

Priddy XC: Boys loaded; girls get infusion of youth

By Mike Lee
Eagle Contributor

The Priddy boys' cross country team is loaded with experience for a run at a sixth state meet appearance in the last seven years. But preseason talk was dominated by the shutdown of Texas high school sports in March and the uncertainty of the 2020 cross country schedule because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We don't know how the coronavirus is going to affect our team," said veteran Priddy coach Curtis Hurst. "We haven't seen the kids much since March. We usually play summer league basketball and have open gym, and that helps keep the boys in shape during the summer. But we were not able to do that this year.

"Everybody missed the last half of track season last spring, and they haven't competed in any sport since March. There are just a lot of unknowns going into this season."

Adding to the confusion for Class 1A, 2A, 3A and 4A high schools was the UIL's announcement in July that, despite starting the season on time with meets on Aug. 17, the regional and state cross country meets would be pushed back by three weeks. Regional meets were delayed until Nov. 23, and the state meet was delayed until Dec. 5. The delays make for a long season, plus it creates 3-4 weeks of overlap between cross country and basketball for athletes in small schools.

"Whatever sport is in the postseason will take priority," Hurst said of the overlap. "As far as our schedule, we probably won't start running in meets until September. In the past we've gone to meets in Arlington and

Round Rock to run against different competition. But this year, we'll probably stay closer to home to stay out of the cities where there's more coronavirus."

Once the Pirates get to running, they are poised to have a strong team after losing only one senior from last season. Junior Jarek Stout, along with seniors Joey Hall and Chance Hodges, were Priddy's top three finishers at the 2019 UIL state meet. Stout, who finished 12th at state last year, Hall (16th at state) and Hodges (32nd) have competed at the state meet for the last three years.

The top three are backed up by sophomores Zackrey Ward and Javier Del Bosque. Ward finished 34th at last year's state meet while Del Bosque was 72nd. Junior Hunter Gutierrez, who also ran at state last year, returns for the Pirates as well.

"Our top five are pretty solid," said Hurst, noting the top five finishers count toward team scores at meets. "Jarek, Joey and Chance have so much experience. Zackrey Ward really improved toward the end of last season. He ran really well at regional and state. He was our No. 3 runner at both meets. Javi was having a good track season last spring until we were shut down."

In addition to a solid top five, the Pirates also have depth with senior Keagan Wood; juniors Gabriel Del Bosque and Marcos Gutierrez; sophomores Luke Breum and Britt Major; and freshman Keithan Wiedebusch.

Priddy will be a heavy favorite to win the District 18-1A team title over Blanket, Evant, Gustine, Sidney and Zephyr. The district meet will be Nov. 9 or 11 on the Melody Oaks course at Priddy.

In Region III, Priddy will run into longtime foes Cumby Miller Grove and Saltillo. Last

year at state, Miller Grove won the team title, Saltillo finished second and Priddy was fifth. All three teams will be expected to qualify for state again this year. Teams from Region III have combined to win the last five state championships – Cumby Miller Grove in 2014 and from 2017-2019; Saltillo in 2016; and Priddy in 2015.

The Priddy boys have qualified as a team for the state meet in five of the last six years -- finishing third in 2014, first in 2015, fifth in 2017, fourth in 2018, and fifth in 2019. Hurst has coached the Pirates to three state championships between 1994 and 2015.

Priddy Girls

The Priddy girls' cross country team finished second at its district meet last year, and Sydney Partin qualified for state individually, finishing 85th.

Partin, now a sophomore, leads a young team that includes no seniors. But in cross country, youth is often an asset.

The Lady Pirates also should receive a

boost from junior newcomer Emma Martin, who ran at the UIL state meet for Evant two years ago. The freshmen talent includes 2019 junior high district champion Lindsey Grelle, along with classmates Zoey Ward, McKyna Harvey, Emily Andrade and Lilly Head.

"We call Lindsey the Terminator because she runs at the same pace the whole race. She never slows down," said Jimmie Cain, the Lady Pirates' fourth-year head coach. "Lindsey's time last year at district was as good as any of the high school runners. The other freshmen have run well in the past."

Joining Partin and Martin as veteran runners are juniors Alyssa Hurst, Rianne Hurst and Danielle Goehmann; along with sophomore Mackenzie Martin.

Even though she qualified for state last year, Partin battled a breathing issue that often kept her from running as well as she wanted.

"She's usually really good for about 1.8

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The Priddy boys' cross country team.

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