

## CROSS-COUNTRY PREVIEW

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### BOYS

Another brilliant cross-country season looms in New Jersey this fall with defending individual AG champion Tyler Udland of Millburn heading a group that includes no less than six boys who ran under 9:10 for the 3200 last spring.

The team picture will also be very strong, led by defending AG champion West Windsor-Plainsboro North and including three others who will be strong contenders for a spot in the national championships in Portland, Ore.: Don Bosco, Christian Brothers and Haddonfield.

There will also be a new look in the state, at least the northern half, for the conference meets. Under the football-driven rearrangement, county-oriented leagues such as the age-old Northern New Jersey Interscholastic League and the Hudson County Interscholastic Athletic Association have been reformed, though, in some cases, the old names will be retained.

A notable schedule change, for site not for date, is the move---for one year only, we hope---of the Footlocker Trials from Van Courtlandt Park to Suffolk County. The repairs to Van Cortlandt this fall make it impossible to use the regular 5K start across the great plain; however, the Manhattan Invitational remains there with the finish line coming down along Broadway rather than in the shadow of the hills. It will still be at the venerable 2.5M distance.

Now for a preview of the top teams and individuals (number after school name indicates AG finish, if any, last fall):

#### TEAM

**BRIDGEWATER:** The top trio of Chris Banafato, Dom Tasco and Jake Rusman is one of the best in the state; it's just a question of filling out the last two places which was a problem last fall.

**CHRISTIAN BROTHERS (3):** The perennial contenders should have one of their best teams ever both this year and next, led by juniors Mike Mazzaccaro and Dan Mykityshyn. Tom Heath's main task will be picking which five to fill out the lineup, the prime contenders being seniors Dan Bailey and Mark Lee and juniors Joe Martin and William Villa.

**DON BOSCO (2):** Graduation hit hard here with all-stater Leighton and Bob Molke gone, but the Ironmen retained Rafael Vargas, Mike Belgiovine and Howard Rosas and have had top freshman teams the past two years.

**HADDONFIELD (4):** Three boys under 4:15 at 1600 last spring give the Gr. II defenders a leg up on their rivals. Jon Vitez, Colin Baker and Ben Potts will be joined by Ray Schlitt (who missed last spring) and Mtt Nussbaum to provide a solid top five.

**MILLBURN:** Tyler Udland will have kid brother Blake, one of the state's top frosh last fall, and senior classmate Brian Robinson to give the Millers a great start with junior John Murphy as backup. The question will be filling out the lineup.

**OLD BRIDGE (12):** The defending Gr. IV champs lost only Bill Crane to graduation with Corey O'Neill, Moheb Thomas, Vince Vento and 2008 frosh star Shawn Burke ready to put the Knights in the top five this fall.

**RED BANK CATHOLIC:** Senior Bobby McGann and Vince Clonan and junior Kevin Byrne should put the Caseys into the AG meet this fall behind CBA and Don Bosco.

**RIDGE:** Anthony Bellitti and Dan Guglielmo head the Red Devils along with 2009 frosh star Tyler Gibbons. The rest of the 2009 Central Jersey Gr. IV champs (over Old Bridge) return intact, except for Ben Tumolo. And two boys who were injured last fall, Evan Roelke and Pat Farrell, will also be back to flesh out the lineup.

### GIRLS

It would be hard to beat the 2008-09 season of distance running in New Jersey, a season which would have been even more spectacular but for minor or major injuries to some of the top performers. Graduation had removed a number of them, but enough remain to insure another great campaign this fall.

Chelsea Ley of Kingsway, No. 2 in the AG meet last fall, heads the list with four more of the top seven also returning. And that group does not include Marielle Hall of Haddonfield, who missed the AG race last fall after a late injury, but returned outdoors and had a spectacular summer season.

The state had no top class team last fall and that may be the case again this time, though Randolph has the potential to reach the Nationals if all of its top four are in top form.

