

# Cherokee's O'Leary has a love for running

Megan O'Leary doesn't necessarily look the part of a runner, but she sure knows how to play it.

The Cherokee junior doesn't have the stereotypical runner's build. The legs aren't long. The body isn't naturally slim. The proper form just didn't come to her the first time she ran a race as a sixth-grader.

But her heart — it is long on desire, naturally motivated and well, just in love with distance running.

"I know I don't look like a runner and I don't seem like the running type, so I've got to work a little extra harder to make sure I'm in shape," said O'Leary, who is the No. 2 runner on the No. 2 ranked team in South Jersey so far this season.

The extra work has allowed O'Leary to be one of the more consistent runners in South Jersey. She finished fourth in the senior race at the Cherokee Challenge, fifth in Division 3 at the South Jersey Open, fifth at the Burlington County Open, 10th in the Red Invitational at the Great American Cross Country race in North Carolina and 11th in Division A at the Shore Coaches Invitational.

"She definitely is the standard to what we try to get the girls to go by," Cherokee coach Chris Tarrello said. "She is one of our most dedicated girls in the summer. She shows everybody the way to follow."

What gives O'Leary some satisfaction is that when she steps to the line, she's most likely going to finish ahead of a whole slew of runners who have more physical talent than her.

"I know I work as hard as anybody and I know in our program that we work hard,"

Jeff Wolfe



O'Leary said. "When I go to the line I know that we are fit, so we go in confident."

"People come in with so much talent sometimes, but they don't put forth the effort and nothing happens."

That confidence not only comes from hard work, but knowing she's got some quality teammates in top runner Lisa Burkholder as well as No. 3 and No. 4 runners Abbey Anderson and Amy Domowitch.

"I know my team is going to be up there and I know I can't let them down," O'Leary said.

What makes O'Leary special is that she is constantly exploring ways to run faster. This summer she went to her uncle Mark O'Leary's running camp just to work on her form. Mark O'Leary is the boys' cross country coach at Toms River South.

"I've had problems kicking at the end of the race," she said. "We just worked on form and worked on getting leg speed at the end of the race."

O'Leary admits she likes running the longer distances and the harder courses, like the hilly Holmdel course, where the state meet will be two weeks from today.

"I like the course," O'Leary said. "It seems like you either love it or hate it. I can get up hill pretty good, but coming down hill I have to work at it."

O'Leary admits she needed to work on her mental approach to

## UPCOMING KEY MEETS

■ Saturday, Nov. 8, 10 a.m. at Deisea High School, Franklin Twp.: South Jersey sectionals

This is the time of year where everybody wants to run well. It all starts next Saturday at the sectionals. The girls' races are Group 3 at 10 a.m., Group 2 at 10:25 a.m., Group 4 at 11:40 a.m. and Group 1 at 12:05 p.m.

■ Saturday, Nov. 8, 10 a.m. at Holmdel State Park: Central Jersey sectionals

With the sectional realignment, former South Jersey teams Rancocas Valley in Group 4, Willingboro and Northern Burlington in Group 3 and Deiran, Burlington Township and Bordentown in Group 2 have all been moved to the Central sectional.

racing and that has been a big help this year, too.

"I tend to break up the race now," she said. "Like at Holmdel, I think about just doing the first 800 and getting to the top of the first hill, and then I work on the next part."

What she doesn't need to work on is her passion for running. She estimates that she misses only two days a month, at most, of running. She's also faithful in keeping her journal.

"I'm like religious with my journal," she said. "I just like to look back at last year and compare races and times. I'm a results freak. I just love looking back."

And if she keeps finding ways to run faster, O'Leary will have a lot of good times to look back on in the years to come.

## Burkholder adjusting

Cherokee sophomore Lisa Burkholder was a big success on the track last spring. She's

# Varsity

South Jersey Scholastic Sports

Player of the Week

**Brittnee Bynoe**  
 Willingboro  
 Grade: Sophomore



**Accomplishments:** Bynoe has been one of the most consistent performers in South Jersey this season. She turned in another big effort by winning the Burlington County Open at Millcreek Park, Willingboro on Oct. 24 with a time of 19 minutes, 21 seconds.

**Comments:** "I usually try to go up the hill strong," Bynoe said of the big hill in the middle of Millcreek Park. "It can take a lot of seconds off your time and usually does separate you from the others."

## GIRLS' CROSS COUNTRY

had a good fall season in cross country, but she's certainly noticed the difference in the distance. While the longest race in track is 3,200 meters, every cross country race is 5,000 meters, or 3.1 miles.

"It's a big adjustment, but I'm getting used to it," Burkholder said after last week's Burlington County Open. "I think I still have some work to do. I felt stronger and better than I did at the South Jersey Open (on Oct. 11). That was not a good day."

Burkholder missed about a week of running with a sore foot, so she realizes she's on her way

to getting in top shape. At the Burlington County Open, she finished second behind Willingboro's Brittnee Bynoe, but finished ahead of Shawnee's Kim Bonner and Robin McDowell for the first time this season.

"I've been feeling really good the first two miles," Burkholder said. "Now I just have to hang on for the whole race."

## A lot of other stuff, too

■ A key for team success in any sport is depth, and cross country is no different. Shawnee is annually one of the top two or three teams in South Jersey because of it and this year is no ex-

ception.

At the Burlington County Open last week, the Renegades had their first seven finishers cross the line before any other team had its fifth runner finish.

■ Third-ranked Moorestown has put together a solid season, even though the Quakers have had some nagging injuries that have caused some runners to miss meets or run in discomfort. But Moorestown coach Jim Brudnicki knows the time for nursing injuries is over.

"Right now I just tell them to give me what they have. We can't hold them out any longer," said Brudnicki before last week's Burlington County Open.

One of those runners has been senior Liz Barlow. She ran for the Quakers at the Burlington County Open and was their sixth runner, but has potential to join the top five.

■ If you're looking for a most improved team from the start of this season, it could be Highland, which won the Tri-County Conference meet on Thursday. The Tartans have had a legitimate frontrunner in Arianna McKinney, who has yet to lose in a major meet this season. But she has had plenty of help in Brittany Caserta, Ashley Thornton, Espe Nsenga and Helen McGuire.

## Quote to run by

This week's quote comes from author Erica Jong.

"Everyone has talent; what is rare is the courage to follow that talent to the dark place where it leads."

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