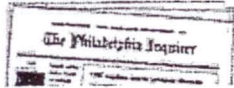




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## Sports

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### Freshmen pushing leader at Cherokee

**By Josh Egerman**

INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Lauren Jones was supposed to be Cherokee's undisputed cross-country leader.

Jones, a senior cocaptain, was the Chiefs' only returning runner who had broken 21 minutes on the challenging state championship course at Holmdel Park.

Only, it hasn't exactly worked out that way on the course. But, being the undisputed team leader off the course that she is, she can't complain.

Megan O'Leary, who leads a pack of four freshmen, has stepped in and pushed Jones for her spot as Cherokee's top runner.

"It was a little difficult at first, but I was in the same position as they are my freshman year," Jones said. "It's a team thing. It doesn't bother me. If they can race and get out in front of me, more power to them."

The freshmen - O'Leary, Laura Scheeler, Catherine Holmes, and Grace Pelerin (the younger sister of Marc Pelerin, the favorite to win the New Jersey boys' Meet of Champions) - have combined with Jones and junior Jenna Viggiano to get the Chiefs off to a 2-0 start.

Cherokee also participated in the Sept. 15 Cherokee Challenge, and the freshmen were particularly impressive. In the freshman race, O'Leary, Pelerin and Scheeler were the first three South Jersey runners to cross the finish line, in third, sixth and eighth, respectively. Holmes was the fifth South Jersey freshman finisher, taking 12th.

"I heard about this class forever," third-year Cherokee

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coach Chris Tarello said. "I didn't want to get too excited about it until I saw them, but they've come in as runners, and that's just a dream."

The freshmen have changed the dynamics of the team. Jones would like to get stronger as the season goes on and be a clear front-runner, but she knows running together makes the team stronger.

"Our team is very young, but the pack is very strong," said Jones, who was 12th in the senior race at the Cherokee Challenge. "We don't have one specific leader this year."

"We've always had a small team, and it's been one girl's job to be the No. 1 runner, another girl's job to be the No. 2 runner, another girl's job to be the No. 3 runner," Tarello said. "Now, we're emphasizing running as a group and running as a team."

The boost from the freshman class also has raised expectations not just for the future, but for this season.

"I definitely think, if we continue to develop, we have to be one of the top teams in South Jersey," Tarello said. "We're better than we have been. We have more talent and we work harder."

**Hawks take flight.** Haddon Township had waited a long time for this one.

For four seasons, Haddonfield, led by standout Erin Donohue, had its way with rival Haddon Township.

With the graduation of Donohue, the Hawks, the defending South Jersey Group 1 champions, knew they could change their fortunes against the Bulldogs.

"We knew we had a chance this year. We started training July 5 for this meet," Township coach Pam Gess said. "We got bumped up to Group 2 this year and Moorestown is there, so we decided to set our goal on winning the Colonial Conference."

Township still has to win out the string of conference meets, but after beating Haddonfield, 24-31, on Tuesday, that shouldn't be much of a problem.

"It was the best dual cross-country meet I've ever seen," Gess said. "At two miles, you had no idea who was going