

Bulldog runners dig deep to place over race favorites



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Mahomet-Seymour's boys' cross-country team took care of business on Saturday in the Class 2A Bloomington Sectional, held at Maxwell Park in Normal.

The Bulldogs were in an 18-school field which included eight state-ranked teams, according to the final runnerspace.com poll.

"Going into the sectional we were ranked anywhere from fourth to seventh in the meet, so our runners knew they had to run especially well in order to

be in the top five teams so they could qualify for state," M-S head coach Neal Garrison said.

M-S more than met expectations.

The five scoring Bulldog runners crossed the finish line within 52 seconds of one another.

Not only did their performances help the team secure a state-meet berth, but it also enabled the Bulldogs to finish in front of both state-ranked teams (Metamora and Bloomington) which had beaten them one week earlier in the Class 2A regional.

"Our team really faced a tough situation this weekend," Garrison said. "They ran in the sectional with more state-ranked teams than any other.

"Some sectionals had zero state-ranked teams. Our sectional had eight state-ranked teams. Our young runners handled the high-pressure situation well and placed third."

The sectional champion was Morton (67 points) followed by Peoria Notre Dame (118) and the Bulldogs (126).

Other teams advancing to state, which will be Saturday, Nov. 9 at Detweiler Park in Peoria (noon start), are Bloomington (130) and Metamora (157).

"They came together mentally and physically when their team needed them to," Garrison said. "The course was incredibly wet, so the times from all teams were slow.

"Yet, four of our runners ran their best 3-mile time."

Sophomore Kyle Nofziger and junior Nick Mies entered the finish chute next to one another. Nofziger was 10th with a time of 16 minutes, 3.61

seconds. Mies was a step behind, in 11th place, and was clocked in 16:04.81.

Nofziger earned all-sectional accolades and posted the 11th-best time by a Bulldog sophomore ever in a sectional race.

Mies' time represented a personal-best by 41 seconds, the team's biggest drop of the day.

The Bulldogs' next three placers completed the course within 19 seconds of one another.

Sophomore Jonah Singer was 27th in 16:36.72, sophomore Joseph Scheele was 37th in 16:45.07 and junior Joe Taylor was 51st in 16:55.84.

Garrison considered Singer's effort as one of the day's keys.

"Jonah cut off 13 seconds from his 3-mile season-best time," the coach said. "He really had a major impact on the success of our team.

"He was able to pass a large pack of runners in the final half-mile that helped us pass up a couple teams in the team score. If he had settled in the race, I do not think we would have qualified as a team for state."

Scheele's time represented a 36-second improvement over his 2018 sectional mark.

Taylor's time was a career-best by 17 seconds.

"He broke into the 16s for the first time on a true 3-mile course," Garrison said. "Joe's race was incredibly important. He knew he had to beat many of the other state-ranked No. 5 runners in order for our team to make it to state.

"Joe had to improve about 15 to 30 seconds faster than his tough

competitors did. This would have mentally crushed most high school runners, but Joe ran with such determination that he did exactly what his teammates needed. He improved 23 seconds from last year's sectional meet."

Though the Bulldogs' Nos. 6 and 7 runners didn't score for the team, they affected the overall score of other programs by finishing in front of the No. 4 and/or No. 5 runners from those schools.

Freshman Hayden Grotelueschen placed 58th overall with a time of 17:07.03. Sophomore Josh Wilcoski finished in 91st in 17:41.84.

"Hayden dug down and helped our team by beating many No. 4 and No. 5 runners from the other top teams," Garrison said. "This helped push back their score. He showed he is a champion runner.

"Josh also helped our team by raising other team's scores by getting in front of their top five runners."

Grotelueschen's time was a lifetime best.

"It is rare that a freshman races in the boys' sectional meet," Garrison said. "It is even more rare that a freshman will run their lifetime best in this stressful meet.

"Hayden is an amazing runner and ran well beyond his years. He will be one of only 10 M-S freshmen runners ever to race at state in 50 years."

Wilcoski's time was a 1-minute improvement over his 2018 sectional effort.

In the final Class 2A state poll by runnerspace.com, the ranked teams at the Bloomington Sectional were: Metamora (No. 4), Morton (No. 5), Bloomington (No. 9), Peoria Notre Dame (No. 14), M-S (No. 15), Normal U-High (No. 17), Geneseo (No. 23) and Bartonville Limestone (No. 25).

"I think what isn't seen in the team score is how much support our runners got from their teammates, their families, our alumni, and our alumni parents that showed up to encourage them during the race," Garrison said. "Their teammates were running all over the course to support their teammates at key places where our runners would need it.

"I do not think without this help that our top seven runners would have been able to dig down so much. It showed how much our runners that were racing and those who weren't really care about each other. The success of our team and program is not based off talent as much as it is based off how much our runners have cared about each other and how much support they have gotten from their families. I am so grateful for this as a coach both this year and in past years."

This week's state-meet appearance will be the 22nd all-time for the M-S boys' program.

Mahomet-Seymour Girls' cross-country

Olivia Bunting had a memorable 17th birthday on Saturday.

The junior was one of the scoring runners for the Bulldogs in the Bloomington Class 2A Sectional, helping the girls' program secure its fifth state appearance in a row, and the ninth in the past 10 years.

Bunting positioned herself ahead of Urbana's fourth- and fifth-place runners, solidifying the Bulldogs' advancement.

"She has done this for us a few times this year," Bulldog coach Kristin Allen said. "I am extremely proud of her, and it shows what experience can do for a team, especially with all of her young teammates."

In an 18-school event which featured eight state-ranked programs (according to the final runnerspace.com poll), M-S placed fifth and earned the final state berth from the Bloomington Sectional.

The five team advancers in a meet held at Maxwell Park, in Normal, were 10th-ranked Peoria Notre Dame (first with 88 points), 13th-ranked Bloomington (second with 106 points), fourth-ranked Dunlap (third with 110 points), 23rd-ranked Morton (fourth with 138 points) and 17th-ranked Mahomet-Seymour (fifth with 141 points).

Urbana (which was ranked 18th) missed the cut, ending sixth with 150 points.

"The most competitive sectional that I have seen in a while," Allen said.

The leader of the M-S pack was sophomore all-sectional performer Elizabeth Sims. She ran fourth with a 3-mile time of 18 minutes, 26.47 seconds.

"Elizabeth Sims continued to show up for us," Allen said. "She is amazing to coach."

The next four Bulldogs completed the course within 49 seconds of one another.

Sophomore Klein Powell was 20th in 19:35.23, sophomore Grace Lietz was 27th in 19:51.84, freshman Ella Scott was 44th in 20:20.69 and Bunting – the lone non freshman or sophomore in the lineup – took 46th in 20:24.30.

In the 136-runner field, the other Bulldog competitors were in the top half. Sophomore Chloe Allen was 50th in 20:34.09 and sophomore Emily Bednar was 54th in 20:41.48.

Allen had to make a race-day substitution when one of her regional runners, freshman Callie Jansen, missed the meet due to an illness.

"Excited to see these girls in action next Saturday," Allen said.

The pressure associated with qualifying for state is gone and Allen

expects her runners to be stress-free.

“Now it’s fun,” she said. “You run your heart out.”

The girls’ Class 2A state race, at Peoria’s Detweiler Park, will start at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 9.

Overall, the team state appearance will be the 17th in the history of the M-S girls’ program.

 Tags

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