

SPORTS

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Hampton's Barry Britt (red shorts), shown here competing in the 5,000-metre run at the Canadian track and field championships in Moncton, is one of six New Brunswickers who will compete in the Canadian cross-country championships on Saturday in British Columbia. PHOTO: JAMIE ROACH/FOR THE KING'S COUNTY RECORD

Province's team small but mighty

Contingent of six cross-country runners have potential for a series of good results at nationals

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TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN • New Brunswick athletes will bring a small but mighty attitude to the 2014 Canadian cross-country championships when the nation's best runners converge at Vancouver's Jericho Beach Park on Saturday.

The province's contingent numbers only six athletes – Barry Britt of Hampton, Ryan Cassidy of Grand Digue, Alex Coffin of Saint John and the Fredericton trio of Taylor Dunn, Alexandra Kiely and Sarah Macpherson. Coffin, who'll wear dual hats as both competitor and coach, would not be surprised if the New Brunswickers acquit themselves well, although wet weather may bring muddy conditions on race day.

"There are differences between track, road racing and cross-country," said the 46-year-old owner of Coach Coffin's Fitness Shop. "But there are differences in this course, in particular. I went as a coach last year, and it was incredibly muddy. That's something that a road racer just doesn't have to deal with. There were a couple of runners who lost their shoes in the muck, so you have to be prepared for anything."

Coffin will be keeping an eye on the New Brunswickers, especially Dunn, who trains with him at the Saint John Track Club.

"I'll be looking out for the other athletes in case they need anything on race day," said Coffin. "I'm excited to see how Taylor performs. She ran as a junior last year, which is under 20 years of age. They have added the youth category, which is 17 and under, so she'll get to compete in the younger category. I think she'll have a much better result against runners her own age. Taylor has



Saint John's Alex Coffin will be competing and coaching for New Brunswick in the Canadian cross-country championships in Vancouver on Saturday. PHOTO: KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

trained hard and her parents actually worked in Vancouver at one time, so it's like a homecoming for her. From the workouts she has had, she's ready."

Dunn and Kiely will race in the youth girls' division over a four-kilometre course. Macpherson, who won a bronze medal at the 2013 Canada Games as a 5,000-metre competitor, will be in the women's 6K field. Britt and Cassidy will be among the favourites in the men's 10K event – Cassidy was fourth and Britt fifth in 2013 – while Coffin will be among 174 masters athletes in the 8K race.

The stakes are high – beyond a national title, runners are vying for qualification spots on the junior and senior teams that will represent Canada at the 2015 NACAC cross-country championships and the 2015 IAAF world cross-country championships. Britt, who's training out of Guelph, Ont., is focused on the task at hand.

"The only thing I am expecting is a sloppy and muddy course, and it's going

to take a tough individual to win the race," said the reigning 10,000-metre Canadian track and field champion. "Besides the course you shouldn't expect anything – the race could go out hard, could be sit and kick, or it could be filled with surges."

"I'm not expecting anything in particular, but I'm ready for anything. My goal is to put myself in contention to win. There are tons of fit and talented guys who could take the win, but I believe I am one of them. A top five finish, however, would leave me satisfied because the field is so talented. If you can finish top five this weekend, it's a great accomplishment."

Britt is blessed with a familiarity for the course, which could augur well on Saturday.

"There are no unknowns," he said. "I know how it runs. I know where I can push and where I can't. Also, for my pre-race visualization, I can see every part of the course in my head, which is very helpful."

The 24-year-old has a long-term plan in place beyond this weekend, and has moved to an elite training environment in Guelph in pursuit of his career goals.

"I want to become one of Canada's best distance runners and eventually make senior national teams in between 2016-2020," he said.

"I believe being in Guelph will give me the best shot at making that happen. They have a great team to train with on a day-to-day basis that includes Olympians and other national team members, good facilities to train, great support staff, great coaching and financial stability as a club.

"On top of all of that, they have a reputation of being great and a reputation that I wanted to help uphold. Short-term goals are to get fit and to set personal bests in the 2015 outdoor track season. Long-term is similar to most post-collegiate athletes – to be an Olympian."

Coffin, for one, likes the mindset of Paul and Margaret Britt's son.

"Barry is trying to get to that next level, and I think that's awesome," said Coffin. "He's training with Dave Scott-Thomas, and he has a lot of talent – I mean, he's our current national 10,000-metre champion. He has the rest of his life to do other things, so I think it's great."

As for himself, Coffin is fit heading into the competition.

"I feel very good. It's very exciting because a lot of the runners are athletes I used to race against when I competed in British Columbia," said Coffin. "There are two former Olympians in the field – Bruce Deacon and Kerry Nelson – so I can't wait to compete. It will be a lot of fun. I pass on to my athletes that they should look forward to competition and not be intimidated or anxious about it, so I try to practise what I preach."

"I'd like to be in the top 10, regardless who's in front of me. I finished fifth four years ago in Guelph. I'll be looking for a lot of good results from all our athletes and I hope to add to that mojo and do well in the masters race."

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Mill Rats add Dailey

SAINT JOHN • The Saint John Mill Rats announced on Wednesday the signing of six-foot-eight forward Jermaine Dailey. The 28-year-old averaged 9.4 points, 6.4 rebounds on 50 per cent shooting in a crowded front-court last season with the Moncton Miracles. Dailey has played previously in Taiwan, Uruguay, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Venezuela, United Arab Emirates, Cyprus and the United States. "Jermaine is extremely athletic, tough and gives us a two-way player who can help on the defensive and offensive ends," Mill Rats general manager Ian McCarthy said in a release. To make room for Dailey, the Mill Rats released John Paul Nyadaro. The Mill Rats' next game is Saturday night at 7 p.m. at Harbour Station against the Miracles. Tickets are available at harbourstation.ca.

Crookshank at Indigo

SAINT JOHN • Saint John Mill Rats power forward Eric Crookshank will be signing copies of his book *It's Not Just a Game* on Friday night from 6 to 8 p.m. at Indigo on the city's east side. Crookshank and the Mill Rats will return to action when they welcome the Moncton Miracles to Harbour Station on Saturday at 7 p.m.

Junior curling prelims at Thistle

SAINT JOHN • Thistle-St. Andrews Curling Club in Saint John will host the first junior preliminary bonspiel from Friday to Sunday. This event will qualify the first four teams that will play in Moncton in January in hopes of representing New Brunswick at the 2015 M&M Meat Shops Canadian Juniors, where the province won silver medal last year. This weekend's field includes 11 boys teams and eight girls teams. Team Comeau will be back to defend its boys title. Also competing this weekend are Team Small and Team Comeau, the two teams that will represent New Brunswick at the Canada Winter Games in Prince George, B.C.

Hodgin will lead horsemen's group

SAINT JOHN • Sam Hodgin finds himself in a familiar spot after a recent election of the Saint John Harness Horsemen Association. Hodgin, a local farmer and trainer/driver, returns as president for 2015. He takes over for Dr. Mitch Downey, who now will serve as a director. Mike Downey was voted in as vice-president, while Traci Friars will assume the role of secretary. Luke Armstrong will serve for the first time in the association as treasurer. His father, Rick, also was elected as a director, as was Wanda Foster.

Miramichi inductees named

Surprising Predators push near top of West

