

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE KEEPING KIDS IN THE NEWS

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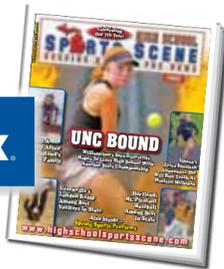
Vol. 7, Issue 77 • April/May 2016

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Hey Sports Fans! It's another great day at Sports Scene I have always been told that you never get into coaching for the money. The love, the kids and the knowledge you bring to the table is all you need.

I have been a wrestling coach and a youth football coach for more than 25 years now. I'm not quite sure if that's admirable or foolish.

High school coaches receive a stipend, generally anywhere between \$3,000 and \$6,000 a year. One former coach I know estimated he made 98 cents an hour. Most coaches at the high school level teach all day then they coach during the evenings.

However, the norm is changing and you can see it everywhere you turn. You see fewer coaches staying a long time; a lot more people leaving, either for college jobs or administrative jobs where the money is better and you don't have to deal with all that pressure.

Again that pressure isn't about wins and losses. Coaches are harder on themselves than any administrator, alumni or fan could be. Instead, the pressure is often external. Too many parents, coaches say, are a pain in the backside, complaining about their son's playing time or wondering why he isn't getting more college offers.

You sometime question who you have become and why you do what you do.

The harsh reality sometimes is you start to question yourself and your abilities as a coach.

You get bothered by what you read on social media and the impact it has on our lives. The thing that stings us a lot more is when our children and wives are exposed to those kinds of things, and that's happening more often. I don't think they should have to deal with that.

So why stay? Why put up with the low pay, the harassing parents, the recruiting and school shopping that has changed the game or the ugly comments from anonymous voices?

Because they love helping kids, right?

Yes, but read on:

There is one sure way to keep high school coaches from moving on: Pay them more. It's not uncommon for high school coaches in Texas, for example, to make more than \$100,000 a year. But do we really want a high school educational system in which the football coach makes three times as much as the math or English teacher?

On the other side of the coin, one night a week you don't have 10,000 people evaluating that math teacher.

If they want to pay me more, I'm all for it.

O.K., but given that has almost no chance of happening, will there be anybody in the current generation of young coaches that in 20 years will still walking a sideline on Friday nights?

That's a shame. For the game and the kids.



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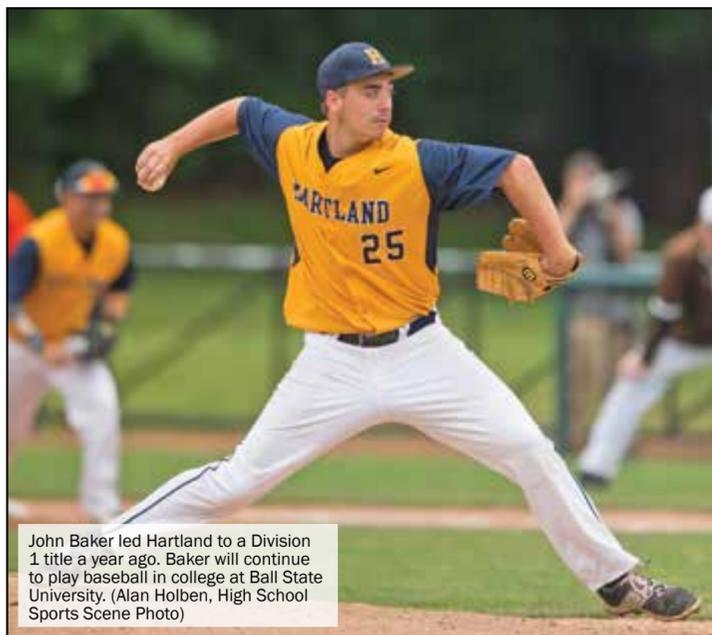
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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON BASEBALL

DIVISION 1 BASEBALL PREVIEW

Hartland, MP Loaded; Saginaw Heritage Lurking



John Baker led Hartland to a Division 1 title a year ago. Baker will continue to play baseball in college at Ball State University. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Saline, Birmingham Brother Rice, Portage Northern.

Top area teams: Rockford, Hartland, Mt. Pleasant, Bay City Western.

Top area players: John Baker (p/3b), Hartland; Bryce Kelley (lhp), Rockford; Adam Proctor (ca), St. Johns; Obie Ricumstrict (ss), Mt Pleasant; Jack Weisenburger (rhp), Rockford.

