

has been rescheduled twice already due to weather, should also be made up at some point.

"Just to have fun and just to participate 100 percent," Pfenninger said of his goals for the rest of the year.

**Solebury School** has a new top singles player who has made a splash so far.

Described as an "excellent mover for a kid his age" by coach Matt Mehler, Koffe Desouza wasn't even in this country last year. But the sophomore from Switzerland has come to the school and joined the Spartans team, and Mehler hopes he's planning on staying for awhile.

"We have a good, young team. We brought most everybody back from last year, but we have a new no. 1 player and he's kind of carrying our team," said Mehler. "I would probably describe him as an all-court type of player."

Like the Spartans as a whole, Desouza is 3-3 overall on the year. Solebury has knocked off Pine Forge Academy twice and the Perkiomen School, and were leading Church Farm when rain postponed the match. A big match looms this week, when Solebury hosts top rival Barrack Hebrew Academy Wednesday. Those schools meet again next Wednesday in a rematch.

If all goes well, Mehler thinks this group could contend for the

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## Upper Black Eddy's Van Hook prepares for half marathon

For 17-year-old Alexander Van Hook, the Long Branch (N.J.) Half Marathon is a challenge he simply can't let slip by.

"Since the half marathon will be 13.1 miles long, it will be quite a challenge for me," said Alex. "I also love speed and the wind blowing in my face and the environment whirring past me. I especially love to race, so I decided to join the Long Branch Half Marathon."

Alex also has another reason to enter the race. The Pennsylvania teenager has an undiagnosed sub-type of Congenital Muscular Dystrophy (CMD), a group of diseases that cause muscle weakness at birth or within the first two years of childhood. As a result, Alex gets around in an electric power wheelchair, and that's what he will be using when he joins thousands of other competitors from 40-plus states and more than

10 countries in the annual event, which takes place May 2.

Alex will be the first-ever power wheelchair user in the race. He will be participating to raise money for Cure CMD, a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization founded in 2008. Cure CMD seeks to bring research, treatments and, in the future, a cure for CMD by working globally with parents, researchers, scientists, physicians and government health-related organizations.

Alex says that by joining the race, "I will be helping the CMD community. I really want to help Cure CMD because I have CMD, so I would do anything to help discover a cure. I'm not just thinking about curing myself but also about curing other people who have a similar diagnosis."

Alex and his family will be hard at work securing sponsors and other supporters who will contribute to Cure CMD on their behalf. Each participant on "Team Cure CMD" has pledged to raise \$500 for Cure CMD. Every dollar pledged will go directly to CMD research focused on identifying a treatment.

For the official 9 a.m. start, Alex and manual wheelchair users will start ahead of other competitors by about 5 minutes for safety reasons. His father, Greg Van Hook, will be on a bicycle alongside. Greg expects Alex's group to be passed by only a few of the fastest runners. In case it is needed, Alex's backup power chair will be staged at a location in downtown Long Branch along the race route. Cecilia Kodama, another Team Cure CMD member and the liaison between the race organizers and Cure CMD, will also participate, along with more than 20 other Team Cure CMD members.

Access for Alex has a meaning beyond that for most people.

"Early on, I remember praying for Alex's happiness, for his peace, contentment, even for love," said mother Susan, who will be walking the half marathon. "Now, I believe my greatest hope is that Alex will have, in a word, access."

That Alex can participate in the half marathon is a testament to his dedication and to the organizers of the event, who each year invite athletes of all abilities, including runners, walkers and athletes in wheelchairs, to participate and who work diligently to ensure access for everyone.

"Alex's participation as a power wheelchair user is a first for the half marathon, and the event organizers have gone beyond the call of duty to make sure he has a safe and enjoyable race," said Greg.

"I am thrilled that Alex has taken up the Long Branch Half Marathon challenge," said race director Art Castellano. "He will be an inspiration to the thousands of other athletes on the course and spectators along the course. His message will be clear, without saying a word, 'You, too, can set goals and dream large.' He already has made this impression on the race director."

Long-distance races are not the only form of recreation for Alex. He plays for the Philadelphia Power Play, a power wheelchair hockey team in the Philadelphia area, and flies sailplanes with the group Freedom's Wings. Other hobbies include reading and playing video games. Alex also is deaf, so he uses American Sign Language as his main language. He is a junior at Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf in West Trenton, N.J., not far from the Van Hooks' home in Upper Black Eddy.



ERIC HARTLINE

*Alex Van Hook, right, plays for the Philadelphia Power Play. However, on May 2, Alex will run a half marathon in New Jersey.*