

# A closer look at how Ridgewood girls set a course record in sectional win at Garret

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WOODLAND PARK — Ridgewood finally got turned loose Saturday at the North 1 sectional cross-country meet and the Garret Mountain course may never be the same.

The Maroons, generally considered the top team in New Jersey and one of the best teams in the country, stormed to their third straight Group 4 title and record 26th overall with an overwhelming 20-57 win over Montclair.

At the same time, Ridgewood set the all-time Garret five-girl record with a combined time of 96:10, 18 seconds faster than the previous record shared by the 2005 Roxbury and 2009 Randolph teams. Roxbury went on to easily win the State Meet of Champions that year and Randolph lost the SMOC by a point. The State Meet of Champions will not be held this year.

"I'm very happy with the record," said Opremcak. "They're really mature and aware kids who have followed the plan we established on March 13. We hoped to be able to race in the fall. If we have that opportunity we want to be ready and follow the plan. The kids followed and we were ready to run fast today."



Clifton's Mia Dubac won the race, in a personal best 18:40, holding off a hard charging AnnaMaria Tretola of Ridgewood, who finished second in 18:45. The Maroons took 3-4-5-6 with Sarah Policano, Olivia Shattuck, Lily Williams and newcomer Caroline Deiss all easily surpassing their Garret Mountain personal bests.

Senior Clair Hamlet, who missed much of the season with the after effects of a stress fracture last winter and shin splints over the summer, had her best race of the season to finish eighth and Lucia Rabolli was 10th. Ridgewood's winning score of 20 tied the meet record set by the 2009 Randolph and 2001 Ridgewood teams.

"It felt really good to let it go," said Tretola, who has been the Maroons' leader all season. "We raced here a few times this season so we knew the course and it puts us in a good spot for the Holmdel Invitational (Nov. 25)."



"This was really fun because it's one of our last races together this season," said Policano. "With everything that's gone on you never know if each race is going to be your last, We have limited time and I kept thinking this could be my last race and I wanted to cherish it."

"I love the team aspect of it and having the season was so special because this is our last one as a team and I've been running with them for three years."

Dubac became the first girl in Clifton history to win a sectional race, grabbing the lead early from Maria Laverde of Kearny and then holding off the Ridgewood charge.

"It felt really good today," said Dubac, who will run at Temple University. "I felt nervous at first but also confident at the same time because I've been believing in myself more."

"It felt really strange because this is my last race at Garret," she added. "it feels really strange because I've been racing here for four years. It's really sad but I'm glad I'm ending it on a high note."

## Lakeland kicks the door in

Lakeland coach Damiano Conforti and his assistant, Frank Lamberti, motivated his team all season for the group 2 sectional, telling the Lancers they knocked on the door last year and this year they were going to kick it in.

Saturday, the Lancers, second to Indian Hills last season in this race, finished their quest with an easy 46-85 win over surprising West Milford to earn their first ever sectional title -- but probably not their last.

With Angelina Perez winning her second straight individual title -- "only" running 17:31 on the Garret course after lowering her course record to 17:21 last week, the Lancers put two other runners in the top 10 and two others in the top 20, and kept their hopes alive for a team bid to the Holmdel Invitational Nov.

25.

Abigail Horevay finished fourth for the Lancers and hopes to get back to Holmdel, where she finished 10th in the State Meet of Champions a year ago and Caitlin Fahy was ninth.

And like they have all year, Faith Norrell and Reagan Lamascola finished in the top quarter of the field in 17th and 19th, respectively and freshman Kayla Barnhardt was 25th, with a Garret personal best.

## Young Highlands team keeps surprising

After Ridgewood, perhaps no girls North Jersey team has a better pedigree than Northern Highlands, especially in state sectional competition. And even though the Highlanders have lost tons of talent to graduation over the last four years, their run keeps getting better.

The Highlanders returned only two varsity runners from last year's state sectional champions, Jessica Reilly (second Saturday) and Sydney Schildiner (fourth) but with five new varsity performers, including four in their first year of cross-country, Highlands won its fifth straight title and 15th overall, easily defeating Ramapo, 29-72, after placing six runners in the top 12 and seven in the top 18.



"There's a certain pressure to keep the streak going, but we've had a really good season and we were confident coming in that we'd do our best," said Reilly.

"I was excited to come back and run again and I knew we were getting a couple of good freshmen and Michaela (Powell) and Margaret (Bainbridge) were coming over to run so that even with everything that happened with COVID I knew we'd be good again."

Freshmen Autumn Ritter and Abigail Gamarello finished ninth and 12th, respectively behind the two veterans, bracketing two transfers from soccer, sophomore Bainbridge and junior Powell. The quartet finished with 22 seconds and Highlands' No. 7 junior Lauren Orr was 18th, less than 30 seconds behind Gamarello.

With Reilly and Schildiner also juniors, the Highlanders have bigger goals for next season.

Ramapo's Brianna Braver became the second straight Green Raider to win a sectional title as the sophomore succeeded teammate Samantha Judd and won in 19:16, the second best time ever run by a Ramapo athlete on the long standing course.

"It was (probably) my last race this season and I really felt amazing today," said Braver, who ran 75 seconds faster than her race at the North Jersey Finale last week. "I just had more confidence today. My competitors are really good and I was surprised I was able to hold that big a lead."



## Park Ridge/Emerson duo finish strong

The biggest problem with the Park Ridge/Emerson girls team the lack of a nickname -- CavoOwls or OwlCavos doesn't cut it.



But that hasn't stopped this year's team from recording the best sectional finish in program history. PRE was second to perennial group 1 champion Mountain Lakes, which won its 10th title in its last 15 North 1 appearances, with juniors Elyse von der Lieth and Cali Marck finishing 3-4 behind repeat race winner Sophia Knerr of North Warren. Mountain Lakes beat PRE, 39-76.

But the co-op should return five of their top six runners next year and maybe by then, it can get its first title -- and a usable nickname.

*Paul Schwartz covers high school track and field for NorthJersey.com. For full access to live scores, breaking news and analysis from our Varsity Aces team, subscribe today. To get breaking news directly to your inbox, [sign up for our newsletter](#) and [download our app](#).*

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