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If you have a story idea or suggestions please contact Randy Miniard at 517-202-1808. or randy@highschoolsportsscene.com. Thanks again for your support.

Publisher's note

It's a great day here at High School Sports Scene. The holidays are now upon us and the football season is at its apex with the state finals taking place the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving. Three area teams will be battling it out for state titles this season. In Division 3, DeWitt will be playing in its fifth state title game in school history. Ithaca is making its fourth straight trip to Ford Field and the Yellowjackets are gunning for a fourth fabulous state title after edging Montrose by a single point in a dramatic state semifinal game. In Division 8, Beal City will be looking to add another state championship trophy to its trophy case. With the fall season coming to an end, the winter sports season is right around the corner. Winter means the mats will be coming out for another year of high school wrestling. It will be hard to beat the success of area teams the past few seasons, and area wrestlers are set to add to that success

this year. St. Johns will be looking to add to its list of titles, and other area powerhouses like Davison, Holt, Grand Ledge, Lowell, Greenville, Swan Valley, Chippewa Hills, Birch Run, Carson City-Crystal, and New Lothrop have outstanding teams waiting to be let loose. The boys' and girls' basketball seasons are also set to open up. The news out of Saginaw is promising for both Saginaw and Arthur Hill, who both look to have powerhouse teams this season, while the Pewamo-Westphalia boys are also primed for a big year. So grab a turkey leg, enjoy friends and family, and take in some football and good luck to all the area teams and athletes, both in the football finals and in the winter season.



Randy Miniard



Ford Field Bound

Although the Ithaca football endured its toughest test since the inception of the consecutive game winning streak with its 21-20 win in the Division 6 semis against Montrose, the Yellowjackets head back to Ford Field with another state title in their grasp. (Scott Keyes Photo)

Triple Threat!

Area Teams Win Three Of Four State Titles; East Lansing (Division 2), Flint Powers (Division 3), Lansing Christian (Division 4) Flex Muscles During Tough Championship Seasons

More Cross Country...

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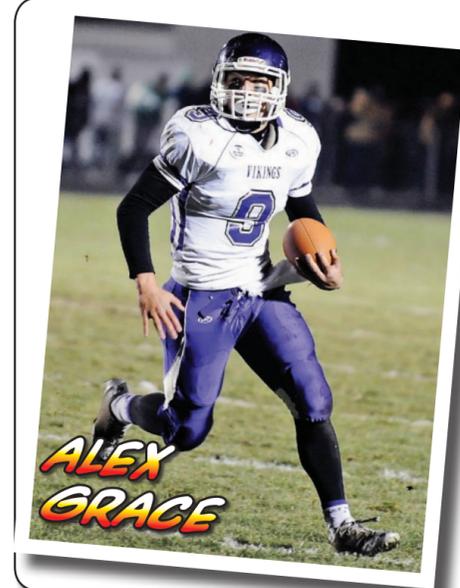
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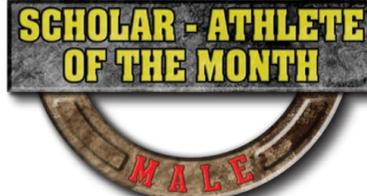


MALE AND FEMALE SCHOLAR-ATHLETE OF THE MONTH PRESENTED BY:

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ALEX GRACE



The Alex Grace File

Swan Valley High School

Class: Junior

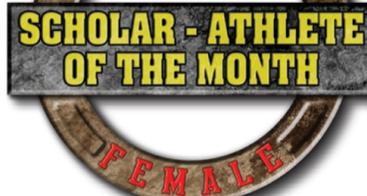
Sport: Football

Accomplishments: Grace ran for 236 yards and two touchdowns in Swan Valley's 26-21 Division 4 quarterfinal loss to Lansing Sexton. He also completed 2 of 2 passes for 17 yards. With the 236 yards rushing, Grace finished the season with 2,952 yards, a state single-season rushing record. He averaged more than 10 yards a carry during the season.

College: Grace is receiving a lot of attention from Big Ten and MAC Schools as one of the top juniors in Michigan.



KAYLIE RHYNARD



The Kaylie Rhynard File

Shepherd High School

Class: Senior

Sport: Cross Country and Softball

Accomplishments: Rhynard helped the Shepherd girls cross country team to its first Division 3 state championship since 1994. She placed fifth overall in the state final in a time of 18:55.5.

GPA: Academic All-State in both cross country and softball.

College: Rhynard will attend Grand Valley State University, where she plans on running cross country and playing softball for the Lakers.



HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE MALE AND FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE MONTH PRESENTED BY:

ATHLETIC REPUBLIC Physical Therapy & Rehab Specialists



ECKA HENDERSON



The Ecka Henderson File

Saginaw Arthur Hill

Class: Senior

Accomplishments: Was a standout football player on both offense and defense for the Lumberjacks. Helped lead his team to its best record since the 2007 season.

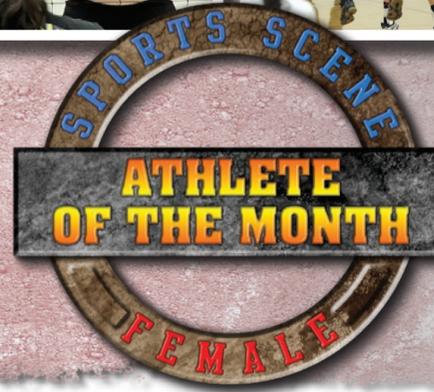
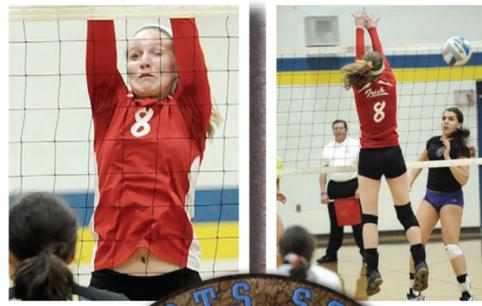
Hobbies: Watching TV, lifting weights, sleeping

Favorite Subject: ELA

College: Hopes to play football at the next level but is currently undecided on what college he plans to attend.



LEXIE METHNER



The Lexie Methner File

Sacred Heart Academy

Class: Junior

Accomplishments: Led the Irish to the volleyball quarterfinals before losing in four sets to Leland. Guided her team to a Class D regional title via wins over Pentwater and Ashley. Had 36 kills during regionals.

Favorite Subject: English

Hobbies: Country music, hanging out with friends, and watching movies



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Olling goes out with BANG!



Wins D4 title for fourth year in row; Breckenridge finishes second as team

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Kirsten Olling made it four straight state titles and she set a state record when she covered the Michigan International Speedway course in 17:44.9 for first place in the Division 4 meet on Nov. 2.

She also helped Breckenridge get second place as a team with 136 points, behind first place Beal City.

During her race, Olling "was crying because it was my last year," she said. "This is over, this is it; I have to give it my all."

Dominique Adams finished 19th in 20:22.6, Rachel Reiber 23rd in 20:39.1, Lindsay Hoard 26th in 20:43.3, Ayanna Williams 67th in 21:34.8, Carly Jenkins 78th in 21:51.1 and Kaitlin Fleming 113th in 23:13.6.

"We had some freshmen that matched up well for us, said Breckenridge coach Royce Humm, referring to Ayanna Williams. "We knew we were going to be in a hunt for the title and would be this close. We were going after that."

It's the highest finish school history. Olling became the seventh female runner in state history to win four straight titles.

"That's amazing," she said. "So few have done it." Entering her high school career, "I was expecting all-state or something like that, but not four state championships," she smiled.

Olling beat Tessa Fornari of Our Lady of the Lakes by almost a minute. Fornari had a second place time of 18:41.7. Olling's time set a new Division 4 record.

"She's been running well all season," Humm said. "Dominique Adams ran well and is a solid leader for our program."

Olling "helps set a benchmark for everyone," Humm said. "She knows you have to go out there and work hard. She's out there running every day. That sets the benchmark for the rest of the girls. They see that and know that's what makes her better."

Adams, Hoard, and Olling will graduate in the spring, but "[w]e've got some underclassmen that are shining really well," Humm said. "We'll reload next year."

The only remaining unknown for Olling is for what team she run her next cross country race.

"I'm looking forward to going to college," said Olling, who said after her race that she hasn't yet made up her mind where she is going,



but that she is intrigued by Michigan State University.

Meanwhile, it's been a unique recruiting process for Olling. "It's been kind of weird," she smiled. "I feel the coach and athlete relationship should be where you can trust your coaches. That's what I look for, finding the right coach and the right teammates."

She's made an unofficial visit to MSU. "I really, really liked it," she said.

"I'm very comfortable with the coaches. It's fun knowing I have all these options open and there's no limit. I don't want to get so far away that I can't visit home. But I don't want to be too close that it doesn't feel like I ever left."

Breckenridge's Kirsten Olling made her final cross country race memorable by winning her fourth consecutive cross country championship earlier this month at Michigan International Speedway. Olling will leave high school as one of the most decorated runners in the history of Michigan cross country. The Huskies finished second as a team. (Jeff McGinthy photos)

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Central Michigan Dominance

Beal City (D4), Shepherd (D3) win girls cross country titles; Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart boys finish second.

Rhynard leads way for Bluejays

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Shepherd netted outstanding runs from its top six runners and posted an easy first-place finish Nov. 2 in the Division 2 cross country state finals at Michigan International Speedway.



The Shepherd girls cross country team won its first state championship since the 1994 season. (Jeff McGinthy photos)

The Bluejays had 120 points to earn their first cross country state title since 1994. Second-place Benzie Central had 186 points.

Kaylie Rhynard placed fifth overall in 18:55.5, while Katelyn Hutchinson was 10th in 19:12.8, Kylie Hutchinson 33rd in 20:15, Rachel Mathers 35th in 20:20.4, Taylor Thrush 37th in 20:21.6, Taylor Priest 39th in 20:27.3 and Sarah Bellinger 56th in 20:44.9.

"It is amazing; it is everything I could have imagined," said Rhynard, a senior. "We worked so hard, and it's awesome to see it pay off with this group of girls. It's unbelievable."

Rhynard was part of two Bluejay teams that placed ninth at state in previous years. The two Hutchinson girls and Mathers are freshmen.

"We were shooting for this before the season started," Rhynard said. "In August, we were preparing to be the best team we could be. We did not come in thinking we were going to win it. We came in thinking we'd run our hearts out, and if we all run well, we should be able to win."

The top two runners were all-staters, but others ran well enough to give Rhynard a strong notion even before seeing the final results that her team had won.

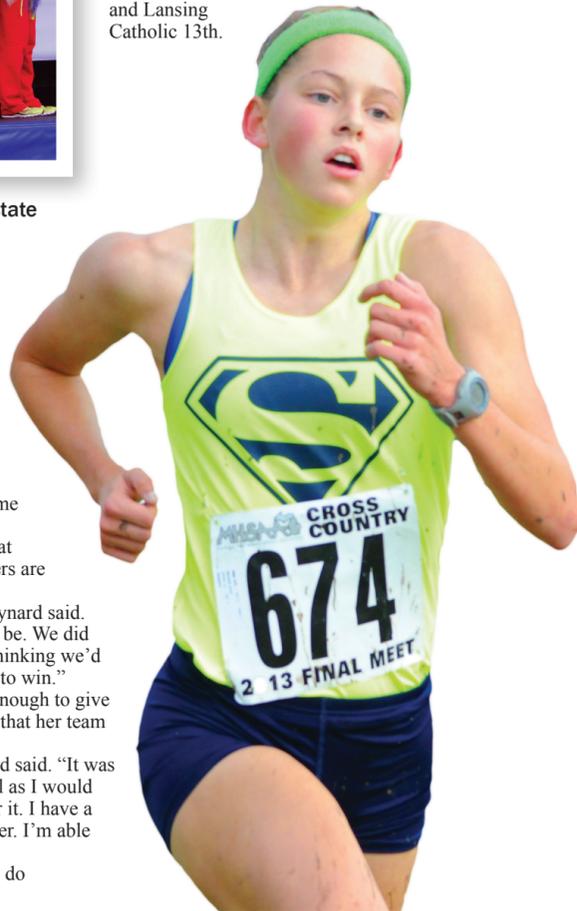
"Once we found out, it was the best feeling ever," Rhynard said. "It was not my best [race]. The season didn't go as individually well as I would have liked it to. What we've done as a team has made up for it. I have a strained muscle in my stomach and that started in the summer. I'm able to run pretty close to what I have in past years."

"Anytime you're in a state meet and you have a chance to do well, you're a little bit nervous," said coach Carey Hammel.

"I was pretty confident. I knew the girls were ready. I knew they were going to run well, and it worked out."

"Kaylie Rhynard finishing in the top 10 was awesome. She finished all-state all four years. One of the biggest things was Kylie Hutchinson, our third girl today, ran an exceptional race. Taylor Thrush our fifth runner today, is normally one of our top three runners. But she was running with mono, so that was a really gutty performance. It wasn't easy for her, but she really kept it up. Overall, all seven runners ran exceptionally well, and I couldn't be prouder of them than I am."

Clare finished ninth, Ithaca 10th, and Lansing Catholic 13th.



Sacred Heart comes up short in D4

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Chad Zitzelsberger coached three all-state runners for Sacred Heart Academy's cross country team this season. Just as impressively, he also skipped a team that finished second in the state in Division 4 in the Lower Peninsula meet Nov. 2 at Michigan International Speedway.

Cooper Terry was third in 16:39.4 for the Irish, while Jim English was ninth in 16:58.1, Logan Moyle 10th in 16:59.3, Tony Perez 41st in 17:5.2, Sam Meyer 57th in 18:07.4, Nate Thering 162nd in 20:52.6, and John Obeid 168th in 21:25.6.

Terry and English are seniors, while the other five are sophomores and will return for the next two seasons.

Saugatuck won the championship with 113 points, while Sacred Heart had 121. Saugatuck had places two, seven, 26, 38, and 40 for team scoring. Concord was third at 134.

