

MORRIS COUNTY REWIND

Morris County's finest made their presence felt in a big way at the NJSIAA Group Championships this past week as many athletes won state titles and several produced breakthrough performances.

Let's take a look back at some of the great highlights.

COCHRANE BREAKS THROUGH AND SMASHES RECORD

Kylene Cochrane of West Morris, who has had multiple runner-up finishes in her career at state meets, broke through to win her first state title in record breaking fashion at the state Group 3 meet.

Taking control right away, Cochrane built a 15 meter cushion after a 2:25.7 first 800 and kept pushing the pace before crossing the finish line first in a personal best and meet record 4:54.07, the fastest time in the state this season.

The former meet record of 4:58.78 was set by the great Ajee' Wilson of Neptune in 2009.

Cochrane's victory comes after she finished second in both the 800 and 1,600 at the Group 3 meet last spring and completed a great week for the Penn-bound star.

Last Saturday, Cochrane finished sixth in the mile (4:56.81) at the Millrose Games in New York.

Cochrane will head into the March 1 Meet of Champions as the favorite to win the 1,600.

BENIULIS HURDLES TO A STATE TITLE

Danielle Beniulis was a little concerned about how she would perform when she took the starting line for the 55 hurdles at the state Group 2 meet.

“With the weather the way it's been lately I didn't get to practice the way I would have liked, so I wasn't sure what would happen,” said Beniulis, a senior at Jefferson who also played goalie on the soccer team.

What happened was the best moment of her track and field career.

After running the top time in the trials of 8.64, Beniulis got a good start in the final and an even better finish as she surged across the line first in 8.43.

The victory by Beniulis marks the second straight year that a Jefferson hurdler captured the state Group 2 title. Last year Katie Hatler, who graduated last spring, was the state champion.

“I never imagined having a season like this in the hurdles,” said Beniulis, who has a personal best of 8.26, No. 9 in the state this season. “

THREE-PEAT

Mackenzie Barry of Mendham continued her domination in the 3,200 at the Group 3 meet on Thursday when she captured her third straight title in the event by running 10:47.94, nearly eight seconds in front of Hamilton North sophomore star Grace Dwyer.

The Providence-bound Barry will head into the Meet of Champions favored to win her second straight title and the third overall in her career. She also captured the 3,200 at the outdoor M of C as a sophomore in 2012.

BENZ AND RHODES HAVE A FIELD DAY

Field event stars **Mike Benz** and **Tommy Rhodes** each come up with great performances to lead Delbarton to a third place finish at the Non-Public A Championships.

Benz, a senior, cleared 14-6 in the pole vault to break the meet record of 14-0, and Rhodes, also a senior, set the 12-pound shot put 53-3 ¼ to finish first.

FLAIR IN THE AIR

Morris County athletes captured three of the 12 state titles in the high jump, including a sweep in Group 1 by **Whippany Park**, and **Abe Gertler of Madison** continued his sensational season on the pole vault.

Nick Medway won the boys Group 1 title for Whippany Park by clearing

5-10, and **Whippany Park's Gina Dello Russo** won the girls Group 1 HJ with a 5-0. Also excelling over the bar was **Danielle Monahan** of Hanover Park, who made 5-1 to win a jump off and capture the girls Group 2 high jump.

Gertler, the Morris County co-record holder indoors in the pole vault at 15-0, won the state title in Group 2 by making 14-6.

SO CLOSE

Christian Kildal-Brandt of Mendham looked like he was headed to the first state title of his career in the Group 3 400. But just as he approached the finish line while in the lead, Jamaad Muse of Timber Creek made a hard charge on the outside and caught Kildal-Brandt right at the line to win, 49.46 to 49.48.

The time of 49.48 by Kildal Brandt, a junior, narrowly missed breaking the Morris County record of 49.30 set in 2005 by Mendham's Marcel VanEeden.

Kildal-Brandt came back later to run 49.4 on the anchor leg of the third-place 4x400 (3:32.46).

SPEED AND POWER

Conor McClain of Morris Hills joined a unique club when the senior topped 50 feet in the shot put for the first time in his career at the state Group 2 meet with a 50-9 to place eighth in the Group 2 meet.

McClain's performance makes him the only track athlete in the state this season to throw over 50 in the shot and run under 7.00 in the 55 dash.

McClain went 6.99 in the dash when he placed seventh at the North Jersey, Section 1 meet.

VERY IMPRESSIVE!!!!

MCSORLEY IS LATEST STAR AT RANDOLPH

When sophomore **Nora May McSorley** ran 2:16.21 to finish third in the Group 3 800 on Thursday, she moved into the No. 2 spot all-time in Randolph indoor history and into the No. 10 spot in the state rankings for this season.

Joelle Amaral is No. 1 in Randolph indoor history in the 800 with a 2:14.47 in 2011.

Amaral, who won the 1,600 at the Meet of Champions in the spring of 2011, holds the Morris County indoor record in the mile (4:49.23). Amaral is now running at the University of Washington.

McSorley, loaded with talent and determination, has a realistic shot and plenty of time to make a run at the Morris County indoor 800 record of 2:13.05, set in 2009 by Ariann Neutts of Roxbury.

Randolph also received a big PR from senior **Liz Wellman** in the 1,600, fifth in 5:00.11. Wellman's previous best was 5:03.66 last spring

Randolph is going to be tough for many teams to handle in both the DM and 4x800 this spring when junior Liz Lansing (basketball this winter) is back on the track. Lansing, who won the Meet of Champions 1,600 as a freshman in 2012, ran a Morris County record 4:45.36 when she was second to Josette Norris of Tenafly in the 1,600 at the M of C last June.

AIR ORJI

Any time **Keturah Orji** is on a runway, there's always a chance that something magical could happen. So when the senior at Mount Olive competes in the long jump and triple jump at Monday's Eastern Championships, the record book could take a beating.

Orji will head into the meet with US #1 marks of 44-0 in the TJ and 20-8 $\frac{3}{4}$ this season. While the national indoor TJ record of 44-6 $\frac{3}{4}$ (set in 2007 by Ke'Nyia Richardson of Holy Names in Oakland, Calif.) could go down, Orji has her sights set on something much bigger-**45 FEET!!!!** That's something no high school girl has ever done-indoor or outdoors.

As a junior last year, Orji won the New Balance Indoor and New Balance Outdoor national titles in the triple jump, and at the IAAF World Youth Championships in the Ukraine last July, she finished third in the TJ with a PR and state record of 44-11, No. 2 in U.S. history, and second in the LJ with a 20-11 $\frac{3}{4}$, No. 2 in N.J. history.

COMING UP

The 80th Eastern States Championships, one of the best meets in the

country each season, is scheduled to begin this Monday at 4:30 p.m. at the New Balance Track and Field Center in New York.

The entries for the Easterns are [here](#)

A history of the Easterns, order of events, and other general information on the meet can be found [here](#)

On March 1, the **NJSIAA Meet of Champions** will take place at the Bennett Center in Toms River. The girls meet and the boys pole vault will begin at 10 a.m. And the remainder of the boys events are scheduled to begin at 1 p.m.

The performance lists for the Meet of Champions are [here](#)