



HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE
KEEPING KIDS IN THE NEWS

555 E Downie St
Alma, MI 48801
(517) 202-1808

www.highschoolsportsscene.com

- **Publisher**
Randy Miniard
randy@highschoolsportsscene.com
517-202-1808
- **High School Liaison**
Paul Hornak
paul@highschoolsportsscene.com
989-331-1168
- **Editorial**
John Raffel, David Cook,
Butch Harmon, Scott Salowich,
Scott Keyes
- **Photographers**
Chuck Prikasky, Zip Widman,
Russ Pierce, Skip Traynor,
Dana McCann, Bob Campbell,
Gary Williams, Don Goostrey,
Kim Larner, Nick Rethman,

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Hey Sports Fans! It's another great day at Sports Scene. Every month it seems like over the last nine year's a story pops into your head that is a feel-good moment and learn from it as a family.

Earlier this month I received a phone call that every father dreads.

Your daughter has been a bad car accident! You go through all kinds of emotions.

At that moment you are numb. Numb to the whole situation until you get to the scene of the accident and realize everyone is ok. Bailey and four of her friends along with the four other individuals in the other car are all fine, but if you could have seen the car you realize how lucky they actually were.

Someone was definitely watching over those kids on that night. As a parent always remember to tell your kids you love them even on the worst days because you never want to go through life with regrets.

Regrets are something we all live with. Coaches have regrets every year when the calendar turns from summer to fall and so forth. It's what we do as coaches to help build those regrets into positives. That is where athletes and parents come into play.

But we began by discussing our high school coaches and their vernacular.

We as wrestling coaches get pretty intense yelling at our athletes trying to get the most out of them on the mat. Sometimes what comes out of our mouths can become construed as harsh to some, but other times the kids know in the heat of battle words and emotions can take over.

Just remember, parents and coaches alike, words are just that. Being vulnerable to a persons' words can only make you stronger, but never take words to heart.

Believe in yourself and anything is possible.

Never take anything for granted and never live with regret.

With the fall sports tournaments just around the corner good luck to all the area athletes and coaches. High school sports are some of the best times of your life. Live in the moment and never have regrets.



Randy Miniard
Publisher/Owner
517-202-1808
randy@highschoolsportsscene.com

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON FOOTBALL

Ithaca Bounces Back After Season-Opening Loss To P-W

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Ithaca's football team is getting back on track after falling to Pewamo-Westphalia in a battle of defending state champions in the season opener.

Ithaca coach Terry Hessbrook came into this season realizing there would be some challenges and the Yellowjackets continue to show improvement as the season progresses.



"We will have a very small roster (22) players," Hessbrook said in preseason. "We must have some luck on our side to stay healthy. If we do, we will be very competitive. Our roster has lots of talent, but most are inexperienced in games."

Pewamo-Westphalia ended Ithaca's 73-game regular season winning streak 38-0 to open the

season in front of more than 5,000 fans at Alma College.

The second week, Ithaca regrouped with a 46-14 win over Hemlock.

In week three, Ithaca defeated Saginaw Valley Lutheran 73-0. Quarterback Brady Hessbrook passed for 211 yards and three touchdowns to pace the offense with Bradeyn Shaw rushing for 80 yards and three touchdowns. Hunter Beck caught four passes for 140 yards. Zack Poff and Derek Draher led the defense with five solo tackles and one assist each.

Ithaca improved to 3-1 for the season with a 42-0 win against Pinconning.

In week five, however, the Yellowjackets were hit by injury when Hessbrook was lost with a potential season-ending injury. The Yellowjackets, however, rallied behind Peyton Smith who came in and guided Ithaca to a 42-7 win. Like Hessbrook, Smith is an excellent all-around athlete that will keep the Yellowjacket offense rolling.

Hessbrook, the team's sophomore quarterback, whose dad Terry is the longtime coach, has been focusing on being among the offense's leaders.

It's Brady's second season on varsity after starting 10 games as a freshman in the secondary.

"I am obviously very proud of Brady at this point of the season,"

Ithaca bounced back from its season opening 38-0 loss to Pewamo-Westphalia and have won four straight games prior to press time. Brady Hessbrook (right) and Peyton Smith (left) have played key roles on both sides of the football for Ithaca thus far this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene photos)

Terry Hessbrook said. "He has endured some adversity as well as success early in the season. He has handled both very well."

After four games, Brady Hessbrook completed 40-of-61 passes for 747 yards for six touchdowns. He also added 49 carries for 324 yards and has 10 tackles on defense.

"Brady's key to success has been the protection that his offensive line has provided him, so he can work through his reads to find open receivers," Terry Hessbrook said. "He is very fortunate to have a good offensive line and some very good receivers around him."

He has added 15 pounds of muscle to his frame this year. He has worked a great deal on his mechanics and becoming a better quarterback. Strength has increased a great deal. Arm strength has improved. Ability to read defenses has improved."

Terry Hessbrook has coached in Ithaca for a long time but admits it's a unique situation with his son at quarterback.

"The opportunity to coach him has been memorable," Terry said. "I try to not to treat him any different than anyone else when on the field. Some may say that I am harder on him than I would be on someone



else. But we are just trying to enjoy the ride together. I hope that he will continue to grow as a football player and continue to learn the game and improve his craft. He has worked very hard in the off-season to improve. We work 5-to-6 days a week at getting better at the game. Lifting, speed training and throwing mechanics are all part of his weekly work load. It's no different than any other quarterback we have had over the last 8-to-10 years."



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LCC Quarterback Enjoys Impressive Early Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Lansing Catholic quarterback senior Josh Kramer didn't start last season, but is taking advantage of his opportunity as a full-timer starter this year.

He ended up with 149 yards rushing and two scores in an early-season win over defending state champion Grand Rapids West Catholic. He was 15-of-18 for 117 yards in passing. He had seven tackles. He has scored seven TDs this year (4 rushing,

2 passing and a 76-yard pass interception TD).

Last season, he had a three-touchdown performance in a playoff win over Olivet.

"He's done a really good job," Lansing Catholic coach Jim Ahern said. "He's one of those kids who can make a bad play turn into a good play. A lot of times, he'll make something out of nothing happen."

Kramer has shown the ability to roll out and be a drop back quarterback.

Lansing Catholic Central quarterback Josh Kramer has guided the Cougars to a 4-1 record to start the season. (Submitted Photo)

"I think he's a bigger threat when he rolls out because he's also a very good runner," Ahern said. "He puts a lot of defenses on pressure. He's a confident dropback passer."

The Cougars, with a tough schedule, lost to Portland 16-8 on Sept. 21 to fall to 4-1, but those two state-ranked teams could meet up again in the playoffs.

Ahern has been impressed with Kramer's performances so far.

Of the four wins, "he's sort of been our leader in all of them," Ahern said. "He's usually passing or running for TDs. He's had a hand in most of our touchdowns this year. He's close to 70 percent completion which is what we're

looking for.

"He reads things very well. Most of our routes he has to read the defense and hit the open receiver. He's very good on that. He worked a lot on that last year. It shows this year. He's hitting the open receiver most of the time. He's one of our best runners also. We do a lot of option stuff where he runs the ball."

Kramer has started on the basketball team since he was a sophomore and ran some track last spring.

"He's a really good athlete," Ahern said. "He plays a lot of sports. If he plays at the collegiate level, it would probably be as a receiver or defensive back. He's a tremendous receiver."

Eli Haddad An Impact Player On Offense, Defense, Special Teams For Rockford

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

While playing both offense and defense is common at many high schools, starting both ways for perennial Division 1 football power Rockford is a rarity. Starting both ways as a junior is even more rare.

Rockford junior Eli Haddad, however, is a standout all-around athlete that is doing just that for the Rams this season. A starting defensive back as a sophomore, Haddad starts at both safety and wide receiver for the Rams this season along with playing on special teams as a kick returner while going up against some of the premier teams in the state of Michigan on a weekly basis.

"Eli is a big-time playmaker

with excellent speed," said Rockford coach Ralph Munger. "He is one of our most talented individuals and is a warrior on the field playing both ways for us."

Speed and quickness is a big part of Haddad's game and it's no surprise that he is a standout for the Rockford track team. Last spring Haddad was part of Rockford's 4x100 relay team that placed seventh in the state in Division 1. Haddad was also part of the 4x200 relay that qualified for state. Haddad recorded season-best times of 22.95 in the 200 meters and 53.9 in the 400-meter dash. Haddad also spent the summer running track as he competed in the decathlon for his track club.

Football, however, is Haddad's

passion. Haddad began playing football at age five and has been playing it since. "I started playing flag football when I was five-years old and fell in love with the game," Haddad said. "My dad played football in high school and he was the one that got me started."

Haddad's father, George Haddad, was a standout in his own right during his high school years. A 1987 graduate of St. Louis high school, George earned honorable-mention, all-state honors in football, basketball and track and went on to play four years of college rugby at Northern Arizona University.

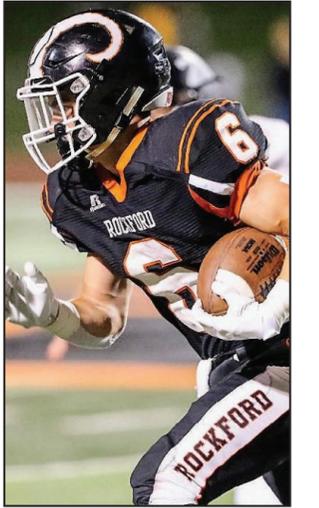
George Haddad went on to a military career as an intelligence analyst and serving his country

is something that Eli plans in the future as well.

"My long-term plan is to enter the service in the intelligence field," Eli said. "Serving in the military is a family tradition. My dad and both my grandfathers served in the military. My dad was in intel and my grandpa was in the Air Force and my other grandpa was in the Marines. I have a passion for the military."

Haddad also has a passion for becoming a college football player. With his athletic skills, passion and high-football IQ and his production at the Division 1 high school level, he has already drawn interest from some small Division 2 and 3 schools. Playing for a service academy would be a dream scenario.

"Playing college football has been a goal of mine since I began playing football as a youngster," Eli said. "I would love to play for a service academy for sure. It would be an honor to play for them."



Rockford junior Eli Haddad is a starter at both wide receiver on offense and safety on defense for the Rams. (Submitted Photo)



East Lansing Football Team Starts Season Strong

David Cook Sports Scene

Thanks to big efforts from the offense, defense and special teams, the East Lansing football team is off to a fast start this season.

East Lansing opened the season with four straight wins, the first time the Trojans opened with four consecutive wins since the 2012 season. However the Trojans saw their winning streak come to a stretching halt Sept. 21 losing big to DeWitt 37-0.

East Lansing began the season with a 40-6 win against rival St. Johns. Senior running back Kobe Hayward rushed for 156 yards and scored a pair of touchdowns while junior quarterback Sam Busch passed for 210 yards and a pair of scores. Senior linebacker Noah Iosefa led the defense with 11 tackles while senior linebacker

Justin Brown added 10 tackles. Brown also added an interception and caught a 70-yard touchdown pass while sophomore Tyler Washington caught a 47-yard scoring strike.

The Trojan defense and special teams came up big in week two's 20-10 win at Dearborn Divine Child. The East Lansing defense caused four turnovers with senior Kaleb Elam intercepting a pair of passes and Hayward and Iosefa recovering fumbles. Senior placekicker Jack Morse kicked field goals of 45 and 33 yards along with converting a pair of extra points. Hayward led the offense with 119 yards rushing and two touchdowns.

East Lansing followed that win by opening CAAC Blue conference play with a thrilling 31-28 win against Grand Ledge. Senior quarterback Joe Brenbraham led the offense with 200

yards passing and three touchdown passes. Morse caught eight of those passes for 77 yards and a touchdown. Hayward added 120 yards rushing and a touchdown. The Trojan defense forced four turnovers with Darvelle Grubbs, Dano Ley and Hayward intercepting passes.

