

Cross-country: Best of the Big North meets

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With all the Big North races completed, here is a list of the top 10 boys and girls performances at this year's Darlington course.

Boys: 1. Jacob Heredia, Clifton, 15:27; 2. Bobby Hymans, Ramapo, 15:35; 3. Sean Fortunato, Ridgewood, 15:47; 4. Steven Hatano, NV/Old Tappan, 15:59; 5. Kenneth Morrissey, Northern Highlands, 16:02; 6. Ryan Pena, Hackensack, 16:05; 7. Mick Barbi, Ridgewood, 16:09; 8. Jay Boogaert, Ridgewood, 16:10; 9. Owen McCarthy, Bergen Catholic, 16:22; 10. Alex Saldana, River Dell, 16:25.



Girls: 1. Angelina Perez, Lakeland, 16:56; 2. Christina Allen, River Dell, 17:41; 3. AnnaMarie Tretola, Ridgewood, 17:51; 4. Mia Dubac, Clifton, 17:59; 5. Sarah Policano, Ridgewood, 18:03; 6. Olivia Shattuck, Ridgewood, 18:17; 7. Lily Williams, Ridgewood, 18:27; 8. Allison Lounsbury, Indian Hills, 18:34; 9. Jessica Reilly, Northern Highlands, 18:45; 10. Abigail Horevay, Lakeland, 18:49.

Ramapo switches divisions, sweeps Juliet

Ramapo and Westwood missed their Big North championship races in the Hotel and Fox Divisions because of COVID 19 shutdowns but were added to the Juliet division Nov. 3 and took advantage of the opportunity.

Ramapo won both the boys and girls division of the meet with Westwood second in the boys team race and Westwood's Kayla Jarski taking second individually in the girls race.

Bobby Hymans of Ramapo edged Marcus Cheema of Westwood by 45 meters in the boys race, running 16:20 and the Green Raiders captured a 32-42 win over the Cardinals.

The race was close throughout, with Ramapo's Alex Horgan edging Westwood's Owen Long for third. Nate Somppi of Ramapo was fifth but Westwood put two runners ahead of Ramapo's fourth. But Ramapo returned the favor putting its last four runners ahead of Westwood's fifth to grab the win. Ramapo's Brianna Braver beat Jarski by less than 20 meters as both posted seasonal bests, 19:19 and 19:24 respectively. but Ramapo took five of the next seven places and easily defeated Ramsey, 20-43. Claire O'Keeffe led Ramsey in third place.

Pena, Cottone power India Division wins

Ryan Pena of Wayne Valley and Katharine Cottone of Passaic Valley scored easy individual victories leading their respective teams to wins at the COVID 19 impacted India division meet Nov. 2.

Pena ran 16:05 to defeat Passaic Valley's Elliot Whitney by 200 meters and Wayne Valley put a total of five runners in front of PV's fourth to beat the Hornets, 25-33 for the boys title. PV's Jessier Soriano was third, just behind Whitney, but Shawn Corcoran (fourth), freshmen Matt Califf (fifth) and Hudson Devine (seventh) and soph Sean Matthews (eighth) finished in quick succession to provide the victory margin.

Cottone's win came by more than 200 meters over Devon Edmonds of Wayne Valley in 21:20 and the Hornet girls went 3-4-5 (Yastika Singh, Lauren Koman and Kaitlyn Cronon) to secure a 21-35 win for PV.

Pizzella leads Pascack Valley to Hotel win

Pascack Valley took advantage of the absence of heavily favored Ramapo (due to a COVID 19 shutdown) to win its first boys league championship since the 2014 Big North National division, using a 1-2 finish by sophs Michael Pizzella (18:00) and Connor Oates to defeat Paramus, 24-37 in the Hotel division Oct. 29. Paramus took the next spots but PV took sixth through 10th as its runners finished in a tight 34 second pack to gain the victory.

There were no full girls teams in the division but Paramus freshman Hana Weisinger (20:17), Paramus soph Erin Jyung (20:36) and Bergenfield senior Jasmine Velasquez (20:59) all ran well.

IHA and Bergen Catholic dominate golf division

IHA continued to show it's a team to watch at the North Jersey Finale and the first North Non-Public A sectional meets by easily dispatching Holy Angels, 19-41 in the Golf division on Oct. 28.

Leanna Johnston of IHA continued her breakout season by winning the race in 18:52, about 75 meters ahead of freshman Kate Hurst of Holy Angels, who ran a personal best 19:10. The next four spots went to IHA's Jillian Shea (19:56), Geri Tabbachino (20:07), Grace Kelleher (20:16) and Keara Skae (20:35).

Don Bosco was unable to run the boys race because of a COVID 19 shutdown so Bergen Catholic swept the first seven positions for a 15-55 win over St. Joseph. Owen McCarthy won the race in 16:47 and Alex Costabile (17:26), Matt Marques (17:47), Alex Shaia (17:54) and Nick Pesanello (17:57) were the other Crusader scorers.

