



Photo by Amanda Brown

Science High's Romel Fernandez finishes second in Group 1 cross-country race in Elizabeth's Warinanco Park yesterday

East Side takes 2d in Group 4

By JIM LAMBERT

Bob Keino of Ridgewood, who set a course record by winning in 15:32, and Jackson's Rich Morris, who finished first in a sizzling 15:12, continued on course for a Nov. 20 showdown at the Meet of Champions, and North Hunterdon, No. 4 in The Star-Ledger Cross-Country Top 10, edged fifth-ranked Cedar Ridge by three points for a team title during boys' action yesterday at the NJSIAA sectional championships.

Freshman Matt Elmuccio, who had water drained from a knee on Friday night, won the North Jersey, Section 1, Group 4 race in 17:00 to help 10th-ranked Westfield retain its title, 29-40 over Newark East Side.

"I was kind of surprised how slow that race went," said the 14-year-old Elmuccio. "I didn't expect to win because of my knee. The rain slowed things up and that helped me."

In the North Jersey, Section 1 meet at Garret Mountain in West Paterson, North Bergen in Group 4, Wayne Valley in Group 3, Mahwah in Group 2 and Bogota in Group 1 won the team titles.

Victorious at the North Jersey, Section 2 meet in Warinanco Park, Elizabeth, were Westfield in Group 4,

West Morris in Group 3, Morris Hills in Group 2 and Newark Science in Group 1.

Winners at the Central Jersey meet at Holmdel Park were Hamilton East in Group 4, North Hunterdon in Group 3, Holmdel in Group 2 and Metuchen in Group 1.

In the South Jersey meet at Kingsway in Swedesboro, third-ranked Highland Regional in Group 4, sixth-ranked Toms River South in Group 3, ninth-ranked Delran in Group 2 and Maple Shade in Group 1 captured the team championships.

Keino, as expected, easily retained his title in the North Jersey, Section 1, Group 4 race in 15:32, and bettered the 1981 course record held by Wayne Valley's Jeff VanHorn by two seconds.

But it wasn't enough to give Ridgewood, which finished sixth, a berth in the Nov. 13 NJSIAA Groups championship meet. The top five teams in each Group in each sectional meet and the top 10 individuals qualified for the Groups championships. This was the first time in 21 years that the Ridgewood boys failed to qualify.

Keino is attempting to win what was taken away from him last year when the NJSIAA ruled that he trans-

ferred from Kenya for athletic advantage and stripped him of his 1992 state cross-country title. Keino had finished first at last year's Meet of Champions in 15:52.

As usual, among those standing between Keino and a state championship is Morris, who took advantage of the flat course at Kingsway to win the South Jersey, Group 4 title in 15:12, the fastest time in the state this season. Last Spring, Keino and Morris met in the NJSIAA track and field Meet of Champions in the 1,600, Keino won one of the most-memorable races in recent time in 4:11.42. Morris was second in 4:11.78.

A teachers' strike in the North Hunterdon-Voorhees district left the two high schools unsure if they'd compete. But, late Thursday night, the board of education ruled that the cross-country teams could run.

That set up a classic confrontation between North Hunterdon and Cedar Ridge in the Central Jersey Group 3 team competition. North Hunterdon sophomore Jon Tillman won the race in 17:02, the fastest time at Holmdel yesterday, and North Hunterdon also placed runners fourth, fifth, eighth and 10th to finish with 28. Cedar Ridge's five runners were second, third, sixth, ninth and 11th for 31

points. In Group 2 in Central Jersey, Holmdel and Asbury Park finished with 69 points each. But Holmdel retained its title based on a sixth runner tie-breaker. Holmdel's sixth runner was 28th while Asbury Park's sixth man finished 69th. The individual winner in Group 2 was Randy Latza of Voorhees in 17:08.

Metuchen, second the last four years, avenged a one-point loss to Henry Hudson in last year's sectionals with a 39-89 margin over its rival in Central Jersey, Group 1.

Hamilton East, with Chris Boots fifth in 17:42, Ryan gentiles sixth in 17:47, Jeff Armas eighth in 17:50 and Jason Conti 10th in 17:57, won in Central Jersey, Group 4 with 74 points.

Mt. Olive's Scott McDonnell finished first in 17:04 and two other teammates each finished ahead of its counterpart from Morris Knolls for a 61-62 victory in North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3. Morris Hills, as predicted, easily won in Group 2 and Whippary Park, the 1992 North Jersey, Section 2, Group 2 winner, had it first, four runners in the top 10 to win Group 1, 37-63 over Newark Science. Roselle Park's Anthony DeBenedictis of Roselle Park retained his Group 1 individual title in 16:32, the fastest time in the section.