

Pope John wins Parochial B for second season in row

By JIM LAMBERT

In a battle anticipated since last November, Paul VI, No. 1 in The Star-Ledger Top 10, received a first place from John Williams in 16:17 and packed its five into the top 10 for a 25-57 victory over second-ranked Christian Brothers, the defending champion, for the boys' Parochial A title yesterday in the NJSIAA cross-country group championships at Holmdel Park.

Since finishing second to long-time rival CBA in the Parochial A race a year ago, Paul VI has been gearing up for the group race. With Williams first, Joe DiGiacomo second in 16:22, a team average of 16:41 and a gap of 46 seconds, Paul VI ended CBA's three-year streak as Parochial A kingpin in impressive fashion.

The top three teams in each race and the first 10 individuals who did not run for a team qualifier earned a ticket to Saturday's Meet of Champions. The M of C boys' race starts at 11 a.m. and the girls' race at 11:45.

Eamon Blanchard of Lacey solidified his status as the favorite for the M of C by running a 16:02, the best time of the day, for the second straight week to win the Group 3 race by 20 seconds over Scott Munoz of Brick to even their season series at 3-3. Blanchard has won the last three meetings.

Rich Christenson, improving his personal Holmdel best by 13 seconds, won the Group 2 race in 16:50 to help No. 7 Holmdel, second the last two years, win its first state title with 59 points.

No. 4 Highland took care of No. 3 Westfield, 67-92, to win its first Group 4 title. Westfield was second for the second straight year. Westfield sophomore Matt Elmuccio overtook Highland's Jay Wassell with about three-quarters of a mile to go and outkicked Kearny sophomore Roger Munoz over the final 400 meters to win Group 4 in 16:27.

In Group 3, No. 5 North Hunterdon defeated No. 6 Toms River South, 89-111, to capture its third straight title.

Metuchen won its first state title since 1961 by placing its five within 56 seconds to win with 88 points in Group 1.

In Parochial B, Pope John won its second straight title with 43 points and Mater Dei's Mike Houlihan, second last year, was first in 17:04.



Matt Elmuccio crosses finish line to win Group 4 title in 16:28 yesterday at Holmdel Park. (Photo by Jim Wright)

Paul VI won the Parochial A title for the first time since 1990. "Our main priority all year was this race," said Williams, who cut 23 seconds off his previous Holmdel best and broke away from DiGiacomo with about three-quarters of a mile left. "This is what we've worked for since Day 1 and it feels great. It feels like having a piano lifted off my back."

Paul VI received a huge race from Ryan Anderson, fifth in 16:48, and a 10th from Brian Bach in 17:03, who led early.

"Bach, usually our sixth man, set the tone for us and Anderson is normally our fifth and today he was our third. So that was a lift," said Paul VI coach George Steinhoff. "We've been pushing towards CBA because they're

the team that has consistently beaten us for the last three years. I have a lot of respect for CBA coach Tom Heath and his program. As for next week, it would be a real disappointment if we don't win."

Blanchard, unbeaten since winning the South Jersey sectional on Oct. 29, went to the lead with about a mile left on the flats following the bowl.

"I waited on the bowl," said Blanchard, a senior, who also ran 16:02 to win the Shore Conference title at Holmdel on Nov. 5. "I was more conservative than I've been in the past, but I wanted to take the lead before the downhill because I know that, if it comes down to a kick, I'll be in trouble. I wanted to break 16, but the headwind was tough."

In Group 4, Highland received a third from Wassell in 16:31 and a fifth from Nick Noguera in 16:35. Brian Bernardo, 20th in 17:11, finished ahead of Westfield's second and third. Highland's fourth, Kyle Connor, 23rd in 17:15, was five places in front of Westfield's fourth.

"We've said all season that if we didn't win today our season would be a major disappointment," said Highland coach Bill Collins. "We'd been watching Westfield's times all season and knew they were a good team. We knew our first two guys would be up there, but it was the third, fourth and fifth guys that really put us over the top."

In Group 2, Holmdel coach Bill Loughran was relieved to come out on top.

