



Rick Danzl/The News-Gazette

Members of the Mahomet-Seymour cross-country team, from left, coach Neal Garrison and athletes Nate Douglas, Mathias Powell and Bryson Keeble aim to win their third straight Class 2A state championship this fall.

**BOYS: MAHOMET-SEYMOUR**

# FOLLOWING HIS LEAD

*Powell steps into key role as senior leader for young Bulldogs*

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MAHOMET — During the last three years, Mathias Powell has watched a number of talented athletes come and go through the Mahomet-Seymour boys' cross-country machine.

Powell also has witnessed the capturing of a second-place state trophy followed by back-to-back Class 2A state championships. He's been an integral part of those titles as well.

Still, there's something unique about being a senior on this Bulldogs squad, a position Powell now holds. Even after soaring to an individual fourth-place finish last season at the 2A state meet, Powell feels a new pressure.

"It's incredibly intimidating at times," Powell said. "There are a few guys who I leaned on last year, like Ryan Hodge and Riley Fortune, who were just phenomenal leaders. It's sort of scary to know you have to fill that big of shoes."

There's no doubt: Powell is at the top of the food chain for this M-S program. It's an interesting time to hold the role.

Not only are the Bulldogs coming off a four-year stretch of utter dominance — they captured another 2A runner-up state honor when Powell was in eighth grade — they're fielding their youngest roster in quite some time.

"Probably 70 percent of our team is freshmen," said Neal Garrison, back for his 17th season in charge of the Bulldogs. "So they work strong, and they really put in the good work this summer. I'm really super proud of them. But it's just a big step up from junior high to high school as far as believing they can do it."

There's an inherent positive to this news, of course. M-S' rampant success has incoming high school students more curious about what

running cross-country for the Bulldogs really entails.

Powell said he's been impressed by the freshmen's work ethic, estimating 11 currently are involved with the crew.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how well a lot of the freshmen develop," Powell said. "I've been a freshman. I know that it's hard. When they see all that (work) pay off, I know that's a great feeling."

Garrison also is upbeat about his club's future, advising foes to be on the lookout for his boys a couple years down the road.

But he's also ready to see what Powell and fellow seniors Bryson Keeble and Nate Douglas — all competitors in 2017 at the state meet — can do in their last go-round.

That's especially true for Powell, whom the ILXCTF website rates as the top returning runner in Class 2A.

"Of course, anything can happen, but he's pretty well dead set," Garrison said. "He's determined. If somebody beats him, it's because there's more talent, not because they out-fought him or outworked him."

Powell is sticking to Garrison's training plan — "as long as you're getting a great workout in, as long as you're just really exhausting yourself ... then it doesn't matter what your time is" — with the goal of being prepared to post the best clocking on the season's final day.

His last prep campaign is about more than solo glory, though.

Powell hopes for Keeble to have a bounceback stretch after poor health plagued the senior during the most recent track and field season. There's also the mission of getting the younger athletes acclimated to the Bulldogs' mentality.

Even if M-S is sort of going through a rebuild, this isn't the Mathias Powell Show. Not in his eyes.

"I've just tried to make it as fun as possible for the guys, make this a team they want to be on," Powell said. "It makes it so much easier to compete when you're doing it for your team and not just yourself."

# It's time to hit the trail

Preps coordinator **COLIN LIKAS** offers up four storylines to watch in 2018:

## NO SMALL BALL

The area Class 1A boys' cross-country scene is on the uptick, if the ILXCTF website's projections pan out. Monticello presently rates second as a unit, powered by top-ranked 1A individual **Garrett Dixon**. Uni High slots into third, St. Thomas More settles into 20th, Clinton rates 23rd, Paxton-Buckley-Loda holds 24th and St. Joseph-Ogden finds itself in 26th.

## MORE FUN WITH NUMBERS

Jetting over to the Class 2A side, when it comes to ILXCTF's predictions, Danville is the area program to beat at No. 5 statewide. Centennial clocks in at 12th, while Mahomet-Seymour and top-rated **Mathias Powell** hold 13th. Rantoul is also in the preseason picture, checking in at No. 30.

## ALL-STATE CONVERSATION

Numerous local stars who earned all-state status last year — finishing inside the top 25 at state — have graduated: Arthur-Lovington-Atwood-Hammond's **Logan Hall**, Hoopeston Area's **Trey Houmes**, St. Joseph-Ogden's **Wyatt Wolfersberger** and Mahomet-Seymour's **Riley Fortune** and **Ryan Hodge**. Returning from the group are Dixon, Powell and Centennial's **Luke Manolakes**.

## EARLY SHOWCASE

Area running fans looking for a packed race to catch early on should experience today's Saber Corn Classic, hosted by St. Thomas More. It'll include participants from Bement, Judah Christian, Villa Grove/Heritage, Mahomet-Seymour, Monticello, Paxton-Buckley-Loda, Rantoul, Argenta-Oreana, Bismarck-Henning/Rossville-Alvin, Armstrong-Potomac, Uni High and ALAH.