

Notebook: Haddonfield eyes fifth straight state crown

By GUS OSTRUM • Courier-Post Staff •
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Two Colonial Conference boys' cross country teams -- Haddonfield and Haddon Township -- along with Ocean City clearly represent South Jersey's best chances at bringing home team titles when the NJSIAA group state championships get underway today at Holmdel Park.

Haddonfield, the four-time defending Group 2 state champion under coach Nick Baker, is the heavy favorite to win a fifth straight crown. Haddon Township, the South Jersey Group 1 titlist, is hoping to return to the winners' circle after last capturing a state championship in 2008.

Ocean City, led by one of the state's top runners in senior Miles Schoedler, will look to upset three-time champion West Windsor-Plainsboro North in Group 3.

Defending team champions include Robbinsville (Group 1), Haddonfield (Group 2), West Windsor-Plainsboro North (Group 3) and Westfield (Group 4).

The first boys' race will begin at 10 a.m. with the Non-Public B championships followed by Non-Public A at 10:25 a.m., Group 1 at 11:40, Group 4 at 12:05, Group 2 at 1:20, and Group 3 at 1:40.

The top individual performers and the top five teams advance to the Meet of Champions at Holmdel Park on Nov. 20.

Group 2

Defending champion: Haddonfield

Team race: Haddonfield should easily capture its fifth straight state championship. Although the Bulldawgs lost plenty of talent from 2009, coach Baker has done an excellent job reloading this team. Three of his runners could even sweep the top three spots in the race and the Dawgs' top five clearly have an advantage in depth over any contender in this group.

Other teams looking to challenge for a top five spot are Morris Hills, Ramsey, Barnegat, Delaware Valley and Holmdel.

Individual race: Haddonfield's top three finishers at sectionals -- Ben Potts, Matt Nussbaum and Tim Malloy -- will push each other hard for the individual crown with Potts and Nussbaum likely to challenge each other to the finish line.

Last fall, Nussbaum ran perhaps the best race of his career when he placed second in the Group 2 state meet at Holmdel Park in 16:30. Potts, this year's South Jersey sectional champion, was right behind him at 16:32.

"Matt (Nussbaum) and I have always pushed each other hard in our careers, and I expect nothing different in the state meet," said Potts. "I expect this race to be a close one among several runners, and hopefully Matt and I will be right there with the leaders."

Don't count out Barnegat sophomore Matt Nelson, who was fourth in the South Jersey sectionals but sixth in the state meet a year ago.

Group 1

Defending champion: Robbinsville

Team race: The top teams to watch are sectional champions Mountain Lakes (North 1), Lyndhurst (North 2), Robbinsville (Central) and Haddon Township (South). Also in the race will be McNair Academic and Shore Regional. Mountain Lakes, defending champion Robbinsville and Haddon Township may have the best shot at the team crown.

Individual race: The lone South Jersey contestants

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who could challenge for the title are Haddon Township's Joe Eagan, Pennsville's Tyler Cummings and Schalick's Brandon Dugan.

But the clear favorite is Lyndhurst junior Patrick Rono, who placed second in this race last season in 16:12 and who has been running well this season. Other contenders for the top spot are Robbinsville's Brian O'Toole, third last season; Mountain Lakes' Steve Lewandowski and New Providence's Everett Price, fourth last season.

Group 3

Defending champion: West Windsor-Plainsboro North.

Team race: West Windsor North has won the state title three straight seasons, but will receive a stiff challenge from Ocean City this time around. The Knights lost the state's top runner -- senior Joe Rosa -- to injury earlier this fall, but his twin brother Jim Rosa will lead a formidable team.

Ocean City has solid depth among its top five with Schoedler and Erik Johnson leading the way, and the Raiders will look to upset North for the crown.

Others in the mix will be Indian Hills, Princeton and West Morris Mendham.

Individual race: This field has many solid runners with Jim Rosa, the Central Jersey champion, the clear favorite after posting a winning time of 15:15 at Thompson Park last weekend.

Schoedler is the top challenger after he won the South Jersey sectional title at Delsea, with Colts Neck's Mike O'Dowd, Indian Hill's Nick Ward, Moorestown's Anthony Horten and Pascack Valley's Ben Malone in the hunt for qualifying spots in the Meet of Champions.

Group 4

Defending champion: Westfield

Team race: South Jersey teams will be clear underdogs in this team chase with Ridgewood, Westfield, West Windsor-Plainsboro South and Southern Regionals all likely to stage a close battle for the team title.

Individual race: Washington Township's Anthony Dentino and Shawnee's Connor Herr have South

Jersey's best chance at winning the gold medal in this race. Dentino won a spirited race over Herr in the sectionals at Delsea last weekend, so you can count on another close battle.

Livingston's Jeremy Elkaim, who ran a blazing 15:33 at Holmdel earlier this year, must be considered the favorite with Dentino, Herr, Randolph's Collin Frost, North Brunswick's Cullen Davis and Ridgewood's Pat Rynkowski all looking for top 10 finishes.

Non-Public B

Defending champion: St. Rose.

Team race: South Jersey champion Bishop Eustace will challenge St. Rose and Mater Dei for team honors.

Individual race: Defending champion Colin Richmond of St. Rose heads in as the individual favorite while Bishop Eustace's Ron Griswold, Luke Mazzochette and Eric Franklin will also be in the hunt to qualify for the Meet of Champions. Reach Gus Ostrum at gostrum@gannett.com

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