

Tuscola girls trick cross-country field

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MAHOMET — Tuscola's girls are going to state. St. Joseph-Ogden's boys aren't.

Clearly, it was business unusual at Saturday's Class A cross-country sectional at Mahomet.

Tuscola has never been to a girls' state meet. In fact, the Warriors, until this season, never had enough runners to compete as a team.

Now, with a new and improved roster, Tuscola's bound for Peoria. The Warriors earned the invitation by finishing second among 20 teams at Mahomet.

"We didn't even have a team last year," Tuscola sophomore Sara Vest said. "Now we're going to state."

For a change, St. Joseph-Ogden can't say the same. Shackled by the absence of No. 2 runner Corey Plotner, the Spartans failed to make the five-team cut, finishing a disappointing seventh.

Fifth-year coach Jim Acklin has never had a team not qualify for state.

"It seems more and more luck is involved more than anything else," Acklin said.

The Spartans didn't have any this week. Plotner had his appendix removed on Monday and was unable to race.

The loss was too much for the two-time state champions, one of five ranked teams in the boys' field.

Seventh-ranked Petersburg-Porta, led by individual champ Aaron Hart, won the boys' race, edging Chrisman for the

crown by five points.

Mahomet-Seymour and Urbana University High also qualified.

"With this tough of a sectional, somebody was going to end up staying home," Uni coach Bonnie Moxley said.

Four Chrisman runners finished in the top 17, including Rob Waltz, who was third in 15 minutes, 58 seconds.

A year ago, Scott Dewitt was 55th at Peoria but his Mahomet-Seymour teammates weren't with him. The Bulldogs haven't been to state since the 1980s.

Dewitt paced the Bulldogs on Saturday with an 11th-place finish.

"We're a close team. We're all friends, and we encourage each other," Dewitt said. "We know we're capable of beating just about anybody every time out."

The same goes for Tuscola's eighth-ranked girls, who finished 39 points behind ninth-ranked Delavan-Tremont.

Vest led a balanced attack, finishing 28th. After crossing the finish line, the sophomore, who suffers from asthma, collapsed and stayed on the ground for five minutes.

"It happens every race," she said. "I guess I just breathe too hard."

St. Joseph-Ogden's girls advanced, too, placing fourth. Sarah Bobsin was 18th and Jodie Ring 27th for the unranked Spartans who, according to coach Andrew Larson, have some work to do.

"The hay's in the barn. We've put in our work," Larson said. "If we're going to make a statement at state, we're going to need to run better."