

Austin Gabay edges Ethan Wechsler in epic Burlington County Open 1,600 battle!!!!

Reuben Frank, [May 12, 2019](#), [sjtcaweb](#)

The latest Austin Gabay-Ethan Wechsler showdown certainly lived up to expectations!

Cinnaminson's Gabay and Cherokee's Wechsler, two of the top junior distance runners in New Jersey, locked up in an epic race over 1,600 meters Saturday at the Burlington County Open, and when it was over just 3-100ths of a second separated them.

The whole field was out fast, with Wechsler leading a pack of five runners that came through the 400 between 62.4 and 62.9. Everybody predictably slowed down on a slow second lap, and at the bell lap four runners had gapped the field — Wechsler came through in 3:19.80, Cherokee junior David [sic] Jackson in 3:19.92, Gabay in 3:20.05 and Cherokee junior Chase Miller in 3:20.18.

That group stuck together until the first turn on the final lap, when Gabay, Wechsler and Miller took off, and at the start of the backstretch, Gabay and Wechsler began hammering side by side, Wechsler on the inside, Gabay on the outside.

Gabay built a two-meter lead coming off the final turn, but Wechsler caught him with 40 meters to go and pulled just ahead with 20 meters to go before Gabay used one final surge to inch ahead at the line.

Gabay closed in 60.8 for a 4:20.86 and Wechsler closed in 61.1 for a 4:20.89. Miller was third in 4:26.87 and Jackson, in his first serious mile ever, took fourth in 4:31.23.

Gabay warmed up for the 1,600 by splitting 1:55.1 on Cinnaminson's 3,200-meter relay team, which won in 8:08.02. Gabe Saint Elie, Zach Walton and Chad Howard also ran for Cinnaminson. That's fourth-fastest this year by a South Jersey school and No. 2 by a Group 2 school. It's also fifth-fastest in meet history.

The Gabay-Wechsler race was the fifth-fastest 1,600 or mile in the meet's more than 50-year history behind these four memorable battles:

1978: 1) Bob Mann (Willingboro) 4:17.9, 2) Mark Strucko (Rancocas Valley) 4:19.3
1979: 1) Bob Mann (Willingboro) 4:19.3, 2) Mark Strucko (Rancocas Valley) 4:19.4
2004: 1) Jon Anderson (Cinnaminson) 4:16.05, 2) Ian Waterhouse (R.V.) 4:16.93
2017: 1) Mark Miller (Shawnee) 4:18.13, 2) Jack Shea (Cherokee) 4:19.36

Gabay's PR is 4:17.79 from last year's state Group 2 meet. The 4:20 was a big PR for Wechsler, who had a 4:24.40 to his credit from indoor sectionals.

Wechsler edged Gabay when they met at the Holmdel Night of 3200's earlier this month, with both PR'ing — Wechsler with 9:10.90 and Gabay with 9:15.13.

But Gabay edged Wechsler by less than 1 1/2 seconds to win the County Open XC title at Mill Creek, both going under 16 minutes. Miller was third in that race, too. They met again at the XC Meet of Champs, where Wechsler ran 15:56 for fourth at Holmdel and Gabay was 13th in 16:10.

Gabay and Wechsler rank No. 21 and 22 in the state in the 1,600 and No. 6 and 7 among juniors. They're No. 2 and 3 in South Jersey, behind only Camden Catholic senior Matt Coffey (4:18.53 at S.J. Invite).

In the 3,200, they're No. 8 and 14 in the state and No. 3 and 7 among juniors. They're ranked No. 2 and 4 in South Jersey, with Connor Melko (9:06.52) and Martin Riddell (9:12.43) at No. 1 and 3.