East Lansing improved to 4-0 for the season with a 30-20 win against Portage Northern. Brenbraham turned in another stellar passing performance as he completed 11-of-15 passes for 206 yards and two touchdowns. Sophomore wide receiver Andre Anthony caught four of those passes for 114 yards and a touchdown. Hayward rushed for 80 yards and a touchdown while James Hosey ran for 51 yards and caught a touchdown pass. Justin Brown supplied a big special teams play with a 99-yard kickoff return for a touchdown.

East Lansing started the season off 4-0 before losing to DeWitt 37-0 Sept. 21. (Marvin Hall, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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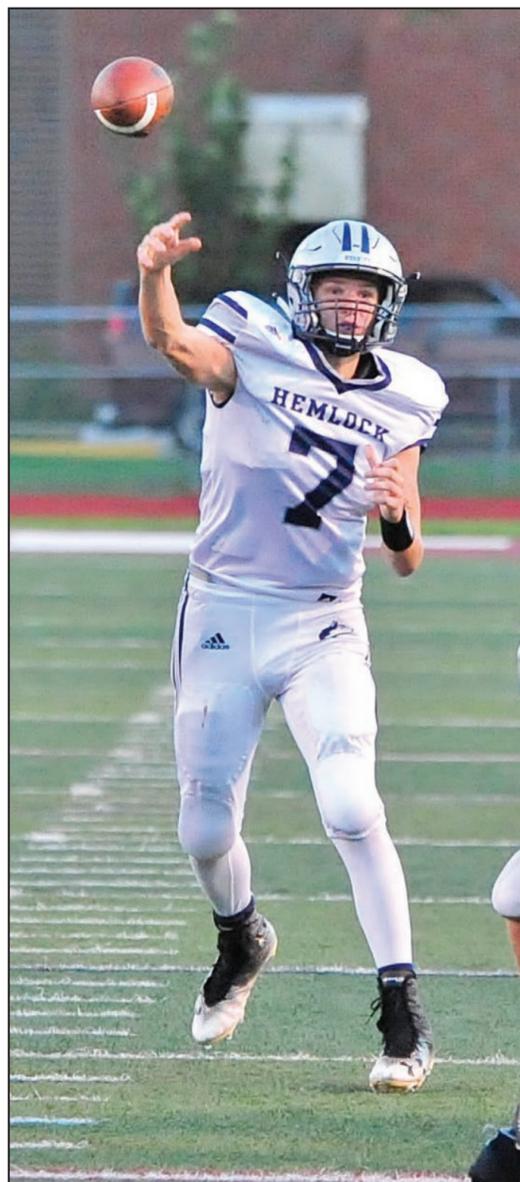
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Hemlock's O-Line Taking Charge

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Hemlock football coach Adam Clark would like to be 5-0 right now but realizes 4-1 isn't too bad considering the loss came to perennial power Ithaca the second week of the season.

When the Huskies defeated St. Charles on Sept. 21, the team was at 4-1 and within reach of an 8-1 regular season. Michigan Lutheran Seminary is among the upcoming opponents that could have something to say about that.

It could be the best season since 2012 when the squad was 9-2 and advanced to the second round of

the playoffs.

"We're getting better as the season progresses," Clark said. "We had some adversity early with losing our starting quarterback. We plugged in the backup and it's worked out well in our favor. We'll keep rolling with the current lineup despite the fact the other boy is back. He's done a good job in his areas as well. It's been a good situation for us."

Jonas Kanouse was the original quarterback. Handling the job now is Brady Devereaux.

"They're very similar athletes," Clark said. "But Brady is bigger than Jonas. He's 6-3 190 pounds and

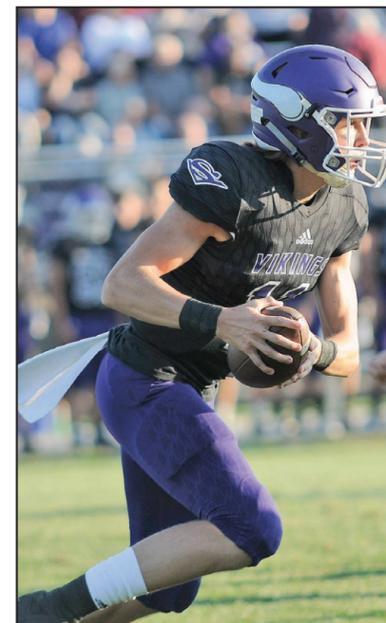
is a state qualifier in track. He long jumps 21 feet and was on our 4-by-2 team last spring and was real close to qualifying in the 200 and 4-by-1 as well. The kid can fly."

The offensive line has been getting the job done for Hemlock.

"Brady is probably closing in on 800 yards rushing on the season through four games," Clark said. "Logan Peters has 500 to 600 yards. So really, the MVP in our season through four games is our offensive line. We are big, we are learning to be consistently physical. As long as we stay healthy, we'll be able to play some meaningful ballgames in the future."



Prior to press time, Hemlock was an impressive 4-1 on the season with its only loss on the season coming against Ithaca in week 2. (Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene Photos)



Swan Valley's Fries Continues To Improve

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Alex Fries, Saginaw Swan Valley quarterback, has been impressive in demonstrating his credentials so far this season.

Fries was 13-of-22 in passing for 272 yards and five touchdowns in a 56-20 Swan Valley win over Frankenmuth in the second week. In a 59-6 win over Shepherd in week five, Fries was 12-of-29 for 217 yards and three touchdowns.

Coach Kevin Gavenda's team was 5-0 heading to a showdown with Alma. The closest of the five wins for Swan Valley was in the opener with a 21-12 win over Cedar Springs.

Swan Valley quarterback Alex Fries has guided the Vikings to an impressive 5-0 start to start the season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene photos)

It's Fries' third year on varsity and his third year as a starter, including for the 2017 state runners-ups. Both running and throwing have been strengths for Fries. "His best passing game was probably the Frankenmuth game," Gavenda said. "He had tremendous arm strengths. He's doing things right before he gets rid of the ball. It helps him get in the right spot and do well. We try to keep him in the pocket. But he can do damage when he gets outside the pocket. He can pretty much make all the throws."

Fries had 266 yards rushing through four games with 8.5 yards per carry.

"If he didn't have the sacks taking away from his rushing total, he'd probably have over 400 games right now," Gavenda said.

"We try not to use him as much on the ground. If we used him more, he'd be averaging more per game."

Fries also is an excellent basketball player.

In terms of college potential, "he's had a bunch of teams show interest," Gavenda said. "At this point I believe the only school that has given him an offer is Mount Union, a pretty successful Division III program. He's visited most of the Division 2 schools in the state." has a wonderful opportunity to close out his high school football career with a successful senior season from both an individual and team perspective."



Clare's Strong Talent Pool Has Pioneers Believing

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Clare's football team is a touchdown away from being 5-0. But for now, veteran coach Kelly Luplow and his Clare Pioneers will focus on going 8-1.

The only loss for Clare (4-1) has been a 46-40 setback to Jack Pine Conference foe Roscommon.

"Our defense has got to get better," Luplow said. "We lost so many people off the defense and we knew we would

struggle at times, and we have. It's not for the lack of effort. We have a lot of new kids coming and doing different things on defense."

Clare has three offensive players whose numbers are very impressive, including senior quarterback Kaden Kelly for five games. Brendan Sersaw has split between running back and slot back. Nick Roe is a wide receiver.

"They all have very good numbers," Luplow said. "Kaden has a lot of composure. He doesn't get rattled. He

seems to field well. He's tall. He's 6-4, 6-5. He throws a good ball, no question about it. He's smart with the decisions he's making. He puts us in a situation to be successful. His composure makes him better than just an average quarterback.

"Brendan is a four-year starter. He has what it takes. He has so much finesse. He has great vision. He's fast. He has great hands. He sees the field in ways other kids don't see. He's played so much at the varsity level. He's always a threat on the field. Between those three guys, we try to get the ball in his hands. It's always nice to have a four-year starter. He's the only kid I've ever had start all four years.

Roe "runs outstanding routes. He has good speed," Luplow said. "He's our go to receiver. He had 10 catches last week. He's over 100 yards an awful lot of times."

Clare's only loss this season was a 46-40 shootout against Roscommon. The Pioneers were 4-1 prior to press time. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Another Ruggles Finding Success At QB For Sacred Heart

John Raffel Sports Scene

Junior Ben Ruggles has had some impressive games this season as quarterback for Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart's 8-player football team.

In a game at Hillman to open the season, Ruggles was 16-of-29 for 150 yards and two touchdowns. The following week at Kinde North Huron, he was 24 of 33 for 295 yards and five touchdowns.

Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart quarterback Ben Ruggles drops back to pass earlier this season against Deckerville. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

His dad, John Ruggles, is also the Sacred Heart head coach.

Ben has been on the team previously but mainly saw action as cornerback. It's his first year as varsity quarterback.

"I would say he's more of a pocket passer," John Ruggles said. "We don't use him to run a whole lot. We do speed work."

Sacred Heart, in its first year of 8-player football, lost its first game to Hillman, but came back and won three straight before falling to Morrice. The Irish are 3-2 and hope to make the playoffs. There are 32 teams that qualify for the 8-player playoffs.

"Our adjustment to 8-man took a little figuring out in the beginning," Ruggles said. "I think we're getting in the groove."

Portland Emerges As State Title Contender

John Raffel Sports Scene

The Portland Red Raiders are the real deal.

It was obvious after four games and a 4-0 record. But when Portland, ranked fourth in the Associated Press Division 5 polls, defeated No. 2 Lansing Catholic 16-8 Sept. 21, it became obvious this was a squad which could compete for a state title; especially with talented players like Jacob Veale, who had 18 carries for 144 yards and three touchdowns in a 48-0 win over Corunna.

"Defensively we're playing very well," Portland coach John

Novara said after the fourth game. "Defensively, we've only given up one touchdown. Offensively, we're kind of a work in progress, getting better each week."

Novara noted it would be a major test against Lansing Catholic.

"They have a good quarterback and are a well-coached team," Novara said, prior to the game. "I think the team which makes the least amount of mistakes will come out on top."

Novara acknowledges his team relies heavily on the run.

"Our running game is getting better," he said. "The key for us year

in and year out is we have to be able to run the football consistently. So far, we're able to do that."

Veale is a transfer from Ionia and has been the main running back.

"Our offensive line has been doing very well," Novara said. "Our right tackle Hunter Klein, is 6-foot-6, 305 pounds and is a good player for us. I know some Division II schools are interested in him.

"But realistically we have all five of our offensive line returning from last year."

Nose guard Dylan Arthur is also a collegiate prospect.

Portland coach John Novara patrols the sidelines during a game last season. Portland is one of the top teams in Division 5 this season. (File Photo)



Ostrowsky, Huenemann Have Oilers Believing; Duo sparks Mt. Pleasant To 5-0 Start

John Raffel Sports Scene

Mount Pleasant has two outstanding football players with quarterback Jackson Ostrowsky and tight end/defensive end Tyler Huenemann, and Oiler coach Jason McIntyre is ecstatic with the efforts of both players so far this season.

McIntyre's team is off to a 5-0 start and has outscored its five opponents 181-22.

"Jackson's having a great year," McIntyre said. "He's one of the best leaders I've had in a long time. He's a competitor. He's a coach's son. This is his third year starting as a varsity quarterback. He didn't start for us but the year before that he started at Marquette. He had a lot of football experience. Whether it's with his feet or with his arm, he's willing to do whatever it takes to win. He loves to win. If it involves handing the ball off or making the right call, he's happy to do that. If he has to throw the ball to win the game, he'll do that."

