

Local

MSJHS Cross Country: more than just a course



admin • October 4, 2019

0 4 minutes read



BY DANI TIETZ

dani@mahometnews.com

Junior high can be a confusing time for students.

But at Mahomet-Seymour Junior High School, there is a group that helps them gain individual confidence, become part of a group and realize their full potential.

Growing numbers season-to-season indicate that the Mahomet-Seymour cross-country program is doing something right. For some runners, it might come in personal success, crossing the finish line towards the front of the pack.

But for the majority of cross-country participants at MSJHS, the draw to participate, even through tough times, comes from the encouragement of coaches, a supportive team and the realization that there are hills in life that you can conquer.

Newcomer Samantha Beasley (sixth-grade) said, "Being on a team is one of the best things that's ever happened to me because I'm normally one of the last runners, but everybody still cheers me on.

"They don't point me out, which makes me feel really good about myself. And I basically feel like I've got a huge family, and that just makes me feel good because I have other people that I could go to and talk to."

Beasley joined cross-country for the same reason many other students do: because her friends were doing it.

After participating in track and field as a sixth-grade student, Taya Barton joined the summer fun runs hosted by coach Lisa Martin.

"When I was in track, it's not as much a team sport, so I felt like I wasn't doing good enough because I was comparing myself to others," Barton said. "As I got into cross-country, I realized these people are really supportive and I don't need to compare myself to them because all of our times are going to get put together anyway to get an average."

Barton started out the summer finishing the 2-mile course at 23 minutes, but by the end of the summer, she had her time down to 19 minutes.

Through cross-country, seventh-grader Lydia Risser has learned that she doesn't have to compare herself to others.

"You have your own goals that you need to be focusing on," Risser said. "And another person has their own goals they might be working up to. You're working throughout the season, so you can't really compare yourself to them."

But Risser can see the link between what she does at cross-country and how she performs when she competes in swimming.

"My mom always tells me, running will help you with everything: sports and school," Risser said. "It's because you need the endurance: the faster you will be at whatever else you are doing."

After three years on the cross-country team, Jack Louis sees that sometimes, even when it hurts, you just have to keep going.

"If you're sore, you can slow down a bit, but never start walking," he said. "If you think it's okay to walk, you just start stopping. If you keep on running, you're less likely to walk more."

Louis will run his last race as a junior high student on Saturday when the Bulldogs travel to Monticello.

He is looking to keep the same strategy that he's employed the last three seasons: to target a runner in front of him so that he can push himself to get a PR.

Barton said, "Cross-country takes more than physical health. It also takes mental health because if you have a really bad mindset, then you're more likely to slow down and not actually want to finish it.

"But if you're like, I can do this, I can get past this hill, then you're more likely to get past that hill. And you feel good about what you've achieved."

Finishing the regular season strong is on all the Bulldogs' minds.

Monticello has one of the hilliest courses the Bulldogs see each year. Berg said as he works to come in under the 15-minute mark, he will speak positively to himself, knowing that after the climb up, there is time to run downhill.

"You think you're not going to be able to do it, but you can," Berg said.

In his first year on the team, sixth-grader Eli Welch said that he, too, struggles with hills and heat, but in the middle of the race, when he's really tired, he knows that there will be water at the end, and that he will get to rest.

"When I'm running if someone is ahead of me, I try to pass them and keep doing that until I can't pass anyone," he said.

Max Peters sees how much he improved in time from his sixth-grade to seventh-grade year, and believes by taking the advice of his coaches, he will be a strong contender going into eighth-grade, if he keeps working hard.

He tries to keep steady strides throughout the majority of the course, then towards the end, shortens them, making them quicker as he heads towards the finish line.

"I've improved by more than a minute and a half," Peters said. "Makes me feel really good.

Barton said the lessons she's learning in cross-country are being carried over into her academics.

"I used to think running was the worst and I'd never get good at it; until I started working harder," she said. "And I thought math was the worst and I'd never get good at it. But I was improving in running, and I kind of took that mindset into class as well, if I can improve at running, then I can improve at math."

Beasley said what she's learning on the cross-country course can be applied in other areas of life, too.

"It helps me face other challenges in my life," she said. "Running is one of

the big challenges, and I try to do things to challenge myself.

"It helped me figure out how to solve problems better in my life. Since I face challenges in running, and I can normally beat the challenge, it makes me look at different things in my life."

But most of all, the teenagers who, like everyone else are looking for a place to belong and be accepted, have realized that there is more to cross-country than meets the eye.

"You meet people that you think you wouldn't hang out with and you start to know them and you actually do (hang out)," Berg said.

"Being on a team, you don't feel left out," Louis said.

"When my teammates run a different race, they cheer me on and that helps me to run better," Peters said.

 Tags

Mahomet-Seymour Cross Country

Mahomet-Seymour Sports