

Seaside boys set to repeat as state champs

By Gary Henley
EO Media Group

“Perfect and gettin’ better,” is a favorite phrase of Seaside cross country coach Neil Branson.

It’s also the perfect fit for the Seaside boys’ cross country team.

The Gulls were certainly perfect in 2015 — enough to win the Class 4A state championship in Eugene. And they were also “gettin’ better,” since six of their seven runners who competed at state were non-seniors.

As it turns out, their top six finishers in the meet at Lane Community College were the non-seniors. All of which spells one thing, as the Gulls enter the 2016 season: R-E-P-E-A-T.

Led by individual state champion Bradley Rzewnicki, Branson’s crew is the best in Oregon as they enter a new year, in search of another state title.

The Seaside boys finished with 49 points to top the 14 boys’ programs who competed with full teams in the state meet. The next closest was Phoenix, with 65.

Rzewnicki — who had actually finished second in the Cowapa League meet just 10 days earlier — ran the 5,000-meter course at LCC in 16 minutes, 13 seconds, finishing well ahead of Tony Hooks, a senior at Sisters.

And Rzewnicki did not have to wait around long for his teammates, as Hunter Thompson crossed the finished line in 16:34 for fifth place; Jackson Januik took ninth in 16:40; and Rafi Sibony placed 12th in 16:59.

Colton Carter was 31st



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Seaside’s Bradley Rzewnicki is the returning individual state champion in Class 4A, for the defending state team champion Gulls.

and Juneau Meyer 33rd, with senior Jack Whittle placing 89th.

The theme for Class 4A boys’ cross country in Oregon this year? “Chasing Seaside.”

That’s what everybody will be doing this year, as Rzewnicki, Thompson, Januik, Sibony, Carter and Meyer all return. Rze-

wnicki, Thompson, Januik and Meyer are seniors, while Sibony and Carter are juniors.

This year’s senior class could turn out to be one of the most decorated in Seaside school history.

In addition to their state championship in cross country, Carter, Januik, Meyer and Thompson

fun the way it came together, and all the cooperation.

“The important thing is that we have kids out here who were part of that team last year, 37 kids who ran at district ... and we’re going to take care of everybody and have fun. I do not get lost or wrapped up in the state meet.

“If we take care of kids, treat ’em right, train them proper ... everybody is going to improve, and then what comes from that, comes from that.”

The Cowapa

Before the Seaside boys can win another state title, they have to get out of their own league first — the toughest at the 4A level.

The rankings going into the state meet had Seaside first, Tillamook second and Valley Catholic third.

Because only two teams advance from district meets, only the Gulls and Cheesemakers took teams to state.

“We had the top three teams in the state, and Valley Catholic drew the short straw,” Branson said. Statewide, “Who knows what other school has popped up? In our own league, all we can do is take care of our own business and have fun with it.

“Tillamook will be competitive,” he said. “And Valley Catholic has huge numbers. The Scappoose girls always have numbers, and they’re a well-organized team.

“October 27 (league championships) is when you lay it on the line.”

The Gulls

In addition to the above, “we’ve added one (senior Will Garvin) who was here

his freshman year, and wants to give it another go,” Branson said.

“And you can’t be a 300-meter hurdler without having a few strings of toughness in you.

“The biggest thing with these guys coming back — certainly they’re talented — but they’re just plain tough. They know how to compete,” he said. “And not necessarily for the first half-mile. I don’t know much about soccer, but they know how to attack and defend. It’s the same way they play basketball. You can’t coach that. They just innately know how to compete in everything they do, even in the classroom. I just sit back for the ride.”

And “we’ve got some others coming in,” including freshman Beau Johnson. “We have nine kids working for seven spots. Having that internal competition is good.”

The Seaside girls finished fourth out of six in the team standings in the Cowapa League meet last year, but there’s plenty to look forward to for the Lady Gulls in 2016.

Their top two runners in the league meet were freshman Katie Zagata and junior Josie Smith, who finished fourth and fifth, respectively, out of 42 runners. (Smith would finish 16th at state, out of 108 runner).

The Seaside girls are hoping to add a little depth this season, to climb the Cowapa ladder and make a run at traditional league powers Tillamook and Scappoose.