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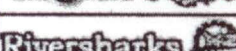
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Varsity HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Three sophomores pace themselves for big year

Saturday, September 6, 2003

By JEFF WOLFE
Courier-Post Staff

Going out and running is one thing. It's often something you can do alone. You set your own pace.

Running a cross country race is quite another thing. There are often dozens, and sometimes more than a hundred people in the race. And trying to run at your chosen speed can often be an unpleasant task.

And figuring out just how to deal with so many people in a race, all trying to run faster than you, isn't an easy thing.

That's especially true for a young runner, say a freshman.

But it's not often that a group like last year's freshman class comes along. Three freshmen figured out how to deal with all the things that can happen in a cross country race.

Ocean City's Brittany Sedberry got better as the races got bigger and ended up being the Courier-Post Runner of the Year.

Haddonfield's Vanessa Wright won a state Group 2 title on a miserable muddy day at the Holmdel Park course and made first-team All-South Jersey.

And Willingboro's Brittnee Bynoe proved she was one of the more talented runners in South Jersey and was also a first-team All-South Jersey selection.

Now, that trio looks as if it will become a foursome as Cherokee sophomore and spring track standout Lisa Burkholder will run for the Chiefs this fall.

"It's a great class," Cherokee coach Chris Tarello said of the sophomore group. "Lisa and Brittany (Sedberry) both ran in the top group together at camp. They became friends with each other, but you could also see the competitiveness."

Sedberry, Burkholder and Wright all will compete against each other in the sophomore race at the opening big meet of the season on Sept. 20 at the Cherokee Challenge, where the races will be two miles, rather than the normal 3.1 miles for almost all other cross country races.

Yes, they will notice who is in the race. But it's also not a win-at-all-costs situation.

"I don't meet up with them very much," Wright said, "so it's an opportunity. But there's also two months left in the season after that race."

Sedberry knows she will be watched at every meet this season. That's what happens when a freshman wins the South Jersey Group 3 title, then takes fourth in the state Group 3 meet and fifth in the Meet of Champions.

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"There seems like there is a lot of pressure, but every athlete has it," Sedberry said. "I'm expected to do what I did last year, but I want myself to be better and I want to push myself to try and do better."

Sedberry knows she will be pushed in the race at Cherokee.

"Right now, I think I would be ready and that I could run pretty fast," she said. "I'm up for the competition, but whether I would win or not, I don't know."

Bynoe certainly knows a lot more about cross country heading into this season. After running strong for most of last year, she struggled at the state Group 3 meet at Holmdel and did not qualify for the Meet of Champions.

"I do want to run well at Holmdel," Bynoe said, "but I don't think I have anything to prove. I just want to run my best time."

Bynoe didn't have the kind of spring track season she wanted as she dealt with a bad hamstring. But that is healed now and her coach, and mom, Tosca Bynoe, thinks they have a better plan for this season.

"I think as a freshman coming in she had an extraordinarily good season," Tosca Bynoe said. "I think we would have maintained her mileage a lot more toward the end of last season, so pacing the season is what I learned from last year."

When it comes to setting the pace, Burkholder certainly doesn't mind that task. She was first-team All-South Jersey in spring track in the 1,600-meter run. "She has this competitiveness that is unparalleled from anybody who I've coached," said Tarello, who is in his fifth season at Cherokee and was a long-time assistant in the Cherokee and Shawnee programs. "She gets no thrill out of the success, but can't stand to lose. The girls really respect her work ethic."

Along with the four sophomores, two others who could contend for Runner of the Year honors include Shawnee senior Kim Bonner and Highland junior Arianna McKinney.

McKinney battled injury most of last season. Her most impressive race may have come in the Group 3 sectionals, where with very little training because of the injury, she finished ninth. McKinney has been healthy this summer, so she could emerge.

Bonner led Shawnee to the Meet of Champions title and took second individually in the state Group 4 meet, also leading Shawnee to that crown.

The Renegades have a new leader as assistant coach Cliff Scott takes over for the retired Mike Yurcho. Along with Bonner, the Renegades will have some familiar faces back in top-five performers and seniors Robin McDowell and Katie Quinn.

While Shawnee starts the season at the top of the rankings, the addition of Burkholder, along with her senior sister, Kate, could put the No. 2 Chiefs in position to challenge the Renegades.

While Lisa certainly added running talent, Kate brings some important leadership.

"She will definitely be a varsity runner for us," Tarello said of Kate Burkholder. "She has taken a real leadership position. She knows this is the only year she will run with her sister, so she wants this to be the best year this team has ever had."

Third-ranked Ocean City should be one of South Jersey's best teams. Along with Sedberry, the Red Raiders return several runners and have a new coaching situation as Trish Hopson and Bruce Welch are co-coaches.

twin sister, Katie, running virtually stride for stride with her in every race. McKinney ran away from the competition Saturday.

Highland coach Jill Dorio said it is one of McKinney's strengths that she can run her own race, regardless of what the competition is doing.

"She had a plan that she followed," Dorio said. "To execute that when you're running by yourself with no one around to push you can be difficult."

Bouncing back. The sophomore race at the Cherokee Challenge had one of the strongest fields of any race this season. It was just the kind of challenge Cherokee's Lisa Burkholder, was looking for.

Burkholder made a move with about 600 meters to go, pulling away from defending champion Vanessa Wright of Haddonfield and Ocean City's Brittany Sedberry and held on for the win. Sedberry was The Inquirer's cross-country runner of the year last season.

"It's given me a lot of confidence to know that I can run with those two girls and still come out on top," said Burkholder, who covered the 3,200-meter course in 11:57.

Wright out-kicked Sedberry to the line to take second in 12:02. Sedberry was credited with the same time to take third.

Burkholder was coming off shaky performances in her first two races of the season, a dual meet against Shawnee and the Randolph Invitational.

"I wasn't really happy with those performances so this is a big boost of confidence," Burkholder said. "I was better mentally prepared. The other days, I wasn't feeling it.

"This is only my third cross-country race so I'm really excited and glad to be back on track."

Streak in jeopardy. The Paul VI boys added three dual-meet wins Tuesday to run their historic streak to 219. Earning win No. 220 could be a challenge when they face Bishop Eustace at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday at Gloucester County College.

"We've been training hard and we'll do the best we can," first-year coach Jim Enright said. "Bishop Eustace is an excellent team. They're the defending [Parochial B] state champions."

Enright described seniors Tim Miles and Tim Lively as team leaders, but the strength of the squad is in the other classes. Shawn D'Andrea had the Eagles' best time of the day at the Cherokee Challenge, covering the 3,200-meter course in 10:29 to finish seventh in the junior race. Colin MacFarlane was eighth in the sophomore race in