"The other night was the first time when the other team made it a little difficult for us to run the ball. It gave us the passing game and he threw for 242 yards."

The Oilers went on to beat Bay City Western 42-0.

"He's playing safety for us too," McIntyre said. "He's a real competitive athlete who wants to win and he'll do whatever it takes to do that."

Ostrowsky, as a passer "has a real good understanding of defenses in football," McIntyre said. "He's a coach's kid. He has a sense of knowledge about football. He understands what we're trying to go with our passing game. He has a

strong arm."

Ostrowsky, on defense, "has a lot of confidence so he seems to have a little break on the ball," McIntyre said.

Huenemann is at defensive end and tight end. He is only a junior but is already drawing looks from Division I schools and has one offer.

"He's a big strong kid with good

feet," McIntyre said. "He's 6-3, 250 pounds and he can run. He's strong and he's hard to block. He has great hands and great feet. He had two catches for 75 yards (against Western) and one of them was a 40-yard screen pass. It's not often you see a guy 6-3, 250 pounds catch a pass and out-run everybody. He's a good blocker, which we like at tight end, obviously."



Junior Tyler Huenemann (left) and senior quarterback Jackson Ostrowsky are two reasons why Mt. Pleasant is undefeated heading into the final three weeks of the regular season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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Alward Off To Sizzling Start For Alma

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Alma's football team is off to a spectacular start and third-year varsity player and senior Brec Alward is playing no small role in the effort.

"He's had a great senior season so far," coach Dan Falor said. "He already has 20 touchdowns."

Alward has 1,086 yards on 132 carries, for 8.23 yards per carry, 217.2 yds per game and 17 touchdowns and nine catches for 160 yards and three Tds.

"Brec is a very hard worker and

will do anything that the team needs him to do," Falor said. "He had a great junior season but so far he has exceeded his output. He works extremely hard in the offseason and I've seen gains in his overall strength and explosiveness."

There's one particular play from Alward, which Falor won't soon forget.

"The last play before halftime against Shepherd, he was not going to be denied the end zone and made a spectacular 30-plus yard run to score with zero seconds on the clock," Falor said. "I expect it is going to get

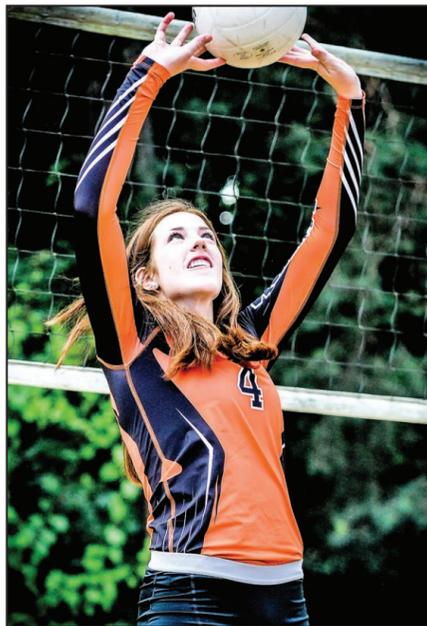
tougher for Brec because teams are going to focus on stopping him but he's going to still be the focal point of our offense.

"Brec is one of the hardest workers we've had come through Alma. His hard work is paying off this season."

Alma has a major test coming up on Sept. 28 with Saginaw Valley. But the Panthers are 5-0 after wins over Ionia (34-20), Bridgeport (35-14), Shepherd (50-6), Standish Sterling (33-7) and Bullock Creek (33-13).

Alward is now playing basketball and baseball. But he's hoping to have long football postseason.

Alma's Brec Alward finds the end zone during the Panthers week 2 victory over Bridgeport. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Alma Sisters Giving Volleyball Team Major Boost

John Raffel
Sports Scene

The sister combination Hailey and Alyssa Leister is among the weapons Alma volleyball coach Kristi Lippert and her team have been presenting to opponents this year.

The Panthers have been working to get above the .500 mark.

Hailey Leister and her sister Alyssa have been playing key roles for Alma.

"Hailey is an outside (hitter) and

Alyssa is a setter in the middle," Lippert said. "They both are very competitive and they both are powerful. They bring that competitiveness and that power for us."

Danielle Bastion "is playing well for us too and is a senior middle."

The Panthers hope to keep picking up momentum and enjoy the same type of success in the postseason as they did a year ago.

"We have a solid group of returners who had good experience

and good success last year, winning a district title and going to the regional finals," Lippert said. "They have experienced success in wanting to build on that. We also have a younger group new to the team coming. We've worked hard to bring the two groups together for a common cause."

This includes the combination of the Leister sisters with Lippert confident the blending of a senior and sophomore will help the Panthers have success for the rest of the season.

Hailey Leister has played a key role in Alma's success during the early part of this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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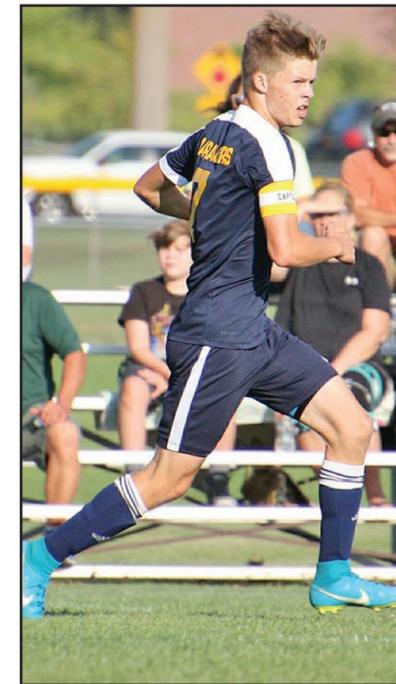
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PRESENTS AREA TEAMS TO WATCH



O-E's Chris Zruna Chasing History

John Raffel
Sports Scene

As far as Ovid Elsie soccer coach Chris Parker is concerned, Ovid-Elsie soccer fans haven't quite seen the best of Chris Zruna.

But what they've seen so far has been mighty impressive.

Zruna, a senior, is in his fourth varsity year.

"He's having outstanding start to this season," Parker said. "He's scored 25 goals and added five assists. He's scored in all nine games we've played so far. His 25 goals are already more than he had all last season. He sits at 69 goals for his career so far."

It's easy for Parker to explain the keys behind Zruna's success.

"Chris is a fast player who has improved his on-ball skills every year," Parker said. "He's able to take on defenders and beat them but he is also

Ovid-Elsie's Chris Zruna is scoring goals in bunches this season for the Maruders. (Submitted Photo)

able to play off the ball and find the seams to make runs towards the net. He is also a very willing passer and will play as hard as he can at all times. His biggest improvement this season has been his finishing. He's always been a good goal scorer but this season he has been able to score more on less shot attempts.

"Chris has improved his shooting accuracy and his ability to beat multiple defenders.

Chris scored the game-winning goal in a 1-0 win at Leslie and scored five goals at Chesaning this season. As a sophomore, Chris scored an amazing goal against Lake Fenton in the district final. He saved a ball from going out of bounds in front of our bench, beat six defenders off the dribble and scored to give us a 1-0 lead."

Parker believes there's more coming from Zruna.

"I expect Chris to continue to lead us on the field," Parker said. "He's a leader-by-example-type of player. He will always

give 100 percent effort. Chris has an outside chance to score 100 career goals and has a good chance of breaking our single season scoring record, which is 43.

"Chris is always looking to improve his game. He plays indoor soccer with his teammates and plays on a USSF team with them as well."

Zruna also plays baseball for Ovid-Elsie.

"Our team has had a great run over the last three seasons and Chris is a main contributor to it," Parker said. "He has improved his scoring each year which helps our great defense to play even better. As a sophomore, Chris was Honorable Mention All-State and as a junior he was third Team All-State. Our team won back-to-back TVC West conference championships.

"We are currently in first place in the newly formed Mid-Michigan Activities Conference (MMAC) and if we win it will be our third straight conference championship. Our record this season is 8-1 (7-0)."

New Lothrop Freshman Taking Races By Storm

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Vera Root has been coaching New Lothrop cross country for 16 years and she has never had a freshman perform as well as Clara Krupp

She came to that conclusion after watching Krupp in her first six races.

"She's outstanding," Root said. "In 16 years of coaching, we have not had any girl runner start her freshman season as she has. Her

first race, she ran 50:53 and by her sixth race, she ran 19:54, which is just four records off our all-time fastest second place girl for our school.

"She isn't afraid to run in the offseason. We not have many runners who are willing to put in the extra work."

This season, Krupp won the Carrollton Invitational and Genesse Invitational. She was second at the MMAC jamboree No. 1 and the 34th annual Chesaning Cross

County Invitational.

"She isn't afraid to run in the offseason," Root said. "We do not have many runners who are willing to put in the extra work. She was a middle school runner last year, but she did end as our No. 2 fastest middle school runner of all time, running two miles in 12:24.

"She is a very pleasant young lady with great determination," Root said. "We believe she will reach low 19s or better."

New Lothrop's Clara Krupp has more than impressed her coaches during the first half of the cross country season. (Submitted Photo)






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St. Johns Volleyball Team Showing Improvement As Season Progresses

John Raffel Sports Scene

A balanced offensive attack is a hallmark of this year's St. Johns volleyball team that has turned in a number of strong efforts this season.

Hovering around the .500 mark at the halfway point of the season, St. Johns has turned in some solid efforts at tournaments this season. The Redwings won the silver bracket at the Portage Northern Invitational and placed fourth at the Flushing Invitational.

A balanced attack at the net is a strong point of this year's team. A quartet of players are averaging over a kill per set. Junior Kiana Martens leads the team in kills with 1.8 kills per set while senior

Brooke Gregory is averaging 1.7, senior Abbey Voisinet 1.6 and junior Mallory Smith 1.3 kills per set.

Junior setter Ashley Miller is doing a strong job of putting the offense in motion as she is averaging 4.1 assists per set. Gnegy is adding 1.9 assists per set.

Junior Kylee White and Gnegy have been among the defensive leaders. White is averaging 2.3 digs per set with Gnegy averaging 1.6 digs per set. At the net, junior Ashlyn Michalski and Martens lead the Redwings in blocks.

The RedWings are also getting solid contributions from senior Alyson Gonzales off the bench.



Alyson Gonzales

Ithaca Volleyball Team Remains Confident

John Raffel Sports Scene

Karla McDonald is coaching an Ithaca volleyball team eager to have a strong second half of the season.

As of late September, the team was 6-8-2.

"We're inconsistent with our play," McDonald said. "At times they're playing well. At other times, I'm not sure what's going on. The girls are working hard at trying to get that figured out, too."

There are been some enjoyable highlights.

"The girls that have been there for awhile are stepping up," McDonald

said. "They're taking control trying to get it together. The girls are jelling well. We don't have any conflicts this year. Their motto is family and they're working hard on that."

Key players include MacKelle Thompson, a junior setter in her third year on the team. It's her second year of being captain.

"She is the biggest part of our volleyball team," McDonald said. "She was a captain as a sophomore. That's how dedicated she is. Everybody follows her. She's putting up a lot of positive stats and is becoming a force, not only as a setter, but with her attacks as well. She's our best server. She's the best all-around player we have."

Another junior in her third varsity year is Emma Belles as a middle hitter.

"She (Emma) gets stronger every year," McDonald said. "She's stepping up and doing her job. She's the biggest blocker we have. She's one we like to go to for our offense. We want to make sure she gets the ball to get the job done."

Kailyn Fairchild is a senior captain for Ithaca, and an outside hitter. She's a returning starter and plays all the way around.

A newcomer, sophomore Mady Snyder, is a sophomore starter who can play outside or rightside hitter.

"She's making a lot of good plays," McDonald said.