#### TEAM

**HILLSBORO (3):** Ashley Smolinka and Juliann Miller return, top 50 finishers last fall, return, along with Nicolle Rittman and Stephanie Nunes, who had a fine spring season to put the Raiders in the mix for the gold.

**IMMACULATE HEART ACADEMY (5):** The absence of Mary Kaye Duff probably cost the Blue Eagles a higher place in the AG meet last fall after their victory in Parochial A. Their 2-3-4 girls in that race, Erin Thompson, Julie Sinkovitz and Rachel Lotterman all return and there is plenty of depth to go with them.

**POPE JOHN (4):** The Lions lost their top two, Sarah Cariati and Jenny Heigis, but return Catherine Carey, Marissa Galante and Ashton Weiler and also have sophomore Tess Keller, who came along so well last spring.

**RANDOLPH (8):** The 1-2-4 finishers in last fall's sectional meet all return---Joelle Amaral, Natalie Anthony and Molly Higgins, along with Rebecca Snelson and Victoria Kiss---all return to give the Rams the most solid top five in the state.

**RED BANK CATHOLIC (7):** The Caseys have two top hands in Michelle Capozzi and Molly McNamara and a huge squad behind them to fill out the other three positions.

**SENECA:** The Golden Eagles just missed the AG meet last fall and return the top four from that team: Nicole McGrainer (who missed last indoor and outdoor seasons with injuries, sub-2:15 800M runner Lyndsey Horn, Austin Fowler and Chris Hecher.

**SHAWNEE (15):** The onetime perennial contenders got back in form last fall and have a veteran squad this time, led by Casey Doyle, an all-stater as a freshman. Marina Masters and Shannon McLernan provided the backup in 2008 that got the Renegades to the AG meet.

**SOUTH BRUNSWICK (9):** This promises to be a big year for the Vikings with Gr. IV titles looming indoors and out now that Jillian Smith is off the scene. Senior Sophia Ginez and soph Kayla DelPiano should easily lead their team to another AG slot and perhaps to a top three finish. Lyndsey Sample and Ashley Edwards provide solid support.

**SOUTHERN OCEAN:** Though Smith is gone, Carrie Gethard transferred in from Toms River East last spring and will join Chelsea Cox, Shaylene Risdan and Kate Armstrong on a team which will bid for at least a wild card spot in the AG meet.

**TOMS RIVER NORTH (6):** Angela Rugino is gone, but the Mariners still have those members of stellar freshman class of 2007, Ashley Kotran, Andrea Mathis and Johanna Petruski, as well as senior Kelly Newcomb.

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### BOYS (Cont.)

**TOMS RIVER NORTH:** Joe Kotran and Aaron Leskow ran 1-3 in a sectional win last fall and were both under 9:25 in the spring. Brian McNab and Kenny Brady from last year's top five also return.

**WEST WINDSOR-PLAINSBORO NORTH (1):** The defending AG champs have the state's top duo in the Rosa twins and perhaps this year James will be fit from the start. Jon Squeri if the other returnee from last year's top six, but, after that, there are two big question marks.

### INDIVIDUAL

**COLIN BAKER, Haddonfield:** Baker finished 3rd in Gr. II and 2nd in his sectional, but had an off day at the AG meet. He really came into his own outdoors, placing 2nd in the AG 1600 in 4:09.30.

**CHRIS BANAFATO, Bridgewater (17):** One of that breed known as "pure CC runners," Banafato won his sectionals and was 7th in Gr. IV before yielding to teammate Dom Tasco on the track.

**MICHAEL BELGIOVINE, Don Bosco (28):** Another of that type, Belgiovine finished 11th in Parochial A and did manage a 9:37.70 3200 indoors.

**KEVIN BYRNE, Red Bank Catholic:** A disappointing sophomore year with injuries that only cleared up late outdoors. He still managed to finished 6th in the AG 800 in 1:53.51 and run a 4:21.77 1600.

**JEREMY ELKAIN, Livingston:** His CC season was modest, the best finish being a 2nd in the Iron Hills Conference. He was 14th in Gr. IV, earning his way into the AG meet where he failed to make the top 50. But he literally exploded in the outdoor season, placing 3rd in the AG meet at 9:07.06.

