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Ed Grant's New Jersey Report

The Haddons and CBA set to clash

September 24, 2009

The first meeting of the co-favorites for the New Jersey boys' all-group championships this year will take place this weekend on a foreign field as **Haddonfield** and **Christian Brothers** take on the best New York has to offer at the Bowdoin Classic.

Neither team was in action last weekend, the Haddons taking the day off entirely and the Colts running only in the sophomore and freshman divisions of the Magee Memorial Class Meet at Warinanco Park. Haddonfield had dominated the Cherokee Challenge two weeks ago, with **Jon Vitez** winning the senior race and **Ben Potts** the junior; CBA had yet to send its first team into action except in dual competition.

Speaking of the latter, **Tom Heath**'s boys passed another milestone this past Monday as they raised their national dual meet winning streak to 300, with no end in sight. It is now some 33 years since CBA last lost on this level of competition and the success of its underclass group in two outings this fall indicates it will be several years before they face a serious challenge from their local competition.

The Magee Memorial provided the highlights of both boys' and girls' action this past weekend, its only rival being out of state: The Regis Invitational, where **Don Bosco** won handily with a 1-2 finish from **Howard Rosas** and **Rafael Vargas** in 12:55 and 12:57 on the slightly revamped 2.5-mile course at Van Cortlandt Park, and the Briarwood Invitational at Philadelphia's Fairmont Park, where **Joe** and **James Rosa** led West Windsor-Plainsboro Park to a 63-69 win over LaSalle in 15:19 and 15:38. The defending AG champs, however, showed a lack of depth as their fifth finisher came home in 18:04.

Fastest of the boy winners at Warinanco was cross-country novice **Curtis Richburg** of West Orange, who won the senior event handily in 16:19 from **Anthony Bellitti** of Ridge. Richburg had made a tentative debut the week before at the Roxbury Invitational, failing to make the top 10 in the junior-senior race. This time, he followed Bellitti closely through the first two and a half, then ran away from the field when the runners hit the track for the final lap.

Missing from this race was defending AG champ **Tyler Udland**, who sat out the weekend with his teammates due to the clash with the Jewish holidays.

Darrel Gooding of Franklin, who had won at the St. Dominic Academy Invitational a week earlier, scored here in the sophomore event at 16:29. **Matt McDonald** of North Hunterdon had the second-fastest time of the day as he outran **Jake Ruskan** of Bridgewater to win the junior event in 16:27.

Ruskan, who ran the last mile of the event missing one shoe, led a strong team effort by the Panthers, who also had a 4-5 finish from **Dom Tasco** and **Chris Banafato** in the senior race, as well as a 9th-place finish by **Andrew Bak**. Their fifth boy, **Mike Jones**, had a creditable 17:22 as he placed 12th in the same race. This performance sets up a close Gr. IV battle at the state meet with Old Bridge, which dominated its own Central Jersey Shootout at Thompson Park.

Copying the format of its South Jersey namesake, which comes up this Saturday at Gloucester County College, this one had three races - the first for a team's 1-2 runners, the second for numbers 3-4 and the third 5-6-7. Old Bridge went 4-5 in the first with **Moheb Thomas** and **Corey O'Neill**, 1-2 in the second with **Anthony Branco** and **Vince Vento** and 1-2-3 in the third with **Shawn Burke**, **Joe Capolino** and **Mike Stateson**. **John Arnone** of Red Bank won the top race in 16:13 from Ewing sophomore **Matt Bearden**.

The Season Opener at Darlington Park on Friday saw **Salim Corbin** of Paterson Eastside outkick **Dan Rondon** of North Bergen in the A race in 16:03, and **Pat Rono** of Lyndhurst take the C event in 16:00. It was a return to action for Rondon, who had an outstanding junior season last fall, but missed both the indoor and outdoor campaigns with a leg injury. **Sherif Ali** led Cliffside Park to its first ever open cross-country win as he took the B race in 16:50.

The girls' races at the Magee Memorial had both good and bad news for South Brunswick, which is looking forward to an outstanding year in all three seasons. Soph **Cayla DelPiano** won her race in 19:24, but senior **Sophia Ginez** collapsed in the homestretch of a tightly-contested senior event, which was won by **Caroline Williams** of Mt. St. Mary's over **Colette Whitney** of Voorhees in 19:09. The Vikings also had **Lyndsey Sample** and **Jen Smilgis** finish 9-10 in that race, indicating it could give AG favorites Randolph and Ridge a run for their money in November.

Ridge took both overall team titles at the Magee meet (Randolph, like Millburn, was on the sidelines) with five girls in the top five of their respective races, led by **Jackie Madden**'s 19:44 for 5th in the senior event. The other three in full-course races were all well under 21:00.

Holy Angels turned in an outstanding team effort at the Season Opener. Going 1-2-3-4-5 in the A race with **Jen Molke** winning in 19:34. **Alyssa LaGuardia** took the B race for DePaul in 19:56 and **Betsy Eickelberg** of Leonia the C event in 20:00.

The Central Jersey Shootout "A" race drew a strong field with **Ashley Smolinka** of Hillsboro finishing 10 yards ahead of **Rashmi Singh** of Hunterdon Central in 18:50. Singh's teammate **Allison Payenski** was 3rd, also under 19:00, and the Red Raiders went on to claim team honors with **Carlie Skellington** taking the B race in 20:11 and three other girls under 21:00.

At the lightly-entered Battle of Monmouth, the **Prendergast** sisters, **Gerri** and **Kris**, of visiting Highland won the senior and junior races in 20:28 and 21:08. The Tartans lead runner, 2008 all-stater **Megan Venables**, finished in a virtual tie with **Kris** in the junior race, evidently recovered from the injury which ruined her outdoor season.



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