

## **This year's seniors were in kindergarten in the fall of 2007 when the Cherokee Cross Country Team last won the Group 4 State Championship ...**

The class of 2019 has come a long way since that fall . . . and so has the Cherokee Cross Country Program . . . eight conference championships, nine county championships, three sectional championship, five trips to the Meet of Champions, seven top 3 South Jersey rankings . . . quite a record of success! However, though many great athletes have come through the program in those years, no one had been able to lead the team to another state title...until now. Seniors, **Ethan Wechsler, Chase Miller, Tyler Jackson, Mike Gavio, Bobby Hackney and Matt Campbell**, all four year runners, were the group that finally made it happen! Under their leadership, the 2019 team enjoyed perhaps the best season in the storied history of Cherokee Cross Country!

After using the early season to train and prepare for the championships, the real racing began at the **Burlington County Open** on October 18<sup>th</sup> at Millcreek Park where the team won a 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive championship, scoring a record low 20 points. So dominant was the victory that, if you took the other 14 teams and combined them into one, Cherokee would still have won by a score of 20 to 35!

The following week, on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the team repeated that dominance at the **Olympic Conference Championship** at Dream Park, winning for the 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive time with 21 points, effectively beating the rest of the conference by a score of 21 to 35! Cherokee's five-man average time for the race – 16:00 – is a record that may remain untouched for quite a while!

Two weeks later, on Saturday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, the team won the 9<sup>th</sup> **Group 4 Sectional Championship** in school history, the most by any Group 4 school in South Jersey. With six runners in the top 20, Cherokee again dominated the field, winning by 38 points over runner-up, Cherry Hill East. The team's five man average time of 16:02 is now the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest ever on the Delsea High School course!

The next Saturday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, at the **Group 4 State Championship**, the team went to the line at Holmdel as the favorite. In a field that included 9 of the top 14 ranked teams in the state, there was no doubt that it would take a great race to come out on top. The boys responded with a convincing 28 point win over runner-up, Ridge High School and, in the process, established a new school record at Holmdel, averaging 16:34! It was just the 7<sup>th</sup> state championship in the history of the Cherokee program and the first since the 2007 team captured the title.

One week later, on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the team returned to Holmdel for the **State Meet of Champions**. It had been 14 years since Cherokee last made the podium at MOC's (top 6) and all seven runners were determined to do so. Just as they had all season, the boys stepped up and got it done, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> behind CBA, Mendham and Haddonfield. It was the highest finish by a Cherokee team since 2001 and the team broke the school record they established last week by 4 seconds, averaging 16:30!

On Saturday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, running as the Evesham Harriers, the team competed in the **Nike Northeast Regional Championship** at Bowdoin Park in Wappinger Falls, New York. Having never finished higher than 9<sup>th</sup>, the team was looking to, once again, make some school history. When the results were finally announced, the Evesham Harriers had placed 6<sup>th</sup>, the top South Jersey team and just the second team from New Jersey! It was a fitting way to end the season. This group just kept finding ways to get it done! There were certainly obstacles along the way but they never let anything stop them! It wasn't surprising given where they had come from . . .

. . . The Journey began three years ago, in the fall of 2016, when this senior class entered high school. Right away, it was clear that they were something special when they won every freshman championship they entered – The Battle at OCP, The Bowdoin Invitational, The Shore Coaches Invitational and the Manhattan Meet. The Shore Coaches Invitational was, perhaps, the most telling sign of what was to come as they set the freshman five-man average record at Holmdel on the 2.1 mile layout. The following year, as sophomores, they helped the team to county and conference championships, a 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at Sectionals and 7<sup>th</sup> at the State Group 4 Meet. As juniors, they again led the team to county and conference championships, another 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at Sectionals, a 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish at the State Group 4 Meet, a 6<sup>th</sup> place finish at the State Meet of Champions and 10<sup>th</sup> at the Nike Northeast Regionals. These seniors have been the mainstay of the Cherokee Cross Country Program for the past 3 years! They are the primary reason for the success of this year's team and they will be greatly missed!

So, as we look back in appreciation of all that this team has accomplished. **Seniors**, we are forever grateful to you for the hard work and dedication you have shown over the past 4 years. This program would not be where it is if not for you! Thank you. Please know that, whatever we accomplish in the coming years, you are, and will always be, a part of it . . .

**For those of you returning:** As we look forward, what does the future hold for Cherokee Cross Country? Yes, this group of seniors will be difficult to replace. However, we have the makings of another great team next year. The class of 2020 has set the bar high. Let's do all we can to live up to the standards they have established!

**Thank you . . .**

Thank you **Matt Monteleone** for your help as our manager for the past two years! Workout days would have been a lot tougher without you.

Thank you **parents** for the support you provide. It really does make a difference!

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

Thanks to our AD, Mr. Agnew, for his support of the program!

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! Keep those young runners coming! It has made a huge difference in our program!

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*