Breaking it Down

Mt Pleasant makes the move up to Division 1 with one of the most talented teams in school history. Senior Hunter Buczkowski and his brother, junior Logan Buczkowski, give the team a dominating one-two combo on the mound. Junior shortstop Obie Ricumstrict has committed to the University of Cincinnati while senior third baseman Zach Heeke is headed to Central Michigan University next season. Senior first baseman Max Trucks will play his college ball at Davenport while junior Noah Ingram is a talented second baseman. Senior Dan Keller returns behind the plate with junior lefthander Cameron Mitchell adding depth on the mound.

Bay City Western saw its string of two straight state titles come to an end last season in the regionals. Western is loaded again this season led by standout seniors Jason Clark (p/lf), Hunter David (of), Zach Schirmer (2b), Connor Sonnier (c/inf) and Brandon Wise (p/1b).

Saginaw Heritage boasts plenty of pitching, led by Eli Abenth, Ryan Abenth and Nick Frontiera. Senior Mason Schwellenbach (p/ss) is heading to Saginaw Valley State University next season while sophomores Spencer Schellenbach and Brandon Smith

are upcoming standouts.

Midland is solid on the mound with junior right-hander Jordan Patty. Seniors Luke DeLong (of), Cheyne Maier (catcher) and Cam Wing (ss) are proven hitters while Martin Money (3b) is a talented sophomore making an impact.

Few teams in the state can match Rockford's one-two pitching punch of right hander Jack Weisenburger who will be taking his 92-mph fastball to the University of Michigan next season and lefty Bryce Kelley who will take his 89-nph heater to Michigan State.

Grand Ledge won more than 30 games last season and was perfect in the CAAC Blue. The Comets are solid again this year led by standout senior catcher Sam Davison, senior outfielder Luke LuLamia and senior Jordan Goebel (p/1b).

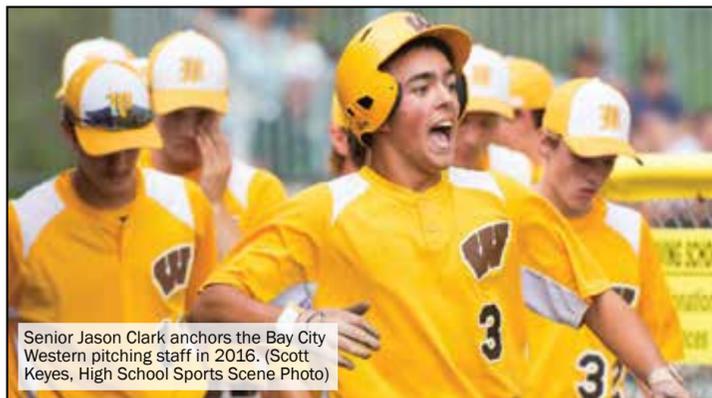
This and That

St. Johns is led by one of the top catchers in the state in junior Adam Proctor. Senior Avery Maurer heads up the pitching staff while Addison Swarthout is an all-conference first baseman.

Holt is led by junior pitcher Jesse Heikkinen, who has committed to Michigan State, along with senior outfielder Drew Stavischek and sophomore Burrell Jones (p/1b).

Howell boasts some of the best young talent in the state, and is led by junior pitcher Sam Weatherly, who is headed to Clemson and junior shortstop Caleb Balgaard who is headed to the University of Indiana.

Hartland will be led by its standout pitching this season. Senior John Baker brings a 90-mph fastball and is headed to Ball State University while Noah Lohmeier is another solid arm.



Senior Jason Clark anchors the Bay City Western pitching staff in 2016. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

DIVISION 2 BASEBALL PREVIEW

Area Teams Loaded With Talent; DeWitt, Haslett, John Glenn Primed For Strong Runs

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Orchard Lake St. Mary's, East Grand Rapids, Vicksburg.

Top area teams: DeWitt, Bay City John Glenn, Portland, Haslett.

Top area players: Jakob Ackley (inf), Owosso; Haydin Brandt (of/p), Portland; Cole Brooks (c/of), Bay City Glenn; Luke Sleeper (p), Haslett; Donovan Tarn (p/3b) DeWitt.

Breaking it Down

DeWitt won conference, district and regional championships last season, and plenty of talent returns this season led by senior Donovan Tarn (p/3b), who is strong on the mound and at the plate. Josh Robinson and junior Will Nagel (p/2b) add more depth to the staff along with Michael Stygles, JD Ross, Jacob Yost, Trevor Kapp and Nolan Knauff will also be key contributors.

