

MORRIS COUNTY REWIND

Morris County's finest put on a remarkable show with several breathtaking performances at the State Group Championships at Holmdel Park last Saturday.

How great was Morris County?

How about four state champions (one team and three individual winners) in the 12 races, and several other qualifiers into Saturday's Meet of Champions.

Let's get right into it with the Morris County Rewind.

BOYS GROUP CHAMPIONSHIP RECAP

HANKO KICKS HIS WAY TO A MEET RECORD VICTORY

Josiah Hanko not only successfully defended his state Non-Public B title, he did so in record breaking fashion.

In one of the most eagerly anticipated races of the day, Hanko outdueled friendly rival Liam Mullett of Pingry, the 2010 state Non Public B champion, by pulling away over the final 1,200 meters to win in a Non Public B record 15:39!!! That time broke the Non Public B record of 15:44 set in 2007 by Doug Smith of Gill St. Bernard's, and is a 20 second personal best at Holmdel for Hanko.

Mullett came into the race undefeated against New Jersey competition.

"I came in knowing it was going to be a tough race," said the Duke-bound Hanko. "I wasn't sure how the race was going to play out. I was confident I could stick with him, but the next step was could I lose him? After sticking with him for two-and-a-half miles, I was feeling great and put a lot into my surge after the tennis courts going into the woods, and when I hit the downhill I was able to keep that momentum all the way to the finish."

LUCIANO KEEPS THE LAKERS STREAK ALIVE

Chris Luciano's breakout season continued with the biggest win of his career when the senior pulled away to win the Group 2 race with a big Holmdel personal best of 16:02.

With the victory, Luciano became the third straight boy and fourth straight runner from

Mountain Lakes to win a state XC title.

Kristen Landry won the girls Group 1 race in 2010, Steve Lewandowski finished first in Group 1 in 2011, and Luciano's current teammate Ben DeVenezia won Group 1 last year.

“I'm not really surprised because I knew going into the race that I was training my best for this part in the season,” said Luciano. “In those early meets this season when I wasn't running so great, I was training hard so I could run my best at the end of the season and do well here, at Meet of Champions, and at Foot Locker. I came into this race with the mentality that I was not going to lose. I was determined to get the win.”

Luciano said adding his name to the great Lakers legacy of state champions means a lot to him.

“Just to get my name up there with a bunch of legendary Lakers like Steve, Ben, Kristen Landy and Colette Richter is pretty awesome,” said Luciano.

MORRISTOWN GETS 2ND

Morristown had high hopes of winning its first state title since 1997, but ran into a buzzsaw in Middletown North and wound up second for the second straight year, 100-145.

Senior Sean Lyons led the way by placing 18th in 16:41 as Morristown put three runners under 17 minutes and averaged 16:57.5.

DELBARTON ADVANCES IN A THRILLER

With first and second place locked up with No. 1 CBA and No. 3 Don Bosco Prep, a wild scramble took place for the third and final qualifying spot in the Non Public A race between Delbarton and NJAC rival Pope John.

Delbarton was trailing Pope John by 17 points after each team had four runners across, but Delbarton freshman Anthony Kearns finished 18 places ahead of Pope John's No. 5 runner to give Delbarton a dramatic 115-116 decision over Pope John for the final automatic qualifying spot into the Meet of Champions.

Another big key for the Green Wave was the finish by junior Jordan Earlywine. Earlywine, the No. 4 runner for Delbarton, edged Pope John's No. 4 runner by one place, crossing a stride ahead.

Delbarton, led by senior Jack O'Reilly (15th in 16:34), had a 1-5 spread of 50 seconds and averaged 16:55.5, the top Morris County average of the day.

GIRLS GROUP CHAMPIONSHIP RECAP

EMOTIONAL VICTORY

There were a lot of tears and cheers after the team scores were announced for the girls Group 3 race and it was revealed that Mount Olive, coached by Mike Behre, had finished first, 134-152 over runner-up Seneca. It's the second state title in school history for the Marauders, who last won in 1989.

