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REGIONAL CROSS COUNTRY

Seven area teams advance from Maxwell Park regionals

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Normal West High School junior Charlie Wetzel fought through 20 mph winds to capture the Class 3A Normal Community Cross Country Regional title at Maxwell Park on Saturday. His time on the 3-mile course was 15 minutes, 35 seconds.

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NORMAL — Success came in many forms in four regional cross country races at Maxwell Park on Saturday where ignoring 20 mph winds to advance felt a lot like winning.

In the Class 2A U High Regional boys race, for example, No. 2-state ranked Bloomington High School rested two key

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runners due to "soreness," but still advanced second to next Saturday's East Peoria Sectional behind No. 6 Metamora.

"We knew we could make it out so we'll save them for sectional," said BHS coach John Szabo, who gave Roger Mendiola and Quinn Olson the day off. "I thought our top four competed well."

In the 2A girls race, injury-plagued U High, ranked No. 8 in the state, made a run at No. 4 Mahomet-Seymour before settling for second, 55-57. BHS grabbed the sixth and final qualifying spot with 132 points.

The highlight of the Class 3A Normal Community Regional came from Normal West junior Charlie Wetzel, who won the 3-mile event by 13 seconds in 15:35 to help his team advance fourth (145) to the Quincy Sectional. Class 3A newcomer U High qualified third (72) along with fifth-place NCHS (154).

For the 3A girls, NCHS advanced fourth (154) along with 25th-place Mackenzie Piazza (20:01) of Normal West, which failed to advance in 10th (224).

Class 2A: Metamora's boys edged BHS, 53-61, despite a second-place finish by Purple Raider senior Nick Doud (15:44). The repeat champion was Mathias Powell of fourth-place Mahomet-Seymour in 15:14.

"We know next week we're going to have to bring it and we will," said Doud, who saw Powell take the lead for good after a half mile. "Getting to run against someone like him is good experience. It shows me what I need to run like come state."

Other Raiders in the top 25 were Bradyn Olmstead (7th, 16:10), Evan Turnbull (9th, 16:14), Drew Gibson (18th, 16:48) and Bryce Reed (25th, 17:09).

The U High girls — who ran without injured aces Lyndsey Wolters, Emmy Mussey and Tasha Schuckman — impressed Coach John Neisler.

"Considering everybody we've got sitting on the sidelines for whatever reason, to come out and still just be two points behind Mahomet, I can't complain at all," he said.

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Ella Bittner led the Pioneers in third (18:19). Ahead were Morton's Aspen Gordon (17:45) and Mahomet-Seymour's Elizabeth Sims (18:05).

"We were talking yesterday that the big goal was to get another week together, which we did today," Bittner said, "but the even bigger goal is to have two weeks."

Other U High scorers were Mackie Madix (7th, 18:43), Lizzy Zacharias (11th, 19:07), Britany Ziemer (15th, 19:34) and Kendy Ummel (21st, 19:50).

BHS was led by Kaitlin Skeate in eighth (18:53). Ninth-place Lincoln (267) advanced Reece McCuan in 39th (20:47).

Class 3A: "It was my slowest time of the season, but on this course and these conditions, I'll take it," said West's Wetzel, who escaped eventual runner-up Vincent Van Eck of Minooka after they passed two miles in 10:22.

Next week, Wetzel expects to battle Granite City's Andrew O'Keefe, the 2017 state 1,600-meter run runner-up, and Edwardsville's Roland Prenzler.

"It's nice to have the one point (from Wetzel) because then you are basically running four versus five, which does help out this younger crew that we have," said West coach Chad Aubin. "I think he can compete with anybody at this point."

Third-place U High, which trailed only No. 22 Minooka (49) and Yorkville (67), was led by the 9-10-11 sweep of Jackson McClure (16:09), Dane Alexander (16:09) and Cooper Wilken (16:11). The 2017 2A state runners-up, the Pioneers were bumped to 3A by the IHSA's success multiplier.

"I don't think they've allowed it to affect them at all," said Coach Lester Hampton. "Our program is about doing the best you possibly can."

The fifth-place NCHS boys were led by Drew Toohill in 24th (16:38) while the fourth-place NCHS girls were paced by Olivia Hartke in 26th (20:02). Boys stalwart Jacob Myers (39th, 17:02) was returning from strep throat while Hartke was coming back from a fever.

"Normally she would be up much farther than she is right now," said NCHS coach Tom Patten. "Olivia, if we can get her

back to where she was two weeks ago,
has a great shot of going to state."

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