"Finally," said Loughran, whose team is going to its fifth straight M of C. "We've been running up against a gorilla team like CBA all year and today we were the gorilla. Christenson winning was a real plus for us. He's just the second kid in the school to go under 17 minutes and this was his fourth straight personal best."

"It feels great to be first and first as a team," said Christenson, a junior. "It felt unusual to be out front like that. It felt good."

Holmdel's Brian Herr celebrated his 18th birthday by finishing sixth in 17:08.

In Group 1, Metuchen stayed tight and received a 10th from Sean Ryan in 17:33, a 19-second drop from his sectional time at Holmdel, and had its five in the first 35.

"We felt we could win if everyone was packed in the first 35," said Metuchen coach Marty Holleran. "This is the best team I've had. We've had other good individuals but never this kind of depth."

Anthony DeBenedictis of Roselle Park, second in 1992 and fourth last year, finally won the Group 1 title by running 16:33. DeBenedictis, the state outdoor 3,200 champion, took the lead right before the bowl on Secaucus' Felix Olivo and put the hammer down over the final downhill to win by 10 seconds.

"All week I was thinking how I've won three sectional titles and three county titles but never won this," said DeBenedictis, who had a knee lock up on him in this race a year ago. "So it feels real good to finally win."

Boys' cross-country summaries

BOYS' GROUP 4
TEAMS: 1-Highland 61, 2-Westfield 92, 3-Shawnee 120, 4-Eastern 161, 5-Hunterdon Central 185, 6-Windland 211, 7-Old Bridge 116, 8-North Bergen 238, 9-Memorial (W.N.J.) 299, 10-East Side 299, 11-Hamilton East 316, 12-Rockaway 323, 13-Chester 327, 14-East Brunswick 350, 15-Randolph 360, 16-Passaic 364, 17-West Albany 367, 18-Linton 390, 19-Vernon 423, 20-Bridgewater-Raritan 455.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Matt Elmuccio, Westfield 16:27, 2-Scott Munoz, Kearny 16:28, 3-Jay Wassell, Highland 16:31, 4-Carmen Masfrando, Eastern 16:34, 5-Kevin Noguera, Highland 16:35, 6-Kevin Stengle, Old Bridge 16:38, 7-Eric Bonner, Cherry Hill East 16:46, 8-Dan Scarpellino, North Bergen 16:48, 9-Kyle Connor, Lincaster, Shawnee 16:54, 10-Wilfredo Rivera, Old Bridge 16:57, 11-Jason Corliss, Bridgewater-Raritan 16:57, 12-Anthony Doyler, Trenton 16:58, 13-Jose Delapava, North Bergen 17:00, 14-Nam Grignon, Passaic 17:00, 15-Scott Cigno, P. Stevens 17:02, 16-Jim McCadden, Shawnee 17:06, 17-Rafael Almanzar, Memorial (W.N.J.) 17:08, 18-Rui Noguera, East Side 17:11, 19-Marco Penetra, East Side 17:11, 20-Brian Bernardo, Highland 17:11.

BOYS' GROUP 3
TEAMS: 1-North Hunterdon 89, 2-Toms River South 111, 3-Abseggen 182, 4-Morris Knolls 202, 5-Bridgeton 224, 6-Old Tappan 224, 7-Rancocas Valley 236, 8-Watchung 236, 9-Mainland 251, 10-Mt. Olive 271, 11-Union Hill 274, 12-West Morris 283, 13-Scotts Run 288, 14-Demarest 307, 15-Matawan 316, 16-Passaic Valley 326, 17-Brunswick 362, 18-Phillipsburg 414, 19-Hightstown 46, 20-River Dell 46.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Eamon Blanchard, Lacey 16:02, 2-Steve Slattery, Mt. Olive 16:36, 3-Sean McCafferty, Northern Regional 16:42, 4-Chris Robinson, North Hunterdon 16:45, 5-Erik Bennett, North Hunterdon 16:46, 6-Kurt Wayton, Mainland 16:46, 7-Matt Illian, Passaic Valley 16:48, 8-Mike Walker, Rancocas Valley 16:58, 9-Jon Herr, Rancocas Valley 16:58, 10-Julio Ortiz, Hoboken 16:59, 11-Scott Keyser, Mainland 17:02, 12-Chris Dolan, North Hunterdon 17:04, 13-Chris Greer, Toms River South 17:09, 14-Kevin Carey, Pemberton 17:11, 15-Rubert Huang, Morristown 17:12, 16-Drew Fronko, Morris Knolls 17:21, 17-Jon Tillman, North Hunterdon 17:21.

