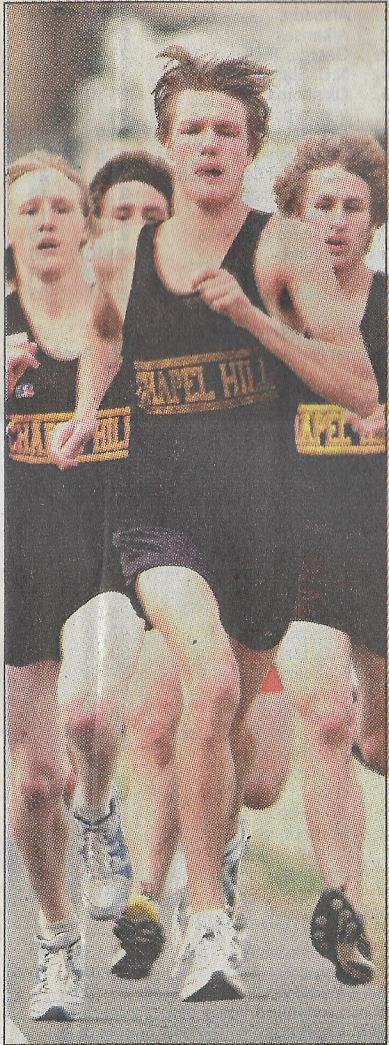
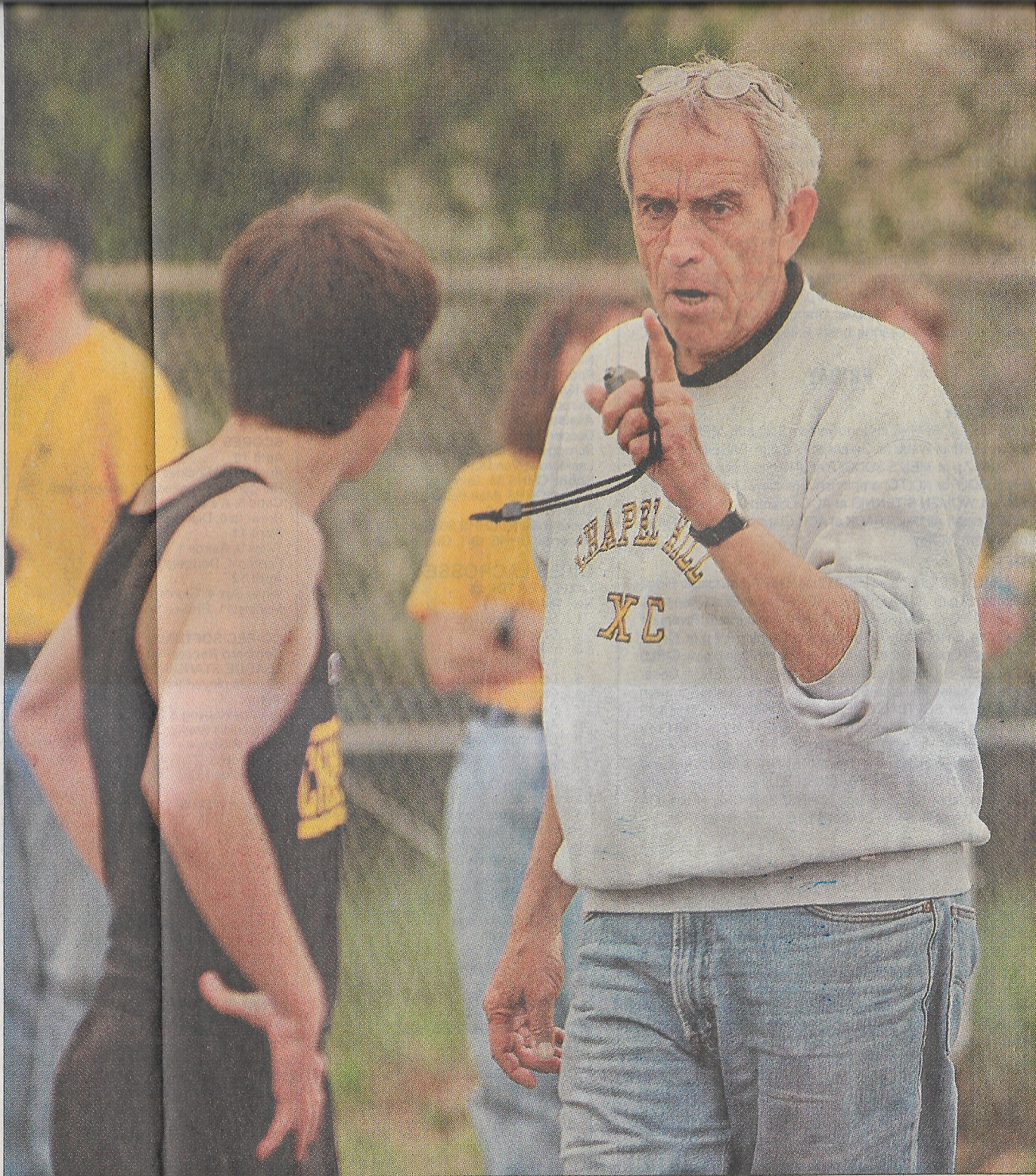