**DAVID FORWARD, Shawnee (8):** A fine CC season with victories on the county and conference level, a 2nd to Brett Johnson of Ocean City in the sectionals, a 6th in the loaded Gr. III field and the 8th at the AG. Some were disappointed with his outdoor season, but a 4:17.42 1600 and a 9:09.26 3200 are not to be sneezed at.

**JOE KOTRAN, Toms River North (20):** The older half of the state's top brother-sister team, Joe had a very solid junior season, placing 2nd in his county meet and 5th in the Shore Conference, winning his sectionals and placing 13th in Gr. IV. Outdoors, he ran 9:19.04 and 9:20.18 for 3200.

**NICK LACHMAN, Robbinsville (22):** A 5th in the Mercer County meet, a victory at the sectionals and a close 2nd in Gr. I to Dave Oster of Verona preceded the AG meet where he ran 16:27. Indoors, he won the Gr. I 3200 at 9:30.52 and outdoors he ran 9:16.52.

**AARON LESKOW, Toms River North:** His big race last fall was a 3rd in the South Jersey Gr. I meet behind teammate Kotran. Nothing much after that until he won the second-seeded section at the outdoor AG meet in 9:22.57.

**SAM MACALUSO, WW-Plainsboro North:** A third in the CJ Gr. IV was the lone highlight of his CC season last fall and injuries plagued him indoors. But he came around outdoors, running an early 9:28.3 at a Holmdel twilight meet, taking his sectionals at 9:29.18 and then running 9:17.04 in the AG final.

**MIKE MAZZACCARO, CBA (12):** What a season this sophomore had last year. In CC, he was 2nd in his county meet, 4th in Parochial A and 12th in 16:11 at the AG meet. Indoors, he finished 8th in the AG race in 9:24.63. But that was just the warmup for an outdoor season which saw him finish 2nd in the AG 3200 in 9:07.05 and win the NJCTC 1600 over Pat Schellberg of Delbarton in 4:15.92.

### GIRLS (Cont.)

### INDIVIDUALS

**JOELLE AMARAL, Randolph:** A somewhat uneven CC season last fall with the high points being victories in the Iron Hills meet and the sectionals and a 7th in the Gr. IV meet and the low point a failure to make the top 50 in the AG race. Outdoors, she ran 5:01.29 for 1600 and 10:46.59 for 3200.

**MICHELLE CAPOZZI, RBC:** A shade off the all-state team last fall, Michelle finished 5th in both her county and conference races and 3rd in Parochial A at 19:24. Outdoors, she ran 11:05.69 for 3200.

**CAYLA DEL PIANO, South Brunswick:** Had a very successful freshman campaign last fall, beginning with a 3rd place finish to teammate Sophia Ginez at the Stewart Memorial. She finished 3rd again in her county meet, ahead of Ginez, finished 6th in CJ behind a flock of all-state runners and was 16th in Gr. IV. Outdoors, she ran 5:04.89 for 1600.

**BRIANNA FEERST, Pt. Pleasant Beach (19):** The top freshman finisher at last fall's AG meet in 19:15, Feerst finished 2nd in both her sectional and group races, was 3rd to Jillian Smith in Ocean County and 8th in the Shore Conference. Did not run indoors, but won sectional honors outdoors at both 1600 and 3200.

**MEGAN FLYNN, Robbinsville (31):** After defeating Feerst in both the sectional and group races, the latter at 19:39, Flynn finished 31st in the AG meet at 19:15. After that, however, injuries wiped out her indoor season and she didn't get back until late in the outdoor campaign.

**EMMA GIANTISCO, Delaware Valley (15):** Ran in the shadow of Gr. II champ Julie Mark last fall, placing 4th in the Hunterdon-Warren meet, 8th in the Skyland Conference, 2nd in the sectionals, 3rd in Gr. II and 15th in the AG at 19:05. Outdoors, she got down to 4:56.36 in the 1600.