"We thought it was going to be a four-team race," Zitzelsberger said. "Pretty much all season, we've been battling with Concord and Saugatuck and Pewamo. We've raced all three of those teams. Every time we've raced them, it's been close."

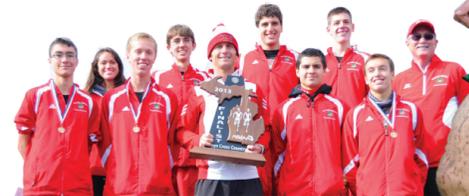
"I think I could have done a lot better," Terry said. "But we're second place as a team. It's been a very memorable season. We're doing what I thought we'd do. We came out here and we did our best as a team."

Sacred Heart was also runner-up in 2011. "We came so close that year," Zitzelsberger said. "Our goal was to get back as soon as possible and do it again. We were close to accomplishing that. I'm proud of the guys. They ran very well."

Zitzelsberger was happy with the effort of his two seniors. "I've coached them four years, and they were a key part of that team in 2011," Zitzelsberger said. He indicated that the muddy conditions probably didn't make a difference in the final results. "We talked all week that it might be a wet day and muddy. We were prepared for it. I told them the toughest team will come down on top. They didn't let it slow them down too much."

"Other than the mud, it was perfect," Terry said. "But it did slow my time down."

Pewamo-Westphalia was sixth, led by Tanner Droste, who finished fourth in 16:43.4. Beal City was seventh, led by Nick Pung, eighth in 16:56.6.



The Sacred Heart boys cross country team came up short in its quest of winning a D4 state title, finishing eight points behind Saugatuck, which finished the day with 113. Cooper Terry paced the Irish with a third place finish. (Jeff McGinthy Photos)

Aggies win first-ever girls state championship in any sport

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Beal City now has a girls' state championship team.

The school has won several boys' titles in baseball and football. But the cross country team winning a state title in Division 4 on Nov. 2 at Michigan International Speedway was a first for a girls' program.

The Aggies posted 120 points at the state meet and finished first out of 27 teams. Breckenridge was second at 136.

"It was a fantastic race," said Beal City coach Dave King. "Our kids came in ready to run and went out and did their job. It wasn't a fast day on the course, and times weren't exceptional. But they raced for a championship, and that's what they needed to do today. It's about places, and they ran for their places and did a great job."

Hannah Steffke led the Aggies with a seventh-place finish in 19:27.0. Hannah Neyer was 14th in 19:57.0, Emily Steffke 18th in 20:12.5, Ariel Salter 37th in 20:52.6, Brenda Faber 44th in 21:04.2, Hayley Neyer 48th in 21:11.5 and Rachel Schwerwin 171st in 25:43.7.

"I knew we had a shot," King said. "I felt we were under-ranked for most of the season. I knew we were in the top three or four that had a chance."

"It's so amazing, I'm so happy for myself and the team even more," said Hannah Steffke. "We worked so hard for it."

Beal City finished fourth in the state last year, and the Aggies started thinking about a title in 2014 immediately after last year's season ended, Steffke noted. "It was really close last year," she said. "We knew we were one of the top teams and only lost one girl from last year. We had a couple of girls, including myself, getting over sicknesses. Everyone gave it their all, no matter what."

Course conditions were muddy because of heavy rains which stopped prior to race time. The Division 4 girls race was the first of eight races for the day.

"I was close to a PR," Steffke said. "With the way the course was today, it was super muddy and sucked in your feet and didn't want to let you go."

"Our one senior on the team ran her lifetime best and got an all-state position," King said, referring to Hannah Neyer. "She broke 20 minutes for the first time in her life. It was her last high school race but finished with an all-state medal and state championship. She was key to making that happen. Her finish was big for us."

Salter and Faber are freshmen. Talking about them, King indicated that "[t]hey worked hard all summer long, came in, and stepped in for what was already a good team coming back. We will have a good team coming back next year."

"My youngest sister is coming up and she's really excited," Steffke said.

King noted that the Beal City football and volleyball teams are highly-ranked in their respective postseason tournaments.

"From the history of the people I talked to, I think this might be the first girls' state championship in Beal City," King said.



Beal City posted 120 points at the state meet and finished first out of 27 teams. Breckenridge was second at 136. (Jeff McGinthy photos)

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Rockford, Chippewa Hills girls have strong races

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Lauren Brasure made her last cross country race a memorable one.

The Rockford senior placed second in the Division 1 race Nov. 2 at Michigan International Speedway. Audrey Belf of Birmingham Seaholm won the race in 17:31.1. Brasure was second in 17:40.8.

Brasure's performance helped Rockford take fifth as a team. Hudsonville was third at 164, Seaholm fourth at 165, Rockford fifth at 169 and Traverse City Central was sixth at 170.

Kerianne Schoff was 17th in the team race for the Rams in 18:31.7, while Morgan Harney was 30th in 18:46.5, Morgan Benoit 41st in 19:03.4 and Larissa Medich 79th in 19:38.7.

It was Brasure's best finish at a state meet, which was dramatic considering it's also the first time she broke into the top 100.

"I had a lot of confidence coming into this race," she said, adding that in the final 1,000 meters, she realized she wasn't going to catch Belf. She felt secure in second place.

"I felt really happy," she said. "I couldn't have asked for a more successful season."

The team had hopes for a strong finish, Brasure acknowledged.

"We're happy with what we got," she said. "We met (expectations)."

Brasure plans on running after high school but isn't sure yet of her exact plans."

Meanwhile, it was the final Division 2 race for Chippewa Hills' Megan O'Neil, an all-stater the fourth straight year.

O'Neil was eighth in the Division 2 race with a time of 18:50.5. But because of previous downpours, runners were presented with muddy course conditions at MIS.



The Rockford girls cross country team finished fifth in the Division 1 state meet held at Michigan International Speedway earlier this month. Lauren Brasure led the way for the Rams with a second place finish.

"I think I did OK but I would have liked to have been higher, but it's all right," O'Neil said. "I wasn't at where I wanted to be at the start."

When it got down to the nitty gritty, O'Neil found herself too far behind to challenge for a top spot.

She smiled while talking about the muddy conditions. "I wore half-inch spikes which may not have been the best idea," she said. "Everything else was good."

O'Neil was third as a freshman in 2010. She was ninth as a sophomore and seventh as a junior.



Chippewa Hills' Megan O'Neil earned All-State honors for the fourth straight year during the Division 2 race at MIS earlier this month.

Cedar Springs boasts state Division 2 champ in XC for boys and girls

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Cedar Springs showcased its cross country program at the Lower Peninsula state finals by having the individual winner in both the girls' and boys' races Nov. 2 at Michigan International Speedway.

Kenzie Weiler won the girls' race in 17:55.1 in dramatic fashion, while Austin Sargeant took the boys' race with a few more seconds to spare.

Weiler, locked in second place most of the race, sprinted to pass Jackie Bredenberg of Detroit Country Day in the final yards of the girls' race. Weiler's time was 17:55.1, while Bredenberg came in at 17:55.9.

"I have goals, but I don't have strategies because when things go wrong...my strategy was to listen to my heart and then make up my mind to take over," Weiler said. "I was tired. Never did I give up."

After the frontrunners had separated from the pack, Weiler was as far as 20 yards behind Bredenberg at one stage of the race.

"I was happy," she said. "I wouldn't have been upset with a second-place finish. I definitely am happier with a first-place finish."

It's her first state title after two straight runner-up finishes.

"One of my really good friends won the boys' race. So it's been a good day for our school," Weiler smiled. "My teammates had PRs."

Cedar Springs finished 15th as a team. In the team standings, Kelsie Webber was 71st in 20:26.4, Maddie Pekrul 90th in 20:46.4, Ellie Ovokaitys 91st in 20:46.4, and Shayne Mann 103rd in 20:55.6. Of the top five runners for Cedar Springs, only Pekrul graduates.

In the boys' race, Sargeant timed a 15:42.7 to beat second-place runner Mason Van Dyke of Mason in 15:48.5.

Sargeant was 27th in the Division 2 final race in 2012. He hasn't lost a race all season and was confident that he could keep that streak going at the final. He was confident of victory at the 2 1/2-mile mark.

"It's been a lot of hard work in the off-season and staying with the pack for pretty much the whole race until I can keep it down," Sargeant said.

His finishes have usually been strong, he added. Winning the same year that Weiler did made it even more special, Sargeant noted.

"That was our goal this year," he said.



Kenzie Weiler and Austin Sargeant won their respective races during the D2 state finals at Michigan International Speedway.

Lansing Catholic runner wins state title

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Lansing Catholic senior Keenan Rebera won the Division 3 boys' cross country state championship at Michigan International Speedway on Nov. 2 with time to spare.

Rebera clocked the course in 15:31.0. He beat second-place finisher Chase Barnett of Mason County in 16:00.9.

Rebera helped Lansing Catholic take third place in the team standings with 189 points. Benzie Central was first at 111. Stockbridge was second at 129 and Clare was fourth at 192.

For Lansing Catholic, Jefferey Lorencen was 25th in 17:57.8, Nick Kelsey 41st in 17:15.6, Ethan Markey 60th in 17:31.3, Teddy Terzian 62nd in 17:33.9, Teddy Jurkovic 90th in 18:00.9, and Max Hayden 146th in 18:57.1.

"I took the first mile very hard," Rebera said. "I managed to hold on to that second mile. I tried as hard as I could in that third mile, when there was hard footing."

Rebera said he was confident of victory at about the second mile. "I knew if I had to, I had enough energy

to kick it in if someone came up on me," he said. "I knew if I had a larger lead by the second mile I could get it. I'm very happy with it."

Being at state was definitely a goal for Rebera coming into the season.

On his team's third place finish, "I'm really proud of them. They worked really hard," Rebera said. "We've been struggling all year. It's a great way to end the season."

Clare was led by Hunter Nivison, ninth in 16:27.4. Tyler Phillips was 15th in 16:39.9, Kevin Spicer-Torres 34th in 17:09.3, Ben Haupt 50th in 17:24.8, and Chase Field 84th in 17:56.2.

St. Louis was ninth as a team. Connor Pilmore was 18th in 16:44.3, while Evan Goodell was 29th in 17:06.5, Collin Shaw 36th in 17:11.5, and Zack Ross 96th in 18:08.7.

Bullock Creek was 11th, led by James Sira, seventh in 16:15.9.

Lansing Catholic senior Keenan Rebera runs to victory during the Division 3 finals at MIS earlier this month. Rebera led the Cougars to a third place finish.



Grand Blanc's Fisher wins Division 1 state CC title

DAN STICKRADT

For Sports Scene
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BROOKLYN — Grant Fisher had to make a choice last November. The Grand Blanc sophomore had to choose between the boys' soccer state finals and the boys' cross-country state championship.

Being involved in two sports in the same season, Fisher was caught in a pickle. The Bobcats soccer team reached the Division 1 state title game against East Kentwood, while the previous weekend, the cross country team had qualified for the championship.

Same day at the same time equaled conflict.

Fisher headed to Troy Athens for the soccer finals that day and left his cross country dreams behind. East Kentwood defeated Grand Blanc 1-0 for the title that day.

This year, Fisher decided before the state tournament that he would attend the cross country state meet, regardless of his soccer team's postseason success. As it turned out, Grand Blanc was upset in the boys' soccer district final by Clarkston, 1-0.

"I knew before the season that I was definitely going to cross country," said Fisher. "I really wanted to do well this year, especially missing last year."

Fisher capped an unbeaten season against Michigan runners Saturday at Michigan International Speedway,

cruising to the Division 1 title in 15:13.7, despite chilly temperatures that hovered around 45 degrees and solid mud at some points of the 3.1-mile course.

Locked in a tight race with Milford's Brian Kettle at the two-mile mark, Fisher pulled away. Kettle, the defending state champion, ran 15:31.7 and finished second. Royal Oak's Ben Hill (15:41.2), Waterford Mott's Ryan Robinson (15:42.6), and Okemos' Daniel Kroth (15:43.5) finished out the top five.

"This is my first state title in cross country. This is what I trained for," said Fisher. "I knew it would be close. I had to keep pushing. I really picked it up after the two-mile mark."

A total of 22 runners broke 16 minutes in the unfavorable conditions. Milford, the defending champion, only had one other runner in the top 30 but came through in the clutch with four in the top 61 to win the team crown again with 165 points. Ranked third in the polls going in, Milford prevailed despite their No. 5 runner, Clinton Caddell, fighting through an injury.

"It's nice considering the adversary we had to face," noted veteran Milford coach Bryan Sayers, whose team captured its fifth state crown since 2003. "Clinton was just coming back and was not at full strength. We had to have other runners step up, and we did. In a wide-open, high-scoring race, we had enough to win it again. Anything can happen. We were five points better today and only 15 better than the third place team."



