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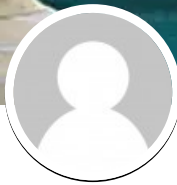
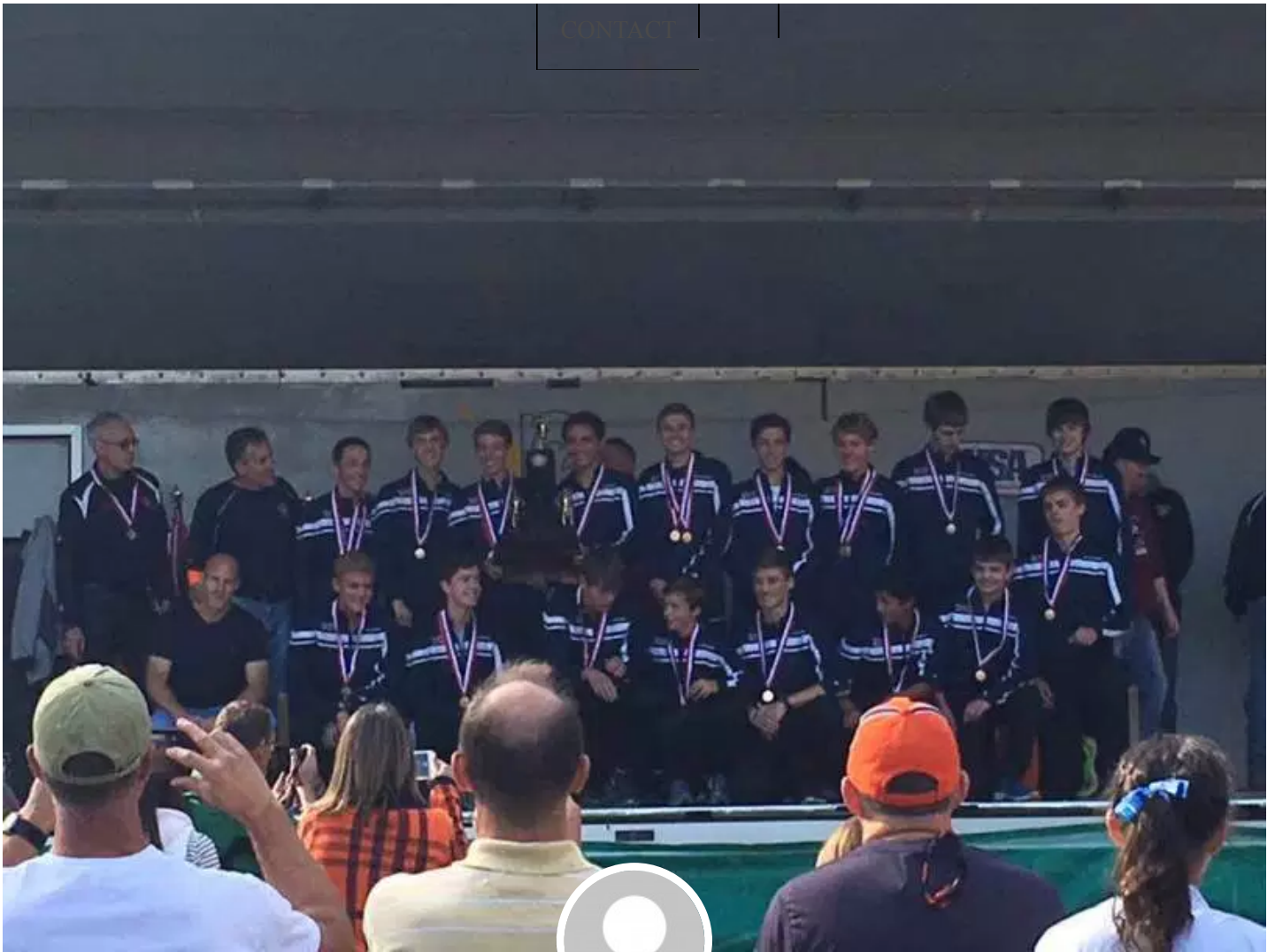
sports

Pack of Bulldogs brings home IHSA 2A Cross Country Championship

19 hours ago • by Dani Tietz • Add Comment

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Written by [Dani Tietz](#)

Success does not happen overnight. For some programs, it takes a few years with a new coach or promising players to achieve success. But for the Mahomet-Seymour boys' cross country program, the IHSA State title has been in the making for 47 years.