Look for Haslett to have a big season led by Stanford-bound senior pitcher Luke Sleeper who struck out 86 batters in 49 innings last season. Senior Hunter Ruhstorfer (of/p) hit .442 last season and returns along with senior Cullin Turner (c/inf) and Jack Rosenbrook and junior middle infielder Hayden Cross.

Bay City John Glenn has been a consistent winner and the Bobcats are ranked in the top 10 in the state again this spring. Cole Brooks (c/of) is headed to Saginaw Valley State and leads an impressive group of players that includes Nolan O'Hare (c/of), Logan Mlujeak (lhp), Sam Goodnight (rhp), Conner Esch (ss) and Matt Fischer (2b).

Portland is primed for a big season led by junior standouts Haydin Brandt (of/p) and Trevyn Groesser (of/p). Seniors Trevor Trierweiler (p/of), Noah Hengesbach (p/c), Cory Gesterblum

(inf) and Jared Schrauben (p/inf) also return.

Pitchers Brandon Braman, Noah Spohr and Ben West lead Central Montcalm. Bryant Ciganik, Austin Williams, Sporhr and Braman also pace the offense.

Lansing Catholic Central is led by seniors Riley Creamer (p/ss), Nic Olson (p/inf) and catcher Max Zemke.

Fowlerville won the CAAC White last season and a district tournament, and the Gladiators are strong again this season with standout sophomore Eric Fritz part of a solid pitching staff that includes Nate Leonard, Connor Matlock and Wyatt Thomas. Fritz is a standout hitter as well along with senior Alex Montrose (of), Clay Boak (inf) and Adam Joliff.

This and That

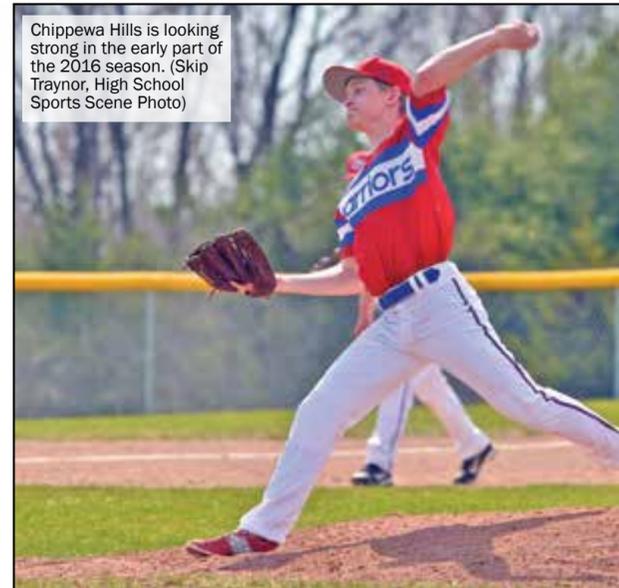
Eaton Rapids won 28 games last season and returns senior all-conference player Vann Acker (p/ss). Senior Tyler Oberlin-Scott returns at catcher while Lewis Beals (p/of) is a talented sophomore to watch.

Owosso has a young and promising team this year. Junior shortstop Jakob Ackley is a talented player along with sophomore Jordan Klapko (c/of) and pitcher Jesse Giraud.

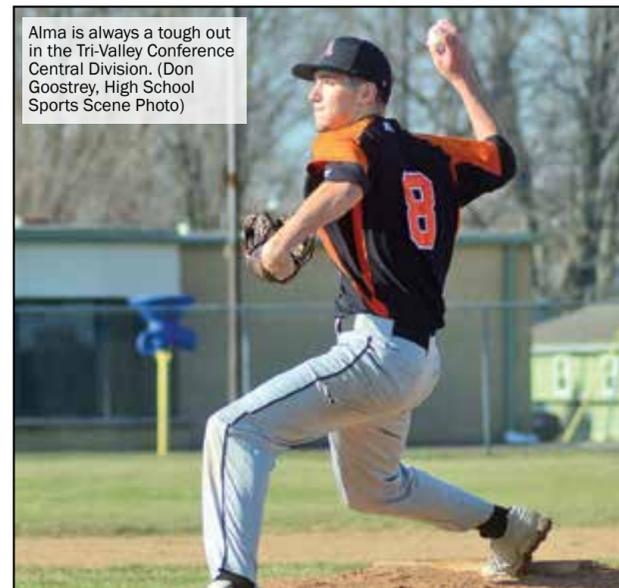
Alma has a number of young, talented players as well. Junior pitcher Konner Vedrode earned second-team, all-conference honors last season, and Tristan Villalobos earned honorable-mention, all-conference honors last year as a sophomore.

