



News-Gazette Photo By Brian K. Johnson

Mahomet-Seymour seniors Neil Mathis, left, and Karl Welke are shown in action Tuesday in a dual meet against Champaign Central. The Bulldog duo finished in a tie for first Tuesday after going 1-2 in the Spartan Classic last Saturday.

Bulldog runners paid their dues in offseason

By JOE MILLAS

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Most coaches say that winning records are not built during the season itself but during the months that precede the first competition.

Mahomet-Seymour cross-country runners Neil Mathis and Karl Welke are living proof of that.

The two Bulldog seniors paid their dues all summer, running and lifting weights. This fall they're collecting the dividends.

Last Saturday the payoff was spectacular as Mathis and Welke finished 1-2 in the prestigious Spartan Classic in St. Joseph.

In the process they made meet history, becoming the first pair of runners from the same school to go 1-2 in the 13 years the Classic has been conducted. In addition, Mathis became the first Mahomet-Seymour runner ever to win the meet's individual championship.

Mathis finished the 2.98-mile run through the streets of St. Joseph in 14 minutes, 54 seconds, the fourth fastest winning time in meet histo-

ry and the fastest since Mike Jackson of Blue Mound was clocked in 14:45 in 1977.

WELKE RAN a 15:06, faster than at least four past winners and good enough to edge defending champion Brian Oakley of Cumberland and Mark Haggerty of Hoopeston-East Lynn, who both ran 15:07. Welke's time was nearly one minute faster than his 1983 effort in the Classic. He had turned in a similar one minute improvement at Tuscola the week before.

Mathis has been a model of consistency this fall, finishing in under 16 minutes in all but one meet.

Both Mathis and Welke readily admit the work they did together last summer is the reason for their success this fall.

"We really hit the weights this year," said Mathis, who has been running competitively since the seventh grade. "We always said we needed to work with the weights, but this time we did it."

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Runners

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"It was really started at the end of cross-country last year," said Welke, in his third year of running. "We decided we were going to work through the winter for track and during the summer."

The winter work showed immediate results. Mathis qualified for the boys' Class A state meet in the 1,600-meter run while Welke went in the 3,200. Mathis barely missed making the finals, finishing with the 13th best time in the preliminaries. The top 12 times advanced, but his prelim time ended up faster than many of the times in the finals.

It was a step up, but it also created more incentive to work hard during the summer. "It was a bad feeling," said Mathis, "because they were a day in front of me, a big day (the day of the finals)."

AFTER TRACK season, the pair took two weeks off. Then they

started their summer program by attending the University of Illinois track camp.

"They give you a schedule and we took most of the strength training parts of it, like the hill training, and the stretching routines," said Mathis.

They added the new material to their own summer routine, which included circuit weight work including specific Nautilus work for the legs and a running program that consisted of workouts early in the morning and again in the evening. The two ran five days a week and lifted weights three days a week.

The result was a marked improvement in strength and stamina — and confidence.

"It puts the synonym 'contender' on you," Mathis said. "Last year you'd run the race for 11th place or try to get in the top 10. Now you think about the guys running with you in front, their strengths and weaknesses, when they're likely to

move. You think about the end of the race. It gives you a little more guts to hang on."

"You can go out faster and you don't feel it," said Welke. "Your arms don't feel so tired. Sure you're tired at the end, but it's a different kind of tired."

MATHIS AND Welke were with the lead pack at St. Joseph when it came through the first mile in about 4:40. Mathis said he took the lead after the 1 1/2-mile mark when Oakley and Warrensburg-Latham's Jerry Giberson, who had both made a move at the mile mark, slowed perceptibly and he simply "went right between them."

Welke did the same thing after the 2-mile mark and then held off Oakley and Haggerty at the chute.

Both Mahomet-Seymour runners also credit an improvement in their running efficiency as a major factor in their current success. They have worked hard on the length of their strides, the lift of their knees and the movement of their arms, critiquing each other during their summer runs.

While things are going well now

Mathis and Welke are aware that there is a lot of season left.

"This was just one race," said Welke. "I beat all those guys once, but everyone's going to be there the next time."

"I just think you can always keep improving," added Mathis. "I think we can run faster than we did Saturday. We ran easy and relaxed. It hurt, but it felt good. My mind kept in control the whole time."

The Bulldog duo will be aiming for several big meets during the remainder of the season. There will be the prestigious Amboy Invitational in early October, the Mahomet-Seymour Invitational, the Okaw Valley Conference meet and, of course, the regional, sectional and state meets.

The Okaw meet will be special since it will be the last-ever cross-country meet for that conference. The Okaw will disband after the current school year. There is little doubt Mathis and Welke would like to have their names at the top of that final conference meet result sheet. After the way they ran last Saturday, don't bet against them.