

AMONG THE NATION'S BEST

M-S team comes 17th among the top cross-country teams

By JASON BROWN
Citizen sportswriter

The seven runners of the Mahomet-Seymour Distance Project braved a muddy course to finish 17th at the Nike Cross Nationals meet Saturday in Portland, Oregon, capping off a season that saw a state title win amid other highlights.

The team's five-man spread of 14.2 seconds was the lowest in the meet, which included 22 of the best cross-country teams from across the nation.

Junior Riley Fortune led the way in the 5-kilometer race in 104th-place with a time of 16:57.3. Junior Ryan Hodge followed in 116th place and a time of 17:02.9, and senior Ben Crow placed 121st at 17:07.

"This past weekend was the best weekend of high school thus far," said Crow. "Being able to be apart of something this big is amazing...Words can't describe the feeling of running something this special with my team."

Senior Gabe Pommier finished in 126th place with a time of 17:10.4, and senior Andrew Walmer crossed the line in 131st at 17:11.5.

Mathias Powell was 137th with 17:16.2, while Brian Butcher followed at 147th



Submitted photo

The M-S team took this tongue-in-cheek group photo advertising their small-town, Midwestern roots as they went up against teams from around the U.S.

with 17:23.7.

To advance to the Nike Cross Nationals, MSDP placed third in the Midwest region, which was good enough for an at-large all-paid bid to Portland. The M-S group was one of four at-large teams in its division invited to the national race.

MSDP—made up of Mahomet-Seymour cross country's top runners—couldn't compete as a school-sponsored team because of IHSA rules. But Coach Neal Garrison, who followed their progress closely, said that the muddy course posed a challenge for the runners.

"It's probably worse than

running on wet sand, where you just sink in," Garrison told the News-Gazette. "You just sink in, your shoes are heavy. The guys did well; they kept their spirits up. They had a slow start and then worked themselves up from 21st at the mile."

Outside the race, the runners also had the privilege to eat lunch with former Illinois state champion and 2016 Olympic steeplechase silver medalist Evan Jager.

They also visited with four-time Olympic gold medalist Mo Farah and attended a question-and-answer session that included Olympic silver medalist Ga-

ALL-AREA

Plenty of boys and girls cross-country runners from M-S ended up on the News-Gazette's All-Area teams.

Selected to the all-area first team were Andrew Walmer, Brian Butcher, Gabe Pommier, Riley Fortune, Ryan Hodge and Mathias Powell.

Evan Burge and Ben Crow earned second team all-area honors. Joseph Churm, Kaelan Davis, Patrik Elkins, Bryson Keeble and Garrett Williams earned all-area honorable mention.

Megan Churm earned all-area second team honors, while six runners were named to the special mention team:

Madilynn Balbach, Kaitlin Lewis, Brisa McGrath, Olivia Meyer, Jenna Straub and Jocelyn Thrasher.

len Rupp.

M-S wasn't the only Illinois team on the course. Powerhouse Nequa Valley, from Naperville, took fifth.



Submitted
photo

Among the best

For some teams, winning a state title might've been enough. But Mahomet-Seymour's cross country runners weren't done yet. Get the details on their whirlwind trip to the Nike Cross Nationals in Portland, Oregon, on page B1.