

2009 Canada West CIS Cross Country Preview

Overview

Queen's University will host this year's CIS cross country championship. Both Canada West and CIS championships are up for grabs in Kingston, Ont. on Saturday, Nov. 14 at the Fort Henry Heights Course, with the women's 5 km starting at 11:00 a.m. Mountain Time and the men 10 km getting underway at 11:45 a.m.

Alberta Golden Bears & Pandas

2008 CW men's: 3rd

2008 CIS men's: 9th

Last CW men's title: 2004

Last CIS men's title: 1980

2008 CW women's: 3rd

2008 CIS women's: 12th

Last CW women's title: 1997

Last CIS women's title: none

For the University of Alberta cross country teams, youth will be served at Fort Henry Hill in Kingston, Ontario and this season's CIS championships.

OUA based schools have won 11 straight CIS men's banners, and five of the last nine women's championships, and with Guelph having won three straight on the men's side, and four straight on the women's side, and, more recently, their fifth straight OUA conference title on both sides, it would seem as though the No. 1 ranked Gryphons are poised to make another title run.

Georgette Reed's Pandas and Golden Bears are ranked No. 9 in CIS, and will be looking to improve their 12th-place women's finish and ninth place men's finish from last season. The seventh year head coach has 14 athletes, seven men and seven women, qualified and ready to compete in Ontario, including Jamie Weikum who was Alberta's lone CIS All-Canadian last season after finishing in 14th-place in Quebec one year ago. Among the 14, only one is in their fifth and final season of eligibility, Lindsay Acheson, and there is only one fourth-year athlete as well (Cody Carver). The rest of the team is made up of freshmen, sophomores and juniors, meaning that Reed has lots of potential and young talent to work with now and in the future.

Danika Medinski, a Canada West Second Team All-Star in her rookie year, is a key third-year athlete for the Pandas, who are rounded out by fifth-year Lindsay Acheson, sophomores Hayley Degaust, Alana Soderberg, Cassandra Tomas, as well as, fourth-year Joelle Stenger and freshman Natalia Szykarczuk.

Weikum, a third-year runner for the Golden Bears will lead the U of A men's team, and is likely to be the program's top finisher in Kingston. He has posted the Golden Bears' best results all season long, and is coming off a sophomore season where he was named an All-Canadian. Cody Carver, the 2007 Canada West rookie of the year, lands on the Alberta CIS team for the third straight season, and is joined by Graeme Law, Max Leboeuf, Harry Moore, Joel Lauzon and freshman Jaden Ostapowich, who ran in the recent Canada Summer games, and finished fourth in the 800m at the 2008 Canadian nationals.

The CIS championship also serves as the Canada West championship, and last year the Bears and Pandas finished third in the conference. The Calgary women (No. 4), Regina men (No. 4) and both Victoria Vikes squads are ranked in the top 10 by CIS, meaning the Golden Bears and Pandas are in an uphill battle for a top-three conference finish.

Calgary Dinos

2008 CW men's: 1st

2008 CIS men's: 5th

Last CW men's title: 2008

Last CIS men's title: none

2008 CW women's: 1st

2008 CIS women's: 3rd

Last CW women's title: 2008

Last CIS women's title: 2003

The Calgary Dinos cross country teams, the reigning men's and women's Canada West champions, are looking for a repeat effort and a little bit more as they fight for both the conference and national crowns at Queen's University in Kingston.

With both the Canada West and CIS titles up for grabs on the same weekend, the pressure to perform is high for the Dinos. And while the challenge is ratcheted up even more with a tough field of runners around them, the Dinos have more than enough tools to compete at a high level.

On the women's side, Calgary will be looking for a fast time from rookie Katie Fenton, who is in the running for both Rookie of the Year honours and an All-Canadian nod. Fenton won the Inland Northwest XC Challenge in Moscow, Idaho, a competition with both CIS and NCAA-calibre runners, and placed sixth at the U of S open.

Runners such as Faye Stenning (5th in Idaho and at the U of S open) and Riley McQueen, (9th in Idaho and at the U of S open) help solidify the team, which won the U of S open team title and placed second at the Stewart Cup in Edmonton.

Head coach Doug Lamont points to his women's team depth as a possible indicator of how the squad might finish this weekend.

"Our top six runners are capable of top-20 finishes, and that would set us up nicely for a solid team score," explained Lamont. "Right now we're ranked fourth, and I think we have a very realistic shot at a team medal this weekend."

The Dinos will be in tough for their fourth straight Canada West title against the Victoria Vikes and the Alberta Pandas, and will attempt to crack the Guelph Gryphons' four-year stranglehold on the national title, which hasn't come to Calgary since 2003.

In their Canada West title defence, the men's team has won two team meets so far (Stewart Cup and the U of S open), and are led by Matthew Cloutier (three top-10 finishes in 2009) and Spencer Pootz, who finished third at the U of S open and sixth at the Stewart Cup.

