

2016 DYESTAT ILLINOIS XC AWARDS - BOYS COACH OF THE YEAR



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Mahomet-Seymour Coach **Neal Garrison's** approach towards summer training for the Cross Country season is unique and completely different than the rest of the coaches in the state. He does not coach his athletes during the track season. The last time that he saw his squad was after his team finished second in the 2015 2A State Meet. The next time he saw his group was the first day of fall practice.

"All I do for off-season and summer training is just pray. I pray every day that God gives me the right kids on my team as far as leaders, talent, and personality. I start praying the day after XC ends every day until XC starts," Garrison said in an e-mail to me before the start of the 2016 season. "Then I just work with the runners I believe God placed on my team. He tends to do a much better job than I ever would. I know not everyone believes in God. That just gives me an advantage in using my pre-season training method versus having organized practices all summer. It would be great if they improved over the summer. I just don't know until I see them run when we meet up again for practice."

The team was driven this fall after their 2015 finish. We saw how good the Bulldogs were when they finished second behind Neuqua Valley at the Richard Spring Invitational. We got a better glimpse at the team in their conference race when they easily won putting six runners under 15 minutes on the 3 mile Maxwell Park course. They ran most likely had the best 2A performance ever in their 2A state win as they placed all their seven runners in the top 7 including 6 all-state runners. Part of that had to do with the hands-off approach that Garrison has during the summer and how he handles his team during the fall season.

That hands-off approach helped the team as they raced the following week at the Nike Cross Midwest Regionals when Mahomet-Seymour finished a strong third place in the race. Three weeks later, they were chosen as an at-large team to run in the Nike Cross Nationals where they finished 17th overall. They were the team with the smallest enrollment (over 900 students) than the rest of the teams in the field. Schools that size wished they were in the position that this school was. They made their dreams come through basically because the way that Garrison handled his team during the season.

Congratulations to **Neal Garrison** of Mahomet-Seymour High School as the **DyeStat Illinois 2016 Coach of the Year as well as the 2A Coach of the Year.**

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Neuqua Valley's **Paul Vandersteen** did a great job keeping his team focused especially with the pre-season expectations that were out there in August. The Wildcats were ranked among the top teams in the nation throughout the year finishing winning their third state championship and then finishing 5<sup>th</sup> at the Nike Cross Nationals.

**John Sipple** had a ton of talent returning heading into the 2016 season but not too many people knew what to expect from his young Downers Grove North team. They started the season ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the DyeStat IL 3A rankings. They moved up the rankings quickly using a split of 20 seconds or less in their first meets. Their 2nd place finish in the 3A race at state was followed by a 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at the Nike Cross Midwest Regional qualifying them for a trip to Portland The Trojans finished 12<sup>th</sup> at the Nike Cross Nationals with 5 of the runners underclassmen. Sipple did a great job in getting his young team to believe in pack running and the confidence that comes from it. Lyons Township's **Michael Danner** and Whitney Young's **Billy Poole-Harris** were also considered.

Congratulations to **John Sipple** of Downers Grove North High School as the **DyeStat Illinois 2016 Boys 3A Coach of the Year.**

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Expectations were high at the beginning of the year for Harvest Christian Academy and their Coach **Steve Bland**. They were a tough team to beat during the season including winning the school's first ever state championship. Acknowledgements must go out to Freeburg's **Carl Florczyk**. It is not often that you see a team from Southern Illinois among the top teams in 1A. Freeburg showed they will be a team to be reckoned with over the next few years as they finished only 9 points behind Harvest Christian Academy.

Congratulations to **Steven Bland** of Harvest Christian Academy as the **DyeStat Illinois 2016 1A Boys Coach of the Year.**