

Lancaster places fifth in state meet; Keeve wins gold medal in 500-meter

by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Marcus Keeve ran the 500-meter final on an empty stomach at the Class 1A/2A state indoor track championships February 26. That's because the Lancaster High School senior threw up just before the big race.

Keeve didn't think it was nerves or the stomach bug that had him "just not feeling good." Instead, he chalked it up to a bad hotel breakfast. Whatever it was, it didn't affect his ability to race past the competition as the gold medalist in the 500-meter.

LHS head indoor track coach Draper Washington and assistant James Timm took six boys to compete in five of 17 events at the Class 1A/2A meet and produced a state champion in Keeve, a runner-up in speedster Chris Dameron and Lancaster's boys finished fifth out of 39 teams. Not a bad day at the track.

"We proved even with six kids, we can compete with just about anybody," said Washington. "I'm beyond excited about how they did."

And to top it off, about four of the boys were feeling ill-effects of a questionable omelet, including Dameron, who was the runner-up in the 300-meter.

Keeve actually outran teammate De'Avion Harding to win the state championship in the 500-meter, after finishing second to Harding in the Region 1A/2A meet a few weeks ago. Harding's mind wasn't in the race, according to coaches, following a snafu in the boy's 4X200-meter relay.

Lancaster's team of Dameron, Harding, Keeve and Elijah Palmer actually won the race by two seconds but was then disqualified (DQ) because of interference. Judges ruled that Harding had stepped in front of the sixth place team after the baton exchange.

"He was still on the track and didn't even realize the other team hadn't made the exchange. That's how far back they were," said Washington. "In my mind, they won and they are state champions."

"After that it was hard for De'Avion to get his mind back into racing," he added. "He was still shook up about the DQ when it was time for the 500-meter."

Harding finished seventh in the 500.

"I wasn't mentally prepared to the run that race," said Harding.

Keeve and Harding had paced each other all season in the 500-meter with Harding winning the regional championship by less than a second over Keeve.

"This was a dominant performance by Marcus," said Washington.

"He won that race from start to finish," added Timm.

Keeve won the race in 1:09.52.

"I knew De'Avion was shook up," said Keeve. "But I wasn't thinking about that like I can beat him. I was



Marcus Keeve

just thinking one of us has got to go home with something."

Dameron, who is a three-time region champion in the 55-meter and who was the region champion in the 300-meter last year, placed second in the state in the 300-meter with a time of 37:47, just steps behind the state champ Chadwick Cleaton of Brunswick High School. Cleaton finished the race in 37:45.

Cleaton beat Dameron by a much bigger margin at the region race. "But this time I gave him a run for his money," said Dameron. "I almost got him."

"It was an exciting meet," he added. "The competition was a lot tougher but that's what made it fun. I like chasing after the competition."

Dameron also placed sixth in the 55-meter dash with a time of 6.77.

Lancaster's 4X400-meter relay team of Harding, Keeve, Veney and Zach Kane finished third with a time of 3:40.28.

Although Lancaster's 4X800 meter relay team had previously posted one of the three fastest times in the state at a regular season meet, the Devils didn't compete in that race.

At the state meet, runners can only compete in three running events. Lancaster had several athletes state-qualified in multiple events, including Harding who qualified for five races and Keeve, who had qualified for six events.

Maggie Walker won both the boys and girls state championships. Maggie Walker scored 99 points to win the boys title and 110 to win the girls. Auburn was second in the boys meet with 43, Brunswick third with 42 and Floyd County fourth with 30.

In the girls race, Lancaster's Hailey Smith medaled with a fifth-place finish in the 500-meter race with a time of 1:23.27. She also ran a leg of Lancaster's 4X400-meter relay team, which finished eighth in 4:52.27. Running the 400 relay were Smith, Whitney Nelson, Katelyn Seaver and Chyra Boyd.

"We are really looking forward



Lancaster High track coach Draper Washington distributes medals from the region and state indoor meets during a track and field practice last week. He hands De'Avion Harding his gold medal for winning the 500-meter at the Region 1A/2A meet. Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

"We proved even with six kids, we can compete with just about anybody ...I'm beyond excited about how they did."

– Coach Draper Washington

to the outdoor season because we have a lot of talent to work with on both the boys and girls teams," said Timm.

A season for the record books

Lancaster's indoor track teams shattered 12 LHS school records during meets throughout the season, including setting eight new records on the boys team and four on the girls team.

For the boys, Harding set two new records including a 2:48.78 in the 1000-meter and a 4:55.21 in the 1600-meter.

