

# Puyear Finishes In State Qualifying Position at Sectionals, First Deerfield Runner To Do So Since 2011



It was not how he imagined it. Josh Puyear lined up at Sectionals without his team and without a State Meet to qualify for. But he ran his heart out and still accomplished what he had always aimed for.

At last week's Regional, Deerfield's best season in decades ended early as an unlucky draw placed them with some of the state's toughest teams. Despite the team's elimination, Puyear grabbed an individual qualifying spot for Sectionals.

Normally, teams and individuals at Sectionals are competing for state qualifying spots. The top seven teams and top ten individuals not on qualifying teams were supposed to qualify. But this year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the IHSA elected to offer the Regional and Sectional rounds, but not the State Finals. However, while this was the end of the road, teams and runners could still be proud of finishing in State qualifying

positions despite not actually getting the chance to compete at State.

That's what Puyear was aiming for. He lined up with each team's top runner and the top five individual qualifiers in Flight 1, a very elite group. The entire group of 20 runners ran in a single pack for the first mile, and the pace was fast. Over time, more and more runners started to fall off, but Puyear went for it and hung on through nearly two miles. At that point, fatigue set in and his pace slowed down, but he was already in position for a great finish. A few runners who fell off the pace prematurely wound up passing Puyear at the end of the race, but Puyear held on for 12th place in the flight in 15:54. After all the other flights ran, nine more runners ran faster than Josh's 15:54, so Josh's final place was 21st.

After removing all the runners whose teams would have qualified, Puyear was the fifth finisher, meaning he would have qualified for State! Puyear is the first Deerfield runner to finish in State qualifying position in the 3A classification since Alex Gold in 2011.

Puyear's career started with bang as he was Deerfield's first freshman in a long time to run on the varsity level. He narrowly missed All-Conference (top 14) as a freshman and finished in the top five every year after that. He ran in the State Meet as a freshman because the team was classified as 2A that year. For the rest of his career, Deerfield was classified as 3A, and if it weren't for the pandemic, Puyear would have successfully earned his way back to the State Meet but on the much harder 3A stage. It's an amazing accomplishment. Puyear has stamped his name all over the DFDC record books. Congratulations on an amazing career!

