

Hint for those who have ADD, gave up reading for the summer, prefer the Cliff's Notes, or are just generally too lazy to read the entire preview: The team and individual rankings are on the last page. Scroll down if that's all you want to see.

Now onto the Boys:

De La Salle won the EBAL Center Meet in 2012. Amador Valley won the EBAL Championship. In the race that mattered most though, it was San Ramon Valley that took the title. In a season of second place finishes, the veteran led Wolves blitzed the muddy Hayward course in a runaway shocker, winning by twenty points over their nearest competitor. With scoring finishes of 4th, 6th, 7th, 11th, and 12th, nobody else was even in the race. San Ramon's decisive win left De La Salle and Amador Valley to fight it out for second place and even without pre-season favorite Blair Hurlock, it was De La Salle that edged out the state meet qualifier 60-66 over the Dons. From a team standpoint, San Ramon, De La Salle and Amador Valley were the only teams in state meet contention as the now departed Santa Rosa finished in fourth place, 35 points behind Amador Valley. This year's race is shaping up to be much closer as both San Ramon Valley and Amador Valley have graduated the bulk of last year's teams and other teams return with many of their top runners. San Ramon Valley's monster run was not the only surprise of the day as Berkeley sophomore Tariku Abdo took the individual title away from several runners predicted to finish in front of him. Up until then, everyone knew about his sister Diribe, but Tariku had not yet shown himself to be a contender to win that type of race. He returns this year with five of his teammates to try to put added pressure on the EBAL schools up front. 2012 might have been the year of the sophomore in division 1 as Castro Valley's Carter Mackey finished second at last year's race. It will be up to him to put the Trojans back into contention after a couple of down years by their standards. Where the quality of this division does not appear to match the quality on the girls' side this year, the division 1 boys season promises to be exciting as a lot of teams go into the season with a chance to qualify out. I'll preview those teams here and then we can watch as their seasons unfold.

Can They Surprise Everyone Again?

If San Ramon Valley is to repeat as champions, it might be even more surprising than it was last season. It would be difficult enough with De La Salle returning seven strong varsity runners, but compounding that is the fact that San Ramon Valley only returns three varsity runners and only one scorer. That one scorer though, put together a heck of a track season for SRV and is the type of runner that any team would be happy to start out with. Senior Jason Intravaia was the third man for the Wolves last season and finished 7th at NCS. He then went on to run 4:20 and 1:58 on the track. Ryan Colaco, last year's #7 runner, was much improved on the track as well, running times of 4:29 and 9:59. Having a sub ten minute guy as the #2 puts the team in a pretty good position up front. Also returning from last year's championship team is Tyler Gambill. Gambill was 25th last year and ran 4:38 and 10:21 on the track. The rest of the team will be new this year, but the Wolves have some solid candidates to fill the open spots. The most likely candidates were not necessarily looking promising during cross country, but all showed major improvements during the track season. Senior Brandon Darling only finished 17th in the JV race in the EBAL last year, but ran 4:38 on the track. Fellow senior Justin Goldt was only 11th in that same JV race, but he came on to run 4:44 and 10:30 during the track season. Eli Sommers finished 10th in the EBAL frosh/soph race, but was the fourth

freshman in that race. He then ran 4:48 and 10:25 on the track, showing real improvement.

Strengths: Tradition. San Ramon Valley is a team accustomed to winning. They go the state meet every year. When a team is accustomed to success, it makes them much more difficult to beat, even when they look very beatable on paper.

Weaknesses: Depth. This is not the traditional San Ramon team, loaded with mid-distance talent and trying to make it translate to the cross country course. There is some talent here, but this team is going to have to be developed over the course of the season and will have to run another great race at NCS if they are to have a chance to qualify for the state meet.

Prognosis: On paper, San Ramon Valley does not appear to have enough in the tank to make a state meet run, but to rule them out would be...well...stupid. They are always in the mix and will continue to be in the mix this year. That group of runners knows what it takes to be successful and will find a way to be a threat when November rolls around.

