

# Cherokee runner doesn't let Achilles

Last Saturday at the Woodbury Relays, Cherokee senior **Melissa Razo** was awarded the Founders' Trophy in recognition of being the meet's Most Courageous Athlete.



JODY  
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Notebook

Razo, who ran the first leg in the Lady Chiefs' 3200-meter relay victory, suffers from a leg condition known as Achilles' tendonitis. The ailment causes the Achilles' tendon to swell, which reduces its mobility.

"There's always pain there, just sometimes it is worse than others," says Razo. "But if I stopped every time it hurt, I would never run."

Razo was diagnosed in 1997. After taking the spring season off, Razo has run cross country and track every season since.

"I ran with the pain in the winter season of 1996, without knowing how bad it was," Razo said. "And that probably worsened it. Now it just hurts — some times are worse than others."

Razo, who runs middle distances for the Lady Chiefs, says the leg doesn't affect her too much as long as she takes precautions, such as icing and stretching properly.

The senior contends the award last Saturday was no big deal but admits it certainly felt good to be recognized by others.

"It felt great that people acknowledged me," says Razo. "I mean, I'm sure I'm not the only one running in pain or anything like that, but it does feel good."

Razo says the support of her teammates and coaches helps make a tough situation even easier to get through.

"My teammates are great. They are all really supportive of me and they know my situation," Razo said. "Mr. (Cherokee assistant coach **Chris**) **Tarello** always makes sure I'm doing the right things and makes sure I'm feeling OK."

Razo, who hopes to attend The College of New Jersey in the fall, says the ailment does have a positive

side.

"I think it keeps me more focused on my running and it helps me push myself a little more," said Razo. "I try my best not to think about it, and I think it makes me run better."

After hearing of Razo's situation and the amount of pain she sometimes suffers, one question comes to mind: Why run with the pain?

Razo was confident in her answer.

"I love the sport and I love to run. I don't think I'd ever consider giving it all up unless I really had to," said Razo. Doctors have told her the condition will most likely give her problems in the long term.

"They've said it could cause problems if I overcompensate for the pain, so I concentrate sometimes on not compensating too much. But they've said it could cause problems in the future. I try to not to think about that too much."

Razo's story is certainly one of inspiration and courage for the dozens of athletes in the area who may have more hurdles to surpass than the ones on the track.

The Lady Chiefs, No. 16 in the *Courier-Post* Top 20 Poll, were also given the Ted Klepac Memorial Award for recording the fastest time in the 4x800 meter relay. Cherokee finished third in Division A behind Shawnee and Pennsauken.

## tendonitis stop her

Cherokee handily outran Shawnee in the Division A 3,200 relay. Melissa Razo, who was named the Meet's Most Courageous Runner for overcoming acute tendonitis to compete this weekend, led the Chiefs to the win.

Razo's Most Courageous Athlete Award was well earned. She set aside her pain to help Julie Harms, Michelle Bilicki and Erin Chiarulli set an eye-opening mark of 9:36.4 in the 3,200.

"We went in there with high expectations," Razo said. "We wanted to beat our school record (they did by more than five seconds). We wanted to go right out to the front to set up a big gap for our anchor."

"This was pretty important because the other schools like Shawnee have such a reputation in the distance events. It was very important for us to run like this today."