

# North Jersey Male Athlete of the Week making one good decision after another



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NorthJersey.com

Luke Pash has made a lot of tough decisions since starting Ridgewood High School in the fall of 2021. So far, he hasn't missed a step.

Baseball was on his mind when he reported to tryouts in March of 2022. He'd played a lot in his early years, but by the time of the tryout, he had enjoyed success as one of the best freshmen in North Jersey in his new sport of cross-country, a sport he'd never done before.

But when his coach told him he saw him as the fourth outfielder and the designated runner on the freshman team, Pash decided to cast his lot with the track team.

That was good decision No. 1.

"I figured I had already run pretty well and enjoyed being on the cross-country team, so if all I was going to do was run, I wanted to run more than 90 feet at a time," he said with a laugh.



Last Saturday's win at the Shore Coaches Invitational, the unofficial preview meet for next month's state championships, wasn't the first time Pash has captured widespread attention. And it likely won't be the last.

In fact, from his very first varsity race six weeks after he gave up his baseball dreams, Pash has caught the attention of nearly everyone who watched him run.

Older teammates and coaches marvelled when he ripped off a 4-minute-38-second 1,600 meters at the Big North Freedom meet.

Last fall, he was Ridgewood's No. 1 cross-country runner on a team that came up just short of wins at the North 1, Group 4 state sectionals and Lou Molino Bergen Meet of Champions.

Then it really got interesting.

"I wasn't going to do winter track as a freshman," Pash said. "But I had so much fun with the bunch of guys who were on the cross-country team, I decided to do winter."

That was good decision No. 2.

"Last winter season, I got to run a lot of 3,200s," he said. "That is putting yourself out there and I loved it."

Pash ran five 3,200 races last winter, including a 9:13.51 to break the Ridgewood school record and move in No. 10 all-time in Bergen County indoor history. It also earned him a State Meet of Champions medal.

That propelled him into an even better spring, including a berth in the prestigious Penn Relays 3,000 and a stunning Group meet where he tested eventual state champion Lucas Reguinho (Elizabeth) and ran a 9:06.10, seventh fastest in Bergen outdoor history.

Unfortunately, a postponement of the State Meet of Champions forced him out of a rematch. The Maroons had committed to running the New Balance Nationals at Franklin Field in Philadelphia in both the 4-mile relay and distance medley, and Luke didn't want to let his friends and teammates down.

That was good decision No. 3.

"That's why I loved track and cross-country so much," he said. "I have such a great group of friends from running and I wanted to get All-American with them."

The 4-mile relay didn't go as well as hoped, but a day later, Pash lined up with graduating seniors Ian Bajarktari and Lucas Barrales and fellow sophomore Jack McKenna for a memorable distance medley. Ridgewood ran well through three legs but Pash was in eighth place when he got the baton for his 1,600 anchor leg.

"I knew I had to get (pass) two for All-American," he said. He got four.

Going out in a sizzling 60 seconds, he slowed to 63 to 68 but still was about eighth with a lap to go. "The guys in front of me looked like they were running in quicksand and I still felt good, so I just kept going."

That was good decision No. 4.

The result was a stunning 60-second final lap, a 4:12.25 anchor and a fourth-place finish for the team, ensuring All-American status and confirming that so far Pash's decision making has been as good as his talent.

## Luke Pash

Sport: Cross-country

School: Ridgewood

Class: Junior. Age: 16

Accomplishment: Became the first Ridgewood runner in 30 years to win a race at Shore Coaches Invitational, held at the Holmdel Park state course, and ran the 12th fastest time ever there by a Bergen County runner.

Also nominated: Kevin Regula of Pascack Valley, Joseph Cortese of Indian Hills, Jason Marasciulo of Cliffside Park/Ridgefield and Patrick Grusser of St. Joseph for football, and Saif Ahmed of Becton for soccer.