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Villa Grove cross country preview

By Tony Hooker

Coaches Jim Kestner and Jacob Griffith are looking forward to the 2023 cross country season for both the high school and junior high school squads.

High School Team:

Kestner took a moment to reflect on last season's squad, giving thanks to three graduating athletes.

"It was hard to lose the senior trio of Emma Buesing, Madison Logan, and Kyleigh Price last year, but I appreciate the effort and character they modeled not just for our girls, but the entire team," he remembered.

With the graduation losses, the squad will have only one

female athlete, but Kestner is convinced that big things are ahead for her.

"I'm especially looking forward to seeing our juniors take their next steps this year. Scarlett Howard has established herself as a very strong runner. She's our sole girl on the team this year, but Coach Griffith and I feel she's poised to take a big step forward," he enthused.

In addition to the five returning athletes, Kestner and Griffith are welcoming a strong group of newcomers.

"We have a strong slate of freshmen joining us this year, including Logan Hauerperger, who ran at last year's junior high state meet. Just behind him last year were Owen Kneer

and Cole Cardiff," Kestner said.

"Besides these three freshmen, we are excited to have junior Ryan Schlueter join us for his first year in cross country. He has done well in track and field, and we look forward to having him compete."

In addition to Kurt Zimmerman, who came within five seconds of qualifying for the state meet a season ago, Kestner and Griffith will be looking to get scoring by committee, at least at the beginning of the season.

"It's too early to tell who might be the top scorers, but we have a solid 5 to 6 boys who should help us compete," Kestner stated.

For his part, Kestner identified an old favorite.

"I would have a hard time identifying a favorite race, as each has its own features that I enjoy. I guess the Cow Chip in Chrisman would be a top contender, as it's a race that is widely known across central Illinois. It's not every day you get to run a race in an active cow pasture! The only meets I dread are those that present safety concerns for our student-athletes. When the temperatures soar or torrents of rain fall, I'm always wary that someone will suffer an injury or illness. I'm excited by the work he has put in coming into this year. We have four to five legitimate competitors to join Kurt [Zimmerman] in making our team one to watch as the

season develops," said Kestner.

Junior High Team:

"Last season was a lot of fun, as our boys gained momentum throughout, culminating in a conference title for the inaugural JHOC junior high cross-country meet. The team as a whole had a great attitude and spread the reputation of our team as an exciting place to be."

"We return three girls and

eight boys from last year's squad. We're excited to have enough runners to field full teams in both boys' and girls' competitions this year. The team includes 20 total runners, six of whom are 5th graders. It's hard to call out exactly who will rise to the top this season, but we expect to have a few names that teams and spectators will become familiar with as the season progresses."

Villa Grove golf preview

By Tony Hooker

First-year coach Amber Schweighart welcomes five returning players to her 2023 squad, Logan Lillard, Addie Wilson, James Nelson, Ella Schweighart, and Jackson Smith.

Junior Karder Kirkman, in his first year on the team, is also expected to be a contributor.

The coaches will be trying to replace meaningful contributions from graduated players Maci Clodfelder, Jake Gilles,

Jesse Bessent and Gavin Kiser, who each had memorable moments a season ago, but returnee Ella Schweighart will try to build off an appearance in the IHSA sectional tournament a year ago.

For her part, Schweighart has clearly defined goals for the season ahead.

"My expectations are to increase numbers and build a strong top 6 for varsity team," she exclaimed.



VILLA GROVE GOLF PLAYERS Ella Schweighart and Karder Kirkman. Photo by Tony Hooker.

Villa Grove football preview

By Tony Hooker

Coach Heath Wilson is looking forward to his sixth season as head coach of the Blue Devils Football Team, after a 2022 season that saw them qualify for the IHSA state playoffs for the fourth time in five seasons,

with the Covid year in 2020 being the exception.

"A 6-4 last season was a solid year for the Blue Devils. Every year the goal is to play week 10 and we got that opportunity. If you get to week 10 then you have a chance to play

extra games," Wilson stated.

Experience should be a strength, as the Blue Devils return at least 12 starters.

"We return a bunch of starters. 12-14 range, along with newcomer Noah Wilcoxon, a junior wide receiver and defen-

sive back," the coach said.

As is seemingly always the case, the Lincoln Prairie Conference will be loaded with teams with playoff aspirations, including newcomer Sullivan Okaw Valley, their first-week foe.

