



Tiny High School Makes Huge Strides

A new Cinderella has emerged in Maine's high school cross-country running competitions this season. At The Western Maine Class C Cross Country Regional Championships held at Twin Brook in Cumberland on Saturday, tiny Merriconeag (pronounced Mer-eh-cuh-NEEG) Waldorf High School boys' cross country team finished runner-up to Freeport High School. Freeport boasts a student enrollment of over 450. Merriconeag's total high school enrollment? 35 students. Under the guidance of Coach Tom Ryan and spearheaded by two gritty freshmen—Jack Pierce, who finished fifth, and Juan Mesones, ninth—Merriconeag defeated ten other far larger and more established programs, including Boothbay, North Yarmouth Academy, Monmouth, Telstar, and Waynflete.

Merriconeag's emergence should not have come as a total surprise, since it also defeated Gray-New Gloucester, Poland, Lake Region and Wells High Schools in races earlier in the season. Although Merriconeag, located on two campuses in Freeport and New Gloucester, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the high school program is only three years old. Much of the credit for the school's success can be traced to Coach Ryan, who doesn't just talk the talk, or even walk the walk. He runs the run! At the recent USATF Masters 5K road Championship held in Syracuse, NY, he won his fourth national title.

The Regionals' results prove once again that in a sport such as cross-country running, it's not the size of the school, it's the strength of the program that counts. At the State Championships next weekend, Merriconeag hopes to extend its Cinderella "run."