**SOPHIA GINEZ, South Brunswick (38):** The key to all of South Brunswick's hopes this year, Ginez struggled a bit last fall due to a minor injury, but came into form indoors where she ran 5:02.4 for 1600 and 10:59.59 and then hit 4:53.15 placing 5th in the AG 1600 outdoors and also ran 10:47.10 for 3200.

**KATHLEEN GRIMES, Chatham (34):** A solid CC season with a victory in the Hills Division at the IHC meet, a 4th in the Gr. II meet and a 19:39 in the AG race. Lost her training mate, Jessica Villars, after the CC season, but still managed a 5:02.16 1600 outdoors.

**MARIELLE HALL, Haddonfield:** Her cross-country season started on a high note with an 18:52 win at the Shore Coaches meet, continued with a 17:49 at the Colonial Conference meet and hit its peak with a 19:30 runaway at the SJ sectionals. Another Gr. II title seemed certain, but a foot injury pushed her back to 9th in that race and she was seen again until outdoors. She came back with a bang, however, running 2:07.33 for 800, 4:52.94 for 1600 and 10:43.71 for 3200 in the scholastic season and doubling at a national JO meet outdoors.

**JULIE JABLONSKI, Hopewell Valley (7):** Part of great 1-2 punch the past two years, Julie will be pretty much on her own this year with Clare Buck graduated. They traded positions in major meets last fall, with Julie getting the edge in the Shore Coaches and AG meets and Clare in the county, sectionals and group. Julie ran 2nd in the sectionals, 6th in Gr. III in 19:02 and hit 18:41 in the AG. Outdoors, she ran 5:05.68 for 1600 and 10:47.23 for 3200.

**CAROLINE KELLNER,, WW-Plainsboro So. (24):** No. 2 frosh in the AG meet, Caroline ran in sister Katie's wake last fall with a 5th place in the sectionals and a 10th in Gr. IV where she ran 19:19, a time she

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### BOYS (Cont.)

**MICHAEL O'DOWD**, Colts Neck (29): Another of last year's brilliant sophomore class, O'Dowd was in the top 10 in all of his championship races prior to the AG where he ran 16:34.

**DAVE OSTER**, Verona (15): After losing a close one in the Gr. I finals in 2008, he took an equally close race from Nick Lachman last fall in 16:30. The onetime NBA hopeful also won the Colonial Hills and NJ 2 sectionals easily and laced 2nd to Tyler Udland in Essex County. He clocked 16:19 in the AG race and went on to double in Gr. I, running 4:17.99 in the 1600 and, ultimately, 9:09.67, placing 7th in that awesome AG 3200.

**BEN POTTS**, Haddonfield: Just an ordinary cross-country campaign for this sophomore last fall and not much to talk about indoors. But he really came into form outdoors and his 4:17.58 for third to teammates Baker and Vitz in the Gr. II race and his subsequent 4:14.14 presaged great things for this fall.

**MICHAEL RANKIN**, Paul VI (14): His finish in the top 15 at 16:18 was probably the greatest surprise of last year's AG meet. Earlier, he had won the South Jersey Parochial meet, placed 7th in the B race at the SJ Open and 5th in Parochial A.

**CURTIS RICHBURG**, West Orange: A soccer player last fall, Richburg was the find of the outdoor campaign, starting with a 4:17.28 win at the Iron Hills meet and winding up with a 4th-place finish in the AG at 4:11.07.

**BRIAN ROBINSON**, Millburn: You could call him the fourth Udland brother; he has been running the past three years with the other three. Last fall, he was 2nd to Tyler in the Northern Hills meet, 3rd in Essex County and 4th in the sectionals. In the spring, he hit 4:18.53 for the 1600.

**DANIEL RONDON**, North Bergen: After a highly successful fall, culminating with a 3rd in the Gr. IV meet at 16:23, Rondon suffered a stress fracture which ended his junior year. His wins included a sweep of Hudson County titles and a couple of invitational meets.

