

Drake Relays could be Metro bonanza

Written by Jim Ecker
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Metro athletes have hit the jackpot at the Drake Relays the last three years with 12 gold medals and three meet records since 2012.

There could be more of the same this week when the Relays are held at Drake Stadium in Des Moines, with the high school events set for Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Linn-Mar junior Stephanie Jenks, one of the top young distance runners in the country, appears poised for more success at Drake this week. She captured the 1500 and 3000 meter runs at Drake as a freshman in 2013, then repeated her double last year as a sophomore and set a meet record in the 3000.

Linn-Mar athletes have claimed nine of those 12 gold medals by Metro athletes since 2012, but members of the Jefferson girls track team will be looking to make their mark this year after several near-misses the past few seasons.

The J-Hawks rank first in the state in the 4x100 meter relay and they rank second in the 4x200 and sprint medley. They feature some of the top sprinters in the state and have been dominating the competition so far this year in their favorite events.

Jenks currently leads the state in the 800, 1500 and 3000. In addition, she ran the fastest 1600 for a high school girl in the country Friday when she won the 1600 at the Kansas Relays.

Linn-Mar girls also lead the state in the 4x400 and 4x800 relays and should be formidable in those events as well.

Linn-Mar freshman Payton Wensel has burst onto the scene this year in the 200 and 400, but the Drake Relays do not offer those events at the high school level. Wensel should be an important member for the Lions on their relays, however.

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The Linn-Mar boys rank first in the state in the 4x200 relay. In addition, Austin Flieder of Linn-Mar ranks second in the open 400. Jackson Coker of Kennedy ranks second in the discus.

Linn-Mar athletes won four events at the Drake Relays last year. Jenks doubled in the distance races and Josh Evans (now at Iowa State) set a meet record in the 1600. Evans also ran the anchor leg when the Lions set a meet record in the 1600 sprint medley with Tristan Freese, Daniel Gorsich and Dalton Gosch.

Metro athletes hauled in six gold medals at the 2013 Drake Relays. Linn-Mar claimed five of those victories with Jenks doubling in the 1500 and 3000 and Evans taking the 1600. The Linn-Mar boys also won the 1600 medley and the 4x200 relay.

The Cedar Rapids Prairie boys also got into the victory column in 2013 by capturing the 4x400 relay. The Hawks also won the 4x400 relay in 2012 for back-to-back titles.

The Cedar Rapids Washington boys won the 1600 medley in 2012.