

Track teams send 5 events to state meet

By Ally Happ

The girls’ and boys’ track teams are sending a total of five events to the state meet in Des Moines.

The teams competed in their state qualifier on May 13 at Tipton.

The boys’ track team racked up a total of three state qualifying events: the 4x400-meter relay, the 200-meter dash, and the 100-meter dash.

All events include the rising track star sophomore Nolan DeLong.

The event of the night May 13 was the 4x400-meter relay. Starting out of the blocks for the Cats was sophomore Garrett Hollenback, followed by seniors Aydin Flockhart and Keagen Head. DeLong anchored the relay, and the team finished first in the race with a personal best of 3:29.40, four seconds faster than its past one.

The two alternates for the 4x400-meter relay are junior Ethan Schlackohl and freshman Charlie Huesmann.

This relay team did not compete together until April 29 at a Clear Creek Amana track meet. There, the team ran a time of 3:33.33. They knew that time would qualify them for state, and they proved exactly that.

“We knew this team was going to be good,” said Head, who already had some experience at the state track meet under his belt. He was an alternate for the 4x400-meter

relay his sophomore year.

“The difference between now and then was I was a young buck, so it motivated me to do better junior and senior year, but unfortunately I didn’t have a junior year, so this year, it was even more important for me, personally, to excel in this race,” Head said.

DeLong also has some experience on the blue oval track at Drake University. DeLong competed in the Drake Relays 100-meter dash earlier this season.

The relay team feels well prepared for state.

“We are going to keep doing what we are doing,” said Hollenback. The 4x400-meter relay is scheduled to run tomorrow.

As an individual, DeLong qualified for state in both the 200-meter dash and 100-meter dash. DeLong ran 23.19 seconds for the 200-meter dash and 11.29 seconds for the 100-meter dash to qualify.

“It feels phenomenal watching all of my hard work pay off,” said DeLong. “I try to do my best in anything I do. I think it just comes from my very competitive background. I’ve been competing my whole life, so that competitiveness is cemented into my personality.”

DeLong is scheduled to run both individual events today.

The girls’ track team qualified in

two events: the 400-meter hurdles and the shuttle hurdle relay.

The shuttle hurdle relay consists of sophomore Carlie Jo Fusco, junior Elizabeth Daufeldt, freshman Lainey Shelangoski, and senior Savanna Strom. The two alternates are junior Dayna Maiers and freshman Macyn Huston. They qualified with a time of 1:12.43.

Shelangoski has done hurdles since seventh grade and looks to continue doing them throughout her high school career.

“I was not expecting to make it to state, but I am grateful we did,” said Shelangoski.

The last two weeks the relay team has been focusing on its race, specifically the exchanges, which has made the chemistry stronger.

“This event is the one I succeed the most in because I feel like it puts enough pressure on me to hold me accountable by my teammates,” said Shelangoski.

The shuttle hurdle relay is scheduled to run today.

Fusco qualified in the 400-meter hurdles with a time of 1:09.90, a new personal best for her this season.

“I knew I had it in myself. I just had to find it,” said Fusco. “I didn’t expect to excel in the 400 lows as much as I am.” Fusco is set to run tomorrow morning.



Freshman Lainey Shelangoski runs the third leg of the shuttle hurdle relay at the state qualifier May 13 at Tipton High School.

Coach Bland to bring back winning tradition

By Carlie Jo Fusco

The last time the Wildcat softball team made it the state tournament was in 2017 when current junior shortstop Ally Happ was only in seventh grade.

“I want to restart the tradition of making it to the state tournament after seeing it at a very young age,” said Happ, recalling that a trip to the state tournament for the softball team was an expected occurrence each year under former coach Steve Hopkins.

The Wildcats second-year coach, Aubrey Bland, played third base for Coach Hopkins and won a state title in her junior year.

“I think we have a good chance to get back to the state tournament,” said Happ.

Last season the girls finished with a record of 10 wins and five losses.

