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## Cross-country preview: Powerhouse MDI girls look strong yet again

By Ryan McLaughlin  
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Mount Desert Island High School junior Amelia VanDongen cruises across the finish line to win the 2023 Class B North cross-country regional championship race in Belfast.

ISLANDER PHOTO BY RYAN MCLAUGHLIN

**ELLSWORTH** — The cross country programs at Mount Desert Island High have been a powerhouse for generations, having produced some talented runners and a lot of team championships.

And if Saturday's season-opening Ellsworth Invitational is any indication, the Trojans will be just as strong this fall, in particular the girls, who have won the last four Class B North regional championships.

Coach Desiree Sirois' club ran away from the rest of the field, with all seven of MDI's runners finishing in the top 20 as the Trojans finished more than 60 points clear of runner-up Presque Isle, 33 points to 96.

Senior Amelia Vandongen, the 2023 Class B North individual top finisher, returns to lead MDI's pack once again this fall. Vandongen was the Trojans' top runner on Saturday, finishing Ellsworth High's hilly 5K course in 19 minute, 45.41 seconds.

But perhaps what's scary for the rest of the eastern Maine cross country landscape is three of the Trojans' next four finishers are freshmen.

Kulani Granholm, Marlee Cantanese and Rebecca Rand finished fifth, ninth and 10th, respectively, in their high school debuts, while Meri Ranford, a senior, also earned a top-10 finish for MDI in coming in sixth.

Fiona St. Germain (17th) and Hope LeMoine (19th) rounded out the Trojans' pack.

One thing MDI has prided itself on over the years is continuity in its pack, which is an essential championship-winning formula in cross country.

For instance, on Saturday, the difference between No. 1 runner Vandongen and No. 5 finisher Rand was 1:57, also known as a pack time.

MDI's boys are also the defending regional champs, and were led Saturday by Lucian Avila-Gatz, who finished 22nd overall.

The Trojans were fifth as a team at the Ellsworth opener, and third among Class B competitors.

## Ryan McLaughlin