

Record Day at Nike Heartland Regional

Over four thousand cross country athletes from seven states converged on Yankton Trail Park in Sioux Falls for the Nike Heartland Regional on November 13. It was the largest number of competitors in the 15-year history of the meet and the largest of Nike's eight regions.

Runners competed in ten open sections and two championship sections. The championship races serve as qualifiers for the Nike Cross Nationals in Portland Oregon on December 3rd. The top two boys' and girls' teams earn automatic bids as well as the top five boys' and girls' runners who are not part of the two qualifying teams. States in the Heartland Region include North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. Complete meet results can be found at <https://results.wayzatatiming.com>

The weekend started with the annual pasta dinner on Saturday night. The 1,200 athletes in attendance heard from two Nike elite athletes who were guests for the weekend. Conner Matz, former BYU national cross-country champion and Josh Thompson, who ran collegiately at Oklahoma State took questions from the crowd.

Action got underway Sunday morning with the Boys and Girls Rising Stars races – reserved for high school freshman and sophomores. The Boys winner was sophomore Gannon Farrens of Maple Grove, MN in a time of 15:58.10. The Girls winner was freshman Addison Scholten of Brandon Valley, SD in 18:11.50. Scholten was fifth in the recent South Dakota Class AA state cross country meet.

Five sections of the Boys Open Invitational class competed next. The results were combined, and the overall winner was sophomore Robert Mechara of Roseville, MN in 15:06.60. Three sections of the Girls Open Invitational followed. The combined winner was eighth grader Piper Messerly of Grimes, IA in 18:31.70.

The All-Comers Community race went off at 1:50 PM. Former MSU Moorhead All-American Nadir Yusuf won the men's division in 15:28.30. The women's winner was Augustana freshman Eleni Lovgren. The Williston, ND native covered the 5K course in 18:49.50.



Abby Nechanicky, Wayzata, MN wins the Girls Championship race in a course record time of 16:44.7. Photo courtesy of RunnerSpace.

The stage was now set for the Championship races. First up were the girls. 232 runners toed the line in a field that featured numerous state champions from the Heartland Region. Abbey Nechanicky of Wayzata, MN left no doubt who would win the race as she took charge in the early going and raced to a course-record clocking of 16:44.70. The Colorado recruit won the Minnesota AAA title one week earlier, also in a course record. She came into the meet ranked No. 4 in the US. Her Heartland time was the fifth time she had run under seventeen minutes during the 2022 season.

Paityn Noe of Ballard High School in Huxley, IA was second in 17:02.70. Noe was two-time state champ in Iowa class 3A. She set the course record at the Iowa state meet in Ft. Dodge as well. Noe came into the meet ranked No. 11 in the US. Third place went to Jade Rypkema of Nevis, MN in 17:09.8. Rypkema won the Minnesota class A state title this fall. Sydney Drevlow of Hopkins, MN was fourth in 17:16.8. She was runner-up at the state meet in class AAA. Fifth place went to Norah Hushagen of Forest Lake, MN in 17:17.4. Hushagen was third at the Minnesota state meet in class AAA. The top three placers in the Minnesota state cross country meet in class AAA took three of the top five spots and the Minnesota state champ in class A was also in the top five. Sixth place went to Sioux Falls Lincoln senior Ali Bainbridge in 17:20.5. Bainbridge, also a state champ, won her title in class AA. Based on her finish, she became the first South Dakota girl to earn a trip to the Nike Cross Nationals since 2008.

Wayzata placed their five scoring runners in the top 23 to win the team title with 75 points, earning their sixth trip to the Nationals. Olathe West High School of Kansas was second in the team race with 140 points, which gave Kansas their first team representative at the Nationals.



Jackson Heidesch of West Des Moines, IA edges past Simeon Birnbaum of Rapid City to win the title in the Boys Championship Race. Photo courtesy of RunnerSpace.