River Dell freshmen sweep COVID-impacted Big North Fox meet

The absence of Westwood and Pascack Hills as a result of a COVID 19 shutdown turned the Big North Fox division, one of the more interesting of the 10 divisional meets, into a pair of dual meets swept by River Dell over Mahwah on Oct. 27.

Freshman Christina Allen of River Dell remained undefeated as she torched the Darlington course in 17:41, second only to Angelina Perez (16:56) on the new course and one of the fastest times in the state on any course this year. Allen beat Mahwah's Megan Dursema (19:22) by nearly 400 meters and Amanda Mircovich (20:33), Isabella Gabay (20:34) and Alex Grivas (20:51) took the next three spots as No. 5 River Dell won the girls meet over No. 6 Mahwah, 24-32. Pascack Hills is North Jersey's No.13 girls team and Westwood was No. 23 in the last ranking.

River Dell's second outstanding freshman, Alex Saldana beat his sophomore teammate, Max Emelo by 125 meters, in 16:41 to lead the No. 19 Golden Hawks to a 23-35 win over Mahwah, with No. 21

Westwood and No. 22 Pascack Hills forced to miss the race. The top nine finishers in the boys race are underclassmen.

Northern Valley schools split Echo titles

Steven Hatano of NV/Old Tappan showed why he is Bergen County's top returning runner, as he ran 15:59 to win the boys race by 200 meters over NV/Demarest junior Andrew Kleinman to lead the No. 7 Golden Knights to a 30-37 win over No. 12 NV/Demarest on Oct. 26.

Theo Davis was third for the Norsemen, but OT put five runners between fifth and 11th within 16 seconds of each other led by fifth place finisher Nolan Travers to earn its first divisional title since its 2013 National win.

The NV/Demarest have shared girls league titles before but earned their first solo division title with a 28-37 over NV/Old Tappan, led by the 1-2 finish of seniors Casey Walter and Kimi Quayle.

The pair spent the first mile off of the lead, but picked the up in the second mile of the race and went on to finish 1-2 in personal best times of 19:23 for Walter and 19:37 for Quayle. OT's Francesca Proto was third but Demarest freshman Finley Aspholm's fourth place finish secured the win for the No. 7 Norsewomen over the No. 12 Golden Knights.

Heredia sets course record, leads Clifton to Delta Division title

It seems like every time Jacob Heredia steps onto a cross-country course this year, some record is in jeopardy of being broken. On Oct. 22, the Clifton junior ran the fastest race ever run by a Mustang athlete on any course when he ran 15:27 to easily win the Big North Delta division title at the new Darlington County Park course in Mahwah.

Heredia won by more than a quarter mile over teammates Harrison Schimpf and Matthew Burgos as No. 2 Clifton easily won the team title, 18-52, over Passaic Tech grabbing seven of the first nine spots in the absence of shut down No. 18 Bergen Tech, who had given the Mustangs some trouble during the batch meet.

Heredia's time took down the previous course record of 15:35 set by Ramapo's Bobby Hymans two weeks ago in a batch meet.

Mia Dubac and her sister Remy went 1-2 for No. 15 Clifton in the girls race, but Passaic put five runners in front of Clifton's fourth and took the team title on a tiebreaker after the teams tied at 37.

Mia Dubac became the first Clifton girl under 18 minutes when she won the race in 17:59, 250 yards ahead of her younger sister, Remy, who ran a personal best 18:59. But Marilyn Gonzalez (third), Kiara Perez (fourth), Jesebel Feenandez (ninth), Delijah Irizarry (10th) and Delcarmen Rodriguez (11th) put Passaic in a position to tie Clifton and senior Vanessa Martinez edged her Clifton counterpart by three places to clinch Passaic's first league title since the 2002 NNJIL B division crown.

Ridgefield Park, just back from shutdown, wins division meet

Ridgefield Park's boys cross-country team opened its 2020 season on Oct. 1 with a disappointing 28-31 loss to Cliffside Park in the first Big North batch meet of the year. But the disappointment of that close loss was nothing compared to what happened next.

"The next day we found out that we were shut down for two weeks, a huge twist because our season had just started," senior Richard Kwon said. "They told us we were on a two week hiatus and we took it upon ourselves not to waste it."

Getting their workouts via Zoom chats and texts from head coach Dennis Murri, the Scarlet boys ran their own practices over the next 14 days, led by Kwon and team leader Ezequiel Reyes.

"We're used to that because that's the way we did it throughout the summer," Reyes said. "We held our practices because we knew that when we got back, our league championship was right around the corner. We had to be ready."

On Oct. 19, they were. The team had not officially met since the shutdown, but with Reyes outkicking Fort Lee sophomore Ekuyami Conteh in 17:02, more than 20 seconds faster than he did run the previous time at the new Darlington course, and Kwon running third in 17:45, the Scarlets reversed their dual loss

to Cliffside Park and won the Alpha Division title, 44-48. It was Ridgefield Park's first divisional title since the 2011 American Division crown.

"We just needed Ezequiel to do what he did in the batch meet and win the race," said Murri, but we needed both Richard and Saim Syed to break up the Cliffside Park pack and they did that."

