

Rockford Christian's historic run sets stage for next season

By Reed Schreck

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ROCKFORD —

After his **Rockford Christian** girls track team finished Top Ten at state, coach **Joel Sprecher** went to the IHSA Web site.

He discovered that his **Royals** were the first Class A Rockford team to place Top Ten at state, and first Rockford team to do so in 16 years. Guilford tied for fifth in 1978, and East was eighth in 1991 and tied for third in 1992.

Seven NIC-9 or NIC-10 schools have placed in the Top Ten, but only the E-Rabs collected a team trophy with a top-three finish. And that was more a family effort than a team effort, as Donna and Patsy Cargill accounted for all 38 points in 1992.

Belvidere was sixth in 1990 and tied for fourth in 1991. Hononegah was the only conference school since East in 1992 to reach top 10 by tying for eighth in 2006.

For **Rockford Christian**, while it just experienced its most success, the best may be ahead. Only one relay girl — **Stephanie Braun** — graduates. The rest of the team's point scorers return.

Molly Ellis, who just completed her junior year, leads the way after securing second in the 400 (56.60 seconds) and fourth in the 100 (12.89, but 12.63 in prelims).

Sophomore **Courtney McKibben** took fourth in the 100-meter high hurdles (15.73, but 15.50 in prelims). Junior **Emily Reier**son filled out the 1,600 relay that placed seventh (4:12.54, but 4:07.08 in prelims). The same four girls also reached state in the 400 relay.

"It's bold to say we're going to get a trophy," **Sprecher** said of 2009, "but I think it's something to strive for."

It wasn't a stated goal to get Top Ten this year.

"It was a surprise," **Sprecher** said. "We expected **Molly** to place pretty high in the 400 and she was for real. We knew **Courtney** was a good hurdler and her times were coming down, but she really turned it on at sectionals."

Ellis called the team finish “exciting.”

“We weren’t expecting it at first. After we got there, then we realized it was a possibility.”

Just as she realizes, by being the top returnee in the 400, she has a shot at an individual title.

“It’s not so much pressure, but knowing it’s a possibility will make me try to work harder so it can happen,” she said. “I’m not expecting anything yet.”

Sprecher had an average turnout of 15 girls in his fourth season as head coach and fifth with the program.

“The first step is to try and get as much excitement and as many girls involved and get them in their best shape,” **Sprecher** said. “My hope is to get as many girls as possible to run cross country, and some are going to be doing track in summer.”

Whatever it takes to earn a Top Three trophy.

“We haven’t made plans that far ahead,” **Ellis** said, “but it would be really cool.”