Both runners could see themselves in the top 20 in Kingston, and both are capable of All-Canadian status with typical strong performances. The men are filled out by a strong group of runners who will prove to be the X-factors as to whether or not the Dinos can medal this weekend.

Lamont is confident in his team's chances despite a top-heavy Canada West.

"This could be one of the closest Canada West battles in a long time with four teams having a legitimate claim to the title," Lamont continued. "However, we have a formidable group of guys, and with everything going right, a medal is definitely a possibility for us."

The Dinos, currently ranked fifth in the country, will be competing with Victoria, Regina and Alberta for the Canada West title, and much like the women are staring up at the Guelph Gryphons for CIS supremacy. The Gryphons have won three National titles in a row, and along with No. 2 Windsor have won the past 11 CIS championships. The Dinos have never captured the national men's cross country title.

Manitoba Bisons

2008 CW men's: 4th

2008 CIS men's: 1-9th

Last CW men's title: 1989

Last CIS men's title: 1989

2008 CW women's: 4th

2008 CIS women's: 13th

Last CW women's title: 2002

Last CIS women's title: none

The Bison men's cross country team has three of five members from last season's squad who ran at the CIS championship. Last season the team had a full contingent of seven members at the Nationals, but lost athletes to graduation and will not have two conference All-Stars on this year's squad.

This season has been a rebuilding season with several good individual performances. Rookie Jason Redpath has shone after a slow start as he had a fifth-place at the Manitoba championship and top Bison in 18th at the Stewart Cup, with the best chance for Manitoba to earn a conference All-Star selection. Third-year Colin Shepherd and fourth-year Adam Penner have been consistent this season with a 25th and 28th finish, respectively, at the Stewart Cup. Fourth-year Chris Belof bounces back from injury and looks to use his experience in his third Nationals appearance while fifth-year Andrew Schellenberg runs at his first Nationals. Head coach Claude Berube is confident the men's team will peak at the Nationals and have a

top-12 finish.

The Bison women's cross country team faces the opposite dilemma as the men's squad, as there are four of seven returning members from last season's team who competed at the CIS championship, plus two more with Nationals experience.

The Bison women's squad is led by 2008 Canada West First Team All-Star Katrina Bruckschwaiger. She wants to improve on her 22nd finish last season. The third-year runner is poised to reach the Top 10 and has a realistic shot at CIS All-Canadian recognition. This season, Bruckschwaiger consistency is evident with her fourth place finish at the Roy Griak Invitational, second at U of S Open, first at the Manitoba championship and fifth at the Stewart Cup, while being the top Bison in all four races leading to the CIS championship.

The team has very good depth as all other runners will battle to be in the top five for Manitoba. Third-year runners Melanie Gregoire and Lacey Ginter have been solid this season as they finished eighth and ninth at the Stewart Cup and will be in line for conference All-Star awards. Third-year Alex Bell has steadily improved this season and finished 45th in 2008 Nationals. Second-year Alice Sherwin and fifth-year Gina Tessmann both raced at the 2007 CIS championship and add depth to the team, while third-year Nicole Barnett will be at her first Nationals and could push to be one of the top five Bisons counting points this season.

Head coach Claude Berube stated, "The women's team has been consistent throughout the season and have more depth than in recent years. I am seeking a realistic goal of a top-seven finish and possible top team in Canada West."

Regina Cougars

2008 CW men's: N/A

2008 CIS men's: N/A

Last CW men's title: none

Last CIS men's title: none

2008 CW women's: N/A

2008 CIS women's: N/A

Last CW women's title: none

Last CIS women's title: none

Currently ranked No. 4 in the country, the Regina cross country team is poised for a breakthrough at this weekend's CIS Championships in Kingston, Ont. The Cougars were hoping for that breakthrough at last year's national championship meet, but an injury to top runner Kelly Wiebe meant they could only field four runners.

This time around, the Cougars are even stronger, with Wiebe back from injury and first-year runner Wyatt Baiton now in the mix. U of R cross country and track & field head coach Bruce McCannel expects the group to show well on Saturday at the Fort Henry Hill course.

"We really started out strong at the Cougar Trot, and that gave us an indication of where we could be by the end of the year," McCannel said. "The guys have built up a strong team mentality throughout the season, and I think our team has a chance to compete for the Canada West championship."

Wiebe, Baiton, Eric Benjamin, Iain Fyfe, and Dale Wig will make up the men's team. Melissa Petersen and Karissa LePage will represent the women's team as individuals. The Cougars will be led by cross country coach Dr. Graeme McMaster, who has overseen the team's training.

"Graeme has done a fantastic job of helping the team build unity and cohesion as the year's gone on," McCannel said. "He's really emphasized the importance of running as a team at the CIS meet, and this will help them run better individually as well."

The men's team has a nice mix of experience, with one runner at each year of eligibility. Benjamin leads the way as a fifth-year runner, with Wig in his fourth year and Wiebe in his third. Fyfe is in his second season of eligibility, with Baiton as the sole rookie on the team.

