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Highland's Venables wins Meet of Champions

By Bob Cabnet

FOR THE INQUIRER

HOLMDEL, N.J. - Megan Venables made a prerace decision to focus on winning rather than breaking another record on Saturday at the NJSIAA Cross-Country Meet of Champions at Holmdel Park.

The Highland senior, who set a course record of 17 minutes, 28 seconds over 5 kilometers a week earlier during the Group 3 state championships, broke the tape in 17:46 to win her first Meet of Champions title.

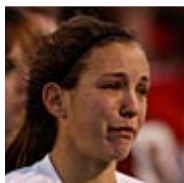
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Venables was followed home by Bishop Eustace's Holly Bischof (18:09), West Windsor-Plainsboro South's Caroline Kellner (18:09), and Cherokee's Megan Lacy (18:13).

In the boys' race, seniors Ben Potts and Matt Nussbaum led the way as Haddonfield, which was expected to finish no better than fifth in the team competition, stunned the field to finish second with 98 points behind Christian Brothers Academy - ranked No. 1 in New Jersey and the Northeast and No. 12 nationally - which finished with 68 points for its 16th Meet of Champions title.

"My prime motive was to win the race, not break the record again," Venables said. "Winning this race has been my goal since last year. I had some injuries in the past, but this year everything worked out well for me.

"It's my first season running where nothing really went wrong. I have no regrets about the way I ran."

Venables changed her racing strategy from last week when she went out fast and was unchallenged from the start.

"I wanted to stay on a good pace today and make sure I had enough left at the end," Venables said. "There was a pack of runners with me until after the second mile.

"It was important not to have a foot race at the end. Anything can happen in that situation so I surged at the top of the hill and got the lead. As I approached the finish line, I felt a sense of relief. There was no need to push it to try to break the record again."

Bischof needed to hold off Kellner in the last 20 yards to take the silver medal.

"I had a real adrenaline rush when I saw the finish line," Bischof said. "Everybody ran so well today. The competition helped me improve my time."

Venables, Bischof, and Lacy will all compete in this Saturday's Foot Locker Northeast Regional Championships at Sunken Meadow State Park in Long Island.

Potts and Nussbaum each experienced more than 20-second improvements in time from last week's Group 2 championships.

"Our plan was for everyone to drop at least 10 seconds," Potts said. "We always shoot to win, but finishing second is exciting, considering how much talent we lost from last year.

"Last week we went out too hard and didn't run as fast, but it gave us the confidence as a team to come out here and surprise a lot of people."

Potts, who won the Group 2 title last week in 16:09, finished sixth in 15:43, the fifth-best time ever posted by a South Jersey boy at Holmdel.

"Usually when we race, it's just me and Matt at the front," Potts said, "so I was excited about running against a lot of people with aggressive running strategies. I wanted to show that I was more than a kid who can run fast in Group 2.

Haddonfield coach Nick Baker admitted he was surprised by his team's performance.

"I'm usually not surprised," Baker said, "but the kids really pulled it together. They ran incredibly as a team and averaged time drops of 26 seconds per runner over last week."

The results

Boys' team scoring: Christian Brothers 68, Haddonfield 98, West Windsor-Plainsboro South 124, Westfield 126, West Windsor-Plainsboro North 127, Ridge 182, Freehold Township 194, Ridgewood 216, Don Bosco 217, Lacey 284 (Other South Jersey teams: Bishop Eustace 419, Haddon Township 450).

Boys' individual leaders: 1, Jim Rosa, West Windsor North, 15:15. 2, Mike Mazzaccaro, CBA, 15:20. 3, Jeremy Elkaim, Livingston, 15:29. 4, Matthew McDonald, North Hunterdon, 15:31. 6, Ben Potts, Haddonfield, 15:43. 7, Patrick Rono, Lyndhurst, 15:46. 8, Paul Szulewski, Williamstown, 15:55. 9, Collin Frost, Randolph 15:57. 10, Connor Herr, Shawnee, 15:58. (Other South Jersey runners in top 50: 13, Matt Nussbaum, Haddonfield, 16:01. 21, Miles Schoedler, Ocean City, 16:09. 24, Peter Murray, Shawnee, 16:14. 25, Greg Malloy, Cherokee, 16:14. 26, Anthony Dentino, Washington Township, 16:16. 27, Robert Rawls, Triton, 16:16. 36, Anthony Horton, Moorestown, 16:22. 38, Nick Costello, Delsea, 16:24. 39, Greg Halla, Haddonfield, 16:25. 50, Tim Malloy, Haddonfield, 16:29).

Girls' team scoring: Hillsborough 95, Voorhees 111, Red Bank Catholic 147, Ridge 200, Hunterdon Central 212, Cherokee 220, Holy Angels, 253, Mountain Lakes 255, Pingry 269, Mount St. Dominic 282 (Other South Jersey teams: Bishop Eustace 291, Haddonfield 307, Moorestown 324).

Girls' individual leaders: 1, Megan Venables, Highland, 17:46. 2, Holly Bischof, Bishop Eustace, 18:09. 3, Caroline Kellner, West Windsor South, 18:09. 4, Megan Lacy, Cherokee, 18:13. 5, Julianna Miller, Hillsborough, 18:18. 6, Molly McNamara, Red Bank Catholic, 18:21. 7, Samantha Jones, Randolph, 18:30. 8, Tara Hanley, Chatham, 18:30. 9, Amanda Corbosiero, Mt. St. Dominic, 18:33. 10, Mackenzie Barry, West Morris-Mendham, 18:35. (Other South Jersey runners in top 50: 35, Emily Casey, Holy Spirit, 19:37. 37, Montana DiPietranto, Bishop Eustace, 19:39. 39, Emily McGee, Lenape, 19:43. 50, Megan Charbeneau, Cherokee, 19:52).

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