

Cherokee coming to the fore under Chris Tarello

By Josh Egerman
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

When Chris Tarello arrived as the Cherokee girls' cross-country coach four seasons ago after a stint as an assistant at Shawnee, he made it the Chiefs' goal to be the best team in South Jersey.

Which is quite the dream considering they weren't even the best team in their school district.

"Shawnee is the gold standard, and our goal is to be the best team in South Jersey," Tarello said. "In past years, it wasn't all that realistic, but we still have to keep it as a goal and just try to close the gap. Finally, this year, we noticed we've made significant strides."

The gap was never closer than in Friday's Burlington County Open. Shawnee won with 33 points, 13 better than Cherokee. But two miles into the race, Cherokee, whose fifth runner, freshman Megan File, missed the meet with a foot injury, had a lead. When it ended, the Chiefs' fourth runner had finished before the Renegades' fourth.

"We've just had to make the mind-set that in the championship season, we're going to go after them in every single race," Tarello said.

Cherokee could get four more cracks at its rival, starting tomorrow with the Olympic Conference championships at Gloucester County College. And, if both teams race to their

capabilities, they'll square off on three successive Saturdays, starting with the South Jersey Group 4 championships Nov. 8 at Delsea.

Cherokee sophomore Lisa Burkholder, who will be one of the favorites for the individual conference title, along with Shawnee seniors Kim Bonner and Robin McDowell and Triton junior Katie Van Horn, has been the Chiefs' frontrunner. Injuries slowed her in the middle of the season, but she was second in the county Open. Junior Megan O'Leary, sophomore Abbey Anderson and senior Amy Domowitch finished in the top 10 in the county Open.

Tarello said part of the difference in this year's team has been an aggressive attitude and improved leadership. Three of Cherokee's top five have a background in team sports, which, he says, helps them run more aggressively and be less intimidated. Also, Domowitch and senior Kate Burkholder have provided strong guidance.

"It's the first time I've really had captains who hold the team to a high standard and let the other girls know when they're not doing what they should be," the coach said.

The secret is out. When Woodrow Wilson sophomore Jasmine Still finished sixth in the Cougar Invitational in Colts Neck

last month, few from South Jersey noticed (Eastern was the only other team from the region at the meet). And that was just the way Wilson coach Ringo Adanson wanted it.

"She's a secret weapon," Adanson said. "I was trying to keep her a secret for a while, but now the cat's out of the bag."

That's because Still then added a sixth-place finish in the Division 2 race in the South Jersey Open and a second-place finish in the Camden County championships.

"She looks real good now," Adanson said. "I have good girls in the pack, but this girl is downright fast. If she's close, she can turn on that other gear."

Still will look for that gear in tomorrow's Olympic Conference championships.

Conference previews. The Tri-County Conference and Cape-Atlantic League will run their championship races today, with the former crowning a team champion and the latter just handing out an individual championship.

In the Tri-County, Highland's Arianna McKinney is an overwhelming favorite for the individual title in today's meet at Cumberland. The team title could come down to Highland, Delsea and Kingsway, which shared the regular-season Royal

Division title. Classic Division champion Gloucester City could be a dark horse.

The Cape-Atlantic League meet is at Stockton College, where Ocean City's Brittany Sedberry is the strong favorite, with Mainland's Andrea Campbell also in contention.

Boys

In big meets, Deptford's top runner, more often than not, has been senior Steve Beecher. In dual meets, though, Deptford's top runner, more often than not recently, has been senior Bill Cowin.

"Over the last three or four weeks, he's really excelled in dual meets," Deptford coach Rich Janofsky said. "He's just been taking it out and everyone's trying to catch him."

They haven't been doing a very good job lately. Earlier this month, Cowin set a course record at Overbrook. On Friday, he tied Deptford's course record of 16 minutes, 33 seconds, set by Jeff Zola in 2000.

"Bill's very carefree," Janofsky said. "Things don't bother him. He just goes out and runs."

Cowin will get a chance to excel in a big meet today during the Tri-County Conference championships at Cumberland. He will be one of the favorites, along with Beecher; Kingsway sophomore Ozzie Huerta; Schal-

ick junior Eric Mills; and Highland junior Jim Kavaliauskas, the defending champion.

Highland is the favorite for the team title, although Deptford, Kingsway and Schalick should be in the hunt.

Conference previews. The Cape-Atlantic League all-star meet also is today. The race is Mainland senior Greg Hughes' to lose. He has been Mainland's No. 1 runner all season. If he falters, one of his teammates, probably Jimmy Wyner or Spenser Popeson, should be in position to move ahead. No team title is awarded.

That's not the case in tomorrow's Olympic Conference championship, which should be a wide-open race. Cherokee isn't running most of its varsity runners — they will be taking a break before the sectional championships, state championships and Meet of Champions. That leaves Paul VI, Triton and Cherry Hill East to battle it out. Triton has an advantage with front-runner Josh Krowicki, the Camden County champion, but Paul VI and East have more depth.

Individually, Krowicki and Washington Township senior Carman Cavella should set the pace and battle for the victory.

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