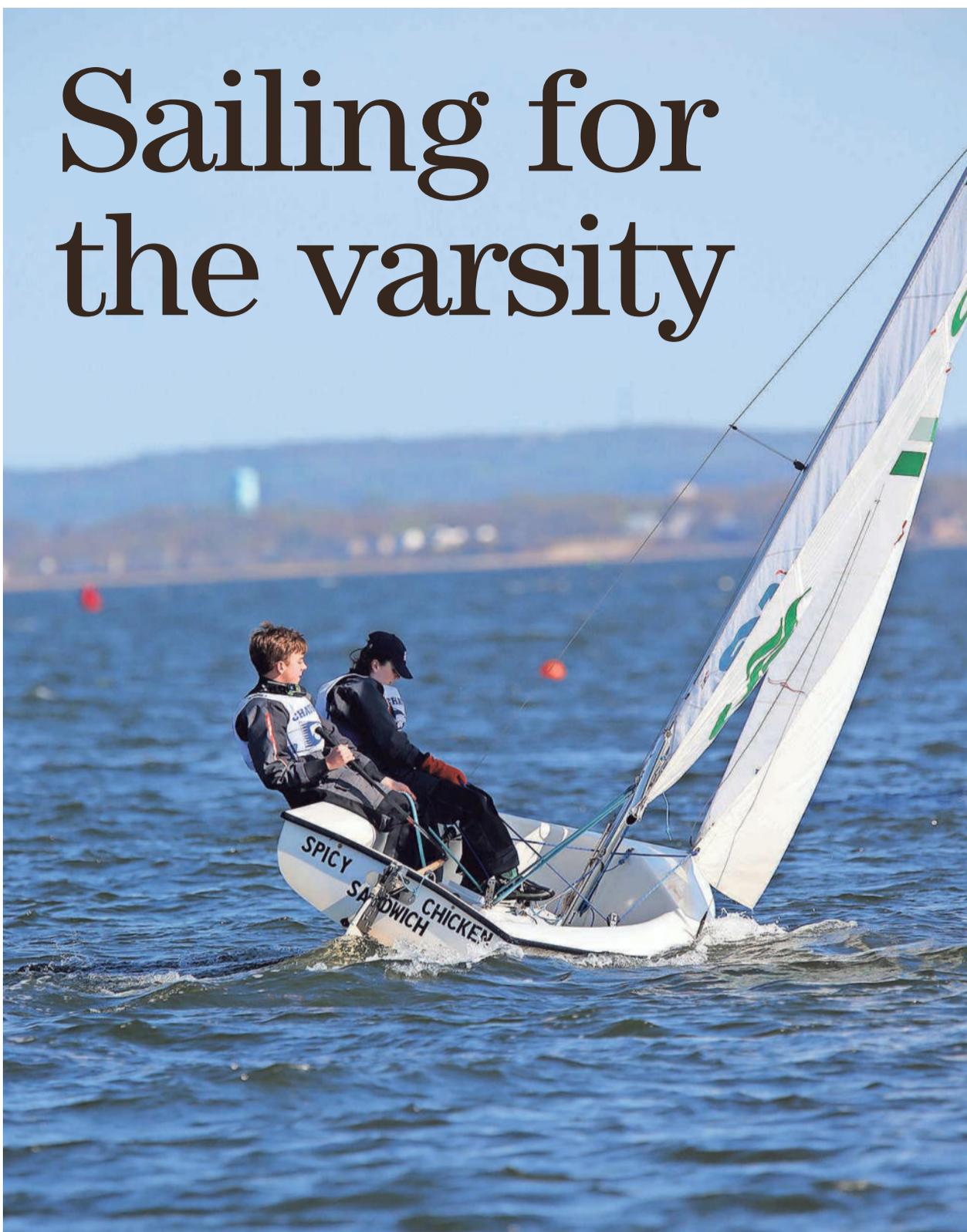


Sailing for the varsity



ED PAGLIARINI/CORRESPONDENT

Chatham skipper Paul Danenberg and crew member Zoe Papier compete in Racing on the Raritan.

New Jersey high schools have teams competing on state, national levels

JANE HAVSY @DAILYRECORDSPTS

PERTH AMBOY – About 5-foot-2, with dark hair pulled tightly into a tuft on top of her head, Janelle Sonsiadek never thought of herself as athletic. Sonsiadek is ranked in the top 15 in the sophomore class at Perth Amboy, more accustomed to puzzling over physics in textbooks than out on the water.

But she tried a recreational sailing program during the summer, and soon joined the high school team as well.

