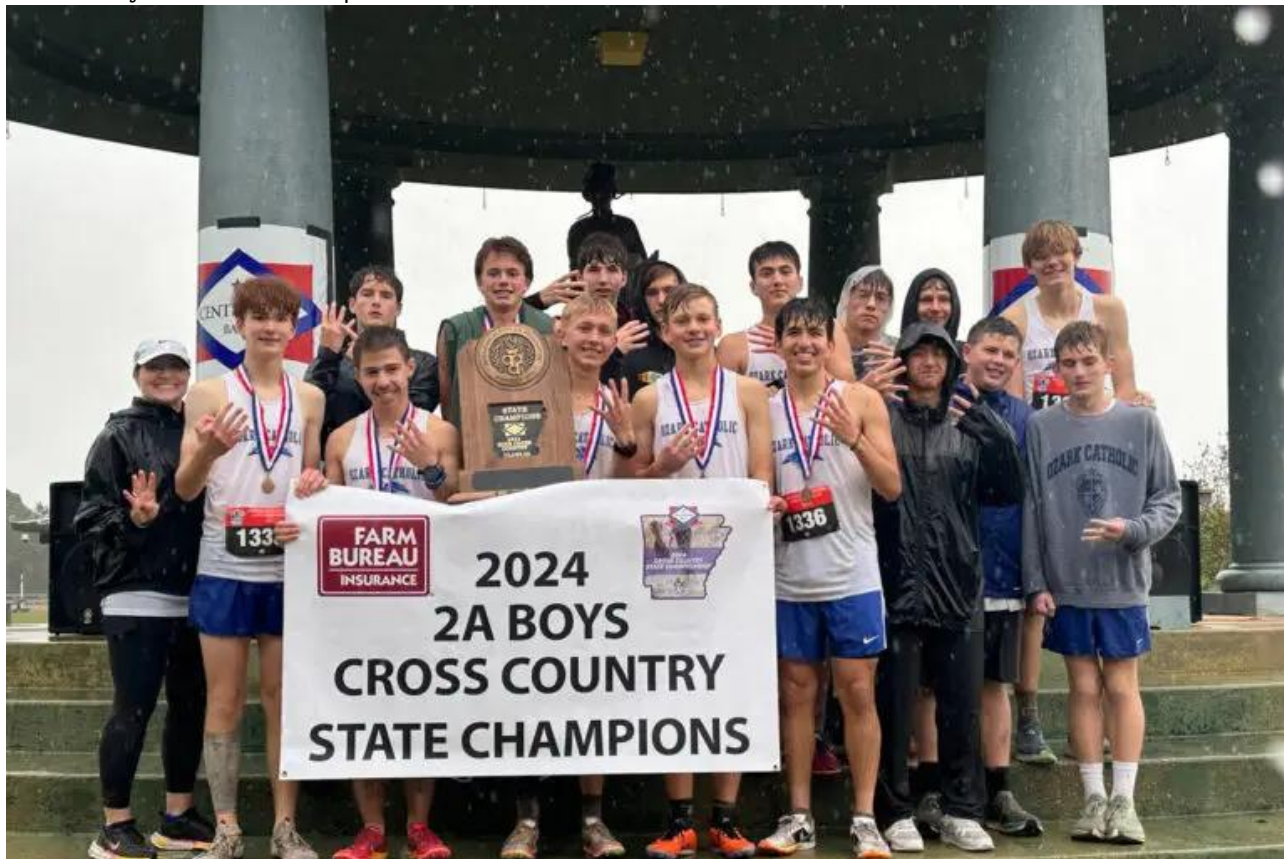


# OCA senior maintains his pace with another XC state title

written by Dwain Hebda |



Isaac Pohlmeier, senior running phenom for the Ozark Catholic Academy Griffins, is rarely stumped in interviews. Being one of the more heralded athletes to come out of middle school in run-crazy northwest Arkansas, he's fielded questions since his days of dominating the competition at St. Joseph School in Fayetteville.

But in the closing moments of this interview a question flew at him that caused him to stop and take serious stock of his running career.

Just how many high school state golds has he won, anyway?

"Umm, well, I've won three individual state cross country titles and part of four team titles," he began. "We won one track team title and then, let's see, I've won the mile my first three years, so that's three, and then the two-mile twice, so that's five, and then I've won the 800 twice, so that's seven."

He pauses, then adds quickly, "I don't know if these count, but I've been on the state championship four-by-1800-meter relay twice as well."

The fact that Pohlmeier has to stop and think about being a 17-time state champ says it all about the senior who, along with the two graduating classes ahead of him and his fellow senior mates, have laid the groundwork for a running dynasty at small, close-knit OCA. At the head of

that column has been the slight but powerful strider Pohlmeier who has set the pace literally and figuratively for the past four years.

“We were confident going in that, even though we’ve got the target on our back, and we were the team that everyone was trying to beat, if we just ran our own race and ran the way we knew we could run it’d all work itself out,” he said. “We just wanted to win as big as possible.”

As final acts go, the 2024 2A state meet, held Nov. 7-8 at Oaklawn in Hot Springs, was a humdinger. The Griffins were running in a new classification for the first time, having decimated the competition in 1A as threepeat state cross-country champions. The move was supposed to level the playing field by pushing OCA up against larger schools and, theoretically, stiffer competition.

Thing is, theories don’t always hold up, especially in athletics where the human spirit and drive can lay the best-placed logic to waste, much like the Griffins did this year. In addition to Pohlmeier smoking the state field, finishing nearly a full minute ahead of teammate Joey Squillance in second place, the Griffins all clustered in the top 11 placements.

In a sport where low score wins, the meet was a laugher with the Griffins finishing 69 points ahead of second-place Caddo Hills. And all this, mind you, under gray, rainy skies that turned the course into a boggy mud slick.

“Super muddy, a bunch of puddles and water and mud all over the course. It was mostly just a fight to get your legs to warm up because it was so cold,” Pohlmeier said. “It was a fight to get through that mud, because every time you would step you would sink into the ground instead of bouncing off the grass like usual.

“A lot of it was just strength, being confident in your leg strength and knowing that once you stepped into it, you could push yourself up thanks to the constant training you did for months to get your legs stronger.”

Pohlmeier was quick to credit the efforts of the team from top to bottom but saved special praise for his senior teammate Squillance.

“I knew we had a good shot to win big again this year and (Squillance) and I just kept pushing each other in practice,” he said. “We kept each other accountable on weekends, we’d go on long runs and push each other. We wanted to go out with the first (2A state title) in OCA history.”

The teammates have one last hurrah at the high school level — looking to avenge last year’s narrow upset loss in track and field team scoring — before stepping into the next chapter. For Pohlmeier, that means running for Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia next season while studying kinesiology. He and Squillance leave OCA knowing the program is in very good hands.

In addition to juniors, particularly Ben Frederick and Liam Burney, “I have an eighth-grade brother who runs cross country; he’ll go to OCA next year,” Pohlmeier said. He described the oncoming Dominic Pohlmeier as “pretty good” before his competitive streak kicked in.

“I mean, he’s slower than what I was running as an eighth grader, but only by about 30 or 40 seconds,” he said with a big brother grin. “He’s pretty quick. Just not as quick as I was.”