

Science captures 1st Group 1 title

By JIM LAMBERT

Middletown South, ninth in The Star-Ledger Girls' Cross-Country Top 10, knocked off fifth-ranked Hunterdon Central, the defending champion, to capture the Group 4 title and freshman Claire Nicholas was a surprise winner in 20:48 to lead Ridge to the Group 2 title to highlight girls' action in the NJSIAA Central Jersey Cross-Country Championships yesterday in Holmdel Park.

Also at Holmdel, Wall, the 1993 sectional Group 2 champion, edged Ocean Township, the 1993 and 1994 champion, 58-59, to win Group 3 and, in the closest finish of the day, Bernards beat Bound Brook on a sixth-runner tie-breaker to repeat in Group 1.

The top five teams and top 10 individuals in each group in each section earned a ticket into the state group championships on Nov. 11 at Holmdel Park. At the group championships, the top three teams and the top 10 individuals who run for other teams will qualify for the Meet of Champions at Holmdel on Nov. 18.

In the North Jersey, Section 2 meet at Garrett Mountain in West Paterson, No. 7 Ridgewood, with a 20:14 victory from Amy Smith, rolled to a repeat title in Group 4. Northern Highlands, with Jen Meighan taking first in 20:30, won Group 3. Ramsey, the 1994 sectional champion in Group 3, captured Group 2 behind winner Dana Satir, who ran 20:13. Bogota successfully defended in Group 1.

In North Jersey, Section 2 at Warranco Park in Elizabeth, Westfield beat Randolph, 52-71, to repeat in Group 4. Mt. Olive, which swept the first five places led by freshman Kim Primavera's 20:15 victory, retained its crown in Group 3. Jefferson claimed Group 2 and Science won its first title in Group 1.

There were no surprise winners in the South Jersey meet at Kingsway in Swedesboro with four repeat champions. No. 2 Shawnee repeated in Group 4. No. 3 Brick beat No. 10 Ocean City, 59-72, to retain in Group 3. Haddonfield in Group 2 and Maple Shade in Group 1 defended successfully.

The biggest shock of the day came at Holmdel where Middletown South offset a one-two finish for Hunterdon Central by packing its five within 56 seconds and 11 places for a 43-57 victory. Middletown South's five were senior Jean Griffin, fourth in 20:45; junior Colleen Glass, seventh in 20:58; freshman Cate Guiney, eighth in 21:02; junior

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Teresa Joerger, ninth in 21:05, and junior Tara Cullen, 15th in 21:41. Middletown South last won the Group 4 sectional title in 1992. Hunterdon Central won the last two.

Things might have been tighter if Hunterdon Central had normal No. 4 runner Erica Goetz, who had a 102-degree fever and didn't run. Hunterdon Central's Autumn Fogg won for the third straight year in 19:39 and teammate Beth Crawford was second in 20:01.

"We suspected that we could run with Hunterdon Central," said Middletown South coach Nancy Taylor. "I know they didn't have Goetz, but that doesn't take away from us winning. We've been rotating our top five all season and this is the first time they all ran well at the same time. I felt this would be our year.

"We don't have a middle school program, so I knew it would take a couple of years of nurturing with this group before we'd be ready to challenge and they were ready. Now I just want to make it to the Meet of Champions. But that will be tough because Group 4 is so competitive."

Nicholas, usually Ridge's third or fourth runner, couldn't believe that she won the Group 2 race to help her team win its first sectional championship since 1986.

"I'm very surprised," said Nicholas, who finished a second ahead of teammate Becca Raum, second in 20:49. "Becca has always been a minute ahead of me all year, so I didn't think I could win. I was shocked when I crossed the finish line first. I just wanted to be in the top 10. This is the most incredible feeling."

In Central Jersey, Group 1, Bernards and Bound Brook, the 1993 champion, finished tied for first with 81 points. But Bernards' won the tie-breaker because its sixth runner, Kate Henry, finished 39th in 25:37 to beat Bound Brook's sixth, Nicole Patullo, 71st in 30:08. It was the second tight finish in less than a week for Bernards and Bound Brook. At the Somerset County Championships on Monday, Bound Brook finished sixth with 159 and Bernards was seventh with 160.

Neptune senior Amala Merritt, running cross-country for the first time this season, made a bold move to the front going up the bowl portion of the course and ran away for a 20:35 victory in Group 3. Merritt beat runner-up Heather Perrine, the sectional champion in Group 2 in 1993, by 30 seconds.

"This is the first major title I've ever won in cross-country," said Merritt, who reported that she was talked into running cross-country by her track coach, Caleb Morris, and former Neptune track star, Kisha Blanton. "When I made my move, I heard another coach telling the girl behind me that I couldn't keep it up. That made me push ever harder."

FIELD HOCKEY

Hamilton North beats Princeton D in semis

Lindsay Nami converted a feed from Alicia Leone with 15:21 remaining in the first half and Hamilton North held on for a 1-0 victory over Princeton