

## **MORRIS COUNTY REWIND**

### **MEET OF CHAMPIONS EDITION**

What do you get when you combine a first year cross-country runner with a runner that has sprained their ankle twice, a runner who suffered a concussion while running, a runner who completed a race with a bloody foot after running half a race with one shoe and a sophomore running with lots of pressure on them?

The answer is- The 2013 Meet of Champions winning Randolph girls cross-country team.

The Randolph girls, coached by Len Pietrewicz and Kevin Higgins, overcame so many obstacles this season to make their dream become a reality by beating runner-up Red Bank Catholic, 106-113, at the 42nd Meet of Champions last Saturday at Holmdel Park.

The top five runners for Randolph were first year runner Liz Lansing, fourth in 18:14, Carole Harsch, who suffered two sprained ankles this season (24th in 19:04), Margaret Thomson, who ran half the race with one shoe (30th in 19:11), Liz Wellman, who missed a lot of action after suffering a concussion in September when she tripped on a root and hit her head at Garret Mountain (46th in 19:36), and sophomore Nora May McSorley, 106th in 20:36.

McSorley had a lot of pressure on her to drop her time from the week before and she responded by slicing 17 seconds off her time. Lansing cut 15 seconds off her time from Group 4, Harsch dropped 35 seconds, and Thompson managed to run 11 seconds faster despite her shoe coming off. Randolph's average at the M of C was 19:20.

"We had a lot of obstacles this season, but it just shows our dedication and commitment to come back," Harsch said.

It was the first Meet of Champions title for Randolph as it became the first team since 2009 to win the M of C title after losing at the state Group meet the week before. Randolph was second to West Windsor-Plainsboro South in the Group 4 race on Nov. 16.

Ironically, it was Randolph in 2009 that was favored to win the Meet of Champions after it had beaten Hillsborough for the Group 4 title, but Hillsborough upset Randolph to win by one point to win the title.

Randolph is the fourth Morris County team to win an MOC title. The Morris Catholic boys won back-to-back titles in 1974-75. The Roxbury girls had back-to-back titles in 2004-05. Mount Olive girls won in 1989 led by Christine Engel, current Head Coach at Elon College

"This is such a blessing and it's amazing," said Lansing, who ran cross-country for the first time this season after giving up soccer. "This is so special and it means the world to us. We made state history and school history."

**VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH LIZ LANSING** - [http://videos.nj.com/star-ledger/2013/11/liz\\_lansing\\_of\\_randolph\\_talks.html](http://videos.nj.com/star-ledger/2013/11/liz_lansing_of_randolph_talks.html)

Although no one on the current Randolph team ran on the 2009 team that finished second at the M of C, Harsch remembers that race vividly.

"I was at that race in 2009," said Harsch, who ran for the second straight week with a sprained ankle that was re-injured at sectionals. "I remember when they found out they lost by one point, and how all the girls were crying. Our coaches said all year that this was the best team we've ever had."

### **ONE SHOE HERO**

There are so many Legends of the Fall who have left indelible marks on the great sport of cross-country in New Jersey over the years.

Runners like Janet Smith, Michelle Rowen, Jodie Bilotta, Monal Chokshi, Jason DiJoseph, Brendan Heffernan, Craig Forys, Jim and Joe Rosa, and Edward Cheserek are all remembered for how they dominated the sport with red hot performances that made people drop their jaws in astonishment.

But you don't always have to be the fastest runner or a record breaking machine to become an unforgettable part of New Jersey's rich distance running history.

Sometimes a runner can spill their guts on the course, show remarkable heart and resiliency, and overcome all the odds with a courageous and memorable performance to earn a place in N.J. XC lore.

Margaret Thomson did exactly that last Saturday when she delivered a heroic performance at Holmdel Park that will be talked about for years and years to come.

Thomson, a junior at Randolph, had just passed the mile mark and was heading toward the bowl at the 42nd XC Meet of Champions when her right shoe came off after someone stepped on it from behind.

She knew her team was in contention to win the team title, so stopping wasn't an option.

