

MORRIS COUNTY REWIND

Kylene Cochrane of West Morris celebrated her 18th birthday with the biggest win of her life, and **Mike Benz** of Delbarton had the best day of his career when he was a surprise winner at last Saturday's NJSIAA Meet of Champions at the Bennett Center in Toms River.

While Cochrane and Benz were the lone Meet of Champions winners from Morris County, several other athletes turned in great performances.

Let's look back at the Meet of Champions highlights as well as a recap from the Eastern Championships in Morris County Rewind.

Here we go!

18 CANDLES

Kylene Cochrane had a birthday she will never forget.

The West Morris senior made a big move on the backstretch with about 125 meters left to take the lead in the Meet of Champions 1,600, and then held off a hard-charging Lindsey Kane of Washington to finish first in a personal best 4:53.17, the top time in the state this season and No. 3 in meet history. Kane was second in 4:53.36.

When the UPenn-bound Cochrane crossed the line, she wasn't sure if she won or not, so she asked around to find out. When she was informed that she won, she couldn't believe it.

"This is something I have thought about on every run I have gone on this season," said Cochrane. "I can't believe it actually happened. It really is a dream come true. And to do it on my 18th birthday makes this the best birthday I've ever had."

A video of the finish to Cochrane's victory is [here](#)

A video interview with Cochrane after the race is [here](#)

BENZ SOARS TO NEW HEIGHTS

Mike Benz of Delbarton has had his sights on making 15-0 in the pole vault all season.

He couldn't have picked a better time to finally breakthrough that barrier.

On his first attempt at 15-0 at the Meet of Champions, Benz made 15-0 to equal the Morris County indoor record.

That clearance also secured Benz the victory on fewer misses as four other vaulters made 15-0. It's the first time in meet history that five athletes made 15-0.

The University of Pennsylvania-bound Benz, who had no misses until he got to 15-6, next fall, exceeded his personal best by three inches.

His previous best of 14-9 came on Dec. 22 at the Armory Youth Holiday Classic in New York.

Benz edged Luke Annichiarico of Old Tappan, the state-leader at 15-6, and **Abe Gertler** of Madison, who finished tied for second at 15-0. Dylan Altland of Kingsway (15-0) placed fourth, and Trevor Knowles of North Hunterdon (15-0) was fifth.

Benz is now tied with Gertler and Jordan Pacheco of Morris Hills (who reached 15-0 last season) for the Morris County indoor record.

MEET OF CHAMPIONS NOTES

Christian Kildal-Brandt, a junior at Mendham, nearly won the boys 400, but was edged by Taylor McLaughlin of Union Catholic. McLaughlin, also a junior, crossed first in 49.36, and Kildal-Brandt took second in 49.60. **Brendan Kenny** of Delbarton also earned a medal (awarded to the top 8 finishers

in each event) by placing sixth in the 55 dash in 6.65.

In the girls M of C, Mackenzie Barry of Mendham, the defending champion in the 3,200, placed second in the 3,200 in 10:43.40. Barry also ran 10:50.80 in the two-mile at Easterns on Feb. 24 in New York to place second.

Other medalists in the girls M of C competition were **Monica Benz** (Mike's sister) of Villa Walsh in the pole vault, tied for third at 11-0. **Bria Saunders** of Parsippany, fourth in the 55 dash in 7.22 (a PR matching 7.21 in trials), **Danielle Beniulis** of Jefferson, sixth in the 55 dash in 7.29, **Liz Wellman** of Randolph, sixth in the 1600 in a personal best 4:59.22, **Nora May McSorley** of Randolph, eighth in the 800 in 2:16.66, and **Leah Wis** of Montville, tied for sixth in the high jump at 5-2.

EASTERNS

AIR ORJI

Keturah Orji of Mount Olive put on another sensational horizontal show at the Eastern Championships on Feb. 24 in New York.

The Georgia-bound Orji smashed the meet records in both the triple jump and long jump with mark of 43-11 ½ and 20-8, just off her US #1 mark of 44-0 and 20-8 ¾.

Orji now owns the No. 2 and 3 triple jump marks in U.S. high school indoor history. Orji will take her last shot at the national indoor record of 44-6 when she defends her title at the New Balance National Championships (March 14-15-16) in at the New Balance Track and Field Center.

MENDHAM RIPS UP THE RELAYS

Although **Mendham** didn't finish first in either race, its

performances in the 4x400 and 4x800 at the 80th Eastern States Championships on Feb. 24 in New York were simply awesome!!!

In the 4x800, Mendham, running in the unseeded section, picked up two huge PR's from **Tyler Pressl** on the leadoff leg (1:58.1) and **Paul Ehmann** on the third leg (1:56.8), and **Phil St. Jacque** (2:01.2) and anchor **Christian Kildal-Brandt** (2:00.5) ran strong as the Minutemen ran a school record **7:56.56** to win its heat and get second overall. South Brunswick ran 7:49.89 in the seeded heat to win the race. Mendham's 7:56.56 is **NJ#5 and US#16 this season**, and is a virtual lock to get the Minutemen a berth in the Penn Relays for the first time ever in the 4x800.

A couple hours later, Mendham returned to the track and dropped another bomb, this time ripping a **Morris County record 3:23.74** in the 4x400 to place second in its heat and third overall.

Mendham's 3:23.74 is **NJ#6 and US#18 this season**, and it broke the Morris County record of 3:24.25 set by Morris Hills (Travis Ellis, Adrian Samsel, Mike Demby, and Greg Leeper) at the 2012 National Championships.

Mendham's splits in the 4x400 were a PR of **52.2 for Ian Graham**, a season best **51.3 for Dylan Heraghty**, a PR of **51.8 for Malcolm Montilus**, and a PR of **48.4 on the anchor from Kildal-Brandt**.

One more important result for Mendham to mention-junior Paul Ehmann, in addition to his huge 1:56.8 carry on the 4x800, finished second in the mile in a personal best 4:22.74.

KEEPING TRACK

Morris Hills, which has sent several teams to the Penn Relays in the 4x800 over the last decade, took a big step toward earning another trip to the prestigious meet by running 8:12.35 to place second at the JaRon McBride Winter Classic on Feb. 23 at the New Balance Track and Field Center in New York. The splits for Morris Hills were 2:00.0 for Matt Weintraub, 2:04.6 for John Dennehy, 2:05.6 for Mike Gosden, and 2:01.2 for Ian McNally.

The Penn Relays will be held April 24-25-26 at Franklin Field in Philadelphia.

At Easterns, Randolph placed sixth in the boys 4x400 at Easterns in 3:26.06, No. 12 in the state this season and No. 48 in the country, and **Morristown** placed fourth in the 4x800 in 7:58.01, No. 8 in the state this season and No. 22 in the nation.

Sean Lyons of Morristown, one of the state's top distance runners, announced on Friday afternoon that he will run next year at the **United States Air Force Academy**.

Lyons, who won North Jersey, Section 2 Group 3 XC title last fall and captured the 1,600 and 3,200 at the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 meet this season, has personal bests of 4:21.15 for 1,600, and 9:29.17 for 3,200. He also ran 16:11 at Holmdel Park when he placed 24th at the XC Meet of Champions last November.

NEXT UP

Many of the top teams and athletes in Morris County will conclude their indoor seasons at the New Balance Championships, March 14-15-16 at the New Balance Track and Field Center in New York.