Wild Card: SRV had four runners that broke 5:00 on the track who were not on the cross country roster last year. The fastest such runner was John Hammill, who ran 4:41 and 10:25. A non-cross country distance runner is probably running those times without training in the fall and without an extensive preseason, which means that they are more dangerous than their PR's if they ever decide to run cross country. If any of these athletes decide to run for SRV, it will add depth to a team that sorely needs it.

The rest (alphabetically):

Amador Valley—The defending EBAL champions will have a new look this season as they have graduated four scorers from last year's NCS crew including two individual state meet qualifiers. Although the Dons will be looking for contributions from new sources, the cupboard is not bare for the Dons. Their three returners are all very strong runners and will be backed up by a talented group of young runners. Junior, Peter Schlachte finished 10th last year in qualifying for the state meet individually. Fellow junior Zach Beston didn't run well at NCS last year, finishing 35th, but did run well at the EBAL Championships, finishing 13th in 15:52. He also ran 4:28 and 10:07 during the track season as just a sophomore. Senior Conner McKinnon had a rough cross country season last year recovering from a stress fracture, but found his form on the track, crossing the finish line first at NCS Tri-Valley in front of eventual state runner up Adler Faulkner in the 800. He was later disqualified for cutting in early, but with splits of 59 and 55, it was clear that he was ready to run fast. He then moved on to help the Dons' 400m relay team to a third place finish at the state meet running a split of well under 48 seconds. Will his speed translate to a good cross country season? It's hard to say for sure, but because he improved his 1600 PR from 4:31 to 4:22, I think probably. Amador Valley also has a collection of youngsters that have shown promise, but will have to step up for the Dons' to qualify on to Fresno. Rising sophomores, Brett Walsh and Seth Girvan ran 10:26 and 10:27 3200 as freshmen while fellow soph. Dylan Dantzig ran 4:53 for 1600. Junior, Andy Buck, will run cross country for the first time, but his 4:44 1600 and 10:38 3200 suggest that he could be in the mix for a varsity spot as well.

Strengths: Front runners. Amador Valley should be very good through three runners. Between Schlachte,

McKinnon, and Beston, the Dons have three athletes who could potentially qualify for the state meet individually.

Weaknesses: Depth. In recent years Amador Valley has relied on a strong pack for good performances, but that pack isn't nearly as strong coming into this season as the team will be relying on rookies and sophomores to close out the scoring.

Wild Card: The Dons had eight first year track runners who ran under 11:30 last year, seven of whom were freshmen. Some of those athletes are mentioned above, but all of them improved throughout the season. It is a strong possibility that at least one of those athletes will take big steps this summer and put himself in a position to contend for a varsity spot. I do not have a certain athlete in mind, but when there are that many strong athletes that are so new to the sport, odds are that someone will emerge.

Berkeley—The Yellow Jackets come into 2013 with more weapons than they have had in a long time. It all begins with defending NCS champion Tariku Abdo, who won the championship last year as only a sophomore. Unlike previous Berkeley teams which lacked the depth necessary to complete well as a team, it doesn't end with Abdo. The Yellow Jackets return six runners from last year's sixth place team, several of whom have made noticeable improvements during the track season. After a 53rd place finish last season, senior Camden Sikes ran 1:58 over 800m in the spring. Rising sophomore Robel Kelkile looks like he is ready to make a bigger contribution than last year, when he was the team's #7 runner and finished 98th. He ran a strong 1600 for a freshman stopping the clock in 5:01 and his 3200 was even more notable as he ran a time of 10:36. Fellow sophomore Aiden Fike has a 17:02 to his credit on the Hayward course, which he recorded at the WACC finals. The conditions that day were far different from the day of NCS, nevertheless 17:02 as a freshman is very promising. Although I didn't see any marks for him during the track season, Berkeley will also rely heavily on its returning #2 runner. Coming off of his 23rd place finish last year, senior Austin Lloyd could be ready to do some damage in the front of the race. Senior Joseph Battles also returns after a 68th place finish last season.

Strengths: Berkeley looks to be a strong team top to bottom. They have a top notch #1 runner, with a solid #2 and a number of runners whose accomplishments suggest that they could run with the top teams in the section.