**VIDEO WITH MARGARET THOMSON**- [http://videos.nj.com/star-ledger/2013/11/margaret\\_thomson\\_of\\_randolph\\_h.html](http://videos.nj.com/star-ledger/2013/11/margaret_thomson_of_randolph_h.html)

"Carole (Harsch) ran past me and asked if I was OK," Thomson said. "I knew I couldn't stop and that my team had worked so hard. I figured if Carole (her teammate) could keep running (with a sprained ankle), so could I."

Running down, up and then out of the bowl and pounding her shoeless foot over Holmdel's gravel trails took its toll as Thomson's right foot, which began throbbing and bleeding as she

made her way past the tennis courts and into the back woods.

Despite a big flap of skin hanging off her big toe and quarter sized blood blister on the ball of her foot, she kept fighting her way through every step of the pain. She was determined to do everything she could to help her team reach its ultimate goal of winning the ultimate prize.

As the shoeless Thomson came hammering through the kill zone at the end of the race, she picked off several runners and somehow came across the line with a new personal best time at Holmdel of 19:11 to place third for her team and 30th in the race.

When the team scores were announced, almost everyone on the Randolph team jumped up and down in total euphoria as the Rams had edged Red Bank Catholic, 106-113, for its first Meet of Champions title ever. Everyone except Thomson that is.

Thomson was on the ground nearby having her foot bandaged up by the medical staff.

I asked Thomson if it was worth the pain?

She smiled and said, "Definitely. It's all about the team. I would do anything for them."

Randolph junior Liz Lansing, who finished fourth in 18:14, marveled at Thomson's competitiveness and toughness.

"She's such a fighter," Lansing said of Thomson. "It's amazing what she did for the team. We would not have been able to win this without what she did. I am so proud of her for being able to fight through it. I have so much respect for what Margaret did today."

Margaret Thomson represented what the sport of XC is all about!!! Running with your heart, sacrificing yourself for the team, laying it all on the line for teammates that you've side-by-side with since the summer.

While her teammates were properly calling Thomson a hero, she was very humble about the part she played saying "we won this as a team."

Yes, Randolph did win as a team with a great overall performance from its entire pack. But make no mistake about it, Thomson has secured a place in NJ XC history as the One Shoe Hero!!

### **BARRY, MOUNT OLIVE, O'KANE, AND WEST MORRIS GIRLS SHINE**

Although Randolph grabbed the headlines at the Meet of Champions, there were several other runners and teams that sparkled.

Providence-bound Mackenzie Barry of Mendham became one of very few runners to finish in the top 10 four straight years when she placed third for third straight year in a Holmdel PR of 18:12, the same time as runner-up Josette Norris of Tenafly. Barry was 10th as a freshman.

West Morris had three runners in the race, Sierra Castaneda, 10th in 18:39, Brennan Sharkey, 14th in 18:50, and Kylene Cochrane, 42nd in 19:28.

Castaneda emerged as one of the state's best runners this season, and since she's just a sophomore, look out this major talent on the state scene over the next couple years. But Castaneda isn't just a great distance runner, she is also one of the state's top swimmer. She will be back on the track in the spring after the swim season.

Ashleigh Thurston of Morris Hills completed a great late season run by placing 22nd in 19:03, a drop of 20 seconds off her time in the Group 3 race. Morristown's Christine O'Kane also had a great race, placing 31st in 19:12.

In the team competition, Mount Olive finished a very strong eighth with an average of 19:57, just off its school record average of 19:53 the week before when it won the state Group 3 title for the first time since 1989. Villa Walsh finished 19th as senior Jackie Endres led the way by running 21:03.

For Mount Olive, Sarah Masukewicz was 57th in 19:47, Sarah Christian 88th in 20:13, Mariah Christian 92nd in 20:18, and Erin Schafer was 97th in 20:24.

In other highlights, Micaela Reilly of Morristown Beard finished 63rd in 19:51, and Olivia Viparina of Roxbury was 75th in 20:00.

## **BOYS MEET OF CHAMPIONS REWIND**

### **MORRISTOWN AND DELBARTON RUN STRONG RACE**

Morristown, coming off its runner-up finish to Middletown North in the Group 3 race, wanted to have a much stronger showing at the Meet of Champions. It accomplished that goal by averaging 16:49.7 and placing eighth with 241 points, just four points behind seventh-place Haddonfield. Morristown's average was eight seconds faster than its time at the Group 3 meet.