Mount Olive, which had a 62 second 1-5 spread and averaged a Holmdel Park school record of 19:52, trailed Seneca by four points after each team had three runners across, but Mount Olive's No. 4 and No. 5 runners outscored Seneca at the last two scoring places by a combined 22 points to rally for the win.

"It's unbelievable," said Mount Olive senior Sara Christian, Mount Olive's No. 4 runner in the race (41st in 20:16). "We've had this goal ever since the summer."

Sara Christian is one of three Christian sisters on the team. Sophomore Alexandra Christian was the top finisher for Mount Olive, placing 19th in 19:27, and senior Mariah was 25th in 19:39.

Sara said that she and her sisters were reminded of what their goals were all season whenever they looked in the mirror at home where they had notes with the goals written down.

One of the notes said "Hold on for 19 minutes of agony for 12 months of glory." Another one referred to winning the group title and breaking the school record at Holmdel.

I guess seeing really is believing!!!

LANSING MAKES HISTORY

It sure didn't take Liz Lansing long to make an impact on the state cross-country scene.

In her first season of cross-country after giving up soccer, Lansing, a junior, blasted past Eve Glasergreen of North Hunterdon with about 500 meters to go on her way to winning the state Group 4 race in 18:29, the third fastest time of the day.

With the victory, Lansing, the Meet of Champions outdoor 1,600 champion as a freshman, became the first state XC champion from Randolph.

"It means the world to me," said Lansing. I feel so blessed and it's just an amazing feeling."

BOYS MEET OF CHAMPIONS PREVIEW

SATURDAY, NOV. 23 AT HOLMDEL PARK

GIRLS RACE-11 A.M.

BOYS RACE 11:45 A.M.

PARKING-Free at Holmdel Park

BOYS OUTLOOK

MORRIS COUNTY TEAM QUALIFIERS: Morristown and Delbarton

MORRIS COUNTY INDIVIDUAL QUALIFIERS: Josiah Hankom Trinity Christian; Chris Luciano, Mountain Lakes; Will Mitchell, Chatham; Ben DeVenezia, Mountain Lakes

HANKO TRYING TO PULL OFF THE UPSET

Josiah Hanko knows that with Tom O'Neill of Middletown North back to defend his M of C title that he's an underdog in this race, but that doesn't mean the senior at Trinity Christian isn't confident and optimistic about his chances.

"There are so many good guys in this race that a lot of different things can happen," said the Duke-bound Hanko. "I just want to stay relaxed and focus on keeping pace with O'Neill and see what I can do."

Hanko dropped his Holmdel personal best by 20 seconds when he won the Non Public B race.

"I think I can drop it a lot more," said Hanko. "I just have to see how the race progresses and try to stick with the leader and see how it goes."

There are a meet record 15 runners in the race that have cracked 16 minutes at Holmdel, and the top seven finishers from last year return.

"If someone is willing to take the pace out fast, this could be a really fast race," said Hanko. "I'm looking forward to it. It should be a lot of fun."

CBA GOES FOR NO. 19 AND THE COURSE RECORD

CBA has won three straight M of C titles and a state record 18 overall (the rest of the state has combined for 22). The next highest total is four by Paul VI.

With the Colts expected to steamroll to yet another title, the only real question will be how much it wins by and if it can break the course record average of 16:03.2, set last year by CBA in the Non Public A race.

CBA, led by individual winner Mike McClemens, had a spread of just 18 seconds between its first and fifth runners and averaged 16:05.0, No. 3 all-time, when it won the Non Public A title last week.

“We'll see if we can (break the course record), but our goal is always to win the race,” McClemens said. “That's the most important thing.”

CBA's lineup is expected to be McClemens, senior Fran Bogan, senior Tom Rooney, sophomore Blaise Ferro, junior Josh Kruppa, sophomore Nick Trigani, and senior Mike Cassidy.

