

## **PRESS RELEASE**

June 13, 2013

### **ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS HONOR THE STATE CHAMPION COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS TRACK & BOYS FENCING TEAMS**

(Newark, NJ) – During its Wednesday, June 12, 2013, meeting at the Hall of Records, the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders honored the girls track and boys fencing programs at Columbia High School for winning 2013 State Championships. The Board’s commendations were co-sponsored and presented to the teams by Freeholders Carol Clark of East Orange and Gerald Owens of South Orange.

The Girls Winter Track Team won both the Group 4 State Relay and Team Championships, while the Spring Track Team won the Group 4 State Team Championship. The Boys Fencing Team won the overall State Championship while its Sabre Squad also won the Sabre Squad State Championship.



Members of the State Champion Columbia H. S. Girls Winter and Spring Track Teams and Boys Fencing Team and Sabre Squad received commendations from the Board during its June 12<sup>th</sup> meeting at the Hall of Records. Also pictured are Freeholders Gerald Owens (back row, center) and Carol Clark (2<sup>nd</sup> row, far right), and Freeholder Clerk Deborah Davis Ford (front row, far right).  
PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

“Today we will honor two programs at Columbia that have enjoyed spectacular success for many years... track and fencing... and which are known, respected and feared across New Jersey and beyond”, said Freeholder Clark. “They are programs that bring great pride to the high school community, to the communities of South Orange and Maplewood, and to Essex County... and we are as pleased as we can be to recognize them today.”

“This is an extraordinary group, and being from South Orange I’m so proud of you”, said Freeholder Owens, who resides in South Orange.

The Girls Winter Track Team, which was named Essex County's "Team of the Year" by *The Star-Ledger* and was coached by Lisa Morgan, the newspaper's Essex County "Coach of the Year", won both the New Jersey Group 4 State Relays and Team Championships. They also won the Bishop Loughlin Games, Super Essex Conference, Essex

County Relays for the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the New Balance Games Invitational Meet and the Essex County Indoor championships. The team also finished second at the New Balance Nationals, where the 4x400 Meter Relay Team of Kenya Gaston, Shanika Dessen, Cheyenne Trigg and Olivia Baker won the national championship, setting a new state record while running the fastest time in the country this year.

Members of the team also enjoyed extraordinary individual success. The phenomenal Olivia Baker became only the second girl in state history to win three gold medals at the Meet of Champions, where she won the 400-Meter Dash, the 800-Meter Run and the 4x400 Meter Relay with her teammates, Kenya Gaston, Cheyenne Trigg and Shanika Dessen. And for those astounding accomplishments, Baker was named New Jersey's Girls Winter Track "Athlete of the Year" by *The Star-Ledger*. Additionally, nine girls also received New Balance All-American honors: Olivia Baker, Shanika Dessen, Kenya Gaston, Cheyenne Trigg, Simone Brownlee, Amber Ballew, Kiana Winston, Kayla Richardson and TraciMarie Chandler.

The Winter Track Team is comprised of the following members: Seniors Amber Ballew, Simone Brownlee, Shanika Dessen, Kenya Gaston, Anna Van Zeijts and Kiana Winston; Juniors Olivia Baker, Aigner Bobbitt, Ezerea Brassington, Imani Coleman, Kayla Richardson, Cheyenne Trigg and Raquel Williams; Sophomores Evelyn Besom and TraciMarie Chandler; and Freshman Kenya Waldron Winston. Head Coach Lisa Morgan was aided by Assistant Coach Duke Richmond and Volunteer Coach William Seaman.

The Cougars' Spring Team won its fourth consecutive Group 4 Spring State Championship, when it earned an amazing 160 points, finishing far, far ahead of its nearest competitor, Franklin H. S., with 81 points. The team also won the Essex County Relays for the fifth consecutive year and the Super Essex Conference for the fourth year in a row. The Team also enjoyed a highly successful performance at the Penn Relays where the 4x800 Meter Relay Team of Olivia Baker, Imani Coleman, Shanika Dessen and Kenya Gaston won the "Championship of America".

