

# Mount de Sales enjoying a stellar fall sports season

While volleyball has gotten the most attention, it is one of just four teams from Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville enjoying strong fall seasons.

Cross country, field hockey and soccer are also faring well, and also poised for their championship seasons in the Interscholastic Athletic Association of Maryland.

Eric Dummann, athletic director at the all-girls' school, noted a recent pep rally, where students cheered all four teams at a time when none had lost a conference competition. He said the Sailors' fall success has given the school a boost.

"I think it certainly gives the young ladies a sense of confidence and pride when you're winning," Dummann said. "We've been (stronger) from the beginning this year. They knew right from the get-go that this would be a strong season."

On the volleyball front, Mount de Sales is 10-0 in the IAAM A Conference through Oct. 6. The Sailors are seeking their third straight title A Conference title, and haven't skipped a beat under new coach Gary Troy, who said this team simply does its work on a daily basis and isn't obsessed with any streaks.

"They want to three-peat, but they also know that in order to three-peat, they have to take care of business," Troy said after a recent four-set victory at McDonogh. "They are a hard-working team."

The Sailors have a solid core of players, led by juniors Mary Grace Goyena, who has already committed to play at the University of Pennsylvania, and Chidinma Onukwugha. The latter's sister, Kelenna, is a freshman who is developing into a force, as she played a big role in the win at McDonogh.

The mother of the Onukwugha sisters, Ebere, is an associate professor of pharmaceutical health services at the University of Maryland's School of Pharmacy in Baltimore. She wanted her daughters to find a sport to enjoy, which they have done. (Their father, Chidi, is an attorney).

“They are mentally tough, and it shows on the court,” Troy said of his team. “When they have a little bad streak, they’re the first to know what they did wrong.”

Cross country, meanwhile, is poised for a similar feat. It includes many holdovers from last season, when it dominated the IAAM championships, starting with sophomore Juliette Whittaker, who posted a mild upset over then-senior Samantha Facius to take individual honors.

Whittaker continued to emerge as one of the top runners not just in the state, but the nation, with an outstanding campaign in spring track and field that IAAM titles at 800- and 1,600-meter runs. Her cross country season includes taking the Elite Division race at Hereford High School’s Bull Run Invitational, covering 3.1 miles in 18 minutes, 25.5 seconds. Her sister, Bella, one of the Mid-Atlantic’s best at 400 meters, is slowly making her way back from a foot injury.

The IAAM championships will be held Oct. 29 at McDaniel College in Westminster.

Soccer started 8-1 overall, 5-0 record in the IAAM B Conference, where the Sailors lost to Roland Park Country School in the tournament semifinals last season. Obviously, they want more this time around.

Field hockey also plays in the B Conference. It started 8-4 overall, but 5-0 in the conference. Last year, it lost in the conference title game to St. Mary’s.

Steve Weber, who coaches cross country as well as track and field, is also a philosophy professor at Loyola University Maryland. He has been working on a new mission statement for the Sailors’ athletic program, one, he said, which mentions seeking excellence in sports through the practice of courage, moderation (self-control), justice (fair play) and wisdom.

“Its virtue is that it’s simple and clear,” Weber said. “We all realize that this is what we’ve all been seeking.”