

# Boys Spring Track Athlete of the Year: Years of hard work pay off for Pizarro

*After never contending for a state title prior to this year, Pizarro became the best shot putter in New Jersey when he took first place at the Meet of Champions with a 60-foot, 11-inch toss.*

By  
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Years of hard work paid off for Cherokee's Lucciano Pizarro this spring. Pizarro became the shot put king in New Jersey, taking first place at the South Jersey Group 4 sectional meet, the NJSIAA Group 4 championships and the NJSIAA Meet of Champions.

Prior to this year, Cherokee senior Lucciano Pizarro wasn't on the radar as one of the best in the shot put in New Jersey.

Prior to his senior year, Pizarro had only qualified for the Group 4 state finals once in his career. Cherokee throws coach Ed Kramer noted Pizarro spent his freshman and sophomore years with throws in the 30- to 40-foot range as he learned the finer aspects of shot put.

Then, in early May, it all began to come together for Pizarro. During warm-ups for the SJTCA Open at Delsea on May 2, Pizarro began hitting throws in the high-50-foot range, something he hadn't done in competition before.

"Finally seeing that mentally gave me the idea that I could maybe get to 60-feet this year," he said.

A month later, Pizarro finally broke the 60-foot barrier and became the best shot putter in the state. Pizarro took first place in the NJSIAA Meet of Champions, capping off an incredible month of rapid improvement for the senior. Pizarro's wild journey to the top of the state rankings makes him South Jersey Sports Weekly's Boys Spring Track Athlete of the Year.

Pizarro became the king of the shot put just a few months after finishing 12th at the Indoor Meet of Champions with a throw of only 49-feet. Kramer believes the one difference in Pizarro this spring was confidence after he started hitting bigger throws in competition. The first big throw for Pizarro was a 56-foot, 3.5-inch toss to win first place at the Olympic Conference Championships.

(Lucciano Pizarro throws at the Olympic Conference Championships on May 15. Pizarro took first place at the meet with a throw of 56-feet, 3.5-inches. Pizarro's first place finish was the first of four consecutive wins that culminated in a Meet of Champions title.)

"The past couple months, he's been hitting these throws in practice and warm-ups and stuff," Kramer said. "I just think he was a little unsure of himself for a while. He wanted to get there, but wasn't sure how to get to that next level. I think a couple things just clicked. We fixed a couple things technically and his confidence shot up."

Wins in the South Jersey Group 4 sectional meet and the NJSIAA Group 4 Championships caused Pizarro's role to change from underdog to favorite. Pizarro launched a 59-foot, 9-inch throw at the Group 4 finals to put him at the top of the state leaderboards entering the Meet of Champions. Instead of seeing his new position of being the favorite as pressure, Pizarro saw it as an opportunity.

"I just wanted to demonstrate why I was No. 1 in the state," he said. "Going into states, I had the No. 1 mark so I really wanted to show the guys I was no fluke. I put in the work to be No. 1 in the state."

It was in his last throw at the Meet of Champions where Pizarro launched his title-winning, 60-feet, 11-inch bomb. Pizarro was in third place at the time he made his last throw.

"I didn't really know where it landed," he said. "The lines they had painted I wasn't used to, so I couldn't see the 60 line. But I saw it land and felt that it was a bomb. It was exactly what I needed."

"It was satisfaction knowing I put in all of the work the last four years for something," Pizarro added. "It's more than just a PR, more than just a state championship. I got a Meet of Champions championship."

Just a few months ago, Pizarro was battling just to crack the top-10 in the state's shot put rankings. Now, he's got an eye on keeping his track and field career going in college. Prior to this season, Pizarro didn't think he had good enough throws to make an impression at the collegiate level and decided he was going to attend Penn State strictly for academics. After his big spring season, however, Pizarro plans to continue training this summer with the hope of walking onto Penn State's team next year.