Grand Blanc's Grant Fisher gets set to cross the finish line during the Division 1 state finals held at MIS earlier this month. (Jeff McGinthy photos)

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Area Athletes Take Advantage Of Early Signing Period To Decide Their Future



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Zac Hall of St. Johns



Maddy Seeley of Alma



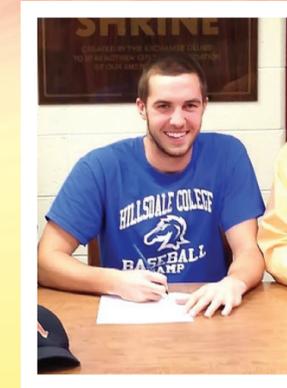
Rachael McInerney of Saginaw Nouvel



Karli Herrington of Hemlock



Brenna Pawelkowsk of Saginaw Nouvel



Mike Young of Alma



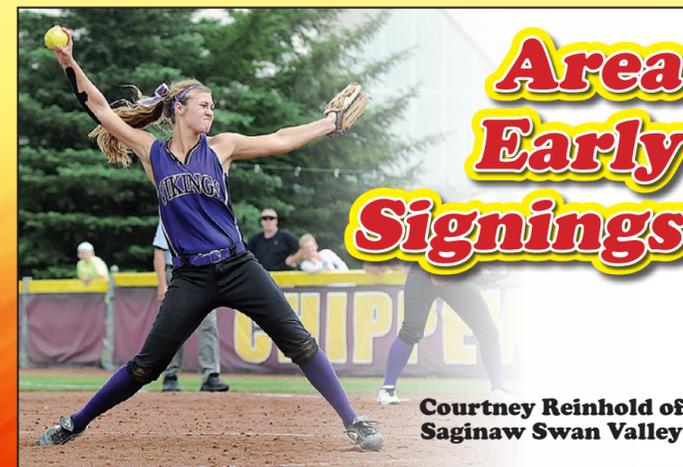
Maison Kalina of Midland Bullock Creek



Sara Hansen of Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart



Lindsay Winter of Clare



Area Early Signings

Courtney Reinhold of Saginaw Swan Valley

Jess Walter, Midland High, basketball, (Indiana University)
 Zac Hall, St. Johns, wrestling, (University of Michigan)
 Karli Herrington, Hemlock, basketball, (Central Michigan University)
 Lacy Tolfree, Saginaw Heritage, softball, (Central Michigan University)
 Sara Hansen, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart, softball, (Central Michigan University)
 Maison Kalina, Midland Bullock Creek, softball, (Central Michigan University)
 Maddy Seeley, Alma, basketball, (Northwood)
 Mike Young, Alma, baseball, (Hillsdale)
 Courtney Reinhold, Saginaw Swan Valley, softball, (Grand Valley State University)
 Lindsay Winter, Clare, basketball, (Michigan Tech University)
 Rachael McInerney, Saginaw Nouvel, basketball, (Ferris State University)
 Brenna Pawelkowsk, Saginaw Nouvel, soccer, (Butler University)
 Garrett Stehley, Lowell, wrestling, (Lehigh University)



Garrett Stehley of Lowell



Lacy Tolfree of Saginaw Heritage

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Lansing area flexes MUSCLES

East Lansing (D2), Lansing Christian (D4) win state boys soccer titles

East Lansing secures championship with 2-0 win over Spring Lake

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

While the East Lansing boys soccer team won the Division 2 state title with a 2-0 victory over Spring Lake this month, the seeds of that championship were planted last October, when the Trojans lost in the regional championship match.

"We lost in the regional finals last year, and the guys were kind of upset they let that one get away," said veteran head coach Nick Archer, who completed his 38th year of coaching with the Trojans this fall. "From where we came from, we were a work in progress. We had our scorers coming back from last year, but it took us awhile; it was near midseason when they somehow decided to play both sides of the ball."

Once the Trojans put their explosive offense together with their stingy defense, they proved to be tough to beat. They began their title run down the stretch when they captured the CAAC Cup Tournament.

"We played real well in cup play," Archer said. "There were four teams rated in the state - Holt, Okemos, DeWitt, Mason. We made it all the way through, and we gained some confidence heading into state tournament play." East Lansing won the CAAC Cup Tournament with a 2-1 win over Holt in the championship match.

Once the Trojans hit the state tournament, they were unbeatable. They went 3-0 in district play and outscored their three opponents by a 12-1 combined score, finishing by defeating DeWitt 4-1 in the title match.

They were just as dominant in the regional at Fenton, as they defeated Lapeer East 4-0 in the semifinal and Linden 3-0 in the final.

East Lansing's closest match of the state tournament came in the state semifinal, when it edged Lake Shore 1-0. "That was our closest call," Archer said. "We were up 1-0, and they hit a crossbar late in the game, but we went on to win it."

East Lansing finished the season with a 25-2 overall

record. The state title was the fourth in school history, adding to those won in 1987, 2002, and 2005. The school also finished as state runner-up twice.

East Lansing outscored its opponents 95-17 this season. Junior forward DeJuan Jones led the team in scoring with 27 goals and eight assists. He was also named first-team all-state. Senior forward Ben Swanson-Ralph was selected second-team all-state, while senior midfielder Tommy Lammers was a third-team all-state selection. Senior goalkeeper Blair Moore and senior defender Michie Nimsombun were both named honorable-mention all-state.

Moore missed part of the early season because of an injury. "We lost Blair to a hand injury early in the season," Archer said. "Chris Wallace stepped in and did a nice job for us. We got Blair back just before Cup play. The kids have a lot of confidence with him back there."

With a fourth state title in the trophy case, the Trojans will be looking to add another next year.

"We have DeJuan back and some other kids back," Archer said. "Some of our younger kids did very well, and we expect them to improve. Next year will be a new season, and it depends on how hard they want it and are willing to work."



The East Lansing boys soccer team celebrates after defeating Spring Lake earlier this month during the D2 soccer finals at East Kentwood Middle School. East Lansing finishes the season 25-2. (Tom Reynolds photo)

Lansing Christian too much for Covenant Christian; wins D4 crown 1-0

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

So much for the experts.

Despite finishing the season with an unbeaten record, the Lansing Christian boys soccer team never cracked the top ten of the state soccer rankings all season and were listed as honorable mention in the final regular-season poll.

Despite being unranked, the Pilgrims shocked the state and captured the Division 4 state championship by defeating top-ranked Covenant Christian 1-0 in the state final. The win capped the finest season in school history, as the team finished with a 22-0-1 record.

"It has been a lot of hard work, especially from our seniors," said coach Joel Vande Kopple. "After three tough years losing in the regional finals, we finally broke through. Everything just fell in place for us. Everything came together, and it starts with the seniors. It was their last chance. They really wanted to give it their all."

It's not as if the Pilgrims were an unknown coming into the season. They had reached the regional final the last three years but were unable to break through and secure a regional title until this season.

"It's always been a dream to go to the state championship," said senior forward Jordan Terry. "We've been working hard and striving hard every year to get there. It felt good to get past the regional finals."

A four-year varsity player, Terry has been a team leader for the Pilgrims, and he came up big in the state title game by scoring the game-winning goal early in the second half off an assist from Alex McDowell.

Terry also led the way for the Pilgrims in their state semifinal match with Roeper School. He scored a pair of goals in a 4-1 Christian win, with Jacob Lyon and Brayan Guzman-Ortiz also scoring for the Pilgrims.

Terry was the catalyst of the team all season, leading in scoring with 27 goals and 11 assists. Junior Martin Lang, Jr. added 18 goals during the season, while Guzman-Ortiz and McDowell scored 11 goals apiece.

While the Pilgrims had a potent offense, it was the play of the defense that was key in the state tournament. Lansing Christian outscored its tournament opponents 22-1, with the lone goal allowed in the state semifinal win.

"At the beginning of the year, our big worry

was if we can keep teams from scoring, because we knew we were going to score a lot of goals," Vande Kopple said.

The Pilgrims had six seniors on this year's roster, and the state title capped what has been a memorable four-year run.

"It was a lot of hard work," Vande Kopple said. "Three months put into it, and really for a lot of these guys, it was a lot more than that, for the seniors especially."

"It feels really good," Terry said. "I can't really describe it. It is something we all wanted. I am just happy we pulled it out."



The Lansing Christian boys soccer team wrapped up an undefeated season by defeating Grand Rapids Covenant Christian 1-0 during the Division 4 state soccer finals earlier this month at East Kentwood Middle School. The Pilgrims finished the Year 22-0-1. (Tom Reynolds photo)

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CINDERELLA RUN

Flint Powers gets hot in playoffs; caps magical season with D3 title

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

“What a long, strange trip it’s been.”

The album by the Grateful Dead best sums up the storybook season that the Powers Catholic boys soccer team put together this season.

At one point during the season, the Chargers had a 4-8 record, and a state championship was one of the last things on the minds of the players and coaches.

Turning the season around was something that the Chargers were determined to do. Not only did they turn the season around, but they also went on a thrilling state-tournament run that ended with a dramatic, sudden-death shootout victory in the Division 3 state final against Grand Rapids South Christian.

“It’s just unbelievable,” Powers coach Tony Rowe said. “It is a storybook. We were 4-8 at one point this season. I told one of my friends that it was like a 30 for 30 feature. We just got on a roll at the right time and kept on rolling.”

While a state title seemed next to impossible at the time the Chargers were sitting at 4-8, the team was not ready to lower its goals or expectations.

“We didn’t think it was impossible to get to state,” Rowe said. “Any time you play, you want to get to the state finals. These guys were just awesome.”

Not only was the regular-season a strange ride for the Chargers, but the state tournament was also filled with twists and turns.

Powers opened up tournament play by winning the district it hosted. The Chargers scored 19 goals in three district wins, while they gave up seven goals. They defeated Lake Fenton 6-2 in the opener, Corunna 7-1 in the semifinal, and Durand 6-4 in a district final barnburner.

Defense took center stage in the regional at Freeland. Powers blanked Hemlock 3-0 in the semifinal and then defeated Williamston 1-0 in the final.



The Flint Powers boys soccer team was 4-8 at one point during the season, but got hot late in the year winning its last 10 games en route to a Division 3 state title. The title match was a defensive struggle from start to finish. After a back and forth first half, Grand Rapids South Christian began to carry the play in the second half, but the game ended in regulation in a 0-0 tie. The two teams finished an overtime period with no goals being scored, which sent the game into a shootout. The Chargers finished the year 14-8. (Butch Harmon photos)

The Chargers moved on to defeat Lutheran High School North 2-1 in the state semifinal to get into the final against South Christian.

The title match was a defensive struggle from start to finish. After a back and forth first half, South Christian began to carry the play in the second half, but the game ended in regulation in a 0-0 tie.

The two teams finished an overtime period with no goals being scored, which sent the game into a shootout.

South Christian led 3-2 in the shootout, but Powers tied the match when Christian Mansour scored on the final shot to send the match into a sudden-death shootout. Both teams scored on their first two shots of sudden death. In the third round, Powers’ goalkeeper Stephen Wilbur came up with a save. That set the stage for Powers sophomore Erich Ruth to win the game on the next shot.

“When I stepped up to the ball, I kept my eyes on one post the whole time,” Ruth said. “Then I shot it the other way. I just tried to keep my composure.”

After Ruth’s shot went in the goal, the Chargers erupted onto the field, their storybook finish complete.

“It’s just crazy,” Wilbur said. “It’s a dream come true.”

It’s a dream that the Chargers never gave up on. “We just kept working all season,” said senior captain Charlie Emmert. “We went to practice every day and kept working. I told the guys the state finals are November 2, so keep your parking passes until November first.”

Heritage soccer falls in district finals

After just nine wins in the regular season, the Heritage soccer team came together in the postseason. The Hawks topped Midland and Midland Dow in the first two rounds of districts before falling to Traverse City West in the championship game.

“The guys were a very talented group that struggled with playing to our potential all season,” head coach Michelle Noble said of the 11-6-6 team. “During the last regular season game of the season, something seemed to click. We unfortunately lost in a battle and a shoot-out against T.C. West, but we peaked at the right time but have some thoughts of unfinished business linger.”

As for what hindered the team’s success earlier in the year, the coach felt it was because a few players needed to let go.

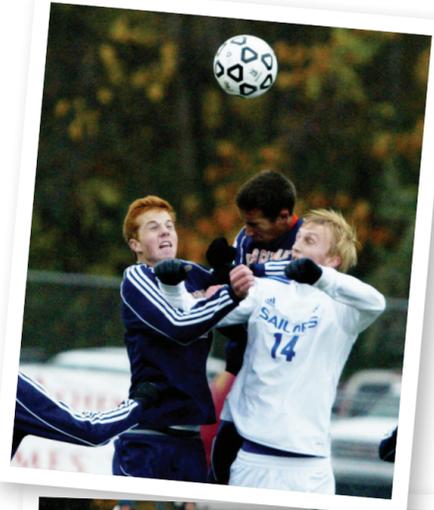
“Some of the guys were resistant to the plan

and what they had to contribute in order for us to be successful, because everyone has a role,” Noble said. “Once they bought into hard work and realizing we need to play as one unit, things began to change.”

The coach pointed to several players as reasons for their late season surge, including 20-plus goal scorer Connor Flynn, Jake Lopez, Riley Cavenaugh, AJ Williams, Trevor Swartz, and Noah Troxell.

“Very difficult [to have season end], but this season I knew we had it in us to go farther than what we did,” Noble said “I was very happy with how we played in districts. Hopefully it lights a fire for us next season.

“I’m encouraged, even though we will be graduating 10 seniors and some very talented players,” Noble added. “I hope the guys realize what hard work can get you and live it out. I’m confident we have learned from this season and will use it as a learning tool for what’s to come.”



