

Ed Grant Weekly XC Report

Week 9 (9 Nov 09)

A late-season nor'easter, boiling up the East Coast as these words are written, may have a lot to say about what happens at this weekend's New Jersey group track and field championships at Holmdel County Park.

It could, at worst, even cause a postponement of the meet; it will at least delay for one week any chance of Joe Rosa of West Windsor-Plainsboro North becoming the first boy to run the difficult 5K course under 15:00, a prospect that seemed well within reach when he set his course record of 15:04 at the Shore Coaches Invitational in early October. And it could also have a major effect on several of the team battles, particularly the closely-matched Gr. IV boys' affair.

In the four sectional races last weekend, the widest margin of victory was the four points by which Randolph defeated Ridgewood in North Jersey 1 at Garret Mountain. Ridge edged Westfield, 65-67, in NJ 2 at Warinanco Park, East Brunswick upset Old Bridge, 104-106, in Central Jersey at Thompson Park and just five points separated the first four teams in the South Jersey race at Delsea, where Shawnee nosed out Southern Ocean, 84-85.

A comparison of team averages gives the edge to the NJ 2 teams with Westfield's more compact lineup perhaps having the best chance to emerge the winner over Ridge and Bridgewater Raritan, which was only four points behind the Blue Devils. This was the third time Ridge had finished ahead of Bridgewater in the past three weeks and this was their closest finish yet.

In the other boys' team races, West Windsor-Plainsboro North and Haddonfield should have little trouble retaining their titles in Gr. III and II, respectively, and Christian Brothers, the state's No. 1 team at this point, seems ready to reclaim the Parochial A title from Don Bosco. In a reversal of past years, the Colts took last weekend off, while the Ironmen ran away with the New Jersey Catholic Track Conference race at Warinanco Park.

Robbinsville, which seeks a double in Gr. I this year, won the Central Jersey race rather easily from Metuchen with a 1-3 finish from Brian O'Toole and Nick Lachman, who was running his first major race of the season. Their average of 17:16 at Thompson Park compares favorably with Verona's 17:45 at the longer Warinanco course, a time that was heavily weighted by the meet record 15:48 by three-time sectional champ Dave Oster.

The Parochial B race seems wide open with defending Roselle Catholic up in A this year. Monmouth County rivals St. Rose and Mater Dei have perhaps the best chance, with Moorestown Friends the unknown quantity.

On the girls' side, two-time all-group defender Voorhees was hit hard by the swine flu last weekend, but a promising freshman group backed up veterans Colette Whitney, Kathryn Hahn and Katie Petruzzellis for a fourth-straight North Jersey 2 title at Warinanco Park. The Vikings should have little trouble repeating in Gr. III this weekend. Their Skyland Conference rival, Hillsboro, ranked No. 1 at this point, won handily in CJ Gr. IV, but faces a tough challenge from Randolph, which finally put its act together last Saturday with a 1-2-4 finish at Garret Mountain, led by junior Joelle Amaral in 18:28.

The Robbinsville girls, led by defending Gr. I champ Megan Flynn, had one of the day's lowest winning totals at 24 points in Central Jersey, but will get a good run for their money this week from NJ I champ Mt. Lakes, which had a 1-2-3 finish from three-time winner Kris Landry, Jenny Picot and frosh Colette Richter. Gr. II will probably be a repeat of the SJ battle between defender Haddonfield and Delsea, which came off with a 33-41 win on its home course behind a 2-3 finish by Felicia O'Donnell and Ashley Deckert.

The top Parochial A teams were idle last weekend. Defending Immaculate Heart Academy and Holy Angels both skipped the NJCTC meet and will resume their rivalry this weekend with the Angels' compact lineup giving it the edge not only in this race, but in the upcoming AG meet as well. In Parochial B, with the Pingry defenders moving up to A, 2007 champion Wildwood Catholic, led by Tara Wuko, is the choice over Villa Walsh.

Individual attention for the boys will naturally center on the Gr. III race with the Rosa twins going against AG defender Tyler Udland of Millburn. Next will come the Gr. I rematch of Oster and Pat Rono of Lyndhurst who chased him home last weekend in that NJ 2 race. Parochial A feature a duel between defender Pat Schellberg, winner of the NJCTC race last weekend in 16:02, and Mike Mazzaccaro of CBA. The last time they met, Mazzaccaro caught Schellberg at the finish of the NJCTC 3200 last spring.

Gr. IV has an interesting match featuring NJ 1 winner Jeremy Elkaim of Livingston, NJ 2 champ Matt McDonald of North Hunterdon, CJ titlist Mike O'Dowd of Colts Neck and Joe Kotran of TR North, who upset David Forward of Shawnee in the South Jersey race. And lurking in the wings is Curtis Richburg of West Orange, who scored over Kotran and McDonald at the Shore Coaches invitational.

Jon Vitez of Haddonfield figures to run away with his third Gr. II title and Colin Richmond of St. Rose should win in PB with plenty to spare.

Gr. III heads the girls' action with Chelsea Ley of Kingway hoping to claim her first group title over Megan Venables of Highland and NJ 2 winner Vigilante of Mendham. Ley hit 17:32 in her 50-yard win over Venables in SJ; Vigilante came within a few seconds of Melanie Thompson's Warinanco Park record at 18:37 in NJ 2.

The Gr. IV race is the deepest of the girls' events with soph Caroline Kellner of WW-Plainsboro South hoping to repeat her CJ win over Jillian Prentice of Montgomery, Rashmi Singh of Hunterdon Central and Ashley Smolinka of Hillsboro, not to mention two other sectional winners, Joelle Amaral and Natalie Ocascio of Lenape, perhaps the state's outstanding freshman this year.

Marielle Hall of Haddonfield was also under 18:00 at Delsea and is ready for the challenge from CJ winner Nichelle Harris in Gr. II. Flynn was beaten in CJ Gr. I by soph Brianna Feerst of Pt. Pleasant Beach and also has Landry to contend with this weekend.

The Red Bank Catholic pair of Molly McNamara and Michelle Capozzi, both already under 19:00 at Holmdel this fall, should dominate the Parochial A race; Capozzi has a fast win last Saturday in the NJCTC race, with McNamara taking the day off. It should be a two-girl race in PB between Wuko and Kristen Traub of Eastern Christian.