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Solon High School, Middle School Science Olympiad teams win national tournament

Published: Wednesday, May 25, 2011, 5:24 PM

By **Kyla Price, Sun News**
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Solon's Science Olympiad teams broke a 21-year-old record May 21 at the 27th annual National Science Olympiad Tournament, taking first place in both the middle school and high school divisions.

This is the fourth year in a row Solon's middle school team won the national title, but it is the first time since 1998 that the high school team landed in the top spot.

The tournament was held at the University of Wisconsin and featured 23 different science-related events in which students had to compete. Participants battled for individual medals, and those who earned the lowest scores took the top spots. Team trophies were then granted based upon cumulative points earned throughout the tournament.

Approximately 6,200 teams began competing at the beginning of the season, but only 120 made it to nationals, representing 47 states.

The average state only has one team represented in each of the two divisions at nationals, but in Ohio, two teams made it to each division.

"Ohio has really strong science programs," said Diana Ross, coach for Solon's high school team.

There were only 10 other states that had more than one team in both the middle school and high school divisions, and Solon was one of few districts that had representation in both.

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During the awards ceremony, middle school coach Drew Kirian did not hold out much hope for a victorious outcome.

"About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the awards ceremony, I pulled out my phone and began texting my assistant coach. I said, 'It's not looking too good.' At that point, we had only medaled twice," Kirian said.

However, the team made it through in the end, as Kirian had hoped.

"My team this year is very relaxed. They are confident and they work well as a team," he said.

The high school team, which Ross has coached since the 1997-1998 school year, has been in the top 10 for the past 13 years.

"This year's team was very dedicated," she said. "Those that make it to the top have sincere commitment and passion for what they do."

Ross credits unity as the primary factor behind this year's success.

"For the team that won in 1998, it didn't matter if a student was a sophomore, junior or senior. They were all one team — and they respected each other for what they knew," she said.

This year's team fostered that same concept, helping one another to work together, she said.

Sometimes you get a group of kids who by January haven't bonded yet," Ross said, explaining those types of teams usually do not make it as far as those who build social bonds.

Centerville High School, near Dayton, was the two-time defending champion entering the competition, but finished second to Solon.

"There was only a 6-point spread between first and second place. That's not a very big gap," Ross said. "They were all very good."

Whether Solon will manage to make another mark such as this in the future is unknown, but the coaches think it is certainly possible.

"What these kids do is absolutely phenomenal. I'm amazed year to year," Ross said.

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