Chippewa Hills is led by a solid core of players. Austin Young and Cade Schafer are among the top pitchers while Slade Todd, Jaycob Sharp and Andrew Vinton led the offense.

Swan Valley is solid up the middle with the return of seniors Noah Stewart at shortstop and Hunter Turner at second base.



Chippewa Hills is looking strong in the early part of the 2016 season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Alma is always a tough out in the Tri-Valley Conference Central Division. (Don Goostrey, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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DIVISION 3 BASEBALL PREVIEW

Numerous Area Teams Chasing D3 Glory; Division-Wide and Statewide



St. Louis coach Rollie Carman recently celebrated this 300th career coaching victory. St. Louis is a vastly improved team that continues to impress in the Tri-Valley Conference West Division. (Ed Courter Photos)

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Jackson Lumen Christi, Buchanan, G.P. University Liggett.

Top area teams: Ovid-Elsie, Sanford-Meridian, St. Louis, Clare, Bath.

Top area players: Gabe Denton (catcher), Clare; Nic Huntey (catcher), Morley-Stanwood; Christian Petre (of), Sanford-Meridian; Monte Petre (inf) Sanford-Meridian; Zac Spangler (catcher), Sanford-Meridian; Keaghan Sutliff (p/inf), Ovid-Elsie; Collin Vandergronden (inf), Montrose.

Breaking it Down

Look for Ovid-Elsie to be a standout team in Division 3. Senior Keaghan Sutliff is a returning all-state player who excels at the plate and on the mound. Devon Kelley and Michael Beno will also be key to the offense while Michael Ryals is a solid pitcher. The Marauders also have some talented young players to watch in sophomores Jake Fox on the mound, Jericho Herblet at the plate and freshmen Chris Zruna and Bryce Dolan, who are strong hitters and promising pitchers.

St. Louis is primed for a solid season led by a pitching staff that includes Jim Pierce, Steve Hall and Chase Pestrue. Lane Sherwood is at catcher with Marcus Beeson and Mark Janasik among the top hitters to watch.

St. Charles is paced by senior pitcher Billy Blair, who is the ace of the pitching staff. Look for Brenden Slick to have a strong senior season.

Carson City-Crystal has a solid group of pitchers that include Ryan Argersinger, Jarrett Loomis and Tabor Erskin. At the plate, Dallas O'Green and Erskin lead the offense.

Shepherd is led by senior outfielder Jacob Harkrader (p/

of) who hits for power and average and sophomore Dyre Leonard will pitch and play third base.

This and That

At Clare, all-state catcher Gabe Denton returns to lead the Pioneers. Camden Dice and Cole Keene give Clare a solid pair of pitchers to build around.

Pewamo-Westphalia is paced by senior Austin Lewis, who earned all-conference honors last season. Bryce Thelen and Mason Schneider will also be key contributors for the Pirates.

Laingsburg is led by Hunter Blaski on the mound while Jordan Jones, Nate Mentus and Levi Fraidenburg will supply punch to the offense.

Bath will rely on its pitching this season. The Bees return senior standout Schuyler Shirey, who will pitch, catch and play in the infield. Senior Sean Wineland (p/3b) and junior Drew Coulter (p/of) will also play key roles.

Sanford-Meridian is primed for a big season. The Mustangs are led by returning all-state athletes Monte Petre and Christian Petre, along with standout senior catcher Zac Spangler who has committed to Alma College. Senior pitcher Ben Blake heads a pitching staff that includes talented freshman Hunter Merillat. The offense will be explosive led by Spangler, the Petres, Merillat and Parker Reynaert.

At Blanchard-Montabella, senior Colby Butler is a solid pitcher and shortstop.



Ithaca has a lot of senior depth that should allow the Yellowjackets to compete at a high level in the TVC this season. (Randy Miniard Photo)

DIVISION 4 BASEBALL PREVIEW

Beal City Aiming To Make Another Title Run In D4



Breckenridge is always a tough out come Division 4 tournament time. (Chuck Prikasky Photo)

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Centreville, Muskegon Catholic, Maple City Glen Lake.

