

State meet heartbreak fuels Keeble's rise

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MAHOMET – Survivors of calamities routinely say they were lucky.

Things could have been worse.

So it was fortunate Alex Keeble had a 103-degree fever while standing on the starting line of last year's Class 2A state cross country meet.

A Mahomet-Seymour High School sophomore at the time, Keeble bravely tried to help the Bulldogs uphold their No. 2 ranking in the 3-mile race. He made it a mile before reluctantly dropping out as his team slumped to 15th.



Alex Keeble

"Every time I go to that course, I think about state last year."

Keeble's most recent visit to Peoria's Detweiller Park saw him tie the fourth best time in Pantagraph area history at 14 minutes, 41 seconds, a mark that also tied Mark Johnson's 1974 school record for that course.

The only runners faster

"That motivated me an insane amount," said Keeble, who has been on a tear ever since.

in area history are Woodland's Troy Maddux (14:18.5 in 1985), Gilman's Reo Rorem (14:39 in 1975) and Bloomington's Brian Stephens (14:39 in 1981).

"He was kind of due for that time," said 13th-year coach Neal Garrison. "He just needed some competition to pull him to that time. He's gained a lot of confidence in the last year so he went after it."

Keeble went wild last spring, breaking Johnson's 1977 school record of 9:27.6 in the 3,200 with a 9:27.58, which ranks second in area history among sophomores behind the 9:17.38 clocked by Clint Kaeb of BHS in 1994.

Keeble was fifth in the

state 3,200, where he led all sophomores.

In the 57-team, mostly Class 3A field on Saturday, Keeble finished fifth after stringing together mile splits of 4:45, 5:02 and 4:54 to help his No. 2-state ranked team place second behind 3A's No. 2-ranked Sandburg. His previous best on that course was 15:03.

"It was a fun race and great to have all the competition," said Keeble, who might have been faster if the humidity hadn't spiked to 90 percent in the 76-degree conditions. "I actually had a hard time breathing some of the race."

SEE KEEBLE / PAGE B2

KEEBLE

FROM B1

Now Keeble hopes to dip into in the low 14:30s. Garrison thinks that might be worth a top-five state medal, maybe better.

"In the state meet, there is some luck involved," Garrison said. "To get in the top five would be pretty incredible."

More than anything, Keeble, a team captain, wants to lead the Bulldogs to their first state trophy. They were on pace to get one last year after winning their first Corn Belt Conference title since 1980 and their first sectional crown since 1979 before disaster struck at state.

Unlike most top distance runners, the 5-foot-9, 150-pound Keeble has

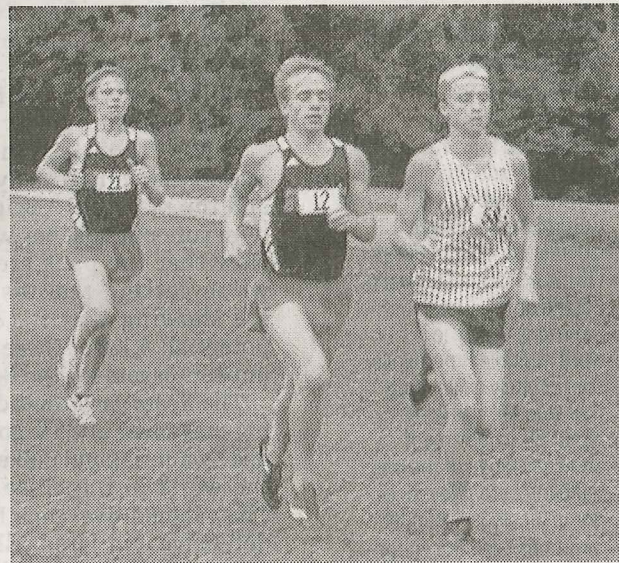
the muscles of a running back to go with the lungs of a musician. His father, Jonathan, is a University of Illinois flute professor, and his mother, Susan, is also a musician.

After training up to 60 miles per week last summer, Keeble has helped build the fastest squad in school history. The top five Bulldogs on Saturday averaged 15:25.5 per man.

"They are super supportive of each other," Garrison said. "I think that's really the reason we are doing so well."

The rest of Saturday's top five included junior Jack Hyde (35th, 15:27), sophomore Andrew Walmer (37th, 15:28), senior William Wolf (47th, 15:35) and sophomore Brian Butcher (78th, 15:55).

When asked how much



For The Pantagraph

Junior Alex Keeble, center, is looking to help Mahomet-Seymour High School's No. 2-state ranked cross country team earn its first state trophy this season.

they help him excel, Keeble said, "It helps me an insane amount."

It's crazy what team support and a lucky calamity can do.