BOYS' GROUP 2
TEAMS: 1-Holmdel 59, 2-Morris Hills 128, 3-Jefferson 136, 4-Newton 209, 5-Westwood 203, 6-Haddon Township 207, 7-Northern Highlands 217, 8-Newton 229, 9-Haddonfield 240, 10-Pinelands 256, 11-Somerville 267, 12-Clearview 272, 13-Spring 311, 14-Mahwah 313, 15-Kittatiny 321, 16-Caldwell 345, 17-Freedom Borough 399, 18-Milburn 406, 19-Dover 417.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Rich Christenson, Holmdel 16:50, 2-Jeff Fuels, Clearview 16:51, 3-Mark Kite, Carteret 17:00, 4-Joshua McClymont, Mendham 17:04, 5-Andy Wallace, Caldwell 17:06, 6-Brian Herr, Holmdel 17:08, 7-Jarnell McLean, Astory Park 17:08, 8-Kevin Dulio, Morris Hills 17:10, 9-Raymond Bierbach, Newton 17:10, 10-Chris White, Northern Highlands 17:12, 11-Matthew Lenting, Delaware Valley 17:14, 12-Scott Clayton, Pinelands 17:16, 13-Quentel Saunders, Ridge 17:17, 14-Bret Wass, Westwood 17:18, 15-Jayton Pak, Haddon Township 17:19, 16-Joel Lucario, Somerville 17:20, 17-Dan Tavares, Delran 17:20, 18-Tristan Schiomann, Holmdel 17:23, 19-Mike McCurdy, Morris Hills 17:24, 20-Brian Falkowski, Pinelands 17:27.

TEAMS: 1-Metuchen 88, 2-Henry Hudson 118, 3-Point Pleasant Beach 122, 4-Palmdale Park 150, 5-Montgomery 226, 6-Bernards 193, 7-Haddon Heights 226, 8-Science 227, 9-Whippany Park 233, 10-Magle Shade 244, 11-Waldwick 281, 12-Audubon 283, 13-Madison Borough 333, 14-Roseville 346, 15-Secaucus 393, 16-North Warren 400, 17-New Providence 407, 18-Schwartz 407, 19-Becton 426, 20-Middletown 455.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Ashley DeBenedictis, Roselle Park 16:33, 2-Felix Olivo, Secaucus 16:43, 3-Tom Horne, Glassboro 17:00, 4-Andy Kapp, Point Pleasant Beach 17:06, 5-Frank Antonelli, Palmdale Park 17:23, 6-Peter Startz, Waldwick 17:24, 7-Dave Berger, Haddon Heights 17:27, 8-John Bertolami, Point Pleasant Beach 17:22, 9-Sean Ryan, Metuchen 17:33, 10-Jon Egbert, Haddon Heights 17:34, 12-Dave Ledgerwood, Park Ridge 17:35, 13-Carmelo Reyes, Academy 17:35, 14-Jay McGovern, Henry Hudson 17:38, 15-Noel Zee, Metuchen 17:46, 16-Jeff Finucane, Bernards 17:51, 17-Dave McGovern, Henry Hudson 17:52, 18-Scott Menti, Cresskill 17:53, 19-Glenn Hawkswell, North Warren 17:54, 20-Chris Kulik, Bernards 17:54.

