

JUNIOR HIGH CROSS-COUNTRY

Boys', girls' teams not short on runners, talent

By **JASON BROWN**
For the Mahomet Citizen

The Mahomet-Seymour High School boys' and girls' cross-country teams have proven to be a powerhouse in the area year after year.

The boys' cross-country team took home the Class 2A state championship trophy for the second straight year, and the girls' team took fourth at state last year and 11th the year before.

For this consistency, the high school teams rely on the junior high programs to help them reload each year instead of needing to rebuild. This season, the junior high cross-county teams have a record-setting 106 runners. The highest amount of participants before this year was 84 in 2016.

"The advantage of a large team is that nearly every runner has someone that is running around the same pace/time that they are," said Lisa Martin, junior high cross-country coach. "With that, our practices can actually become a little more intense. Runners can set goals that can be shared with a group rather than just an individual."

"In fact, at meets we focus on our runners finding each other during a race. This is comforting, especially for young run-

ners. Once they catch up to their teammate, we encourage them to push each other in. Most would say that it is much easier to run with a teammate during a hard 2-mile race than to be out there running as an individual."

And it's not just numbers for Martin. She also has talent.

But if Martin wants her runners to be the right type of people who can help the high school team in a few years, she needs to instill character first.

"Before we boarded our bus, we spent time talking about those who have worn the Bulldog jersey," Martin said. "We talked about what that meant. I then asked the runners to take that pride and put it on the course, but more importantly show great character and sportsmanship. Once again, they did just that."

Martin also charged her eighth-graders with some leadership roles before the meet.

In its first meet of the season, the MSJH cross-country teams traveled to Unity.

MSJH won the girls' 1-mile race 27-28, the boys' 1-mile race 24-37 and the seventh- and eighth-grade 2-mile race 24-33.

Unity won the seventh- and eighth-grade girls' two-mile race 20-38.

For the boys' seventh- and eighth-graders' 2-mile run, six Bulldogs finished in the top 10.

Gage Williams was meet champion with a time of 12:20.

Other top 10 finishers included Gabe Difanis (third), Hayden Grotelueschen (fifth), Kai Jones (seventh), Finn Randolph (eighth) and Isaac Warren (ninth).

In the girls' sixth-grade race, Reese Gallier placed third with a time of 6:54 to top the Bulldog runners.

Avah Turner placed fourth, Emmaline Culp fifth, Ava Jansen ninth and Lacie Bushman 10th.

In the boys' sixth-grade mile, Tyler Clark was the runner-up with a time of 6:12.5.

Camden Heinold placed fourth, Mason Orton fifth, Gavin Bailey sixth, Kaden Jackson seventh, Blake Dillman eighth, Todd Laughton ninth and Lukas Nykaza 10th.

Four runners finished in the top 10 in the girls' seventh- and eighth-grade 2-mile run.

Ava Boyd (14:07) placed third, Ella Scott fifth, Abby Bunting ninth and Durbin Thomas 10th.

The MSJH cross-country teams are scheduled to travel to Dodds Park in Champaign to take on Edison Middle School on Saturday.