

Bulldogs place fourth at Class 2A Sectional Meet

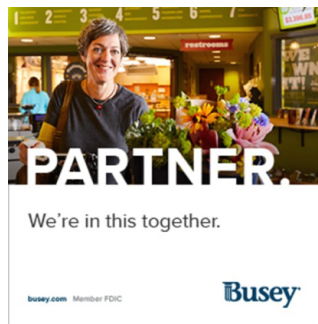


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Photo by Kristi Lietz



By FRED KRONER

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The Bulldogs finished the IHSA portion of their boys' cross-country season

on Saturday (Oct. 31) in a Class 2A sectional meet which featured four of the state's top 11-ranked teams.

M-S placed fourth in the 15-school event, a finish that in previous years would have qualified the school for the IHSA state meet.

The M-S boys' program, which had sent teams to state eight of the past nine years, did not get the opportunity to officially extend that streak.

The IHSA has canceled this year's state meet due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Ninth-ranked (according to milesplit.com) Mascoutah was the sectional team champion (73 points), followed by top-ranked Chatham Glenwood (84 points), 10th-ranked Marion (97 points), 11th-ranked M-S (146) and unranked Olney East Richland (156 points) in a meet that was contested at Olney Central College.

In previous years, the top five schools would have moved on to the state finals.

On Sunday, M-S learned it has received an invitation to compete in an unofficial Class 2A state meet sponsored by ShaZam Racing on Saturday (Nov. 7) at Chillicothe.

The Bulldogs' individual leader at sectional was junior Kyle Nofziger. His 3-mile time of 16 minutes, 10.17 seconds enabled him to capture seventh place in a field of 120 competitors.

Nofziger earned all-sectional laurels for the second consecutive year and provided the Bulldogs with an all-sectional performer for the 10th year in a row.

M-S' scoring runners (top-five placers) finished within 1:16 of each other, a better split than at regional one week earlier when the top-five split was

1:19.

Other team leaders were junior Joseph Scheele (23rd in 16:41.64), junior Jonah Singer (41st in 17:04.21), junior Taylor Fan (46th in 17:09.21) and senior Joe Taylor (59th in 17:26.26).

Rounding out the lineup were sophomore Hayden Grotelueschen (68th in 17:36.40) and sophomore Ben Wallace (86th in 17:59.15). Wallace, who did not race at the regional, was running his first postseason race of the season.

Even though the course measured slightly more than 3 miles, all seven of the Bulldogs' participants ran times that rank among the school's all-time top 50 for their respective grade levels.

Grotelueschen's time was 30th for sophomores. Wallace's was 33rd for sophomores.

Nofziger's time was 20th for juniors, Scheele's time was 31st for juniors, Singer's was 44th for juniors and Fan's was 46th for juniors.

Among seniors, Taylor's time ranks 48th.



The IHSA restructured the state series this year, combining what had been a five-sectional format into four sectionals for 2020.

"This made them more competitive," M-S coach Neal Garrison said. "Our sectional included more state-ranked teams than the other sectionals, with a total of seven state-ranked teams."

The Bulldogs targeted runners from top-ranked Chatham Glenwood in their

particular flights.

"In each flight, our runners put themselves in position to have a chance of taking on the top team," Garrison said. "This took a lot of courage.

"Our team was predicted to earn 145.5 points (and place fourth) in a virtual meet using the best times of the season from all runners in the sectional."

M-S finished with a score of 146 points and was the fourth-place team.

"Our runners that weren't in the top seven also did a nice job representing our team by giving up their day to run from spot to spot on the course to cheer on their teammates," Garrison said. "I really appreciate the supportive bond that this year's team had.

"I am thankful that we had a chance to get to practice and run in meets during a pandemic. I think it gave the runners and coaches something positive to look forward to in a very tough time.

"It provided a time in our days that seemed much more normal and runners could socialize when there were so many more health restrictions indoors."

Among the M-S season highlights were winning conference and regional team championships.

"The wins were nice," Garrison said, "but I will remember this team the most for bringing back the special tight team bond and incredible work ethic that has made our program so well-respected over the years.

"I know that our assistant coaches, Brian Butcher and Andrew Walmer, were an essential part in bringing this back. I am also extremely grateful to the parents of our runners that always invest so much to make it a great experience for our team."