“Our program has been working for this for a long time,” Head Coach Neal Garrison said. “I think every program really dreams of reaching the top, but our alumni and their parents worked so hard over the years to really help the program improve each year towards this State title. Our current runners were no exception. They knew they owed it to both the alumni and themselves to strive to build off what the alumni had already accomplished. Even for myself as a coach, I feel a great sense of responsibility to build off the great program Coach John King had built before me. Coach King was the head XC coach for 29

The Bulldogs, who came into the 2016 season as two-time IHSA 2A State Runner Up, worked over the last 12 months to win the State title by dedicating themselves to run and work as a group as they improved individually.

“It wasn’t a cut throat competition to beat each other and out train each other,” Garrison said. “It was a collective effort to push or pull their teammate to being great.”

Ranked No. 1 in Illinois in the milesplit.com and Dyestat.com and with three runners in the top 25 in the AA preseason polls, the Bulldogs placed first throughout the season in each race, including the Peoria Notre Dame Invitational, Metamora Invitational and the Cornbelt Conference Meet. MSHS kept their first place ranking and were ranked No. 15 in the Nation for the latter part of the season.

With a preseason goal to win the IHSA 2A State title, the Bulldogs stayed with their plan to run as a pack, which not only led them to the title, but also helped to place multiple, sometimes the majority of runners, including Senior Andrew Walmer, Junior Riley Fortune, Sophomore Mathias Powell, Junior Ryan Hodge, Senior Brian Butcher, Senior Ben Crow, and Senior Gabe Pommier finishing in the top 10 throughout the season.

“Our race day plan was really to keep doing what has worked for us all year,” Garrison said. “The plan was to just stick to each other and run a strong race as a pack. The runners handled the pressure extremely well and stuck to the plan of doing what they would at any other race.”

In doing so, Mahomet-Seymour tied the 71 year old IHSA State record (Saint-Joe Ogden 1991 and York 1999) for having the most amount of All-State runners with 6 All-State runners. Andrew Walmer (6th), Riley Fortune (14th) Mathias Powell (18th), Ryan Hodge (19th), Brian Butcher (21st), Ben Crow (24th) received medals.

“I am of course extremely pleased the boys won,” Garrison said. “I think I am most happy for the families of the runners that invested so much into their sons and into the other runners’ families. I think it was just a great moment for the families to share. I was also very happy for all the alumni and their parents. They knew they were an important part in setting the team up for this. While they didn’t personally get to be on the team that won, it was very much a victory for them.”

Garrison, who received over 200 emails of congratulations last weekend, said he is overwhelmed by the support of the community.



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families, and the program left me with a feeling of extreme gratitude that I have rarely ever felt in my life. This really is a tremendous place to work and to be part of.”

“I am so grateful to all the coaches, past coaches, parents, alumni parents, current runners, past runners, administration, and community members that have invested into our program over the years,” he said. “I hope in some way that winning the State title is a way to thank them for their help and support along this journey.”

M-SHS will host a reception honoring the Class 2A Boys Cross Country State Championship Team on Wednesday 11/9 @ 6p in the M-SHS Auditorium.

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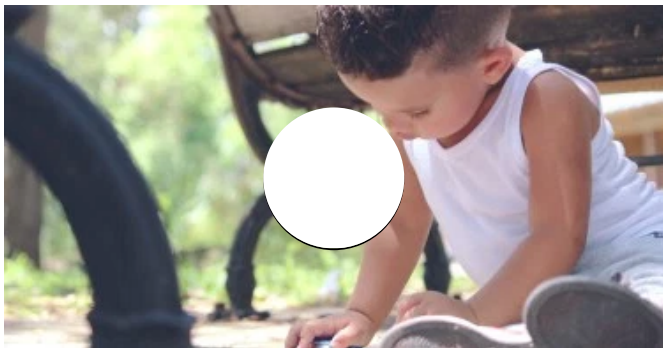


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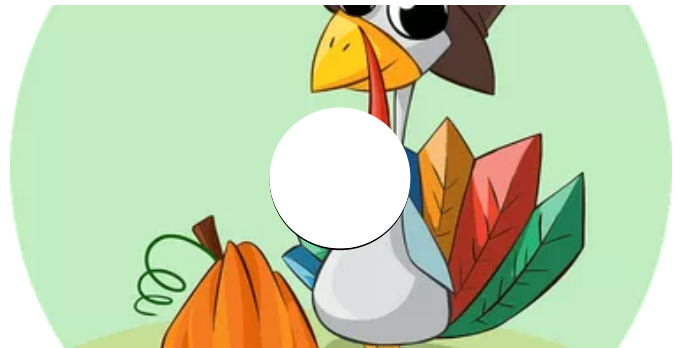
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