Keeve also broke two records by

running the 500-meter in 1:09.52 and clearing 10' in the pole vault.

Dameron set a new 300-meter record with a time of 37.47.

The boys 4X200-meter relay team of Dameron, Harding, Keeve and Palmer set a new record with a time of 1:37.15, and the 4X400-meter team of Kane, Harding, Keeve and Domonique Veney set a new record of 3:40.28. Kane, Harding, Keeve and Veney teamed up again for a school record of 8:53.49.

Smith, a freshman distance runner, broke three school records. She set a new 500-meter record with a time of 1:23.27, a 1000-



Chris Dameron

meter record with a time of 3:20.72 and a 1600-meter record with a time of 5:35.77.

Smith, Nelson, Seaver and Boyd also set a new record of 4:51.00 in the 4X400-meter relay.



Lancaster took 10 to the Class 1A/2A state indoor track meet at Roanoke College last week. The Red Devils produced a state champion and several medalists. Competing for LHS from left were (front row) Katelyn Seaver, Whitney Nelson, Hailey Smith and Chyra Boyd; (next row) Chris Dameron, Marcus Keeve, De'Avion Harding, Zach Kane, Elijah Palmer and Domonique Veney. Photo by James Time



Lancaster's Dorrien Lee (25) defends a shot by Rappahannock's Lawrence Reed (2). Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi



Lancaster's CJ Smith goes up for two against Rappahannock's Lawrence Reed (2) and Tyler West (11). Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Rappahannock's 'gutsy' trey at the buzzer clocks Lancaster, 42-41

by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Rappahannock High coach Jonas Ankrom made a gutsy call.

Down by two with four seconds on the clock against Lancaster last Friday night in varsity boys basketball, he went for the win instead of the tie. The Raiders put four players around the arc and threw the ball inbounds under their own goal. Tyler West put the shot up and caught nothing but net on the way down to lift the Raiders over Lancaster, 42-41.

It was a gutsy call for a few reasons. Rappahannock hadn't hit a three-pointer in the game. In fact, Rappahannock hadn't scored from the floor in the fourth quarter.

Free throws kept the Raiders in the game in the final eight minutes. Rappahannock scored all 11 of their fourth quarter points—before the trey—at the charity line. Kevin Byrd, who finished with 16 points to lead RHS, sank seven foul shots in the fourth and hit 10-of-12 free throws on the night.

Rappahannock held a 12-10 lead at the end of one then went on a 5-0 run early in the second before Lancaster shut the Raider scorers down. The Red Devils scored a quick four unanswered late in the quarter to take a one point lead, 18-17, at the half.

The two teams traded shots in an 11-11 third quarter and Lancaster led 33-30 with five minutes to play in the fourth. Gerrell Moody hit a three pointer to keep Lancaster ahead by three, 37-34, but three free throws by Byrd and another two by Savian Epps put Rappahannock up,

39-37, with 58 seconds to play.

Lancaster's CJ Smith scored in traffic for a 39-39 tie and Moody dished off to TJ Frisby for a 41-39 lead with 18 seconds left.

Rappahannock took a shot under the goal and Lancaster knocked the ball out of bounds on the rebound to give the Raiders the throw in under the goal with four seconds to play.

RHS kept Lancaster's top scorers in single digits with Smith and Frisby scoring eight points each to lead. BJ Lee finished with seven.

Delonta' Butler scored 10 for Rappahannock and Epps added eight.

Lancaster 44

Northumberland 42

Frisby hit a pair of free throws with seconds on the clock last Tuesday to lift Lancaster over Northumberland, 44-42, in a district game in Claraville.

The host Indians made a late-game run with a 13-9 fourth quarter. Lancaster led by three at the half and six at the end of three. Northumberland kept Lancaster's shooters in check in the fourth, with LHS hitting only twice from the field in the final eight minutes.

Lee scored six points for LHS in the first quarter and finished with half of his team's 20 in the first half. He scored 13 as the Devils' only double-digit scorer in the outing.

Delvin Palmer scored 20 to lead Northumberland, including all of his team's nine points in the second quarter and seven of the Indian's 12 in the third. Nick Basye finished with 11 for



Lancaster's Gerrell Moody (4) drives for the basket around Rappahannock's Tyler West (11). Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

NHS and drilled three three-pointers in the second half, including two in the fourth.

Lancaster is now 7-4 overall and 2-2 in the district. The Devils will visit Essex tomorrow, January 18, and will host Washington & Lee on Tuesday, January 22.

