

Hawks rank among favorites to win Observerland title

BY RICHARD L. SPOOK
STAFF WRITER

It happens every spring. At least it's happened every one of the last 30.

Saturday will mark the 31st year for the Observerland Relays, one of the highlight meets of the track and field season for area high schools.

"It's good for the kids," said Tony Magni, coach of one of the meet favorites, Redford Catholic Central. "They know each other. They're all basically from the same neighborhood."

"They know what (each other) can do. It's very competitive, yet there's a lot of mutual respect."

"As a track and field athlete, you point to a few meets throughout the year. The Observerland is one they like to do well in."

This year's meet will be held at Redford Union's home facility, Hilbert Junior High. Field events start at 3:30 p.m. and the running finals at 7 p.m.

Among the favorites (a role nobody seems to want) are defending champion Plymouth Canton, CC, Farmington Harrison, Northville and possibly Livonia city champion Churchill.

"What? Us? Catholic Central has to be the favorite," Canton's Bob Richardson protested. "They won the Dearborn Elks; we got fourth."

"Tony has another good team of distance kids, sprinters, hurdlers and relay teams. What he doesn't have is pole vault. That's where we will probably do well."

Three different schools dominate one of three segments of the meet and how well each of the three punch on the other's turf could determine the winner.

"What we have to do is score points in the field events," Harrison coach John Reed said, "and that's where Canton is strong and CC, too. CC is real strong in the distance events."

Canton appears strongest in the field events, Harrison dominates the sprint relays while CC is formidable in the distance relays.

The Chiefs won the pole vault last year and returns all three competitors: Jordan Chapman, Brian Page and Kevin Palmer.

"We've got a 14-footer, 12-footer and 11-6," Richardson said. "We should be able to score some pretty good points there. I would say we'll be one of the top three."

Also expected to be among the top three is Churchill, which has three of the top four pole vault heights on the area's top 10 list this spring.

The Chargers' Kevin Peterman (13-9), Howard Whitefoot (12-6) and Frank Baker (12-3) provide coach Rick Austin's team with tremendous balance.

Andrew Ribar and Michael Ghannam also give Churchill the start of a good showing in the discus.

"We have a very young team,"

TRACK

Austin said, "We're still filling holes. But I would never count us out. Anything can happen this year."

"Canton has a strong team. They're one of the more balanced teams, and that's what you need to win the Observerland Relays."

Canton won last year's meet with 68 points, edging Harrison by three and CC by six.

"If we do well," Harrison's

Reed said, "we can be up there. It will be a real competitive meet."

The Hawks scored heavily in the sprint relays a year ago and figure to do so again.

Harrison won the 400 relay and 800 relay events last season and returns two runners, Agim Shahaj and Marcus Woods, from each foursome. The Hawks' Charles Pickett owns one of the area's 10-best times in the 100.

"(Brian) Coats could do well in the mile," Reed said. "We should

get some points in the pole vault, the shot and discus, too. We'll be OK in the long jump."

"We'll score some points in the field events, but we're not one of the top three teams. But, when we get on the track, I expect to be right up there with the best."

"If we do well in the field events, I expect us to be right there."

"I'll take the trophy without even running," CC's Magni chuckled. "I think we're one of maybe three or four teams that

has a pretty good shot at it. Obviously we're not the only one."

"We're going to be strong in the distance events again. We'll be down a little bit in the field events, especially the shot and discus."

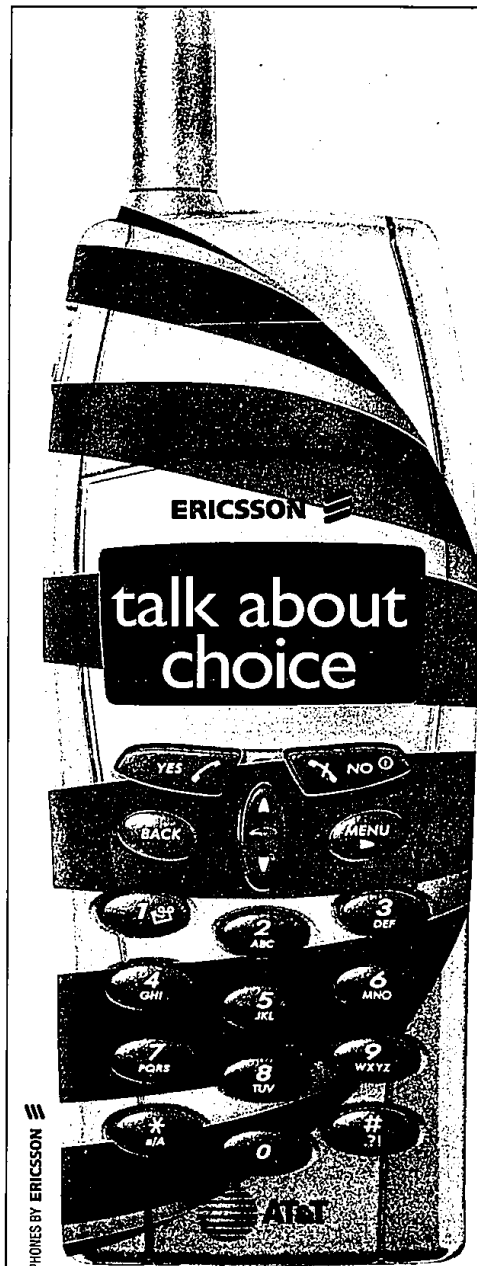
CC returns the 1,600 winner, Matt Daly, but he won't defend in a strategic move by Magni to maximize his team's points.

Both Donnie Warner of Plymouth Salem and Churchill's Ryan Gall have posted lower times in the 1,600 this season.

What Magni is going to do is ask Daly to double up in the distance relays.

"He'll run in the four-mile relay and come back in the two-mile relay," Magni said. "We're not going to put him in the mile."

"Hopefully, he'll be strong enough to do what we ask. We won both (the mile- and two-mile relays) last year with basically the same kids in each event. We lost two from last year, so hopefully putting Matt in there could make us as strong."



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31ST OBSERVERLAND BOYS TRACK RELAYS

Where: Saturday, May 5,
Where: Redford Union's Kraft Field
Alumni Track, 28440 Puritan (at Kinloch).

Order of events: 3:30 field events (pole vault, high jump, discus, shot put, long jump); 6 p.m. preliminary heats (110-meter hurdles, 100 dash); 6:30 p.m. finals (8-400 relay, 110 hurdles, distance medley, 800 relay, 1,600 run, 2,200 relay, 200 dash, sprint medley, shuttle hurdle relay, 400 relay, 1,600 relay).

Participating teams: Redford Union, Redford Thurston, Redford Catholic Central, Redford Bishop Borgese, Redford St. Agatha, Garden City, Plymouth Canton (defending champion), Plymouth Salem, Livonia Churchill, Livonia Franklin, Livonia Stevenson, Livonia Clarenceville, Westland John Glenn, Wayne Memorial, Farmington North, Farmington, Farmington Hills Harrison, Northville.

Admission: \$4, adults; \$1 seniors and elementary students.

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