

Varsityextra

South Jersey Scholastic Sports

Pelerins are on the run in S.J.

Marc Pelerin recalls the days when he trained for his distance running career with his younger sister, Grace, hanging in right by his side.

They were not using the same mode of transportation, however. While Marc was running, Grace would be riding along on her bicycle to keep up with him.



Don Benevento

"She used to come along just so I had somebody to run with," Marc said. "But there was no way she could run that far herself."

These days Marc, a Cherokee High School senior, has emerged as perhaps the best cross country runner in the state — and Grace is still trying to keep up with him.

As a freshman at Cherokee, Grace may be well on the way to becoming a proficient cross country runner in her own right.

And she is not alone, either. There is another Pelerin chasing close behind.

Aside from the two high school students, Dana, a sixth-grade student at Marlton's DeMasi Middle School, may become the next Pelerin to add to the family's running legacy.

Marc may be the best, Grace is training

"Right now, Dana is doing it just for fun," said Marc. "But she does take it seriously to some degree, too."

Though it's early in their careers, both sisters would seem to have a way to go before matching Marc's achievements. A two-time All-South Jersey performer, he is off to another outstanding start.

On Oct. 6, he turned in the best time in the state at the Shore Coaches Invitational, finishing in 18 minutes, .80 seconds — 21 seconds ahead of his nearest competitor, Eastern's Dan Deichert.

He followed that up on Saturday by running a 12:48.4, the fastest time for any New Jersey competitor, to lead his team to a second-place finish in the A race of the Manhattan Cross Country Invitational in New York's Van Cortland Park.

His recent efforts are follow-ups to a junior season in which he finished second in both the South Jersey and state Group 4 meets.

According to Grace, Marc did not start out his athletic career as a cross country runner.

"I think I introduced him to the sport," she said. "Until then, he had always been a soccer per-

son."

Indeed, it was Grace who first became interested in track and field. She first made an impression as a high jumper, earning two berths on Junior Olympic teams in that event.

This spring, she plans to jump for the first time for the Cherokee track and field team, and she will come into action having posted a best jump of 5 feet, 2 inches.

Marc admits his sister's experience in the Junior Olympics motivated him to try running.

"When I saw how well she was doing," he said, "I wanted to go to the Junior Olympics, too."

Even after she and Marc both became interested in running, Grace admits it was hard to keep up with her older brother.

She has her own recollection of the bicycle story.

"He was running like eight miles, and I couldn't run that far," she said. "At that time, I thought four miles was a long way to go."

Now Marc runs 33 to 50 miles per week, while Grace logs 25 to 35 miles per week.

Like his sister, Marc also is a member of the Cherokee track team. He runs in the 3,200-, 1,600- and 800-meter races, the latter of

which is an extremely short distance compared to cross country.

"I think that's what makes the 800 so special," he said. "I'm used to running distances, so for me the 800 is a speed race."

Besides his cross country honors, Marc was selected All-South Jersey in the spring in the 3,200, after winning the event in both the South Jersey and state Group 4 meets. His 9:15.49 time in the Meet of Champions was the year's fastest in South Jersey.

Despite his advancement in the sport, Marc is reluctant to try to coach Grace. But they both say they talk about running during their daily conversations.

"I try to stay out of the way," Marc said. "I don't like to get too involved. But if she asks me, I'll tell what I think she's doing right or wrong."

Grace said it's nice to have someone to talk to about running.

"It helps to have someone who knows what you're going through," she said. "We try to get each other motivated."

So far, it's a system that's worked well for both.

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Marc Pelerin (left) recently won the Shore Coaches Invitational. His sister Grace also runs for Cherokee's cross country team.