Saginaw Heritage made it all the way through to the district finals before losing to Traverse City West. The Hawks had a solid district showing by defeating Midland High and Midland Dow before losing to West. (Scott Keyes photo)

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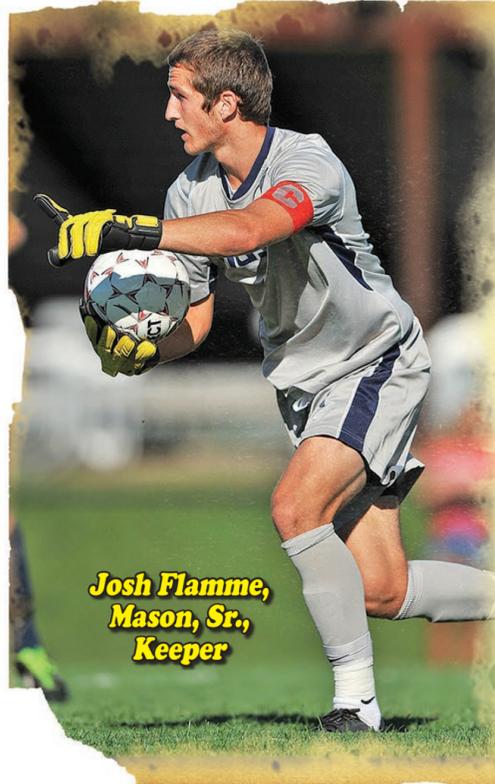
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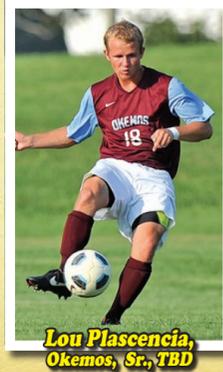
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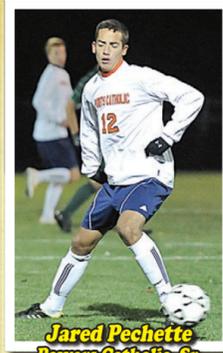
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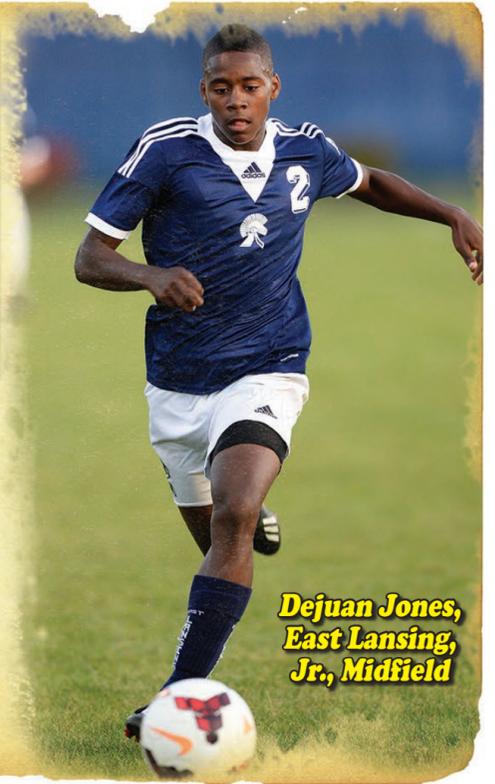
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Midfield**



**Charlie Emmert,
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Midfield**



**Dejuan Jones,
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Mitch Smith, DeWitt, Sr., Forward
Zach Bakos, Linden, Sr., Forward
Lyle Hunter, Williamston, Sr., Defender

Nathan Weeks, Montrose, Sr., Keeper
Nathan Garpiel, Saginaw Nouvel, Sr., Defender
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ALL-STATE HONORS GO TO....

Breckenridge's Kirsten Olling Earned Her Fourth Straight Division 4 State Championship During The Recent State Cross Country Finals At Michigan International Speedway. Olling And The Huskies Finished Second In D4 Behind Beal City.



Cedar Springs Kenzie Weiler Finished First In The Division 2 Race.

Jeff McGinthy Photo

Area Runners Run Toward All-State Status

John Raffel Sports Scene

Many area teams competed and many athletes earned all-state honors at the Lower Peninsula State cross country finals Nov. 2 at Michigan

International Speedway. Teams and individuals competed. The top 30 individuals overall earned all-state honors in their respective classes.

DIVISION 1 GIRLS

Team: Rockford, 5th, 169; Midland Dow, 12th, 357; East Lansing, 17th, 439; Bay City Western, 21st, 511.

All-Staters: 2-Lauren Brasure, Rockford, 17:48; 5-Jordan Storer, Midland Dow, 18:09.9; 9-Kali Dent, Midland Dow, 18:20.1; 17-Kerianna Schoff, Rockford, 18:31.7.

DIVISION 1 BOYS

Team: Heritage, 6th, 205; Rockford, 12th, 336

All-Staters: 5-Daniel Kroth, Okemos, 15:43.4; 25-Dietrich Hittner, East Lansing, 16:01.7

DIVISION 2 GIRLS

Team: Dewitt, 11th, 309; Cedar Springs, 15th, 356; Garber, 17th, 429; Charlotte, 22nd, 19:05.7

All-Staters: 1-Kenzie Weiler, Cedar Springs, 17:55.1; 3-Karrigan Smith, St. Johns, 18:04.0; 4-Meg Darmofal, Mason, 18:21.8; 8-Megan O'Neil, Chippewa Hills, 18:50.5; 18-Teresa Myles, Belding, 19:14.3; 21-Kayla Kraft, St. Johns, 19:17.2; 24-Shelby Waterson, DeWitt, 19:23.2

DIVISION 2 BOYS

Team: Mason, 12th, 326; Corunna, 16th, 389; Essexville-Garber, 25th, 606.

All-Staters: 1-Austin Sargeant, Cedar Springs, 15:42.7; 2-Mason VanDyke, Mason, 15:48.5; 3-Blake Watson, Corunna, 15:52.5; 4-Alex McCormick, Haslett, 15:58.1; 7-Codey Cook, St. Johns, 16:08.8; 16-Paul Pioszak, Mason, 16:16.1

DIVISION 3 GIRLS

Team: Shepherd, 1st, 120; Clare, 9th, 257; Ithaca, 10th, 260; Lansing Catholic, 13th, 294; Frankenmuth 21st, 560; Freeland 23rd, 571; Reese, 25, 611,

All-Staters: 7-Kaylie Rhynard, Shepherd, 18:55.5; 10-Jasmine Harper, Clare, 18:59; 11-Courtney Allen, Ithaca, 19:08.3; 12-Katelyn Hutchinson, Shepherd, 19:12.8; 13-Hannah Davis, St. Louis, 19:19.4; 14-Abigail Gilmore, Lansing Catholic, 19:20.2; 16-Emily Sievert, Frankenmuth, 19:21.5; 17-Kaitlin Beyer, Carson City-Crystal, 19:22.8; 24-Megan Heft, Hopkins, 19:33.2.

DIVISION 3 BOYS

Team: Lansing Catholic, 3rd, 189; Clare, 4th, 192; St. Louis, 9th, 292; Bullock Creek, 11th, 332; Hemlock, 17th, 363; Frankenmuth, 21st, 560; Freeland, 23rd, 571; Reese, 25th, 611

All-Staters: 1-Keenan Rebera, Lansing Catholic, 15:31; 11-James Sira, Bullock Creek, 16:15.9; 14-Hunter Nivison, Clare, 16:27.4; 17-Alex Stowell, Freeland, 16:33; 25-Kyler Phillips, Clare, 16:39.9; 28-Brendan Klynstra, Saranac, 16:42.9; 29-Connor Pilmore, St. Louis, 16:44.3

DIVISION 4 GIRLS

Team: Beal City, 1st, 120; Breckenridge, 2nd, 136; Pewamo-Westphalia, 4th, 160; Montabella, 9th, 260

All-Staters: 1-Kirsten Olling, Breckenridge, 17:44.9; 10-Hannah Steffke, Beal City, 19:27; 11-Taylor Smith, Montabella, 19:28.2; 13-Betsy Arens, Pewamo-Westphalia, 19:45.2; 15-Alexis McConnell, Sacred Heart, 19:46.3; 19-Hannah Neyer, Beal City, 19:57.0; 27-Kensington Garvey, Montabella, 20:07.7; 30-Emily Steffke, Beal City, 20:12.5

DIVISION 4 BOYS

Team: Sacred Heart Academy, 2nd, 121; Pewamo-Westphalia, 6th, 162; Beal City, 7th 242; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, 14th, 411

All-Staters: 4-Cooper Terry, Sacred Heart, 16:39.4; 5-Tanner Droste, Pewamo-Westphalia, 16:43.4; 10-Nick Pung, Beal City, 16:56.5; 11-Zach Feldpausch, Fowler, 16:57.7; 12- Jim English, Sacred Heart, 16:58.1; 16-Logan Moyle, Sacred Heart, 16:59.3; 18-Caleb Barker, Pewamo-Westphalia, 17:01.3; 30-Ethan Schafer, Beal City, 17:13

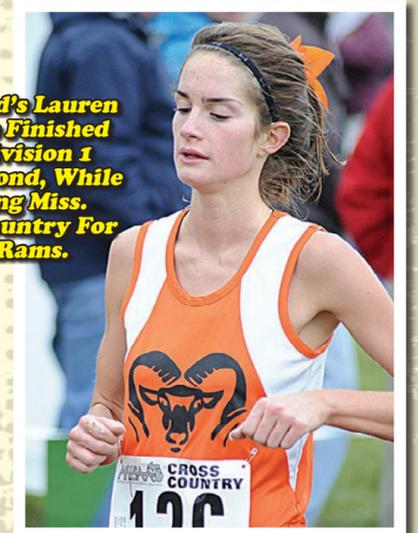


Jeff McGinthy Photo

Austin Sargeant Gave Cedar Springs A Clean Sweep In The Division 2 Finals Joining Teammate Kenzie Weiler, Who Won The Girls Race.



Haslett's Alex McCormick Finished Fourth In The Division 2 State Finals To Receive All-State Honors.



Rockford's Lauren Brasure Finished The Division 1 Race Second, While Earning Miss. Cross Country For The Rams.



Kyle Guster won't let an ACL injury slow him down; Expects to make full recovery

Geoff Mott Sports Scene

FREELAND – Injuries never slowed Kyle Guster. Through his time on the football field, the basketball court, and the track, the Freeland senior missed just three days of competition because of the flu. His health allowed him to improve in each sport over the years, culminating in a 2013 summer that drew attention from both collegiate track and football coaches. Last summer, he qualified for the 400-meter relay with Swan Valley's Alex Grace, Nouvel Catholic Central's Tyler Hendricks, and Arthur Hill's Anthony DeBardelaben at the USA Junior Nationals. Later in the summer, Guster joined Grace, Heritage's Brian Cole, and Saginaw's Keyon Addison in winning the NFL 7-on-7 National Tournament championship in Cleveland. All signs pointed to a big senior season of football on a talented Freeland team. Then, on the final scrimmage of the preseason, Guster took a sweep play around end against Bay City Western. "I beat the guy to the edge and he kind of dove at my backside," the 5'11", 170-pound Guster said. "Another guy came, and I put my shoulder into him to fight for yards instead of hopping out of bounds like I could have. "I planted and my knee was exposed, and the first guy rolled up on me. It popped and cracked. It was the worst pain I've felt in my life." Guster tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, along with partially tearing both menisci in his left knee. It was the third straight season that Freeland lost its best running back during preseason play. David Ruhlman separated a shoulder in 2011, while Matt Schauman also tore the ACL in his left knee. "It's pretty tough to get over mentally," said Schauman, a freshman at Delta College. "The hardest part is watching your team play in a close game. You want to be out there and see if you could make the difference." Schauman tried to rehabilitate his knee instead of having surgery. He was on the mend for a month and played two and a half games before twisting it again. He then had



Freeland's Kyle Guster saw a promising senior season flash before his eyes as he tore his ACL during a scrimmage before the start of the football season; Guster is determined to get back to good health and possibly walk on as a college freshman at Michigan State University next summer. Guster hopes to be healthy in time for track season in the spring. (Scott Keyes photos)

it scoped at St. Mary's of Michigan, and an ankle tendon graft from a cadaver was used to repair it. Schauman was on his way to watch Guster and the Falcons scrimmage when he heard news that his friend had suffered the same injury. "I was about five minutes away and my mom called me," Schauman said. "I texted him, and he was busy with the doctors. Once I got a hold of him, I just told him to keep his head high and look to the future. He's an all-stater in track, and he's going to have a great season in the spring. "You have to keep your head in the right place. Freak accidents happen, but he's a hard worker. He'll get over this." It was devastating for Guster after a summer without a vacation. While he worked out with the USA Junior National relay team and the 7-on-7 football team, he also went to basketball camps and worked for his father, Craig Guster, at All-Terrain Landscaping. "I lifted weights every day and then went to work," Guster said. "After work, it was track and basketball, or football and track, or football and basketball. I was getting faster and stronger by doing all the extra stuff. I didn't get tired easily. I felt really good." After the injury, Craig Guster helped his son to his feet and into the car. They went for x-rays, and after five

days got the bad news from the MRI. "My dad was hit pretty hard by the injury," Kyle said. "He played football and baseball throughout, and he beat himself up that he could have done more. He pushed me. He was my youth football coach and always helped me along." The healing process didn't get off to as fast a start as Guster does on the track, where he holds the school record in the 100-meter dash at 11.0 seconds. He's close to schools records in the 200- and 400-dashes and helped the 400-meter relay team to an all-state finish. He was originally scheduled for surgery on Sept. 18, which would have taken away his chance to dress and take the final three snaps in Freeland's 34-6 win over Shepherd in the school's annual Clash for a Cure game. He had the surgery rescheduled for the following week at McLaren Bay Region Medical Center, but the doctor declined to do the surgery, forcing Guster to look elsewhere. He ended up going to Dr. Michael B. Shingles at Michigan State University for surgery in early October. "They put me in the pre-op room at 9 a.m. and surgery was at 10:30 a.m. It was the longest hour and a half of my life," said Guster, who passed time

watching SportsCenter. "They slowly drugged me down, and I was out while getting carted down the hallway. "Next thing I know I'm talking to a lady holding a big knee brace with a gauze pad and cooler on my knee." Doctors used a graft from Guster's hamstring and two small pieces of tendons from his ankle. The doctor sutured the tendons together and attached them on both ends of his knee. The doctor also repaired the lateral meniscus, which had a small tear from an earlier injury. "I missed a week of school and spent two weeks of non-weight bearing on two crutches," Kyle Guster said. "Then I went to one crutch, and now I have range of motion nearly completely back. It doesn't hurt anymore, but it's tight after therapy." He now trains at Auburn Physical Therapy. He tosses around a medicine ball, does various flexibility stretches on huge exercise balls, and works on balance three days a week. "I love it over there," Kyle said. "They make it fun and have me doing a lot of different types of exercises." Guster still has interest from track programs at Division III schools, including Hillsdale College, but he is driven to attend Michigan State University and walk on to the football team. He's been interested since playing 7-on-7 with MSU football camp coordinator Curtis Blackwell. "He's a good guy and has done a lot to get my name out there," Kyle said. "I went down on a couple visits to practices and games, and it's been nice to stick around football and the games. I have planned to play college football since the beginning of last year, hitting the weight room and gaining more speed. "I'm hoping to walk on at MSU. If I do or don't play football, I want to at least try. It's go big or go home." And it's that spirit that will help carry Guster through six months of rehabilitation before he gets the chance to salvage his senior year of athletics on the track. The senior will support the basketball team, even though he's not allowed to lace up. "My goal was always to get back for track season; work hard and get back for track," Schauman said. "It's a bummer, but it's something that happens in life. I told Kyle that your athletic career could end sooner or later, but it's not going to end now. "You need something to look forward to, and he has a lot to look forward to."

