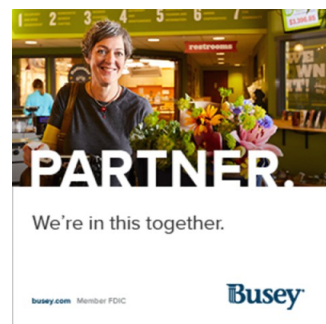


Bulldogs finish season as runner-up at unofficial state meet



Fred Kroner • 1 hour ago

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By FRED KRONER

They called themselves members of MSDP – standing for Mahomet-Seymour Distance Project – and on Saturday (Nov. 7), seven students from the high school completed their season-long project.

Running in the unofficial state cross-country meet – unofficial because it was sponsored by ShaZam Racing and not the IHSA – MSDP combined for a runner-up team finish in the 21-team Class 2A field at Chillicothe.

In the final state rankings compiled by milesplit.com, the Bulldogs were rated 11th. Sixteen of the top 17 ranked teams participated in the unofficial state meet.

With the top five runners on Saturday – all of whom are underclassmen – finishing within 43 seconds of one another, MSDP compiled a composite score of 154 points. Only 2A champion MOTRON (104 points) registered a better team score. MOTRON consisted of runners from Morton High School.

Kyle Nofziger was the MSDP leader, covering the 5-kilometer course at Three Sisters Park in 16 minutes, 38.50 seconds. Nofziger, a junior, finished 18th overall in a race with 173 competitors and was accorded all-state honors.

The team's lead pack also included junior Joseph Scheele (27th in 16:51.49), sophomore Hayden Grotelueschen (42nd in 17:14.31), junior Taylor Fan (54th in 17:20.97) and junior Jonah Singer (56th in 17:21.65).

Scheele was four seconds away from a spot in the top 25, which would have secured him all-state recognition.

Grotelueschen moved up consistently as the race progressed. He was 59th after the first mile.

Of the 16 Bulldogs who also participated in the IHSA sectional meet a week

earlier, Grotelueschen was the only one to post a quicker time at the unofficial, and slightly longer, state meet. He dropped his time by 22 seconds.

Other MSDP representatives at the unofficial state meet were Matthew Sims (94th in 17:44.61) and Joe Taylor (154th in 18:39.75).

Sims was running in a meet for the first time since the regular season ended.

The meet was contested in four flights. After all runners had finished, the results were collated to produce the overall results.

Neal Garrison, who coached M-S during the IHSA portion of the season, said the Bulldogs gained momentum by the performance of the runners in the early flights.

"Our two seniors (Taylor and Sims) represented our team (in the day's first race)," Garrison said. "Joe Taylor had a great start, pushing the pace early. Matthew Sims worked his way to the top right away as well and ran the race of his life.

"This really raised the energy of our team and that created the positive energy our team needed for the rest of the day. Joe and Matthew showing how much they were willing to fight for the team really meant something to their teammates.

"Those teammates that weren't in the top seven fed off this positive energy and ran from spot to spot on the course to encourage and support their racing teammates. We always say the best team will win. And by this we mean the most supportive team. Our team has really bonded this summer and fall like we haven't seen in years. Their bond and love for each other really took our team to an amazing place at the state meet."

Grotelueschen and Fan participated in the second flight, set aside for a

team's No. 4 and 5 runners.

"Hayden and Taylor followed the example of Joe and Matthew by also getting towards the lead of the race right at the start," Garrison said. "This created quite the excitement for the cheering teammates and parents.

"They could see that our runners were setting themselves up for a chance to do well as a team. Hayden and Taylor often ran side by side for much of the race in the lead pack. They were beating some of the highest ranked teams in the state and looked super confident while doing it.

"Our cheering teammates kept hearing other teams ask who our team was as it surprised them to see our runners up so high. In the end of the Flight 2 race, Hayden placed third and close behind him Taylor placed seventh."

While the final two flights were preparing to run, Garrison said the expectations were starting to increase.

"Typically in a cross-country meet, you can't see how the race is developing in terms of the team score until the race is over," Garrison said. "With the flighted races, we were able to see that our team had already set themselves up for a chance to be one of the top teams with our first four runners.

"This helped give confidence to our final three runners."

Starting with Scheele and Singer in the flight for a team's No. 2 and 3 runners, they showed they were up for the challenge.

"Both runners put themselves in the top pack from the start," Garrison said. "They ran with such determination. They fought hard for their cheering teammates and parents.

"In the end, Joseph placed sixth in the flight and Jonah placed 19th. Both of our runners had placed ahead of some of the top runners from the best

teams in the state."

Nofziger joined the other No. 1 runners in the day's final race.

"Kyle represented our team well," Garrison said. "He continued the trend of our team for the day by going out with the lead pack and fighting to stay in it throughout the race.

"He finished 14th in the flight. The runners really represented our team and long-term program so well. They continued to improve throughout the season and finished strong."



As a team, MSDP ran a consistent race. The Bulldogs were second after the first mile, third after the second mile and surged ahead of Chatham Glenwood in the final mile to secure the runner-up placement. Chatham Glenwood finished in third place.

Garrison was pleased that his 2020 team carried on a tradition of excellence within the cross-country program.

"Last year our program was recognized as the best AA team of the past five years and of the past decade," he said. "This was quite an honor for all the alumni runners and alumni parents who had invested so much into the cross-country program.

"They had won four trophies at state in the last decade. This current team took us back to that level in this new decade. They gave our team the fifth top-two finish at state in the past seven years. They represented the alumni well.

"I am so proud of our runners. I am so grateful to the current and past

cross-country parents for all their support in helping build this program to a top program in the state. I am appreciative of all the alumni that sacrificed so much to build this program so that our current runners believe they can achieve high results as well.

"And I know that our assistant coaches, Brian Butcher and Andrew Walmer, were a major part in getting our current runners to place so high this year by bridging the gap from the last decade to this decade."