, Ringle finished fourth in the prestigious Mobile Challenge of Champions in Mobile, Ala.

"She's done a fantastic job," Falting said. "She's only lost to four other girls the entire season."

Entering the 1-5A meet, Parkway's top five runners are Ringle, Alayna Nevins, Jayni Wilcher and two freshmen, Sara Funderburk and Cassidy Cummings.

Two years ago, Ringle and Nevins finished 2-3 in the Class 4A state meet.

"We've had some people step up," Falting said. "We have six new girls in our top 10 this year and a lot of them are freshmen."

The boys team is a senior-laden, veteran group. The top five heading into Saturday's meet are Kingfisher, Taylor Bazo, Skylar Reese, Chance Vatovec and Chase Livesay.

"Skylar Reese last year as a junior was our No. 8 man," Falting said. "He's worked his tail off and is the No. 3 guy. That's something that we didn't expect but we're real excited about. It's not that anybody's gotten slower. He's just gotten a lot faster."

The Class 5A state meet is a week from Tuesday at Northwestern State University, and each team can enter only seven runners. Falting said the district meet will help determine his entries with a couple of seniors vying for the final spot.

Falting expects Airline and Byrd to challenge his team for the boys' title.

Airline's Jack Wilkes is the defending individual champion, and teammate Matt Henry finished third last year.

"We're not taking anything for granted," Falting said. "Airline and Byrd bring quality teams to the table."

Parkway is the overwhelming favorite to win the girls' title.

The girls' race starts at 8 a.m. and the boys' at 8:45. There will also be junior varsity boys' and girls' races.