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Brothers show Ithaca football is more than just winning; Family means everything

Geoff Mott Sports Scene

ITHACA – On a much smaller scale, the football-playing Smith family from Ithaca High School can draw comparisons to the NFL royal family of Manning.

Father Archie Manning played NFL football. Ithaca High School football players Travis and Jacob Smith's mother Aubrey comes from a family that produced five all-state athletes at Meridian High School.

Both families have three sons that include two quarterbacks and, at the moment, one receiver.

While Cooper Manning didn't make it to the pro level, brothers Peyton and Eli Manning have a combined three Super Bowl titles at quarterback.

Travis Smith is in his senior season at quarterback, and after getting brought up to varsity as a freshman, he helped Ithaca win three straight state championships. Sophomore Jacob Smith is one of Travis Smith's top targets this season, while sixth grader and appropriately named Peyton Smith could be the best quarterback of the group.

"He probably better than either of us," boasts the 6'2", 205-pound Travis Smith, who has committed to play football at University of Toledo next fall. "He works out all the time, and he'll be a hard worker up here someday."

Travis Smith is 41-0 as a starter for the Yellowjackets. Going into the Division 6 state semifinal game against Montrose, Ithaca was on a 54-game winning streak. As a sophomore, he completed 159 of 234 passes for 1,999 yards and 19 touchdowns and only threw two interceptions. He also ran for 879 yards and 18 touchdowns on 116 carries.

Last season, Travis connected on 108 of 174 passes for 1,651 yards and 28 touchdowns with five interceptions. He ran the ball 90 times for 600 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Heading into the Montrose game, the 18-year-old had completed 154 of 211 passes for 2,773 yards and 35 touchdowns with six interceptions this season. On the ground he has 475 yards and nine touchdowns on 59 carries.

Jacob Smith caught 26 of his older brother's passes this year for 441 yards and five touchdowns. He also has 241 rushing yards and four touchdowns and has completed 14 of 18 passes for 180 yards as backup quarterback.



"The season has gone great, and with this being his senior year, I'm giving it my all," Jacob said. "I love playing with him. He's always focused on game day, and that's what helps him perform well."

"I didn't get the chance to play with him on the field until this year, but we have worked out together in the backyard. We've got great chemistry out there and the timing to make things happen."

The two brothers have a tight bond. "It's definitely cool to be able to play with my little brother this year," Travis said. "We've played basketball together but not football, so this is special."

"We're really close. We have a little rivalry in 1-on-1 basketball."

While the brothers enjoy the bond on the field, father Bret Smith watches anxiously from the stands.

"It's pretty exciting, but I'm not sure how to explain how I feel watching it," said Brett Smith, a 1989 graduate of Ithaca. "I'm pretty nervous during the game."

The worst feeling was during last year's third state title game when Travis went down with a shoulder injury at Ford Field. Logan Hessbrook came in relief to lead the Yellowjackets to a 37-27 win over Constantine.

"It was a terrible feeling for a parent to go through," Bret Smith said. "I went down to the sidelines to try and lift his spirit. But he stayed close to Logan and kept focused on helping him."

Travis Smith believes he set a good example for his brothers to follow as field general at quarterback for the Ithaca program.

"I definitely think [Jacob] is ready for it, and I'm pretty proud to hand it over to him," Travis said. "Yeah, there will be pressure. But I had a lot of pressure filling in for [Central Michigan quarterback] Alex Niznak."

Jacob knows he has to be ready for the fall of 2014. "I'll be preparing all off-season," he said. "I've got to make sure this team will be ready to go."

Jacob Smith will graduate one year before Peyton Smith enters high school, so the Smith era will span 10 seasons at Ithaca. Will Peyton Smith outshine his older brothers, much like Eli Manning did with his two Super Bowl titles?

"As of right now, judging by their arms in sixth grade, Peyton has the most intangibles to be better in everything on the field," Bret Smith said. "We'll wait and see."



Ithaca's Jake Smith



Ithaca's Travis Smith is headed to the University of Toledo next season and along with his younger brother (Jake) have helped lead the Ithaca football team to its fourth consecutive D6 title game. Heading into the state championship game Travis Smith was a perfect 42-0 during his career. (Scott Keyes and Kevin Chaffin photos)

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Mr. Consistent

Geoff Mott
Sports Scene

ITHACA – Eli Villalobos has been a consistent contributor at wide receiver, at defensive back, and on special teams for the Ithaca football team this season.

But it was his attitude last season that impressed Ithaca coach Terry Hessbrook the most.

“He’s so skilled and talented, and yet he was a kid who couldn’t get on the field last season,” Hessbrook said. “He’s a kid that kept his mouth shut and kept working and working. I’m so proud of that attitude, and that really helps out on a team like this.”

“And he came in this season ready to play.”

Villalobos has made contributions in all facets of the game this postseason, as the Yellowjackets pursue a fourth-straight Division 6 state championship.

He had a 30-yard kick return and a rushing touchdown in the first round, 36-0 win over Meridian. He returned a punt 47 yards for a touchdown, had nine tackles, and caught six balls for 83 yards in the 42-7 win over Glen Lake. He followed that with a 25-yard touchdown reception, five catches for 66 yards, and an interception on defense in the 62-34 win over Negaunee in the state quarterfinal game at Ithaca.

Villalobos contributed on special teams throughout last season’s run to the state title, and he’s happy to have made a seamless transition into the starting lineup this year.

“I played a lot in the second half of games last year, and that experience helped,” Villalobos said. “It didn’t discourage me. I just wanted to help out in any way that I could. It was all worth it, because it prepared me for this season.”

Villalobos had scored in nine of the Ithaca’s 12 games heading into the state semifinal game with Montrose. Of his 13 touchdowns, six came through the air, two on the ground, four on punt returns, and one on an interception return.

“I feel I can go out there and do whatever to help the team win,” Villalobos said.

The 5’8”, 150-pounder played with quarterback Travis Smith on the freshman football team and made an easy adjustment into the passing game.

“He knows exactly how to run this system out here,” Villalobos said. “It took a little while for me to figure it out, but we’ve played a lot of catch, and the timing is there.”

The Yellowjackets are on an amazing run of 54 straight victories heading into the state semifinal, but that mark isn’t what inspired Villalobos to give everything to the program.

“I remember watching [former Ithaca receiver] J.T. Jones when I was little,” Villalobos said. “I couldn’t wait to get out here and be part of this.”



Eli Villalobos continues to get it done for the Yellowjackets

Senior wide receiver Eli Villalobos has been one of the most consistent players for the Ithaca football team this season. (Scott Keyes photos)

Jake Oszust Brief

Jacob Oszust became the first Ithaca High School tennis player in five years to win the Tri Valley Conference Tournament.

“Jacob has had a great year and has been the most valuable player on our team this year,” said Ithaca tennis coach Marc Mercer.

At the TVC event, Jacob was seeded No. 4 overall and beat his Ovid-Elsie opponent in the first round for the fourth straight time.

“It was a good match and Jacob played great, winning the first set in a tie breaker,” Mercer said. “In his second round, Jacob faced the No. 1 seed from Essexville Garber. With Essexville winning the dual match earlier in the year, it looked as if this would not be a close match at all. However, Jacob stuck with their three singles player point for point and could have won the first set. He did, however, win the second set and sent it to a three setter where he won a memorable match in a back-and-forth tie-breaker.”

“Once Jacob beat Garber, he was on to the finals match, where he faced Frankenmuth, a team he lost to earlier in the year in straight sets. Jacob was determined and took a close first set. In the second set, Jacob was focused and closed out very nicely. It was nice to see a player knock off a perennial giant in Essexville Garber, a team that has won almost all flights each season I have coached. I spoke with Jacob before his final match, and we talked about how beating Garber was not our only goal, and how he had bigger goals to meet. We also discussed how momentum was in his court, and he was playing great tennis.”



Midland High puts together another solid season

Geoff Mott
Sports Scene

MIDLAND – Every week of the season, Midland High’s football team improved.

The growth and improvement was not lost on head coach Eric Methner. “You are always optimistic to start the season as a coach, and you know a lot of things are going to occur,” he said. “We got better as the season went on. We had a lot of seniors starting for the first time this year, because they had good players in front of them last year. We had question marks, and these guys did a good job.”

Midland High’s only blemish during the regular season was a 50-42 shootout loss to Mount Pleasant in Week 5. Mount Pleasant finished unbeaten in the league and won the Saginaw Valley League North, while the Chemics finished second.

Midland thrashed rival Midland Dow 45-6 to close the regular season, and it and beat Marquette 41-10 in the playoff opener before beating Dow again, 56-28, in the second round of the playoffs. Muskegon, which advanced to the Division 2 state title game, ended the Chemics season at 10-2 with a 24-7 win in the quarterfinals.

Senior Will Williams was dynamic in the backfield, finishing with 1,841 yards and 26 touchdowns on 295 carries. He averaged 6.2 yards per carry before an all-senior offensive line that included three first-year starters.

“They really gained confidence and worked together as a unit,” Methner said. “We started putting together an effective running game in the three to four weeks before playing Muskegon.”

Tanner Gross completed 122 of 207 passes for 1,720 yards and 14 touchdowns, with six

interceptions. Austen Irrer was his favorite target, catching 48 passes for 689 yards and five touchdowns.

Linebacker Michael Alexander led the defense with 138 tackles and two interceptions. “In my opinion, [Alexander] was the best defensive football player on the field every week,” Methner said. “He’s a senior who is starting to be recruited by Division 2 schools.”

Williams, offensive linemen Austin Rapanos and Zach Stirn, and kicker Phil Wandor all received All-SVL North first team offense honors, while Alexander and defensive lineman Colin Colton earned All-SVL North first team defense honors.

“We started three sophomores and a couple of juniors, but for the most part, this was a senior-laden team,” Methner said. “It will be another challenge for next year’s senior class to work hard over the winter and put in the work.”

“Hopefully they can leave a legacy in their senior season.”



The Midland High football team traveled to Muskegon Nov. 16 and lost 24-7 in the regional finals. (Kim Johnson photo)

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Unsung Heroes

Beal City linemen lead way for Aggies tough ground game

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Any successful high school football team most likely has a top-notch offensive line. This has been true for the Beal City Aggies this season.

The tight ends are Carson Salisbury at the left side and Ryan Tilmann on the right. Left tackle is Nick Ward. Right tackle Austin Cook was a running back who was moved to the line. Tackles are Jacob Flaughter and Thomas Fussman, who both return from last season. The center is Kevin Bleise. The two tight ends, plus Ware and Bleise, are seniors.

Both tight ends and guards, plus the left tackle, started last year. Cook and Bleise were both on the varsity at different positions. Cook was fullback and Bleise was at linebacker.

"Salisbury is a great blocking tight end and has really caught the ball well this year," said coach Lou Rau. "He's made some spectacular catches when you least expect it."

Tilmann "is nicknamed 'Megatron' for his spectacular catches," Rau said. "He's a 6'3" guy with wide range in catching the ball."

Rau called Ward the "cerebral one of the bunch. Our other tackle, Austin Cook, is a converted fullback from last year," Rau said. "We like his athleticism up front."

Flaughter and Fussman started as sophomores for

Beal City last year. "They spent the off-season and really hit the weights hard," Rau said. "They put on probably 30 pounds each since last year. They really developed their strength and speed."

Bleise "is the steady hand who makes sure the ball gets to the same place every time," Rau said.

"This is a very athletic and strong line, physically," Rau said. "They're not huge but are physically strong and quick."

The best part of the line is that it's stayed intact all season with no notable absences. "They have to be able to play as a unit and be able to do different combination blocks," Rau said. "They all but Bleise play on defense, too."

Flaughter is the biggest lineman at 210 pounds. The smallest is 185 pounds. "We try to stress lean, fit physiques to be able to do the things we want to do," Rau said.

The impact of the offensive line on a team that started out 12-0 and is making a serious bid for a state title has been "huge," Rau said. "They've struggled at times but have always come up big when we've needed them to. They do a wide range of things from beginning our sweeps to pass blocking to all sorts of things. It's a very versatile group."



Tom Fussman (No. 53), Jake Flaughter (No. 73) and tackle Austin Cook (No. 69) have paved the way for the Aggies dominant running game this season. (Jared Moore Photos)

Mt Pleasant enjoys another solid season; falls to Zeeland West in regionals

Geoff Mott
Sports Scene

MOUNT PLEASANT – Mount Pleasant lost just two football games this fall.

DeWitt beat the Oilers 28-16 in the season opener and Zeeland West knocked off the Oilers 62-27 in a Division 3 quarterfinal game.

Mount Pleasant went on to win the Saginaw Valley League North for the fourth time in five seasons, and DeWitt advanced to meet Zeeland West in the Division 3 state championship game.

"It's really a neat storyline that those two teams that beat us are playing for the title," Mount Pleasant coach Jason McIntyre said. "It should be pretty fun to see."



Mt. Pleasant senior Blake Blackford (No. 63) celebrates with his teammates during a district finals win against Sault Ste. Marie.



The Mt. Pleasant football team finished the season 10-2 after losing to Zeeland West in the regionals. (Scott Keyes photos)

After losing a large group of seniors from a run to the state runner-up finish in 2011, the Oilers finished 5-4 last season, but were forced to forfeit three games and ended up 2-7. Mount Pleasant came back with another large group of experienced seniors this fall.

"We had a group of seniors that set their mind to be a part of something that we've done here," McIntyre said. "As a group last year, maybe we took for granted what we have, and that reality hits that you didn't commit."

"Individually this year, we were fundamentally there, and that success became reality. I'm really happy for what my seniors did."