**JAMES ROSA**, WW-Plainsboro No. (6): For two years in a row, James has gotten a late start in cross-country. He made it further back last fall, placing 6th behind his twin in 16:01. With Udland on the sideline all of the indoor and much of the outdoor season, he took over the distances, winning the 3200 indoors and out and clocking 4:12.38 for the 1600 and 9:02.18. With his team unlikely to make the Nationals this fall, he should set his eyes on the Footlocker crown.

**JOSEPH ROSA**, WW-Plainsboro No. (2): Another fine fall with wins at the Manhattan Inv., Mercer County and the CJ Sectionals before placing 3rd to Udland and Brett Johnson in Gr. III. Joe also was individual winner at the Northeast National trials after taking 2nd in the AG meet in 15:47. In the spring, He clocked 4:13.77 for the 1600 and 9:09.61 for 3200.

**PAT SCHELLBERG**, Delbarton: Four big wins for Pat last fall in the Shore Coaches, Northern Hills, NJCTC and Parochial A meets before a DNF at the all-group. His track seasons were both first class as he wound up 3rd in the outdoor AG at 4:10.07, also running 9:15.14 for 3200 in a hot Morris County race.

**D.J. THORNTON**, Union Catholic (11): D.J. dominated his county and conference meets and finished 2nd to Jon Vitez at the Shore Coaches and 2nd to Schellberg in the NJCTC meet and 3rd in Parochial A to Schellberg and Leighton Spencer of Don Bosco. He ran 16:16 at the AG. Outdoors, Thornton ran 4:12.97 for 1600 and 9:20.03 for 3200.

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### GIRLS (Cont.)

matched in the AG meet. Outdoors, she ran 10:43.61 for 3200, only 11 seconds off Jodie Bilotta's state freshman record.

**CHELSEA LEY**, Kingsway (2): The obvious favorite for the AG title this fall, Chelsea had the 3rd-fastest time in Holmdel history last year when she won her race at the Shore Coaches in 17:44. After sweeping her SJ races, including a sectional victory at 17:23, she ran 2nd to Melanie Thompson in the Gr. III and AG meets. Indoors, she ran away with the National 5K in 17:17.05 and hit 10:33.57 in the 2M; outdoors, she came within a second of the AG 3200 record at 10:19.31.

**CHELSEA LODATO**, Old Bridge (30): Though primarily an 800M runner---she hit 2:14.40 outdoors, Chelsea had a more than respectable CC season last fall, placing 2nd in her county meet, 7th in her sectionals and 12th in Gr. IV before running 19:28 at the AG.

**MOLLY MCNAMARA**, RBC (36): Ran 3rd in the Monmouth County feet last fall and 8th in Parochial A. Had a great indoor season, placing 2nd to Jillian Smith in the AG 1600 at 4:58.79, but got a slow start outdoors due to injuries before running a pair of sub-5:04 races in her county and group meets.

**CAITLIN ORR**, Lenape (14): Victories in her county and conference meets, a 4th in the loaded SJ sectionals and 5th in Gr. IV preceded the AG race where Caitlin ran 19:03. She was 7th in the indoor AG 1600 and 4th outdoors in 4:52.95.

**JILLIAN PRENTICE**, Montgomery (21): Started off last fall with a bang, winning at the Magee Memorial and Old Bridge class meets and placing 2nd at the Shore Coaches in 18:57. Later, she won the Somerset County title, finished 4th in Skyland behind two later group champions, was 4th again in the sectionals and Gr. IV, but slacked off a bit in the AG race. Outdoors, she ran 8th in the AG 3200 in 10:43.22.

**INES SIMOES**, Roselle Catholic (20): Had a great sophomore year, winning her conference and county meets, placing 2nd in Parochial B and running 19:16 at the AG. Indoors she tripled the distances at the Mountain Valley meet, doubled in Union County and won the Parochial B 3200. Outdoors, she followed a similar path, winning up 6th in the AG 3200 at 10:39.86.

**RASHMI SINGH**, Hunterdon Central: Injuries dogged Rashmi through the CC and indoor season, but she rounded into form outdoors and got down to 11:09.55 at the Skyland Conference meet.

