

Coles County Sports

CROSS COUNTRY

Mattoon boys, Charleston girls have high hopes of advancing as a team at Class 2A XC Regionals



Charleston's Sofie Kattenbraker runs slightly ahead of Olympia's Jordan Bicknell towards the finish line during the 2021 Bulldog XC Invitational in Effingham Saturday morning. Bicknell finished 54th.

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When the opportunity presents itself, the question is always who is going to take advantage of it?

The Mattoon Green Wave boys cross country team is positioned to make a run to qualify for the next level of the postseason at the Class 2A Olney Regional this Saturday. However, Mattoon head coach Troy Haacke believes that is going to be very close for that final spot.

Mahomet-Seymour is heavily favored to win the Regional with Champaign Central and Urbana potentially finishing right behind. Mt. Vernon and Champaign Centennial could contend for any spot fourth through sixth, while Mattoon figures to be in the mix with Effingham and Olney for the final qualifying spot.

"I just told the boys that I think four teams are fighting for one spot," said Haacke. "It's going to be a dog fight. We are going to have to run as a group and run for each other. It's all about you and the runner in front of you. It's all going to come down to as low as 10 points I think."

Mattoon is headlined by senior Brock Davee, who owns a personal best time of 14:54.8 this season, but was defeated by Apollo Conference champion Joseph Sheele of Mahomet-Seymour. Urbana's Sam Lambert owns a time of 15:22.2 and figures to be a top contender for a top-3 finish, while Scheele's teammate Kyle Nofziger has been right around Davee's time to form a friendly rivalry.

"He should be in the conversation for top-3," said Haacke. "He is currently ranked No. 5 on paper. Mahomet brings the returning conference champion and another kid that beat him. Brock barely outkicked the Nofziger kid at the very end. There's also a kid from Urbana that is pretty fast. The one advantage he has is that he is familiar with the course. That is a huge advantage and I think he'll be fine as long as he does what he normally does."

If the Green Wave doesn't advance as a team, Haacke believes that Sam Ferrar could be in the mix for an individual spot. Ferrar has been a contender for a top-10 spot in seven meets this season and hovered around the low 17-minute mark.

"Sam is having a great senior year," said Haacke. "I am proud of him. A goal he set out was top-10 every meet and he has consistently met or been near that goal. As long as he has the right mindset, he could be in the conversation for individuals if the team doesn't make it out."

Another individual qualifier could be Charleston's Luca Carcasi. Head coach Greg Rogers does not see the Trojans advancing as a team this season.

"According to the Athletic.net rankings, we are ranked 10th out of 10 teams in our Regional," said Rogers. "I don't foresee us qualifying for the IHSA Sectional as a team, however, I do foresee Luca Carcasi as a solid individual qualifier if he runs at the same level he has all year, he should be the third individual qualifier based on current Regional times/rankings. Blake Homann is about five places away from qualifying, but those five are definitely within reach if Blake has a good day."

Rogers is hopeful that the team can compete well in what appears to be their final meet of the season.

"While our team isn't looking at qualifying, I have been proud of my remaining runners' attitudes and competitive drive," said Rogers. "At our meet at St. Anthony this past Saturday, I was proud of their responsiveness and engagement during the race. There have been times throughout the year where individuals have not been engaged in the race and were just out there to run, so my main goal this Saturday is for my team to always stay engaged and to be competitive."

On the girls side, Mahomet-Seymour is also favored to win the Regional with Ava Boyd and Effingham's Jessica Larson favored to take the individual title. Champaign Centennial, Mt. Vernon, Effingham, and Urbana are also in consideration to move on as a team. On paper, Charleston is ranked as the last qualifying team.

"Our girls' team is projected to make it out of the Regional as the sixth and last team," said Hawk. "We rested our top two girls on Saturday in the hopes that some lingering aches and pains can have some time to heal. I'm expecting to have our top seven altogether and relatively healthy for the first time all year."

Junior Whitley Wood owns the 15th best overall time in the Regional with a time of 20:15.0 on the season. Junior Ila Richter, a state qualifier from last year, appears to be healthy for the first time this season after making strides since the back end of September. To truly advance, Charleston will need a big day from their last three runners in Sophia Kattenbracker, Lilly Long, and Jordyn Kiefer, who have hovered around the 22-minute mark or less this season.

“I am mainly looking to see how they compete this week with the hopes to get several girls finishing in the top 25,” said Hawk. “We want to build some momentum going into a tough Sectional meet in Decatur, but we need to make sure we advance past this week first.”

Mattoon appears to be on the outside of qualifying teams, but Haacke sees his two top runners as prospects to advance individually. Oakley Layton owns the 18th best time in the Regional, while Hallee Perry is ranked 33rd.

“Hallee and Oakley have a great shot to get out individually,” said Haacke. “The top six teams take a lot of girls away. The next five individuals have both of them in that mix. They just can’t fall apart and have to run a good race.”



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