

Winning a state championship is never a piece of cake.

The Mahomet-Seymour boys cross country team learned that on their way to a second consecutive IHSA 2A State title this season.

“I think winning State last year was a little bit of a double-edged sword for these guys,” Head Coach Neal Garrison said. “It showed our current runners that it was possible for a Mahomet team to win State.”

“The alumni showed them what kind of work it would take to set themselves up to win State as well.  But I think last year’s group made it seem almost as if it came too easy.  In reality, they tried to win State and barely fell short twice.”

Competing against programs that sometimes have 100-200 runners, the 17-runner Mahomet-Seymour High School team had to pick and chose their battles coming into the 2017 season.

Running faithfully every day, the team carried the 2016 success throughout the summer months.

Coming into the season, MSHS won the Charleston Invitations, the East Peoria Invitational, the Metamora Invitational and the Apollo Conference meet.

“Our team had a lot of success throughout the season, but we often had to sacrifice success at certain meets so that our team had success in the State meet,” Garrison said. “They won 6 of the 9 races they ran this season.  They had the ability to win 2 of the races that we placed 2nd in, but in doing so it would have taken the edge off of the team mentally and physically that we needed to have the best chances to compete our best at State.”

The Bulldog placed second at the Springfield Invitational and the IHSA 2A Regional meet just to keep the edge they needed until the end of the season.

“Once the season officially started we quickly found that when it came time to run the hard intervals or harder races that things weren’t falling quickly into place,” Garrison said.

“Each runner really had to grow in their confidence throughout the season.  They gave it their all, but it didn’t come quickly which made the season a little more nerve-racking.  I was proud of the way they handled the pressure and even more proud of them in how they didn’t give up when it was tough mentally.”

With a limited amount of runners who spend a lot of time together, the Bulldog received a scare as 4 of the team’s top 12 runners came down with strep throat a week prior to the meet. The top seven runners were able to stay healthy through the State meet, though.

But Garrison said the key to the Bulldog’s success this season was their mental attitude.

“We have to make all of our runners count,” he said. “Each of our runners is so important to the success of the team.  If one of them has a great day in practice they help to emotionally inspire or physically drag their teammates to being better.”

“If one of the runners is having a bad day or gives up mentally in a workout that drags the team down.  Each runner on a daily basis directly impacts the success of the overall team and their individual teammates.”

“So we really do know the success of the team isn’t just a 1 runner show or a top 5 effort.  It was a culmination of what all of them did for weeks, months, and years to build each other up to the point that our top runners can be prepared to represent our team best at State at the end of the year.”