

## Title is Icing on the Cake for Men's Cross Country

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"This group embraced the idea that we should persevere in our faith and through all areas of our lives, together," says Coach Nate Wolf.

# TITLE IS ICING ON THE CAKE FOR MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

Dordt men's cross country claimed the 67th Annual NAIA Men's Cross Country National Championship at Apalachee Regional Park in Tallahassee in November.

The win is Dordt's first national title in any team sport. It also makes the team the first in the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) to win a cross country national championship.

Senior Joe Anderson had a sense that the team might place well, but he wasn't exactly sure how well. "It takes everything coming together on that day to win a national title," he says. "We were blessed with our best race of the season."

Before going to nationals, says Senior Eric Steiger, the team knew that they were one of seven potential contenders for the title. They had consistently ranked third or fourth over the course of the season, in part because other teams weren't sure how good the Defenders were.

"As a team based in the Midwest, we don't get the opportunity to race

on many fast courses or with good weather," explains Steiger. "In addition to that, we don't get to race many of the top teams in the nation. This makes it hard for people to understand how we would stack up against others. With these low expectations we really enjoyed being able to show what a gritty team from Northwest Iowa could do against the rest of the nation."

culmination of aerobic development contributed to a successful season," says Steiger. "Cross country is unique because the only race that matters for us is nationals. So when we begin our training in June, it is with the focus and intent of performing well at a single race in mid-November."

Senior Davis Tebben remembers walking out before the race and looking back at the hundreds of runners grouped together at the starting line. "I thought, 'This is the last cross country race I'll ever get to race. I'm so thankful to be here, and no matter how this race goes, I'm going to enjoy it.' I locked that image away in my mind, jogged back to my team, and raced."

Looking back at the race, Junior Peter Shippy recalls how he hoped that he would not let his teammates down and that he would run the best race he could.

“It takes everything coming together on that day to win a national title. We were blessed with our best race of the season.”

— Joe Anderson, senior

Prior to the championships, the team trained hard. They spent the summer doing workouts and running 90 to 100 miles per week. Even on the morning of his wedding, Anderson ran 10 miles.

"We had quite a few guys who ran over 3,000 miles in 2022, and that



"The night before, we talked about how to run the race, it was key for me to start further back because I tend to race poorly if I go out with the top guys," he says. "I wanted to start working my way up at mile two. I followed that plan during the race. When I caught up to Eric, Davis, and Joe—which I hadn't done all season up to that point—it became real to me that we could actually win it, so I just tried to hang on."

Hang on he did, and the men's cross country team was rewarded for its months-long effort by taking home the first place trophy.

"Everything is special about this group," says Men's Cross Country Coach Nate Wolf. "Their willingness to sacrifice and share in each other's successes. The way they prepared after a disappointing 2021 national championship race. I challenged the team at the start of the year to not be satisfied with good but to pursue the fullest extent of their God-given abilities and to do that together."

Looking back at the race, Wolf is struck by how well the team raced. "Since 2016, only one other men's team has scored fewer than 100 points at the national meet (we scored 97). The men beat the defending national champions who scored the exact same number of points that they did in 2021, when they won by 60 points. Our top six runners were

across the line in 34 seconds, before any other team had five runners finish. It was not only a championship performance, but one of the best championship performances by a men's team in the past decade."

Even winning first place at nationals couldn't make Tebben more grateful for being part of the team than he already was. "I was already so full of gratitude for these people. Dordt cross country is one of the great blessings of my life; many of my best friends and best memories have come from this team, and Wolf is the best coach I've ever had."

Steiger agrees. "I don't think I'm out of line in saying that our team wouldn't trade the relationships we've built with each other and with Coach Wolf for even a national title. Obviously, we structure our running around the national championship and performing to the best of our abilities there, but we run because we love to do it with each other, and we get to work toward a common goal together. The national championship was the icing on the cake for a running career I already couldn't be more grateful for. I am so thankful for the teammates and the coaching staff I was surrounded by and for how running at Dordt developed me into the person I am today."

SARAH MOSS ('10)



## WOLF NAMED TOP DOG

Coach Nate Wolf was named the NAIA Men's Cross Country Coach of the Year after leading Dordt to the national championship.

Wolf, who took over both the men's and women's program in 2015, continues to add to his impressive coaching resumé at Dordt. Named GPAC Coach of the Year 11 times (six times for the women's program, five times for the men's program), Wolf has guided the Dordt men to five consecutive conference titles and five straight trips to the NAIA National Championship event. He has led the women's program to three straight GPAC titles, six overall during his eight-year tenure, and eight consecutive NAIA Championship appearances. Wolf was named the GPAC Coach of the Year in both men's and women's cross country this season as well as the Midwest Regional Coach of the Year and National Coach of the Year by the United States Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association.

What Wolf enjoys most about coaching cross country are the athletes. "I get to see some of the best people I know, nearly every day. I get to see 17 and 18-year-olds mature and develop as runners, as students, as people, and in their faith as they progress to 21 and 22-year-olds and then depart Dordt to be kingdom citizens looking to be part of God's redemptive work," says Wolf. "There are no words that fully encompass how I feel about them, and I am beyond privileged to have them call me their coach."



DORDT DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS INFORMATION

"I love to be outside, exploring new roads, moving faster than I thought I could," says Davis Tebben. "I love the people I run with and knowing that a workout made me better."