

## **The Sun One-On-One with ... Cherokee junior Ethan Wechsler**

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The Chiefs cross country team is a perennial South Jersey power because of the sheer talent it fields year in and year out, like Wechsler, who had a strong performance recently at the Shore Coaches Invitational

The best high school sports programs — the ones that can sustain success for over a decade — are the teams that can continually reload rather than rebuild, that can graduate seniors but have underclassmen more than ready to step in and step up. Cherokee cross country is built this way. Thanks to a strong feeder program, a committed coaching staff, and strength in numbers of quality athletes and kids, the Chiefs are a regular South Jersey power. The current Cherokee team — which will make a run at a state crown next month — should be very good in 2019, too, as it's not very senior-heavy this fall. One of the Chiefs coming into his own this fall is junior **Ethan Wechsler**. The 16-year-old Wechsler was Cherokee's top finisher at the Shore Coaches Invitational the first weekend of October, finishing in fourth place in his race but also sporting the sixth-best time overall in a field of more than 1,200 runners.

A few days later, Wechsler took part in ***The Sun One-on-One***.

**Q: How long have you been running?**

**Ethan Wechsler:** Oh, God, I've been running track since like second grade. Marlton rec didn't have cross country and my friend's dad, Bill Shea, Brett is his son, and he has an older son, Jack, who graduated from here, he was super good. He founded that program when I was in like fifth grade, so I've been there. That's how a lot of the guys on the team started out, in there and then progressively into high school.

**Q: Cherokee has a strong reputation in cross country. Does that bring the best out of you?**

**Wechsler:** Yeah, it's encouraging. Last year there were always two guys ahead of me, before there were probably 10 guys ahead of me. So you're always trying to get better by seeing how they're doing, try to match what they're doing, then do better and beat them, eventually, you know?

**The Sun: Right, you have a barometer right there, can always test yourself.**

**Wechsler:** It sets the path to where you should go.

**The Sun: You had a pretty good race over the weekend (Shore Coaches Invitational), how did that feel, doing well on a big stage?**

**Wechsler:** So I felt awful the whole week, sickness-wise, congested a lot. So I was like, 'Oh no, this might not go well.' But I don't know, I just wanted to go out and have a good race. I didn't want to look at any results before, but one of my old teammates texted me, 'Did you hear what this guy ran?' and then I'm like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe (that time)' I just went out and tried to stay with Chris (Spisak). He kind of fell off and I went on my own, and it felt good at the end, [laughs], yeah, definitely.

**The Sun: Does that change your goals for end-of-season?**

**Wechsler:** [Sigh]. Yeah, so I didn't want to stay second guy forever ... so my goal is to catch up with Chris and be closer to him. Because a few weeks ago he beat me by 35 seconds, and I'm like, oh God, if this is how the remainder of the season is going ... I would get kind of angry because I'd go to races and see kids on other teams winning, and I know that if they went against us, they'd lose to two or three of our guys, but they're getting all this attention because they won. You can't win anything unless I become Number 1. So, just be close to Chris, he's still really good. ... I just want to break 16 (minutes) in the 5K. And just win a race, sectionals, county or conference.

**The Sun: Do you play any other sports?**

**Wechsler:** Nah. [laughs].

**The Sun: When was the last time you played something else?**

**Wechsler:** I played basketball. My dad likes basketball a lot. I think I stopped that in seventh grade. That was the last time.

**The Sun: Did your dad (Frank) play basketball in high school?**

**Wechsler:** Yes. He ran, but it wasn't that serious. He did basketball, too, even though he's super short.

**The Sun: Your dad is short, huh? How tall are you?**

**Wechsler:** I'm 5-11 and he's 5-8. My mom is 5-9.

**The Sun: So you get your height from your mom.**

**Wechsler:** Yeah, her side. Her parents were giants.

**The Sun: Do you want to run in college?**

**Wechsler:** Definitely, yeah. After seeing other kids who have graduated go on to do good things, that'll definitely be an interest of mine in the future.

**The Sun: Do you have a favorite school subject?**

**Wechsler:** Ooooooh... [Head coach Steve Shaklee chimes in and suggests physics, since the assistant coach is his physics teacher]. Physics is rough right now. Probably pre-calculus. I'd like to think math is my strongest subject, even though my grades wouldn't say that, I just think I can always get better in there.

**The Sun: Who is your favorite teacher? Maybe you guys just answered this earlier. [Laughs].**

**Wechsler:** I'd definitely chose to do physics because I knew (Jeff) Thompson, our assistant coach, was the teacher, so he's one of my favorite teachers, but, I have to think ... .

**The Sun: It doesn't have to be this year.**

**Wechsler:** I really like my math teacher from last year, Mrs. (Nicole) Muller, and my German teacher, too, who I've had for three years, Mr. (William) Ivory.

**The Sun: My mom is a teacher so I want to make sure they get their due.**

**Do you have a TV show you're currently into?**

**Wechsler:** I'm obsessed with "Game of Thrones," I always talk about it, my teammates get sick of me talking about it. I'm obsessed with it.

**The Sun: I'm also a "Game of Thrones" fan. Who's your favorite character?**

**Wechsler:** I love Cersei.

**The Sun: Cersei, wow, that's evil.**

**Wechsler:** I know, she's evil but she's good.

**The Sun: See, I like Arya so you and I aren't going to get along.**

**Wechsler:** No...

**The Sun: I want Arya to take out Cersei so bad ...**

**Wechsler:** ... I think it's going to happen, too.

**The Sun: She'll put Jamie's face on.**

**Wechsler:** That's what everyone is saying, I think it's going to happen.

**The Sun: Jamie already almost died. How many people will even survive the whole show, like three people?**

**Wechsler:** Or maybe no one. They'll kill everyone.

**The Sun: That would be very George R.R. Martin.**

**Wechsler:** Definitely.

**The Sun: Who is your funniest teammate?**

**Wechsler:** Oh, God. Hmmm. I have to say Chase, Chase Miller.

**The Sun: What makes him funny?**

**Wechsler:** He's just a character, plus I talk to him a lot, too. He makes everything fun, or, it's not a word, but funner.

**The Sun: Do you have a role model?**

**Wechsler:** Running-wise I would say Justin Kelly, he'd helped me a lot last year and still talks to me this year about running in college. He's at Stony Brook. And my dad obviously, my parents (Jen and Frank Wechsler), they just help me with so much.

**The Sun: Last question: Whom do you consider to be the best runner in South Jersey?**

**Wechsler:** In South Jersey? Well, I mean I'd have to say ... [laughs]. I can't say myself?

**The Sun: I like that answer. Just finish it there.**

**Wechsler:** I'd like to believe it's myself.

**The Sun: That's a good mindset, that's how an athlete should think.**

**Wechsler:** There are others out there. [Shaklee interjects: "If I'm answering that, I'm saying he's potentially the best. There are probably four or five people that could be in the mix, and he's one of them."] In our one race this year, a few weeks ago, I was so far behind Chris in part due to the fact that I thought I couldn't beat him. And then, if I think that about everyone now, if I think that way, then I'll stay behind them.