McQuaid Invitational celebrates 26th running on Saturday

Twenty-five years ago on an overcast October morning, 85 runners raced away from the McQuaid Jesuit campus as a Brighton police car led the way. The event was the first McQuaid Invitational, which has grown to become the second largest high school cross-country meet in the United States.

This Saturday, the meet's 26th running will find more than 3,500 athletes from 165 schools competing in 21 races at Genesee Valley Park.

The meet director for all 25 years has been McQuaid teacher and coach Bob Bradley, who at that time was in his fourth year at the head of the Knight's cross-country and track program. As Bradley recalls it, the major local meet then was the Brighton Invitational, which for some reason was not being held that year.

"Our senior, Eric Kendrick, was one of the best runners in the state in '65, and we wanted to give him a chance to win a race locally, so starting our own meet seemed the logical thing to do. Twelve teams came, including our fellow Jesuit school, Brooklyn Prep, who won it. I was in the police car and had a great view of the race. Eric ran second until the last mile, then won going away."

The meet stayed at McQuaid for only two more years before moving to the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1968, when the number of schools had increased to more than 50.

By 1973, the number was approaching 100, and the meet moved to the main picnic glen at Genesee Valley Park. That's where the first gun will go off at 9:45 a.m. this Saturday.

Schools from five states and Canada will be represented, and many of the

McQuaid

visiting teams are powers in their own areas. West Springfield, the Virginia state champion, is returning to defend its Boys AAA title, against New York powers Fairport, Ithaca, and Guilderland.

Ohio girls powers Magnificat of Rocky River and arch-rival Lakewood will go against New York's highly regarded Auburn squad.

Individually, the top boys returnee is John Wassenaar of St. Michael's, Toronto, who ran the three-mile course in 15:08 while placing third. Right behind him in fourth was Fairport's Nate Ruder, who has established himself as one of New York's best. Those two figure to battle it out for AAA honors, but the winner will have to top the times of AA favorite Pat Van Boden of Syracuse Corcoran and Class A standout, Shane DuBois of Sherburne-Earlville, to win the Steve Prefontaine Memorial Plaque as fastest runner of the day.

Four of five girls winners from last year are back, including seniors Deresa Walters of East and Becky Alfieri of Spencerport, and junior Jenny Rhines of Liverpool, all of whom will be in the AA race.

In the A race, a two-time winner who was slowed by injury last year, senior Roberta Raszkowski of North East, Pa., will take on '89 winner Chris Rolleri of Skaneateles. They'll all be competing for the gold cup trophy awarded to the fastest girl runner of the day, won last year by Walters.

Bradley feels that the meet's strong competitive mix is the main factor in its growth over the years. "Some of these runners will face each other just this once, and the adrenalin is really flowing. The course is ideal for racing, and the spectators are able to see almost all of it, so it's a great experience for the runners hearing that much cheering."

Among the meet's 21 races are 12 varsity, three JV, one for sophomore boys, and five for junior high. The five seeded varsity races are kept small, usually under 100 runners, but the others have as many as 225-250.

"It's a lot of work," said Bradley, "but our parents and alumni do a great job to pull it all off, and the McQuaid team really gets into it, too. It's the high spot of our season."