

High Schools

At last, Cherokee girls realize dream

The Chiefs' first-ever cross-country victory over Shawnee gave them the South Jersey Group 4 title.

By Josh Egerman
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Chris Tarello couldn't finish the sentence.

"To watch it happen," he said, "is just...." He tried again.

"It seemed like we would never get them and when it happened, it's just...."

Tarello, the Cherokee girls' cross-country coach, was at a loss for words, but his team finally — finally — beat Shawnee.

Led by sophomore Lisa Burkholder's individual victory, the Chiefs won the first sectional championship in the 25-plus-year history of the program yesterday at Delsea, earning the South Jersey Group 4 title. In doing so, they beat district rival Shawnee for the first time — ever.

"It's never happened. I can't even describe it," said junior Megan O'Leary, Cherokee's No. 2 runner who finished seventh. "We're setting the standard for next year and years to come."

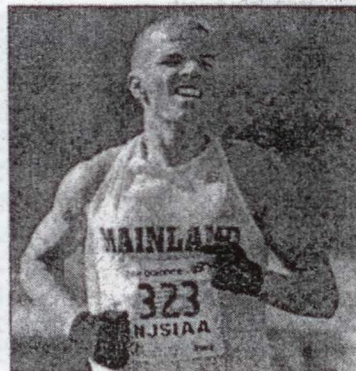
Exactly how many consecutive times Shawnee, South Jersey's premier program the last 20 years, had beaten Cherokee isn't clear. But figuring the teams race each other about six times a season, the number is probably close to 150.

"This is huge," said senior Amy Domowitch, a second-year runner who placed 17th overall yesterday. "Every day, [Tarello] tells us we're getting closer and we're getting closer. But you hold them on such a pedestal that it's almost in the back of your head, you're thinking 'Second to Shawnee is still good because it's Shawnee.' This just goes to show, when he was telling us we're getting closer, it was a reality. To finally do it is incredible."

Shawnee finished two points short, 62-64, of reclaiming the title it had won 12 straight times before it was upset last year by Toms River East. Shawnee, though, bounced back to win the state title and the Meet of



Cherokee's Lisa Burkholder led the Chiefs' team win, finishing first in the Group 4 race.



Mainland's Greg Hughes placed first in the Group 4 meet, as the Mustangs won the team title.

Champions.

The Renegades had already beaten Cherokee four times this season. This time, though, Cherokee's fifth runner, freshman Megan Siler, was healthy and in the race. Siler had missed the last two races with tendinitis in her left foot, but returned to finish 23d yesterday.

Cherokee's win was the biggest surprise of the sectionals, where the top five teams and top 10 individuals in each race qualify for Saturday's state group championships at Holmdel Park, but it was not the only surprise.

The Cinnamonson boys, led by senior Jon Anderson's individual



ROSE HOWERTER / Inquirer Suburban Staff

Cherokee's Megan O'Leary (right), who finished seventh, celebrates the South Jersey Group 4 championship with her teammates.

win, upset Haddonfield in Group 2. That ended the Bulldogs' run of nine straight sectional titles. Senior Dan Reidenbaker had, perhaps, his best race since his sophomore year to take third, and sophomore Steve Grabowski was fourth. The Pirates won their first sectional title since 1992.

The Group 3 races were expected to be the most competitive of the meet; neither was that close. The Highland boys won their first sectional title since 1994, beating Ocean City, 57-90. Junior Jim Kavaliauskus took the individual championship. Moorestown was three points behind Ocean City.

In the girls' race, Ocean City sophomore Brittany Sedberry ran away from Highland's Arianna McKinney over the last mile of the 3.1-mile course to win in 17 minutes, 55 seconds. Ocean City beat Moorestown, 38-67, to snap the Quakers' streak of six consecutive sectional titles. McKinney had the second-fastest time of the day, 18:30.

Haddonfield's Vanessa Wright, Abby Booker and Colleen Brogan

took the top three spots and the Bulldogs held on to win Group 2, their first sectional title since 1999. The Mainland boys also had a 1-2-3 finish in Group 4, as seniors Greg Hughes, who posted a meet-best 15:22, Jimmy Wyner and Spenser Popeson helped the Mustangs dominate the field. Junior Joey Masters was fifth and senior Matt McGroarty was 14th as the Mustangs accumulated 25 points.

In the Group 1 races, Rick Hall and Tim Rose took the top two spots as Maple Shade won its third straight title. The Gloucester City girls won their third title in five years behind Jenn Lippincott's second-place finish. The Lions became the only team champion not to have an individual champion. That was Point Pleasant Beach sophomore Lindsey Ritchings. Ritchings, though, did share something in common with the other girls' champions — they are all sophomores.

Contact suburban staff writer Josh Egerman at 856-779-3865 or jegerman@phillynews.com.