

Thrills run right to the finish

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For sheer excitement, the boys and girls regional track championships at Troy Athens held the patent among the three state qualifying meets in the county Friday and Saturday.

Though the regional championships at West Bloomfield and Oxford had their share of thrills, none could match the climax of the boys regional Friday at Troy Athens and the final, scintillating finish turned in by the teams from Southfield and Rochester.

Heading into the final event, the 1600-meter relay, Southfield clung to a one-point lead in the race for the team championship. Rochester Coach Hal Commerson, whose girls team already had sewn up the overall championship earlier in the day, had hoped his boys team still would be within striking distance going into the final race. But he really didn't expect to be.

"We'll have to win just about every event from here on in, and I don't think we will," Commerson said with three races to go. "They've got four kids running in the 200, and we've got one. But I'd like it to come down to the 1600 relay. Then we've got a chance."

Rochester got a big boost when senior Terry Whitt beat Southfield's Terrence Robinson with his lean at the finish line in the 200-meter dash. Melvin Peeples, in fourth, was the only other Southfield runner to score in the event. The meet tightened up along with the faces of the sprinters from both teams when Rochester's Bob Thompson came in fourth in the 3200-meter run to set the stage for the shootout in the final event, which brought the fans out of their seats.

FOR MOST of the first three laps of the 1600-meter relay, both Southfield and Rochester runners ran side by side and exchanged the baton flawlessly. Then Rochester's Scott Balter opened up a narrow five-foot lead in the final 100 meters to give Whitt, the Falcon anchorman, a slight advantage at the start of the final 400-meter leg.

But Southfield's anchorman was Glen Williams, who already had won two races. And when the runners rounded the first turn in the backstretch, the taller, long-striding Williams had drawn even with Whitt. But the early rush proved Williams' downfall when Whitt kicked in the final 100 meters of the race and Williams couldn't respond. Whitt won by two yards to clinch the meet for the Rochester Falcons. He also had first place finishes in the 200-meter dash and the 800-meter relay, and ran a leg for Rochester's second-place 400-meter relay.

"I was really surprised he challenged so soon," Whitt said breathlessly, after the final race. "I love to run when the meet comes down to me. I prefer it that way."

In the girls competition at Athens, the battle was mostly for second place. Rochester won the team title with 100 points, followed by Seaholm with 73 and Rochester Adams with 58.

The Troy regional also was highlighted by Brother Rice runner Joe Davey's scorching time of 9:14.6 in the 3200-meter run. Davey pulled away from the field after one lap and ran alone the entire race, lapping three runners, to turn in a personal best and the fastest time in the state this season. Teammate John McCleary also ran a personal best to win the 800-meter run with a time of 1:55.3. Seaholm's Eric Wittenberg won the 1600-meter run with a career best of 4:19.2, and was second in the 3200 with a 9:34.4.

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Several girls had big days. Berni Branton of Rochester and Molly Acton of Troy Athens each qualified for the state meet in four events. Acton outleaned Branton at the finish to win the 200-meter dash with a time of 26-flat, but Acton was later a runner-up to Branton in the 100-meter dash. Branton also ran the anchor legs of Rochester's winning 400-meter and 800-meter relays.

Acton, who twice now has worked her way back from serious knee injuries to win regional track championships, also qualified for the state meet with a third place in the 400-meter dash and as part of Athens' 800 relay.

"I'm beat," giggled Acton, moments after winning the 200. "I ran eight races today between the prelims and finals. I was worried about running four races all week, but I'm glad I did. This is great."

Kathy Kubicki of Adams blew away the field in the 3200, winning by more than eight full seconds with a time of 11:34.2. Mary Ballantyne of Seaholm won the 400 and the 800 and teammate Karyn Flinucan won the high jump with a leap of 5-feet, 4-inches, and finished second in the long jump.

AT THE REGIONAL championships at West Bloomfield High School, West Bloomfield's team depth overshadowed a great day by Lisa McCoy of second-place Pontiac Northern. The Lakers, who won only two events, took the regional team title with 67 points to Northern's 64. Northern's boys team also took second place in the team competition with 90 points. Livonia Churchill won the region with 105 points.

Northern's Lisa McCoy won the 100 (11.9), 200 (25.39), and anchored the winning 400- and 800-meter relay teams. Northern also took the 1600-meter relay. Farmington Harrison's Alice Short, the defending state shot put champ, won three events Saturday — the shot (42-9½), discus (124-10), and the 100-meter hurdles (14.6). West Bloomfield's Kelly Gieger and Mary Mickley were the Lakers' only first-place finishers — Gieger in the 1600-meter run and Mickley in the 300-meter hurdles. Gieger also took second in the 800.

In the boys competition, P.J. Osika of Waterford Kettering remained unbeaten this year, winning the 1600- and 800-meter runs. But Osika's time of 1:57.34 in the 800 was well off his best this season of 1:52.8. Osika is chasing the state record of 1:50.9 held by another Kettering runner, Kevin Reabe.

Pontiac Northern's Reggie Williams won the long jump, ran a leg of the Huskies' winning 400-meter relay, and took second in the 100 meter dash. Farmington's Pete Brown took first in the shot put, with a toss of 56-4½, and second in the discus with a throw of 159 feet.

AT THE OXFORD regional Saturday, Cranbrook took third in the boys competition and Avondale took third in the girls competition. Cranbrook's Mike Rotter, Greg Brown, Justin Hunt and Mark Kring all qualified for the state meet. Avondale's Hank Woodmore won the 200 and took second in the long jump. Teammate Dave Kapanowski took third in the 300 meter hurdles.

Avondale's Kim Woods won the discus and the 400-meter relay team of Cindy Jonson, Paula and Kay Buckhaultler, and Amy Cosgrove won their event. The Buckhaultlers also ran on Avondale's second-place 800 relay and Paula took second place in the 200 meter dash.

At Romeo High School, Clarkston won the girls regional with 67 points — 40 of those coming from Julie Beamer. She took first place in the 100- and 300-meter hurdles, and ran on Clarkston's winning 800- and 1600-meter relay teams. Clarkston's Kelly Craig, Bridget Kilcline and Sandy Craig also swept the high jump.

For a list of all the regional winners, see Scoreboard.