

Robinson takes crown; CBA claims championship

By JIM LAMBERT

Chris Robinson's frustration over a sixth-place finish in the Group 3 race last week turned into jubilation yesterday when the North Hunterdon runner won the boys' title in 16:02.9 at the 24th NJSIAA Cross-Country Meet of Champions at Holmdel Park.

Christian Brothers, ranked No. 1 in The Star-Ledger Top 10, averaged 16:40 and had a gap of just 40 seconds between its first and fifth runners to claim the team competition with 51 points. No. 3 North Hunterdon, behind Robinson and Chris Dolan's seventh-place showing in 16:15.6, was second with 88 points. No. 6 Paul VI, the defending champion, was third with 118.

Christian Brothers, which finished second last year, extended its state record to eight M of C titles. CBA also won in 1979, '80, '86, '87, '90, '91 and '93.

Although he was the top returning finisher by virtue of placing fourth in the M of C last year, Robinson had left some question marks with his 17:07.1 showing in Group 3 last week. But the senior turned in a strategically sound race yesterday.

Robinson made a bold move to the front as he went into the bowl in the lead at around the 1.5-mile mark and methodically opened the gap to 30 yards as he came out of the bowl with about one mile remaining. His big surge dropped pre-race favorite Matt Elmuccio of Westfield out of striking distance. Elmuccio was the best kicker

in the race, but he never got close enough to use it.

Mainland's Scott Keyser, the Group 3 champion, was the only one who had a shot at catching Robinson. But Robinson's lead was too big for the hard-charging Keyser, who was second in a personal Holmdel best of 16:06.1.

"My plan was to get to the front and try to break them," said Robinson, who was leading the Group 3 race before he was stricken by stomach cramps. "And once I took it out and got the lead, I felt nobody could stop me."

"After last week, everybody counted me out. I was like a secret coming into this race. Last week's disappointment made me thirst for this even more. I'm a very spiritual person and I prayed to God all week to give me the confidence and the strength to come back.

"I kept believing all along that this was my race to win," Robinson added. "It's a good feeling to do something others feel you can't do. Ever since I started running, I wanted to accomplish something great, and I finally did."

Robinson, who cut his previous Holmdel best by 25 seconds, is the fourth runner from North Hunterdon to win the M of C title. The other North Hunterdon champions were Brad Hudson (1983), Andy Martin (1984) and Brendan Heffernan (1991). No other school has had more than two champions.

"When he made his move, he got away," said Keyser. "He got the lead

and just took it. When I started to kick, I thought I might be able to get him, but his lead was deceptive. He was further ahead than I thought. I never thought before the race that Robinson was one of the guys to beat. He surprised me."

Christian Brothers, which came in as an overwhelming favorite, received an 11th from Eric Savoth in 16:22.7, a 12th from Brian Bennett in 16:32.8 and a 13th from Brian Cunniff in 16:35.0. Cunniff's sister, Meghan, finished second in the girls' race yesterday to help No. 1 Red Bank Catholic repeat as M of C champion.

Last week, Christian Brothers averaged 16:49 in winning the Parochial A title.

"I told the guys that anything can happen and they had to run hard," said CBA coach Tom Heath. "They didn't get out well, but they didn't panic and, time-wise, we ran a better race than we did last week. It feels good to go wire-to-wire as the No. 1 team. The whole season it was a case of here we are — come and get us. And nobody could."

BOYS
TEAMS: 1-Christian Brothers 51, 2-North Hunterdon 88, 3-Paul VI 118, 4-Westfield 128, 5-Ridgewood 162, 6-Highland Regional 196, 7-Palisades Park 245, 8-Morris Hills 261, 9-Bernards 273, 10-Haddonfield 279, 11-Pope John 312, 12-Toms River South 312, 13-Mainland 314, 14-Holmdel 319, 15-Red Bank Catholic 326, 16-Paramus Catholic 368, 17-Henry Hudson 275, 18-St. John Vianney 400.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Chris Robinson, North Hunterdon, 16:02.9; 2-Scott Keyser, Mainland, 16:06.1; 3-Steve Saffery, Mt. Olive, 16:09.0; 4-Matt Elmuccio, Westfield, 16:12.9; 5-Sean McCafferty, Central Regional, 16:13.4; 6-Jay Wassell, Highland Regional, 16:15.0; 7-Chris



Photo by Frank Wojciechowski

Chris Robinson of North Hunterdon crosses the finish line first in the boys cross country Meet of Champions at Holmdel Park yesterday.

Dolan, North Hunterdon, 16:15.6; 8-Roger Munoz, Kearny, 16:17.0; 9-Adam Daniels, Seton Hall Prep, 16:20.7; 10-Andrew Knight, Ramapo, 16:21.8; 11-Eric Savoth, Christian Brothers, 16:22.7; 12-Brian Bennett, Christian Brothers, 16:32.8; 13-Brian Cunniff, Christian Brothers, 16:35.0; 14-Wilfredo Rivera, Old Bridge, 16:36.7; 15-Pat Ryan, Glassboro, 16:38.9; 16-Karl Savage, Eastern, 16:40.1; 17-John Clark, Red Bank Catholic, 16:40.9; 18-Ryan Anderson, Paul VI, 16:41.8; 19-Eric Bonnette, Haddonfield, 16:43.3; 20-Terence Rozier-Byrd, Christian Brothers, 16:44.9; 21-Nick Nugger, Highland Regional, 16:48.2; 22-Skip Allen, Hunterdon Central, 16:49.1; 23-Mark Freund, Eastern, 16:51.3; 24-Aaron Kinsley, West Deptford, 16:51.5; 25-Ray Biersbach, Newton, 16:52.2.

