

CLOSING FAST

O/A-P's Davis takes title, leads cheers; Monticello boys, SJ-O girls lead area contingent

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CHAMPAIGN — Jon Davis finished his regional cross-country race at St. Thomas More on Saturday in first place.

He could have hung around the finish line and gotten congratulatory wishes and slaps on the back after running a season-best 14 minutes, 52.09 seconds for 3 miles and beating the runner-up by 19 seconds.

The Oakwood/Armstrong-Potomac junior had other thoughts on his mind.

Davis positioned himself where he could see teammate Lucas Vasquez approach the finish, where he could shout a few words of encouragement.

The O/A-P teammates have another week to spend together. Vasquez secured the final individual sectional-qualifying spot by posting his best time of the season, 17:47.98.

"This means so much to him, and I tried to make it possible," Davis said. "I helped him with his stretching."

He also offered a word of advice.

"I told him not to start too fast," Davis said.

Vasquez started, however, like he was shot out of a cannon. Just 200 meters into the race, he was the leader of the 86-runner pack.

Defending Class 1A state champion Davis pulled away from Tuscola's Eric Ponder in the second mile.

"I wanted to post a decent time, but I didn't want to spill my guts," Davis said. "I have a lot of confidence going into next Saturday (sectional at Decatur), and I hope to run even faster."

Former Oakwood runner Justin Jones, who helps train Davis, said Davis met all expectations in a meet in which the state's top two ranked teams competed along with Ponder, "who may be the second-best runner in 1A," Jones said.

"Jon is in phenomenal shape and used this as a dress rehearsal for what he will see the next couple of weeks. He's the hardest-working high school athlete I've seen."

There was no discouragement in the Tuscola camp.

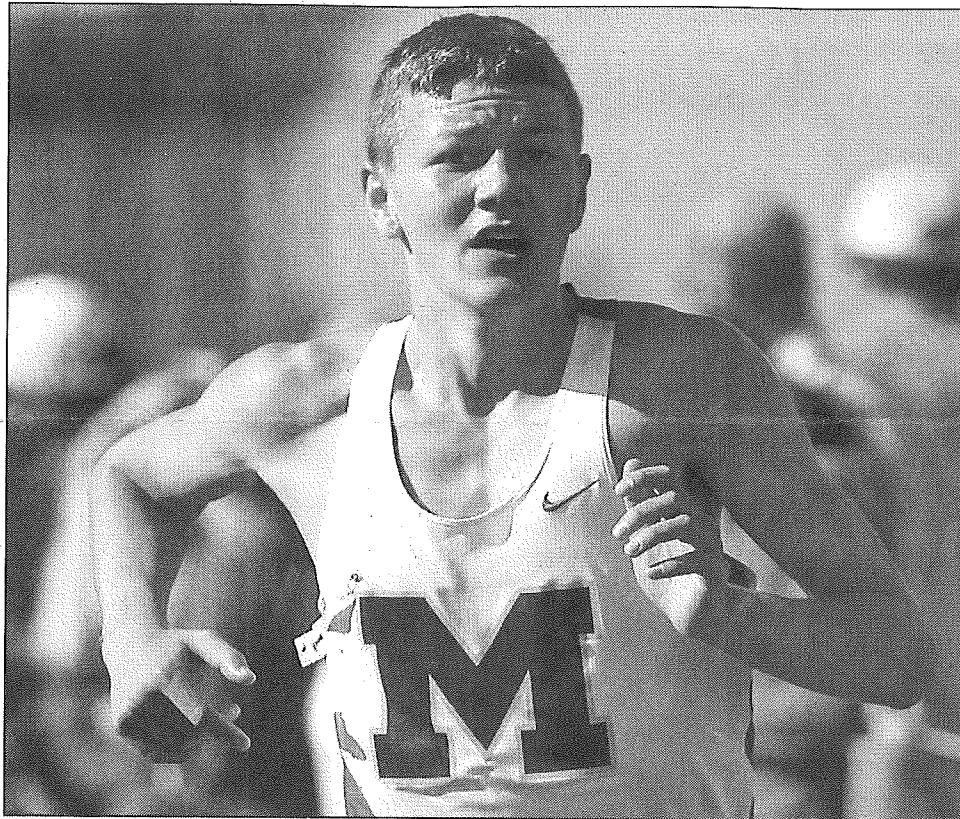
"We will learn from this and work on it this week," Tuscola coach Doug Robinson said. "Eric did an awesome job, and this will push him to do his best. Jon is a tough runner, and we will try to narrow the gap each race."

Team honors in the 15-school field were captured by second-ranked Monticello, which edged No. 1 Unity 35-44.

Also advancing full teams to the sectional were St. Joseph-Ogden, Paxton-Buckley-Loda, Urbana Uni High, St. Thomas More and LeRoy/Tri-Valley.

