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One would think they were just born to run.

Four Cobb County girls enter the cross country season as former state, county or region champions, but each has had her doubts and doubters. Each has something to prove this fall.

Taylor Adams

•**School, class:** Sprayberry, senior

•**Champion:** state 1,600 meters (2005)

•**Finish at state cross country:** 10th

"It motivates me when people think I'm not good at cross country because I'm not bad," Adams said.

Not bad? Adams finished 10th at state, but she's better known on the track, where she's the reigning Class AAAAA champ in the mile and runner-up in the 800 meters.

Underrated on the trails, Adams is a natural sprinter who has worked herself into becoming one of the state's top distance runners, with a finishing kick that is feared.

"I just tell myself to stay with the good runners and keep the pace and hope I have a bigger and longer kick at the finish," Adams said. "When it's close, I feel I can catch them in the end."

Kylie Foley

•**School, class:** Harrison, junior

•**Champion:** region cross country (2003)

•**Finish at state cross country:** 11th

"People are going to underestimate me: 'She was good as a freshman, but she was horrible last year,' " Foley said. "I just want to show everyone that I'm still a good runner."

Horrible? Foley finished 11th at state, but some expected more after her victory in the Region 5-AAAAA meet as a freshman.

What few people knew was that Foley competed with two stomach ulcers and a hole in her esophagus caused by pain medication to treat a stress fracture.

"Last year, I just wanted to try my best every race, but I didn't have high goals because of everything going on," Foley said. "I still have those goals from my freshman year I want to achieve."

Leila Norman

•**School, class:** Walton, sophomore

•**Champion:** county 1,600 and 3,200 meters (2005)

•**Finish at state cross country:** 20th

"I'm a natural kind of girl," Norman said. "I love running in the hills and mountains and getting muddy."

It didn't seem that way last fall, though. Norman, who set Walton's freshman records in the 1,600 and 3,200 meters on the track last spring, admittedly underachieved in her favorite sport. The cause was chronic iron deficiency that's now being treated. She still finished 20th at state.

Norman cut her summer miles in half this year to only 250 to take care of her body, and she now believes a state title is realistic.

"My coach predicted 18:25 [18:28 won state last year], but I'm trying to get into the 17s this year because I'm feeling really, really good," she said.

Lindsey Pickens

•**School, class:** Kennesaw Mountain, senior

•**Champion:** county cross country (2004)

•**Finish at state cross country:** seventh

"I hate to lose," Pickens said. "And when it comes down to it, if there's any question, I will find that extra ounce of energy to win."

Pickens vows that her worst moment of 2004 — a seventh-place finish at state after running with the leader until the final mile — will only make her stronger.

Until then, Pickens had been unflappable, dominating Cobb and region meets as the state's newcomer of the year. Pickens denies that inexperience or nerves were factors at state. Her body just didn't have its usual zip.

Now, after doubling her summer mileage to 400, Pickens is pegged by many as the runner to beat statewide. The memory of the state meet will only help, she said.

"It will drive every single race I run in my life again," Pickens said. "I'll never forget it."