

# A Season of Beginnings

## Cross-Country Preview

By Karina Schlect

The start of a new season is always exciting: new seniors leading the team; new freshmen trying to find their niche; new chances to improve and compete. But not every season begins with the kind of excitement that Concordia's cross-country team is enjoying this year. In addition to all these things, add the birth of the third child of Head Coach Jonathan Breitbarth the week before the start of classes. This has made what is naturally a big transitional time into an even bigger one for this team.

Two helpers this year in the midst of this are Matt Buns, the new Assistant Coach, and Dave Pieper, a volunteer coach. In a normal preseason, the team travels to Heartwood Conference Center and Retreat in Trego, Wisconsin, but because of the unusual circumstances this year, they stayed close to home. Most teams across the sports spectrum use preseason to get in shape and plan out the coming months of training and competing. The Golden Bears cross-country team is not most teams.

The biggest focus during what the cross-country team calls "Camp Week" (the week leading up to the first week of classes) is creating and building a culture of teamwork. Track and cross-country are often seen more as individual sports, but Breitbarth believes that the biggest improvements from season-to-season need to come from encouraging and supporting one another. The team works to set overall season goals, which they then break down into smaller goals to aim towards throughout the season. One area of weakness that the teams need to be aware of is the size of each squad. Breitbarth explains, "We rely on being smart about what they're doing, knowing the line of how hard they can push without getting hurt. We have to

be a little more mindful that we are a smaller team, that we can get up to the edge, but can't push it as much as we'd like to with more depth." The team's strengths, however, seem to outweigh this lack of depth. Breitbarth describes the women's team as very hardworking; "We have 'blue-collar-type' ladies that get out and put in the work." And he says that the men's team has the ability to see the importance of self-improvement; "They're not intimidated by the competition because they stay focused on the process."

The women's squad is still that same group from last year's team—led by senior Maggie Marcus and junior Erin Spatenka—but the men lost a number of strong senior runners. Sam Anderson is this year's lone senior that was part of last year's group of leading male runners. Breitbarth says that he is transitioning into a sort of "father figure" role in order to lead the team and build up the next generation of runners. The coaching staff is encouraging these young Golden Bears to focus mainly on their college transition, a rocky time of life no matter how close one is to home.

This year, Concordia hosts the NSIC Conference Championships. Every few years the Golden Bears host the NSIC Conference Championships, and this is one of those years. The meet will be on October 24, 2015 at the University of Minnesota's Les Bolstad Golf Course.

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