



Thair Bradley of Science High in Newark runs in the boys' Group 1 race during cross-country sectionals yesterday at Warinanco Park

Science captures Group 1 title

By JIM LAMBERT

Lacey's Eamon Blanchard, putting together his best strategic race of the season, pulled off the biggest upset of the day when he knocked off previously unbeaten Scott Muoio of Brick and Kurt Wayton of Mainland to win the South Jersey, Group 3 title in 15:07 in Swedesboro in the NJSIAA boys' cross-country sectional championships.

Erik Bertsch shared the spotlight when he won in a personal-best 16:43 to lead resurgent North Hunterdon, No. 7 in The Star-Ledger Top 10, to a repeat title in Central Jersey, Group 3 at Holmdel Park.

The top five teams and first 10 individuals in each group in every section earned tickets into the state group championships on Nov. 12 at Holmdel.

At the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 2 meet in Warinanco Park, Elizabeth, sophomore Matt Elmuccio retained his title in 16:42 to spark third-ranked Westfield to a repeat title in Group 4. Morris Knolls won its first sectional title since 1966 by capturing Group 3. Steve Slattery of Mt. Olive continued his impressive rookie sea-

son by winning Group 3 in 16:47. Steve Seeback, first in a personal best 16:51, helped Jefferson, second last year, avenge that loss with a 42-52 victory over Morris Hills, the 1993 champion, for the Group 2 title, its first since 1985. Science won Group 1. Anthony DeBenedictis of Roselle Park ran a personal best of 16:10 over Warinanco's 3.2-mile course to win his third straight title and break the Group 1 meet record of 16:32 he set last year.

"I was really shooting for time today and just wanted to run as fast as I could," said DeBenedictis, who hit two miles under 10 minutes and cut 14 seconds off his previous best at Warinanco.

In Central Jersey, Hamilton East upset eighth-ranked Hunterdon Central, 69-73, to repeat in Group 4. Holmdel, with its lowest total ever of 41 and all seven under 17:50, successfully defended in Group 2. Noel Zeh's victory in 17:23, a personal best by 20 seconds, sparked Metuchen to a second straight Group 1 title. Asbury Park's Darnell McLean ran away from Monroe's Randy Lowenthal with about three-quarters of a mile to go to win Group 2 in a personal-best 16:51.

Group 3 champion North Hunterdon, after a slow start, is back on track.

"The emergence of a fifth runner (Don Ruane) and a sixth runner (Kevin Sullivan) have put us back to where we feel we take a shot at winning the big races," said Bertsch. North Hunterdon, the defending Group 3 champion, also took second with Chris Robinson in 17:01, third with Chris Dolan in 17:04 and fifth with Jon Tillman in 17:22.

At Kingsway in Swedesboro, Jay Wassell was first in 15:40 and Nick Noguier second in 15:45 to lead fourth-ranked Highland to its second straight Group 4 championship, 39-86 over sixth-ranked Eastern. Toms River South edged Mainland, 96-106, to win again in Group 3. Pinelands won Group 2 and Point Pleasant Beach captured Group 1. Tom Horne of Glassboro repeated in Group 1 in 15:41.

At Garret Mountain in West Paterson, Bret Hask, second in 16:46.03, nipped Ray Biersbach, third in 16:46.30, at the finish to give Westwood a 46-47 victory over Newton for the Group 2 title. Chris White of Northern Highlands won the Group 2 race in 16:36. In Group 4, North Bergen repeated and sophomore Roger Munoz of Kearny finished first in 16:27. In Group 3, Old Tappan and Julio Ortiz of Hoboken, at 16:15, captured titles.

Palisades Park and Felix Olivo of Secaucus in 16:30 were first in Group 1.

In the marquee matchup of the day, Blanchard, now 1-4 against Muoio this season, didn't go right to the lead as he had done in past races with his rival. Blanchard lost a 50-yard lead to Muoio at the Ocean County championships on Oct. 22 and wound up second in 15:40 to Muoio's 15:30.

"Last week, I went out too quickly and Scott beat me in the end," said Blanchard, second in 15:40 to Muoio's 15:30 at the Ocean meet.

"This time I ran a tactical race. I stayed with the pack the first mile instead of dictating the pace, then made my move."

Blanchard took the lead for good at a mile and a half during a 5:15 second mile on his way to a personal best and the fastest time in any sectional yesterday. Wayton was second in 15:23 and Muoio third in 15:25.

"I was a lot less mentally prepared and just wasn't into it today," said Muoio, who emerged early this season as the favorite to win the NJSIAA Meet of Champions title. "I guess I let all the pressure get to me and I couldn't recover at the end. I waited too long to make my move and couldn't make it up."

Muoio and Blanchard will meet again on Saturday at the Shore Conference championships in Holmdel.

Columbia's Clark wins;