Ithaca's seniors are hoping to lead the Yellowjackets to a strong second half of the season. As of late September, the team was 6-8-2. (Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Barrus Ignites Fulton Volleyball Attack

John Raffel Sports Scene

Fulton volleyball coach Holly Malek realizes she has a special senior four-year in Brittany Barrus.

"Brittany has had a great season so far," Malek said. "She is one of our team captains, and she definitely sets an example of leadership on and off the court. We are running a 5-1 this year, and she is our main setter. She has a phenomenal serve, digs up a ton of balls and sets her teammates up consistently."

As of mid-September, Barrus currently has 282 assists averaging 7.42 assists per set. She is leading the team with 29 aces averaging 0.76 aces per set. She has 98 digs averaging 2.58 digs per set with only one teammate ahead of her in that stat category. She has played in all 38 of our sets.

"Many factors have contributed to Brittany's success in volleyball," Malek said. "First of all, she is an extremely hard worker. We graduated some great passers last year, so we have struggled a little bit with passing this year. There are many moments when Brittany is running all over

the place to set the ball. Second, she is a positive teammate and does her best to pick her teammates up when they have a bad play. If they make a mistake, she takes a moment to let them know it's ok, and they'll get the next one.

"Brittany is a very skilled volleyball player. She has great hands, digs up some hard hit balls, and earns us points with her great serves. Brittany has definitely stepped up to be more of a leader this year than last year. She has also taken on more responsibility running our 5-1."

Malek recalls a memorable moment from a team meeting. "One athlete thanked

Brittany for reaching out to her after she made a mistake," Malek said. "Instead of getting frustrated and mad at the athlete, she chose to try and pick her up. That athlete was very appreciative of that. I was also thankful to hear that because as a coach you don't always see or hear everything that happens on the court between athletes."

"I expect Brittany to continue working hard. I would expect that she continues to lead our team and set a great example in the gym, in the hallways, and in every facet of her life."

As of mid September, Fulton's Brittany Barrus had 282 assists, averaging 7.42 assists per set. She is also leading the team with 29 aces on the season. (Submitted Photo)



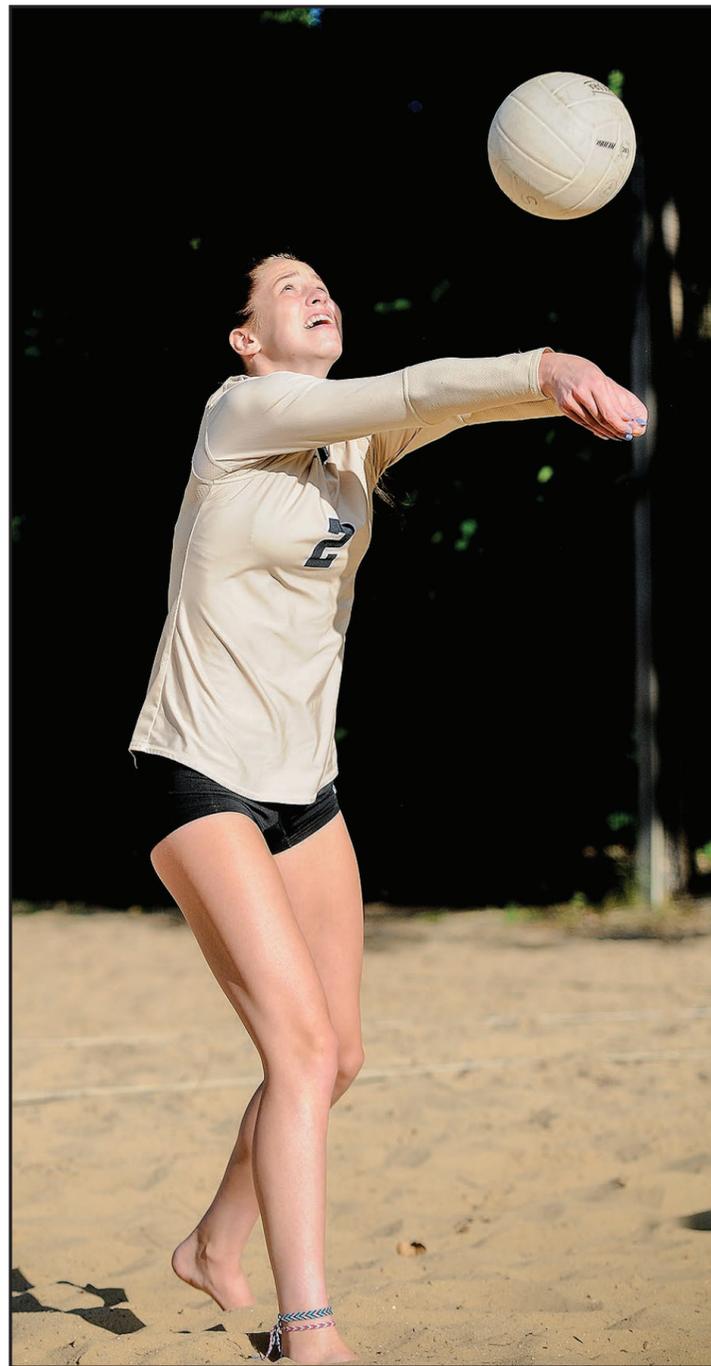
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Balance, Depth Keys To Success For Corunna Volleyball Team

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by a talented core of veterans, the Corunna volleyball team is getting the job done on the court this season.

Ranked among the honorable-mention in the state in Division 2, the Cavaliers have turned in some impressive efforts this season including winning their own Corunna tournament and the Byron Invitational. Corunna also defeated league-rival Goodrich in three sets for a key league win.

"I feel we have been progressing well," said Corunna coach Kari Carnell. "We have greatly improved from our first tournament at New Lothrop. That tournament kind of made us re-evaluate a few things and really made us focus in on what we needed to do to improve in all areas."

Balance and a strong all-around team effort are keys to the Cavaliers success.

"I honestly have five or six kids who really are leading the way on the court so far, but my entire team is so focused in on what we need to do to get better each and every day," Carnell said. "Our non-starting kids are making so many improvements because they know that it takes all of us to improve and be successful. They have really stepped up to the plate."

Elizabeth Norris, an honorable-mention, all-state player last year leads the team with 254 kills and recently surpassed 1,000 career kills.

"Elizabeth is a normally setter but we have her fill another role as our starting

middle hitter," Carnell said. "She is a six-rotation player that can play anywhere you ask her to. She loves learning and it shows on the volleyball court."

Senior setter Lexi Mort is a three-year starter and a two-time, all-regional player. Mort has totaled over 3,000 assists for her career.



Senior Madison Birchmeier anchors the defense from her Libero position. A two-year starter, Birchmeier leads the team in digs with over 150.

"Madison is making a huge difference for us this year," Carnell said. "She has transitioned to the outside position for us this year and has been doing great."

Hannah Hollister, a returning starter, is providing solid play at outside hitter where she has over 60 kills and 110 digs.

"We depend on Hannah's aggressiveness on the court," Carnell said. "She leads by example and is such a hard worker."

Sophomore Lilly Bower is a returning defensive specialist. Bower has over 60 digs and is a solid server with over 20 aces.

Freshman Ellie Toney is making an impact on the varsity. Toney is Corunna's second-leading offensive scorer with 78 kills on the season heading into the final week of September.

"Ellie is a very smart player and has filled a few different roles for us," Carnell said. "She started on the outside and we have moved her to middle hitter from time to time. She is skilled at both positions."

Elizabeth Norris is an extremely versatile player on the court and currently leads Corunna with 254 kills and she recently surpassed 1,000 career kills in a match earlier this season. Norris was all-state a year ago for the Cavaliers. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)

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Desiree Becker Leads Way For Talented DeWitt Volleyball Team

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by one of the premier volleyball players in the state, the DeWitt volleyball team is turning a rebuilding year into a season where the Panthers are again one of the premier teams in mid-Michigan.

With returning all-stater Desiree Becker leading the way, DeWitt is ranked among the honorable-mention in the state in Division 1. With the volleyball season reaching the halfway point, DeWitt has compiled a 12-6-1 overall record.

"We graduated seven seniors from last year's team so it's quite a new team we have this year," said DeWitt coach Kyle Anderson, who is in his first year as head coach after serving as an assistant coach with the Panthers last year. "The season has been going pretty good. We've been playing some real good competition so far. We've beat a couple of highly-ranked teams and lost a few matches

here and there that we shouldn't have lost."

Becker is one very key player returning. A candidate for the state of Michigan's Miss Volleyball award, Becker is averaging 3.5 kills per set. A middle blocker last year, Becker has moved to outside hitter this season.

"Desiree is super-talented," Anderson said. "She was first-team all-state last year as a middle blocker and plays club volleyball at a high level. She a competitor and has been a great leader for us."

Becker is committed to playing college volleyball in the Big 10 next year at Northwestern University.

Becker is not the lone threat at the net for the Panthers. Seniors Sydney Mills and Allison Haller provide even more impact up front for DeWitt. Mills is averaging 3.3 kills per set at outside hitter while Haller has turned in some big efforts

including a recent 15-kill match.

"We have three or four hitters who can lead us in any given game," Anderson said. "We have a good core of senior hitters on this team."

Along with the senior hitters, DeWitt is getting some key contributions from a pair of sophomores.

Sophomore libero Grace Marshall has stepped in as a defensive stalwart for the Panthers.

"Grace leads the Lansing area in digs," Anderson said. "Our only returning passes, Meredith Nakfoor, is out for the season after getting hurt playing basketball this summer. Grace has stepped up in a big way and filled that role."

Sophomore Kaitlyn Bangs has stepped up in the setter role.

"We graduated a four-year varsity setter," Anderson said. "Kaitlyn has stepped up and done very well."



DeWitt's Desiree Becker will take her talents to Northwestern next fall to continue her college career. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Merrill Volleyball Near-Perfect On Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Ann Wiley is in her fourth year of coaching a Merrill volleyball team that is 20-0-3 heading into late September.

"We have a tremendous junior group that is coming through right now," Wiley said. "A lot of them are committed to volleyball. They like volleyball and they work extremely hard. We have two seniors. Six juniors and one sophomore that are on the team. They've made others work hard. Everybody is returning from last year except for the sophomore and one junior."

Merrill volleyball was nearly perfect heading into the second half of the season posting a 20-0-3 record prior to press time. (Ryan Heath, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Among the standouts has been Ashtyn Hescott, a junior, who had 34 kills 15 aces; 5 blocks and 42 digs at the Breckenridge Tournament.

"Volleyball is kind of that sport where you have to have everything happen," Wiley said. "Ashtyn Hescott and Libby Fischer are our middle hitters who bring quite a lot of power for us. But then you have Maggie Debeau who is a good inside hitter, who brings a different dynamic for us. She can hit on the right side and also is a backup setter. Then you have Zoe Fleming who has been with me three years on varsity and two years setting."

Despite the successes, Wiley realizes it's a team which faces enormous challenges.

"Coleman will be a challenge, we split with them earlier in the year," Fleming said. "We have a Mount Morris tournament in a couple of weeks. We'll see some different things. It will be a good challenge to see where we're at and what we have to improve on. We'll see Sacred Heart down the road for the conference. We lost to them the last two years. It will be quite a challenge."

"The biggest thing is playing our game and not getting too frustrated when things don't go well and not getting too frustrated. And trying to maintain our composure. Volleyball is all about momentum. You have to stay focused."

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Cribbs Playing Key Role For Heritage Volleyball

John Raffel Sports Scene

Saginaw Heritage's volleyball team has gotten off to a strong start with junior Ayden Cribbs playing no small role in that success.

Cribbs is in her second varsity season.

Cribbs had 35 kills, 8 aces and 37 assists in her team's first-place effort at the Swan Valley Invitational.

