

Ready to make a run

• Local athletes are headed to state track and field meets while Berry College prepares to host.

 By Tommy Romanach

Sports Writer

TRomanach@RN-T.com

🕒 05.11.17

PREP TRACK

After months of meets and preparation, Northwest Georgia is ready for the state track meets, both as competitors and host. The GHSA Track and Field State Championships are happening at three venues this weekend — Carrollton's Grisham Stadium, Albany's Hugh Mills Stadium and Valhalla Stadium at Berry College. The meets begin today with the preliminaries and ultimately conclude on Saturday.

One of the most notable local teams is Rome, which won the boys' Region 7-5A title and is sending six athletes to compete in 11 different events at the Class 5A meet in Carrollton.

Many Rome athletes headed to state are seniors, including distance runner John Berry Bowling, field events specialist TaCoria Williams and all-around athlete Shidell Millsap. Coach Nick Bridges has advised them to simply enjoy the moment.

"They just have to go out there and have fun. We have been battle-tested all season, and they are ready for this," Bridges said. "All we can ask for is 100 percent, and all of our athletes have given that this season. We've pushed as hard as we can all year long."

In addition to finishing first in many of their meets this season, the Wolves also broke numerous school records. In fact, Millsap, Williams and Ja'Taria Jackson all broke school records at the sectional meet on April 26 in Carrollton.

The selection of Berry as a host came rather sudden, with Jefferson High School announcing that it could not serve its usual role as host in March. With Berry alums serving as track coaches around the state, the college began getting emails about the possibility of hosting.

"It is a big win for Berry and a big win for Rome and Floyd County," Syverson said. "It's been a sudden development, but we are so proud we can showcase our facilities this weekend. This whole experience has been an honor."

Berry, which hosts the Class A Private, 4A and 7A athletes, has had a short time to put together the event, but Syverson credits the Georgia Cross Country and Track and Field Coaches Association in being a big help. Many other parts of Berry's athletic department have also stepped up and assisted with the event.

Valhalla Stadium will host plenty of talent throughout the week, including defending champions like Wesleyan, Landmark Christian, Eastside, Newton, McEachern and Athens Academy.

"Anytime you can have some of the best 500 athletes in the state at your facilities you'll take it," Syverson said. "I think it's great for the program and recruiting. We have hosted college meets, but I expect some stadium records to fall this weekend."

Darlington will be one of the teams at Berry, with seven different athletes participating in 12 events under the Class A Private banner. Some notable performers include Elijah McKoy in the long jump and triple jump and Elijah Ball in the shot put and discus.

Rockmart carries the largest team out of the Region 7-AA into the AA meet in Albany, with nine different athletes competing in individual events as well as two relay teams. Cambree Stanley will compete in the 100 and 200 meters, while Jamal Ware will compete in the shot put and discus.

Ware was one of two local athletes to finish in first place in the sectional meet, along with Pepperell's Jesse Burkhalter in the high jump. Among other noteworthy athletes, Model's Alex Quarles competes in the 1600 and 3200 meters after finishing second in both events at sectionals. Meanwhile, Chattooga's Isaac Foster competes in the 100 and 200 after finishing in the top four in both events.



File, Jeremy Stewart/RN-T

Shidell Millsap is one of the members of the Rome High track and field team in Carrollton this weekend for the state meet.