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ALL-STATE XC: On the trail of a title

Heading into last week's EMass Division 1 Championship Meet at Franklin Park, the Newton South and overwhelming were the underdogs, seemingly vying for second behind the dominant Warriors.

That image shattered when Lion junior Kelsey Karys and sophomore Madeleine Reed finished 1-2 with senior Hannah Westbrook, junior Juliet Ryan-Davis and sophomore Melanie Fineman placed 11th, 12th and 17th as South toppled Goliath, 43-55, to claim its 10th EMass title in 18 seasons.

Tomorrow, in the All-State Championship Meet at the Gardner Municipal Golf Course (Mt. Wachusett Community College, 11 a.m.), the Lions will switch roles with their nemeses and come in as, arguably, stemming from last week's upset loss. Freshman Andrea Keklak fell down at FP's Bear Cage Hill while leading before finishing third, while senior Dana Jamieson, who placed third behind Keklak and Karys at DCL's, placed 19th while running with bandaged ankles. Both finished 40 seconds slower than they had at DCL's. L-S will also be bolstered by the return of junior Ellie Hylton, who finished fifth at DCL's but did not run last Saturday.

Translation: L-S will be healthier and more focused tomorrow and figures to more closely resemble the juggernaut that cruised through the DCL this season. South coach Steve McChesney allowed that much saying after the D-I race: "I think we woke up a sleeping giant." Still, the veteran coach likes his chances, given that his squad is finally completely healthy after suffering from various injuries and illnesses through the dual-meet season. Plus, the Lions have their own motivation to hold on to the top spot in the state.

"I feel like we are just where we want to be going into All-States," said McChesney. "We are fit and happy coming off of a very uplifting EMass meet. When the season started everyone felt L-S was the team to beat and we wanted to improve enough to be in the hunt with them. We can now go into this meet knowing that we are ready to take on that challenge."

for the All-State meet, South and L-S appear to be the class of the girls meet ahead of Haverhill, Beverly, Whitman-Hanson and Chelmsford. South and L-S project to score between 50 and 75 points each, while Haverhill (111), Beverly (167), W-H (169) and Chelmsford (196) are all in the hunt for a trophy.

Karys (18:31) and Reed (18:37) will challenge EMass Division II champion Kirsten Kasper of North Andover for the Individual championship, while Westbrook (19:25) and Ryan-Davis (19:25) hope to finish in the early 20's or late teens. Fineman is shooting to place 35th or better as the Lions hope to have their scoring five in the top 35. North junior Carolyn Ranti placed fourth last Saturday and could break into the top-5 tomorrow.

"Our goal is to have our scoring top five come in the top 30-35," said McChesney. "We have asked a couple of our girls to improve a bit upon last week and also need our sixth and seventh to run races that will put us in a position to win if they are needed to score. Having our all of our runners running to play important roles should may help us in case of a tie, which is not out of the question."

Of course, it depends on which L-S team shows up. If the Warriors run as they did at DCL's, L-S may win convincingly, by about 15-20 points. If both South and L-S turn in efforts similar to those at D-I's, the Lions emerge with a 15- to 20-point victory. So many factors (the course, injuries, illness, weather, times converted from West and Central races on other courses) affect the final tally that discerning a favorite is virtually impossible. But McChesney defers to L-S.

"I would say that going into this meet a case could be made for either team being the favorite," said McChesney. "I am willing to wait and how things turn out. If I had to name a favorite, I would say it has to be L-S because of such a great overall season. But I really like where we are as a team right now and there is a lot to be said for believing. I feel comfortable that our girls like our chances and that gives me a great deal of comfort as their coach."