

'Dogs run to title at Urbana regional

By SAL NUDO
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With plenty of graduated seniors from last year no longer on his squad, boys' cross country coach Neil Garrison knew he had some big running shoes to fill this fall.

Those shoes were aptly filled Oct. 20, when the Bulldogs won the team crown at the Class 2A Urbana Regional.

"We've been slowly climbing up," said Garrison about his teams over the years. "We appreciate every little step we take. We're not taking it for granted."

Indeed, the six-year head coach has seen his cross country teams steadily improve at regional competition. A ninth-place showing at regionals in 2001 was perhaps the team's lowest point this decade. Since then, M-S has finished seventh (2002), fifth (2003), third (2004 and 2005) and first (2006 and 2007).

This year's squad won

regionals behind the solid efforts of John Prillaman (fifth), Dustin Kinkelaar (11th), Austin Beck (12th) and Steve Roberts (19th).

M-S edged out Bishop MacNamara 49-52 for the regional team crown. Following M-S and Bishop MacNamara was Centennial (74), Central (104) and Rantoul (115).

The Bulldogs' top seven runners this season consist of one freshman, three juniors and three seniors. Though Garrison is conservative about predicting how well his team will do at the Oct. 27 sectionals, he does admit M-S has an outside chance of

finishing in the top five and advancing to state. In the last 11 years in Class 2A competition, the Bulldogs' best showing at sectionals was a ninth-place finish in 2006.

"I guess our goal is really to be higher than ninth, which I think we can do," Garrison said.