

Lady Eagles have the look of a winner this XC season

**By Mike Lee
Eagle Contributor**

Seventh-year Goldthwaite cross country coach Ashley Spradley has noticed a major difference in her Lady Eagles' team entering this season.

"We look like runners," Spradley said. "In the past, we've looked basketball players when we were down on the (cross country) starting line. This year our girls are slender and long-legged. They probably average about 98 pounds.

"I've never had a group of girls that looked like this and have the ability they have throughout the team."

The Goldthwaite girls have had an individual state qualifier for the last five years, but this year's preseason practices have excited Spradley about the prospects of the Lady Eagles qualifying for the Class 2A state meet as a team.

Rani House kept the streak of individual qualifiers alive last year, advancing to state and finishing 26th as a freshman. House is joined this year by fellow sophomores Hope Hermesmeyer, Abbey Patrick, Lainey Jernigan, and Linley Graves.

Juniors Avery Graves and Annie Grebe are the veterans of the team since the Lady Eagles have no seniors. Several incoming freshmen will challenge for varsity spots -- including Jemma Williams, Addisyn Howard, Jacie Williams, Mylee Guthrie, Madi Wood, and Danika Macias.

"They're blowing me away with their work ethic and the times they put up in the first practices," Spradley said. "Nobody is taking time off or holding back. They want to go compete. They're training to be competitors, winners, and to have a champion's mentality -- whether it's offseason or cross country.

"They don't want to hear about Mason and San Saba."

Goldthwaite was moved from Region II to Region IV last year and into a district with perennial state qualifiers Mason and San Saba -- which finished sixth and seventh, respectively, at last year's 2A state meet. Harper also is enjoying a run of strong athletes on the girls' side. It doesn't matter if the sport is cross country, basketball or track, Goldthwaite will have to compete against Mason, San Saba, and Harper.

The Lady Eagles finished third at last year's District 29-2A meet behind Mason and San Saba. It marked the sixth consecutive year for

the Goldthwaite girls to finish second or third at district, but Spradley has a higher goal for this team.

"We want to win district for starters," the coach said. "It'll be tough, but it's doable. I'm like the girls. I'm tired of hearing about Mason and San Saba. I'm ready to get back to the days when people from other schools said, 'Oh, no. Goldthwaite's in our district.'"

District 29-2A also includes Junction, Johnson City, Center Point and Buda Live Oak.

Spradley expects tough competition for the Lady Eagles' seven varsity spots for the District 29-2A meet, scheduled for Oct. 11 at San Saba. The top five runners count toward the team score.

House finished 26th last year at state, finishing the two-mile course in 13 minutes, 18.26 seconds.

"Rani has a goal to qualify for state all four years, but I know she wants her teammates down there running with her," Spradley said. "We're in a situation where it's almost tougher to advance out of our district than it is our region. The top three teams go from district to regional, and we've got at least four good teams in our district. At regional, the top four teams qualify for state.

"If you do well in our district and get out, you'll do well at regional."

The Region IV-2A meet is scheduled for Oct. 25 at Corpus Christi. The UIL state meet is set for Nov. 6 at Round Rock.

SUBHEAD: Bartek leads GHS boys

The Goldthwaite boys' cross country team lost four seniors from last year's third-place finish at district behind Harper and San Saba. But Goldthwaite junior Connor Bartek is seeking his third consecutive state meet berth as an individual runner.

As a freshman in 2019, Bartek finished 17th at state in a time of 16:45.61 for the three-mile boys' run. As a sophomore last year, he moved up to 11th with a time of 16:54.

"Connor wants to finish in the top 10 at state this year. He was just outside of it last year," Coach Spradley said. "He's never satisfied until he meets his goals.

"Other schools in our regional are always contacting me, wanting to know where we're running from week to week because they want their kids to run against Connor. He's one of the

toughest competitors I've ever coached."

Bartek won't have the supporting cast he had last year. The Eagles began preseason practices with five runners, the minimum required to field a team. Junior Javier Vanegas joined Bartek as a regional qualifier last year, and sophomore Colton Esse should be primed for a solid year after a good showing in the 800 meters in track last spring as a freshman.

"Connor, Javier, and Colton are all three capable of qualifying for regional as individuals," Spradley said. "Getting to regional as a team will be tough. He just don't have the depth we've had in the past. But I'm hoping this is one of those teams that shocks me."

The boys' roster also includes juniors Caleb Avants and Brennan Reyes, along with freshman Blake Bristol. Avants, back at Goldthwaite after running for Priddy's JV last year, is a surprise bonus for the Eagles.

"Colton has been showing up every day and demanding work from himself," Spradley said. "Brennan didn't finish the season last year, but he's working harder than I've seen him work. Blake medaled at every junior high meet last year, but he has to adjust to competing against older kids in high school. He has the ability."

The District 29-2A meet is scheduled for Oct. 11 at San Saba. In addition to Goldthwaite and San Saba, the field will include Mason, Junction, Johnson City, Harper, Center Point and Buda Live Oak.

GOLDTHWAITE CROSS COUNTRY

Girls Roster

Juniors -- Avery Graves, Annie Grebe, Jaycie Chapman.

Sophomores -- Rani House, Lainey Jernigan, Abbey Patrick, Hope Hermesmeyer, Linley Graves, Kaylyn Owen.

Freshmen -- Jemma Williams, Addisyn Howard, Jacie Williams, Mylee Guthrie, Madi Wood, Danika Macias, Jacqueline Delacruz.

Boys Roster

Juniors -- Connor Bartek, Javier Vanegas, Brennan Reyes, Caleb Avants.

Sophomore -- Colton Esse.

Freshman -- Blake Bristol.