Syed had taken third in the batch meet, but Kwon finished seventh behind two of the seven Cliffside runners who had packed ahead of the No 4 and 5 for Ridgefield Park, providing the Red Raiders' margin of victory in the first matchup.

"We told them to attack their pack and they knew their jobs," said Murri. "they kept talking about beating Pablo and Antonio (the first two runners in the potent CP pack)."

And both did. Kwon improved on his batch meet race by 44 seconds and held off a pair of Dumont runners to finish third in the championship, in 17:45. He also beat Pablo Gutierrez and Antonio Rinaldi of Cliffside Park, both of whom improved on their batch meet performances. Syed was sixth and even though Cliffside Park ran a tighter top six by nearly a minute than in the dual meet, the 1-3-6 finish and good finishes by Adam Vercelli (16th) and Jesus Mancera (18th) gave the Scarlets the win.

"We worked too dang hard to let victory slip away because we got shut down," said Kwon.

"It was a good challenge and experience," added Reyes. "It takes persistence to keep fighting after things happen you can't predict."

The Cliffside Park girls easily defeated Fort Lee, 21-43 to win their eighth divisional title in nine years.

The Red Raiders took six places in the top 10

Kelsey Pereira, who won the 2019 American division title won this year's race in 19:52, about 50 yards ahead of CP teammate Tasnim Eissa and freshman Leah Fedouchik was fifth for the winners. Tiffany Park of Fort Lee led the runnersup in fourth place.

Ridgewood tears up Beta Division

Ridgewood's nationally ranked girls team had the reins removed Oct. 20 for the first time and the Beta division and the newly redesigned Darlington course paid the price.

In the previous 11 meets run at the Mahwah course, only six girls had broken 19 minutes and only two had gone under 18:30. But after Ridgewood's race, there are 11 under 19 and six under 18:30.

AnnaMarie Tretola led a 1-2-3-4-6 finish for the Maroons with a win in 17:51, second only to Angelina Perez's historic sub-17 performance two weeks ago on the list. Sarah Policano was next in 18:03, followed by Olivia Shattuck at 18:17 and Lily Williams at 18:27. Northern Highlands junior Jessica Reilly ran a personal best 18:45 for fifth and Ridgewood junior Caroline Deiss, a first year runner, was next at 18:54.

"We wanted to give them a chance to see what they could do," said Ridgewood coach Steve Opremcak.

"If we can stay healthy, we can do some special things."

No. 1 Ridgewood defeated No. 4 Northern Highlands, 16-44 with No. 9 Indian Hills third. Indian Hills was missing its top runner, Allison Lounsbury, who had suffered a sprained ankle on Sunday. It was Ridgewood's third straight division title.

The Ridgewood boys were also impressive in winning their fourth straight divisional title, 27-40-62 over No. 7 Indian Hills and No. 4 Northern Highlands with No. 19 Hackensack fourth.

Jay Boogaert continued his recovery from an early season injury, winning in 16:10 with Mick Barbi taking second in 16:17 and Quinn McCutcheon fourth in 16:26 for the Maroons. Sean Fortunato was seventh and Tommy Koltermann finished the scoring for Ridgewood in 13th.

Indian Hills had a tight 37 second pack between fifth and 12th led by outstanding freshman Daniel Phillips, fifth in 16:31, just ahead of teammate Anthony Macejka. That bodes well for the Braves for the North Jersey Invitational on Oct. 31 and the group 2 sectional two weeks later. Northern Highlands was led by third place finisher Kenneth Morrissey.

West Milford girls, Fair Lawn boys roll in Charlie Division

The absence of Lakeland, shut down as a result of COVID-19 exposure was felt keenly in the Oct. 21 Charlie Division championship.

The Lancers, No. 2 in the NorthJersey.com rankings, had dominated the girls batch meet on Oct. 5, taking six of the top 10 places led by the spectacular performance of Angelina Perez, who became only the fifth girl in state history to break 17 minutes on a full length cross-country course.

With Lakeland out, No. 8 West Milford overwhelmed Fair Lawn and Wayne Hills, 18-53-65, taking five of the top six spots. Sophomore Cassidy Clinton won the race in 20:24, 75 meters ahead of teammate Kate Vreeland with Wayne Hills junior Kyla Leathers third. Lauren Frey, Abby Budd and Emily Coppola went 4-5-6 as the Highlanders' packed their top five within 56 seconds.

Fair Lawn had edged Lakeland by a point in the boys batch and the rematch between No. 3 Lakeland and No 4 Fair Lawn was eagerly anticipated with No. 11 Wayne Hills also in the mix.

But the Cutters dominated the Lakeland-less race, with five runners in the top seven to easily defeat Wayne Hills, 21-40.

Blake Bomersbach of Fair Lawn edged Patrick Stroble at the finish line, 17:06-17:07 with Fair Lawn's Michael Lustberg third in 17:12. With Jacob Michelman (fourth, 17:22), Justin Brooks (sixth, 17:34) and Jason Shepetofsky (seventh, 17:40) providing one of the the tightest packs in the state, the Fair Lawn victory was an impressive one.

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