

The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.

Vince Lombardi

The 2018 Cherokee Cross Country season, by any measure, was successful.

A county championship, a conference championship, a 3rd place finish at the State Group 4 race and a 6th place finish at the State Meet of Champions . . . these are clear measures of success.

What, then, set this team (*and the other top teams in the state*) apart from the hundreds of other programs that did not have this kind of success? To paraphrase a quote . . .

The difference between a successful cross country team and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of talent, but rather a lack of will.

The great marathoner, **Juma Ikangaa**, coined the phrase – *The will to win is nothing without the will to prepare*. While he is correct, might it not be more accurate to say – *The wish to win is nothing without the will to prepare*. Everybody wants to win but without the will to prepare it is nothing but a wish. We all *wish* we could be champions! Few possess the will to do what it takes to get there. This team did . . .

. . . and so, after a summer spent preparing, we entered the season feeling optimistic. Although we were a little short on major championship experience (*just 3 returning runners had run at the 2017 Group 4 State Meet and only one at the 2017 MOC*), we felt confident that we could be in the hunt in any race we entered.

That feeling was reinforced when we traveled to Bear Mountain State Park early in September for the Suffren Invitational and came away with a dominating win in the varsity B race and in the merged results, which included 58 schools. **Chris Spisak** led the way, taking the individual victory with the fastest time of the day out of the three championship races.

The varsity squad ran in just one additional invitational prior to the championship season – The Shore Coaches Meet – and finished 2nd in the 162 team-merged results with **Ethan Wechsler** leading the way in 4th, setting a huge Holmdel PR. Clearly our preseason optimism was not just wishful thinking.

We went on to win our 5th consecutive Burlington County Championship and our 4th straight Olympic Conference Championship. At the later, **Ethan Wechsler** became our 3rd consecutive individual conference champion setting a course record in the process.

While the varsity was busy preparing for Sectionals, States and Meet of Champs during the 2 ½ week break following the conference meet, the JV and freshmen squads put on a winning display of their own, dominating both the Haddonfield Invitational and the Olympic Conference JV Championship.

At the South Jersey Group 4 Sectional meet, running without **Chris Spisak** (*who was out for the remainder of the season*) and **Mike Gavio** (*who would return for the Meet of Champs*), we still managed to take 2nd behind a strong Kingsway squad with **Ethan Wechsler** taking the individual victory.

The next week we, despite again missing key varsity runners, **Spisak** and **Gavio**, we put together our best team race of the season to take 3rd in the Group 4 State Meet. **Ethan Wechsler** became Cherokee's 4th individual state champion to lead the team. In addition, both **Chase Miller** and **Brett Shea** had great races. **Chase** knocking 19 seconds off of his previous Holmdel best to take 5th while **Brett** became just the 32nd Cherokee runner to break the 17 minute Holmdel barrier, finishing 26th in the deep field.

We finished the regular season with a solid 6th place finish at the State Meet of Champions, the best finish by a Cherokee squad in 13 years! **Ethan Wechsler** added his name to an elite list of 5 Cherokee runners ever to have run the tough Holmdel Park course in under 16 minutes, placing 4th in 15:56.

Knowing that we would return 9 of our top 10 runners for next year, we entered the post-season Nike Northeast Regional Championship looking to gain some valuable experience on the tough Bowdoin Park course. Not only did we gain the experience we were looking for but we managed a 10th place finish in a field of 33 top teams from 8 different states.

And so we can now look back on one of the most successful seasons in school history because this group of athletes had the necessary will to prepare. We can also look forward with great anticipation at what the 2019 season may hold in store!

Senior, Aatish Gupta, David Jackson, Mike Moraschi and Tyler Ortiz: We appreciate all you have done for the program.

Aatish and **Ty**, while we know that you are track guys at heart, using cross country to get in shape, you have never taken it for granted. Instead, you have always worked hard and given your best during the fall season and, for that, we thank you!

Mike, your four years of work and devotion to the team has not gone unnoticed. You have our thanks and our best wishes as you continue running in college.

David, our team captain, you have our everlasting respect for the way you have dealt with the obstacles you have faced in this sport. Your ability to stay focused and

work through the difficult times is an inspiration to all of us. Thank you for that, and for your leadership.

To all of you: Thank you for your contributions to the Cherokee Cross Country Program. Please know that, whatever we accomplish in the coming years, you are, and will always be, a part of it . . .

For those returning: There is an old Chinese proverb that goes: *The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away a small stone* . It seems to us that this is a fitting proverb for where we find ourselves as we look toward the future. As good as Cherokee Cross Country has been over the years, there are things we have not yet accomplished, goals we have not reached . . . mountains still standing. If we want to accomplish those things, reach those goals . . . remove that mountain, then we need to start by carrying away small stones. One day at a time, we need to devote ourselves to doing everything we can to be the best runners – the best team – we can be. We can't stand back and wish it would happen. We must have the **will to prepare** so that we can make it happen.

Thank you . . .

Thank you **Matt Monteleone** for your help as our manager!

Thank you **parents** for the support you provide. It may not be said often enough but your sons . . . and their coaches . . . truly appreciate it.

Thank you, members of **the booster club** for your support of the team!

Thank you **Mr. Agnew** and **Mrs. Charlesworth**. It's good to have the support of the administration!

Thank you, **Mr. Smyth**, for all the great photos and for keeping the website up to date!

Thanks you **Mr. Shea** for the great work you do with the Marlton Rec Program! We would not be where we are without your help.

Most of all, thank you **athletes** for your hard work and dedication. As your coaches, we feel incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to work with such great young men. We are proud of you!

Coach Shak and Coach Thompson