Petersen, a fifth-year runner who will be competing in her first CIS meet, has shown a huge amount of improvement over previous years. Like Petersen, LePage will also be competing in her first CIS meet, but as a rookie just one year removed from high school.

Saskatchewan Huskies

2008 CW men's: N/A
2008 CIS men's: N/A
Last CW men's title: 1979
Last CIS men's title: 1968

2008 CW women's: 5th
2008 CIS women's: 14th
Last CW women's title: none
Last CIS women's title: none

The Saskatchewan Huskie cross country team has built on strong finishes at competitions throughout 2009 and are poised to have success at the CIS championship.

With four first place finishes, two at second and one at third at non-conference races earlier this year, the women's cross country team will look to improve on the fifth-place Canada West finish at 14th CIS finish from one year ago. In 2008, Caitlin Warkentin earned Canada West First Team All-Star status with a seventh place (25th overall) finish. Jodi Souter was the next best for the Huskies with a 16th Canada West finish (50th overall).

Souter, a fourth-year athlete, has finished first three times this year – once at the UofS Open, at the Concordia Cross Country Classic in Portland, Oregon and again at the Stewart Cup. A favourite to take the conference title, she is undefeated against Canada West competition this season. Third-year Warkentin also has had strong finishes this season winning the Cougar Trot, the first meet of the season.

Also competing for the Huskie women's squad will be third-year Marcia Richards, second-year Miranda Miller, second-year Nadine Brenaut and third year Andrea Armstrong. Richards and Brenaut both competed with the Huskies at the championship in 2008. Richards has had strong results so far with a second place finish at the Cougar Trot in September. Last November, she finished 26th in the Canada West. In Brenaut's rookie season she placed 39th in the Canada West. Armstrong finished 97th at the 2007 Canada West Championship. Miller will be competing in her first CIS competition.

The Huskies will enter a men's team for the first time since 2004 and look to improve on the conference sixth-place finish and 13th CIS finish in that year.

The team will be led by veteran Matt Mazuirk who had the best finish at the championship one year ago finishing 25th in the conference and 75th in the CIS. So far in 2009, he's finished 14th at the UofS Open and 19th at the Stewart Cup. Samir Marin will return to the team after a one-year absence. In 2007, he finished 27th in the Canada West and 78th in the CIS. He's had two top 10 finishes so far with a sixth place finish at Stewart Cup.

Third-year athletes Stephane Gerard, Alyosha Boldt and Johnathan Ell will join the Huskies at the championship. Only Gerard has experience competing on the national stage with a 30th Canada West finish and 90th CIS finish last year.

Victoria Vikes

2008 CW men's placing: 2nd
2008 CIS men's placing: 6th
Last CW men's title: 2006
Last CIS men's title: 1997

2008 CW women's placing: 2nd
2008 CIS women's placing: 6th
Last CW women's title: 2005
Last CIS women's title: 2001

The UVic Vikes men's and women's cross-country teams are hoping to recapture the Canada West conference banners when they compete in this year's CIS championship. The Vikes have won more conference titles than any other Canada West school, but have not won the conference crown since the men's team victory in 2006.

“Our goal is to win the Canada West conference title this year,” said head coach Brent Fougner, who enters his 22nd season as head coach. “The conference is going to be really close, and I think whoever does win the Canada West will finish in the medals for the national title.”

The women's team will be in pursuit of their 18th Canada West title and first since 2005. The Vikes field a deep line-up that features four runners who earned conference All-star status a year ago. Shauna Skinner

and Claire Jean are both two-time All-stars, with Jean also earning All-Canadian honours at the 2007 meet. Julia Tschanz was Canada West Rookie of the year and All-star in 2008, while McGill transfer Brittany Therrien placed 4th at the Quebec conference meet a year ago to earn All-star status.

The Vikes also have big expectations for Deidre Moran, who placed 55th at the 2008 championship, but has been UVic's top runner during the fall season. Since ditching her skis as a member of Alberta's downhill program, the sophomore from Calgary has improved with every race and shows top-20 potential.

Daniel Mallie will be running in his final CIS championship for the men. Mallie is a three-time Canada West All-Star and two-time All-Canadian. The Delta, B.C. native, who is set to graduate with a degree in Engineering, placed 9th at the 2008 CIS meet. Mallie will be complemented up front by UNB transfer Matt Pieteron, who was a bronze medalist at the 2008 Atlantic conference championship. Pieteron, a native of Ottawa, is also a member of Canada's duathlon team and placed 26th at the recent World Championship.

Cliff Childs and Tom Fleming also return for their third CIS race. Childs is a two-time conference All-Star, highlighted by a 25th place showing in last year's meet. For the rest of the Vikes roster it will be their first CIS championship, as a talented freshman class offers plenty of potential for the program's sustained success.

CIS championships site Kingston, Ont. is also future site of the 2010 FISU World University Championship. The Vikes men's and women's team have combined for 13 CIS championships, 19 Canada West championships and 64 CIS All-Canadians.