



The Crofton girls' cross country program has claimed five consecutive state titles, the longest ever in Class D and one of the longest in Nebraska prep cross country history. Pictured are the 2011 Warriors: (front) Molly Bossman, Samantha Guenther, Kendy Kube, Vanessa McFarland, (back) Abby Steffen, Brayton Hagge, Dani Riesberg, Elizabeth Kube, Jazmin Wubben, Tiffany Tramp and Abby Braun

Crofton Keeps Focus On The Journey As It Keeps On Winning

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CROFTON, Neb. — Championship banners cover the walls of the Crofton High School gym like a maroon and white wallpaper. Success in basketball, track and field and cross country have put — and kept — this small town in northeast Nebraska on the Cornhusker State's sporting map for generations.

But the team currently leaving their legacy in the tapestries and the trophy cases at CHS began, not with the desire to be the best, but the desire to share a love of running.

The Crofton girls' cross country team takes a string of five consecutive state titles into the 2011 season, and returns five of the six runners that got the program's "one for the thumb" a year ago.

While the Crofton girls' program has nine titles to its credit, it had not won a title in 14 years when a group of freshmen stepped on to the scene in 2006.

"For while, the cross country program didn't have many girls out," said Kristin Steffen, who ran on the first four title teams and is now a sophomore competing in track and cross country at NCAA Division I University of South Dakota. "My freshman year was the first time in a while that we had a whole team (enough runners to score as a team)."

But the group started with just one.

"Merissa (Falkenberg) was just crazy about running," Steffen said. "She talked me and the others into it. She was really the motivator, the heartbeat of the team through those four years."

Falkenberg recruited Steffen, Rachel

Five Alive

Only two programs in Nebraska prep cross country history have had state title runs longer than Crofton's current string of five straight. One of the two is Crofton, which won eight straight from 1981-88. No boys' program in Nebraska has had a title run of longer than four years.

9	Lincoln Southeast (Class A)	1989-97
8	Crofton (C)	1981-88
5	Crofton (D) - active streak	2006-10
5	Omaha Marian (A)	2003-07

Barnes, Karley Boecker and Lacey Wendte that freshmen year.

"Merissa ran in junior high and loved it," said Crofton head coach Jayne Arens. "She got the others to run with her."

But the freshmen didn't walk into their first practice thinking they would add another — much less four — banners to the CHS walls.

"They started with small goals," Coach Arens said. "First they wanted to run varsity. But after that first meet, their first win, you could see it in their eyes and their spirit. As the season progressed, their goals got more concrete."

"As a championship became more of a possibility, they just ran harder because they knew what they wanted."

Besides the coaches, that freshmen group also had a veteran to follow that first year.

"Lexi Arens was a senior that year, and she was their guide through everything," Coach Arens noted.

The five freshmen numbered just four when they became juniors, but the remaining quartet continued to recruit new runners into the fold.

"Most coaches know that the best way to get kids out is for other kids to invite them along," Coach Arens said. "They had a passion for running and they loved to share it."

The reasons younger runners joined varied as much as their initial ability.

For senior Elizabeth Kube, who has run on the last three title teams, it was about the social aspects.

"For me, it was the team closeness," she said. "We do a lot of stuff together. There is a lot of team bonding."

Junior Tiffany Tramp, who has two individual top-10 finishes under her belt, followed an older cousin to a workout.

"My cousin Lacey (Wendte) told me to come to practice with her one summer," she said. "I started running and I liked it."

The runners who started this latest Crofton dynasty donned their caps and gowns in the spring of 2010, leaving Kube, Tramp and others to pick up the torch.

"Everyone needed to step up," Kube said of last season. "Everyone on the team realized that we had to go on without them, and that we could still be good without them."

Though those runners had moved on, they kept in contact with their friends and former teammates.

