

Will Leigh and St. Francis run away with titles again?

Sept 30, 1982

By Fran Errota
Staff Writer

There is a prevailing opinion that the Central Coast Section cross country season will have striking similarities to last year.

Leigh won the boys championship and St. Francis won the girls title. Both are expected to repeat.

Individually, Grant Foster of Monta Vista returns to defend the boys crown. But there will be a new girls champion since last year's top two finishers were seniors.

Of course, what happened last year is not necessarily an indication of what will transpire this season. Cross country is an unpredictable sport that requires bringing five runners to a peak at the proper time — like Nov. 23, when the CCS Championship meet is held at Crystal Springs.

Bill Hotchkiss, who has coached more than his share of winners at Leigh, likes to have the experience he has at his command. But he is quick to remind you that a year ago his team was not picked to win because there were others who were in the position he is in this year.

"Last year was just that," he said. "It doesn't mean a thing this fall. For instance, our kids will have to do it all over again and that means they have to avoid injuries and run in a close pack as they did a year ago."

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— Leigh coach Bill Hotchkiss

Leigh has won four championships, but Hotchkiss has reason for concern this fall.

"Our championships came in 1973, '77, '79 and '81," said. "I don't know what happened in '75 and I don't know why we've never won in an even-numbered year. I hope we break that spell."

Tom Tuite, coach of the defending champion St. Francis girls team, also is cautious in discussing his

team's chances of repeating.

"We have a good group returning," he said, "but a number of schools have good people back. It is too early to form a judgment."

"We were thrilled to win last year and the returnees would like to experience another victory, but it is easier said than done. It just depends on who has the good fortune on that particular day. I think we have a good chance to repeat, but a lot of teams have a good chance to beat us."

Mercury forecast:

BOYS

1. Leigh — Roy Garcia (7th), Dave Bell (11th) and Chris Craig (14th) return to form a strong nucleus. Only defending champion Grant Foster of Monta Vista returns from among those who finished ahead of Garcia last year. The Longhorns also have Terry Shimada and Dave Leonard back from last year's first seven, but Leonard will be out at least a month because of an injury. Hotchkiss is hopeful juniors Nelson Cottier and Dave Hamm and sophomore Dan Bergkamp will develop in case Leonard has trouble getting into condition to help in late-season meets. Bergkamp is the latest in a long line of brothers who have starred in distance events at Leigh.

2. Saratoga — The Falcons could win it all since they return four of the first 27 finishers in last year's CCS meet. Joe Rust will be looking for a fifth man and two others to give his team the necessary depth to beat the Longhorns. Eugene Tung (15th), Aaron Gabriel (17th), Doug Golliher (18th) and Jeff Hongo (27th) form a nucleus any other school would envy.

3. Willow Glen — A possible titlist if Orben Jones can find at least two runners to go with the talented trio of Orlando Biggs (26th last year) and Mike and Dave Livingston.

4. Bellarmine — Team peaked a week or two too

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early last fall and that experience may help this year. Terry Ward has a fine runner in junior Shawn Ayers, who finished 12th last year, along with Rod Sellard, a 1:54.6 half-miler and 4:25.8 miler during the track season. The Bells have others who gained valuable experience a year ago.

5. Carlmont — Could be a rebuilding year for Scots, but Loren Lansberry has operated one of the quality programs in the state for more than 25 years. Mike Anderson returns as the leader for a team that will develop into a challenger by the end of the season.

Others — Several Los Gatos runners were graduated, but the team should be strong at the end of the season. Teams like San Lorenzo Valley and Lick could also be challengers.

Foster is the leading individual. Interestingly, he uses cross country to condition himself for a sport other than track and field. He is a talented bicyclist.

Other strong runners include Matt Giusto (San Mateo), Jose Gurrola (South San Francisco), Jimmy LaFuenta (Mt. Pleasant), Bill Daley (Gunderson), Sean Crowley (Overfelt), Tom Legan (Independence), Chris Bowe (Pacific Grove), Paul Ghidosi (Capuchino) and Craig Ulibarri (Silver Creek). Crowley, Legan and Ghidosi are juniors who were track stars last spring.

GIRLS

1. St. Francis — Susan Brodie led the Lady Lancers to the title last year with a third-place finish, and the two finishers ahead of her have been graduated. Kim Himenes (9th) also returns along with twin Karen Himenes, but Karen returned to school in poor condition because of a summer bout with mononucleosis. The team has talent and experience in Gail McClure, Renee Gillim, Dana Rositano, Diana Rossman and Sheryl Sant. All but Gillim, who was hurt, ran last year and Sant has shown marked improvement. This team could be better than the one that won it all in '81.

2. Del Mar — Cory Schubert, Lanette Davis and Nora Baker provide a good nucleus, but the team needs at least two more quality runners to challenge St. Francis.

3. Saratoga — Connie Buckler, eighth a year ago, could challenge for individual honors. Several other promising runners make the Lady Falcons tough in team competition.

4. Soquel — Helen Muth is among the most experienced and talented runners in the CCS. She finished sixth a year ago and Jenny Smith gives the Knights a second good runner. Soquel traditionally is strong.

5. Mills — A quality program. Mills finished among the leaders a year ago only to be disqualified because of improper uniform. Barbara Gaenslen and Karen McGough return to form a strong nucleus.

Leland will contend with Jeanette DeMoss and Carla Halford leading the charge. Homestead, Los Gatos and Mitty also could be contenders.

Nanette Garcia, a sophomore at Silver Creek who finished fourth in the state 3200-meter race, figures to be among the leaders for individual honors.

An outstanding freshman prospect is Shannon Clark of Mountain View. Therese Fisher of Los Gatos is a good sophomore.

Other top runners who do not represent rated teams are Barbara Keehner of Hill, Sharon Yaninek of Presentation, Michelle Seck of Lynbrook, Susie Nelson of San Mateo, Sari Kelly of Cupertino, Silvia Aguirre of Burlingame, Cindy Whitmer of Gilroy, Debbie Beste of Willow Glen and Cinty Pierce of Jefferson.