

MCC teams set to battle for

Last year, the race to the top of the Metro Catholic Conference was a tough one for Cham-inade, but a 16th-place finish at the Class 4A state meet made up for it, considering it was the team's first appearance in school history.

This year, the Flyers top runners include seniors Steve Abodeely, Tom Bander, Scott Deaver, Paul Mehan and Matt Dunn; juniors Ryan Keller, Luke Hofmann and Chad Von Doersten; and sophomore Joe Balmer.

Abodeely is the Flyers strong front-runner while Balmer, Keller, Dunn and Von Doersten have the ability to run well as a pack.

The loss of graduated Doug Durand and Andy Vidal, along with the absence of senior Manuel Patino leave the Flyers with question marks on their roster. Patino has been advised not to run as a result of a knee injury suffered last winter that required surgery in the spring.

Despite a relatively inexperienced squad in 1996, the Flyers managed to reach the state meet as a team, and Flyers coach Mike Lampe sees similarities with this fall's team, which he believes can be a bit better.

"I think we're more talented this year," Lampe said. "But I have to admit that we'll really miss Doug. He really held the team together last year."

CBC finished third last year in the MCC and returns a strong roster of experienced runners.

The Cadets' top runners this year include seniors Tom Murphy and Matt Mooney; juniors Mark Hagenhoff, Mike Krull, Jack Bankston and Adam Sullivan; and sophomores Jon-Paul LaVenture, Dave Glennon and Tommy Roy.

The Cadets possess excellent depth, possibly the program's best ever. CBC coach Gaylerd Quigley projects up to eight Cadets running sub-18-minutes by mid-season.

Unfortunately for the Cadets, they only have two seniors among their top nine runners. Three of top nine Cadets are sophomores, but only one has any previous varsity experience. Last fall's No. 1 runner, state-qualifier Bryan Roche, has graduated.

The Cadets narrowly missed a trip to the state meet as a team last season, finishing fifth at their 4A sectional meet. CBC hasn't advanced as a team to the state meet since 1987, but Quigley thinks the Cadets can reach that goal this time around if everyone stays healthy.

"Our sophomores have the talent to help us," Quigley said. "The question is whether they can hold out over the long haul. If they can, then I think we can be more competitive with SLUH and DeSmet (in Metro Catholic competition), and maybe make the state meet."

A strong 10th-place finish at the 4A state meet and a second-place finish in the MCC topped a fine season for DeSmet last year.

The Spartans' talent runs deep and includes seniors Jeff Harvath, Pat Kolb, Casey Mills and Jason Shotwell, juniors Rob Dirnbeck, Mike Mohan, Tim Muckler, Pete Eichholz, Brian Feldman, and Justin Guerra, and sophomores Jake Tressler and Paul Kenney.

DeSmet coach Tom Sothers has been impressed by the amount of summer mileage the team has logged.

"It's been one of my hardest-working groups," he said. Only 40 seconds separate DeSmet's No. 6 through No. 12 runners.

Only one senior is among the team's top seven runners as the season begins, although Miller (28th at state meet) ought to move up a number of places (he's currently eighth) once he fully recovers from tendonitis. The younger runners need to respond well to the "competitive experience" early in the season.

Sothers has high hopes, once again.

"We anticipate going back to the state meet and doing better than we did last year," he said. "We'd also like to knock off SLUH this year."

Kennedy enters its first year of cross country competition. The Celts' top runners include seniors Jason Burns and Sean Trani; sophomores Mark Durst and Andy Ruzicka; and freshman Mike Slane.

Everyone except Slane ran track last season, so the Celts have experienced runners to start the fledgling program. Burns has some experience with distance events, as he ran the 1,600- and 3,200-meter races during the track season.

However, none of these runners has ever competed in cross country.

The goal for this team is to prepare for the future while trying to be competitive this season. Burns should give the Celts a runner with some postseason promise, but the focus is on next year.

"Luckily, I have three runners who are pretty young to help build the program for future years," Celts coach Stephanie Lierz said.

Not only did St. Louis University High out-battle DeSmet to nab the Metro Catholic Conference title, but the Junior Bills also captured a 4A district crown before placing ninth at the state meet. Then-senior Joe Donnelly placed 19th to lead SLUH's best finish since taking eighth in 1991.

This year, the Junior Bills top runners include seniors John Christie, Ben Rosario, Chris Graesser, Scott Lauer, Luke Schulte and John Ramsey; junior Ken Reichert; and sophomores Murphy O'Brien and Ted Snodgrass.

SLUH returns four runners who have varsity experience and another who barely missed making the roster. They've already produced quality times: Rosario, 16 minutes, 47 seconds; Christie, 17:14; Graesser, 17:22; O'Brien, 17:24; Lauer, 17:29; and Snodgrass, 17:47.

Reichert, who was SLUH's second best last year, is currently battling injuries. He will be key for SLUH to get by DeSmet, Parkway South and Parkway West and to have a chance at challenging the likes of Springfield Kickapoo and defending 4A state champion Jefferson City.

"First, the kids get along really well and like each other," SLUH coach Jim Linhares said. "They're all really serious about their running. About eight of them went to camps in Arkansas this summer. I think we can move up this year. We have to set our goals higher, but so will the other teams."

Last year, Vianney finished last in the Metro Catholic Conference and the Griffins best runners have little-to-no varsity experience.

The Griffins are led this year by a host of juniors: Mark Rogers, Mark Errante, Tim O'Donnell, Corey Donahue and Brad Wunderlich.

Rogers and Errante are capable runners who