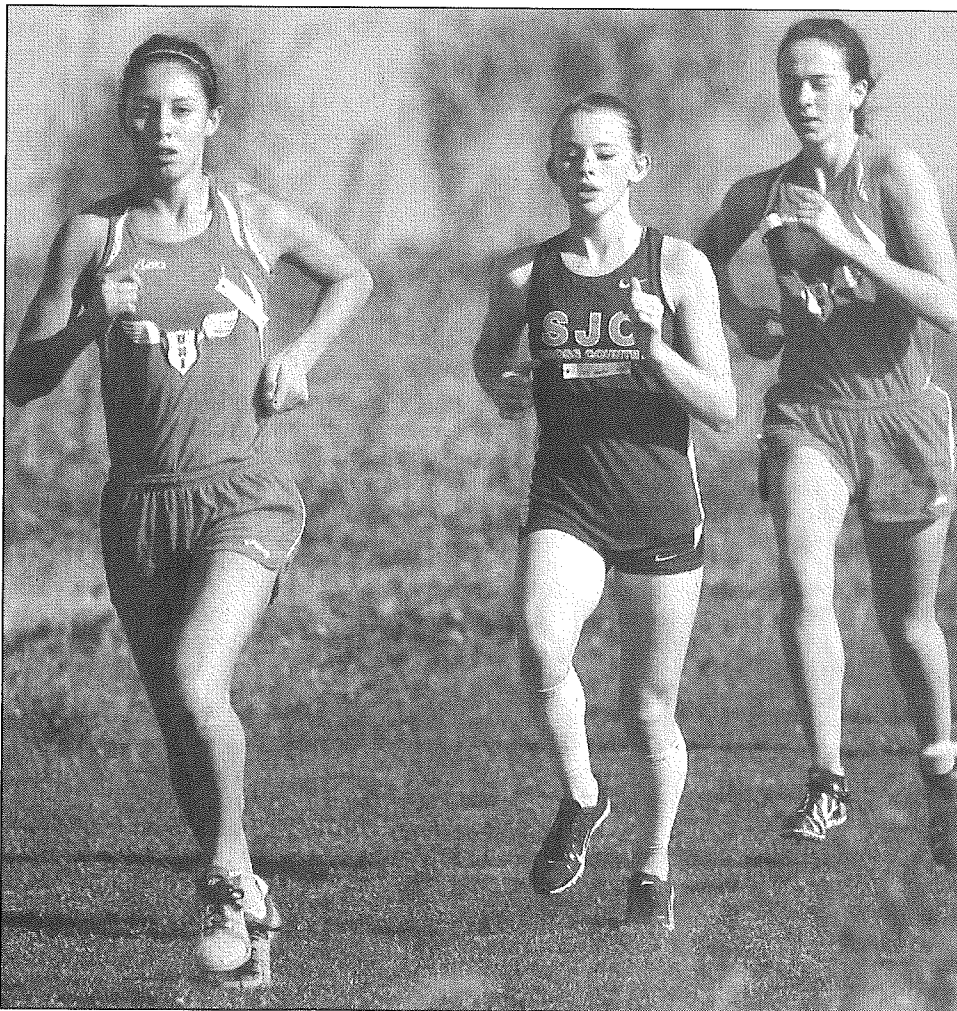
The Sages' top five runners finished within 32 seconds of one another, with Matt Norvell (fourth), Zach Mesplay (sixth) and Justin Furcich (seventh) running within 20 seconds of one another.

"Our teams (Monticello and Unity) are so tight, it could go either way depending on the day," Monticello coach Dave Remmert said. "We had a very hard workout on Thursday, and to come back and run like this is very pleasing. Zach made a big



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ABOVE: Monticello's Zach Mesplay finished sixth to help his team to first place Saturday at a Class 1A cross-country regional at St. Thomas More. **BELOW:** Urbana Uni High's Arielle Summitt leads SJ-O's Abby Fisher and Urbana Uni's Annemarie Michael. Summitt and Michael finished first and second, respectively, in the girls' race.



place and freshman Faith Houston in fifth. "They are locked in, and they ran out of their minds," Rein said. "They've been training insanely. No taper yet. They know they can be a special team."

The first five SJ-O runners entered the finish chute within 54 seconds of one another. Other team leaders were Abby Gawthorp (seventh); Hayley Grice (ninth) and Keely Smith (11th).

Unity's squad had a split of 2:58 among its top five and left room for improvement, according to coach Gary Wieneke.

"We lived to run another day, and that was the major goal," Wieneke said, "but we lacked a little intensity, and we'd better correct it. Everybody will feel a little pressure next week."

Individual sectional qualifiers from the STM site were Tuscola's Emma Henderson, PBL's Audrey Bloomquist, O/A-P's Shaina Andrews and Hoopston Area teammates Hannah Bray and Shania Goble.

At Danville. Caleb Hummer was the individual Class 2A regional champion in a 3-mile race at Kickapoo State Park. The senior was timed in 15:37.30 and defeated runner-up Ashton Hyatt, from Champaign Central, by 36 seconds.

The Vikings were edged by one point by Salem for team honors. Danville's entire team qualified for sectionals, as did third-place Central.

Danville's Carl Way (sixth) and Jeremiah Cooley (seventh) were top-10 finishers, as was Central's Henry Sills (10th). Evan Peirce (16th) and Carter Ware (32nd) led Centennial, and each advanced to sectionals as individuals.

In the girls' race, individual runner-up Mercedes Elliott led Danville to its first regional team crown, by 30 points over runner-up Charleston.

Elliott's time was 19:15.00. Centennial's Rebecca Kaeffring (fourth) was the only other area runner in the top 10.

Besides Danville, fourth-place Central advanced its team to sectionals. The Maroons were led by Desirae Shirley (17th).

Centennial's Kaeffring and Urbana's Libby Cultra, who placed 14th, advanced to sectionals as individuals.

At Normal. Alex Keeble and William Wolf were the top two runners in a Class 2A regional at Maxwell Park, leading Mahomet-Seymour to its fourth consecutive regional championship. Keeble was timed in 15:05 and was three seconds ahead of Wolf. Teammate Jack Hyde placed fifth. The state-ranked Bulldogs advanced their entire team to the East Peoria Sectional.

In the girls' meet, M-S junior Lauren Whitehouse was the individual champion by 42 seconds, leading the Bulldogs to a team runner-up finish and a sectional berth. Whitehouse was clocked in 17:55. Jenna Straub was 11th and Jocelyn Thrasher 18th.

Also qualifying for sectionals was Rantoul freshman Hope Russell.