"Ayden is stepping up this year both hitting and setting," coach Britney Myers, who played volleyball at Central Montcalm, said. "Her attacks have become much more aggressive and her court

awareness has improved. She's our team leader in kills and blocks."

Myers has been impressed with Cribbs' consistency.

"Her powerful attacks and ability to read and see the holes," has been critical, Myers said. "Her court awareness helps her game significantly."

"She has taken on a new position (setting) and has been able to really contribute to our offense. She is a much more confident and stronger player. Her knowledge of the game has increased. We expect her to continue to be a leader on our offense."

Heritage has opened the season strong including winning the Swan Valley Invitational earlier this season. (Nick Rethman, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Saranac Hitter Having Strong Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Saranac volleyball coach Amy McElvain has reason to be impressed with outside hitter Abigail Miller.

In two matches in early September, Miller had 35 kills, 34 digs and 11 aces.

"She has amazing speed and hustle at all times," McElvain said. "We brought her up at the end of the sophomore year

for postseason. But it's her first year on varsity."

Miller is leading her team in kills and is among the leader in digs.

"She has quite a few aces," McElvain said.

"The key to Miller's effective attacking trait "is her overall athletic and jumping ability," McElvain said. "She's only 5-6. But she has the highest vertical jump on the

team. She really gets up there."

On being a good digger "it's her technique," McElvain said. "She has a lot of natural speed and can get to the ball."

Her serving is more consistent, McElvain said. "She has a jump serve that has a nice top spin on it."

Miller also runs track and plays basketball.

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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON GOLF

Okemos Golf Team Off To Strong Start; Ranked Second In Division 2

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

After placing in the top ten at last year's Division 2 state golf finals, the Okemos girls golf team is on a mission to make an even more successful run in the post-seasons this fall.

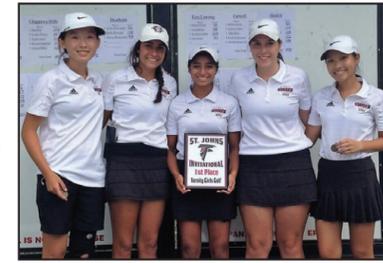
Okemos placed ninth at last year's D2 state finals. This season, the Chieftains are ranked second in the state in Division 2 and poised for bigger things at this year's state tournament.

Led by senior Savera Rajendra Nicolucci, a returning all-state golfer, and talented freshman Allison Cui, Okemos is off to a sizzling start this season.

Cui and Nicolucci have been posting some impressive scores and racking up multiple top-ten finishes in tournaments this season.

Cui captured medalist honors and led Okemos to a second-place finish at the Mason Invitational where she carded a 68. Rhea Shenoy and Angela Mothersell both placed in the top ten at Mason with rounds of 76 and 81 respectively. Jessi

Ranked No. 2 in the state in Division 2 this season, the Okemos girls golf team brought home the first-place trophy from the St. Johns Invitational to go along with titles won at Holt and their own Okemos Invitational. (Submitted Photo)



Hinterman added an 85 at Mason.

A trio of Okemos golfers placed in the top ten when the Chieftains hosted the Okemos Invitational. Cui placed second individually with a 78 while Nicolucci placed ninth with an 84 and Shenoy placed 10th with an 85. Those efforts helped Okemos to the tournament championship with a 338-team score, 15 strokes better than second place Forest Hills Central.

Okemos also brought home the hardware from the St. Johns and Holt invitational with first-place finishes. Cui claimed co-medalist honors at St. Johns with a 74 while Shenoy carded an 87 and Mothersell shot an 89. Cui won medalist honors at Holt with a 70 while Nicolucci placed ninth with a round of 81. Shenoy added a 90 and Mothersell a 95 at Holt.

Senior Nucleus Has Shepherd Looking Strong On Links

David Cook Sports Scene

Ranked 10th in the state in Division 4, the Shepherd girls golf team is making its mark on the state level and aiming even higher.

In only its fourth season as a program, the Shepherd girls golf team is getting stronger each season and this year's senior class provides a strong nucleus.

"We are a newer program and the girls that have made up the foundation of who we are as a program are seniors this year," said Shepherd coach Julie Prout. "Morgan Yates, Maggie Bryant and Olivia Raymond are the pioneers of this program. They will graduate this year leaving behind a legacy of beginning something very, very special at Shepherd High School."

Shepherd has made impressive progress in its first three seasons as a program. After going .500 in its first season, Shepherd was conference champions and qualified for the state finals in year two and last year were conference champions and placed sixth at the Division 4 state meet. The LadyJays also earned Academic All-State honors as a team.

Senior Morgan Yates placed sixth overall as an individual at last year's state finals and is picking up where she left off. Yates is averaging 40 and shot a personal-best 77 in winning the Shark Classic.

In just their fourth season as a program, the Shepherd girls golf team is ranked 10th in the state in Division 4 this season. (Submitted Photo)



Veteran Golfers Have St. Louis Among Top Teams In D4

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by a large and talented group of senior golfers, the St. Louis girls golf team is posting some impressive numbers this season.

Ranked sixth in the state in Division 4 this season, the St. Louis golf team is one of the best in Mid-Michigan and in the state in Division 4.

"It has been an exciting season so far," said St. Louis coach Andrea Biehl. "We have added several new tournaments to our schedule to help us prepare for regionals. We went to Garland over the summer for a team golf camp. Our conference competition with Shepherd has kept the girls on their toes trying to improve their game."

St. Louis started the season strong as it won the Ithaca Fall Swing and turned in a solid effort at the Lober Classic at Grand Traverse Resort.

"We got to golf against

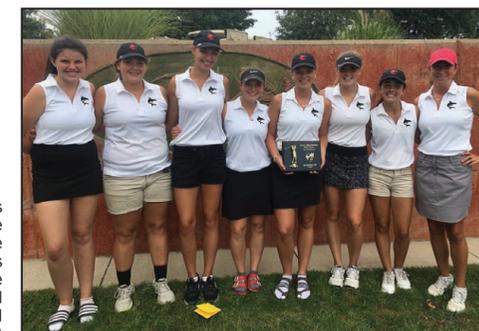
some tough competition and see two beautiful and incredibly difficult courses," Biehl said. "It was a great learning experience for the girls and will hopefully help us at regionals."

With six seniors on this year's squad, the Sharks are a veteran group with the goal of making it to the state finals.

Modestie Hitchcock is leading the team this year.

Modestie was the second-place medalist at the Ithaca Fall Swing and has been bringing in consistent scores in our conference jamborees," Biehl said. "She also led the team at The Patriot Cup and The Lober Classic."

Hitchcock fired an 88 at Ithaca followed by Olivia Anderson (94), Star Hansen (96) and Ali Taipalus (98). Hitchcock carded a 92 at The Patriot Cup followed by Taipalus (92) and Alexis Beeson (94).



The St. Louis girls golf team opened the season with some impressive efforts including winning the title at the Ithaca Fall Swing. (Submitted Photo)

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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON SOCCER

Portland's Dzewiatkowski Scoring Goals In Bunches

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Portland soccer coach Christopher Roof has been extremely impressed with what he's seen from Tate Dzewiatkowski so far this season.

Dzewiatkowski is a four-year varsity player.

"Tate has had a phenomenal season so far and will continue to," Roof said. "He has been very consistent in his play and has come out strong every game. As our starting attacking center midfielder he currently has 24 goals and six assists to the season. Once he hits 25 goals he will break the school record for goals in a single season. The record has been held for 14 years.

"His success has derived from his hard work in both during the season and the off season. He currently plays club soccer for Mid West United out of Grand Rapids in the off season. Since last year he has continued to develop as a leader on the team. Last year he suffered a knee injury that sidelined him for six games towards the end of the season. He made a full recovery and came back very strong this year."

Dzewiatkowski has shown marked improvement.

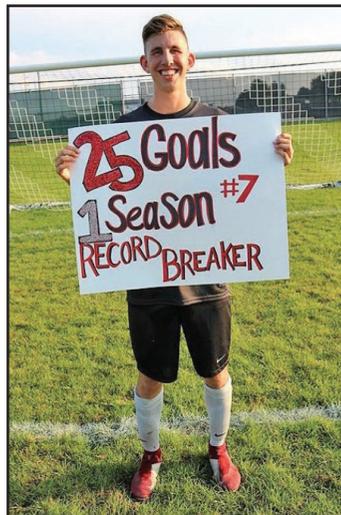
"His vision of the field has improved a lot," Roof said. "He is able to connect well with other players in the offense making us very dangerous as we get towards the other team's goal. Last year we played Grand River Prep at home. The game was tied 2-2 and he scored

the winning goal in the last 20 seconds of the game. I expect him to continue being a dominate force in our offense and a leader of our team.

"He plays club soccer for Mid-West United in the offseason and keep up his athletic ability by also playing two other varsity sports. He plays basketball in the winter and is also the kicker for our football team. Tate is also a two time All State Honorable mention, three-time all conference and three time All district player."

Dzewiatkowski has played no small role in the team's start. Ovid-Elsie is undefeated with a 11-0 mark overall and 2-0 record in the league.

Portland's Tate Dzewiatkowski is on pace to break the Raiders single-season goal scoring mark this season. (Submitted Photo)



Sexton Junior Having Strong Scoring Season

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Donald Kamden-Tegue is coaching a Lansing Sexton squad that boasts a quality player in Mahfuz Edris, who, in his team's first five games, had 10 goals and one assist.

Edris sustained an eye injury shortly after the first five games, and the Sexton junior was expected to be out for about a month.

Edris started playing for Sexton last season. He's a striker.

Donald Kamden-Tegue

"The key behind his scoring has been his teammates," Kamden-Tegue said. "I asked him what the key is. He said 'my teammates love me. They know how I play. They know how to work with me.'"

Edris has shown to his team marked improvement from a year ago.

"He has improved in opening up more and in his speed, and also in ball control and finding the back of the net," Kamden-

Tegue said. "In his first five games, there was only one when he only had one goal. He's either had the hat trick or two goals."

Sexton was 6-1-1 in it first eight games.

John Miller has also had strong season for Sexton as a defender.

"He takes control of the whole defense," Edris said.

Kamden-Tegue indicated Edris would be wrestling this winter.



East Lansing Soccer Team Continuing Winning Tradition

David Cook
Sports Scene

With just three starters returning from a team that reached the Division 2 state championship match last season, the East Lansing soccer team appeared headed for a rebuilding project.

Instead of rebuilding, East Lansing is reloading and continuing a tradition of strong soccer. Ranked sixth in the state in Division 2, the Trojans opened the season with a 10-0-2 overall record.

"It's tough to follow a team that went to the state finals the year before," said East Lansing coach Jeff Lyon, "but so far, the boys have really competed in each game and we are right in the thick of the CAAC Blue competition. We are still working on cleaning up some inconsistencies on our defending, but we are really deep on the attacking end."

Senior Kai Francisco leads East Lansing in scoring with nine goals and four assists, but balance is a strong point for the offense. Eight players have scored two or more goals this season and an additional

six players have also scored.

Senior Paul Carney, the lone starter back on defense, is turning in a strong season on both sides of the pitch.

"Paul has two goals and two assists this season," Lyon said. "but as the only returning starter in the back line, he has done a tremendous job anchoring our defensive group."

Along with replacing the graduated seniors, this is the first season without legendary head coach Nick Archer on the sidelines. Archer retired after 41 seasons of coaching, ended his coaching career with 660 wins and five state championships.

"The players and coaches have been determined to honor his career by continuing with the traditions and expectations that he has set on this program," Lyon said. "This isn't solely based on winning, but on working hard to compete and playing the game the right way that proudly represents the school and the East Lansing community."

The strong start has been fun for the Trojans but finishing the season



The East Lansing boys soccer team is looking to make it all the way back to the Division 2 finals this season after coming up short to Holland 3-0 in the championship game a year ago. (Submitted Photo)

strong is the goal.

