

## Notebook: Candidates for Coach of the Year honors

By **GUS OSTRUM** • Courier-Post Staff •  
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The annual debate has already begun: Who will be the Courier-Post cross country Coaches of the Year in 2010?

As usual there are no shortage of candidates for this prestigious honor when the selection is announced in the all-star section to be published on Dec. 12. Several South Jersey coaches enjoyed banner seasons once again, making the choice another difficult one.

Shawnee's Gary Hill was the South Jersey boys' Coach of the Year in 2009 while Delsea's Linda Marchese won the honor among girls coaches last year.

And in 2010? Here are your top candidates, in no particular order:

**Matt Ciociola, Bishop Eustace:** Ciociola guided the Crusaders to the Non-Public B state championship, the first for Eustace since 2002. Ironically, Ciociola, a 2002 Eustace graduate, just missed out on his team's last state championship effort as an athlete. He graduated the spring before the Crusaders claimed the 2002 Non-Public B crown.

**Nick Baker, Haddonfield:** This veteran coach led his team to a fifth straight NJSIAA Group 2 championship, the South Jersey Group 2 crown, and the Colonial Conference titles among other triumphs. Baker is the architect of a program that has won seven state crowns since 2000.

**Dave Donohue, Haddon Township:** The coach of the year in 2008, Donohue continued a strong tradition at Haddon Township by capturing or sharing the school's third straight South Jersey Group 1 title.

**Brian Cranston, Lenape:** The Indians enjoyed all kinds of success this fall, winning its first Burlington County Open title in 31 years in late October, and then placing second in the South Jersey Group 4 championship meet Nov. 6 at Delsea.

Among local girls' teams, several coaches are again in contention for the 2010 honor. Here they are, again, in no particular order:

**John Denning, Moorestown:** The veteran coach guided his club to its first South Jersey sectional championship since 2005 when the Quakers upset Delsea for the Group 3 crown. Denning's club is one of the youngest in South Jersey with nearly everyone returning next season.

**Linda Marchese, Delsea:** Marchese guided the Crusaders to the Tri-County Conference Royal Division championship and a runnerup spot in the South Jersey Group 3 meet. Delsea also successfully won titles at the South Jersey Open and South Jersey Shootout this fall.

**Mike Busarello, Haddonfield:** One of South Jersey's top coaches, Busarello's Lady Bulldawgs turned in another splendid season, capturing the South Jersey Group 2 title, its fifth in the past six seasons. Haddonfield was also the class of the Colonial Conference once again with a veteran group of athletes, led by senior Mia Spinelli.

**Bob Eck, Pitman:** A long-time fixture at the Gloucester County school, Eck guided his Panthers to their second straight South Jersey Group 1 crown in dominating fashion on Nov. 6 at Delsea. The Panthers were once again Tri-County Conference Classic Division champions.

**Mark Jarvis, Cherokee:** The Chiefs were perhaps South Jersey's No. 1 team this season, finishing tied in the South Jersey Group 4 meet for first, but losing the crown to Toms River North on the sixth-runner criteria.

Runner of the Year

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The Courier-Post also selects an annual Runner of the Year, and once again, several individuals are in the hunt for this honor. This award will be announced Dec. 12.

We will have a new boys' Runner of the Year this season as Haddonfield's Jon Vitez -- the winner last season -- has graduated and is now at Princeton University. The same holds true for the girls as former Kingsway standout Chelsea Ley, a three-time winner from 2007 to 2009, now runs for Virginia.

#### Foot Locker Northeast

Highland senior Megan Venables, the New Jersey girls' Meet of Champions winner, will lead a strong South Jersey contingent in the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships Northeast Regional race today at Sunken Meadow State Park in Kings Park, N. Y.

A top 20 finalist in 2009, Venables, returns to compete against some of the best runners in the region for a coveted spot in the national finals. Venables placed 16th in last year's regional race.

Also scheduled to compete are Bishop Eustace's Holly Bischof and Cherokee's Megan Lacy, who were second and fourth in the Meet of Champions respectively.

Williamstown's Paul Szulewski, Washington Township's Anthony Dentino and Triton's Rob Rawls are among South Jersey contenders in the boys' race.

The 5,000-meter seeded race begins at 11 a.m. for the girls and at 11:35 a.m. for the boys. The top ten boys and the top ten girls in the seeded races qualify for the Foot Locker National Finals on Saturday, Dec. 11 at Morley Field, Balboa Park in San Diego, Calif.

#### Season-ending notes

Haddonfield's Matt Nussbaum, who placed second in the states the past two seasons in Group 2, says he will commit to Yale University as his college choice. Nussbaum, also a standout track runner, led the Bulldogs to their fifth consecutive Group 2 state championship when he placed second behind teammate Ben Potts on Nov. 13 at Holmdel Park.

Speaking of Potts, the star Haddonfield runner has

not yet made his final collegiate choice. He is being recruited heavily among Ivy League and Division 1 schools.

Potts captured the South Jersey Group 2 and state crowns while placing sixth in the Meet of Champions in 15:43.

After turning in a solid 10th place showing in the Meet of Champions as a junior in 2009, Szulewski was expected to be one of New Jersey's premier runners this fall. His season ended well as he posted an eighth place finish in 15:55 in the M of C -- but his path to Holmdel Park was anything but easy.

Szulewski suffered a stress reaction injury last spring and then contacted Lyme disease in September, keeping him out of the lineup for several weeks.

"I was always wiped out, just drained," Szulewski said. "I'm happy how my season ended, but after being out so long, I felt I was just getting started. I haven't hit my peak yet, and I was frustrated from that vantage point." Reach Gus Ostrum at [gostrum@camden.gannett.com](mailto:gostrum@camden.gannett.com)

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