Weaknesses: Outside of Abdo, they haven't done it yet. Although having freshmen who ran as fast as the Berkeley freshmen did last year suggest something special could happen, and running 1:58 suggests enough talent to be a contender in cross country, it's not the same thing as doing it. When the points shake out, the teams that qualify for state will have multiple people in the top 10 and right now Berkeley only figures to have two in the top 20.

Prognosis: This team is really hard to call. History suggests that they won't place very well, because this team never places very well, but they took a huge step last year by finishing third and they have the momentum of the defending individual champion to carry them into this year. Then again, where was that champion during track? This team has the widest possible variance of all the teams in Division 1, but it is likely that they land right around where they were last year.

Wild Card: The whole team is a wild card. As stated above, Berkeley doesn't usually field a very competitive team, but it's not like the teams that they send out there are loaded with talent and then fail. For whatever reason, for a school with as many students as they have, not many people come out for cross country, train, and get good. This Berkeley squad has talent, so it will be interesting to see what happens.

Castro Valley-After his surprising runner-up finish in 2012, rising junior Carter Mackey will have his eyes on the individual title in 2013. After coming into NCS as an accomplished age grouper, Mackey has continued to improve both on the cross country course and on the track. Following the NCS meet, Mackey ran 16:16 at Woodward Park for 86th place, and went on to run 4:35 in the 1600 and 10:16 in the 3200. The Trojans also return senior, Westley Nild, who finished 64th last season, junior Jeffrey Van, who was 77th, and sophomore Eric Sylverne, who finished 99th as a freshman. Castro Valley appears to also have a number of potential contributors who ran track in the spring, but were not on the NCS team last season. Junior Pranay Gundi covered 800m in 2:05 and senior Ben Nakaya ran 2:04. Junior, Chris Servi also clocked in at 4:44 in the 1600.

Strengths: Carter Mackey. Mackey is really the only Trojan who will be predicted to run amongst the top runners in the section at his position (by position I mean where the #2 runner finishes compared to the other #2's, the #3 runner compared to other #3's and so forth). Mackey though, is highly likely to qualify for the state meet and will have the opportunity to challenge for the individual championship.

Weaknesses: Depth. There is only one athlete on the team who has run fast enough to contribute to a high level team. It is one thing to hope that one or two people step up, as that happens all the time, but it is very rare that a team has four such athletes.

Prognosis: Castro Valley will probably finish better than their talent indicates right now because they have a dedicated coaching staff and a tradition of success. That said, they probably will not be in the mix for a state meet spot late in the race. A top five finish is a realistic goal for them though.

Wild Card: For Castro Valley, everyone is a wild card. They have some guys with NCS experience who need to show that they have improved and they have a few track athletes with solid credentials who should be able to contribute. They have to hope that most of those wild cards come up aces, but if they do, they could surprise some people.

De La Salle-John Pelster's crew will once again be a heavy favorite to win the title this year. So much so that their goals should not center around the NCS meet, but instead on the one that comes up the following week. The Spartans return six of their seven from last year's second place team and will add Blair Hurlock to that mix, who was injured during last season's postseason run. The rising senior came back to remind everyone of how good he is, rolling to a 4:14 1600 at the EBAL finals and 9:11 in the 3200 en route to a 12th place finish at the state meet. Fellow senior Luke Williams was third last year and also carried himself to a strong track season, where he ran 9:31 in the 3200. Matt Schumann will also find himself in De La Salle's top three. The junior finished fifth at NCS in 2012 and is the defending EBAL champion. His 14:59 at Shadow Cliffs last year was a sophomore record and the third best time

ever on the course behind only sub 9:00 3200 runner Luis Luna and Footlocker finalist, James Attarian. The Spartans will look to juniors Nick Mitchell, Austin Sanchez, and Sean Wanket and seniors Trey Schwarz and Clark Messman to fill out the varsity team. Mitchell ran 9:58 for 3200 last year while Sanchez and Wanket both clocked in at 10:01. Sanchez also won the EBAL frosh/soph cross country race last year. Schwartz didn't do much during track season (possibly injured?), but finished 20th at the EBAL championships last season and 32nd at NCS. It looks like Messman didn't even run track, but he finished 29th at EBAL's last year and came back to finish 15th at NCS.