"Considering the fact that many of these guys are still getting to know each other, the 12-game unbeaten streak was a little unexpected," Lyon said. The season will get tougher as we face Detroit Catholic Central,

Okemos and play for the CAAC Gold Cup. This also includes a district that has long-time rivals DeWitt and Haslett who will be looking for redemption after losses to us earlier this season. This group has had some late-game heroics

this season coming from behind to beat Williamston, Mason, Portage Northern and tie Holt. Hopefully this experience will come in handy when the state tournament starts. This team knows it's never out of it."

Lansing Catholic Central Among Best In D3

David Cook
Sports Scene

Blending a potent offense with strong defense, the Lansing Catholic Central soccer team is developing into one of the top soccer teams in mid-Michigan.

Ranked third in the state in Division 3, the Cougars are challenging for the top spot in the CAAC White division and have tested themselves against some of the top programs in mid-Michigan including East Lansing,

Haslett and Holt.

Defense is a strong point for the Cougars. Led by goalkeeper Matthew Benivengna, the Cougars have posted 10 shutouts heading into the final week of September. Benivengna is the last line of a defensive corps led by Matt hev Plaehn, a first-team, all-state player last year.

On the offensive end of the field, Forwards Matthew Burns, Sam Gonzalez and Mitchell Raphael are among the strikers that are supplying a

steady flow of goals. Senior midfielder Jack Gonzalez is also turning in a solid all-around season.

With the CAAC Cup and the state tournament coming up in October, the Cougars are poised to build on their momentum. District champions last year, the Cougars reached the regional finals where they fell to Flint Powers Catholic. The Cougars host a district this season and open district play by hosting Williamston on Oct. 15.



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON CROSS COUNTRY

Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart Boys, Girls Cross Country Teams Sit Atop Division 4 Rankings

David Cook
Sports Scene

The season is shaping up as a clean sweep for both the boys and girls cross-country teams at Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart. Both teams are ranked first in the state in Division 4 and are shaping up as the teams to beat come the state finals.

"Our boys have won six of seven invitationals, finishing second at Bath to last year's Division 3 state champions Hanover Horton," said Sacred Heart coach Mark Zitzelsberger. "They also won the Spartan Invitational White Race (Division 3 and 4 teams)."

TJ Moore, a returning all-state runner, leads the way for the Irish along with Josh Lynch, Matt Nowak, Brock Lynch, Chase Nelson and Xavier Addison. Balance is a hallmark for Sacred Heart as there is just a 50-second spread from the number one runner to the number six runner.

Moore has gone under 17 minutes this year with a time of 16:55 while Josh Lynch has also gone under 17 minutes with a 16:59. Nowak has a season-best time of 17:14, Brock Lynch as 17:15, Nelson a time of 17:37 and Addison a 17:50.

The Sacred Heart girls have been unbeaten so far this season. The Irish girls have won all seven

invitationals they have competed in this season including a first-place finish at the Michigan State University Spartan Invitational White Race.

"The girls are led by Scout Nelson, Lauren MacDonald, Cammie McConnell, Desi McConnell and Sara Peltier," Zitzelsberger said. "There is a one minute, 12-second spread from the one through five runners."

Nelson has turned in a season-best time of 19:05 this season. MacDonald has a season-best of 19:35, Cammie McConnell has a season best of 19:52, Desi McConnell has a season-best time of 20:06 while Peltier has a time of 20:20.



Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart's boys and girls cross country teams are ranked No. 1 in Division 4 prior to press time. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Growing Ashley Cross Country Program Hosts First-Ever League Jamboree

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

In year number five of its young cross-country program, the Ashley Bears continue to show improvement on the course.

The cross-country program is growing and this year the program accomplished a milestone when it hosted its first-ever league jamboree on Sept. 19 at Beracy Park in Ashley.

The Ashley boys cross country team continues to make strides on the course as this season marks year five for the Bears as a varsity sport. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

"We hosted our first-ever meet at Beracy Park and it went over very well," said Ashley athletic director Joe Shaw. "Rick Beracy spent countless hours to create a course and environment that was very accommodating and received many compliments from visiting teams and fans."

Cross country has been a very positive addition to the Ashley athletic department.

"Cross country has been a

great thing for our school," Shaw said. "It has allowed some of our students who aren't football or volleyball players to have a sport to participate in during the fall season."

Ashley's boys team is led by senior Tate Kostal. Kostal has a season-best time of 19:18 and has placed in the top 20 at a pair of invitationals this season. Junior Kadyne Welch has a top time of 22:10 this year while sophomore

Grant Malek has a 23:01 p.r. Freshman Logan Hardman has shaved over two minutes off his time since the beginning of the season.

Ashley runners have an example of what it takes to be successful in cross country as Ashley alum Ryan Brzak was a state qualifier in cross country the first two years of the program.

On the girls team, freshman Jenna Wirt has lowered her time by over two minutes this season with a p.r. of 24:49. Freshmen Sharla Juhas and Renee Wirt and junior Ashley Gavenda have also shown improvement since the beginning of the season.

Young Breckenridge Cross Country Teams Showing Plenty Of Improvement

David Cook
Sports Scene

They may have been overlooked heading into the season, but the runners for the Breckenridge cross-country teams are quickly making their presence known both locally and state wide.

Led by one of the top freshman runners in the state, the Breckenridge boys cross-country team is ranked fourth in the state in Division 4.

"The boys team has been really good," said Breckenridge coach Kurt Gulick. "To be honest, we are doing better than I even

thought we would, and I know we are making noise around the state. For pre-season rankings, we were not even in them."

So far this season the Breckenridge boys won titles at the Lancer and Holly invitationals and were runner-up at two meets. Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart and Pewamo-Westphalia have been the only teams to beat the Huskies this season.

Freshman Mason Sumner leads the way for the Huskies. Sumner has the third-fastest time (16:02) in Division 4 this season and is the fastest freshman in the state. Sophomore Colttion

Vine (17:24) is 24th in D4 and freshman Trent Carter (17:26) is 27th in D4. The Huskies feature plenty of depth with juniors Colton Chovanec (18:22), Ashton Gillis (18:32) and Weston Wise (18:51) and senior Henry Richardson (19:20).

The Breckenridge girls team is a young squad ranked honorable-mention in Division 4. The girls team graduated a pair of seniors from last year's squad with no seniors this year.

"The girls side, we have been decent but kind of in a slump," Gulick said. "The girls will come around soon enough, I know it.

I still expect to be a top-10 team come state finals time."

Junior Annie Laurenz leads the way with a p.r. of 21:04 this season. Junior Myra Marr has run a 22:29, freshman Emily Snow a 22:50, sophomore Kiera Goward a 23:16, junior Elizabeth Snow a 23:16, junior Mackenzie Mayle a 24:49 and junior Caitlynn Oswald a 27:16.

Among the highlights of the season so far for the girls was a third-place finish at the Holly Invitational.

"So far, this season has been great for the boys and I hope to keep it that way and improve each meet," Gulick said. "The girls has been a roller-coaster season so far but I know they will be ready for the second-half of the season, so I'm not worried one bit."

Breckenridge's Sumner Off To Impressive Start In Running Career

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Breckenridge cross country coach Kurt Gulick likes what he's seen of his freshman runner Mason Sumner.

"Mason has had a very good start to his freshman year cross country season," Gulick. "He finished as the No. 1 middle school cross country runner in the state of Michigan and was a top 10 runner in the nation last year, so his strong start is no surprise to me or others around the state. So far this season he is

ranked third in Division 4 and is the fastest freshman in the state after Wednesday's meet when he went 16:02. He got out-kicked by 0.3 at that meet by a strong runner of Coleman Clark from Carson City who is only a sophomore so he is young as well."

Sumner was sixth at the Yellowjacket cross country invitational (17:40.7), second at the Shepherd Classic (16:39.9), first (16:59.9) at the Lancer Invitational, second at the 51st annual Holly Festival (17:49.4) and second at the first MSAC

jamboree.

"Mason's key to success is his work ethic," Gulick said. "He is a super hard working kid and always pushes himself to his max. He is super competitive and hates to lose, so that drives him to be great. He is very humble and quiet. I barely know he is at practice because he never talks. At meets he usually talks to his competitors but is very supportive of everyone."

"He trained more and harder this summer than last summer. Most memorable moment of his young career is him being ranked

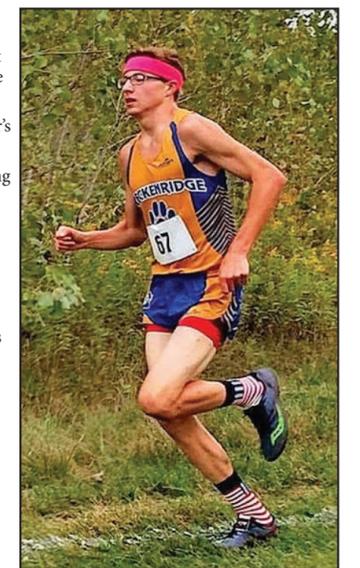
No. 1 in the state last year and easily top 10 in the nation. He did get his first individual win at the Lancer Invite which was nice to see."

Gulick is excited with Sumner's Invitational.

"I expect him to keep dropping time," he said. "The younger the runner, the more time likely is drop, but with him being so fast already the time will be harder to drop. I expect him to make the state meet and hopefully for a top 5 finish at MIS on Nov. 3. I really hope sub 16 is in the cards as well."

"He worked super hard this summer, and is very into the training we do. We are going to keep working hard in practice and keep showing up to meets knowing we can run fast."

Freshman Mason Sumner hits the trails during a recent race this season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Young St. Louis Cross Country Teams Beginning To Turn Corner

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Young and on the move is the story of the St. Louis cross-country teams this season. With a large group of young runners, both the St. Louis girls and boys teams are off to a fast start.

The St. Louis girls are ranked 10th in the state in Division 3. The Sharks opened the season with a runner-up finish at the Chippewa Hills Warrior Invitational and turned in an impressive effort by taking third place in the White Division at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational. The St. Louis boys team also placed second at the Warrior Invitational and placed second in the first Tri-Valley Conference West division jamboree this season.

"The team has been progressing well as we look forward to the championship phase of the season," said St. Louis coach Jay Puffpaff. "This team is really buying into the process and culture of our program and continue to build the habits and routines that will lead to long-term success. As we move through the season we are starting to see that dedication to the process pay dividends on the cross-country course."

Libby Munderloh is among the leaders of the girls team. Munderloh won the individual title in the White Division at Michigan State while teammate Mikenna Borie placed 10th individually.

"We are very young but have a solid group of upperclassmen who have demonstrated great

leadership in helping show and teach the culture of our program," Puffpaff said. "Libby, Mikenna and Brooklyn Filipiak have had great starts to the year. Mikaila Borie, Sela Delgado and Zoe Dickman have continued to show great improvement each day."

The St. Louis boys are also showing steady improvement.

"The guys are continuing to work on a pack mentality," Puffpaff said. "The group of Austyn Rhines, Austin Aldrich, Aaron Bowerman,



The St. Louis cross country teams are off to a strong start this season with the girls ranked 10th in the state in Division 3 and the boys placing second at the first league jamboree. (Submitted Photo)

Joe Erickson, Alex Davis, Nate March, Attah Dryden, Craig Bebow and Tristin Baker continue to improve and move up."

As the season heads for the home stretch, the Sharks are

focused on improving.

"We are continuing to keep a long-term focus as we focus in on the championship phase of our season," Puffpaff said.



Freeland Runner Continues To Improve

John Raffel Sports Scene

Madison O'Deay is a senior Freeland cross country runner who has already posted her personal record this year and is looking to help the Falcons be competitive in the TVC this season.

Her personal best came at the Shepherd Classic when she clocked a 21:35.5. She took eighth overall in the first TVC race.

