

PREPS

MAHOMET-SEYMOUR GRADUATES

Elevating their running passion

Ex-Bulldogs setting pace in Colorado work

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EVERGREEN, Colo. — Ryan Hodge's 2018 graduation from Mahomet-Seymour High School could have meant the end of his connection to numerous individuals from his hometown.

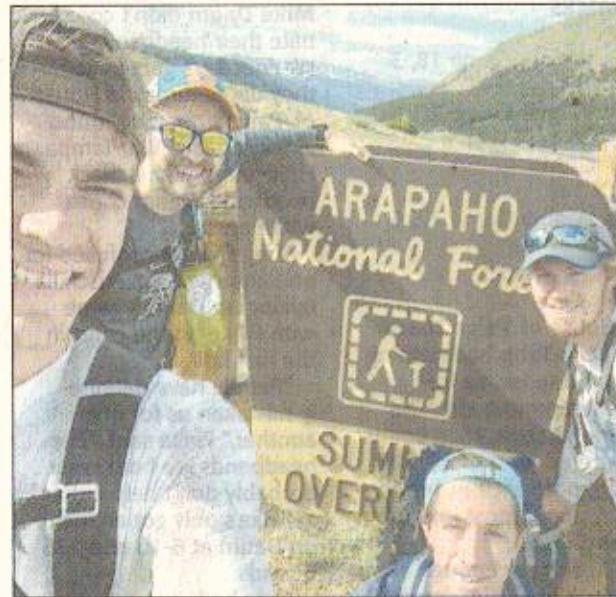
Including the Bulldogs boys' cross-country teammates with whom he won a Class 2A state

championship in November 2017 during his senior season.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, however, has made for interesting times in the sports world.

One such example is Hodge, now a Baylor men's distance runner with the Bears' cross-country and track and field programs, getting back together with three of his M-S pals for some altitude training about 30 miles outside Denver.

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Provided

Ryan Hodge, far left, a 2018 Mahomet-Seymour graduate, poses for selfie with, clockwise from top left, fellow M-S graduates Brian Butcher, Andrew Walmer and Mathias Powell at Arapaho National Forest in Denver earlier this summer.

SPORTS

RUNNING

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"I had talked with some of my college teammates about going out to Colorado for the summer and training," Hodge said. "They were kind of on the fence."

Enter Brian Butcher, a 2017 M-S graduate.

"I was catching up with Brian over the phone, and he mentioned he was applying for an internship in Colorado, in the Denver area," Hodge said. "I was just like, 'Well, I'll keep you posted if ... we end up coming out. Some of my Baylor friends did end up coming out, and me and Brian started looking for other guys.'"

Among them are 2017 M-S graduate Andrew Walmer and 2019 M-S graduate Mathias Powell. The former now is the M-S boys' track and field distance coach, and the latter — in addition to being the 2018 2A boys' cross-country state titlist and 2A boys' 3,200-meter run state champion — is a Villanova distance runner.

Butcher is independently focused on marathons and half-marathons these days.

Hodge is in a unique spot, with his running career hampered by medical maladies the last few years.

"I've been running for a good amount (of time) now, and I'm getting my mileage back up to where I want it to be," Hodge said. "I'm trying to be smart and definitely take it slower — slower than I even think it needs to — just to not get in-

A golden era

Ryan Hodge's four years at Mahomet-Seymour produced some memorable cross-country seasons for he and his teammates.

YEAR	STATE FINISH	STATE RUNNERS
2017	Class 2A, First	Mathias Powell, Riley Fortune, Ryan Hodge, Bryson Keeble, Evan Burge, Kaelan Davis, Nate Douglas
2016	Class 2A, First	Andrew Walmer, Riley Fortune, Mathias Powell, Ryan Hodge, Brian Butcher, Ben Craw, Gabe Pommier
2015	Class 2A, Second	Andrew Walmer, Alex Keeble, Gabe Pommier, Jack Hyde, Brian Butcher, Ben Craw, Ryan Hodge
2014	Class 2A, Second	Alex Keeble, William Wolf, Andrew Walmer, Jack Hyde, Ben Craw, Brian Butcher, Riley Fortune

jured again. I definitely do not want to sit out anymore."

Hodge didn't receive a proper sendoff with the Bulldogs, unable to even qualify for the Class 2A boys' track and field state meet two years ago because of a stress fracture in the sacrum portion of his pelvis. But Hodge boasted plenty of strong running performance before his injury, including a ninth-place effort in his last 2A boys' cross-country state meet.

That boded well for Hodge's college prospects, which included interest from Lipscomb and some Division II programs.

So too did Hodge's father, David, being a professional pole vaulter who competed in college for Baylor, followed by Hodge's four older sisters all attending the same university in Waco, Texas.

"They didn't push me to go to Baylor," Ryan Hodge said of his parents. "Growing up, I visited there and viewed the campus. I already knew it was a really cool school that held all my values and also had really good academics."

The mechanical engineering major arrived in Waco in the summer of 2018 with the knowledge he'd redshirt,

not far removed from his pelvic injury. Even so, Hodge received a body composition scan that is standard for the Baylor distance running program. Through it, he learned he had low bone density. It was classified as osteopenia, just a step above osteoporosis.

"That was a huge blow. That was my second week I was there," Hodge said. "The doctor was like, 'You're going to be doing a lot of cross training — very minimal running for quite a while.'"

Hodge said he did wind up running a bit during his 2019 indoor track and field season, but he also admitted it "didn't go very well." Essentially, Hodge experienced a freshman year filled with recovery and work to improve his bone density.

On the latter point, Hodge said both family genes and diet were key reasons for his osteopenia. He couldn't do anything about the former, but he set out to fix the latter right away.

"That's typically how stress fractures and stress injuries occur, is just based off

of you're burning so much by running so much and working out, and then you're not replenishing it with the proper nutrients," Hodge said. "You can be eating a whole lot, which I definitely did in high school, but if you're not eating the right stuff, then that definitely can take a toll."

Hodge's first true cross-country stint at Baylor, in the fall of 2019, resulted in Hodge being a scoring runner at all five meets in which he toed the start line. Among the outcomes was Hodge placing seventh in the Texas A&M Invitational with a personal-best 8-kilometer time of 25 minutes, 11.6 seconds.

"I surprised myself with the time I was able to run," Hodge said. "For my first 8K, you're talking two-plus more miles than a high school race. It's definitely a monster to tackle."

Hodge finally was realizing his dream of making a meaningful impact at the Division I level of distance running.

"I'm never happy with where I'm at. I want to always be better," Hodge said. "I'm definitely striving to be in that more

top-end level, and I know it just takes more hard work and more discipline."

The injury bug, however, didn't stay away from Hodge.

After a good winter of training and a couple of solid 3,000 run indoor performances, Hodge starting feeling pain in his left foot.

"I had one track workout in particular where we were doing 800 repeats. The third rep, I was about 200 (meters) in and my foot was like, 'Yeah, we need to stop,'" Hodge said. "I ended up having ... four stress reactions."

Hodge didn't wind up missing much as far as Baylor's practices and meets were concerned, with the coronavirus pandemic beginning the month after Hodge's latest injury and canceling the rest of Baylor's track and field season.

He's been back to running since the beginning of April and is looking forward to an Aug. 10 report date at Baylor, trying to remain healthy while hoping for "a relatively normal season" during a major national health crisis. And, for now, the preparation is taking place more than 5,000 feet above sea level, with Hodge and his cohorts lodging via Airbnb.

"It's a big learning curve, racing at the D-I level ... (and) everybody's a stud," he said. "It's a big accomplishment (running at a D-I institution). I don't take it for granted."