The boy's race would prove to be a little more interesting as the outcome was decided in the last few meters of the race. As in the girl's race, numerous state champions were entered among the field of 277. Four runners were ranked in the top 23 in the US. A group of twenty runners stayed towards the front for the first half of the race when several began to distance themselves from the rest of the field. With 100 meters to go, Ford Washburn of Iowa City (runner-up in IA 4A), Jackson Heidesch of West Des Moines, IA (two-time state champ in 4A) and Simeon Birnbaum of Rapid City, SD (two-time SD AA champ) pulled away from the field. Washburn had the lead only to see Birnbaum take it with 25 meters to go. Heidesch would save the best for last, edging ahead of the Rapid City ace in the final few meters.

Heidesch, headed for Duke and ranked no. 21 in the US, who set the course record at the Iowa state meet, finished 14:39.0. Birnbaum, an Oregon recruit, came into the meet ranked number 12 in the US and also set a course record at the SD state meet, finished in 14:39.2. Both were under the Heartland course record of 14:39.4. Washburn would follow in 14:41.6. Fourth place went to Noah Breker of Robbinsdale-Armstrong. Breker was seventh at the MN state meet in class AAA. Finishing in fifth was Colby King of Overland Park, KS in 14:55.5. King is the KS 5A state champ.

Wayzata made it a team sweep, taking the boy's title with 125 points. With the win, the MN AAA champs advanced to the national meet for the tenth time. Stevens Point, the Wisconsin D1 champs, took second with 167 securing their spot in Portland.

Nike will select several at-large teams for the national meet so the Heartland Region could see more squads make it. Final qualifiers will be posted at <https://nxn.runnerspace.com>

South Dakota Placers in the Championship Fields

Girls

6 Ali Bainbridge	SR 983 Greeno Elite	17:20.5
7 Brionna Holso	SR 2158 Rapid City Distance	17:27.2
17 Isabelle Bloker	SO 2569 Sioux Valley Striders	17:50.2
24 Emery Larson	FR 3825 Chester	18:01.2
68 Libby Castelli	SO 3650 Sioux Falls	18:41.3
81 Gracie Uhre	JR 2162 Rapid City Distance	18:53.3
119 Sierra Hopp	SR 2160 Rapid City Distance	19:22.0
140 Heidi Olson	JR 3892 Mobridge-Pollack	19:36.5
175 Brie Peters	SR 3914 Hartford	20:10.1
209 Audrey Weiss	JR 993 Greeno Elite	21:12.7
212 Adison Armstrong	FR 2156 Rapid City Distance	21:13.1
213 Kadance Holso	FR 2159 Rapid City Distance	21:13.8
220 Kaylor Nekl	FR 990 Greeno Elite	21:48.9
221 Ruby Bouwman	FR 986 Greeno Elite	21:54.1

Boys

2 Simeon Birnbaum	SR 2164 Rapid City Distance	14:39.2
56 Sawyer Clarkson	SR 3666 Unattached	15:38.5
64 Lane Krautschun	JR 3813 Unattached	15:43.3
84 Cashton Johnson	SR 1068 Harrisburg Distance	15:50.7
121 Grady Loos	JR 2168 Rapid City Distance	16:05.3
139 Chase Henderson	SR 997 Greeno Elite	16:27.1
166 Kieran Weigelt	JR 4065 Unattached	16:30.2
177 Dylan Payer	JR 3541 Yankton	16:37.4

216 Nathan Thompson	SO 1009 Greeno Elite	16:55.9
228 Miles Lechtenberg	FR 999 Greeno Elite	17:06.9
231 Joseph Levesque	SO 1000 Greeno Elite	17:08.0
272 Harrison Krajewski	FR 3539 Yankton	18:30.1
273 Zach Fedde	SR 3538 Yankton	19:17.6
274 Nate Schoenfelder	SR 3542 Yankton	19:18.6
275 Abe Chance	SO 3536 Yankton	19:20.8
276 Oliver Dooley	SR 3537 Yankton	19:21.0
277 Sam Larrington	SR 3540 Yankton	19:41.7