

Photos by Ed Kenney

CHRIS TARELLO, left, the Cherokee High School girls' cross country coach, offers encouragement to junior Megan O'Leary during the NJSIAA South Group 4 Sectional Championships at Delsea High School. Below, Shawnee's Kim Bonner, left, and Cherokee's Lisa Burkholder run stride-for-stride as they approach the finish line. Burkholder held on for the individual title as the Chiefs won their first sectional crown by beating the Renegades.

Chiefs have their day

Cherokee beats Shawnee for the first time in school history at the NJSIAA South Group 4 Championships last weekend.

by William H. Kile III
CR Sports Editor

A little more than 48 hours after "the unattainable" became "a reality," Cherokee junior Megan O'Leary found it hard to hide her enthusiasm. "Everyone's really excited," said O'Leary, three-year varsity runner, by telephone on Monday night.

There is good reason for excitement in "Cherokee Country" because the wait is finally

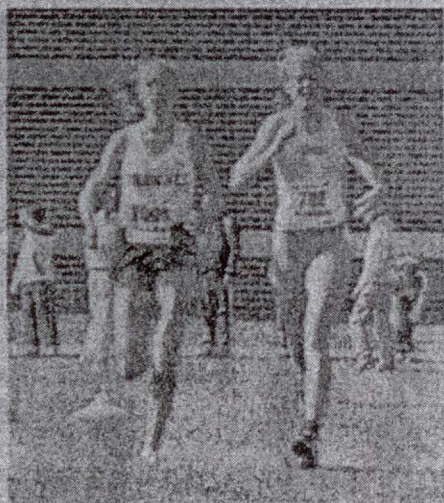
GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

over. It's official. Cherokee has beaten Shawnee in girls' cross country — and what a stage to do it on.

The historic victory came in the NJSIAA South Group 4 Sectional Championships at Delsea High School last Saturday that earned the Lady Chiefs their first-ever sectional title and a berth into Saturday's state Group 4 championships at Hoindell Park.

"I think it was that we all came together on the same day and the difference was our fifth runner," O'Leary said.

Cherokee's top-five pack scored 62 points, two better than Shawnee. Prior to last Saturday, the Renegades had the upper hand against the



Chiefs in all other previous meetings — totaling close to 100 encounters.

Freshman Megan Siler was competing after being sidelined by a foot injury. Her 23rd-place finish of 20:24 proved to be the difference in the outcome since she finished ahead of Shawnee's fifth runner (freshman Kim Bier) by seven seconds and two places.

"Megan ran in the beginning of the season and she came back for this race," said O'Leary, who finished seventh overall in the field of 116 runners in 19:30. "She was a little nervous at first, but she responded well once the race got started."

Siler played a big part in last weekend's out-
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Cross country

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come, but the Chiefs' championship wouldn't have been possible without a gutsy performance from sophomore Lisa Burkholder.

For the second time in six days, Burkholder found herself out in front with Shawnee senior Kim Bonner.

Burkholder made it two-for-two against Bonner as she became the first Cherokee female runner to ever win a sectional championship. She completed the fast and flat 5,000-meter course in 18:50, eight seconds ahead of Bonner.

"Of course I'm happy about winning the race, but it's more exciting to enjoy a team victory with my teammates and coach (Chris Tarello)," said Burkholder, who also outkicked Bonner for first place in the Olympic Conference Championships before the sectionals.

"I'm just so glad I was able to contribute to our biggest win ever. We've been battling with Shawnee for so long, but were never really able to say we were at their level. Now, hopefully, people will look at us as being in the same class with them.

"I don't think we're ever really taken seriously, because no matter how good we do, they (Shawnee) always seems to do

better."

Everyone played a part in a race that will forever go down as a landmark win in Cherokee's girls' cross country program.

"One of the things that made this win so special was the contributions we got from all of our runners," said Burkholder. "We didn't win by much and that means that every spot was important."

Probably one of the hardest part about Saturday was waiting for the results.

"We went for a 20-minute cool down after the race, came back and still had to wait," said O'Leary. "We were really excited once it was announced and couldn't believe it finally happened."

The Lady Chiefs are looking forward to meeting Shawnee again at states this weekend.

"We can't afford to let down now," said Burkholder. "We'll still have to work hard and look to get even better, because they're going to come right after us next week (at states)."

"Last year, Shawnee didn't win at states, but they came back the very next week to win the Meet of Champions, so we certainly know what they're capable of."

Burkholder also had high praise for her coach, commenting: "Coach Tarello has been great. I'm so happy for him. I hear him yelling the whole race 'no gaps' and 'respond to the moves.'