"We will get challenged right away playing Sullivan. They

were a solid 4-5 team last year and bring back a ton of starters. They got the injury bug late in the season, but they are definitely a 2A playoff team," Wilson confided. "Many teams will compete for that conference title. I feel that everyone in our conference is loaded with talent."

As always, a playoff appearance is the goal, but the coach feels that this could be a team that makes a run in the post-season.

The playoffs are always my expectation. This is a team that can do some damage if we stay healthy," he exclaimed.

Villa Grove Sports Wrap

Golf

Strong Showing at Eagle Creek

Ella Schweighart fired a 47 to earn medalist honors on the girls' side, and Karder Kirkman was co-medalist with a 43 for the boys as they opened their season with a triangular match vs Okaw Valley and Windsor Stew Strass. The girls finished second, losing to Okaw Valley 231-235. The boys finished third, at 208, while WSS shot a 179 and Okaw Valley finished second with a score of 197.

Junior High Cross Country

Boys finish second at Sullivan

RJ Mitsdarfer and Reece Vandeventer finished in fourth and sixth places respectively to lead the Blue Devils to a second-place finish at Sullivan on August 17. Miles Swigart, Cooper Leith, and Emmett Mitsdarfer ran ninth, tenth, and 11th for Villa Grove.

Girls take Third

Buoyed by a tenth-place finish by Julie Swigart, the girls' Harriers started their 2023 campaign in fine fashion. Avery Kamerer finished in 24th, Teaghan Henderson ran 27th and Adalyn Vail was right behind her in 28th, for the blue and gold.

Compete at Sabre Corn Invitational

5th grade Boys

Reece Vandeventer cruised to a fourth place finish to lead VG. Cooper Leith backed his classmate by finishing 15th,

Emmett Mitsdarfer ran 19th and Ethan Parr finished in 27th.

5th grade girls

Avery Kamerer finished in 23rd place and Adalyn Vail ran to a 26th place finish to pace the girls' effort.

6th grade girls

Julie Swigart ran to a 38th place finish for the 6th-grade girl's crew. Rylyn Burris finished 86th.

7th grade boys

Miles Swigart finished in 27th place for the Blue Devils and Ethan Vail finished 60th. Dylan Andrade came in 79th for VG, as well.

7th grade girls

Teaghan Henderson placed 76th for Villa Grove.

8th Grade Boys

Robert Mitsdarfer placed 42nd to lead Villa Grove. Thomas Linstead ran 81st, Carter Leith finished 83rd and Max Kneer ran 89th. Wyatt Kamerer rounded out the Blue Devil effort by finishing 92nd.

Junior high softball

The Blue Devils split four games this week

Clawed by Eagles

Villa Grove dropped a 6-3 road contest at Gifford on Aug. 14. Maggi Clodfelder took the loss, giving up 6 runs (5 earned) in 6 innings. Clodfelder doubled and Emma Carroll had an RBI for Villa Grove Junior High. Kinleigh Pellum, Kenna Koeberlein, and Sylvia Thompson-Burton scored runs for the Blue and Gold.

Bitten by Bulldogs

The Blue Devils could only scratch out 3 hits in an 11-1

loss at Cerro Gordo Bement on August 15. Areigha Hauversurk singled and scored the only run, Amijah Riggleman singled and drove in a run, and Kenna Koeberlein also tacked on a base hit for Villa Grove.

Remember Titans

Areigha Hauversurk went 2-4 with a triple, two RBIs and two runs scored as the Blue Devils bats came to life in a 20-5 win over Tri-County on Aug. 16. Amija Riggleman went 3-3 with a double, and RBI and 4 runs scored. Quinn Lillard drove in 3 runs and scored twice. Maggi Clodfelder and Kenna Koeberlein each scored 3 runs. Kinleigh Pellum had an RBI and 2 runs scored, and Sylvia Thompson-Burton drove 3 and had a double. Riayn Cisna chipped in with two RBIs and a run scored for Villa Grove Junior High, who received contributions from 8 different batters. Maggi Clodfelder was the benefactor of the offensive explosion, fanning 4 in 3 innings of work.

Joust Knights

After spotting Arthur Lovington Atwood Hammond, a 5-0 lead after 1 1/2 innings, The Blue Devils responded with a 6 run second inning on their way to an 11-8 win on Aug. 17. Emma Carroll scored 3 times, Maggi Clodfelder doubled and drove in a pair of runs, Amijah Riggleman drove in two and scored twice, and Sylvia Thompson-Burton scored a pair of runs for Villa Grove Junior High. Maggi Clodfelder earned the win, fanning 12 and giving up 4 earned runs in a complete-game effort.



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