

# Marquette Girls, Boys Track Teams Primed for Best Seasons Ever, Hold Out Hope Coronavirus Concerns Will Diminish

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ALTON - The girls and boys track and field teams at Marquette Catholic High School are poised to have one of their best seasons ever, with top talent returning, including a pair of top-ten runners in the state of Illinois.

But the season has already ground to a halt, even before a regular-season outdoor meet has been run. The Explorers are now waiting to see if IHSA sports resume action and school starts again in April.

The concerns and uncertainty over the season all stem from the ongoing COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic around the world and has forced almost unprecedented precautions to be taken around the state, including the closing of all public and private schools in Illinois. To date, the Illinois High School Association has yet to decide whether or not to cancel the spring sporting seasons, almost two weeks after canceling the remainder of the boys' state basketball tournaments, due to COVID-19 concerns.

As a result of the school closures, no meets or formal practice sessions are being allowed, although the athletes can train on their own. The delayed start of the season has concerned head coach Tim Turnbeaugh, who sees the vast potential of the Explorers' team.

"This would be very heartbreaking for the kids if they aren't able to have a part of the season," Turnbeaugh said during a recent interview, "because I think they know how good they could be at the end of the year. If they put the work in which, with the stoppage, I can't do anything with them, so they have to do this on their own. I'm hoping the discipline, which we've tried to instill in them, stays with them, and that they use it to their advantage."

The girls team will be headed by senior Riley Vickrey, who is one of the state's top distance runners, and was one of four returnees who qualified for the IHSA Class 1A state meet last year at Charleston. Other returning state qualifiers are junior middle distance runner Nathaliah Buttry, junior sprinter Jessica Cutts and sophomore hurdler and long jumper Tristen Fraley.

Vickrey recently signed a letter-of-intent to attend Missouri Southern University in Joplin to run on the cross-country team, and will be the Explorers' girls top runner. Turnbeaugh will also depend on the younger runners to score points for the Explorers in meets this season.

"I have so many girls who went to state as freshmen and sophomores," Turnbeaugh said, "and are now sophomores and juniors. They've been working hard, and this may be my best girls team in awhile. But they've still got to put the work in."

Those younger runners include freshman sprinters Sammy Hentrich, Mya McKenzie and Caroline Rea, and freshman middle-distance runner Kailey Vickrey. Freshmen Clara Borman, Jenna Dean, Jaylenn Dickson, Serenity Eldridge and Emma Lendarth, along with sophomores Gabriela Choy, Atira Merriweather, Natalie Nosco and Teryn Smith will also contribute to the team this coming season. Also look for juniors Sydney Cahn, Ellie Hamberg and DeAnna Wells, and senior Seun Obanigba to be a part of the Explorers' success.

The majority of the boys team will be led by junior state shot put qualifier Jake Hewitt, and also has much potential. Expected to be the main point scorers for the Explorers will be first-year junior high jumper Khalin Bethel, second-year junior sprinter Nick Guerin, junior hurdler and long jumper Connor Hampton, first-year senior middle distance runner Asher Linkous, along with junior Jacob Morris, sophomore Dami Obanigba and senior Jake Rummerfield, and junior sprinter Kalen Williams.

Also looking to make major contributions to the team are freshmen Chris Jackson and Jackson Pranger, sophomores Nate Buhs, Braden Coles, Matthew Dixon, Sam Harshbarger, Kendall Neal, Colton Stewart and Sam Ward, and juniors Devon Fields, Stephen Hartzell, Zachary Smith and Sam Yungling.

Turnbeaugh feels that Hewitt has the chance to repeat as a state qualifier, while Hampton has a personal best 18' 10" leap in the long jump at a recent indoor meet.

Overall, Turnbeaugh feels that this could be a banner year for Marquette track, and the potential is there for its best season ever.

"I really think that this could be a great year," Turnbeaugh said, holding on to hope the coronavirus concerns will diminish and the season will resume in April.