Junior varsity

In JV action, Lancaster split against Northern Neck District opponents last week.

The Devils held the Raiders to five points in the second

half of a low-scoring, 21-13, win at LHS last Friday.

Damont Maiden scored five of Lancaster's seven second-quarter points to help give LHS an 11-8 lead at the half.

Rappahannock was held to a lone field goal in the third as the Devils took a six-point lead, 16-10, and was held to a single three-pointer in the fourth. Mark Delano hit the three in the final quarter and had Rappahannock's only points in the first off a pair of free throws.

Maiden led Lancaster with eight points and Sean Thomas scored six points.

Northumberland outscored Lancaster, 28-10, in the first half and held on for a 44-32 win over the Devils last Tuesday.

Katrel Jones did most of the work for the Indians with 24 points to lead all scorers. Jones scored 16 of his team's 28 first-half points and five of Northumberland's nine in the fourth quarter.

Malik Carter hit twice from the cheap seats to finish with 10 points for NHS.

Lancaster, which got off to a slow start, made a late game charge with 14 points in the fourth quarter, including four points each from Jakeem Redmond and Jayden Chapman. X'Zavion Owens did all of the scoring for LHS in an eight-point third quarter. He finished with eight.

Sean Thomas led Lancaster with nine points.

Lancaster boys win state track championship; girls place fourth

Photos and story by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

Lancaster High School is the best in the state. It's been 34 years since the LHS boys track team could make that statement.

But with 70.5 points, two winning relay teams and an individual gold medalist, the Red Devils claimed the Class 1 state championship in track and field Saturday, June 1, at East Rockingham High School. It was Lancaster's first state team championship in boys track since 1985.

The track team without a track showed everybody in the state who was boss last weekend, scoring in 10 of 15 events to outscore 35 teams and win the boys meet. The Lady Devils also had their best showing in state competition in 11 years, scoring in eight events to place fourth among 29 teams. It was the best finish for an LHS girls track team since it placed third in 2008.

And they did all that without a home track. That's right, for those not in the know, LHS hasn't hosted a track and field meet since 2005. All-weather tracks are now the norm and Lancaster's dirt and crush-and-run gravel track is outdated. The teams practice on it but don't hold home meets.

"I'm beyond proud of these kids and what they've accomplished," said LHS boys coach Draper Washington. "I knew when this ninth grade class came in there was something special about them. In this county, we hear a lot of negative about the schools. We don't talk enough about the good things these kids do. This proves just how dedicated they are and what hard workers these kids are."

The Devils took 10 boys and 13 girls to compete in last weekend's state meet in the Shenandoah Valley, which was initially a two-



Thomarrow Hardy races to the finish line in the 100-meter dash.

day event but because of weather on Friday evening was changed to a one-day format Saturday. The change put distance runners at a disadvantage and left athletes competing in multiple running events exhausted.

Pushing through

Lancaster's Domonique Veney fumbled with a #6 sticker he was quickly trying to place on his left shoulder last Saturday afternoon. His fingers just wouldn't work.

"I can't even put my number on my shirt I'm so tired," he said, looking desperately at teammate DeAvion Harding for some help. Harding placed the sticker on Veney's shoulder.

"But I'm doing this for my team. If it means being exhausted, that's okay," said the LHS senior. "I gotta go try to pull off one more miracle."

And pull off a miracle he did.



The Lancaster High School boys track team won the Class 1 state championship and the LHS girls team placed fourth.



Raeghan Franklin takes off in her leg of the 4X400-meter relay.

Veney, who was competing in five events last weekend, the most of any boy on the LHS team, passed three runners with an all-out push in the final 100 meters of the 800 meter race to finish fifth (2:07.92) and pick up four points. Harding was the runner-up in the 800 meter with a time of 2:04.57.

Veney collapsed on the pavement as he crossed the finish line and crawled just out of bounds to the grassy infield, where he laid for a few minutes with both legs cramped. He was dehydrated and drained.

"Both of my legs were cramped up. I just couldn't walk. I was huffing and puffing before I even started the race. I couldn't even warm up properly," he said.

At one point, Veney was competing in three events simultaneously, running back and forth to take his turns in the triple jump and pole vault events, then pausing to run the 800 meter.

One thing you can't control is the pace of the meet and when each event takes place, especially with the changes because of the weather, said Washington. Veney ran a leg of the championship 4X800 relay team to start the meet at 9 a.m. Saturday morning, then around noon competed in the 1600-meter and around 2 p.m. started jumping.

