

Area teams have been assigned to three regional sites in Class 1A as well as one in Class 2A for the start of the IHSA postseason on Saturday. At each location, the girls' race will start at 10 a.m. The 1A sites featuring area teams are Bishop McNamara, Carlinville and Paxton. In 2A, area schools will compete at Taylorville. To qualify for sectionals, runners need to be on one of the top seven teams or else be one of the top five individuals not on an advancing team.

1

Bulldogs making strides

Mahomet-Seymour will be the team to beat in Taylorville's Class 2A boys' regional Saturday and with good reason. The Bulldogs have four runners who have cracked the 16-minute mark this season, including the top two runners in Monday's Corn Belt Conference meet, junior **Forrest Smoes** and senior **Jonathan Schaap**. Smoes' 3-mile time was a season-best 15 minutes, 7 seconds. Schaap was a few steps behind at 15:13. Coach **Neal Garrison's** team is ranked fifth in state rankings compiled by Illinois Prep Harrier. "I am very fortunate to be able to coach such elite runners as Forrest and Jonathan," Garrison said. "They are both very driven to be their best, and I do believe either of them can win on any given day." Smoes has led the team in two races and has won one meet. Schaap led M-S in four races and won two invitations. Junior **Ethan Russell** and freshman **Alex Keeble** are other Bulldogs with sub-16-minute clockings. Senior **Matthew Chupp**, M-S' fifth scoring runner at conference, also ran a season-best Monday (16:45). M-S is shooting for its fourth regional title in seven years. "Our main goal," Garrison said, "is to make sure we get as many runners as possible to run lifetime bests at the state meet." The team's goal is a top-10 finish at state Nov. 3.

2

Still at the top

St. Thomas More's boys' team ran the table this year, being ranked No. 1 each week the state poll was released. "We are always striving to do better," Sabers coach **David Behm** said. On those lines, his team has succeeded. Each of his varsity runners has set his personal-best time this season, including senior **Jacob Helfrich** who was injured much of his junior year and was unable to match his top sophomore time. Helfrich, **Nick Hess**, **Sean Kelley**, **Sam Powers** and **Brendan Remington** have been the team leaders. "We tell them if they do the work and stay healthy, good things are going to happen," Behm said. Freshman **David Horn** and **Jack Bolger** will be the team's other runners at regional. "Everyone seems pretty healthy," Behm said. The coach hopes to see his athletes run as a pack at regionals and will turn them loose at a loaded sectional that is expected to feature seven of the state's Top 15 teams: STM (first), Shelbyville (second), Mount Zion (fourth), St. Joseph-Ogden (ninth), Monticello (10th) and Unity (15th). "We're going to run fairly conservatively at regionals," Behm said. "We have to watch ourselves. Sectionals is when we'll start laying it out and getting ready to run fast." The Sabers are team favorites at the 16-school Paxton-Buckley-Loda Regional.

3

Back — and better

Last year, Schlarman's **Jesse Hahne** was one of three underclassmen to finish in the top 10 individually at state. As a junior, he ran fifth. Until the soccer season ended, he was the Hilltoppers' lone male runner this season. "One of the great things about Jesse," Schlarman coach **Tyler Overstreet** said, "is he doesn't need a lot of motivation. He is such a hard worker, he will go above and beyond every day in practice. He puts in hundreds of miles by himself in the summer." Hahne already has run faster this year (14:59) than he did last year at state (15:02). "He is one of his biggest critics and might not think it, but he's where he needs to be," Overstreet said. "Every course this year, he has run 15 to 20 seconds faster than last year. He has gotten a lot stronger and worked on his foot speed." Hahne is trying to become the first Hilltopper with consecutive top-10 finishes at state. Only one other runner from the school (**Scott Krapf**) earned all-state honors more than once. Krapf was a three-time all-stater. Hahne has put himself in position to join the school's short list of elite runners. The senior also has area coaches in his corner. "He has had another good year of training and is a gutsy runner who pushes himself to the limit," STM coach **David Behm** said.

4

Farewell sendoff for coach

Monticello's **Jeff Butler** will retire in December and doesn't plan to coach the Sages in track next spring. He hopes his state-ranked teams (girls are second, boys are 10th) keep him busy the next three Saturdays. He is downplaying his final weeks as head coach. "I really don't know if this (year) will be any more special," Butler said. "We've had really neat things that have happened." His girls' lineup for regional likely will feature **Hannah Houska**, **Emily Foley**, **Maggie Utgaard**, **Madison Tutich**, **Audrey Duncan**, **Katie Douglas** and **Hannah Remmert**. "Individually, each girl has had a very good race," Butler said, "but the top five haven't all run well on the same day." For now, Butler isn't interested in being a coach who's not also teaching. "I know I'm going to miss it," the 30-year veteran said. "There's no good time to retire. You are always going to have situations where you want to keep coaching the kids, but I really think when I'm done (teaching), it's someone else's turn." Monticello's boys' team will be led into the postseason by Okaw Valley Conference champion **Andrew Hanselman**. "He was not used to being the top dog, but he stepped into that role and has adapted pretty well," Butler said. **Jesse Galaway** and **Matt Norvell** are close behind.

5

Maroons (above) on course

Champaign Central's late state berth as a team in boys' cross-country was nine years ago. Coach **Al Johnson** believes his current team has the potential to match the success of the 2003 squad. "There's a lot of experience with this team, and they've been to sectional every year (in the last three)," Johnson said. Central's postseason lineup will feature fourth-year letter winner **Kain Shirley** along with sophomore **Isaac Kasten**, junior **Corey White**, junior **Hayden Hinton**, junior **Nimesh Avasthi** and freshman **Ashton Hyatt** and freshman **Henry Sill**. All seven have posted their fastest career times this fall. A change in practice structure late last season has produced good results. Instead of turning his runners loose for a workout and expecting them to pick up in the miles, Johnson set specific locations for them to meet him. "That got them to focus, and they are in much better condition than in the past," he said. The Maroons will join Central, Danville, M-S and Urbana at Taylorville's regional. One of the schools ranked ahead of Central is Charleston, a team the Maroons beat (thanks to the sixth-runner tiebreaker) in a recent five-school meet. "That gave us confidence," Johnson said. "I know we will put forth that best effort this weekend."