

History of the NJSIAA Sectional Cross Country Meet

(revised 6-30-17)

The Beginning

When talking about the state sectionals cross country meet we need to go back to the state group races in 1963 held at Warinaco Park in Elizabeth. During the late 50's and early 60's there was a large increase in the number of schools participating in cross country. In 1963 the Group 4 race had over 350 runners from over 40 teams. Because of the large number of runners, a double chute finish set up was in place. After 42 runners crossed the finish line, a runner tripped and fell at the finish line creating a pile up. Amid the confusion, runners who finally crossed the finish line entered both chutes simultaneously. Race officials could not accurately determine runner placement. After much deliberation, the race officials decided not to rerun the race and declared Westfield the winner as they were the only team to have 5 runners finish before the pile up. No other team results were determined.

Due to concerns about runner safety, it was proposed that a series of qualifying races be run throughout the state to reduce the number of teams and runners participating in the state group meet. The qualifying race was the sectional race which was first run in 1965.

The state was divided into 4 sections (North 1, North 2, Central, and South), each section with a similar number of schools. In 1965, Groups 1 and 2 were combined into one race with separate races for Groups 3 and 4. Since 1966, a race has been held for each group. The top 5 teams in each race and the top 10 individual runners of each race advance to the state group meet.

Because the number of non-public schools has always been much smaller than public schools, there was no need for a qualifying race, and (at least for the boys) non-public schools have not participated in the sectionals.

On the girls side, the first girls sectional races were held in 1971. The 1971 girls sectionals was comprised of two "all group" sectional races, a combined North 1 and North 2 race a combined Central and South race. 'All group' races were held in 1974 and 1975 (no sectional races were held in 1972 and 1973). The first girls four sections, four group races were held in 1976. From 1976 to 1981 and from 1986 to 1992, there were no nonpublic state group races for girls, so nonpublic schools were a part of the girls sectional races those years.

First Race

The first south sectional race was held on November 13, 1965 at Pennsauken High School. The winner of the Group I/II race was Don Morgan of Clearview High School who covered the 2.5 mile course in 12 minutes and 24.5 seconds beating team mate Craig Daley. Carl Metzradt of Audubon High Scholl won the Group III race in 12 minutes and 42.8 minutes defeating George Dilenno of Triton Blue (now Highland Regional). In the Group IV race, Leon Nocito of Vineland High School defeated Bill Carlson of Middletown Township in a course record time of 12 minutes and 17.2 seconds.

In Group I/II, Clearview defeated Burlington Township 26 to 61. Haddon Heights won the Group III title defeating Audubon 53 to 59. The Group IV title went to Vineland who defeated Middletown Township in a close race 33 to 36.

As an aside, Don Morgan and Leon Nocito were two of the greatest XC runners from South Jersey in the mid 60s. In 1965, Don went on to win the Group I/II state title. Leon finished second in the Group IV state race losing to Bill Carlson by just over 1 second. At the South Jersey Open in 1965, Leon and Don finished 1 – 2 with Leon setting a Bridgeton High School course record of 11 minutes and 28.4 seconds (remember there was only one varsity race at the time).

As a freshman in 1962 Don finished 3rd in the South Jersey Open and 4th in the state Group I/II race. In 1963 he finished 1st in the Open and 2nd in the state Group I/II race. In 1964, he finished 1st in the Open and 3rd in the state Group I/II race. Leon was 3rd in the Open in 1964 and finished 3rd in the state Group IV race.

The first “all group” Central/South sectional race was held on October 30, 1971 at Monmouth College (now University). The winner of the race was Sue Wolfram of Rancocas Valley covered the 2 mile course in 12:21. Rancocas Valley won the team title over Holy Cross 37 to 42.

Race Location

South sectional races have been held at the following locations:

Pennsauken High School: 1965 – 1981 (Girls: Monmouth College (1971); Pennsauken High School (1974 – 1981))

Camden County College: 1982 – 1983

Clearview High School: 1984 – 1986

Cherokee High School: 1987

Mill Creek Park (Willingboro): 1988

Burlington County Vo Tech (Westhampton): 1989 – 1992

Kingsway High School: 1993 – 1998

Egg Harbor Township High School: 1999

Williamstown High School: 2000 – 2001

Delsea Regional High School: 2002 -

Race Distance

For the South sectional races, the race distance for the boys was 2.5 miles from 1965 to 1972, 3 miles from 1973 to 1978, and 5 K since 1979. For the girls, the race distance was 2 miles in 1974 to 1976, 3 miles in 1977 and 1978, and 5K since 1979.

Barry Frasco