RBC repeats behind Cunniff; Fogg wins

By JIM LAMBERT

Repeat. That's a word the Red Bank Catholic girls, No. 1 in The Star-Ledger Top 10, have heard all season.

And yesterday at the 24th NJSIAA Cross-Country Meet of Champions in Holmdel Park, Red Bank Catholic responded to the call when it became the first girls' team to repeat at the M of C since North Hunterdon won a fourth straight in 1986.

And they did it in dominating fashion.

Behind resurgent sophomore Meghan Cunniff, who was second in a personal best of 19:04.1 for Holmdel, RBC had four girls under 20 minutes for the first time in school history and averaged 19:39 to finish first with 37 points. No. 4 Bishop Eustace was a distant second with 77 points and No. 2 Shawnee placed third with 87.

Red Bank Catholic has now won seven M of C titles, breaking the state record it had shared with North Hunterdon.

Individually, Hunterdon Central senior Autumn Fogg, second to Woodstown's Jaime Weisgerber last year, took control right away and was never threatened as she captured the final jewel in running's triple crown by finishing first 18:56.8. Fogg had also won the 1,600 indoors last winter and the 1,600 outdoors this past spring. Fogg is the first champ, boy or girl, from Hunterdon Central.

Last week, Red Bank Catholic had averaged 20:14 to beat Bishop Eustace, which averaged 20:16, by a 31-38 margin

for the Parochial B title. Based on that tight result, it figured to be a close race between RBC, Bishop Eustace, and Group 4 champion Shawnee yesterday.

"I thought if we ran better than we did last week, we had a shot at beating them," said Bishop Eustace coach Bob Kiessling, whose team also placed second to RBC at the M of C last year. "And we did run better, but I never expected RBC to run the way they did. I have to give them credit. They rose to the occasion for the second straight week. And in both races, we forced them to run their best race."

"We ran fantastic," said RBC coach Mary Banks. "The team was so aware of what they had to do and were so motivated and focused to repeat. It was a total team race. I felt they would all run their best times and they did. Meghan running the way she did the last three weeks really gave this team a lot of confidence. Meghan was the driving force for this team."

Cunniff, an All-Stater who was third in the M of C last year, got off to a slow start this season because of a sprained ankle and insufficient conditioning. She ranged from RBC's third to fifth for most of the early season.

But Cunniff broke out at the Shore Conference race on Nov. 4, where she was RBC's No. 2, and then last week was her team's No. 1 for the first time when she placed second in Parochial B in 19:35.

"I was so frustrated with the way I was running early in the season," said Cunniff, whose brother, Brian, helped No. 1 Christian Brothers win the boys'

title yesterday. "There were times when I didn't think I'd run the way I did last year. But it finally came together. We were so psyched for this. We were pumped up to repeat. We were confident that we could do it and it's something that has been on our minds all season. We knew that everyone would be trying to knock us off, so we had to run a great race, and we did."

Fogg made two big surges, one right before going into the bowl and one on the way out, and nobody could match her moves.

"That's were I wanted to make my surges," said Fogg, who won Group 4 last week in 18:53. "Last week, they gained on me at those spots and I didn't want that to happen again. I was afraid to read the newspaper this week because everyone was picking me to win. That made me nervous. But I'm very happy and relieved now that I've won."

GIRLS
TEAMS: 1-Red Bank Catholic 37, 2-Bishop Eustace 77, 3-Shawnee 87, 4-Brick 128, 5-Middletown South 133, 6-Westfield 148, 7-Mt. Olive 179, 8-Paul VI 228, 9-Ocean City 256, 10-Immaculate Heart 262, 11-Ramsey 294, 12-Notre Dame 317, 13-Haddonfield 312, 14-Voorhees 364, 15-Bound Brook 426, 16-Mater Dei 424, 17-Schallick 482, 18-Maple Shade 517.

INDIVIDUALS: 1-Autumn Fogg, Hunterdon Central, 18:56.8; 2-Meghan Cunniff, Red Bank Catholic, 19:04.1; 3-Archie Hartman, Ocean City, 19:07.2; 4-Stephanie Doyle, Ridgewood, 19:12.9; 5-Shari Hewel, Deptford, 19:15.2; 6-Laura Nann, Bernards, 19:16.0; 7-Jenn Pesce, Toms River North, 19:17.2; 8-Lauren Dunning, Toms River East, 19:21.4; 9-Ann Klocke, Bishop Eustace, 19:25.4; 10-Lorena Adams, Manchester Township, 19:28.5; 11-Stephanie Snyder, Randolph, 19:30.9; 12-Kerry Andrews, Red Bank Catholic, 19:31.3; 13-Jerilyn Frahalone, Red Bank Catholic, 19:31.3; 14-Adrienne delSoli, Bishop Eustace, 19:31.8; 15-Amy Smith, Ridgewood, 19:32.9; 16-Beth Crawford, Hunterdon Central, 19:41.0; 17-Cheryl Wroblewski, Brick, 19:45.0; 18-Sara Tindall, Pingry, 19:45.8.



Photo by Frank Wojciechowski

Autumn Fogg of Hunterdon Central is on her way to victory in the girls' cross country Meet of Champions yesterday at Holmdel Park.

19-Andrea Dipolito, Holy Cross, 19:46.6; 20-Jessica Thomas, Point Pleasant Boro, 19:47.4; 21-Kim Primavera, Mt. Olive, 19:51.3; 22-Mara Maloney, Red Bank Catholic, 19:54.4; 23-Kacy Corbett, Camden Catholic, 19:56.0; 24-Cafe Guiney, Middletown South, 19:56.3; 25-Amalia Merritt, Neptune, 19:59.8.