"I was actually sorta worried about him," said Washington. "That was kind of a sticky situation for a bit. He didn't look good, but he came through for us. I don't know if anybody else could have done that."

In that 800 meter, he added, "if those two Parry McCluer kids had finished in front of Dom, that could have changed the whole outcome."

Veney finished fourth in the mile (4:41.54), also passing three runners in the final 50 meters.

"I lost track of the laps," he said. "I missed one of



U'Nequia Green passes the baton to Nealiasia Redmond in the girls 4X100-meter relay.



BJ Lee cleared 6'0" to place third in the boys high jump at the



Chris Dameron passes the baton to DeAvion Harding in the boys 4X400-meter relay.



Chyra Boyd ran the two-mile race for LHS.

them and then people were passing me and I said, oh no, I gotta go."

Veney also scored in the triple jump with a fifth place 39'11.5" jump and placed third in the pole vault after clearing 11'3".

The champions

Marcus Keeve cleared 10'9" in the pole vault for sixth place but excelled on the track as Lancaster's only individual state champion.

Keeve sprinted to a win in the 400-meter dash in 50.99 and crossed the finish line about 15 meters ahead of the runner-up.

"All the guys in the race knew who I was from indoor track," said Keeve, who also holds the state title in indoor track. He was ranked number



Domonique Veney cleared 11'3" to place third in the pole vault.

one going into last Saturday's race.

"They all said they'd been watching videos of me and how I switch gears in the last 100 meters. Today, I was feeling the pressure. With 200 meters left, I was thinking I gotta go."

"One guy even came over before the race and said he was scared of me. After he said that my nerves went away."

Veney, who also earned gold medals as part of Lancaster's championship 4X400-meter and 4X800-meter relay teams, competed in four events last weekend.

"This race wasn't about beating me or me beating



Jordan Milton competes in the pole vault.

Lancaster boys win state track championship; girls place fourth

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somebody else,” he said. “It’s about beating yourself. That’s what you gotta do.”

Harding also ran a leg in both of the championship relay teams. Lancaster started the day with a win in the 4X800 meter (8:25.85) and ended it with a win in the 4X400 meter (3:33.66).

Lancaster’s team of Harding, Keeve, Veney and Zach Kane was the favorite in the 4X800 relay “so we had to win that,” said Harding. “It was nice to kick start [the meet] off with a win.”

Harding ran the last leg and felt the pressure.

He ran a 2:01 in his leg of the relay and he followed that with a 2:04 as the runner-up in the individual 800-meter run. He was ranked second in the state heading into that race.

“I wanted to run it under two minutes but I couldn’t make it,” he said.

Harding, a junior, ran the second leg of the winning 4X400-meter relay team, which like the 4X800 team, included three seniors.

“It was my last race with the three seniors,” said Harding. “I’m really gonna miss them.”

It was touch-n-go in that race for a minute when Harding and senior BJ Lee, who ran the third leg, didn’t have the smoothest of baton handoffs. In fact, Lee heard teammate Keeve yell no after the exchange and thought they had scratched. He actually stopped on the track and looked to the meet judge, who hollered, “go, go.”

“So I took off,” said Lee. “I thought I had interfered with the other person’s lane, but then the man told me to go.”

And that’s what he did. Although Harding had held about a 15-meter lead, the second-place team from Holston closed the gap. Lee sprinted to reopen it.

It was actually Lee’s first time running the 4X400 so it was a big gamble anyway, said Washington.

“The decision was made to move Dom [Veney] to the 4X800 to strengthen that team and it worked out,” he said.

From where Washington stood opposite the finish line on the track, he didn’t have a clear view of the handoff. A judge’s trailer blocked his view.

“I kept watching and I didn’t see BJ coming. I was like, what is going on?” he said. “Not knowing and not seeing anything was nerve-racking. Then all of the sudden, here he comes.”

Lee is one of five seniors, including Kane, Keeve, Chris Dameron and Elijah Palmer.



Domonique Veney pushes to pass a Parry McCluer runner at the finish line of the 800-meter run.

Dameron ran the first leg of the 4X400 relay and also competed in four events. He scored in the long jump with a 20’6” jump and in the 200-meter dash (23.37). He just missed scoring in the 100-meter dash, finishing ninth in 11.37.

“It was great to go out with a bang,” said Dameron. “It was a great experience and a fun year and I got to build new relationships with the ninth graders.”

