

Sports

# MSJHS cross country ends season on high note



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By FRED KRONER

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Cross-country runners may not think of themselves as models, but Mahomet-Seymour's junior high teams have been a model of consistency since the sport expanded from a single-class state tournament into a multiple-class system in 1997.

In 20 of the following 22 years, at least one M-S cross-country team placed among the state's elite.

This year — for the second consecutive season — both the boys' and

girls' programs secured top 20 placements in the largest of three classes conducted at the Illinois Elementary School Association level.

Last weekend, at Normal's Maxwell Park, the M-S boys finished eighth in the Class 3A team chase, an improvement of 11 positions from 2017.

The M-S girls ran 14th in Class 3A, an improvement of two spots over the previous year.

"Two standout team races," M-S coach Lisa Martin said.

On the girls' side, Ava Boyd again set the pace, running a personal record 2-mile time of 12 minutes, 16 seconds.

Close behind was teammate Ella Scott, who crossed the finish line in her best time, 12:18.

As a group, the young Bulldog runners "surpassed our team goal," Martin said.

The team's other five state competitors also recorded personal-best time: Durbin Thomas, Callie Jansen, Avah Turner, Abby Bunting and Reese Gallier.

Saturday's final race was for the Class 3A boys, "falling at a challenging time for many runners that had to postpone lunch and run on a muddy course that had been run on by five races prior," Martin said.

M-S had two runners place among the top 25 — which earned them all-state recognition — and raised to 20 the number of Bulldog all-staters since 1980.

Gage Williams and Gabe Difanis had nearly identical finishes.

Williams was timed in 10:55.9 and placed 15th. Difanis covered the course

in 10:56.1 and ended 17th.

It was the first time each athlete had broken the 11-minute barrier for 2 miles.

“Both boys beat all of the runners that placed ahead of them at the sectional meet, a huge accomplishment in itself,” Martin noted.

Not far behind were the team’s other competitors: Mitchell McAnally, Hayden Grotelueschen, Ty Clark, Finn Randolph and Kai Jones, “all running times that were right at their personal records or better,” Martin said.

Beyond surpassing team goals in terms of performance, Martin was impressed with the squad in another way.

“The team ... proudly displayed the character that our community expects when wearing the Bulldog name on our jerseys,” she said.

This is the sixth year that the IESA has divided junior high competition into three classes for cross-country. It was the fifth year that at least one M-S squad placed among the state’s top 20.

With a strong nucleus of seventh- and sixth-graders who contributed this season, Martin doesn’t anticipate a dropoff.

“We plan for this tradition to continue, and look forward to what our returning runners will do after running in the off-season to prepare,” Martin said. “With a varsity team that had strong seventh-graders (Finn Randolph, Isaac Warren, Kai Jones and Ava Boyd) in key positions and six sixth-graders in our varsity line up (Ty Clark, Avah Turner, Reese Gallier, Ava Jansen, Camden Heinold and Emmaline Culp), and a team of over 70 returning runners ready to compete next season, we will continue to be a recognizable force to be reckoned with in the state for cross country.”