Top area teams: Beal City, New Lothrop, Waterford Our Lady, Fowler, Portland St. Patrick.

Top area players: Max Kornexl (pitcher) Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart; Cam Pope (p), New Lothrop; Quentin Taylor (of), New Lothrop.

Breaking it Down

Beal City will aim for a return to the state finals this season. The Aggies are led by senior outfielder Chase Rollins who earned first-team, all-state honors last year. Sophomore infielder Brett Upton is a talented player poised for a big season. Kendall Flaughner and Thomas McCann will also provide plenty of offense this season.

Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart has one of the top pitchers in Division 4 in Max Kornexl. The Irish also boast a potent offense that includes Jackson Reetz, Andy Gruss, Carter Lowed and Mason Houston.

New Lothrop returns an outstanding senior tandem in Quentin Taylor and Cam Pope. Pope is a talented pitcher who earned second-team, all-state honors last season while Taylor is a hard-hitting outfielder.

Breckenridge is led on the mound by pitchers Spencer Brown and Gabe Siler. Junior

standout Gracen Garcia (p/3b) will also help out on the mound and hit .411 last spring. Another junior, Brad Siler, is a talented shortstop/outfielder who also hit over .300 last season.

Coleman will have a solid offense this season led by Jason Beckner, Spencer Pnacek and Josh Hilliard. Tayven Cottrell and Beckner will head up the pitching staff.

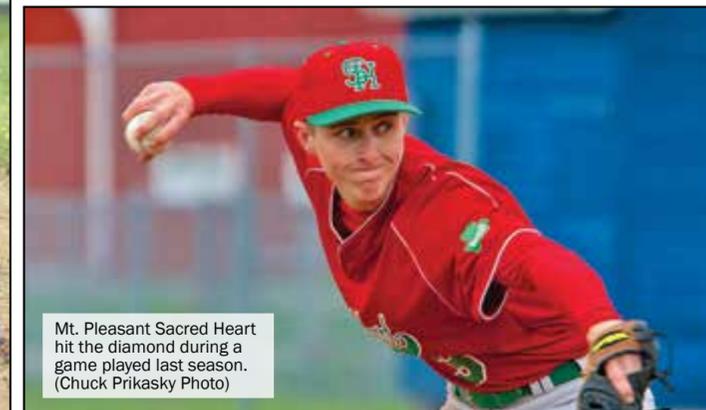
This and That

Vestaburg will also be solid at the plate. Jeremy Smith, Tyler Ruckle, Alex Steed, Seth Stratton and Josh Noe will be among the hitters to watch while Smith will pace the pitching staff.

Fowler returns a solid senior core in Ryan Koenigsnecht (p/of), Jamison George (inf) and Nick Schmitt (p/of). The Eagles also have a pair of talented sophomores in Dane Armbrustmacher (p/of) and Mason Pline (inf/p).

Portland St. Patrick has a strong group of players this season. Garrett Pline leads a deep pitching staff that includes Brandon Scheurer and Travis Moyer. Brendan Schrauben is a power hitter who leads a potent offense that includes Graham Smith, Brady Lehman, Nick Coyne, Moyer and Scheurer.

Pottsville, the defending CMAC league champion, was hit hard by graduation. Senior Marcus Traver returns to lead this year's team along with junior Zach Yarger (p/inf) and sophomore Nick let (p/c/of).



Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart hit the diamond during a game played last season. (Chuck Prikasky Photo)

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Sports Scene

After knocking on the door for several years as a quality program, Hartland finally broke through in 2015 with its first state title.

The Eagles, who entered the postseason nowhere to be found in the Division 1 state rankings, put together a seven-game win streak in the postseason that culminated with a 10-inning, 2-1, triumph over Portage Northern at Michigan State University.

It was the fifth time that Hartland had reached at least the state quarterfinals (2016, 2012, 2011, 2009, 2000) and only second appearance in the Final Four. The Eagles also stalled out in the D1 semifinals in 2000, making the 2016 campaign their first trip to the championship contest — with a very special ending.

"I don't know if we were ever even ranked last season," admitted Hartland coach Brian Morrison. "We had (16) losses. I know in the past we have made long runs before, but last year was a little different because we weren't ranked going into the playoffs. We didn't even win our league. We were third in our division of the KLAA."

Hartland began the season 1-3 this season and because of the start, dropped from first to fifth to out of the rankings by April 20. The Eagles were 9-3 as of April 25 and starting to click.

