



Varsity Insider

Haddonfield's Potts wins close junior division race at Cherokee Challenge; Ley, Vitez win fourth titles

SEPTEMBER 12, 2009 • 9:19 PM

BY GUS OSTRUM

EVESHAM

Haddonfield's Ben Potts and Matt Nussbaum as well as Williamstown's Paul Szulewski all headed straight for a photo finish in Saturday's Cherokee Challenge high school boys' cross country junior division race. Potts emerged the winner by a head, even though he and Szulewski officially clocked 9:58. Nussbaum was right on their heels in 10:00, while three other runners finished within five seconds of the winner.

"I was surprised at the number of runners packing (running together) at the end of the race," said Potts, who won his first Cherokee Challenge divisional race. "Matt (Nussbaum) and I stayed together like we usually do, but we had a lot of company at the finish line."

Even though he narrowly missed winning, Szulewski, who was 15th in the 2008 sophomore division race, couldn't have been happier. "Sure, I would have liked to win, but we had great competition here, and I was glad to be this close," he said. "Hopefully, my times will keep improving, and I can do well in the league (Tri-County Conference) and sectionals this year."

Meanwhile, two star runners captured their fourth straight Cherokee Challenge championships, the first time in the meet's 14-year history that has been accomplished. Kingsway's Chelsea Ley placed first in the girls' senior division race in 11:12, while Haddonfield's Jon "Boo" Vitez finished first in the boys' senior division in 9:33.

Ley, a preseason favorite to win the New Jersey Meet of Champions title in November, wasn't pleased with her time but was happy to win. "I got thrown off because it looks like they changed the course a little, and it threw off my time," said Ley, a major Division I college prospect. "I was hoping to set the meet record here today, but it was also pretty muddy so I'm just happy to get the win."

Millville's Alyssa Harris won the girls' junior division race in 11:45.

Team winners were West Windsor Plainsboro in the boys' competition (34 points) and Tatnall, Del. (23 points) in the girls' scoring.

This year's Challenge was one of the largest in recent memory, with nearly 3,000 runners from three states competing, said meet director Chris Callinan. Last season's meet attracted 2,200 runners.