**ASHLEY SMOLINKA**, Hillsboro (6): After a fine CC season, ending in a top 10 finish at the AG in 18:40 after 2nd-place finishes in her county and conference meets, Ashley was also sidelined all winter with injuries and worked her way back gradually outdoors with final sub-par marks of 5:05.36 and 11:11.89.

**KRISTEN TRAUB**, Eastern Christian: Had a very productive freshman campaign before injuries took her out of the state meet. Won both her county and conference meets as well as a couple of invitationals. Played basketball in the winter, but came back to run 5:05.07 at the outdoor Easterns.

**MEGAN VENABLES**, Highland (5): An all-state selection last fall as a sophomore, Megan won her county and conference titles, then spent the state meet chasing Melanie Thompson and Chelsea Ley with an 18:39 at the AG meet. Was 5th in the indoor AG 3200 at 10:46.09 and also ran 17:29.13 at 5K. Her outdoor season was curtailed by injuries.

**LAURA VIGILANTE**, Mendham (4): Had just one bad race last fall, at the Iron Hills meet, but won in Morris County, placed 3rd at the sec-

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### **BOYS (Cont.)**

**TYLER UDLAND, Millburn (1):** Tyler had only one loss in NJ last fall, to Brett Johnson of Ocean City at the Shore Coaches meet and he avenged that with two wins over Brett in the Gr. IV and AG with a 15:36 in the former race. He was then 3rd to the Solomon Haile of Maryland at Manhattan in 12:28 and 2nd to to Haile at the Footlocker Trials in 15:37, but suffered an injury during the National meet which sidelined him for the entire indoor season. He came back outdoors, but his only performance of note was his 9:07.28 record at the Essex County meet.

**RAFAEL VARGAS, Don Bosco (16):** Another of those “pure” CC runners, Vargas had a strong season last fall, clocking 16:19 at the AG meet, but his best on the track was a 9:32.7 at the Bergen County group meet.

**JON VITEZ, Haddonfield (37):** Vitez opened with a 9:36 3200 at the Cherokee Challenge, repeated at the Shore Coaches in 16:06, ran 6th at Manhattan in 12:39 and ran away with his sectional race in 15:41. But he barely repeated in Gr. II and then ran 37th at the AG, both races some 30 seconds behind his earlier Holmdel time. Indoors, he was 7th in the AG race in 9:21.11; outdoors, he was part of the Haddonfield 1-2-3 Gr. II 1600 finish in 4:15.92 and ran a 9:14.3 3200 at the Haddonfield Inv.

### **GIRLS (Cont.)**

tionals, 5th in Gr. III and improved to 4th in the AG at 18:38. She capped her season by qualifying for the Footlocker Nationals, placing 10th at the trials in 18:16. She was 5th in the outdoor AG 3200 in 10:37.73 and also ran an 18:04.41 5K at the Nationals.

**COLETTE WHITNEY, Voorhees (12):** Was the key to Voorhees’ repeat win at the AG meet as she ran 12th in 19:09. Had a very good indoor season, placing 6th in the AG 3200 in 10:53.25, but missed all of the outdoor campaign with injuries.

**CAROLINE WILLIAMS, Mt. St. Mary’s (26):** Was a consistent performer last fall, finishing in the top seven in her county, conference and group races before running 19:20 in the AG. Caroline ran 11:13.10 for 3200 outdoors and placed 2nd to Simoes in the Parochial B race.

**AJEE WILSON, Neptune:** Divided her time between freshman and varsity races last fall, setting a Holmdel record in the former with a 12:45 at the Shore Coaches meet and running 3rd in her sectional race at Thompson Park at 19:23. Her track seasons were spectacular: frosh state records both indoors and out. Indoors, she won the AG 800 in 2:10.45; outdoors, she won Gr. III in 2:09.66 before placing 2nd in the AG 1600 in 4:46.84. In the summer, she doubled at the AAU National JO meet, winning the 400 in 56.23 and the 800 in a MR 2:07.08.