*CHHS hosts
the Orange
County
Championships
on Friday*



Chapel Hill track long distance runner Jack Bolas leads the pack of runners on his way to first place



Chapel Hill High track coach Ron Olsen, right, advises one of his runners between events of last week's dual meet at

STAFF PHOTOS BY HARRY LYNCH

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Wednesday, April 19, 2006

A closer competition than ever

of runners on his way to first place against Jordan.

Chapel Hill High track coach Ron Olsen, right, advises one of his runners between events of last week's dual meet at CHHS with Durham Jordan High School.

BY PATRICK O'NEILL
CORRESPONDENT

CHAPEL HILL — Two Orange County high schools, East Chapel Hill and Chapel Hill, have statewide reputations for distance running prowess.

Such reputations just fuel the competitive fires of Orange High School senior Thomas Smith.

Smith, who was all-state in last fall's NC High School Athletic Association 2-A Cross Country Championships, says he's looking forward to Friday's fourth annual Orange County Track and Field Championships at host Chapel Hill High School.

The meet, which was founded by CHHS coach Ron Olsen, gives all four county high schools (2-A

Cedar Ridge is the fourth) the chance to face off in a true county-wide championship. Field events start at 5 p.m. The running begins at 6:30.

A fired up Smith, 17, says he's likely to run two, and possibly three events Friday, including the 3,200-meter run, a leg on the Panthers' 3,200-meter relay and, possibly, the 1,600-meter run as well.

"I'm ready for anything," said Thomas, whose best 3,200 time is 10:38. "I feel like this year is my strongest year. I'm going to try to win."

Smith said the fact that this meet is the county championship makes him even more excited. "I love it," he said. "That's going to make me run even harder and

faster."

Orange coach Sarah Roberts says her athletes also have a meet Thursday with conference rival Raleigh Charter High, but the plan is to use that meet "like a practice" so her kids will be strong and ready for the county meet.

"Friday is the big meet," Roberts said.

Smith, of Mebane, will likely have to run his hardest and fastest Friday to have a chance to score points for OHS.

Chapel Hill, which has never lost the county meet's boys or girls competition, will be led by the senior distance trio of Jack Bolas, Duncan Hoge and Ryan Workman, all three of whom

could toe the line with Smith.

Roberts observed athletes like Smith often have weaker competition running against smaller schools.

"He's out there running by himself," she said.

On Friday, with lots of strong 4-A runners in the competition, Roberts is hoping several of the Panthers' athletes can achieve 2-A regional qualifying times. "It's a good chance to get those times running against real good competition."

Unlike a year ago, former 3-A power East Chapel Hill is competing this spring in the 4-A classification. The county meet marks the first of several meetings East and CHHS will have in the near

future now that both squads compete in the Piedmont Athletic Conference.

The two Chapel Hill rivals have a PAC-6 dual meet April 26, followed by the conference championship meet, the 4-A regionals and the state championships.

"We're going to see them on a weekly basis," said East coach Steve Marquis. The Wildcats will enjoy the good competition, he said, "especially Chapel Hill High, because it's a rival."

Marquis says the Wildcats are "making the adjustment" to 4-A. Friday's meet offers a chance for his athletes to improve because they will be pushed by the Tigers,

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