Strengths: Everything. De La Salle is in another class than the rest of their competition this season. They have a chance to put three runners in the top five at NCS and they round out their team with a bunch of guys who can run 10:00 in the 3200. This team has a chance to finish very well at the state meet, which is something that does not happen very often for division one teams in NCS.

Weaknesses: Durability. Talent can win races from the sidelines and as talented as this group is, they have not been able to consistently make it to the starting line. Hurlock missed the postseason last year with a foot ailment and although he was ineligible the year before, dealt with his share of injuries that spring also. Schumann was limited during track season and although he ran well, he did not run to his capability. De La Salle was a heavy favorite last year too, but the team that ended up running the big races was not the same team that they were projecting going into the season.

Prognosis: De La Salle is probably going to win NCS and if they are healthy could do so with about 35 points.

Wild Card: I'm not really sure that there is a wild card here. It's not that there are not talented runners behind the eight who have already been mentioned, but more that those eight are so good that somebody would have to run really, really well just to make the varsity team.

Dougherty Valley: Dougherty Valley comes off an 8th place finish in Division 2 poised for a top 10 finish in Division 1. They only return three athletes from last year's NCS team, but have a large roster of solid junior boys to replenish the team from last year's graduates. Although he only finished 20th in last season's DFAL Frosh/Soph Championships, rising junior Harsh Wadhwa took major steps during the track season, running 2:02 for 800m and 4:44 for Dougherty Valley. After finishing 36th at the DFAL Championships as a freshman, Ben Parisi ran 2:08 and 4:46 in the spring, and will be a mainstay at the top of the Dougherty Valley results page this season. Top NCS returner Dominic Lopez and top DFAL returner Atish Bhakta will look to lead the team in yet another new division this year. It will be the third division in four years for the seniors of the rapidly growing school. Also returning is senior Austin Do, who was 59th last season and ran 2:06 for 800m.

Strengths: Large Roster. Although there are no eye popping times on the Dougherty Valley roster, they have a lot of athletes on the team. Last year a good number of them ran well enough in track to look like guys who could emerge as strong runners. Granted, a lot of them need to really break out, but if they are training hard this summer, a few of them certainly could, which is what this team needs to have happen.

Weaknesses: Inexperience. With only three runners returning from last year, none of who were in the

top 50 in division 2, this team is getting thrust into division 1 without the clear leader to take them there. I do not know the athletes on this team personally, so maybe that personality is hidden amongst the three who are returning, or maybe someone who has never been there before has the presence to make it happen, but from the “been there, done that, got it done” perspective that you can get from a bunch of results, that guy isn’t there.

Prognosis: Dougherty Valley will not be in contention for anything big at NCS this year. They should edge their way into the top 10 and with a lot of juniors on the team, they will gain the experience that they don’t have this year. They don’t have to worry about moving up next year because they are in the biggest division now, but they are not likely to ever move down. Now that the school is open to all four grades, division 1 will be their home.

Wild Card: Dougherty Valley could get a boost from junior Annam Sai. Sai did not run cross country last season, but ran 10:41 on the track. A 10:41 guy would absolutely be a scoring member of the Dougherty Valley team.

Granada: The Matadors bring back four runners from last year’s NCS team including front running junior Brett Rasmussen. Rasmussen finished in 20th place at NCS as a sophomore, but did not compete on the track. Rising sophomore Leo Skellinger returns after an impressive freshman campaign. Skellinger finished 30th in the EBAL as a freshman and 41st at NCS. Skellinger focused on the 800 during the track season and notched a 2:09 in that event. Junior Austin Armstrong returns following 56th place NCS finisher and a track season where he ran 10:08. That leaves three under classmen at the front of the team, but they appear to be more than capable of competing with the better teams in the section. The only seniors on the roster appear to be Austin Horning, who was a JV runner last season, but ran 10:34 in the spring and Austin Hoggatt who was 46th at NCS last year and has a 4:41 1600 to his credit. Sophomore, Sterling Jeppson will also contribute to this team after finishing 7th in the frosh/soph race last season and running 10:24 during the track season.