"We didn't hit very well the first couple of weeks. I think that might have led to some of the losses," said Morrison, whose team finished 25-16-1 last season. "We lost to (state-ranked) Howell (twice) and Canton. Those are good programs. We've picked it up since then. We're hitting better."

Pitching always makes the difference in making a long postseason run. The Eagles have high caliber pitching on their staff this spring.

Senior John Baker has signed with Division I Ball State University. He set the MHSAA record for firing all 10 innings in last year's title game.

The right-hander teams up with senior lefty Nathan Lohmeier to form a dynamite duo from the bump. Lohmeier suffered an injured knee colliding with a player from Novi Detroit Catholic Central in a regional game last season and just started pitching again in January.

"He has a really live arm right now, after missing like eight months," said Morrison. "Overall he's look good. It's nice having him back. It was hard on him not to be able to play in the last few games of our tournament run last year."

Senior shortstop Alex Vydek and senior left fielder R.J. Bortle are both third-year starters for Hartland, along with Baker who will also place first base.

Junior second baseman Hunter Delonoy is also back, while senior outfielder Jack Slavin and senior third baseman Max Hendricks were regulars in the starting nine last season.

In all, Hartland brings back 15 of 19 players on the tournament roster last season, losing three starters and one reserve from the winning contingent.

Hartland is in the same West Division of the KLAA along with fellow state powerhouse programs Howell and Brighton, two schools that have made multiple long postseason runs over the years. Hartland is also in the same district with White Lake Lakeland, another quality opponent.

"It's not going to be easy (to win championships)," said Morrison. "We'll need some help in our division because Howell is in the driver's seat. And Brighton is always good. It's never easy in our league, but maybe that helped us last year. We played some good teams and were able to put it all together last year."

"Of course we don't talk about (winning it all) last season," continued Morrison. "It really won't help us win any games this season. It was a great accomplishment. But that's in the past. I think our players and all of the coaches understand that. We are all focused on this season and what we can do to get better."



Hartland pitcher John Baker returns this season to lead the Eagles pitching staff. Hartland won the Division 1 championship a year ago. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Despite Move To D1, Mt. Pleasant Still Among One Of Top Teams In State

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Mount Pleasant's baseball team came one win away from a Division 2 state title last season.

It won't be easy going for a title this spring, considering the Oilers have moved up to Division 1. But coach Luke Epple might have the talent to give it a good shot.

The Oilers lost 4-1 to Orchard Lake St. Mary in the 2015 title game.

"We have pretty much everybody back," Epple said. "We lose a couple of players, one was a DH and another one played mostly defensively. Pretty much all of the eight or nine starters are back."

The Oilers also appear to be healthier this season.

"We're noticeably stronger physically," Epple said. "We're pretty optimistic of our chances, including in the league, which we haven't won in a couple of years. It's a good league. You have Bay City Western and Midland, Heritage, Bay City Central and Midland Dow, to name a few in the league. That's one of our goals, to compete and win in that league."

Being in Division 1 will be a huge post-season challenge, Epple admits.

"We'll have our work cut out for us in the district where you have to play some of those same Saginaw Valley teams from the north," he said. "Nothing's for sure at all. But we have a team that if we play well..."

Seniors include third baseman Zach Heeke, who has committed to Central Michigan University.

"He's one of our leaders and is vocal," Epple said.

Senior Hunter Buczkowski returns as a pitcher and leftfielder. He pitched in the title game last season.

Senior center fielder Connor Fiolek also returns as a starter, along with catcher Dan Keller, who is back and healthy this year after missing some of the 2015 season.

"He's a good one, and he's college bound somewhere," Epple said. "Some schools are trying to get him."

Max Trucks, a first baseman/pitcher, has committed to Davenport University in Grand Rapids.

"He's been hitting for us very well," Epple said. "He's going on three years with us now. He was with our championship teams."

Seniors Bennett Raymond and Cole Skowronski are left and righthanded designated hitters for Mount Pleasant.

Junior Logan Buczkowski, Hunter's brother, is an outfielder, who is being recruited by Cincinnati and Central Michigan.

"We're pretty deep in the pitching with both Buczkowskis, and also junior Cameron Mitchell, plus Trucks," Epple said. "They're our top four pitchers."

Everyone on the infield is college bound, he noted.

That includes junior second baseman Noah Ingram, and junior shortstop Obie Ricumstrick, committed to Cincinnati.