O'Deay has been a veteran

varsity runner for the Falcons.

"She's off to a great start," Freeland cross country coach George Drown said. "She's almost taken a full minute off her season best from last year. Anything that's high temperature or high humidity, she doesn't do well. The last two races, she didn't have her best runs. But when the weather cooperates she'll continue to drop that time."

"Her season goal was to run around 21:30 and I think she's

going to be around 20:50 It's my coaching goal I have for her. She's off to a good start, for sure. This the best year of her three seasons. If you look at her profile, she's taken probably 13 to 20 seconds off a year. This year it's almost 40 seconds off. She put in probably her hardest summer of training, as well.

"I do a relay every year and call it the Great Lakes relay," Drown added. "It's usually a team of my friends and past athletes that I've coached. I

asked her to do that with us this year because I thought it would benefit her for this season. The relay is unique in that it's a three-day event, the team runs 300 miles on the North County trail. We start in Oscoda and end in Empire. It's tough terrain. She did that to kick the summer off and was to all of our summer conditioning stuff. Those things helped her to put into place having her best season."

O'Deay also runs track.

"I think she's capable in both sports," Drown said. "I think she prefers cross country. The one you tend to gravitate more to is the one you tend to be the most successful at."

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Carson City-Crystal Boys, Girls Cross Country Teams State Ranked This Season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

With both the boys and the girls cross-country teams both ranked in the top ten in the state this season, Carson City-Crystal runners have hit the ground running this fall.

As of mid-September, the Carson City-Crystal boys are ranked eighth in the state in Division 4 while the girls team is ranked 10th in Division 4.

"So far, the season is progressing nicely," said Carson City-Crystal coach Grant Woodman. "We have three meets under our belt and have gotten

better each meet for both the girls and guys teams. The heat has been a factor in every meet thus far, so times haven't been the fastest, but we have competed well in every meet we have been to"

The Carson City-Crystal boys turned in a big effort at the Michigan State University Spartan Invitational. The Eagles placed sixth overall out of 31 teams in the Division 3-4 race. Sophomore Coleman Clark paced the Eagles as he placed third individually with a time of 16:43.

"Coleman Clark and Jamison Ward have been our leaders on the field with Calvin Clark right behind them,"

Woodman said.

Ward, a junior, has a season-best time of 18:06 when he placed 11th at the Shepherd invitational while Calvin Clark, a sophomore, placed in the top-20 at Shepherd with a season-best time of 18:26.

Overall, the Carson City-Crystal boys placed in the top three in each of the first two meets of the season along with the top-ten finish at Michigan State.

Like the boys, the Carson City-Crystal girls placed in the top three in each of their first two races.

"Allyson Stevens has been the leader for the girls with Paige Ewalt and Sarah McCrackin closing in on her," Woodman said.

Stevens, a junior, placed 32nd as an individual at Michigan State with a time of 21:55. Earlier this season Stevens finished seventh at the Shepherd invitational with a season-best time of 21:09.

Ewalt, a freshman, has a season-best time of 22:49 as she placed in the top-20 at Shepherd. McCrackin, a junior, placed in the top-15 at Shepherd with a season-best time of 22:26.

As of mid-September, the Carson City-Crystal boys are ranked eighth in the state in Division 4 while the girls team is ranked 10th in Division. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Haslett Boys Cross Country Team hitting their stride



Butch Harmon Sports Scene

With the high school cross country season rounding the halfway mark, the Haslett boys cross country team is establishing itself as one of the most improved teams in the area.

After placing in the top 10 at last year's regional meet, Haslett has been on a roll this season and

is ranked fourth in the state in Division 2.

The Vikings have turned in several strong efforts this year including winning the Corunna Early Bird Invitational and winning their division at the Bath Invitational.

Haslett opened conference action in a big way by winning the first CAAC Red jamboree of the season. Haslett runners took

four of the top five spots in the opening jamboree led by junior Stephen Henry who won the individual race with a time of 17:15. Freshman Espen Lehnst placed second (17:20) with junior Danny Ezzo taking fourth (17:29) and junior Joseph Eklund placing fifth (17:36).

Henry is putting together a solid season at the front of the Viking pack. At the Michigan State

University Invitational Henry placed 47th overall in the Elite Division as he helped Haslett to an 18th place out of 40 teams in an Elite Division comprised of some of the premier teams in Michigan and Ohio. Henry also placed second individually at the Corunna invite.

Haslett turned in a strong effort at the Jackson Invitational where it placed seventh in the top division. Henry led the way for the Vikings as he placed 27th in a time of 16:26. Eklund placed 30th (16:34) followed by Lehnst (33rd, 16:39), senior Kace Krauss (59th, 16:58) and junior Mitchell Eklund (77th, 17:12).

Pewamo-Westphalia Boys, Girls Runners Ranked In Top 10 In Division 3



Butch Harmon Sports Scene

After posting top-ten finishes at last year's Division 3 state cross country finals, the Pewamo-Westphalia boys and girls are on course to make another run at a lofty finish at the state meet.

The Pewamo-Westphalia boys are ranked second in the state this fall in Division 3. The Pirates opened the season with several impressive efforts including a title-winning effort at the Ithaca

Yellowjacket Invitational and a third-place finish in Class 1 at the Bath Invitational. The boys also placed 23rd in the Elite Division at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational.

Junior Ashton Walker is leading the way as he has a season-best time of 16:04. Walker placed second individually at both the Yellowjacket invite and the first CMAC jamboree of the season.

Three more P-W runners have season-best times under 17 minutes including senior Kyle

Hengesbach (16:40), junior Hayden Germain (16:22) and senior Mitch Nurenberg (16:59).

The Pewamo-Westphalia girls are ranked fifth in the state in Division 3. The Pirates displayed their talent in depth at the first CMAC jamboree of the season as they put five runners in the top six and seven in the top 10. Junior Aubrey George won the individual race with a time of 19:41 with junior Bailey Droste taking second in 20:19. Junior Emily Nurenberg placed fourth in 20:30 followed by

sophomore Amelia Smith (fifth, 20:44), sophomore Sophie Thelen (sixth, 20:49), sophomore Julia Esch (ninth, 21:23) and freshman Katelyn Kramer (tenth, 22:01).

The P-W girls began the season winning the Yellowjacket invite and took second in Class 3 at Bath. The Pirates also placed second at Michigan State in Division 3-4, seven points behind first-place Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart.

George is off to a strong start this season as she took second at the Yellowjacket invite and eighth at Michigan State. Droste finished 12th at the Spartan invite with Nurenberg placing 15th, Thelen 17th, Esch 23rd and Smith 26th.

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Lansing Catholic Central Cross Country Teams Off And Running This Year

Talented runners at the head of the pack and quality depth is the recipe for success this season for the Lansing Catholic Central cross-country teams.

The Lansing Catholic boys are seventh in the state in Division 2 while the Cougar girls are 14th in the state.

For the boys, the tandem of junior Eli Meder and senior Will Peters is leading the way. Meder has posted a season-best time of 16:45 while Peters has turned in a season-best clocking of 16:39. The duo finished second and third respectively as they led the Cougars to a win at the opening CAAC White meet

of the season.

Freshman Josh Frary, senior Eric Warriner and senior Colin Cooper all placed in the top ten at the league opener with freshman Matthew Jenness placing 12th at the meet.

The Cougars showed their ability to contend with the best in the state when

they placed 15th as a team in the Elite Division at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational.

The Lansing Catholic girls are led by senior standout Lauren Cleary. One of the premier distance runners in the state, Cleary has a season-best time of 18:35.

Cleary led the way for

the Cougars in the first CAAC White meet as she placed first followed by junior Rachel Reid who took second. Sophomores Mia Brown and Addison Puck and freshman Hailey Prokop finished in the top ten at the meet while junior Adeline Hauck and senior Claudia Spence both placed in the top 12.

The Cougar girls competed at the Spartan Invitational where they placed 23rd in the Elite Division. Cleary placed 14th individually at the meet.



With the graduation of Olivia Theis, who blitzed the field in last year's Division 2 finals a year ago, Lansing Catholic is relying on youth to help the Cougars make a return trip to the finals in November. (File Photo)



DeWitt Girls Cross Country Team Ranked In Top Ten In Division 2

With standout senior Ashley Shipp at the head of the pack, the DeWitt girls cross country team is ranked among the top in the state and gearing up for a strong finishing kick.

Ranked fifth in the state in Division 2, the DeWitt girls opened the conference season with a big

The DeWitt girls cross country team have been impressive during the early part of the 2018 season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

effort at the first CAAC Blue meet of the year. Shipp led the way for the Panthers as she placed second overall as an individual. Sophomore Kaitlyn Hynes placed fifth with senior Sofia Perez taking eighth and sophomore Elsa Rusthoven placing ninth. Senior Delaney Kirinovic rounded out the top five for DeWitt by placing 15th.

The DeWitt girls have been posting solid times all season. The Panthers placed fourth as a team in Division 1 at the Bath Invitational. The Panthers followed up that performance by taking 10th place in the Elite Division at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational. Shipp led the way at Michigan State as she placed 19th as an individual.

Shipp has posted a season-best time of 18:50. Hynes and Perez have both broken the 20-minute mark this season as Hynes has a 19:24 to her credit and Perez a 19:15. Rusthoven has posted a season-best time of 20:18 with Kirinovic turning in a 21:10.

Fowler Girls Cross Country Team One Of The Best In The State In Division 4

After placing in the top ten at the Division 4 state finals last year, the Fowler girls cross country team is working toward an even higher finish this season.

With a mix of talented veterans and promising underclassmen, Fowler is ranked fifth in the state in Division 4 this fall. The Eagles have tested

themselves against some of the top runners and teams in the area highlighted by a sixth-place finish in the Division 3-4 race at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational.

Seniors Morgan Goerge and Alyssa Vandegriff are leading the way for Fowler. The seniors tandem placed seventh and eighth at the first CMAC

jamboree of the season with times of 21:30.3 and 21:30.4 respectively. Vandegriff also led the way at Michigan State as she placed 29th individually with Goerge placing 44th.

Junior Josie Koenigsnecht placed 13th and sophomore Leah Wieber placed 14th at the opening CMAC jamboree. Koenigsnecht has a season-

best time of 21:47 this season while Wieber has run a season-best time of 22:13. Wieber also placed 50th at Michigan State.

Freshman Olivia Datema and junior Sadie Weber provide the Eagles with good balance. Datema placed 23rd and Weber 24th at the CMAC jamboree.



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Ithaca Senior Runner Eying State Title

John Raffel Sports Scene

He's a senior, but Ithaca cross country standout Ransom Allen definitely wants to make his final prep season his best one.

Allen started out the season with four first places: at Birch Run Early Invitational (16:05.2) on Aug. 23, at the Yellowjacket Cross Country Invitational on Aug. 29 (16:30.8), at the Marauder Invitational on Sept. 6 (16:05.8), and at the TVC West Jamboree No. 1 hosted by



Ransom Allen

St. Charles on Sept. 11 (17:00.9). He was 15th overall at the MSU Spartan Invitational on Sept. 14 with a personal record of 15:51.2. Ithaca opted to run in the elite division. Allen lost to one Division 3 runner by 5.5 seconds.

His coach, Tim Lambrecht, notes it's Allen's third year of cross since he didn't run it as a freshman but played soccer instead.

"As a sophomore, he dual-sported between soccer and cross country," Lambrecht said. "Last year he fully

committed to cross country. He really doesn't have as much racing experience as some of the other kids.

"Last year, it was his breakthrough year. He fully committed to cross. He got some good running in over the summer. He was all-state, and finished eighth at state and won all the league meets. He broke our school record, so then we kind of knew he was the real deal. His sister Courtney Allen had run with us and was the previous school record

holder. Courtney is now running at Western Michigan University. We knew it was in the blood."