Delbarton also had a great race, placing 12th with 261 points and an average of 16:55.9, almost exactly what it averaged when it placed third in the Non Public A race the week before (16:55.5).

Leading the charge was sectional champion Sean Lyons. The senior ran a Holmdel PR of 16:11 to place 24th. That was 30 seconds faster than what he ran at the Group 3 meet. The rest of Morristown's to five were Evan Quinn, 73rd in 16:46, Gavin Pitt, 89th in 16:59, John Vallachi, 91st in 17:01, and Rudy Torres, 105th in 17:14.

For Delbarton, Mike Maguire was 50th in 16:31, Jack O'Reilly 72nd in 16:45, Anthony Kearns 97th in 17:08, Jordan Earlywine 98th in 17:08, and Robbie Siegel 101st in 17:10.

## **GUTSY RACE BY HANKO**

Despite feeling less than 100 percent, Josiah Hanko of Trinity Christian still made a valiant attempt to win the Meet of Champions.

Right up front with the leaders for most of the race, the Duke-bound Hanko started to struggle near the end of the race as his body began to succumb to flu-like symptoms. Hanko slowed up noticeably and started to wobble as he approached the finish line before finally collapsing just a few meters from the finish. He crawled across the line in ninth place (15:46) and was immediately treated in an ambulance for over an hour.

Hanko was bed ridden for a few days this week. As a result, Hanko is a race-time decision for Saturday's Foot Locker Northeast Regional at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx.

### **LUCIANO BREAKS 16**

After running 16:02 to win the state Group 2 title on Nov. 16, senior Chris Luciano of Mountain Lakes was determined to break 16 minute for the first time at Holmdel in his final attempt. He got what he wanted by running 15:55 to finish 17th.

Junior Will Mitchell of Chatham also had a great race placing 65th in 16:31.

### **NEXT UP**

While the cross-country season is over for most, a handful of runners and teams will be in action tomorrow at the Nike and Foot Locker Northeast Regional Championships.

At the Foot Locker meet at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, Mackenzie Barry of Mendham, a Foot Locker national finalist last year, and West Morris teammates Sierra Castaneda and Brennan Sharkey are among the top hopefuls to qualify for the girls Foot Locker National Championships.

On the boys side, state champs Josiah Hanko of Trinity Christian (the Non Public B winner) and Chris Luciano of Mountain Lakes (the Group 2 winner) are among those entered. Hanko is a race-time decision after battling through the flu earlier this week. If Hanko is feeling good, he and Luciano both have a good chance of advancing.

The top 10 finishers in the boys and girls races will advance to the Foot Locker National Championships on Dec. 14 in San Diego.

For more info on the Foot Locker Regional, go to <http://footlockercc.com/northeast/>

At the Nike Northeast Regional at Bowdoin Park in Wappingers Falls, N.Y., the Randolph and Mount Olive girls and Morristown boys and girls will be in action. The top two teams and top five runners not on a qualifying team in both the boys and girls races and will advance to the Nike Nationals on Dec. 7 in Portland, Oregon.

For more information on the Nike Regional, go to  
[http://nxnne.runnerspace.com/eprofile.php?do=news&event\\_id=301](http://nxnne.runnerspace.com/eprofile.php?do=news&event_id=301)

### **MEET OF CHAMPIONS TRIVIA**

Did you know that the only Morris County boys team to win the Meet of Champions title is Morris Catholic!

That's right, in 1974 and '75, coach Tom Donahue guided the Crusaders to back-to-back titles as Morris Catholic became the first boys program to ever win the prestigious championship two straight years. In 1975, Morris Catholic edged Morris Hills, 129-130, for the team title.

Morris Catholic also placed second at the M of C in 1976, fourth in '77 and third in '78, and won five straight state Non Public B titles from 1974-78.

Donahue was chosen by The Star-Ledger as the New Jersey Cross-Country Coach of the Decade for the 1970's.

### **COLLEGE NEWS**

Kylene Cochrane of West Morris, one of the state's top middle distance/distance runners, announced this week that she will attend the University of Pennsylvania next fall. Cochrane also considered Wake Forest, Bucknell, Boston College, Virginia Tech and Villanova.

Congrats, Kylene!!