

Chapman instills running passion in Liberty cross-country members

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Members of the Liberty Middle School boys cross country team that placed second in the Illinois Elementary School Association state championship are, left to right, front row, Jonah Durbin, Josh Reed, Jack Raffaele and Dan Powell. In middle row are Max Hartman, Jack Pifer and Roland Prenzler. In back are Todd Baxter and Joseph Brooks.

For Liberty Middle School cross-country coach Steve Chapman, running is not only a passion, but a way of life. In fact he attributes many of the good things in his life today to running.

Chapman tries to instill that same adoration of the sport to his middle school runners and it has worked. This past year, Liberty Middle School had a boys cross country team that will be remembered for years to come this year, placing second in the Illinois Elementary School Association championships. Chatham-Glenwood was the state champion for boys.

Liberty individuals Dan Powell and Jack Pifer earned all-state honors. Powell placed 10th and Pifer was 19th. “I have been running for 29 years and I love it,” he said. “I owe everything in my life to running. I love coaching and the kids.”

Roland Prenzler, Jonah Durbin, Josh Reed, Joseph Brooks, Max Hartman, Jack Raffaele and Todd Baxter rounded out the Liberty varsity cross-country team members at state.

“I was so impressed,” Chapman said. “This team was a special team. The kids were sixth last year and I was amazed by that. It was a great performance by the kids and they worked so hard all season long.”

Chicago and Central Illinois cross country teams vie for the state title every year and it is extraordinarily competitive, Chapman said.

Powell has been running since he was in third grade and continues to improve each year. Jack Pifer, a seventh grader, is the brother of former Edwardsville High School cross country and track distance running great Stephen Pifer. “His stride is so natural it is like poetry in motion,” Chapman said. “As he gets stronger and taller, the sky is the limit for him.”

Kiara Delgado led the Liberty Middle girls with an eighth place finish in a time of 11:44. The Liberty girls placed 16th overall at state. “She had a break out track season in seventh grade and placed fifth in the mile at IESA state meet,” Chapman said. “Her hard work paid off.”

Chapman has been coaching for 16 years and said this boys group was by far the best he has ever coached. “The second place trophy is something I never thought I would see,” Chapman said. “I was so amazed by that and really proud of the kids. This was a great

performance. The group was hard working and willing to put in extra miles. I preach to the kids all season that they have to be good citizens and people first. I am proud of all 110 kids who finished the cross-country season. I love coaching the kids.”