Strengths: Youth. Granada is very young. When athletes run fast as lower classmen, it is likely that they still have plenty of room for big jumps in the off season. Granada has proven over the years that their athletes do the necessary training in the off season, so it stands to reason that some of these runners are going to be much faster this fall than they were when we last saw them.

Weaknesses: Youth. Although Granada has a strong tradition of distance running, and their girls have been very good over the past few years, most of the boys on this team were not here when they were last good. Sometimes it can be hard for a team to break through when they haven’t had the example to follow.

Prognosis: This is probably going to be the year that Granada’s are going to return to relevance on the NCS level. There are enough good runners on this team that they will compete with the better teams in the section. They will go through the EBAL season schedule, which will prepare them for racing at NCS and if they can have a big day in November, they have a chance.

Wild Card: Leo Skellinger had a very good freshman cross country season, but was very quiet during the

track season. If he can pick up in cross where he left off last year, he has a chance to run with the section's elite runners. If Granada can find an athlete to run in the top ten overall at NCS, it would take a lot of pressure off of their other runners.

Heritage: The boys in baby blue come into 2013 with five returners from last year's NCS Championships. Solomon Demeku figures to lead the way after a 29th place finish last season. The senior progressed even farther in track season, when he recorded times of 1:58 and 4:32, reaching the NCS MOC meet. Junior Jacob Drees should be next, having finished 36th last year and running 4:34 and 10:01 in the spring. Heritage's third returner is senior, Max Lim. Lim finished 60th at NCS last year and came in at 4:50 on the track. Senior, Cameron Bunting looked finished 69th at NCS and looked strong in the spring running 4:43 for 1600, where fellow senior Frank Kurtz (did you know he finished finished 67th at NCS last season?) scorched the track all spring, covering the 400m in 47 low, racing all the way to the state finals. Looking to join the varsity group this season are juniors Keegan Spencer, Ben Needham, and Nathan Grovhoug. Spencer has run 4:53 and 11:10 as a sophomore and Needham has also broken 5:00 at 4:57. Grovhoug is the impact player here though as he finished his track season running a 4:37 1600, giving Heritage three athletes under 4:40 entering the season.

Strengths: Depth through four runners. Although the front four for Heritage will not stack up with the top runners in the division, they should be able to outrun most of the second tier teams. There are only four teams in the division with three or more athletes coming in under 4:40, the other three being De La Salle (with five), San Ramon Valley (with four), and Amador Valley (also with three). Although cross country isn't his strength, Frank Kurtz is probably the only runner outside of anyone's top four who was a state finalist on the track last spring.

Weaknesses: Strength. Although Jacob Drees ran 10:01 in the spring, the team seems to be much more geared toward the middle distances than toward long distances. Most of the athletes on the team have much better PR's at 800m and 1600m than they do at 3200m. I'm not saying that Frank Kurtz should spend his time trying to run 9:55 for 3200m, but only two athletes that I could find are under 11:00.

Prognosis: Heritage should easily finish in the top 10, but a top 5 finish would be a coup. In previous years they may have had a chance with the number of returners they have, but for whatever reason, it seems like most of the teams in the division were young last season. Coaching over there is good though and they are making progress as a program as in the last three years they've gone from 13th, to 11th, to 9th. It is likely they improve a little bit again this year.

Wild Card: Heritage's biggest wildcard has to be Solomon Demeku. He had a very strong postseason on the track, but focused on the 800m. I didn't find a single 3200m result or Demeku all year. Maybe it's because he's not that good at it, but maybe it's because he just likes the shorter stuff better (or maybe I'm just not that good at finding results). If he can run cross country at the same level as he can run 800m though, he might be in contention for an individual berth to the state meet and he certainly won't be finishing 28th at NCS again.

