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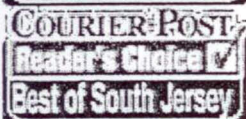
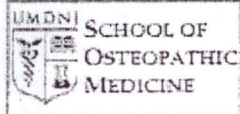
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Hi: 65 °F
Lo: 50 °F

Varsity
South Jersey Scholastic Sports

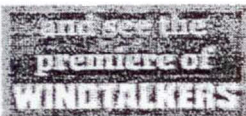
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Freshmen giving Cherokee an early boost

Head coach Chris Tarello doesn't need a crystal ball to foresee the success of the Cherokee girls' cross country team, currently No.4 in the Courier-Post Top 20.

All he had to do was watch the freshman race at last Saturday's Cherokee Challenge.

The Challenge is a 2-mile run with four separate races for each class.

The freshman race saw five Chiefs' runners in the Top 20, and they had the top three finishers in South Jersey, with Megan O'Leary, Grace Pelerin, and Laura Scheeler.

Catherine Holmes finished 12th and Lindsay Hearing finished 19th.

According to Tarello, the girls' reputation as talented runners preceded them long before they set foot in the high school.

"I've been hearing about them forever, and they've been living up to my expectations since I've begun coaching them," Tarello said.

One of the girls, Megan O'Leary, wasn't even sure if she wanted to run cross country before the season started.

"I ran in middle school and played soccer, and I really loved soccer. It was hard for me to decide what one to play," O'Leary said. "I like cross country though. I think it's really working out."

O'Leary finished in 12 minutes, 48 seconds - 33 seconds behind overall freshman winner Mara McInerney of Old Bridge.

As a newcomer, O'Leary is putting her personal goals aside and focusing on the team.

"I ran one 5K before and ran a 22:05 and I would like to beat that, but my main goal for the year is to make the team better," she said.

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Holmes was also unsure about her her future in cross country, but Tarello inspired her to stick it out.

"I would say I was more of a jogger than a runner before I got to Cherokee," Holmes said.

"If it weren't for coach Tarello, I wouldn't be half as good as I am now."

Tarello pointed to Holmes as an example of how positive the team has become since the beginning of the season.

"She had no expectations coming in, but since then she has totally bought into the program. That's the type of attitude we're looking for," Tarello said.

Another reason for the rapid success of the freshmen has been the guidance and tutelage of the older girls.

Senior Lauren Jones says the team has benefited immensely from the presence of the freshmen.

"They handled our workouts well, and now they've been pushing them to another level," Jones said.

"They make everyone better."

Moorestown holds rank

Moorestown might not have the freshman class that Cherokee has, but the runners they do have are equally impressive.

No.1 Moorestown had four runners in the Top 20 at the Cherokee Challenge senior race, with Kelsey Rinehart finishing first in 11:45. Colleen Hughes came in fourth in 12:16.

Megan Hughes won the junior race in 11:48, which would have given her second in the senior race.

Head coach Jim Brudnicki was happy with his team's performance but was hesitant to see the day as a barometer of his team's capabilities.

"It's only a 2-mile race, so the times are really fast," he said.

"It shows me that I have two front-runners in Rinehart and Megan Hughes, but it's way too early to show me what I have."

The Quakers also had four Top 20 finishers in the sophomore race, including Caroline Hipple and Kate Laramie, who came in fourth and fifth.

Over the river

The Schalick, Shawnee and Paul VI teams traveled to West