

NIKE CROSS NATIONALS

Bulldogs place 17th

PORTLAND, Ore. — The Mahomet-Seymour boys' cross-country team was ready for the hills at Saturday's Nike Cross Nationals race. The Bulldogs also were ready for the elite competition after winning the Class 2A state title.

What they couldn't prepare for, coach Neal Garrison said, was the incredibly muddy course, which is intentionally made that way.

"It's probably worse than running on wet sand, where you just sink in," Garrison said. "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."

Running through the mud, the Bulldogs took 17th at the national championship meet. Junior Riley Fortune led the way in the 5-kilometer race with a 104th-place time of 16 minutes, 57 seconds, followed by Ryan Hodge (116th in 17:02), Ben Craw (121st in 17:07), Gabe Pommier (126th in 17:10) and Andrew Walmer (131st in 17:11.5).

The Bulldogs packed together throughout the race, steadily moving forward on the difficult course in which runners fan out to try to find any stretch of grass they can. Their five-man spread of 14.2 seconds was the lowest in the meet.

"They got spread out from time to time just because it was so muddy," Garrison said. "They started regrouping again and finished fairly close to each other. For a meet that big, that's pretty good."

IHSA Class 3A champion Neuqua Valley finished fifth with 181 points, and Class 3A runner-up Downers Grove North took 12th in a race that included 22 of the top teams in the country.

Anthony Zilis