

WINGFOOT

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2021

PEACHTREE **X2**

A RACE TO REMEMBER

CELEBRATING THE OLYMPICS AT "ROAD to GOLD"





Hason Graham (right) received 1990 All-Metro award as Most Outstanding Male Athlete

WINGFOOT XC CLASSIC RETURNS FULL FORCE



By Enrique Tomas

The Wingfoot XC Classic began in 2015 with just 32 high school and 31 middle school teams. Along the way, the event has grown into Georgia's largest cross country race: In 2019, 158 youth, high school and college teams competed in 18 events, with a Community 5K for individuals, in what is now a two-day event amid the hay bales of Cartersville.

Five of those teams – Milton High School, Cartersville High School, Fellowship Christian School, Alpha Crush Running Club and St. Benedict's Episcopal School – have competed every year and will be looking to make it seven straight on September 24-25. After an abbreviated format last year due to Covid-19, they will again face squads from across the Southeast – including Florida, Kentucky, Alabama, Tennessee and South Carolina – in addition to the best teams in Georgia.

When asked why his team has made the Classic a staple on its fall calendar, Matthew Chestnut said his athletes enjoy the spectacle as much as the competition.

“Our youth athletes love the single loop 3K course, the wide starting line, the team tent area, the awards stage and music, the hay bales, watching the high school and college races, and all the pageantry this meet provides,” said Chestnut, head coach of Alpha Crush Running Club in Alpharetta, which won the Girls Team title in 2018. “The venue has the look and feel of a national caliber meet with the convenience of being in our metropolitan area, and the 3K course is a reasonable distance for athletes of all abilities. We have run this race in the morning, in the evening, in the rain and mud and in the heat, and we will continue to do so.”

Once again, the Wingfoot Cup will be awarded to the teams with the lowest cumulative score of the Top 5 runners across both genders in the Championship Division. Milton won the Cup for three consecutive years, from 2015-2017.

For more information, visit atlantatrackclub.org.



has retired as a runner on the Elite team and is now an assistant coach at the University of Connecticut.) Focused on kids in grades 4-8, the team's goals are geared toward long-term development and growth. In addition to track and cross country skills, the program also encourages Youth Team members to learn about sportsmanship, health and wellness and goal setting – skills and knowledge that will aid them throughout their lives.

In just its first year, the Boys team won both the Battle of Atlanta and the Wingfoot XC Classic championships. Since then, the team has expanded to almost 100 members.

Lena Castro, a current member of the Track & Field Youth Team, said: “I've grown significantly since my first practice with the team. I can remember when we first practiced I could barely move the next day, and now I feel like I've grown so much stronger because of the team and I'm just having fun!”

In 2016, the Club launched a Cross Country Camp, which was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of Covid-19 but is expected to return next year.

The most-recent addition to the Club's youth programming began just this May with a new meet, under the lights and organized in partnership with high school track and field coaches from across the state, in which Georgia high school stars were given the opportunity to vie for the title of All-State Champion.

“The inaugural Wingfoot Night of Champions is the latest addition to our youth and high school programming, but it certainly won't be the last,” said Rich Kenah, executive director of Atlanta Track Club. “August may be Youth Month, but our commitment to the health and fitness of the next generation is a bedrock of the Club's mission all year, every year – plus, it's fun to see young people with the smile of success on their faces.”