

WISCONSIN RAPIDS - The Neenah boys cross country team had a collective feeling that it had a chance to do something special this season.

Finishing as WIAA Division 1 state champs certainly qualifies as the Rockets secured their first team state title since 2001 at Saturday's state meet at The Ridges Golf Course.

Matt Meinke led the way with an overall third-place finish time of 15 minutes, 33.9 seconds, but his time was first for those competing in the team competition.

"It feels so good. I couldn't believe (we won) for the first five minutes," he said. "Seeing the team jump around, we were so excited for all of our fans and all of our family. It's unbelievable."

Griffin Congdon (12th, 16:19.2), Trenton Bauer (14th, 16:20.5), Austin Henderson (17th, 16:22.8) and Joe Murray (78th, 17:11) also scored for the Rockets in the team competition.

Neenah coach Mike Jovanovich said the team rallied around the "Dare To Dream" motto to start the season because he said the team knew that it had a "few special athletes."

The Rockets, however, didn't hit their stride until the final lineup was in place and that wasn't until the mid-point of the season, according to Jovanovich.

"We had a freshman coming in (Henderson) and a sophomore (Bauer) that we could figure could be in the top 20 (Team Place)," Jovanovich said. "So we didn't really get it put together until about the middle of the season. Our top two guys were coming in a little bit nicked up and we just believed all season and these guys just believed. ... The younger guys didn't know any better today. We went up last week to Stevens Point and Stevens Point is always formidable and these guys ran so well. And this week it was just mostly about staying relaxed and believing in ourselves and I can't believe it. I'm just in awe. I can't believe it."

Jovanovich, normally an assistant for the Rockets, is the current head coach in place of John Morgen, who is deployed in Jordan as a colonel in the Army National Guard.

Neenah senior Matt Meinke talks about his team winning the WIAA Division 1 state cross country title on Saturday at Wisconsin Rapids "This is so special for him and I'm overwhelmed," he said of Morgen. "He was following this online and he's wishing us the best."

Meinke finished behind Homestead's Drew Bosley (15:20.1) and Kimberly's Rowen Ellenberg (15:30.9) but was pleased with how his final cross country race in high school turned out.

"I just tried to give it my all and I didn't look back once," he said. "I just tried to give it my all. I'm happy with my finish. I did what I needed to do. I'm just so proud of my team."

"I think we're so special this year. We have a lot of seniors and a lot of good guys. We're all very close. We've been working all year. All summer. We've grown so close all year. It's a special year."

# Meinke hopes to make healthy run at state title



Neenah's Matt Meinke, left, battles with Oshkosh North's Wesley Schiek during the 2017 WIAA State Cross Country Championships at Ridges Golf Course in Wisconsin Rapids, WM. GLASHEN/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

## Meinke

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points, followed by Neenah at 70, but it will be a tough challenge for the Papermakers to defend their title as three of their top five runners from last season graduated.

"Last time we won conference, my sophomore year, we placed four in the top 10, which is hard to beat," Meinke said. "I believe we can do the same this year. It won't be easy considering the FVA is one of the toughest conferences in the state, but we'll be tough to beat. Sectionals will also be a test. Stevens Point and Appleton North are great programs and it will be a battle to place top two. It will take the same effort, if not more, to go to state."

Along with Meinke, senior Griffin Condon, sophomore Trenton Bauer, senior Will Newsome, senior Aaron Nussbaum and senior Andrew Kaminski are returning runners this season for Neenah.

**Jordan Jacobson**  
USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

NEENAH - Matt Meinke has lofty goals for the cross-country season.

A nagging injury slowed the Neenah senior at the start of the season, but he's rounding into shape and starting to see positive results.

Meinke finished third at the Midwest Invitational in Janesville on Saturday, and took first place at the Whneconne Invite on Sept. 18.

"This summer we focused more on miles and less speed," Meinke said. "My Achilles has been nagging the past few weeks, but I'm easing back into running now and looking forward to training consistently and racing again with the team."

Meinke won the Fox Valley Association title last year with a time of 15:03 and placed fourth at the WIAA Division 1 state meet, but he desires to achieve more individually and as a team this year after the Rockets finished second at the FVA meet

The Rockets continued their cross-country tradition by heading to Camp Onaway in Waupaca on the first day of practice this season.

"Being stuck on an island for three days with only your teammates around, bonding is inevitable," Meinke said. "Our coaches do a great job of making it fun for everyone and make sure everyone is involved."

"As much as cross-country is running, this is the one time of the year where bonding and working hard together is more important. All of the things we do, we do as a team. In the morning, we wake up to run at 6 a.m. and then from there, it's busy the rest of the day. It's a tiring week but you will have memories that will last forever."

and third at the Neenah sectional.

"I have high goals for not only myself, but for the team this season," Meinke said. "We have a strong team this year. We've got young talent and also many seniors that will be looked at to lead this year's squad."

"In regards to goals for the season, I want to focus on the later meets such as conference, sectionals, state and then on to nationals, but any of the meets before that I'd still want to win and for the team to do well. I want to defend my conference and sectional titles, and win both as a team and then compete for the win at state as an individual. I think we can be on the podium as well."

In order for Meinke to attain his individual goals, he knows it will take some work as Drew Bosley of Homestead won the state meet as a junior last season at 15:39.

Kimberly won the FVA meet last year with 49

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