After splitting time last season at quarterback, senior Robert Backus turned in a strong season, completing 112 of 168 passes for 1,708 yards. The 5'11", 165-pounder threw for 18 touchdowns against five interceptions and ran 87 times for 380 yards and four touchdowns.

"He threw three of those interceptions against DeWitt, including his first pass of the season," said McIntyre, who was voted the SVL North's Coach of the Year. "All that hard work and an interception, but he rebounded and stayed

focused. He only threw one more interception the rest of the year."

"In our biggest game of the year against Midland High, he threw for 311 and five touchdowns."

While Senior Michael Tweh led the ground attack with 993 yards on 146 carries in seven games played, senior receiver Eric Huber was named the SVL North's Most Valuable Player after doing about everything for the Oilers.

Huber caught 45 passes for 768 yards and six touchdowns, ran 22 times for 272 yards and four touchdowns, returned a kickoff 95 yards for a touchdown against Midland, and averaged 30 yards a punt for the season.

Hunter Buczkowski, one of three sophomore starters for the Oilers, led the defense with 121 tackles.

"We'll have kind of the issue next year [like in 2012], with a small senior class," McIntyre said. "We'll have a really strong junior class with those three sophomores getting experience, and we'll mix them in with our seniors."

"We have a lot of work ahead of us."

Oilers' Blake Blackford reflects on senior campaign; team solid

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Blake Blackford won't ever forget his senior football season at Mount Pleasant. The Oilers made it to the regional final, where they lost to Zeeland West and finished with a 10-2 record.

Mount Pleasant opened the season with a 28-16 loss to DeWitt. But starting with 21-14 and 42-21 victories over Powers Catholic and Bay City Central, the Oilers rolled off 10 straight triumphs. They qualified for the playoffs and collected 42-21 and 42-27 victories over Sparta and Sault Ste. Marie. But Zeeland West was too tough for the Oilers and defeated them 62-27.

A second-year varsity player, Blackford started at left guard and saw some action at middle linebacker. "I'm pretty quick off my feet," he said of being an offensive lineman. "I'm usually one of the first people off the ball."

This was Blackford's first year as a starter. "I thought I prepared pretty good for this year," he said. "I went to the weight room quite a bit."

Beating Midland 50-42 was a memorable moment for Mount Pleasant. "That's always our rivalry match of the year," Blackford said, adding that he felt his team "exceeded expectations. We were coming in from last season being kind of down. We did really good this year."

Against Zeeland West, "I thought we did pretty good on offense," Blackford said. "We scored quite a bit, but we couldn't get the ball back."

Blackford was happy with his improvement throughout the season.

"Coming into this year, we didn't know what to expect out of Blake," said coach Jason McIntyre. "He grew and got a little stronger. In two-a-days, we noticed his intensity and how hard he practiced. He was definitely going to get a shot at the starting spot in the offensive line. He battled with some other guys for two or three weeks before he earned the spot permanently. He does whatever he can to help the team."

2013 marked the end of a six-year football career for Blackford. "I'll miss going out there," he said. "We have a good community. Everyone comes out and cheers us on. Every game we felt we had something to prove. Everyone was doubting us from the year before."

"It's a story of handling adversity," McIntyre said. "We lost our starting running back in week one and our starting receiver. We had so many guys step up and take on different roles for us during the year. Guys needed to make plays for us, and we found a way to win. I think the season's a story of playing through adversity and players stepping up and making big plays and taking on other roles. It's definitely a season that was about a team. We did this all together. Every guy, at some point, was a key contributor. It was great for our seniors after not making the playoffs last year. I'm happy for them; they worked hard for it."

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DeWitt heads back to familiar territory



The DeWitt football team has made it to the Division 3 state finals for the fourth time in nine seasons, while capturing its eighth consecutive league championship in 2013. DeWitt played Zeeland West in the state finals game. (Scott Keyes Photo)

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

For the fourth time in the last nine years, the DeWitt football team will end the season playing for the state championship.

After a thrilling 21-20 win against St. Clair in the Division 3 state semifinal, DeWitt earned a trip to Ford Field to play in the Division 3 state championship game against Zeeland West. The title game appearance will be the fifth for the Panthers, who are still looking to win a state championship.

DeWitt improved to 13-0 on the season with the win against St. Clair after a back-and-forth battle. Junior running back Ben Heinritz scored a pair of touchdowns for the Panthers, while Christopher Ruby scored one touchdown. DeWitt relied on its ground game to earn the win in a game played in very windy and cold conditions. Ruby paced the ground game for the Panthers with 77 yards, while junior quarterback Jacob Johnson rushed for 68 yards and Heinritz added 62.

Heinritz has been DeWitt's

leading rusher with over 1,300 yards for the season.

Johnson has enjoyed a big season throwing the football for DeWitt, totaling over 1,600 yards.

DeWitt's defense came up big against St. Clair. Tyler Madar paced the Panthers with 13 tackles, while Joshua Hanna added 11 tackles and Zachary Deak 10 tackles.

"I'm incredibly proud of these kids," coach Rob Zimmerman said. "I couldn't be more proud of them."

DeWitt's offensive and defensive units have both come up big during the postseason. The Panthers opened the postseason with a 14-8 win over Haslett in a defensive struggle. DeWitt followed that win with a 27-14 win against Linden in the regionals and then won the regional title with a 49-0 win against Eaton Rapids. The Panther offense received 145 yards passing and three touchdowns from Johnson, and Heinritz added 183 yards rushing and three touchdowns.

Along with going unbeaten during the season, DeWitt also captured its eighth straight league championship.

P-W enjoys another solid season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by a senior class that has left a lasting legacy, the Pewamo-Westphalia football team enjoyed another big season this fall.

After going 8-1 during the regular season and winning the Central Michigan Conference title, the Pirates added a district title and reached the Division 7 regional final before dropping a 31-14 decision to defending Division 8 state champion Harbor Beach.

The loss marked the end of the career of a senior class that has left a lasting impression. This year's senior class won three district titles and two regional titles over the last three seasons.

"These guys left a great legacy," said coach Jeremy Miller.

This year's team was ranked as high as 5th in the state in Division 7. The Pirates began the season with eight consecutive wins that started with a 20-7 win against Lansing Catholic in week one.

The Pirates reeled off eight straight wins before falling in week nine to New Lothrop 47-33.

Pewamo-Westphalia finished the conference season with a perfect record. The Pirates allowed just four touchdowns during league play and recorded three shutouts.

For the season, the Pirates



averaged 36.3 points per game. They boasted a balanced offense, led by quarterback Kyle Nurenberg. Ross Wolniakowski paced the

ground game, while senior wide receiver Lane Simon was the leading receiver and a force on defense. Pewamo-Westphalia defeated

Saugatuck 57-21 to win the district title, as Wolniakowski rushed for 107 yards and scored five touchdowns. The Pirates then defeated Carson-

City Crystal 20-14 in the regional semifinal before falling to Harbor Beach in the regional final.

The Pewamo-Westphalia football team put together another impressive football season losing just one regular season game to New Lothrop in a game played at Alma College. The Pirates made it all the way to regionals before losing to Harbor Beach. (Zip Widman Photo)

Carson City enjoys one of best seasons in school history

It was quite a football season for the Carson City-Crystal Eagles, who lost to Pewamo-Westphalia 20-14 in the district final to finish at 10-1. After a 9-0 regular season, they beat Ewart 21-6 in the first round of the playoffs at home.

They took advantage of two fumbles and an interception against Ewart. The Wildcats gained 108 yards passing but only 52 on the ground and were penalized nine times for 97 yards including five crucial unsportsmanlike penalties.

"They were physical and

we knew they would be," said Carson City-Crystal coach Devin Pringle. "Our defense, those kids stepped up. I told them [at halftime] this is playoff football and you're beating a very good football team."

CC-C lost to Ewart 16-12 in the first round of districts last year. Pringle said, "I'd be lying if our seniors weren't up for this one. They had a little revenge in mind to even things up."

The Eagles first scored on Will Beedy's 4-yard run and kicked the PAT for a 7-6 lead.

"We have intelligent kids up front," Pringle said. "They're the ones that came up with the scheme that busted a couple of runs and got that first touchdown for us."

The Eagles took advantage of key Ewart penalties and scored in the fourth quarter on touchdown runs of two yards and one yard by Dallas O'Green and Robert Failing.

Beedy had 45 yards rushing, while Haines had 34.

Carson City-Crystal enjoyed the first 9-0 regular season in school history.



The Carson City football team enjoyed its first-ever 9-0 regular season in 2013. (Dave Knarr Photo)

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Hornets just miss

NEW LOTHROP – While New Lothrop’s football season came to an end with a 45-14 loss to Muskegon Catholic Central in the Division 8 state semifinals, it ended a four-year run of one loss seasons.

The Hornets have compiled a 43-4 record since 2010, advancing to the state semifinals twice. Six of the Hornets players played in the state semifinal game in 2011 and had experience through winning seasons.

“With six guys returning that played in that game two years ago, I think they got a good picture of what it’s like to play on this stage,” New Lothrop coach Clint Galvas told MLive before the Muskegon CC game. “We’re excited for where we’re at now, but these guys have been putting in work since the last week in March.

“That’s 244 straight days of football-related activities, so we have a lot invested this year, and these guys definitely deserve to be where they’re at.”

Returning all-stater Amari Coleman had an explosive season as an offensive utility weapon. Coleman verbally committed to Central Michigan University and the 6-foot, 185-pound was 5-for-5 on punt returns for touchdowns heading into the MCC game.

While Coleman was limited to 17 yards rushing on 14 carries against MCC, he eclipsed the 1,000-yard mark on the ground with 1,004 yards on a remarkable 65 carries for a 15.4-yard per carry average. He scored 18 touchdowns on the ground and four more through the air with 282



New Lothrop’s Amari Coleman led his team all the way to the Division 8 semi finals before losing to Muskegon Catholic. New Lothrop finished the year 12-1. (Randy Miniard Photo)

receiving yards.

“He’s a huge weapon to have back there,” Galvas told MLive on Coleman’s punt returning abilities. “It forces teams to kick out of bounds, and we’re constantly getting good field position just by having him stand back there.”

New Lothrop got its offense rolling throughout the postseason. The Hornets opened with a 35-0 win over Michigan Lutheran Seminary and then won a district

title with a 41-28 win over Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes.

Coleman scored on touchdown runs of 9 and 39 yards in a 28-0 New Lothrop first quarter lead against Ottawa Lake-Whiteford in the state quarterfinal game. The Hornets cruised to the 58-22 win over the regional title.

Coleman had five carries for 118 yards while seven other ball carries tallied 167 yards on the ground.



Chesaning’s season came to a close losing to three sets to Freeland during the first round of district play. The Indians 3-0 sweep over Shepherd on Sept. 11 was the lone volleyball victory for the Indians in Tri-Valley Central play.

After a 1-3 finish at the season-opening Carrollton Invitational, the Indians swept Owosso 3-0 and had a strong 3-2 showing at the Durand Invitational, finishing in third place.

Chesaning added a 1-1-3 finish at the Ithaca Sweetheart Tournament and broke up a four-match losing streak by sweeping St. Charles in a non-conference match on Oct. 14.

The Indians finished the season at 3-9 and 1-6 in the TVC Central. They lost 25-15, 25-9 and 25-21 to Freeland in the opening round of the Class B district tournament at Carrollton.

Jalen Lary led the Indians with well over 400 digs while Katelyn Beckman led the team in kills. Savannah Smith led the team in assists.



Zeeland West and Muskegon are two West Michigan teams that will be making the trip to Ford Field this season. (Kim Johnson and Randy Miniard Photos)

West side represents

Jeff Chaney Sports Scene

It’s been a great fall for sports teams in the West Michigan area.

Many teams and athletes made runs to state championships in their respective Michigan High School Athletic Association state tournaments.

The following is a run down of the fabulous fall.

GIRLS SWIMMING – A pair of West Michigan dynasties continued to make waves in girls swimming this fall.

The Holland girls swimming team won its third straight title in Division 2 at Eastern Michigan University, while East Grand Rapids won its third title in five years in Division 3 at the Holland Aquatic Center last weekend.

Senior Holly Morren and junior Taylor Garcia had big weekends in the pool for Holland, while sophomore Emily Converse and freshman Gabby Higgins swam extremely well for the Pioneers in Holland.

BOYS TENNIS – Three West Michigan teams came close in boys tennis this fall, but were unable to bring home state championship trophies.

In Division 2 at Hope, Forest Hills Northern was third, while East Grand Rapids was runner-up in Division 3 at Kalamazoo College, and West Catholic was runner-up at Grand Blanc/Holly.

It’s been a bit of a drought for area teams to win a state championship in tennis. The last team from West Michigan to win a title was

East Grand Rapids in Division 3 in 2007.

VOLLEYBALL – This past weekend champions were crowned in Volleyball at Battle Creek’s Kellogg Arena. And two teams came home with a championship trophy, while another came home with a runner-up trophy.

In Class A, East Grand Rapids beat Bloomfield Hills Marian in four sets. Caroline Knooihuizen led the Pioneers with 15 kills, and Maevie McDonald had 27 assists.

In Class C, Grand Rapids Covenant Christian beat Beal City in three sets. Alyssa Scholten and Shelby Lubbers each had 13 kills for Covenant Christian, while Cailey DeJong had 21 assists.

In Class B, the South Christian Sailors lost a hard-fought five-set match to Pontiac Notre Dame, completing a very successful weekend for area teams in Battle Creek.

FOOTBALL – One sport still needed crown its champions at the time of print. Football will be played this weekend at Ford Field, and three area teams are still alive.

In Division 3, Zeeland West will be looking to win its third state championship in eight years when it plays DeWitt Saturday at 7:30 p.m. It’s only the ninth year the Dux have been a program.

In Division 4, South Christian will be looking to win its second straight state title, and third in 12 years, when it plays Marine City Friday night at 7:30 p.m.

And in Division 5, West Catholic is making its third trip to the finals in four years, and will be looking to win its second title in that time. The Falcons play Menominee on Saturday at 5 p.m.

