



NEWS RELEASE

HOPI RUNNERS MOTIVATED BY FEATS OF THE FEET

PHOENIX, AZ (August 19, 2009) – No matter how many miles the cross country athletes from Keams Canyon Hopi have run over the years, their final destination has been the same – the state meet, where they have held the championship trophy over their heads on a regular basis.

The Hopi boys have won 19 straight titles, while the girls have captured a total of 17 since the school opened on the Hopi Reservation in northeast Arizona in 1987.

Rick Baker started the boys program, which has shown no signs of letting up. Harvey Honyouti coached the girls to most of their titles before Laverne Lomakema took over in 2008 and guided the team to another crown.

“We have good kids, kids that want to run and who are not afraid to work hard,” said Baker, a graduate of Winslow High.

Running almost is as important as eating, sleeping and breathing.

“It is a big part of the Hopi culture,” Baker said. “The kids’ fathers and some of their grandfathers ran for schools in the area and the western part of the country. There is a big tradition. Each year comes along and the next team doesn’t want to be the one that breaks the string.”

There will be about 15 boys and close to 30 girls touring the countryside in their running shoes. The first big meet will be the Hopi Invite at Keams Canyon Sept. 1, featuring 20 teams on each side.

“You have to have self-discipline. You need to stay out of trouble. It starts from within and it carries over to your teammates,” Baker said.

Part of that discipline includes schoolwork. Baker makes sure he emphasizes that.

“It’s a big part of the program, keeping them eligible,” he said. “School is important. Grades follow you wherever you go. We also have tutoring available if the kids need it. All of them want to go on to college if they can.”

The teams began their first official practice on Aug. 17 (Monday), but were running through most of the summer. Baker encouraged the athletes to keep a log of their work and checked it. And now that school has begun, he expects them to sign up for a weight-training class.

Working hard in the classroom also is important to the girls runners. Lomakema wants her athletes to be good examples in every way.

The boys team has a strong chance to record a 20th straight title, thanks to the strength of a group of senior runners.

The leaders are Ronald Laban, Kevin Tsiniginnie, Brennon Sidney, Kyle Silas, Clayden Torivio and junior Justin Secakuku.

Most of the runners also participate in track as well as winter sports such as basketball or wrestling.

Hopi had five runners finish in the top 10 of last year's 1A-2A meet. Tsiniginnie put on a strong kick to edge out Laban and finished second.

Baker said Laban is mentally strong and will use the state meet as motivation this season.

The Hopi boys have some promising runners at the sophomore and freshman levels, and Baker said they should be able to push the older athletes during workouts.

The top two girls runners are young. Sophomore Brittany Little finished third overall at the state meet and sophomore Jasmine Humetewa was fifth. The team also has three strong seniors – Terissa Josytewa, Kayla Koruh and Joelle Mansfield.

“We have received a lot of support from the school and the community,” Baker said.

The team's schedule includes the Doug Conley Invitational in Tempe on Sept. 26 and the Mt. Sac event in Walnut, Calif., on Oct. 23-24, a week before the 1A-2A North Region state qualifying meet.

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