Irvington: I have to somewhat admit defeat on this one. Based on last year's results, Irvington is

the tenth best team, but it was impossible to find much information on them outside of that. Senior Sanjeev Reddy should lead the way. He was their top runner last year at NCS and qualified all the way through to MOC's in track where he ran 4:31 for 1600m. He also ran a 2:07 800m along the way. Unfortunately, that's about all I know, beyond what's printed on last season's NCS results sheet. The team has five returning runners, including seniors Krish Masand, Pranav Shekar, and Joshua Handjojo who finished 52nd, 73rd, and 107th last season. They also return sophomore Chad Walker who was 87th last year.

Strengths: The element of surprise.

Weaknesses: Depth. Of last year's NCS team, only Reddy qualified for NCS Bay Shore. Their fifth returner was not in the top 100 last season. They will need to really improve to get into the 9th position.

Prognosis: Based on very limited information, they appear to be the 10th best team, well ahead of #11, but pretty far off #9. It's pretty rare to be in a clear position by yourself when the team is right in the middle of the twenty-one team field, but it appears to be the case here.

Wild Card: Matt Doerner qualified for NCS Bay Shore for Irvington last year and ran 4:37. He was not on the NCS cross country team last season and I don't know what grade he's in, but if he didn't graduate and he runs cross country, he will be the team's #2 runner.

James Logan: Returning from his 31st place finish at NCS last season and his more impressive 1:58 in the 800, junior, Christian Monsalud looks poised to lead a veteran group of Colts into the 2013 season. Observers would be foolish to undervalue Monsalud's potential as a #1 runner as long distance success runs in the family. Just two years ago, Christian's sister Tiffany led the James Logan, a school traditionally known for success in the sprints and jumps, to a third place finish in the girl's race. This year's boys' team actually has two Monsalud's competing for it as Christian's sophomore brother Jon Jon is the team's #4 returner, following a 55th place performance his freshman year. Of the Logan team, the two Monsalud brothers are the only two who appear to be lower classmen. The rest of the team will be composed of seniors Noel Anaya (39th last year), Nico Bacogian (40th last year with a 4:41 1600 to his credit), Nate Pimental (75th last year), and Jackson Quiros (86th last year). I have not been very successful in finding track results from these athletes, so they are a little bit of a mystery. Some of these athletes might have progressed further during the track season than what is indicated here, but it is also possible that some did not run, so in some sense, we will have to wait and see.

Strengths: Logan has a good, young, front runner and six varsity returners, so experience they have both youth and experience on their side. Christian Monsalud could be ready for a major improvement there is a fairly deep team capable of following him.

Weaknesses: History. I don't know whether it is because James Logan does not prioritize cross country or whether they have pigeon holed themselves as a team that can't get to the next level, but the Colts have underperformed relative to their talent most of the time. It is always difficult to be the team that bucks the trend, or the one that accomplishes something for the first time in a while, but that is the task that is

on their plates.

Prognosis: James Logan should be a top five team in NCS and maybe even fourth. It would be a stretch to consider them a contender for a state meet spot, but they should be able to take a significant step forward for themselves.

Wild Card: Although he doesn't appear in any cross country results that I can find, senior Amaris Clay ran 2:01 for the Colts last spring. If he comes out for the team, he would probably contribute immediately, pushing the Colts significantly closer to the top three teams in the division.

Teams:

1. De La Salle
2. Amador Valley
3. San Ramon Valley
4. James Logan
5. Granada
6. Berkeley
7. Heritage
8. Castro Valley
9. Dougherty Valley
10. Irvington

Individuals:

1. Blair Hurlock (De La Salle)
2. Matt Schumann (De La Salle)
3. Luke Williams (De La Salle)
4. Tariku Abdo (Berkeley)
5. Carter Mackey (Castro Valley)
6. Jason Intravaia (San Ramon Valley)
7. Peter Schlachte (Amador Valley)
8. Clark Messman (De La Salle)
9. Sean Wanket (De La , Salle)
10. Conner McKinnon (Amador Valley)
11. Tyler Gambill (San Ramon Valley)

12. Austin Lloyd (Berkeley)