

# Champ Shawnee redeems itself

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SOUTH PLAINFIELD — The quest began a year ago, not even a day after Shawnee's virtual collapse in the 1991 state Group 4 track meet.

Shawnee, chasing a state title, humbly went home after scoring just five points

## BOYS STATE MEET

and placing 17th overall, far behind Willingboro. The next day, head coach Tim Gushue, still smarting, got the devastating meet results from the newspaper, made copies for everybody on the team, and told his young runners to never forget the feeling of disappointment, to never forget what it was like to lose so completely.

"At the top of it, I wrote, 'Shawnee Track — Pride, poise and desire,' and, 'Only 355 days until next year's state meet,'" Gushue said. "Then last week, I gave everybody another copy. I just wanted to remind them of what happened a year ago."

Some of Shawnee's athletes had that poster on their bedroom walls all year. Some of them just kept the image in their heads. But all of them committed themselves to making sure things turned out differently this year.

And yesterday, after a bizarre and dramatic finish, Shawnee had outscored powerful Eastern High of Voorhees by three points to win the first state track and field championship in school history. The Renegades won the Group 4 title, 63-60, over Eastern in the rain and wind at South Plainfield's Frank Jost Field.

"We worked so darn hard for this," said senior Jim Angermeier, who placed in the intermediate hurdles and ran on Shawnee's relay team. "And this makes it all worthwhile."

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"I think about all the times we moaned and groaned about the work we had to do in practice. But running that one extra lap, doing that one extra cool down, maybe that was the difference between winning and not winning. That's why you do all that work."

Senior Ed Loges led Shawnee with a state title in the high hurdles and second-place finishes in the long jump and 200-meter dash. Junior Jason LaBarbera won the javelin with a personal-best 199-10 throw, second best in the state this year.

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■ CHAMP/From C1

and 12th in Group 1 and four-time defending state champion Willingboro was seventh in Group 4 and won the 1,600-meter relay for the third straight year.

Cinnaminson's John Keevey won his third state title and first in the 800 meters and also ran a leg on the Pirates' winning relay team, which successfully defended its title with Mark Nelms, Kevin Walker and Jason Collins joining Keevey. Palmyra soph Greg Willis won the Group 1 discus with a 157-8 throw (see related story).

For Shawnee, the meet certainly didn't go according to plan, but the Renegades scored in 10 of 15 events, making this a true *team* championship.

Chris Tarello was second in the 800, LaBarbera took third in the discus, and Angermeier ran fourth in the intermediates, but the surprise performer of the meet was senior Jason Douglas, who scored in both the 1,600 and 3,200, beating all-state teammates Keith O'Brien and Aaron Totten-Lancaster.

"It shows that even if our top guys have an off day, we still have guys in there who the team can rely on," said Douglas, who ran personal-bests of 4:22.2 and 9:36.6. "No one expected me to pull that off. But Keith and Tott didn't have it today, so I figured, 'Geeze, I better score some points so we don't get shut out in those events.'"

Shawnee also got points from senior captains Marty Wick (fifth in javelin) and O'Brien (sixth in 800), but the key was the 1,600-meter relay team. The Renegades went into the weekend's final event trailing Eastern by a point. They needed to place fifth or better to win the meet, but they had to do it running alone.

"I was so nervous knowing we had to score out of the second heat," said Tarello, who led off the relay with a 50.3 leg. "It was nerve-wracking. I've never felt so much pressure in my life."

and nobody expected me to do what I did. I just went out there and did it. There was no pressure on me. I just stayed relaxed and did what I had to do."

All year, Shawnee has done what it's had to do. The Renegades lost to Eastern at the Bridgeton Relays but have won everything since — the Woodbury Relays, the County Open, a dual meet against Willingboro, the Liberty Division title, the South Jersey Group 4 crown. All for the first time.

And yesterday, they capped a tremendous year with the ultimate prize, a state Group 4 title. Since New Jersey began sponsoring its state track meet in 1919, South Jersey schools have won just nine Group 4 crowns. From South Jersey, only Willingboro, Edgewood and Camden have ever won the large-school division.

"We're like a big family," said Tarello, who set a school-record of 1:54.28 in the 800, sixth-fastest in county history. "It's nice to be able to trust a bunch of people like we do. Everybody knows they can rely on each other. Everybody knows nobody is going to let the team down."

"On this team, you don't have to worry about somebody not giving 100 percent. If you have Shawnee on your shirt, you're going to walk off the track knowing you gave it everything you had."

Angermeier followed with a 51.4 leg, O'Brien ran 52.3, and Loges went 50.1. All that was left was to watch the seeded heat and see if the fifth-fastest time was worse than 3:24.36. If so, the Renegades would be state champs. If not, they'd be second to Eastern.

As the anchor runners approached the finish line, Gushue shook his head in dismay — "I don't think we got it," he said. "I don't think so."

But fifth-place Teaneck crossed the line in 3:26.27, meaning Shawnee was fourth in the event. The four team points gave Shawnee the title. With fewer than two seconds to spare.

"I saw what Willingboro did last year — they won the state title basically with Lamont Smith scoring most of the points," Loges said. "That's a great accomplishment. But what means the most about this is that it's a team championship. We came up here with guys competing in 18 different events and we scored in almost every event. That's the meaning of a team championship."

Loges was the workhorse, edging Eastern's Vince Rawlins in the high hurdles, taking second to Jackson's Leon Davis in the 200, and second to Atlantic City's Steve Harper — by three-quarters of an inch — in the long jump.

"I'm just glad to have all the other guys with me," said Loges, who will enter Bucknell University this fall. "It's a great feeling knowing that if I don't do something, somebody else will make up those points."

There's no better example of that than Douglas, whose steady improvement this year went unnoticed behind the fast times of O'Brien and Totten-Lancaster. But O'Brien, who had run a 1:55.81 800 on Friday and has been hampered by allergies, faded at the end of the 1,600. And yesterday, Totten-Lancaster — second here last year — struggled at the end of the 3,200.

And both times, there was the smooth-striding Douglas, easing into the top five and scoring four crucial points.

"I figure, I'm just out there to contribute to the team," Douglas said. "I know nobody's heard of me