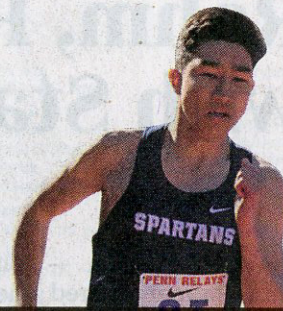


Sports



Teams get wins at Penn

Paramus, River Dell win in nearly identical fashion on Saturday. 11S

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TRACK AND FIELD

Paramus, River Dell win in similar style at Penn Relays

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North Jersey Record
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

PHILADELPHIA — The Paramus 4-x-400 team was aware of the chance to make school history at the Penn Relays Saturday

The quartet of Ryan Fernando, Gabe Pineda, Dennis Hemans and Dan Stipanov knew the Spartans hadn't brought home a mini-wheel plaque awarded for winning its heat at the world's oldest and biggest relay meet since 1962.

And they relished the chance to make it happen.

Running the third race of the day under windy and cool conditions, the Spartans went wire-to-wire and won by more than 20 meters over Marlboro (Monmouth County) to win the plaque in 3:31.68, one of two North Jersey boys teams to bring home the mini-wheel.

"It puts us in Paramus history for all-time," said Fernando, "I came down last year as an alternate but this time I wanted to run."

The team left Paramus High School at 5 a.m. but the trip and the entry into the stadium revitalized what could have been a sleepy foursome.

"It was so lively and exciting to get ready and then to run that I couldn't wait to get started," said Pineda, who had the fastest split, 51.12. "Ryan put me in a great spot to get the baton and I wanted to do the same for Dennis.

Hemans, who dad ran at Penn as a Jamaican high school athlete, was aware of the history and tradition of the meet, which celebrated its 125th anniversary this year. But taking part in it opened his eyes even more.

"To run against all these different schools than the ones we see all the time is a lot of fun," said Hemans, who gave his anchor, Stipanov a 20 meter cushion.

"We practiced all week to be ready for this," said Stipanov, who made the cushion stand up. "I was so fortunate that all the guys kept putting us in better positions and all I had to do is take it home."



Ryan Fernando of Paramus hands the baton to Gabe Pineda as they competed in the 4-x-400 relay on Saturday at the Penn Relays. CHRIS PEDOTA/NORTHJERSEY.COM-USA TODAY NETWORK

Penn Relays

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It might not take 57 years to win the next mini wheel. All four guys are juniors.

About 15 minutes later, River Dell practically ran a carbon copy of Paramus' race to grab its first boys mini-wheel in at least a decade.

The team of Ed Ahn, David Gibbons, Will Vidal and Andrew Sanchez also led after every exchange, and won by 25 meters although it got a little close with 200 meters to go.

Unlike the Paramus team, all but Vidal had run at Penn a year ago and had the fastest North Jersey time of the day but finished out of the medals in a much later race.

This time they didn't worry about time but used their experience to take the plaque. And their 3:30.58 clocking was enough to get the win.

"I knew I had to go out really hard from the gun," said Ahn, "And the guy next to me had the same idea so it was a little difficult early."

But Ahn pulled out of it and handed to Gibbons first. "I knew Eddie was going to get out well, so I knew I had to be ready to get the baton and try and get us a bigger lead.

Gibbons opened up a 10 meter lead on Damascus of Maryland, and Vidal took the stick and had to hold off the Damascus runner.

"I'm really more of an 800 guy so I don't get out as quick as I should be I got more confidence as I ran," said Vidal, who actually was passed briefly before regaining the lead before the final pass.

When the stick got to Sanchez, the rest of the team relaxed.

"We know what he can do with a lead," said Ahn.

And Sanchez delivered. The Damascus anchor



Liam Landau of Pascack Hills competes in the pole vault. CHRIS PEDOTA/NORTHJERSEY.COM-USA TODAY NETWORK

stalked him for the first half of the lap and seemed to be closing as the duo hit the 200 meter mark.

"That's when I want to really go," said Sanchez, who reacted to the Damascus move by accelerating even more, breaking his opponent, who actually finished third as St. Francis (NY) took the silver. "I always feel pretty confident that I can finish a race."

NV/Old Tappan and Paramus Catholic took silvers and Bergen Catholic and Pascack Hills earned bronzes, the latter two with terrific anchors from Rahmir Johnson (49.77) and Thomas Varano (51.13), respectively. Old Tappan's time of 3:29.14 led all North Jersey schools although the top five teams were within two seconds of each other.

Landau medals in pole vault

Liam Landau is the state indoor champion in the pole vault and holds both the indoor and outdoor Bergen County records.

Yet he appeared to be a little in awe in competing on a big stage such as the Penn Relays on Saturday.

The Pascack Hills senior easily cleared 14-5 ¼, his first height and appeared to be ready to contend for the title. But he uncharacteristically aborted all three of his jumps at 14-9, a height he is usually very comfortable at and placed fifth, earning a medal, but not meeting the standards he's set for himself.

"I know the mental part of this can be my weakness," said Landau. "At a big meet like this I don't feel as comfortable as I do other places."

"I try and picture myself doing everything I need to do to succeed and I visualize myself getting over the bar, but this is a big place and I put too much pressure on myself at times."

The winning height was 15-5, a height Landau has cleared four times in his career, but Landau wasn't the only athlete to feel the pressure of competing in Franklin Field. The heavy favorite, who didn't even enter the competition until 15-5, no heighted on his three attempts even though he's cleared 16-7 this year.