"A lot of them still come to meets," said Dani Riesberg, who also has two individual top-10 finishes in the past two seasons. "They'll cheer us on, message

Younger Runners Keep The Streak Alive

A total of 13 different runners have contributed in state meets during Crofton's five-year title run. Five of them have earned state medals with top-15 finishes, including one individual state champion, Kristin Steffen in 2006. Here are those runners, with the place they earned in that year's race:

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Lexi Arens	107				
Rachel Barnes	4	5	7	23	
Karley Boecker	36	17	43		
Abigail Braun *					62
Kerriann Denney		121			
Merissa Falkenberg	35	77	33	15	
Elizabeth Kube *			15	27	33
Heather Lancaster			33		39
Danielle Riesberg *				7	9
Kristin Steffen	1	11	4	5	
Tiffany Tramp *				10	3
Lacey Wendte	32	63			
Jazmin Wubben *					30

* - on 2011 roster

us to see how we're doing."

The new-look Warriors proved they could win without those founding four, and now return five runners as they go for title number six. Besides Kube, Riesberg and Tramp, Crofton returns Jazmin Wubben, who placed 30th a year ago, and Abigail Braun, who finished 62nd.

But the talk of number six remains the sole domain of the fans and the media at this point.

"Last year the coaches didn't even talk about state until the day of the meet," Tramp joked.

Coach Arens has tried to keep the focus on improving the individual and,

in that way, improving the team.

"We focus on getting them to do the best they can," she said. "As coaches, we are just there to guide them and get them in the shape they need to be in to compete to the best of their ability."

At the same time, the coaching staff doesn't want them to just run for four years at CHS.

"When they are done with high school, we want them to still love running," she said. "We love it when a runner comes back and says they just completed a half-marathon. We want them to enjoy running throughout their lives."

Bucks Hope Experience Leads To More Success In 2011

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The Yankton Bucks football team battled through injury after injury in the 2010 season, but put together a late-season run that pushed them through to the second round of the playoffs.

This year, with many of the players that were lost a year ago — and many of the guys who replaced them — back in the fold, the Bucks are looking for a better outcome.

The Bucks return 18 letterwinners from a team that finished 6-5 a year ago, a squad that had several starters miss time due to injury.

"Hopefully we know what we're in for, what it takes to play at this level," said Yankton head coach Arlin Likness. "The key is where we are at now, and where we want to build to."

With several experienced skill players returning, the Bucks have

moved three of their bigger ones — seniors Brady Knodel (6-0, 250) and Terry Huber (6-4, 263) and junior Troy Hunhoff (6-4, 232) — onto the line to bolster that unit's athleticism.

"Troy Hunhoff is playing tackle when he could be a great tight end," Likness noted. "Knodel has been a fullback in the past, but has looked very good on the line. Huber was a tight end last year and will play tackle and he has accepted that role well."

"That tells me that they are team leaders, that they are willing to put the team above themselves."

Likness hopes that, as the younger players develop on the line, he will be able to move them — especially Knodel, who rushed for 160 yards on just 41 attempts last year — back to their old positions.

"Hopefully others can develop so we can move him back to fullback ... or to tight end," he said.

The Soulek brothers — senior Ty

(6-2, 288) and junior Kellen (6-4, 273) — round out the starting offensive line.

Junior Evan Schroeder (74-286, 1 TD rushing) and senior Connor Fitzsimmons (15-67 rushing) return after both getting starting experience last season. Seniors Zach Sage (3-9 rushing) and Alex McKee, and junior James Hisek (8-44 rushing, 1 TD) also spent time in the backfield a year ago.

Quarterback Michael Rucker, who played in the final five games and led the Bucks in passing yards (618) and touchdown passes (3), returns a junior incumbent behind center. John Vollmer and Jackson Pasco (14-395, 4 TD receiving) also have QB experience, but will primarily be used as receivers. Alex McNeill (2-22 receiving) and 6-6 senior Connor Vlasman also provide welcome targets in the pass-



BUCKS: Connor Fitzsimmons (right)