

# Cross-country: North Jersey runners show their stuff at Holmdel

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HOLMDEL — Charlotte Bednar made history at Wednesday's Holmdel Invitational, but the North Jersey girls contingent also made a lasting impact on the meet.

Ten of the top 25 runners in the elite field, easily the deepest and most talented of this most chaotic of seasons came from Bergen and Passaic counties, including four of the top eight.



As this was not an official NJSIAA event, teams ran as clubs and individuals ran unattached, but teams had to be made up of runners from their high school team and either had to have competed for their school this fall or their school chose not to participate in fall sports.

Bednar, a junior who attends the Lawrenceville School, led from the opening gun and outran Lakeland's Angelina Perez in 17:21 over the long-time state course at Holmdel Park, setting the New Jersey course record.

Perez, in her first race at Holmdel since last year's State Meet of Champions, where she struggled from the effects of then newly-diagnosed asthma, followed in 17:36, the North Jersey record and a time beaten only by Bednar and two others in the 42-year history of the course.

Not to be outdone, River Dell freshman Christina Allen was third in 17:50, the fastest first race ever on the course by a New Jerseyan, and second all-time on the freshman list. Clifton senior Mia Dubac was eighth in 18:52, the first Mustang girl to break 19 minutes on the course.

And despite the scary collapse of Ridgewood's top runner all season, Junior AnnaMarie Tretola, the Maroons still managed to finish second to Haddonfield in the girls race, led by the sixth place finish by senior captain Sarah Policano in 18:46.

Tretola was taken to the hospital and is expected to make a full recovery.

### **Perez finishes strong**

The day after her victory in the Nike Virtual Nationals was confirmed, Perez capped her spectacular junior cross-country season by running second behind Bednar, who finished sixth in the nation at the actual Nike Cross Nationals last fall.



"This was probably the most nervous I've ever been coming into a race because I knew I was going to have really good competition today," said Perez, who set the all-time Passaic County and North Jersey Holmdel records in the race. "Also because of everything happened here last year, when I was struggling with asthma, I didn't have a very good race. It brought back bad memories when we got here but I knew I was going to do better than last year." Perez dogged Bednar throughout the first two miles of the race before Bednar pulled away in the final stretch.

"It was nice having someone to push me along the way," said Perez. "Charlotte's an amazing runner and I'm really happy with the way I ran. I hope we can run another time next year, maybe a few times."

On Tuesday, Perez's amazing time of 16:39 on her Lakeland course on Nov. 20 was determined to be the top time of the virtual competition that matched the top regional contenders from the entire season and earned her the title out of a national field of over 1,000 runners.

### **Allen's remarkable first Holmdel race**

From her first race on Oct. 8, a wonderful 18:38 clocking at the reconstructed Darlington course, Allen has been the best freshman in the state. And after her performance on Wednesday, she's clearly one of the best freshman in the country and completed one of the best ninth grade seasons in state history.

Allen was third for nearly the entire race behind Bednar and Perez, but didn't give up a chance at catching either or both.

"I stayed a few steps behind both of them because I know their running styles and I felt I was in a good place," said Allen, who became just the second Bergen County runner under 18 minutes on the state course. "I couldn't really tell how far I was ahead of the fourth place girl. I just knew how far I was behind second place."

Despite being worried about running out of gas from her big effort up the opening hill in her first race at Holmdel, Allen never faltered and was closing on Perez as the race ended.

"I was about a minute behind her (at sectionals on Feb. 14) and I wanted to close that gap," said Allen, who cut the margin to 14 seconds in the race.

### **Policano proves she's Maroon leader**

During the 2018 cross-country season, Policano looked to be a rising star. Only one sophomore beat her at the State Meet of Champions and she finished 23rd overall.

But a series of injuries and ailments cost her most of the winter and spring track seasons that same school year and by the time last cross-country season rolled around, Policano just wasn't ready to make the progress that seemed inevitable.

"I had problems with low iron, shin splints and some foot problems, and I just couldn't put in enough summer training miles in before last fall," said Policano, who still was a vital part of the Ridgewood team that ran at the Nike Cross Nationals. "Then I started doubting myself and whether I'd ever get faster."

A good winter season gave her back her confidence and then COVID hit. But instead of being a crushing setback, Policano and her teammates refocused for the fall.

"When we first went out, we still had hope for the end of the season but as time went by we realized that wasn't going to happen, so we tried to get the miles in during the summer and prepare for this season," said Policano, who has committed to Bucknell University to run next year.

Policano set personal bests at the two most important courses in the state, Garret Mountain (18:57) and Holmdel (18:46). The Garret time puts her in the top 60 runners all-time, while the Holmdel times ranks her 25th on the North Jersey all-time list.

Ridgewood put three other runners in the top 25 of the race, juniors Olivia Shattuck (19:10, 14th); Lily Williams (19:20, 16th) and Caroline Deiss (19:48, 24th). Despite Tretola's misfortune, only Haddonfield was able to beat the Maroons, 52-65.

### **Dubac ends on a high note**

Dubac, the best cross-country runner in Clifton history, finished her career with her best race ever, and continued her steady climb up the ranks of the state's elite.

"I just went out strong and wanted to keep people like (Colts Neck senior) Lily Shapiro in my sights," said Dubac, who finished just 13 seconds and three spots behind the Shore standout. "It felt really good to break 19 minutes here, finally."

Dubac was 51st in the State Meet of Champions as a sophomore and ran 19:11 for 23rd last fall before her eighth-place finish Wednesday.

"This race was kind of like a meet of champs even though we couldn't have it this year," she said. "I'm glad I got to race against some South and Central schools because they have some great runners."

Other North Jersey girls in the top 25 included Allison Lounsbury of Indian Hills (21st, 19:42), Brianna Braver of Ramapo (22nd, 19:45) and Abigail Horevay of Lakeland (23rd, 19:45)

Lakeland finished seventh with 149 points, just five points out of fifth.

The North Jersey boys weren't as successful as the girls.

CBA defeated Ridge, 48-64, placing four among the top 16 runners, with Vidhur Polam of South Brunswick upset Matt Bogdan of Colts Neck, and Jackson Barna of Ridge to win the individual title in 15:32.

Only two North Jersey runners finished in the top 25, Nathan Armstrong of Pompton Lakes (23rd, 16:39) and Jacob Heredia of Clifton (25th, 16:41).

Aidan Carroll of Glen Rock (16:53, 38th) and Jay Boogaert, Ridgewood (16:58, 41st) led Bergen County runners at the meet. Ridgewood finished 10th as a team.

### **Armstrong impresses at Oak Ridge**

Nathan Armstrong of Pompton Lakes won by 25 meters over Zachary Hodges of Mendham on Saturday to win the A race at the Oak Ridge Invitational at the North 2 sectional course at Oak Ridge Park in Clark. He ran 15:48.20 on the 5,000 meter course to defeat a solid field. River Dell freshman Alex Saldana was 16th in 16:32.05.

Kate Hurst of Holy Angels led all freshmen in the girls race, running 19:52.12 for 10th. Jessica Reilly of Northern Highlands was 19th in 20:19.66 to lead the Highlanders to fourth place in the team standings, just five points out of second behind race winner Mendham.

*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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