Among the teams looking to dethrone CBA will be No. 2 West Windsor South, which won its second straight Group 4 title, No. 3 Don Bosco Prep, the Non Public A runner-up, No. 4 Middletown North, the Group 3 champion, and No. 5 Westfield, the Group 4 runner-up.

O'NEILL ON THE VERGE OF HISTORY

The boys individual race, featuring defending champion Tom O'Neill of Middletown North and the top seven finishers from last year, has all the ingredients to be an all-time classic, and one of the fastest races in meet history.

A record 15 runners with sub 16 minute times at Holmdel will be on the starting line, so there's a great chance that the meet record of 12 sub 16 minute finishers in 2011 could go down.

O'Neill, a senior, comes into the race as the favorite based on the Holmdel All-Time #8 time of 15:26 that he ran to win his second straight Group 3 title last week when he led a meet record six guys under 16 in that race. That next fastest runner in the race is Group 3 runner-up Lou Corgliano of Hammonton (15:36).

With a victory, O'Neill would become just the seventh boy in meet history to win two straight titles. No boy has ever won three.

The six two-time champs are all New Jersey legends. They are Jason DiJoseph of Paul VI (1987-88), Bryan Spoonire of Asbury Park (1989-90), Bob Keino of Ridgewood (1992-92), Steve Slattery of Mount Olive (1996-97), Mohamed Khadraoui of Paterson Kennedy (2003-03), and Craig Forsys of Colts Neck 2005-06).

But that's not all.

O'Neill is also on the verge of becoming the first runner to run under 16 minutes at Holmdel four times in one season, and a sub 16 minute would also tie him with legendary runners Forsys, twins Jim and Joe Rosa of West Windsor North, and Tyler Udland of Millburn for the most sub 16 minute times ever run at Holmdel in a career. with six.

Forsys did it six times between 2004-2006. Joe Rosa did it six times between in 2008 and 2009,

and if he didn't miss his senior XC season in 2010 with a foot injury, he probably would have gone under 16 a total of nine times. Jim Rosa went sub 16 six between 2009 and 2010, and Udland did it three times in both 2008 and 2009.

O'Neill went below 16 twice last year, and has gone under three times this fall (15:58 at a divisional meet, 15:42 to win Monmouth County, and 15:26 to win Group 3).

"I want to work real hard with my team this week and hopefully I can win again next week," said O'Neill. "If I do, that would be the greatest feeling in the world."

O'Neill has lost a couple races this year, placing sixth at the Manhattan Invitational and fourth at the Shore Conference Championships. But he's been the King of Holmdel for more than a year, winning five straight on the layout since he was second to Tarpey at the Monmouth County Championships in 2012.

Tarpey, who was third at the Meet of Champs last year and won the Group 4 last week title in 15:39, was four seconds behind O'Neill at the Monmouth County meet at Holmdel, and five seconds ahead of O'Neill at the Shore Conference Championships at Ocean County Park.

Tarpey is one of many sub 16 minute runners at Holmdel that will try to knock off O'Neill.

Here's a list of all the runners in the race who have gone under 16 at Holmdel with their Holmdel personal bests in parenthesis.

O'Neill (15:26), Corgliano (15:36), Josiah Hanco of Trinity Christian (15:39), Tarpey (15:39), Steve Maine of Highland (15:41), Kyle Kroon of Toms River South (15:42), Liam Mullett of Pingry (15:49), Craig Corti of Wallkill Valley (15:52), Rob Stone of Millburn (15:53), Mike McClemens of CBA (15:56), Kyle Kirk of Camden Catholic (15:56), Justin Lippert of Middletown North (15:57), Kyle Levermore of Don Bosco (15:57), Brendan Ungemach of Wayne Hills, and David Mugavero of North Hunterdon (15:59).

Mike Higgins of Don Bosco (16:00), Scott Meehan of Pope John (16:01), and Group 2 winner Chris Luciano of Mountain Lakes (16:02) are all knocking on the sub 16 door!!.