BOYS' PAROCHIAL A
TEAMS: 1-Paul VI 25, 2-Christian Brothers 27, 3-Seton Hall Prep 138, 4-Paramus Catholic 141, 5-Don Bosco Prep 159, 6-DeBartolo 197, 7-Mgr. Donovan 214, 8-Bergen Catholic 227, 9-Notre Dame 233, 10-St. Joseph's (Wee.) 231, 11-St. Peter's Prep 239, 12-Holy Cross 349, 13-Camden Catholic 359, 14-Bishop Ahr 365, 15-Holy Spirit 381, 16-Hudson Catholic 407.



Anthony DeBenedictis wins Group 1 title yesterday. (Photo by Jim Wright)

INDIVIDUALS: 1-John Williams, Paul VI 16:17, 2-Joseph DiGiacomo, Paul VI 16:22, 3-Chris Chiaro, Christian Brothers 16:46, 4-Adams Daniels, Seton Hall Prep 16:47, 5-Ryan Anderson, Paul VI 16:48, 6-Kevin Gilman, Bergen Catholic 16:53, 7-Greg Blazsko, Paul VI 16:56, 8-Brian Cummin, Christian Brothers 16:58, 9-Eric Savoth, Christian Brothers 17:00, 10-Brian Bach, Paul VI 17:03, 11-Jim Caccabeve, Seton Hall Prep 17:04, 12-Andrew Zagula, Paramus Catholic 17:09, 13-Chris McDonnell, Christian Brothers 17:12, 14-Pete Stubbs, Christian Brothers 17:14, 15-John Butth, Paul VI 17:16, 16-Brian Bennett, Christian Brothers 17:17, 17-Bill Ganun, St. Joseph's (Wee.) 17:21, 18-Mike Sherman, Notre Dame 17:24, 19-Waah Murphy, Paramus Catholic 17:25, 20-Ryan Blaney, Mgr. Donovan 17:26, 21-Matt Coleman, Christian Brothers 17:29, 22-John Downey, Queen of Peace 17:30, 23-Divian Coia, Notre Dame 17:33, 24-Jeff Cluffebouck, Don Bosco Prep 17:34, 25-Austin O'Reilly, Mgr. Donovan 17:36.

PAROCHIAL B
TEAMS: 1-Pope John 43, 2-Red Bank Catholic 88, 3-Pingry 88, 4-Roseville Catholic 132, 5-St. John Vianny 136, 6-Mater Dei 152, 7-Sacred Heart 164, 8-St. Rose 202, 9-Bishop Eustace 257, 10-St. James and Widewood Catholic 304, 12-Eastern Christian 326, 13-Immaculata 351, 14-St. Joseph (Hammon) 394, 15-Newark Academy 410, 16-Don Bosco Tech 426, 17-Oratory 498, 18-DePaul 541, 19-Exeter Catholic 547.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Mike Houlihan, Mater Dei 17:04, 2-Mike LaLonde, Pope John 17:33, 3-James Lenihan, St. John Vianny 17:37, 4-Tom Diemar, Pingry 17:38, 5-Andy DelVecchio, Red Bank Catholic 17:44, 6-Eugene Daly, Morris Catholic 17:52, 7-Tom Ribnicky, Pope John 17:59, 8-Rick Janocko, Roseville Catholic 18:00, 9-Eduardo Juarez, Pope John 18:02, 10-Kevin Sacco, Sacred Heart 18:06, 11-Matt Day, Pope John 18:09, 12-Jim Fujinori, Widewood Catholic 18:11, 13-Mike McCowan, Bishop Eustace 18:12, 14-Doug Campbell, Red Bank Catholic 18:14, 15-Andrew Gruel, Pingry 18:16, 16-Jon Nagler, Pingry 18:18, 17-Derek Cunningham, Red Bank Catholic 18:20, 18-John Rafea, Union Catholic 18:25, 19-Tim Langan, Pope John 18:27, 20-Mike Scarnieto, Roseville Catholic 18:28, 21-Pat Hoias, St. Rose 18:28.

Group 1 champion: Carpenter; Coscia captures Group 3 crown

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"I've told her all year that she can be the best in New Jersey. Today, she just..."