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Potts, Nussbaum stepped up for Haddonfield cross-country team

By Phil Anastasia

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Ben Potts and Matt Nussbaum broke into the clear in more ways than one this season.

For several years, the two Haddonfield runners were complementary members of a cross-country team that was led by former stars Jon "Boo" Vitez and Colin Baker.

But this season, Potts and Nussbaum blazed their own trail. They led the Bulldogs to another South Jersey Group 2 title, another state Group 2 title, and an impressive second-place finish in the Meet of Champions.

"It was really satisfying," said Potts, a senior who has committed to Cornell. "A lot of people were thinking that maybe it was a rebuilding year. We wanted to prove we could run great when Boo and Colin were here and we could still run great when they weren't here."

Potts, who was named South Jersey's runner of the year by the South Jersey coaches' association, finished first in the South Jersey sectional at Delsea in 15 minutes, 55 seconds and first at the state meet at Holmdel in 16:09.

Nussbaum was second in the sectional meet in 16:00 and second in the state meet in 16:24.

But the two runners found another gear in the Meet of Champions. Most impressive, so did their teammates.

Potts finished sixth in 15:43. Nussbaum was 13th in 16:01. And nearly every member of the team ran his best race, as sophomore Greg Halla finished in 16:25, senior Tim Malloy in 16:29, senior Ethan Quanci in 17:03, senior Eric Lacy in 17:23, and senior Conor Jacobs in 17:25.

Haddonfield finished a strong second in the race, behind national power Christian Brothers Academy, but ahead of state powers West Windsor-Plainsboro South, Westfield, and West Windsor-Plainsboro North.

"We were running to win it," said Nussbaum, a senior who has committed to Yale. "The great thing was that everybody laid it all out there. It was amazing that everybody ran so well. We all laid it on the line. It was the most rewarding event of my high school career."

Like Potts, Nussbaum said he knew there were some questions about Haddonfield's ability to maintain its stature in cross-country without Vitez and Baker.

But, led by their two senior stars, the Bulldogs went above and beyond expectations, finishing 17th in the country in Harrier magazine's Super 25 rankings.

"It wasn't Boo's and Colin's team the last few years and it wasn't Ben's and my team this year," Nussbaum said. "It's all of us. It's Haddonfield's team."

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