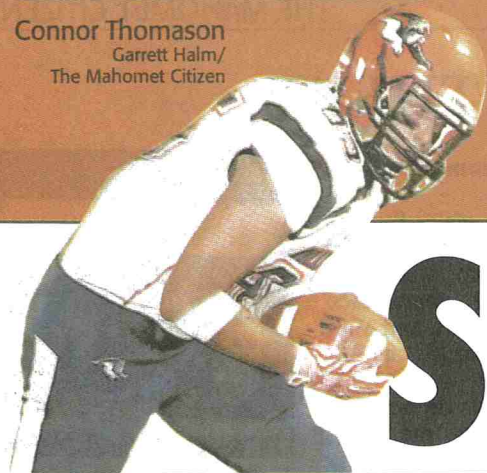


Connor Thomason
Garrett Halm/
The Mahomet Citizen

Connor Thomason puts in extra effort in honor of No. 1 fan B-2

Brianne Nierenhausen excited to begin
first year as M-S cheerleading coach B-3

Ten Blue Ridge athletes to keep
an eye on in the fall B-6



SPORTS

B Mahomet
CITIZEN
FRIDAY, JULY 20, 2018

CROSS-COUNTRY

M-S senior sets lofty goals for season

After finishing 4th at last year's Class 2A meet, Powell is eyeing state championship this year

By ISAAC TROTTER
For The Mahomet Citizen

Mathias Powell was "really" close to not actually running cross-country. What a travesty that might have been. Soccer and cross-country both compete during the fall, and the schedules would have clashed too much.

As he began to prepare for high school, Powell had to choose which sport it would be.

Powell picked cross-country over soccer, but it wasn't an easy decision. Ultimately, the camaraderie and the elite success won him over.

"It was very close because I had been playing soccer since like third or fourth grade, and I had a lot of friends

ell said. "But just seeing how well the cross-country team worked together when I was in eighth grade and how focused they were and how much success they had, it drove me to do cross-country over soccer."

Powell has improved over the years and became one of the best in the entire state last year when he placed fourth in the Class 2A state meet.

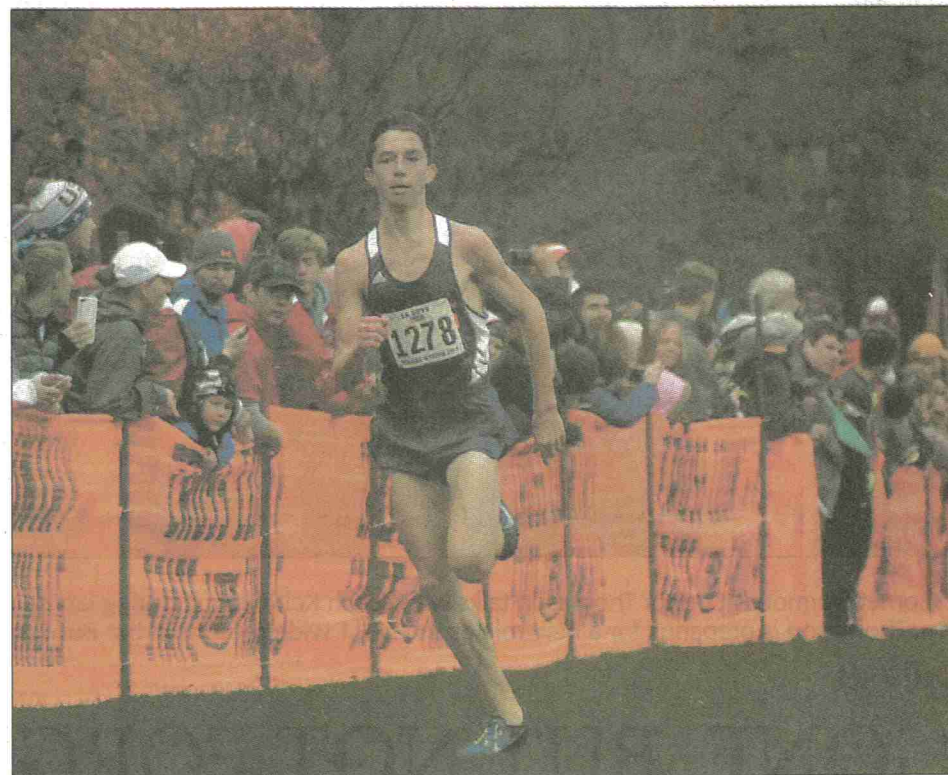
Powell's performance helped M-S bring home the Class 2A State Championship in boys' cross-country.

