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Grizzly cross country team ready to defend crown

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GRIZZLY CROSS COUNTRY TEAM
READY TO DEFEND CROWN



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MISSOULA -- The University of Montana long distance runners travel to Pocatello

Saturday to try for a third Big Sky Conference cross country title in a row with a team that had a win at its back, is healthy, in peak form and so well balanced that coach Harley Lewis is still not certain who his fastest man is.

"Whether or not we'll have the manpower to beat Northern Arizona and Idaho State is the big question mark," Lewis says.

The team from 7,200-foot high Flagstaff placed second behind Montana in last year's conference race and Idaho State placed third. Saturday will be the first meeting this year between Montana and Northern Arizona, but two weeks ago Idaho State placed third in its home Intermountain meet, two points behind Montana.

Northern Arizona has four strong runners that worry Lewis. British runner Richard Sliney won the 1970 conference race 41 seconds ahead of second place, Montana's George Cook. Backing Sliney up are fellow Briton Richard Selby, sixth last year; Dan Sauers, ninth last year, and Canadian Dave Tocheri who finished second behind Sliney in last spring's three mile championship.

Idaho State's team, like Montana's, is young and talented. ISU Coach Bob Beeten has six freshmen and three veterans on his team. Notable among the freshmen are Orville Hess who, like Montana State's top man Jim Robbins, is from the tiny burg of Manhattan, and John Brooks of Canada. Junior college transfer Lou Sanchez was considered the number one ISU man until Hess beat him last week in the Intermountain.

Top performers from other Big Sky schools include Robbins from MSU, Harry Otley and Juan Lopez from Boise State, Jim Hatcher from the University of Idaho and Dan Dean of Weber State, a Wyoming freshman.

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Montana's confidence was restored with a near-perfect 17-44 win over Montana State last weekend in Bozeman. Freshman Doug Darko of Great Falls won that meet, Cook placed second and freshman Hans Templeman, possibly the strongest man on the Grizzly team, stayed home to rest up for the Big Sky championships.

Darko, Templeman, another freshman Dave Pelletier, and veterans Cook, Boyd Collins, Wes Priestly and Mark Ryan made up the Montana team.

Cook, a junior, was considered to be the number one man at the start of the season, but he has been troubled by illness and injury. "He should be at his seasonal best in this meet," says Lewis. "In fact, everyone should be in peak condition." The race in Pocatello is over a new five-mile course that Idaho State calls the "Monster."

Lewis is hoping to be able to take two men to the NCAA national championships Nov. 22 in Knoxville, Tenn. No one from the Big Sky Conference can qualify for that meet unless he places in the top five Saturday.

Montana has been represented in the national meet in all but one of the last 10 years. Last year Cook and Wade Jacobsen made a respectable showing by finishing in the top 10 per cent of the field in a massive race where mere survival through the first mile is noteworthy. A total of 650 contestants from throughout the nation take off at the sound of the gun and sprint for good position in order to avoid being trampled in the bottleneck a short distance from the starting line.

Cook finished 62nd last year and Jacobsen 63rd. Northern Arizona's Sliney made All-American in 1970 by finishing 13th in that race. The top 25 receive the national honor.

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