

BOYS' CROSS-COUNTRY

Future looks bright for young M-S squad

By ISAAC TROTTER

For The Mahomet Citizen

Coach Neal Garrison knew 2018 was going to be a rebuilding year. Evan Burge, Riley Fortune and Ryan Hodge were three standouts of last year's boys' cross-country Class 2A state championship team who graduated.

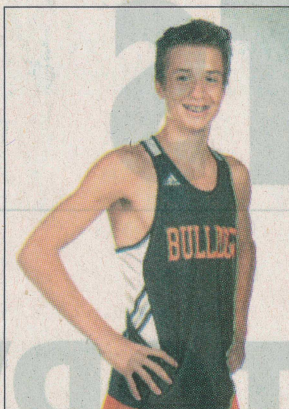
Even with double-digit freshmen on this year's roster, the expectations remained through the roof, but those weren't necessarily realistic. As a team, Mahomet-Seymour finished sixth at the Class 2A sectional, falling one place short of qualifying for state. That in itself was a heck of a performance for the young squad.

"When you're a state championship team, and you know you're going to

take a step back, there's a lot of pressure," Garrison said. "A lot of people were already going to be disappointed if we didn't win it, which we knew wasn't a realistic expectation. Those guys handled the expectations of the fact that the program wasn't going to be a nationally-qualifying team. They did so well."

Mathias Powell becoming the Class 2A state champion brought a medal back to Mahomet. Fellow senior Bryson Keeble placed 95th. Powell and Keeble will be hard to replace, but freshmen Kyle Nofziger, Jonah Singer and Joseph Scheele all will pick up the slack.

Nofziger was just five seconds away from qualifying for the state meet



Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

Mahomet-Seymour senior Bryson Keeble placed 95th at the Class 2A state meet.

this fall, and he will be a force in the next couple of years.

"I was more disappointed for him, even more than

I was for our team because he was so close," Garrison said. "He did everything right. What we usually do is rest some of the younger guys who need it in the regionals and sectionals. We just didn't have that luxury. Traditionally speaking, freshmen don't last until regionals, but Kyle did an amazing job because he was fighting with the top guys in the regional and got 11th. In our program, it is a marking point of greatness if you can be top-10 at regionals as a senior."

M-S has seen incredible runners come through its program in Powell, Alex Keeble and many others. But Nofziger has a chance to be better than them all.

"Some believe he has the greatest potential to

be the best runner we've ever had," Garrison said. "Even Mathias will mention that he thinks he'll be the record-breaker. That's not to take anything away from Joseph, Jonah or the other guys because they all have an amazing amount of potential and the work ethic."

The youngsters' work ethic has Garrison excited about the future.

"Most sports don't usually acquire varsity experience as freshmen, but our guys did," Garrison said. "That experience probably advanced them a couple years, but they certainly had to advance quickly. Their bodies physically, they aren't ready to compete with a 17 or 18-year-old, when they are 14. There's no way to speed

up that process. They did a great job, trying to run more days a week, trying to run more miles, the stuff it takes to be competitive."

Garrison is ready for his freshman-laden squad to get a whole season to physically mature and continue to run. The work ethic set by Powell and Keeble is a high bar, but they know the standard of Bulldog cross-country.

"They did exactly what they needed to do, both short-term and long-term," Garrison said. "I couldn't have been prouder. I guess I'm more excited for two years from now when they are all juniors. It's the process that you can't rush. We learned so much from where we fall short, more so than when things come easy."