

MSHS BOYS CROSS-COUNTRY

XC focused on another strong season

Hoping to top last year's success

By **TERRY GREENE**
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To no one's surprise, the 2012 varsity boys cross country team enjoyed a banner season. A regional title, state qualifier, and

a force to be reckoned with at every race. It was a team loaded with talent, depth, and experience.

With the 2013 season right around the corner, Coach Neal Garrison isn't looking in the rear view mirror or feeling sorry for himself because two of his top runners have graduated and moved on to run at the collegiate level.

Quite the opposite. In fact, Garrison believes this year's running Bulldogs may be "slightly better" than last season's stellar

group. The cross country season will begin on August 27 when the Bulldogs travel to Champaign for the St. Thomas More Kick-Off Classic. Garrison said he had 31 athletes on this year's team, the most he's ever had in the last eight years. When the race begins, Garrison is confident his team will be ready to meet the challenge.

"Despite losing the second fastest runner in school history (Jonathan Schaap) and a college scholarship winner in cross country (Matthew Chupp), I believe that our current team will be stronger than last year," he said. "Each of the last 11 years our team has gotten stronger than the previous year. This year should be no exception."

With Schaap and Chupp moving on, Garrison is counting on a quintet of runners to make up the difference. They include Forrest Smoes (the fourth fastest returnee in the state) and returning state qualifiers Ethan Russell,

Alex Keeble, James Williams, and Jackson Powell.

"We should be slightly stronger on the top end of our team and much stronger in the middle pack of our team," Garrison said. "We may or may not place as high in meets as last year, but our times should be faster as a group."

In Garrison's mind, competing at previous IHSA state cross country meets will make a big difference for this year's squad. The Bulldogs have placed 5th and 11th in the last two IHSA Class 2A state finals.

"This group has either one or two years experience running at the state meet. That experience is priceless and can't be replaced with just talent and work ethic. They should be much more comfortable racing in a top notch meet," Garrison said.

"Hopefully they have proven to themselves that they are capable of being competitive at the state level."