"I actually had a bad game plan," Powell said. "My game plan was to go out very conservatively, not with the top pack, then try and catch them.

place. At the two-mile, I was somewhere in the teens. Then the last mile, I worked my way down to fourth.

"If I could go back in time, I would have gone out with the top pack and see what I could have done because I didn't have any contact with the front pack the entire meet. My two teammates, Ryan Hodge and Riley Fortune, they had a better strategy. They started out with the front pack. They ran incredible races, and I think they got personal records and ended their season phenomenally."

Hodge, Powell and Fortune all finished in the top nine at the state meet.



Daniel L. Chamness/for The Mahomet Citizen

Mathias Powell helped lead Mahomet-Seymour's boys' cross-country team to the Class 2A state championship last fall. Powell finished fourth overall.

POWELL

Continued from B-1

But 2018 is a whole new year. Hodge and Fortune have graduated, and Powell is now surrounded by a lot of young talent. Powell was the only non-senior that finished in the top nine, and a state championship is well within reach.

"Certainly not an expectation, but definitely a goal," Powell said. "It's one of my personal goals and it's on the radar this season. There are several guys who could step up and contend with me, without a doubt."

Boys' cross-country has an outstanding culture, mainly because of head coach Neal Garrison. Over the years, the way to lead has been passed down. Powell learned from Alex Keeble, Andrew Walmer, Gabe Pommer, Hodge and Fortune.

Now, it's his turn to give the insights to the next generation of M-S runners.

"The guys who have come before me have really shown how to lead the team, how to keep people motivated through those hard times where they can see how much they've improved throughout the season," Powell said. "There's a better way to do things than going through the motions in cross-country."

"There's a lot of opportunities in the sport to improve and it's a very tangible improvement. You can see it because it is a cold, hard time. Coach Garrison has pounded into our heads that hard work gets that done. If you work hard, your times will go down. That makes all the difference in the world."

Even without studs like

Fortune and Hodge, the goal is to compete for a trophy at the state meet. Powell, Bryson Keeble and Kaelan Davis will be the nucleus that can carry M-S back into contention.

"Our big goal is just to get a trophy again," Powell said.

Garrison has had an outstanding effect on numerous runners throughout his long coaching career, and Powell has seen his times continue to shrink under Garrison's tutelage.

"Coach Garrison has helped me meet so many of my goals from freshman year until now," Powell said. "It really makes a big difference when the coach cares as much as or more than the runners about their success."

"He runs with us virtually every day, unless we're doing a speed workout, but even then he'll be out there jogging along giving guys encouragement. If we're going out for a six- to 14-mile run, he will run the entire thing with us."

"He'll be motivating us, and it's just really exciting to see that he cares. That's so important to me. He's a very relatable person. He's very funny. He's fun to be around. He doesn't make practice a drag, he tries to make it as fun as possible, but still keeping us focused on the bigger goal."

The rich tradition of Mahomet-Seymour boys' cross-country will continue if Powell achieves his goal of another team state trophy. If he is crowned as the individual Class 2A state champion, that'll just be icing on the cake.

If Powell had picked soccer way back as an eighth-grader, there's a chance none of this could have happened. The results prove that he chose the right sport.