Dameron, Keeve and the rest of the senior crew have been a part of some very successful LHS boys teams. In fact, the Devils have been flirting with the state title for quite a while, finishing as the runner-up and in third place several times.

“We’ve been right there, knocking on the door,” said Washington. “Since 2014, we’ve been in the top three.”



Khalia Harding finished third in the shot put.



Zach Kane makes the final turn in the mile run.

“After the indoor season we had, knowing the only schools that beat us were 2A schools, I knew as long as we stayed healthy we had a real chance,” he added.

Lancaster had state qualifiers in all but five events: the hurdles, discus, shot put and two-mile.

“I knew all we had to do was place in our events,” he said. “Honestly, it really hasn’t hit me yet that we won. What makes me happy is to see these kids smile.”

In the other events, Lee cleared 6’0” to place third in the high jump and Veney finished fourth in the mile (4:41.54).

Kane was 15th in the 800 meter (2:13.49) and in the mile (5:19.20).

Lancaster’s 4X100-meter relay team of Palmer, Lee, Xavier Sutton and Dameron Towles was 12th (46.32) and Jordan Milton competed in the pole vault.

Auburn was the boys runner-up with 52 points and Parry McCluer was third with 48. Surry County had the next best finish among Region A teams with 31 points for seventh place. Tidewater’s Mathews and the Northern Neck’s Washington & Lee were tied for 15th place with 16 points and Middlesex scored 15 points to tie with West Point and Narrows for 17th.

Girls meet

Freshman distance runner Hailey Smith was frustrated with her fourth place finish in the 1600-meter run. So she made up for it by winning the state championship a few hours later in the 800 meter.

“Webb told me to eat food, cool down and take a mental recovery break, to forget about that race and focus on the 800,” said Smith.

Smith, who already holds one state championship in cross country, raced to a gold medal with a 2:24.23 finish in the 800-meter run.

“I had to chase down a girl from Auburn and she was really close to me the whole time,” said Smith, who has set as her goal for next year “to try to do better in my other races.”

Smith ran a 5:37.35 in the mile for fourth place and ran anchor for the girls 4X400-meter relay team, which finished as the state runner-up. Lancaster’s 4X100-meter relay team also sprinted to a second place finish and the LHS girls scored 48.5 points for fourth place overall, their best state finish in more than a decade.

“I was genuinely proud of how we did overall,” said senior Thomarrow Hardy.

“Everybody put forth their



Tanashia Henderson flies through the air in the long jump.



Hailey Smith is the state champion in the 800-meter run and finished fourth in the mile.

best effort.”

Hardy ran her personal record (PR) in the 400-meter dash, 1:04.42 for fifth place. She also ran a leg of the 4X400-meter relay team, which broke the school record with a 4:19.84.

In fact, the girls team broke several school records and recorded several PRs at last weekend’s state meet, according to coach Joanne Webb-Fary.

Smith broke her own school record in the 800 meter, senior Nealasia Redmond had a PR in the triple jump with a 32’8” jump and freshman Shawnicey Veney cleared 4’10” for a personal best in the high jump. Veney was also on the 4X100-meter relay team, which was the state runner-up with a season best time of 52.15.

Her goal for next year: “I just want to do better than I did this year. I’m passionate about it,” she said.

Also running the 4X100 were seniors Redmond and U’Nequia Green and junior Tanashia Henderson.

Running the 4X400 were Green, Hardy, Smith and Raeghan Franklin.

Franklin, Chyra Boyd, Abria Jackson and Whitney Nelson made up the girls 4X800-meter relay team.

Khalia Harding had a third place finish for Lancaster in the shot put with a 37’11”.

Veney and Henderson both scored in the high jump with Henderson clearing 4’8” for sixth place.

She also competed in the long jump and with Redmond in the triple jump.

Franklin competed in the 400 meter dash with Hardy and just missed scoring, placing 10th with a time of 1:07.76. Hardy also just missed scoring in the 200-meter dash. She placed ninth with a time of 27.75.

Boyd ran the two-mile for



Marcus Keeve sprinted to the state championship in the 400-meter dash.



Chris Dameron jumped 20’6” to score for Lancaster in the long jump.

Lancaster in 14:41.16.

West Point had the best finish for Region A schools, placing third with 77 points.

Patrick Henry-Glade Spring was the state champion with 114 points and Auburn was the runner-up with 102. Middlesex scored 24 points for eighth place.



Elijah Palmer takes the handoff from Xavier Sutton in the boys 4X100-meter relay.