Members of the team also enjoyed extraordinary individual success at the Spring Meet of Champions: Olivia Baker became the first athlete in state history, male or female, to win four Gold Medals at a single Meet of Champions by winning the 100-Meter Dash, 200-Meter Dash, 400-Meter Run and the 4x400 Meter Relay with her teammates Cheyenne Trigg, Shanika Dessen and Maya Hinton.

The Spring Track Team was comprised of the following members: Seniors Amber Ballew, Simone Brownlee, Shanika Dessen, Kenya Gaston, Anna Van Zeijts and Kiana Winston, Sierra Bastien and Victoria Thomson; Juniors Olivia Baker, Aigner Bobbitt, Ezerea Brassington, Imani Coleman, Kayla Richardson, Cheyenne Trigg, Raquel Williams, Maya Hinton and Cha'nel Ellis; Sophomores Evelyn Besom and TraciMarie Chandler; and Freshmen Sienna Farrell, Jordan Fields, Chadira Fant, Jasmine Keegan and Nya Hughes. The coaching team was Head Coach Lisa Morgan and Assistant Coaches Chuck Keegan, Duke Richmond, William Seaman and Juan Bas.

During the presentations, Freeholders Clark and Owens also congratulated Sydney Scruggs, a senior member of the Columbia Boys Track Team, for winning the 110-Meter Hurdles State Championship at the Meet of Champions, who became the first boy in Columbia history to win a hurdles state championship.

Coach Morgan thanked the Board for honoring her team and commented on what a blessing it is for her to continue the winning tradition of success at her alma mater, where she excelled as a student/athlete. "I am so thankful that I've been given the ability to manage such great talent and to be consistent in producing and building not only champions, but great citizens of the world... girls and guys who are strong in the classroom as well as socially and athletically."

The Boys Fencing Team won its third state championship in the last four years. In winning its championship, the Cougars first defeated Northern Highlands, Bernards and Millburn high schools before defeating previously-unbeaten Watchung Hills (14-13) in the championship match, to finish their season with an outstanding record of 15-1. The Team also captured its fourth straight District 3 Championship, and captured the Championship of the prestigious Cetrulo Tournament for the second straight year, its third title in the last four years.

The Boys Fencing Team is comprised of the following members: Seniors James Brier, Dan Heffley, Matt Michaels, Cornelius Reule, Martin Santos and Josh Singer; Juniors Basile Antonie, Ravi Cho, Harrison Clarke, Max Gould, Ethan Hein, John Kirk and Jared Lebron; Sophomores Bryn Hammarberg, Gordon Rutledge and Kiichi Sakai; and Freshman Andrew Doddo. It was coached by Co-Head Coaches Daryl White and Ibtihaj Muhammad and Volunteer Coach Samuel Varon.

In recognition of the team's accomplishments, the Cougars were declared the "2013 Boys Fencing Team of the Year" by *The Star-Ledger*, a distinction they also earned in 2011 and 2010, and by its final ranking as the #1 team in New Jersey. The team was further recognized by the naming of Andrew Doddo to the 1<sup>st</sup> Team All-State, Max Gould and Jared LeBron to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Team All-State, and Head Coach Daryl White as *The Star-Ledger* Boys Fencing "Coach of the Year".

The Boys Sabre Squad of Andrew Doddo, Dan Heffley, Matt Michaels and Gordon Rutledge, were also honored for having won the NJSIAA Squad Fencing Championships on February 24<sup>th</sup>. They also won the Bronze Medal at the Cetrulo Tournament and the Silver Medal at the District 3 Championships. Doddo, a freshman, is ranked as the #1 freshman in the state in Sabre, and #2 among 14-year olds and #8 in the Under-17-year olds in North America; Heffley, a senior, will attend Johns Hopkins University in the fall; Michaels, also a senior, will attend Worcester Polytechnic University; and Rutledge, a sophomore, also won the Freshman/Sophomore Tournament at Morris Knolls High School.

"In today's society we hear a lot of negative things about young people", said fencing Coach Daryl White, "but I'm proud to say that the young men I work with exhibit the complete opposite. They are exceptional athletes, but more important to me, and what I'm most proud of, is that they are solid citizens and extremely good students in school."

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