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Raiders look for returners to shine

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Like its girls team, Walton may have lost several key runners from the 2007 cross country season, but the Raiders remain the team to beat in Region 6AAAAA this season.

Walton has several holes to fill in its lineup after losing fourth-place state finisher Mark Vigliotti, Thomas Pilliod and Daniel Heller, among others, from last year's 6AAAAA champions and fourth-place state finisher in Class AAAAA.

As always the Raiders have the talent to fill those holes, with seniors Will Bryfczynski, Adam Joseph and Richard Burroughs and junior Phillip Laskey among the key returnees.

Lassiter is expected to be one of Walton's main challengers in the region, despite the loss of 2007 AAAAA state champion Zack Flickinger.

Seniors Austen Gutierrez and David Pate and junior Christian Erdman will lead the way for the Trojans.

The North Fulton trio of Centennial, Alpharetta and Milton will be the other main challengers for team berths to the state meet, while Pope, Kell, Wheeler and Campbell are the other local teams in the region.

Marietta has been the runner-up in Region 5AAAAA the last two years, but the Blue Devils have a strong shot at claiming the top spot in 2008.

They are bolstered by the presence of senior Obiandu Igwe, the reigning 5AAAAA champion, along with fellow seniors Frank Van Valkenburg and Mark Hiron.

First, however, Marietta will have to dethrone defending champion Etowah, which will be led by 5AAAAA individual runner-up Alex Merrill.

Harrison is also expected to be among the top contenders in Region 5AAAAA, with seniors Ryan Burruss and Lee McClung and junior Derek Brunson the top runners for the Hoyas.

North Cobb will also be contending for a team berth to the state meet, with Alec Clifford leading the way for the Warriors. McEachern and South Cobb face rebuilding years.

At Hillgrove, things are looking up as the Hawks enter their third season of cross country competition as a top contender in Region 7AAAA.

Junior Stephen Payne and senior Patrick Stuart are the top runners for Hillgrove, which will try to improve on its fourth-place finish in 5AAAA last season.

Other local teams in 7AAAA are the first-year program of Allatoona, which is led by former Kennesaw Mountain coach Dave Ravenscraft, along with Sprayberry and Osborne.

Pebblebrook will be competing in Region 4AAAAA, while Walker, Whitefield Academy, North Cobb Christian and Mt. Paran will try to make waves in Region 5A.



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