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Girls Cross Country Preview: Marietta Running for Fifth Straight Title

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Anchored by individual state champion Mary Nesmith, Marietta's girls cross country program is in pursuit of its fifth straight state title this fall.

Special - Anthony Stalcup

Cobb County is in no shortage of talent when it comes to girls cross country.

"Girls cross country in Cobb County is tough. It's tough. Harrison, Walton and Pope put up some of the best teams out there year in year out," Marietta coach Jack Coleman said. "You know, they've all got great individuals. The Cobb County championship in cross country and track is like state. It's going to have the major players in it."

Marietta is preparing for a season in which it will try to continue to solidify their dynasty by winning its fifth straight state championship and seventh of the last eight years. However, the team will have to find a few new pieces first, as three of its top seven runners from the last year's title team graduated.

Coleman said replacing them will be a challenge because they had been there for all four state championships, but he said the team has the depth to be just as good next year.

“The girls’ culture is very good,” Coleman said. “They do a very good job of bringing in people and us, managing the girls themselves, bonding and getting each other to make the commitments to the team that are necessary.”

The road to a fifth state title will also be put to the test by the new Georgia High School Association format. There will be fewer teams advancing to state this year, and instead of a region meet, the GHSA will combine four regions and host sectional meets instead.

“It’ll be different because we won’t get to line up with just seven teams against each other,” Coleman said. “We’ll be out there with 30 teams. We’ll still be racing each other, but it’ll be a little different.”

Coleman said the runners expected to return are going to be very important for the team’s goal of winning a fifth straight state championship.

“We’ve got to always be looking to the next season and bringing along the junior varsity runners and runners deeper down the roster,” he said. “We always have people ready to step up when their season comes along”

The most valuable of those expected returners is junior Mary Nesmith. As a freshman, Nesmith placed fifth at state, then followed in her sophomore year with a state title, winning by nearly 30 seconds.

“Mary’s very important to the team. She’s one of our team leaders,” Coleman said. “On the course, she’s a very hard worker. She puts in really good effort all the time. You couldn’t ask for a more solid runner on the team.”

Nesmith is expected to be joined by senior Maddie Jones, who finished third in last year’s state meet, along with juniors Colette DePasquale (13th) and Bella Russell (26th).

The Blue Devils will be joined in Class AAAAAA by other elite Cobb County teams Walton and Harrison, which finished second and third in the state, respectively.

Walton expects to return six of its top seven finishers from the state meet. Sophomore Julia Betton, junior Mallory Old and junior Nicole Delgado all finished the state meet in the top 25.

Harrison may have to do a little more rebuilding after three of its top seven runners graduated. One of the graduates was Samantha McGarity, who was the Hoyas’ top finisher in the state meet, where she finished 11th.

Harrison, however, does return Isabel Wilson and Peyton Reeves, who both finished in the top 30.

Pope will try to win its first state title since 2020, competing in the new-look Class AAAAA. The Greyhounds will lean on experience this year as they expect to return six of their top seven runners from state last year.

They are expected to be led by Josie Hutchinson, who finished third in the Class AAAAAA meet a year ago, and Aislynn Dunn, who finished eighth.

Whitefield Academy will compete in Class A Division I this year. The Wolfpack have a trio of seniors who were its top three finishers in state last year, led by Ruby Gordon, who finished third in the Class A state meet a year ago.