Coach Bland has many goals for the team this season.

“Every year the goal is to win conference as well as take a trip to state,” Coach Bland said.

“Besides that, my goals for this season are to get the team to take more pride in the program and on the field. We want to get them to focus on the little things more than wins, losses, and statistics.”

The team had only two graduating seniors last season, Kira Schult and Allie Poston.

The graduates were two out of the three team captains last year. Poston was the

varsity starting catcher, and she also led the team with a batting average of .462. Schult played left outfield. Both leave big shoes to fill.

Junior Shannon Head thinks the four-year dry spell could be due to team chemistry.

“I think that our team could do better with chemistry. I think it’s an important part of the game,” Head said.

Coach Bland agrees, believing it should be a team effort as well.

“So trying to get the girls to focus on team instead of me is going to be a big part of this season,” Coach Bland said.

Freshman Savannah Meinert was in the starting varsity lineup her eighth-grade

year. She has a few goals that she would like the team to achieve as well.

“As a team, I believe our goals are to work together and play the best of our abilities,” Meinert said.

“As a team, I think we should just work on being able to handle pressure situations.”

Last season, Poston, Happ, and senior Abbey Rhoades led the team with 10 stolen bases each. Junior Kylie Schult led the team in RBIs with a total of 22.

“The incoming freshmen have a lot of potential and will definitely help. Once they get a few games in on the high school level, I think they will just keep on improving,” Meinert said

Wildcat baseball team hungry for redemption

By Carlie Jo Fusco

The Wildcat baseball team is ready to come back from last year’s heartbreaking loss at the state tournament.

Last year’s team record was 12 wins and 5 losses, including a 6-0 substate victory over Monticello.

In the first-round state tournament game against North Linn, the Wildcats scored one run in the first inning while the Lynx were held scoreless through six innings by Wildcat pitcher senior Nate Dierickx.

However, North Linn scored two runs in the bottom of the seventh on three hits for a 2-1 walk-off victory.

“After the heartbreak that happened last year, there’s nothing I want more than to go back and redeem ourselves,” said junior Ethan Gast.

Dierickx, a returning star player, is now committed to Loras College to pursue his athletic career in baseball.

Dierickx has hopes of breaking the school’s ERA record that he set last year at .50.

Dierickx believes the main weaknesses of this upcoming season could be finding good hitters. After last year’s senior class left, there are many holes in the field and lineup to fill.

“Right now it’s hard to tell the weaknesses. We just need some people to prove who can hit since we lost some starting seniors,” said Dierickx.

Returning junior Ben Orr agrees with Dierickx.

“We have people in our system that are either coming from the bench last year or from JV that should fill in those spots nicely. We’ll miss the seniors, but we have capable players to fill in for them,” Orr said.

Orr also has a few goals of his own for himself and the team.

“I’d like to break the average batting record, field over .900, and have less

than eight strikeouts,” Orr said.

“As a team our goal is to go to state and to win our district.”

Head coach Shaun Dierickx believes that if the team can grow stronger each week, it will succeed in its goal. The biggest factor that the boys need to have is to believe in themselves.

“If we can grow stronger every week and peak in July, we have a strong chance at making it back to state,” Coach Dierickx said.

Several returning players received postseason awards. Nate Dierickx received a variety of awards including *The Des Moines Register* All-Iowa team as an honorable mention.

Orr, Head, and sophomore Nolan DeLong all earned conference awards.

“I believe Aydin Flockhart and Ethan Gast could sneak into that group as well this year,” said Coach Dierickx.

During last season, graduate Jake Willkomm and sophomore DeLong tied for 13 total stolen bases.

DeLong’s older brother, graduate Drew DeLong, led the team with 18 RBIs. Although the DeLong duo had close batting averages of .431 (Drew) and .442 (Nolan), senior Keagen Head led the team, hitting .464.

“The team has been working on our swings during the offseason,” said Head.

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