Dave Dean leaving Lowell at end of school year

Jeff Chaney Sports Scene

LOWELL, MI – Dave Dean acknowledges this was one of the toughest decisions he has had to make, but believes he will be leaving his program in good hands.

After nine successful seasons of leading the Lowell wrestling team, Dean will be leaving the program and the state of Michigan after this school year to take a job at Cornell University and its wrestling program.

Dean will be joining the Cornell program as its new coach in charge of its Olympic Developmental Program.

“This was a very difficult decision,” Dean said. “I have so many friends here at Lowell that have been a great influence on me. Lowell is an outstanding and exceptional place.”

Dean and his family, which includes son Max, who is a sophomore on Lowell’s wrestling team, and daughter Cassie, who is in eighth grade, will be moving to Ithaca, N.Y. This summer to start his new position.

They will be joining the Dean’s oldest son, Gabe Dean, who is a freshman on the Cornell wrestling team.

Dave Dean doesn’t have the final say on who will be his replacement, but is giving a vote of confidence that assistant R. J. Boudro take his place after he leaves.

“I don’t want to speak for our athletic director, but I think R.J. Would be a great transition. He is great with the parents, a great organizer

and has great respect from the kids.”

Boudro, who wrestled at Armada High School, then at the University of Michigan, before transferring to Michigan State

where Dave Dean was an assistant coach before coming to Lowell, said he would be honored to take over the Red Arrows for his head coach.

Boudro has been on Dave Dean’s staff for the past six years.

“First of all, Dave was a big deal when I went to (MSU),” Boudro said. “He and (fellow MSU assistant) Roger Chandler had a lot to do with me going to MSU. He then brought me to Lowell

“When I came from Michigan, he helped me be captain my first year there,” he added. “We hit off right away, and then he was big in bringing me here at Lowell. I can’t put into words what he has done for me in being a coach. Him and (Lowell football coach and Dave Dean brother Noel Dean), have both helped me become the coach I am, because I also coached football for five years here.”

If he gets the job, what Boudro will get to coach is a Lowell program that won the Division 2 state title in 2009 and has been runner-up three times, including the past two years.



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It was less than three years ago that the Ashley volleyball team finished a season 0-32. This year Ashley made it all the way to the regional finals before losing to Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart in four sets. (Chuck Prikasky Photo)

Ashley turning corner

John Raffel
Sports Scene

In his third season as Ashley's volleyball coach, Casey Hilts hit the jackpot with his volleyball team. The Bears fell to Sacred Heart Academy 3-1 in the regional final in early November at Coopersville, ending their season at 28-16-3. Three seasons ago, the Ashley volleyball team was 0-32.

Hilt was previously an assistant coach at Alma College. "We did very well and kind of rebuilt that program," Hilts said. "My head coach took another job. As an assistant coach, you find yourself out of the mix. I knew that Ashley had struggled. But they were down the road, and I wanted to take the challenge of turning them into a program. It was the same at Alma. They had a 3-26 season and we took them to 22-9 the first year there."

In Hilts' first year at Ashley, the Bears were 14-21. They were 21-19 last season and then got to the 28-win level. It was the first time since 2000 that any team at Ashley had won a district title, Hilts said.

Hilts was hired at Ashley shortly before the 2011 season started.

"It was teaching them how to play defense," Hilts said. "It was the bulk of everything we tried to do. We had a couple of kids that could hit the ball over the net a little bit, but nobody who could win a game for us. It was about making ourselves competitive. In high school volleyball, so many times one team plays until one team loses. This year, we finally got to the stage where we could go out and compete where you actually have the offense. If you play good defense, you can usually be competitive with anybody. That first season, that's what it was all about."

His second year at Ashley, Hilts had a chance to work with his girls during

the off-season. "Between that first and second year, coming into a program like that, what I wanted to do was have the kids enjoy the sport so much," Hilts said. "My goal was to get the kids to fall in love with it, and once they fall in love with it, they'll do whatever they have to do to be very good at it. They were having a lot of fun and winning some games."

Ashley girls started playing AAU volleyball. The physical conditioning part started taking root when Liza Gross joined Hilts' staff as assistant coach.

Coming into this season, Hilts was confident that the Bears had plenty of potential, with the return of several three-year varsity players.

"I had 17 years of returning varsity experience," he said. "It allowed us to turn our offense up."

Ashley was led against Sacred Heart, a fellow Mid-State Activities Association member, by Sierra Belongia with eight kills; Meggan Andrews with four aces, eight kills and 17 digs; Megan Seifert with 24 assists; and Kelsey Smith with seven kills. Andrews and Smith are middle hitters.

"Sierra became the third [attacker] that forced teams to not focus on the other two," Hilts said.

Seifert, the setter, was the quarterback of the team. She set for a Haslett team during the off-season. Smith and Andrews also played for that team, Hilts said. "They had the opportunity to play with some outstanding players."

Hilts said the program is designed to try to have competitive teams each season. "We're heading in that direction," he said. "We're going to struggle a little bit in the beginning. By the end of the season, I expect next year's team to be at or above the level we finished with. [Sierra] will be one of those kids coaches want to know about."

Hemlock, Swan Valley post solid showings in tourney

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

One of the finest seasons in Hemlock volleyball history ended in the regional final, and with it, so did a very successful run for Hemlock's head coach.

Hemlock dropped a three-set match to Unionville-Sebewaing, the 4th-ranked team in the state, in the regional final at Ubly, despite 16 kills from senior standout Karlie Herrington.

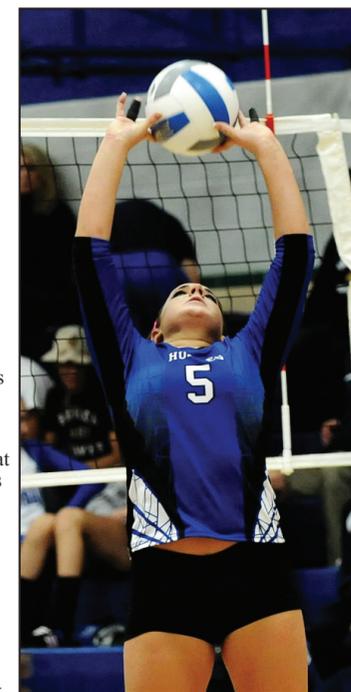
"I'm very proud of my girls," Hemlock coach Russ Kela said. "We've come so far this season; this is the first time Hemlock has gone this far."

The match marked the final match coached by Kela, who stepped down after seven years at the helm. He guided the Huskies to three district titles during his seven seasons, including two district titles in the past three years.

Hemlock won the district in thrilling fashion by defeating Valley Lutheran in five games (25-20, 19-25, 25-22, 24-26, 15-5) at the Nouvel district. Herrington led Hemlock with 34 kills and five blocks in the final.

Hemlock won its regional semifinal match against New Lothrop in four games (17-25, 26-24, 27-25, 25-21). Herrington led Hemlock with 31 kills and seven blocks. Abbi Phillipson recorded 14 kills and five blocks, while Brooke Phillion put the offense in motion with 50 assists.

Hemlock finished the season with a 26-18-2 record.



Both the Swan Valley and Hemlock volleyball teams enjoyed one of the finest seasons in their schools history. Swan Valley won a regional championship defeating Essexville Garber in five sets while Hemlock lost to Unionville-Sebewaing in three sets in the regional finals. Swan Valley dropped a three set decision to Cadillac in the quarterfinals. (Scott Keyes Photos)

Morley Stanwood concludes another successful volleyball season

It was another competitive season for the Morley Stanwood volleyball team.

With a 9-0 Central State Activities Association record, the Mohawks won the conference title for the 11th straight season. They were led by first-team all-CSAA selections Kayla Rosman, Mekayla Carey, and Lindsey Veersma.

A highlight of the season came when the Mohawks defeated St. Louis in the district final on the Sharks' home floor. The Sharks were considered possible state contenders.

The Mohawks (41-10-1) posted a 19-25, 25-18, 25-19, 25-23 victory over the Sharks for the district title. In the win, Carey had two aces, three blocks, 17 kills, and 19 digs for the Mohawks; while Rosman had five aces and 21 kills; Lindsey Veersma netted seven kills and 36

assists; Jennie Kizer posted 18 digs; and Heather Hart added 16 digs.

The Mohawks had high hopes in the regionals, which were held in their home gym.

They opened with a 25-15, 25-13, 25-15 win over White Cloud. It was Carey and Rosman again leading the way. Carey had 12 kills, eight digs, and three blocks; and Rosman had 12 kills and eight digs. But in the regional final, the Mohawks could not outlast Covenant Christian in a very competitive match and lost 20-25, 25-22, 25-23, 25-23.

Carey led the Mohawks with 22 kills, 12 digs, three blocks, and three aces, while Rosman had 15 kills and 20 digs.

Morley Stanwood, the 2011 state champion, ended the season at 42-11-1.



The Morley-Standwood volleyball team won a district championship by defeating St. Louis in four sets earlier this month. The team won a conference championship for the 11th straight season. (Randy Miniard Photo)

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So Close: Beal City's dream season comes to a close

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Beal City's dream of a Class C state title in volleyball ended with a 3-1 loss to Covenant Christian Nov. 23 in the title game at Battle Creek.

Covenant Christian took the first game 25-21 by netting the game's last seven points and took the second game 25-16. Beal City won the third game 25-20. Covenant Christian ruled the fourth game 25-17 and took the match.

In the first game, Beal City fell behind early 8-3 and had problems with Covenant Christian's net play. The Aggies rallied on an ace from Addie Schumacher, who then served for four more points and led them to a 21-18 lead. Covenant came back on Brianna Norman's serving for a 23-21 lead, and the Chargers notched the winning point on a Beal City passing error.

Covenant fired out to a 6-2 lead in the second game. Cailey DeJong tormented the Aggies with her jump serves and had two straight aces for a 14-11 lead. Alyssa Scholten's ace gave her team an 18-13 lead. Shelby Lubbers and Arika Engelsma combined for a block and 22-15 lead. The Chargers went from there for the win and 2-0 lead.

The Chargers enjoyed a 6-3 lead in game 3. Beal City came back and took an 11-8 lead and extended it to 14-10. Grace Schafer's ace gave the Aggies a 17-12 lead, which became 22-17 moments later on Jordan Schneider's kill. Schneider and Nicole Gross had a block for a 24-19 lead. A net error gave Beal City the 25th point.

The Chargers bolted to a 5-0 lead in the fourth game on Cailey DeJong's serving. Beal City settled down and got back in it. Scholten's tip gave the Chargers a 16-13 lead. They later stretched it to 20-14. Lubber's thundering kill made it 23-15 and Sydney Hauck followed with an ace. Lubbers ended the match with a kill.

Scholten stands 6'2" and Lubbers 5'10". "They were definitely a big team, and they put up a big block," said Aggie coach Kelly David. "That was definitely a tough part of the game. They were a tough team and had big girls. It was a tough loss. We fought as hard as we could and left it on the court. That's all we could do."

Schumacher had 15 kills and eight digs for the Aggies. Melanie Schafer had six kills and 17 digs, while Jenna Theisen added 26 assists and seven digs, and Schneider had seven kills.

"I think our defense on our blocks had to stop their offense," David said. "That was the key of the third game. They found a way around our blocking. It was

tough on the defense."

Scholten and Lubbers had 13 kills apiece. DeJong had 21 assists and 15 digs for Covenant Christian.

The season ended at 56-4-1 for Beal City. Covenant Christian was 47-9-0.

"I think it was definitely our serving and our hitting," said Charger coach Denise Uittenbogaard. "We are an attacking team. We have to attack the ball to win games. We have power in the front row and have power in our serves."

The Aggies were in the Class D title match last year and lost to perennial power St. Philips Catholic Central, which won its class again. The hope this season for the Aggies was that they could prevail in Class C.

"They weren't satisfied with last year because they got second," David said. "They really wanted to come in and win a state championship. We fell a little short. They gave it all they had. I'm proud of how they played."



Beal City's Division 3 state title dreams came to an end as the Aggies lost to Grand Rapids Covenant Christian in four sets Nov. 23 at Kellogg Arena in Battle Creek. The Aggies were emotional after the loss. Beal City lost in the D4 state finals a year ago. Beal City finished the year 56-4-1. (Shannon Millard photos)

State finals loss disappointing to Aggies

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Addie Schumacher had a phenomenal volleyball season for the Beal City Aggies, but the 5'11" senior middle blocker had problems holding back the tears after her team lost 3-1 to Covenant Christian in the Class C state volleyball final.

The Aggies and Schumacher were runners-up last season. They wanted the title badly this year but fell short.



"As disappointed as I am right now, I'm more proud to be on this team with this great group of girls," said a very emotional Schumacher. "You do wish something different would have happened. But you can't change anything."

Against a team like Beal City, "[o]ur strategy was play our game. It was our strategy all along," said Covenant Christian coach Denise Uittenbogaard. "I have a determined group of volleyball players. They were determined to win and got the job done. They were not going to go home without the trophy."

Beal City had the same type of determination but not the result the Aggies obviously wanted.

"It's definitely an empty feeling for the girls," coach Kelly David said. "They're a great group of girls. We want to look at the positive things we have going for us. We have to hold our heads up high and walk out of here knowing we did everything we could to win."

The Aggies had defeated Oakland Christian in the semifinals and watched Covenant Christian take care of Mendon.

"We knew we had to spread the ball, since they had big blockers and play good defense, because they're big."

David said. "Our serve receive struggled at times which hurt us."

"We knew they had a big block, and we'd have to hit around it and be aggressive," Schumacher said. "We knew we had to be tough on defense. It just didn't work out today."

"I thought we were going to have to put up a good block, and in the third game we got there, but in the second game we didn't," said Beal City outside hitter Melanie Schafer. "We needed to tip on them. I thought we needed to tip more."

Beal City trailed 2-1, but after winning the third game, David thought her team had captured the momentum.

"We got into a hole that fourth game, and it was hard to get out of after that," she said.

In the third game, "when we got our passes up, we put it down," Schafer said.

