

MAHOMET-SEYMOUR CROSS-COUNTRY INVITATIONAL

Mahaffey paces M-S

Bulldogs girls take title behind Clawson's victory

BY FRED KRONER

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MAHOMET — Jacob Mahaffey was planning on a summer workout routine for cross-country that would have allowed him to run about 400 miles.

No way, said fellow Mahomet-Seymour teammate Austin Beck. Smart thinker that he was, Beck challenged his friend to push himself harder with the promise he would be alongside.

"Five hundred miles is not that much more," Beck said.

They reached that goal — which Beck acknowledged was "outrageous" — and, in the process, helped themselves immensely as runners.

Mahaffey is a junior who has targeted the school 3-mile record (14 minutes, 41 seconds), that has stood for more than three decades, as a goal before he graduates. Beck has transformed himself from a runner who wasn't among the area's fastest 100 in 2006 (when his best time was 19:02) to an individual currently in the top 10 (16:10).

They were among the headliners Saturday as the Bulldogs placed second as a team in their own invitational. Mahaffey, the meet's leading area runner, was fifth (16:24) and Beck was 16th (17:08), inching past a runner from Normal U-High's team champions as they entered the chute.

The Bulldogs' success now can be traced to what happened a few months ago.

"We pushed each other," Mahaffey said. "I wouldn't have done it

without him."

As he views the big picture — the drastic improvement from last season to now — M-S coach Neal Garrison marvels at the changes.

Beck has cut 2:52 off his best 3-mile time from 2006. Kurt Buckner has lowered his marks by nearly 2½ minutes. "Kurt and Austin went from being in the bottom half of our team to some of the best in the area," Garrison said.

His overall boys' group, he said, developed from being "below average to well above average through dedication and hard work.

"You really don't have to be a great athlete to be a good distance runner. You just have to be a consistently dedicated hard worker that puts in the mileage to become great."

Mahaffey had a streak last winter where he ran 138 consecutive days. The offseason work means he doesn't have to play catchup in August and September.

"When you have your base, you can focus on putting in speed you wouldn't be able to otherwise," he said.

Mahaffey was among four area runners to finish among the top 10 Saturday. Monticello's Brent Rhodes was seventh (16:31), Uni High's Malcolm Taylor was ninth (16:34) and Unity's Bryce Dodds was 10th (16:36).

Centennial's Eric Simpson missed the meet to take the SAT, and Rantoul's Connor Miller is sidelined with a stress fracture but hopes to return for the regional Oct. 20.

Girls' race. The host Bulldogs made it a clean sweep. Junior Amy Clawson was the individual winner, running a career-best 18:23, and M-S had five of the top 19 finishers to capture team honors with 51 points.

St. Joseph-Ogden had two top 10

placers and finished second with 82 points.

Clawson, who had an injury-plagued sophomore season, only overlooked Normal U-High's Emily Clay in the final 300 meters.

Clawson was stronger on the finishing uphill grade, winning by seven seconds and posting the area's best mark this season by 35 seconds.

"I haven't been running as well the past couple races, and I wanted to prove what I could do," Clawson said. M-S coach Bonnie Moxley has been aware of Clawson's capabilities.

"She has amazing talent, but having missed last year, she still questions can I run where I used to run," Moxley said. She said the answer is clear.

"This is a tough course and to get in the 18:20s here would mean being sub-18 somewhere else," Moxley said. Amy ran a fantastic race.

Freshman teammate Brittany Bohn was third overall (19:09), followed closely by St-O's Hannah Hogan (fourth in 19:11).

Other leaders for the Bulldogs were Shelby Strucker (14th in 20:26), Hannah Schaap (17th in 20:44) and Katie Pittman (19th in 21:14).

"Strucker is a freshman who was first-time varsity and she ran No. 3 for us," Moxley said. "She showed what a competitor she is."

The coach still is looking for more improvement.

"Our team had a high-mileage summer and that should equate into better times in the end," Moxley said.

Other area athletes among the top 10 were Uni High's Michelle Mahnert (fifth in 19:35), St-O's Sidney Long (seventh in 19:41), Urbana's Meghan Houk (ninth in 19:55) and Centennial's Claire Tortorelli (10th in 20:10).



Holly Hart/The News-Gazette
Mahomet-Seymour's Austin Beck, left, passes Normal University High's Nick Houska seconds before the finish of the boys' race Saturday in the Mahomet-Seymour Invitational cross-country race at Lake of the Woods. Beck was the Bulldogs' No. 2 runner and helped the team to a second-place finish.