

Cross-Country: Lakeland's Angelina Perez rewrites history; Clifton's Heredia hits his stride

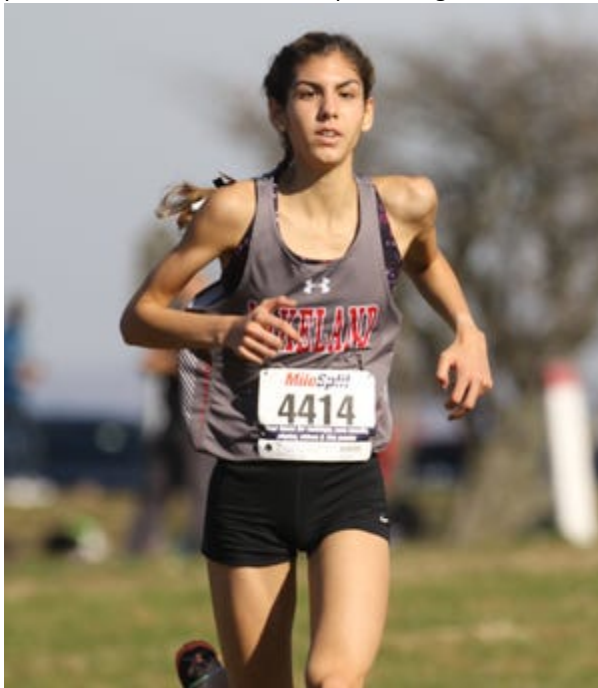
Nick Gantaifis

NorthJersey.com

WOODLAND PARK – Angelina Perez has history on her side.

Just four days after shattering the Garret Mountain course record, the Lakeland junior rewrote history Saturday when she broke her own mark by eight seconds to capture the inaugural North Jersey Finale.

Perez ran a sizzling 17:21 and comfortably captured the girls individual title to help lead the Lancers to a second-place team finish behind champions Ridgewood.



Though Perez admits she didn't set out to break her own mark, she wasn't surprised with the final results.

"Honestly, I didn't think today I was going to PR from where I did on Tuesday," said Perez, who ran a record-breaking 17:29 at Tuesday's Lou Fraulo Invitational on the rugged 3.1-mile course. "Coming into this race it was an invitational and I knew our team wasn't ranked the highest. Coach [Damiano] Conforti told us to save it for today because we had a real chance at winning this race. Coming into this race I told myself that I was going to push myself. But I wasn't expecting to PR today. When I went out the first mile, it did feel harder and I thought maybe I was sore and didn't realize it. I really thought I went out too fast and didn't think I had enough this time."

Perez, one of the nation's top distance runners, posted a mind-blowing 10.48 two-mile split and at that point realized she was within striking distance.

"Right near the end I saw the clock and saw 17:05. At that point I knew I could do this," Perez said. "I'm in a good position for next Saturday's sectionals. I'm satisfied with how this season is going, especially coming into the season not knowing how it would play out and if we would have the opportunity to run. I'm so happy with how this is going."

Ridgewood scored 32 points to claim the team title as the Maroons placed four runners in the top 10 at 4, 5, 8, 9. Junior AnnaMarie Tretola was fourth in 19:39 and junior Olivia Shattuck was fifth in 19:43.

“The event today was awesome. We have some of the best organizers around. As soon as we found out the county race was cancelled, our race organizers like Mike Glynn stepped up and made sure we had some form of a championship,” Ridgewood coach Patrick Ryan said. “This was really exciting, especially in a season of uncertainty. On paper we weren’t the best team coming into the season because of a bunch of unknowns, but so far we’ve risen to the challenge.”

Heredia wins boys title

Clifton junior Jacob Heredia easily won the boys individual title, crossing the line in 15:53.



Heredia, who finished second at the Lou Fraulo Invitational earlier in the week behind Nathan Armstrong of Pompton Lakes, finished ahead of runner-up Steven Hatano of Old Tappan.

Just two weeks earlier, Heredia ran the fastest ever race by a Clifton runner on any course when he ran a 15:27 to easily win the Big North Delta division title at the new Darlington County Park course in Mahwah.

“Today’s time is definitely up there with my best times overall, especially here at Garret,” Heredia said. “The competition was great today, especially Nathan [Armstrong]. He was with me the first mile together, but I then was able to take the lead. I was here today to PR. The competition was deep and everyone came through after I finished. We’re extremely grateful for the opportunity to complete. In summer training we weren’t sure if there was even going to be a season. I’m going to use today’s race to push and motivate me the rest of the way.”

Next weekend the state sectional races get underway at various courses throughout the state. Though there won’t be a traditional season-ending State Meet of Champions this year, runners will have one final opportunity to compete on Nov. 21 at the Oak Ridge Invitational at Oak Ridge Park in Clark.