"We have a real good infield," Epple said. "We're pretty sound defensively. We're healthy and we're strong offensively. We just have to play well the days you have to play well on to be able to beat good teams."



The Mt. Pleasant baseball team has moved up to Division 1 this season after finishing runner-up in Division 2 a year ago. The Oilers are loaded once again this season and should be there again at the end of the season contending for another state championship. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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Lauren Addy is a standout shortstop for the Swan Valley softball team. She leads the way for a strong junior class this season for the Vikings. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Sibling Rivalries

Addys, Schwellenbachs Leave It All On Field

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

In this business you are not supposed to play any favorites. Be objective. Write what you observe.

But I have to admit, I've had the privilege of covering Swan Valley's Addy family each of the last seven years, Sarah and Lauren Addy are about cool as they come on the court or on the softball diamond.

Sarah Addy graduated in 2014 and was a standout volleyball, basketball and softball player. Sarah had range at second base and her speed from home to first could only be matched by a chosen few.

Lauren possess those same aspects and then some. Not to mention Lauren's ability on the basketball court is second to none. She has improved her hoops game so much over the last few seasons it wouldn't surprise me if she elected to make the jump to the next level on the basketball court instead of the softball diamond.

But the softball diamond is probably where the Addy sisters have made the most noise over the years. This year should be no different for the Swan Valley team.

So when Becca Curtis, an honorable mention all-state athlete, transferred to Swan Valley, the Vikings' softball coach just added her to the list.

Curtis is a junior, and is becoming part of a junior class that features eight top players on a 13-member Swan Valley varsity softball team that won 30 games and a district title last season.

Curtis gives the Vikings a second Division 2 all-state honorable mention. And by playing catcher, Curtis allows Jenna Baase, last year's catcher, to move to first base, filling the vacancy left by the graduation of Paige Churchfield.

The junior class is deep and talented.

Other juniors include Ashley Danolowicz, Madison McLeod, Carlee Larsen, Alexis Nickel, Grace Dutoi and Lauren Keyser.

The two sophomores on the team, Kalynn Gulliver and Callie Burgess, are the team's pitchers, with senior Aspin Stack also seeing time on the mound.

But Lauren Addy is the catalyst that gets the Vikings offense moving. She has the ability to get on base and make things happen with her bat or with her legs. Just like her sister.

I remember waiting 20 minutes to speak to Sarah Addy after the Vikings two finals losses in 2012 and 2013. When she finally emerged, clutching a sports energy drink in one hand, her pain was palpable. I asked, almost ashamedly, if she wouldn't mind talking to me for my story.

She nodded her head, wiped at her eyes and talked about the game. I don't remember what she said. But I can see her walking down the hallway, this waif of a girl who had put the team on her back only to know failure - again.

"It's hard to forget emotional highs and lows like that," said Sarah. "That was definitely one of the lowest in regards to sports. It felt like rock bottom, honestly. It took me about a week to come back to life. I was very sad, depressed, angry. I personally thought I did everything I could but I was frustrated I couldn't get a state championship win."

No question Sarah had a standout career at Swan Valley.

Fast forward nearly three years. The low has turned into the highest of highs as Sarah Addy watches her youngest sister and best friend do her thing with the rest of the Vikings, with all eyes on returning back to the Division 2 finals once again.

Even though Lauren walked into the program three years ago being familiar with the surroundings.

So new - and so unexpected - but that didn't stop her from staking her claim and making her own page in the Swan Valley record books at all level. Sometimes they have a hard time believing what they are seeing.

She is that flawless. But the eye is still on the real prize. I have to believe in the Vikings breakthrough and with another shot at winning at Division 2 championship Sara Addy will be right there in the front row

cheering on her little sister and the rest of the Vikings.

Sibling rivalries - you gotta love it.

Meet the Schwellenbach's

Speaking of sibling rivalries Mason and Spencer Schwellenbach have become a very potent 1-2 punch for the Heritage baseball team over the past few seasons.

Spencer Schwellenbach pitches and plays shortstop. His older brother, Mason Schwellenbach, pitches and plays third base.

Mason Schwellenbach has signed to play baseball at Saginaw Valley State University next season, while Spencer Schwellenbach has already drawn a few college scouts to Heritage games.

Meanwhile parents all of who went through the North Saginaw Township Little League program where their dad, Jay Schwellenbach, coached and their mom, Robin Schwellenbach, served as president.

Not to mention older siblings Jordan Schwellenbach, 24, while Taylor Schwellenbach, 23, is the oldest sister. Taylor, too, played baseball in the North Township Little League program.

