

MOUNT UNION CROSS COUNTRY

Coach optimistic about harriers' chances this fall

By **JEFF FISHBEIN***Sentinel sports editor*

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MOUNT UNION — Since each of its last Inter-County Conference titles in cross country — the boys two years ago and the girls three — Mount Union's distance runners have struggled to find the same level of success.

Coach Bob Wydock hasn't forgotten his last state runner, but he hasn't seen one make it to the Parkview Course in Hershey recently.

Despite a handful of key losses on both sides of the fence, he remains optimistic that this fall will prove better than the last, when both teams finished under .500 overall, and even in the conference.

Gone are top girls runner Katrina Hammon and teammate Sarah Estep. Graduating from the boys were its top runner, Ryan McKay, along with Brian Wenzel and Kyle Rhodes.

"All three of those guys were letter winners," Wydock notes. "Definitely those runners will be missed," as they meant a lot of points in meets for the Trojans.

Based on the numbers, look for a better outcome this year for the girls, who bring back more than the boys do in terms of experience.

"We have Brooke Staley returning from last year — she's a senior, she's a letter winner," Wydock said, identifying perhaps his top prospect. Also contending to be among the five scoring runners for the girls are sophomores Elizabeth Steward and Kaitlin Todaro, and junior Marissa Aurand.

Of Steward, he said, "It was her first year last year, but she ran track as a distance runner and has really improved. (Aurand) is a junior who's been with us every



Sentinel photo by BUFFIE BOYER

Members of the Mount Union cross country team are, from left, front, Hunter Corbin Jr., Trevor Welch, Devin Crouse, Nicholas Roddy, Shykai Banks, Jarrett Cramer and Garrett Love; back, coach Casey Hanlon, Marissa Aurand, Brooke Staley, Gabrianna Morder, Elizabeth Steward, Kaitlin Todaro, Delaney Roddy, Courtney Bard, Emily Burns and coach Bob Wydock. Jake Boozel also is a member of the team.

year — she's back from our championship team of two years ago. She brings a great deal of experience."

And Todaro, he said, "ran as a ninth grader last year for us, ran track also, so she has a year under her belt. Basically they've been the team leaders."

Add to that Delaney Roddy, who was on the championship team but did not run last year; junior Gabrianna Morder and frosh Emily Burns, and you see the depth for the Mount Union girls. Another runner Wydock hopes will make some noise is sophomore Courtney Bard, who ran track as a freshman.

"She's new to cross country but she should have some pretty good ability out there. She's been working real well," he said.

Devin Krouse, Nick Roddy ("great improvement since he

was freshman last year") and Trevor Welch are among the more experienced boys runners, Wydock said.

"We have some experience there and those guys are going to provide some leadership for the other members of the team, who are all new runners," he said, adding that the youngsters are stepping it up already.

Wydock also welcomes wrestler Jake Boozel, hurdler Kramer and freshman Shykai Banks to the squad, noting that Banks should immediately be a contender for the scoring five.

"Two years ago we had a pretty good team and the year before we were a championship team. But we lost a ton of guys," Wydock said. "The nice thing is, Hunter Corbin, who was neck and neck with Ryan McKay last year, is a junior."

For the boys, he will have the same team for two years — there are no seniors on this year's squad. The more experienced girls will be counted on to provide leadership for the youngsters.

Wydock said the veterans came back in August ready to run, which meant they could work on reducing times and running pace.

"All our veterans came into practice prepared. They've been working on distance — we don't have to establish the base," he said. "I'm pretty pleased with that."

In league meets, he says, "I look for us to be extremely competitive, naturally. The girls are really working hard, the boys are really working hard and they're developing. We're hurting team wise due to graduation once again, but I really like it because we

have some youth there."

Southern Fulton and West Branch should be the toughest challengers for the boys title, while Juniata Valley is always a favorite among the girls.

"We work to improve our ability and do our best, and the hard work eventually will pay off," Wydock said.

AT A GLANCE**MOUNT UNION TROJANS**

District 6, Class A

Coach: Bob Wydock, assisted by Casey Hanlon
2012: Boys and girls, 3-5, 2-2 Inter-County Conference

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