

Cover story: Five area runners bring excitement to distance races...again

By MIKE COURSON
Distance runners have put Central Kansas on the map both in the fall and in the spring. Ellinwood won three-straight Class 2A boys' titles on the cross country course from 2011-2013. The Lady Eagles won a title last fall Individually, names like Pedro Montoya, Henry Penner, Lisa Penner, and Jenna Snell bring memories of success.

This spring, five area runners look to join that list of accomplished career runners. Hoisington senior Rylie Koester, Larned senior Delainee Gordon, and Lyons junior Samantha Trejo often run against one another in the Central Kansas League. Ellinwood senior Abbie Reichuber and junior Joanna Strecker are the top-two runners from that team that won the Class

2A cross country title this fall.

All five runners were among the track leaders last spring (state times not included). Koester's 1600m time of 5:34.23 led the area. Strecker had the next best time at 5:37.90, just ahead of Gordon in 5:38.50. Reichuber had the best 3200m time in 12:05.27, followed by Trejo in 12:22.65, and Strecker in 12:34.11.

The three CKL runners were each headed for a top-six finish at the league cross country meet last October. Koester led the group in third with a personal-best time of 21:09.78, just two seconds behind the silver. Gordon placed fourth in 21:21.06. Trejo was pegged for a top-six finish before collapsing just short of the finish line.



Rylie Koester

Koester is a two-time state cross country qualifier and a two-time state track qualifier. She ran 27th at the Class 3A State Cross Country meet in October.

On the track, Koester qualified for state in the 1600m run her freshman and junior seasons. Last season she placed 12th in 5:42.59, 14 seconds from a medal. She was also part of the 4x400m relay that placed 11th in prelims to

miss the finals by less than two seconds.

Koester has stayed busy in her four years at Hoisington. Along with her running success, she's the class president and finished an illustrious varsity basketball career with more than 1,000 points (approximately 13 ppg over four seasons!)

Even with all those accomplishments, she still has a big box unchecked on her to-do list.

"A goal of mine has always been to stand on the podium at state track," she said. "Unfortunately, I have not been able to achieve this goal yet, so I am training extra hard to reach my goal this season."

After graduation, Koester plans to attend the University of Kansas to study journalism. Her running career will not end as she plans to join a running club and possibly compete in races.



Abbie Reichuber

made it there later with a fifth-place finish in the 3200m run.

"My freshman year at state was very scary and eye opening," she said. "I wanted to make a name for myself for my town and give everything I worked so hard for. I stared at the podium several times that day. I got up, walked to it, and touched it! I told myself, 'You are going to stand up here today,' and that I did!"

Gordon followed that up with an eighth-place finish in the same event a year later. She placed ninth in the 1600m run to miss a medal by one spot. Last year, still competing in Class 4A, Gordon ran 13th in the 1600m at state in 5:40.75, 17 seconds from a medal.

Heading into her final season as a Lady Indian, Gordon wants to make sure four years of hard work pay off.

"My expectations for this year are just to work hard and give it my all," she said. "It's my last year so I want to leave everything I've worked for on the track. My goals are to make it to state one last time and take home one last medal from state."

After graduation, Gordon will head to Fort Hays State University to run cross country and track for the Tigers. She hopes to be accepted into the nursing program where she can pursue a career as a labor and delivery nurse.



Delainee Gordon

Gordon has already accomplished a lot in her four years of running. A four-time state qualifier in cross country, she placed 26th as a freshman to miss a medal by just six spots. Larned dropped to Class 3A this year, meaning Gordon had to make the change to the Rim Rock course for the state meet in October where she dropped to 36th.

On the track, Gordon is a three-time state qualifier but is coming off her most disappointing season with no state medals. As a freshman, Gordon qualified for state and touched the medals podium before running. She officially

Reichuber is a four-time state cross country qualifier in Class 2A, and a three-time state medalist. In October, Reichuber ran 10th as part of the state championship team.

On the track, Reichuber ran the 1600m run at state her freshman year where she finished 13th. The past two seasons, Reichuber has run the 3200m event at state. Last year she won the bronze medal in 11:54.30, her best time of the season by 11 seconds. She was also a part of the 4x800 team that finished second only to a Maranatha Academy team that had the best time in Kansas.

The Lady Eagles are perennial top-three finishers at the state cross country meet, but this year's state title does not change the way of thinking heading into track season.

"It gives us some confidence but we have to realize we have to work twice as hard so we don't

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