Look out for McClemens. Don't let the 15:56 he ran to win the Non Public A title fool you. He had a ton more left in the tank when he finished, and is capable of something much faster. McClemens ran a team race last week for 2 miles before cranking it up over the final 1,200.

Don't forget that McClemens smashed the course record when he won the Shore Conference title at Ocean County Park with a 14:43, finishing ahead of Tarpey and O'Neill.

Hanco, the Non Public B champ, also feels he can go faster than his 15:39, and don't rule out Mullett. Mullett, second to Hanco at the Non Public B race, last week, finished ahead of O'Neill at the Manhattan Invitational and will want to bounce back with a very strong race after losing last week.

Kroon, who was second last year and was Foot Locker National finalist last year, Maine, 11th last year, and Group 1 winner Corti should all be in the mix for a top spot.

Only six runners have ever gone under 15:20 at Holmdel. Don't be surprised if that number increases when this one is over.

GIRLS MEET OF CHAMPIONS PREVIEW

MORRIS COUNTY TEAM QUALIFIERS: Mount Olive, Randolph and Villa Walsh

MORRIS COUNTY INDIVIDUAL QUALIFIERS: Mackenzie Barry, Mendham; Brennan Sharkey, West Morris; Sierra Castaneda, West Morris; Kylene Cochrane, West Morris; Christine O'Kane, Morristown; Ashleigh Thurston, Morris Hills; Olivia Viparina, Roxbury; Michaela Reilly, Morristown-Beard;

RAM REVERSAL

In 2009, the Randolph girls won the Group 4 title by beating runner-up Hillsborough by seven points, 66-73. That victory made the Rams the favorite to win the Meet of Champions the following week, but Randolph wound up second at the M of C after being upset by Hillsborough, 78-79 .

The Randolph girls gave a chance on Saturday to reverse what happened four yeras ago. After placing second to West Windsor South, 87-107, at the Group 4 race, Randolph is using the 2009 race as motivation to win its first M of C title.

`` We're not going to let this (finishing second to WW South) bring us down," said Lansing.
``We're going to come back even stronger on Saturday . We are so ready and so pumped for what's gonig to come on Saturday."

UP FOR GRABS

Randolph, Mount Olive, West Windsor South, Red Bank Catholic, Rumson and Ridgeowood all have a shot to win the girls M of C race.

For most of the season, Red Bank Catholic was the No. 1 team and looked like the clear favorite, but it had a rough race last week when it gutted out the the Non Public A title. West Windsor South was the most impressive team at the Group meet as it moved up from No. 4 to No. 1 in the state after its 20-point win over No. 2 Randolph gave the Mercer County powerhouse its

first Group 4 title ever.

West Windsor South, which had a spread of 67 seconds between its first and fifth runners, trailed Randolph by 14 points after each team had four runners across, but West Windsor's No. 5 runners finished 34 spots ahead of Randolph's No. 5 to seal the comeback victory.

If West Windsor South can make its pack even tighter, the Pirates could win its first title. Randolph, led by Group 4 champ Liz Lansing, is confident it will run much better and get the gap between its No. 4 and 5 runner closed up. If that happens, the Rams could be land on top.

Randolph is trying to reverse what happened to it four years ago when it beat Hillsborough to win the Group 4 title, but then placed second to Hillsborough by one point at the Meet of Champions.

Group 3 champion Mount Olive, seeking its second M of C title (it won in 1989), is another team that is very consistent and, like Rumson, relies on a very tight pack.

Ridgewood, the Group 4 runner-up, is trying to win its third Meet of Champions title. It won in 1992 and 1999.

And how about defending champion Voorhees? Although not a major threat to win its fifth M of C title, the Vikings finished third in Group 3 to advance to the M of C for the 17th straight year!! That is a truly remarkable streak.

HOW LOW WILL THEY GO

The girls individual race features 15 runners that dropped under 19 minutes at the Group Championships, led by Group 3 champion Josette Norris of Tenafly (18:12), and freshman phenom Briana Gess of Haddonfield, who won Group 2 in a Holmdel freshman course record 18:16.

