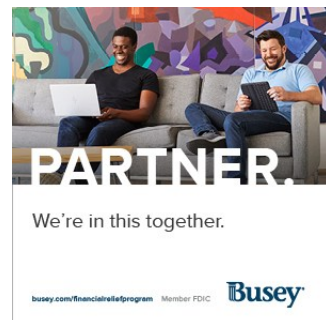


Bulldogs take team and individual honors at Spartan Classic



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By FRED KRONER

The Bulldogs swept the team and individual honors on Saturday (Sept. 26) in the 49th running of the Spartan Classic boys' cross-country race in St. Joseph.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a meet which traditionally attracts about two dozen teams was limited to four of Central Illinois' premier programs.

M-S emerged as the team champions, totaling 36 points. Runner-up Monticello had a score of 48 and was followed by St. Joseph-Ogden (54) and Tolono Unity (80).

In the latest state rankings compiled by milesplit.com, SJ-O was rated eighth, Unity was rated 10th and Monticello was rated 11th in Class 1A. In Class 2A, M-S was ranked 13th.

Individual accolades in the 3-mile race were claimed by M-S junior Kyle Nofziger, who was timed in 15 minutes and 32 seconds. His margin of victory was 24 seconds.

Three teammates — all juniors — joined him in securing top-10 finishes.

Taylor Fan was fifth (16:18), Joseph Scheele was seventh (16:28) and Jonah Singer was ninth (16:33).

Rounding out the Bulldogs' varsity lineup were Joe Taylor (14th in 16:45), Ben Wallace (18th in 17:04, Matthew Sims (23rd in 17:25), Karsten Waisath (24th also in 17:25), Gage Williams (26th in 17:33) and Hayden Grotelueschen (34th in 17:54).

M-S has participated in the Spartan Classic for 33 years, but returned to the event this fall for the first time since 2003.

The only other year the school won team honors at SJ-O was in 1996.

Nofziger was the third M-S athlete to win the varsity race at the Spartan Classic. He joins Neil Mathis (1984) and Jordan Johnson (2000).

Nofziger's time ranks as the 24th-best ever by a junior at M-S in the 51 years cross-country has been offered.

"He is working hard for a chance to join the eight juniors that have broken into the 14s," M-S head coach Neal Garrison said. "This nearly impossible feat is within Kyle's reach if things fall in his favor this season."

M-S was also triumphant in the open race, capturing five of the top six spots.

Open meet champion Gabe Difanis (17:45) finished a few steps in front of teammate Caleb Dowers (17:50).

The Bulldogs' other open-meet finishers were: Justin Straub (18:42), Gabe Wisnasky (18:48) and Grant Smysor (19:04).

"Gabe Difanis and Caleb Dowers took control of the race and pushed the entire field," Garrison said. "Eventually they pulled away and pushed each other to lifetime bests."

In all, 10 M-S athletes registered their career-best times. The others, and the amount of time they cut, were: Taylor (10 seconds), Nofziger (18 seconds), Wallace (22 seconds), Fan (26 seconds), Waisath (52 seconds), Sims (58 seconds), Smysor (1 minute and 23 seconds) and Wisnasky (1 minute and 29 seconds).

Difanis improved by 53 seconds and Dowers by 15 seconds.

In addition to the 10 Bulldogs who posted career-best times, three of their teammates achieved season-best marks: Scheele, Singer and Williams.

Garrison also charts a career most improved list for runners who drop a

minimum of 3 minutes off their first prep race before they graduate.

Two Bulldogs joined that club on Saturday: Waisath's time was an improvement of 3 minutes and 26 seconds. Fan's time was 3 minutes and 40 seconds better than his high school debut.

M-S returns to action on Saturday (Oct. 3) at Urbana in a three-school meet that will also include Clinton. After the race, two new inductees will join the M-S Cross-Country Hall of Fame.

They are John Butcher and Lucas Prather. Their additions will raise to 30 the number of inductees since the selections began in 2010.

Butcher's brother, Brian, and Andrew Walmer are assistant coaches this season for Garrison. This year is the first one in more than a decade that the program has had paid assistant coaches.

M-S has been assigned to a Class 2A regional at Taylorville for the Oct. 24 meet.

Besides the host school and the Bulldogs, the field will include Centennial, Champaign Central, Charleston, Danville, Effingham, Mattoon, Olney Richland County, Rantoul and Urbana.