

Victory and Bilicki record personal bests

By Reuben Frank
BCT sports writer

GLASSBORO — Kelly Victory and Michelle Bilicki are both trying to forget last year. Both are doing that by making this year memorable.

Victory, a junior at Lenape High School, and Bilicki, a junior at Cherokee, both continued their terrific spring track seasons yesterday with middle-distance personal bests at the Olympic Conference Track Championships at Rowan University.

Victory placed third in the 800-meter run in 2:17.6 — fastest by a county half-miler since Liz Moore's 2:17.0 in 1995 — and Bilicki was third in the 1,600 in 5:07 — seventh-fastest in county history.

On the 2000 New Jersey performance list, Victory moved up to No. 10 and Bilicki to No. 7.

"I ran 5:19 as a freshman, but my best last year was 5:25 or something," Bilicki said. "I was really disappointed in last year. This year, I'm so much more confident. Last year, I'd go into every race completely scared. I was like a little girl. This year, coach (Chris) Tarello has given us all so much more confidence. It's made a huge difference."

Shawnee senior Jenna Darcy, the 1999 state Group 4 champ at 1,600, placed second in 5:07.3, a fraction off her PR. Triton's Claudine Evangelista, ranked ninth nationally indoors at 1,500, won in 5:00.5.

Darcy and Bilicki are Burlington County's fastest milers since 1993, when Moore and Kari Vigerstol both ran sub-5:02.

"I basically wanted to try to stay with Jenna and Claudine as long as I could," Bilicki said. "Last year, I'd get into a race with Jenna and I'd be so intimidated. She's an incredible runner. But we're good friends now, so she doesn't intimidate me as much anymore."

Bilicki ran 5:23 indoors, so she's not totally unknown, although yesterday's race was a huge breakthrough.

Victory, however, has come out of

GIRLS TRACK

nowhere. She first ran under 2:20 at Ike Willis, then won the County Open in 2:18.37 before setting her third PR in three weeks yesterday behind two of the nation's fastest half-milers — Evangelista (2:14.3) and Overbrook's Tara DeBriele (2:15.6).

"Last year, I was always hurt," Victory said. "This year, after Ike Willis, I had a different attitude. That race gave me a lot more confidence. Before, I was never sure what I could do. Now, I know that I can run that fast."

Not far behind Bilicki were Lenape senior Lindsay Scarborough and Cherokee senior Melissa Razo, who placed fourth and fifth, both under 5:16.

Razo's training has been slowed by nagging shin injuries, but she ran a personal-best 11:31 at the County Open and scored a nine-second PR yesterday in the 1,600.

"I do the best I can at practice," Razo said. "We had a tough workout Monday and I wasn't sure I'd get through it, but I did."

Bilicki said it's impossible for her to complain about anything when she sees her teammate battling pain every time she takes a step.

"We were doing threshold 800s Monday and she hit every one, but after practice she could barely walk up the steps," Bilicki said. "Melissa's incredible. She's running great. I'm so proud of her. She's really an inspiration to the rest of us."

Cherokee junior Erin Chiarulli posted a big PR in the 800, racing 2:18.7 for fourth place.

Scarborough and teammate Erin Riddle both placed in the 3,200 in 11:42.5 and 11:43.8.

Shawnee's hurdlers had a good day. In the highs, Lindsay McCullough and Christine DeJong both medaled, and in the intermediates soph Samantha O'Reilly had her second PR in five days at 1:05.6 for fifth place.

Cherokee junior Amy Landell was third in the long jump at 16-6 and teammate Jessica Caccamo placed in all three throws.