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Stage races kick off runners' year

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Walton will be joined by a few other Cobb teams as they kick off the 2008 cross country season with the Walton Stage Races at the River Green Complex in Duluth on Saturday.

Walton, which co-hosts the event with Peachtree Ridge, will be joined by fellow Cobb teams Harrison and Pope.

The Walton Stage Races is formatted differently from most cross country meets, with the meet divided into five races, or stages, each race being 2 miles in length instead of the usual 5K (3.1-mile) high school distance, with boys and girls running in the same race instead of separate races.

The varsity portion of the Stage Races begins with Stage 1 - featuring the No. 5 runners for each team - at 9:15 a.m., followed by Stage 2 (No. 4) at 9:30 a.m., Stage 3 (No. 3) at 9:45 a.m., Stage 4 (No. 2) at 10 a.m. and Stage 5 for each team's top runners at 10:15 a.m.

Walton will be among the favorites in both the boys and girls races, along with state powerhouses Brookwood, Etowah, Berkmar and Oconee County.

"It will be a good test for us against some good competition," Walton coach Tom Williams said. "We're looking forward to getting the season started."

Will Bryfczynski, Phillip Laskey and Adam Joseph are among the key runners for the Walton boys, while Kylie Womack and Lena Hamvas will lead the way for the Lady Raiders.

Harrison is also expected to do well in both the boys and girls competition, as co-coach Kent Simmons uses the meet as a measuring stick to see where his squad is at the beginning of the season.

"We use this race to help us gauge how effective the summer training has been for the athletes," Simmons said. "Both the boys and girls hope to see how they measure against some of the best teams in the state."

Ryan Burruss, Lee McClung and Derek Brunson will lead the Harrison boys, with Caroline Oshust, Ali Waterson and Margaret Tucker the top Lady Hoya runners.

The Pope boys enter the race with a younger team after losing six key runners, including sixth-place state finisher and Georgia signee Miles Svoboda, to graduation, while the Lady Greyhounds feature a veteran squad.

"Both our boys and girls teams have been working tremendously hard this season," Pope coach Christine Dahlhauser said. "The Stage Races is a unique event, so we usually take the laid back approach and have fun. The first meet of the season is always exciting and, because the format is so different, our teams really enjoy running it. We have many new faces this season and everyone is looking forward to performing well."

Zach Tupper will lead the Pope boys, with Alyska Kalmeijer leading the girls.



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