In the semifinal, the Aggies prevailed 25-22, 25-15, 25-18 and took a 56-3-1 record into the title match.

"That was pretty special, because we got to stay with the team overnight," Schafer said. "We had a good bond. I thought this team meshed well together compared to other teams."

The Aggies graduate only four seniors, but they're all key players - Anna Reihl, Schafer, Schumacher, and Chloe Steffeke.

"We learned from last year," Schafer said. "Everyone wants to win. But I'm proud we got the chance to get here again."

"I couldn't have asked for a better team my senior year," Schumacher said. "The whole season has been a joy ride."

"Every year, there's always girls that step up," David said. "We're looking forward to next year."



Irish lose in quarters

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It was fun while it lasted for the Sacred Heart Academy volleyball team, which advanced to the state quarterfinals this season before losing to Leland.

Sacred Heart posted a Class D regional final victory over Ashley on Nov. 14. It won the first two games handily 25-18, 25-9. Then Ashley came back for a 25-23 win in the third game. Sacred Heart prevailed 25-7 in the fourth to take the match. The Irish were led by Sara Hansen with 33 assists, 10 digs, and 10 kills; junior Lexie Methner with 19 kills and seven blocks; and Riley Terwillger with eight kills and four aces.

The Irish were confident going into the quarterfinals against Leland but lost 3-1. It was 2-1, Leland, going to the fourth game, and the Irish had a 20-14 lead. It appeared a fifth game was going to be necessary. But Sacred Heart lost 28-26, and the season ended at 49-12-5 for the Irish. Methner had 18 kills; while senior team captain and setter Sara Hansen compiled six kills, 26 assists, and nine digs.

Michael Kruscke coached the Sacred Heart squad for his fifth season. The team also made it to the quarterfinals in 2010.

"It think our record was more sound this year," Kruscke said. "We put ourselves into some heavier tournaments, hopefully to better prepare us for tight matches. The girls don't panic under pressure."



We're trying to keep them comfortable when it gets uncomfortable. That's the name of the game."

Kruscke said that Sara Hansen "has been getting the ball in key spots. She's finding out who's comfortable, who's swinging and who's not and trying to work with the one doing well. Methner has been coming into her own this year."

During the regular season, a major highlight "was to see the growth of the team," Kruscke said. "We weren't quite sure how we were going to match up when all was said and done. They just continue to work every week, every match and got a little better and the team chemistry has come together nicely. It's even a highlight to see that growth."

After the regional title, Kruscke's assertion was that his team was meeting its goals.

"We've always set the bar high," he said. "Back in August, we said one of our goals was to make the trip to Battle Creek. We don't think any team in the school has done that. We have to take one step at a time."

That goal was almost, but not quite, met with the loss in the quarterfinals.

"The biggest thing is that they have been controlling the ball when it's on our side of the net," Kruscke said. "They've been taking care of the ball. When we're playing well and keeping our unforced errors under control, we're a pretty solid team. It's trying not to beat ourselves."

Maggie Voisin, another captain, plays all the way around and said her team has been good at all the spots. "We have the hitters able to put the ball down," she said.

"Maggie is the energy, keeps the spirits up, and keeps the team jelled as one," Kruscke said.

Terwillger and junior Baily Scully have been solid outside hitters for the Irish. "When those two are on, it makes a huge difference and takes a lot of pressure off our middle," Kruscke said.

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State Swimming Finals Recap

Flint Powers Hannah Kopydlowski named top swimmer in D3; Alma places 12th

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Led by senior Hannah Kopydlowski, who was named the meet's outstanding swimmer, the Powers Catholic girls swim team capped the season with a top-ten finish at the Division 3 state finals at the Holland Aquatics Center.

Kopydlowski won the 100 backstroke and finished third in the 50 freestyle. She was also a part of two relay teams that placed eighth. Kopydlowski teamed up with Natalie Seifert, Erin Emmert, and Morgan Szczepaniak in both the 200 medley relay and the 400 free relay.

Emmert placed seventh in both the 200 IM and the 100 butterfly for the Chargers, who placed eighth as a team with 104 points.

East Grand Rapids won the team title with 362 points, while Cranbrook Kingswood placed second with 220.

Alma finished in 12th place overall with 71 points.

All three of Alma's relay teams placed in the top 12. The 200 medley relay team of senior Laura Lowe, freshman Aissa Adams, freshman Evelyn Vandemark, and senior Kaleigh Kovac placed 10th, as did the 200 free relay team of senior Natalie Walsh, senior Kamila Tlegenova, Lowe, and Kovac. The 400 free relay team of Walsh, Vandemark, Lowe, and Kovac placed 12th.

Individually, Vandemark had a big day, as she took fifth in the 100 butterfly and ninth in the 500 free. Lowe placed 11th in the 100 backstroke and Kovac was 13th in the 200 free.

DeWitt took 17th place with 33 points. Senior Rosalie Yockey paced the Panthers with a pair of top-eight finishes. Yockey was third in the 500 free and fourth in the 200 free.

John Glenn placed 19th overall and was paced by senior Kali Hartt, who placed fifth in the 100 backstroke.

Haslett and Nouvel Catholic Central tied for 21st.

Freshman Makenna McCartney led the way for Nouvel, as she placed sixth in the 500 free and ninth in the 200 free. Sophomore Elsa Borrello took 13th in the 200 IM.

Claire Beckett led the way for Haslett, as she placed sixth in the 100 breaststroke and 14th in the 200 IM. Kate Lehman finished 12th in both the 100 butterfly and 200 IM.

DIVISION 1

Rockford finished fifth with 127 points at the Division 1 state finals at Oakland University, while Grand Blanc placed 14th with 75 points. Mercy won the meet with 271 points, and Saline took second with 251.

Junior Erin Hudson led the way for Rockford, as she placed second in the 50 free and seventh in the 100 free. She was a member of the 200 free relay team that placed second overall with Marissa Marion, Dakota



Noble, and Madison Trimble. Hudson was also part of the 200 medley relay team with Kara Vandawater, Sydney McDowell, and Trimble that placed third overall.

Junior Eryn Scannell led the charge for Grand Blanc. Scannell placed fourth in the 50 free and also finished 11th in diving. She was part of the 200 free relay team that placed seventh along with Emma Curtis, Rachel Eaton, and Lindsay Baywol.

DIVISION 2

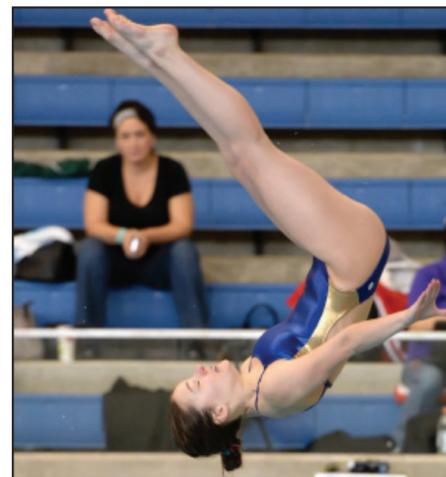
Midland Dow placed in the top ten at the Division 2 state finals at Eastern Michigan University by totaling 112 points. Holland won the title with 287 points followed by Portage Central with 235.

Kara Dean led the way for Dow, as she took fifth in the 200 IM and eighth in the 100 free. Ellie Dean also had a strong meet, as she placed sixth in the 500 free and seventh in the 200 free. The 400 free relay team of Kara Dean, Ellie Dean, Jasmine Purtell, and Mary Noble placed sixth.

Okemos finished in 13th place with 73 points. Katie Dudley led the way for the Chieftains, as she placed second in the 200 IM and fourth in the 100 free.

Bay City Western finished in 15th place with 54 points. Junior Krissy Harmon enjoyed a big meet for Western, as she won the 500 freestyle in 4:59.42 and finished third in the 200 free.

Fenton placed 19th with 25 points. Gabriele Haaroja led the way for Fenton, taking third place in the 50 free.



Top: The Alma girls swim team finished 12th during the Nov. 22-23 swim finals held in Holland. Above: A diver takes flight during the D1 finals held at Oakland University. (Butch Harmon and Alan Holben Photos)



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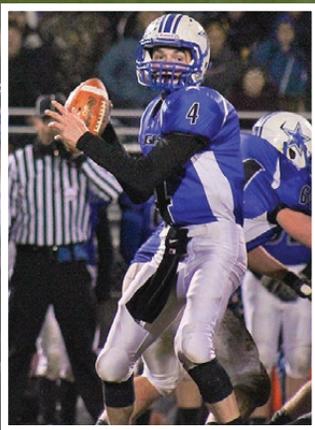
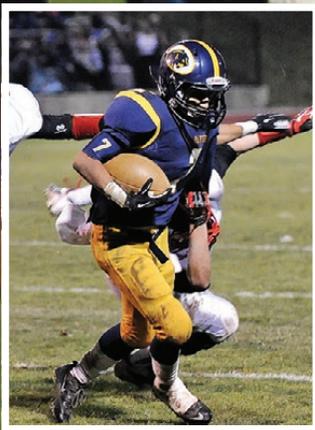
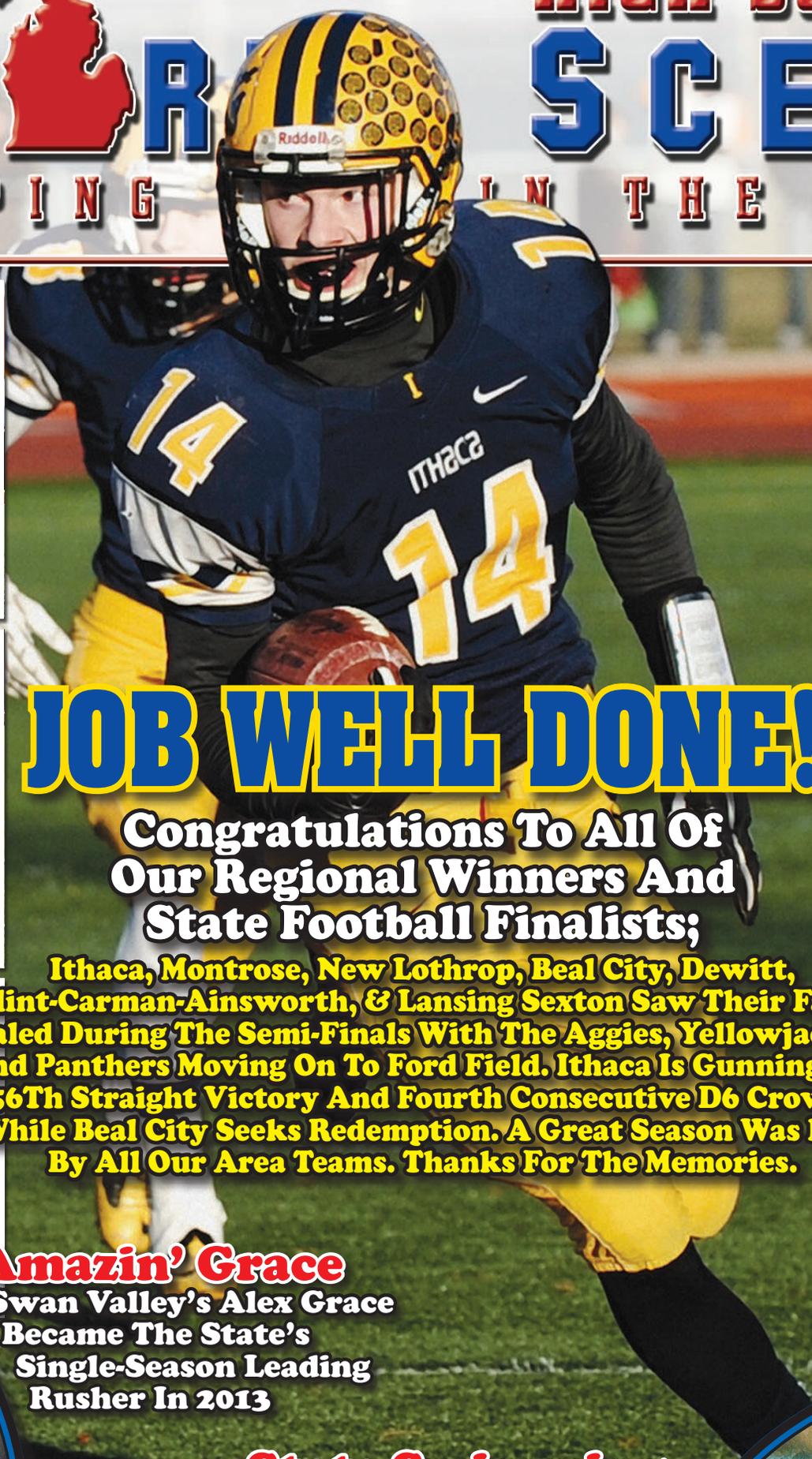
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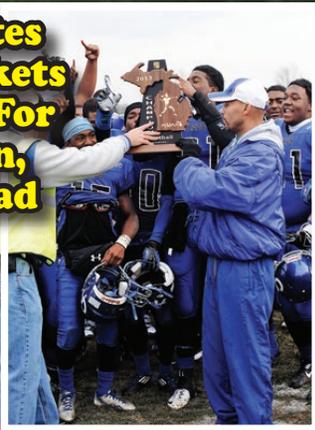
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JOB WELL DONE!

Congratulations To All Of Our Regional Winners And State Football Finalists;

Ithaca, Montrose, New Lothrop, Beal City, Dewitt, Flint-Carman-Ainsworth, & Lansing Sexton Saw Their Fates Sealed During The Semi-Finals With The Aggies, Yellowjackets And Panthers Moving On To Ford Field. Ithaca Is Gunning For 56th Straight Victory And Fourth Consecutive D6 Crown, While Beal City Seeks Redemption. A Great Season Was Had By All Our Area Teams. Thanks For The Memories.



Amazin' Grace
 Swan Valley's Alex Grace Became The State's Single-Season Leading Rusher In 2013

State Swimming
 Where Did Your Favorite Swimmer Place?

