

Zack Munger breaks records at state

Cross country runner overcomes adversity, matching all-time school record at state

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An ear erupting bang vibrates the air. The sight of the smoking gun signified the race had begun. It was Zack Munger's time to prove himself. In the race, Munger finished sixth place, setting himself up for a run towards state.

Munger, a junior, has been invested in running since he was 12 years old. His dad inspired him to participate in the sport when he noticed how fast and quick he was.

"I started running cross country because it's what I'm good at," Munger said. "I found something I didn't like at first, and I never liked training because it's running. Some people like running for fun, but I like winning and finishing my races."

Munger's cross country career started slowly with taking the summer off to participate in the Junior Olympics. He returned his freshman year, but during his sophomore year, his season was put on hold when he got back blood test results stunting his progress.

"I came back, and I had an iron injection because I took a blood test, and my iron levels were low," Munger said. "The doctors said this iron is supposed to help you run faster because your blood will be more oxygenated. This really hurt my season, but my team and coaches helped me get through it."

Cross country coach Dalton Pool has supported Munger since he joined the team. Pool has been an inspiration

to Munger, pushing him to be the best.

"He had a really strong freshman year but struggled his sophomore year with some health issues," Pool said. "I wasn't counting on him to be a top runner this season, so when he became our top runner by the end of the year and then qualified for state I was pleasantly surprised. But at the same time, Zach has always worked hard, and we both knew if he figured out his health stuff, he could be successful."

After Munger made it to regionals, he felt at the top of his game. He continued practicing with the team and pushing himself despite the health issues and other setbacks.

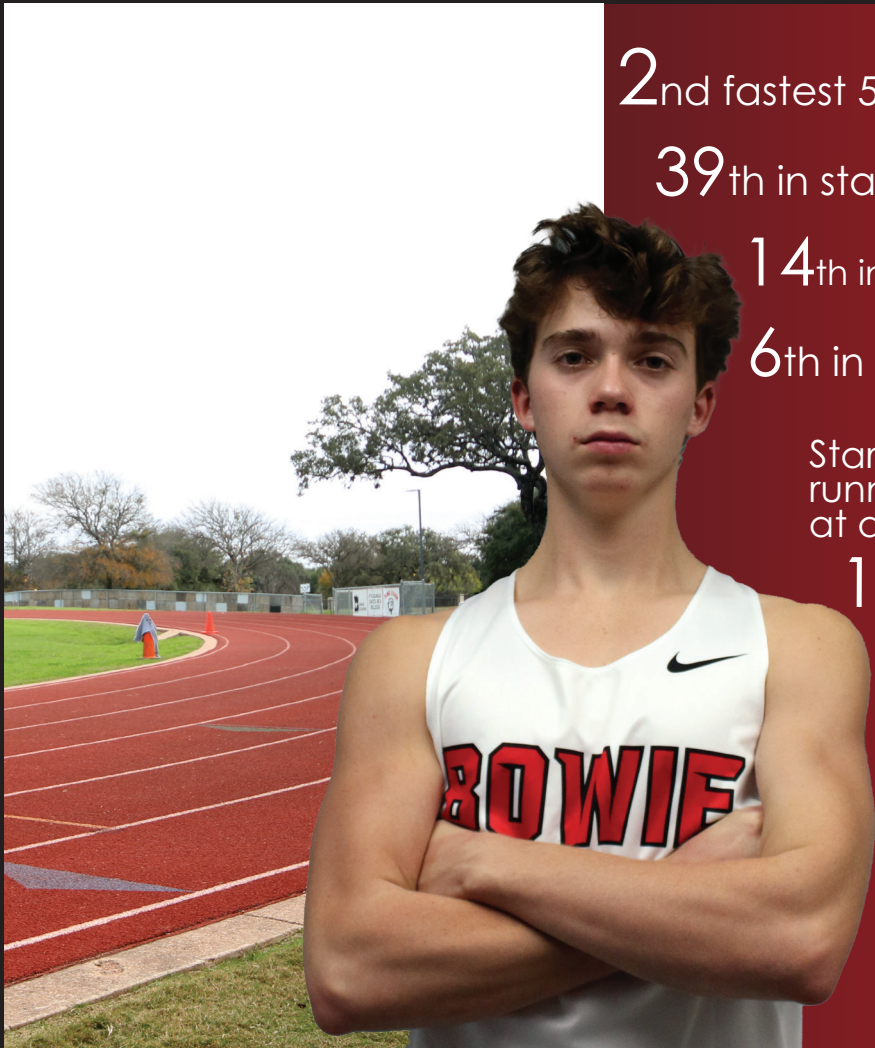
"Patience is a huge challenge for me because over-training is a big thing. I always want to work out constantly, and I never want to rest," Munger said. "But this season, I prioritize taking off days and just making sure my body's fully recovered before I do my next workout. Patients helped me stay fresh, and focusing on my mental

health also helped."

Munger's training finally paid off when he placed 14th at regionals which helped the team qualify for the state meet.

"Regionals was a hard race, it was 90 degrees and right next to a sewage plant, which was terrible," Munger said. "The team didn't do good, and I placed 14th, which was lucky because I barely made the cut-off. They sent 40 kids to the state, including me."

When the state competition began, Munger was ready to compete, warming up with the team and listening to music to get him locked in for the



2nd fastest 5k by a Bowie runner

39th in state: 15:15 minutes

14th in regionals: 16:15 minutes

6th in district: 16:31 minutes

Started running at age: **12**

Average amount of miles completed during season: **45** a week

race distances:
xc 5k
xc 2 mile
track 400m
track 800m
track 1600m

ART AND PHOTO BY Reagan Zuniga

race.

"Crossing the finish line, seeing the time because they have a big clock at the finish line," Munger said. "There isn't much to it; people worry a lot about warming up, and the night before, what are you eating? How much sleep are you getting? But the only thing that can prepare you to be better than everyone else in that race is your training."

During the state competition,

Munger set a new personal record by 20 seconds, earning the title of the 2nd fastest 5k runner in Bowie history.

"Knowing that I'm setting this record is awesome," Munger said. "I feel like all my hard work and dedication is finally paying off. My coaches and teammates really supported me through everything, and doing so well at state felt like a team effort."

Munger's progress and redemp-

tion after his sophomore year season surprised Pool. Munger stuck to his diet plans, workouts and supported his team, all of which played a role in his state performance.

"At a certain point to become a great runner, you must be self-motivated," Pool said. "Zach has always been harder on himself than I have been on him. Which is just one more reason why he achieved so much success this year." ■