Lambrecht was very impressed with Allen's off-season training.

"This year, he's a step above where he was last year, a significant step above," Lambrecht said. "In fact, he's talking to a significant number of college coaches."

His potential?

"Our ultimate goal is an individual state championship," Lambrecht answered, "which is a lofty goal, but it's definitely within reach."

Ithaca Freshman Runner Turning Heads

John Raffel Sports Scene

Ithaca's Lani Bloom didn't waste much time in asserting herself as a quality cross country runner.

In her first five meets, Bloom has two firsts and three second places. She's been breaking school records and her personal mark is 18:54.6 at the Marauder Invitational.

Her coach is veteran cross



Lani Bloom

country skipper Gene Lebron.

"The expectations for her (from junior high) were high, but it's always difficult going from two miles to 5K and that's always the big question mark but there were high expectations and she's lived up to everyone of them and maybe even exceeded them," Lebron said. "She broke the school record in her third race (the Marauder Invitational). That was a pretty good record. The record she broke was held by Courtney Allen, who is a Division I

scholarship runner right now at Western Michigan University.

"The conditions were perfect for one thing. We have not had perfect conditions. Every other race as been really, really hot or wet. It was a combination of having great conditions. She got out fast and ran by herself. She had been second in the previous two races. This was the first big meet and she was fired up. It's the course we'll run on for regional. With all of those things combined, she put everything

together."

Lebron likes Bloom's potential.

"Division 3 girls cross country is so tough," he said. "For her going into the state meet, a top 10 finish is one of the top goals. You have to get there first. Barring any catastrophe, she'll qualify for state. I know she wants to lower the school record even more."

The overall team prospects for Ithaca, led by Bloom, are extremely favorable.

St. John's Runner Wants To Repeat As All-Stater

John Raffel Sports Scene

St. John's cross country coach Bob Sackrider has gotten plenty of enjoyment out of watching his junior runner Taryn Chapko. She won the Coronna Early Bird Invitational, Large School Division, in 19:31.68.

It's her third year on high school varsity.

"She hasn't actually run faster this year than her best from all of last year," Sackrider said. "She's doing a fair amount faster

now than when she was at this point last year. There's more consistency at those faster speeds. She went 18:39 and the other day she was 18:40. Last year she was about 19 flat. She's about 20 seconds faster than she was at this point last year."

Chapko wants to repeat as an all-stater, which she has been her first two seasons.

"She wants to be in the top five in the area, and I think she would like to be top 10 in the state," Sackrider said.

Her season record was 18:39.4 for 13th place at the MSU Spartan Invitational.

Chapko was 11th at the state finals last year and 10th as a freshman.

The St. Johns coach said Chapko "is strong in her consistency and not fluctuating her pace and has a tremendous kick. She's a track 800-meter runner and has a lot of speed as she's finishing."

The 800 is her specialty in track.

"She's working all year round," Sackrider said. "She retains a high mileage base."

The team is having a strong season.

"We've had a few injuries, some that are left over from spring sports," Sackrider said. "Despite that, we're still one of the better teams in the area. If we're healthy by the end of the year, we'll be one of the better teams in the area and among the top 10 in the state."



Taryn Chapko

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Shepherd's Gall Eyes XC State Crown

John Raffel Sports Scene

It looks like another outstanding season for Shepherd's Amber Gall.

Gall is a four-year varsity runner in her senior season.

"Amber is having a great start to her senior season, we have only ran a few meets but at Saranac, our early home invite and the Spartan Invite she has ran faster at all of them," said coach Carey Hammel. "Amber's best time so far this season is 18:00. At the MSU Spartan Invite Elite Race, Amber finished third which was against some of the best competition in Michigan and even

some schools from out of state.

"The key to Amber's success is pretty simple, the key is just that Amber is who she is. She does all of the right things, she works hard, takes care of herself and mentally prepares herself for each season and each race. Her consistency throughout her career has led her to be one of the best runners we have had at Shepherd and also one of the best runners in the state for her entire time."

Gall continues to show improvement.

"In cross country so far she has been slightly ahead of last year in times and when possible has

finished higher as well," Hammel said. "Amber has really continued to plan ahead and work on all of the things that she can control. While she never did bad in that regard she has certainly improved throughout the years. She also has improved her racing skills and tactics.

"My favorite memory or thought about Amber is that every time she starts a race, she has a belief that she can go out and run a PR and win. You can't coach or teach that tenacity and mental toughness. I expect Amber to have an outstanding end to her high cross country career. She can end the year as one of the best runners in the State of Michigan and we hope

to see her continue to set personal bests."

Gall, who also competes in track and field, was third at the state meet as a freshman fifth as a sophomore and second as a junior. She would obviously love being first at the state meet.

"Amber works year round to be the best runner and athlete possible," Hammel said. "Not only does she run but she lifts weights and also does large amount of agility and speed training to keep her healthy and fit.

"Amber along with fellow senior Haley Hegenauer. are the backbone of our young team. Amber has narrowed down her likely Top 4 to Michigan State, Michigan, New Mexico and Oregon."



Amber Gall



Beal City Senior Runner Hitting His Stride

John Raffel Sports Scene

Alex Taylor has been getting the job done for Beal City's cross country program in a major way.

He has been in six years of cross country counting two years of junior high.

"He's been all-state all three years so far and first-team all-conference

Alex Taylor

all three years," Beal City coach Dave King said. "This year, he won our Beal City Invitational home meet. Taylor's season best came with a 17:34.8 in the Clare Invitational. His first-place time at Beal City's Invitational was 17:40.3.

Taylor had his personal record in 2017 with a 16:39.0 in the Alma College Scottie Classic. He went to the state meet and took 12th for all-state honors with a 16:47.6. He had

been 11th at the state meet as a sophomore and 30th as a freshman.

"He's determined to run really well this year," King said. "He came out of track season with a little bit of a hip flexor injury so he got a slow start in the summer as he tried to heal that up a little bit. But he got his miles in during the summer as soon as he could. He's been training hard this year and it's starting to come

together for him."

The strength of Taylor's race, King said, "has been his very good kick. Sometimes he goes out a little too fast. But he controls that. If he lets himself get carried away in the beginning, that hurts him a little. He's been working on his pacing."

During the winter, Taylor continues his training and runs track in the spring.

Midland Dow's Tucker On Record Pace For Chargers

John Raffel Sports Scene

Anastasia Tucker, of Midland Dow's cross country team, clocked a 18:48.95 for first at a home meet early in the season and continues to be among the area's top runners,

Her coach is Jamie Haruska.

Tucker, as senior, had her personal record of 18:08.2 at the Benzie Central Invitational. She finished third in that race and seventh at

the MSU Spartan Invitational. But she's been first in three other races.

Tucker was 17th at the Division 1 state finals as a junior, 42nd as a sophomore and 45th as a freshman.

"She's been great," Haruska said. "This is my first year coaching her. At Michigan State, it was a very hot race. She has really good racing consistency. She knows how to go out initially and maintain that speed. I know her kick has gotten stronger. She's doing well with that final

kick at the end.

"I think she's looking at going and beating her final PR at the end. She has put a lot more time than what the rest of the team is asked to do. She's getting stronger."

Tucker is a runner and also does track with distance racing.

Haruska said her team has grown.

"We've got a wide range of runners," she said.

Midland Dow's Anastasia Tucker continues to impress during the early part of the season recently setting her personal record time of 18:08.2 at the Benzie Central Invitational. (Submitted Photo)



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON TENNIS

Talented Okemos Tennis Team Primed To Defend Division 2 State Title

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Division 2 state champions last season, the Okemos boys tennis team is loaded up and on a mission to defend their title this fall.

Ranked first in the state in Division 2 this season, the Chieftains are turning in some impressive efforts this season. One of the highlights of the season came when the Chieftains won 21 out of 22 matches against fellow state tennis powerhouses Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood, Detroit Country Day

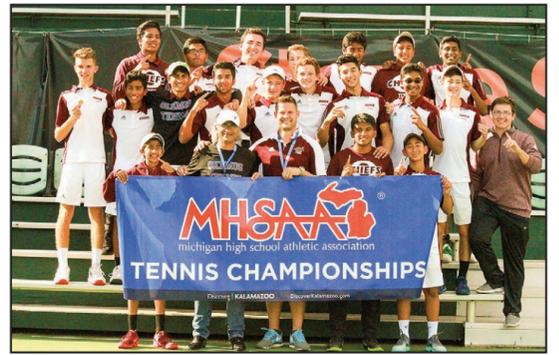
and East Grand Rapids.

This year's squad is stocked with young and highly-skilled tennis players. Three of Okemos' singles players competed at the 2018 United State Tennis Association 16 and 18s Nation Hard Court Championships in Kalamazoo this past summer, one of the premier junior tournaments in tennis.

Topping the singles lineup for Okemos is freshman Ozan Colak. Colak is ranked 13th national in the class of 2022. Okemos returns sophomore Josh Portnoy at No. 2 singles and junior Ben Letzer

at No. 3 singles. Last year as a freshman Portnoy placed second in the state at the D2 state finals. Letzer played No. 1 singles last year and reached the quarterfinals at the state meet. Sophomore Rohan Shah rounds out the singles lineup at No. 4 singles. Shah was a part of the No. 2 doubles team that won a state title last year.

Okemos is equally strong in doubles. Senior captains Zal Chinoy and Daniel Gorelik anchor the doubles lineup at No. 1 doubles. Gorelik was the state champion at No. 4 singles last year while Chinoy was part of the No. 1



The Okemos boys tennis team is ranked No. 1 in the state in Division 2 this season and is the defending Division 2 state champions. (Submitted Photo)

doubles team that won a state title.

Sophomores Shrey Patel and Druv Talluri are at No. 2 doubles.

Patel was the state champion at No. 3 singles last year while Talluri was part of the No. 3 doubles team that won a state title.

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON SWIMMING

Grand Ledge Swim Team Making A Splash To Start Season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

The Grand Ledge girls swimming and diving team is making a big splash during the early season and the goal is to keep gaining momentum as the season plays out.

Grand Ledge is showing promise in the early portion of the season and are ranked among the honorable-mention in the state in Division 1.

"We are off to a strong start and are looking forward to finishing strong," said Grand Ledge coach Ian Townsend. "We've been able to nail down a majority of our state cuts for the end of the season. Our focus right now is pushing toward

a CAAC Blue championship."

A talented group of veteran swimmers lead the way for the Comets. Junior Lola Mull, an all-American last year in both the 200 and 500 freestyle, is the returning state record-holder in the 500 freestyle and is looking on improving in both events this season.

Junior Grace Weston is back after placing eighth in the 100 breaststroke at the state meet last year and finishing in the top 16 in the 200 IM.

Senior Abby Ford is a versatile swimmer who has already qualified for state in the 100 breaststroke and 500 freestyle and is part of three state-qualifying relays.

Junior Danielle Ries has turned in a time of 1:02:75 in the 100 butterfly and contributes in the 200 and 50 freestyle. Senior Isabel Lee is making an impact in the 100 backstroke and freshman Jade Friedlis leads Grand Ledge's best diving crew in six years. Sophomore Nicole Stensen in the distance free events and freshman Alyssa Rainsberger in the sprint free events are also making an impact.

Grand Ledge has turned in several strong performances so far this season to build momentum off.

"We were able to secure our third-straight Waverly Relays win and won the DeWitt Invitational in our first year attending that meet," Townsend said. "We had a great showing at the Comet Cup, finishing fourth behind some perennial Division 1 powers."



The Grand Ledge swimming team returns a great deal of talent this season including veteran swimmer junior Lola Mull, an all-American last year in both the 200 and 500 freestyle, and is the returning state record-holder in the 500 freestyle. (Submitted Photo)

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