Since the M of C began in 1972, only two freshmen ever won the Meet of Champions, Janet Smith of J.P. Stevens in 1980, and Monal Chokshi of Bridgewater in 1989.

The undefeated Gess has a chance to become the third.

But Gess isn't the favorite in a race that features six of the top 12 finishers from last year.

That label belongs to Tenafly senior Josette Norris, also undefeated this season. The North Carolina-bound Norris, 10th at the M of C last year, led nine runners under 19 when she won the Group 3 race in a Bergen County record 18:12, and she looked like she could have gone much faster if she had to.

Norris, who won the 1,600 at the Meet of Champions last spring, built up her endurance over the summer to go along with her already great speed, giving her a lethal combination that will difficult for anyone to beat.

The other contenders include senior Mackenzie Barry of Mendham, sophomore Grace Dwyer of Hamilton North, junior Liz Lansing of Randolph, senior Brennan Sharkey of West Morris, junior Marin Warner of Holmdel, senior Courtney Thompson of St. John Vianney, senior Dana Klein of Gill St. Bernard's, senior Tara Connelly of St. John Vianney, junior Eve Glasergreen of North Hunterdon, senior Clarissa Modde of Voorhees, sophomore Julia Guerra of Indian Hills, sophomore Sierra Castaneda of West Morris, and senior Stephanie Bitcon of Wayne Hills.

Barry, who has won two M of C 3,200 titles (one indoor and one outdoors), was third last year in 18:14, third in 2011 and 10th in 2010.

Dwyer was eighth last year in 18:27. Thompson, the Non Public A champion, was ninth last year in 18:28. Lansing, who gave up soccer to run this season, won the Group 4 race in 18:29. Sharkey was fourth (behind Norrris, Barry and Dwyer) in Group 3 in 18:35. Warner was second to Gess last week in Group 2 in 18:30.

Klein, the Non Public B winner in 18:42, has yet to be pushed this season. If Klein can handle the expected very fast opening mile then she should right in the mix at the end. Connelly was 11th last year in 18:35. Modde was 12th last year in 18:38. Group 4 runner-up Glasergreen has gone 18:47 at Holmdel, Guerra has run 18:42, Castaneda 18:44, and Bitcon 18:47.

Only 13 girls have ever run under 18 minutes at Holmdel. There's a great chance that number will be higher after this race.

COLLEGE NEWS

Mackenzie Barry of Mendham and Brennan Sharkey of West Morris, two of the top distacne runners in the state, recently annoucned their college plans.

Barry is headed to Providence while Sharkey will attend Bucnkell.

Barry, who also visited Virginia and Wake Forest, is a two-time Meet of Champions winner in the 3,200 (once indoors and once outdoors), a two-time state XC champ, a 3-time Morris County XC champ, and she was a Foot Locker National finalist last year in XC.

She has personal bests on the track of 10:18.24 for 3,200, 4:58.30 for 1,600, and 16:57.88 for 5,000

Sharkey, who also visited Elon and Rutgers and cancelled trips to Tennessee, Virginia Tech and Southern Mississippi after her visit to Bucknell, emerged as one of the state's top cross-country runners this fall.

Sharkey, who finished fourth in the state Group 3 race last Saturday with a Holmdel PR of 18:35, led West Morris to its first North Jersey Section 2 Group 2 title in 21 years earlier this month.

She also also finished second in Morris County and in the NJ. Sec. 2 race to Barry, nd ran a PR of 18:01 at the Randolph Invitational, the No. 2 time in Freedom Park course history behind the

great Mary Cain. On the track, Sharkey owns a 3,200 PR of 10:52.57.

Barry and Sharkey will both be on the starting line at Saturday's XC Meet of Champions.

Barry has finished 10th, third and third in the past three years at the M of C. Sharkey will be making her first appearance at the meet.

CONGRATS TO MACKENZIE AND BRENNAN!!!

That's all for now.

Good luck to everyone running at the Meet of Champions!!!

GET UR HOLMDEL PR'S ON!!!