

D E S E R E T
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Bulldogs aim for 4th title in 6 years

By Tim Peterson
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Led by high school all-American and defending 3A cross country champion Luke Puskedra, the Judge Memorial Bulldogs are looking to add another title to their mantel this season.

The east-side school is no stranger to winning the boys state cross country championship. Judge won state titles in 2002, '04 and '05. While second-year coach Mattie Reed is expecting another successful season from the boys team, she hesitates to talk too much about a championship.

"I'm hoping to be top three," Reed said.

Last year, the cross country coach took over the program and admits it took some time for the team to gel. Entering a new season, the coach says things are a lot easier with a season under her belt.

"I didn't want to change the program too much," Reed said.

Why fix what wasn't broken, she explained. The boys team had a slight hiccup, finishing third at state in 2006. Park City's boys took runner-up honors, while Cedar City took home the 3A championship. This year the Judge boys believe they've made enough improvements to make a serious run at a fourth title in six seasons.

The Bulldogs' big gun, Puskedra, is back for another season, and the senior feels the team has worked much harder this summer and should be in position to contend again.

"I'm thinking we can do really well," Puskedra said. "With everyone coming in and the improvements we've made, we haven't really done a lot of races this year, but I think there's going to be a lot of PRs (personal records) this year."

Parker Mildenhall, Max Lamb, John Foye and Chris Sayre make up the core of the team and should keep the boys in the hunt this season. The talented Judge girls team also finished the season in third place behind Cedar City and state champion Park City. Senior captains Lindsay Baker and Hailey Knettles will automatically make Judge one of a handful of contenders in Class 3A. Cedar City and defending champion Park City should have strong teams along with Ogden and North Sanpete.

Hard-working runners Lizzie Hindert and Emma Welch have added strength to a Judge team that looks to be as talented as ever. The Judge girls haven't won a state championship since 1987, and they would like nothing more than to end that 20-year drought.

"I think we have a pretty strong team," said Baker. "Everyone's working harder this season. That's kind of our goal."

Some distance runners from the school's 2007 state champion track team have joined the cross country team this year, which is just fine by their coach.

"I definitely think there's a lot of energy carrying over," said Reed, who watched several of these runners help deliver the school a track and field championship last May. "I do think it's good to have that championship experience."