Sonsiadek and Sophia Reyes waited on the beach for their turn at Racing on the Raritan, a weekly New Jersey Interscholastic Sailing Association regatta. The Panthers only had one trained captain, Kevin

Tang on a recent Tuesday, but each of the three crew members joined him in the small craft with yellow No. 10 on the sails for a couple of races – Reyes for the first time.

“It was a lot faster than I thought it was going to be,” said Reyes, a sophomore at Perth Amboy Vo-Tech. “There were parts when it was really relaxing, when the wind wasn’t blowing as hard. But when it was, it got really intense.”

Added Sonsiadek, “You become one with the water. After all the stress of school, your mind becomes so clear.”

Perth Amboy, Chatham and Summit, who all practice together in the spring and fall, will be competitors at the New Jersey Fleet Championship Saturday at Shrewsbury Sailing & Yacht Club in Oceanport.

The largest varsity team in New Jersey, Christian Brothers Academy is the two-time defending spring state champion, and has won three straight fall titles. CBA also competed in the Atlantic Coast Cham-

See SAILING, Page 2B

“You become one with the water. After all the stress of school, your mind becomes so clear.”

JANELLE SONSIADOK
PERTH AMBOY SOPHOMORE

Sailing

Continued from Page 1B

pionship in Rochester, N.Y., in the fall, which, head coach and team founder Jason Lutz said, “proved to my guys and gave them confidence we could do this. We could play on the national level with the best of them.”

CBA finished second and Ranney School fourth at the MASSA Mallory Qualifier on April 8 and 9, both advancing to the national regatta in mid-May for the first time.

“It’s still a sport that’s trying to take hold and be popular,” said CBA co-captain Chris Magno of Lavallette, who also plays club soccer. “It definitely feels more significant, like you’re more responsible for helping that sport get to where it is. Overall, it’s just a good feeling to know you’re one of the few people who make that sport possible.”

Sailing a flying junior or 420 requires just two individuals: a captain and a crew member. Former Perth Amboy coach Bruce Bertucci explained new sailors usually start as jib trimmers – the crew role, tending the sail – “then they try the helm, and the next thing you know, they’re teaching someone else.”

Most of the Raritan-based sailors are new, learning first through more experienced teammates’ “chalk talks” and then firsthand on the water with coach Kim Myer, a New Brunswick fourth-grade teacher who “grew up pretty much on a boat” in Bridgewater, and now helps Chatham, Mountain Lakes and Summit. The biggest initial challenge is to make sure the fledgling sailors feel comfortable on the water.

Sailing is a truly coed sport, with boys and girls competing together in the same boat, as well as against each other on the uneven currents. Two boats are needed for a school to compete in regattas, one in the A division and one in the B division – with their finishing



ED PAGLIARINI/CORRESPONDENT

Chatham’s Luke duPlessis, Paul Danenberg, Marisa Marino and James McCarron prepare to compete in Racing on the Raritan.

scores averaged.

“It’s not necessarily the guy who takes the tiller because he’s a guy,” said Bertucci, a retired biology teacher at South Plainfield who helped found Perth Amboy’s program. “It’s males and females together, and the females can do it as well or better than the guys, which is always a good thing for both of them to know.”

Slow, steady growth

There were 556 high schools registered with the Interscholastic Sailing Association in 2016. One hundred and five belonged to the Mid-Atlantic Scholastic Sailing Association, from New York to Virginia.

Most high school teams sail out of yacht clubs, borrowing college boats which are docked there. Teams based at Toms River Yacht Club use Ocean County College’s boats. Monmouth’s 18-boat fleet is at Shrewsbury. Perth Amboy and Summit own their boats – the latter fleet built in ‘05 and retired by Rhode Island – stored behind fences in an ordinary parking lot steps from the beach at the end of Second Street.

Perth Amboy, Summit, Chatham, and sometimes Mountain Lakes hold Racing on the Raritan on Tuesdays, and hold varsity practice on Thursday and JV on Sundays. Most major regattas are on Saturday, and the Cougars have gone as far as the PCISA Girls Invitational in San Diego.

Up to 18 sailors in the fall, Chatham has earned varsity status, with team hats, T-shirts, and the opportunity to earn a school letter. To race last week, many of the Cougars wore bright blue T-shirts with the slogan, “What happens on the water stays on the water.”

“It’s mindblowing,” said senior Marisa Marino, a lifelong sailor and dancer who launched the Chatham program in the spring 2014 season with classmate Stephanie Gilseman, and her older sister, Juliana Marino.

“A lot of people don’t know (the team) exists, but it’s starting to grow. It’s a bittersweet moment, my last season. Now that it’s grown so much, I have full confidence it’ll keep going.”

Staff writer Jane Havsy: 973-428-6682; jhavsy@gannettnj.com; www.dailyrecord.com/writerjane/