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## 2002 Girls Cross Country Team

Burlington County Times

### RUNNER OF THE YEAR: MEGHAN HUGHES, Moorestown

Based solely on results, Meghan Hughes did not have the type of year she did as a junior, when she won the state Group 2 championship. Based on performance, she was just as good, especially considering the fact that she was the runner to which all other runners compared themselves this fall.



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Hughes, the favorite in almost every race she ran this season, will run cross country at the University of Virginia next fall.

"Meghan had to deal with a lot of things this year, including the whole recruiting process," coach Jim Brudnicki said. "I think it took a lot out of her to have to run a race, then hop on a plane and visit a school, and then come back to run another race. She also had a lot of high expectations placed on her due to the success she had as a junior."

Despite battling flu-like symptoms, Hughes managed a fourth-place finish at the Shore Coaches Invitational (C Division). Much healthier the following week, she ran 19:08 to win the South Jersey Open (Division 2). Hughes also held off Britnee Bynoe and Jackie Dunn to capture the BCL Liberty Division championship one week before a second-place finish at the County Open.

"Over the last two years, we relied an awful lot on Meghan Hughes," Brudnicki said. "I always felt that she could run out front with anybody. It seemed the bigger the race, the more valuable she became for us. We're going to miss her."

Though Hughes' final race (29th at the Meet of Champions) was one she'd probably like to forget, she put together two strong performances in sectional and state Group 3 meets, where she finished third and fifth, respectively. Had it not been for the Quakers' jump from Group 2 to Group 3, Hughes' time of 19:28 would have been good enough for her to repeat as the Group 2 state champion.

**CAROLINE HIPPLE, Moorestown**

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### **MALIA LYLES, Cherokee**

It could be said that no county runner was more consistent this season than Malia Lyles. The Cherokee senior may not have won any races but finished no worse than seventh in seven of the eight big races that are used to measure a runner's greatness.

The only time she didn't have a single-digit number next to her name in the results was her 13th-place finish in the season-ending Meet of Champions, which was probably Lyles' most impressive performance of the season.

"For Malia to come from where she was last year to where she finished up this year was just amazing," Cherokee coach Chris Tarello said. "This was only her second year running, but in that short time she has become the best cross country runner I've ever coached. The bigger the meet, the better she seemed to get."

Lyles proved her worth with a fourth-place finish in the County Open and second-place finish in the Olympic Conference championship. She took fourth in the S.J. Open (Division 3), and used a third-place finish in sectionals and a fifth in the state Group 4 meet to qualify for the MOC.

### **KIM BONNER, Shawnee**

By the time November rolled around, Kim Bonner was the best runner on the best team in the state. Despite being sick the final two weeks of the season, Bonner managed a remarkable finish to a terrific season that included a first-place finish in the Olympic Conference championship meet.

"Kim just seemed to keep getting better and better as the season went on," coach Mike Yurcho said. "I think the County Open was probably the turning point of the season for her. She ran the last two races really sick. But she is the type of runner that wasn't going to let anything get in her way. She really came on strong when we needed her."

Bonner finished fifth in the County Open and sixth in the South Jersey Open (Division 3) before putting together an impressive three-week stretch to close out the season. The two-time First-Team selection took fourth at sectionals and second at the state Group 4 meet. Her 10th-place finish at the Meet of Champions led Shawnee to its third MOC team title.

### **ROBIN MCDOWELL, Shawnee**

Arguably the best No. 2 runner on any team in South Jersey, McDowell put together a very impressive season to help Shawnee win its third Meet of Champions title. A repeat selection on the First Team, McDowell recently capped off her junior season with a second-place finish in a class race at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships.

"Robin was solid all year for us," coach Mike Yurcho said. "She was our No. 2 runner most of the season and really didn't have a bad race all year. It was great to be able to have a girl like Robin running second for us. Her consistency helped our pack stay near the top in a lot of races."

McDowell finished fourth in the Shore Coaches Invitational (A Division), fifth in the South Jersey Open (Division 3) and seventh in the County Open. She followed up a sixth-place finish in the S.J. Group 4 race by placing 11th in the state meet and 33rd in the Meet of Champions.

### **BRITTNEE BYNOE, Willingboro**

In a year when several freshmen solidified their spots among the best runners in the state, none had quite the impact that Brittnee Bynoe did. Bynoe's success came immediately and helped trigger an interest in the sport at Willingboro, which won five dual meets this fall after going winless in 2001.

"She is really responsible for a revival of the cross country program," said coach Tosca Bynoe, Brittnee's mother. "The kids see the success she has had and it becomes more of a sport during the fall than just a training season."

Earlier this year, Bynoe established herself as a top-notch runner by finishing first among 313 runners in the junior varsity race at the Great American Cross Country Festival in Charlotte, N.C. Closer to home, the freshman edged Meghan Hughes to win the County Open in 18:22. Bynoe's resume also includes second-place finishes in the Cherokee Challenge (freshman race), BCL Liberty Division championship and South Jersey Group 3 meet.

"Brittnee is a student of the sport," Tosca Bynoe said. "She understands a lot about the science of training and she knows what she needs to work on to get better."

### **JACKIE DUNN, Rancocas Valley**

Jackie Dunn went from being a varsity soccer player to one of the state's top runners in just 15 months. A Second-Team selection a year ago, the Rancocas Valley senior continued to improve every time she stepped on a course this fall and proved herself a quick study of the sport with an 11th-place finish at the Meet of Champions.

"Jackie was everything we could have hoped for," coach Eddie Moore said. "She really enjoys running and she was a joy to work with. Her work ethic is fantastic and the potential is there for her to just keep getting better."

Among Dunn's accomplishments this fall were fifth place in the Cherokee Challenge (senior race); second in the South Jersey Open (Division 3) and third in the BCL Liberty Division championship. She was the fastest county runner at the Shore Coaches Invitational, where she finished third in the A Division, and she took third in the County Open (18:52).

Getting stronger as the season went along, Dunn finished up with a ninth-place finish in sectionals and an impressive seventh at the state Group 4 meet, which qualified her for the Meet of Champions. Last weekend, Dunn finished 51st in the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships.

### **CAROLINE HIPPLE, Moorestown**

Hipple was a first-team selection a year ago as Moorestown's fourth runner. This fall, she emerged as the Quakers' No. 2 runner behind Meghan Hughes. On most other teams, she'd be a No. 1.

The junior solidified her spot among the best runners in South Jersey with a 25th-place finish in the Meet of Champions after taking fourth in the South Jersey Group 3 race, running alongside Hughes.

"I think Caroline realized this year that she had to take some of the load and put it on her shoulders," Moorestown coach Jim Brudnicki said. "Last year, she was in the middle of a very talented group but this season, she had to be counted on and she stepped up to the challenge. Caroline is really coming into her own. She is a legitimate frontrunner and is starting to grow into that role."

Hipple finished fourth in a loaded BCL Liberty Division championship field and eighth in the County Open. She also helped her team to a South Jersey Open (Division 2) title by taking third place and finished fifth in the Shore Coaches Invitational Meet (C Division).

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