It's relationships like the Schwellenbachs and the Addys that allow Sports Scene to cover the stories like no other. I mean, you can't go wrong.



Heritage senior Mason Schwellenbach leads the way for a loaded Hawks team that is expected to contend for a Saginaw Valley League North Championship in 2016. Schwellenbach will play his college baseball at Saginaw Valley State University. (Scott Keyes Photo)

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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON SOFTBALL

DIVISION 1 SOFTBALL PREVIEW



The Midland High softball team made it all the way to the Class A quarterfinals a year ago before losing to Caledonia. (Chuck Prikasky, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Saginaw Valley League Loaded; D1 Title Dreams Looming For Many Area Teams

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Caledonia, Farmington Hills Mercy, Plymouth.

Top area teams: Midland, Bay City Western, Mt. Pleasant, Howell, Rockford.

Top area players: Hannah Carson (catcher), Mt. Pleasant; Kristie Gray (p), Bay City Western; Katie Heller (of), Mt. Pleasant; Maya Kipfmiller (p), Midland; Zoe Manary (p), Midland; Kelsie Popp (2b), Bay City Western.

Breaking it Down

The Saginaw Valley League is one of the premier softball leagues in the state, and this year the Valley is loaded with talented teams. Midland reached the Division 1 quarterfinals last year and has the talent to go even further this season. Junior standout Maya Kipfmiller hit .504 last season and also turned in a 1.17 ERA as a pitcher. Senior Zoe Manary is another dangerous hitter and a solid pitcher while Jillian Elmer is a power hitter and also a strong pitcher. Julia Gross, Tara Gross, Sydney Coppens and Catherine Kelley are other key players for the Chemics.

Bay City Western is led by senior second baseman Kelsie Popp. A returning all-state player, Popp hit .471 last season with 39 RBI and will be playing at Central Michigan University next year. Sophomore Kristie Gray is a returning all-conference player and the ace of the pitching staff. Hard-hitting third baseman Melissa Wegener is also an all-conference player. The Warriors also return sophomore Olivia Kowalski while freshman catcher Megan Mann is a talented newcomer with big-time ability.

Mt. Pleasant moves up to Division 1 this season and brings back a wealth of talent. Hannah Carson is a returning all-state catcher while Katie Heller is a returning honorable mention, all-state outfielder who will also pitch. Freshman Oaklie Mogg is an outstanding young

pitcher and hitter. The Oilers also return all-conference third baseman Allie Conway.

St. Johns won the CAAC Red title last season and the Redwings have plenty of talent this season. Senior Adriann Simison returns as catcher while sophomore Brittany VanHorn will pitch and play first base. Key juniors returning include shortstop Jamie Carroll, Lauren Bates (of/p) and Kendall Smith.

Holt turned in a perfect conference record in the CAAC Blue last year and finished 36-3 overall. The Rams return several talented seniors highlighted by Bry Chapman (p/ss), Tracee Hartley (catcher) and Olivia Cottom (ss/3b). Junior first baseman Mackinley Lane also returns.

Grand Ledge took second to Holt last year and has some talented juniors returning. Emily Songer (p/3b), Kenzie Trierweiler (of) and Kahlei Ethridge (1b) pace a talented Comet squad.

Okemos also returns plenty of veterans; senior catcher Kate Buckland will be playing college softball at D1 Mercer. Senior Elizabeth Knox returns in the outfield with senior Emilee Wilkinson back at second base.

Howell is poised for a big season. The Highlanders have a pair of big-time hitters in senior Amy Jarrett (ss) who hit .405 with 48 RBI last season, and junior Veronica Pezzoni (2b) who hit .492. Senior Erin Utter heads the pitching staff while Kara Johnson is an exciting freshman prospect.

Hartland has one of the premier young hitters in Madeline Skene (p/1b). Skene hit .452 with 52 RBI as a freshman last season. Senior Delaney Green hit .390 with 41 RBI for the Eagles.

Rockford has a strong group of seniors led by pitcher Madison Mayle and catcher Jessica Ryan. The Rams also return seniors Abby Carey (inf), Chelsea Chesebro (of) and Emily Johnson (of).

DIVISION 2 SOFTBALL PREVIEW

Can Swan Valley Breakthrough With Another Title Run In D2?



Swan Valley has another strong team returning in 2016 and could contend for a Division 2 title this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

David Cook
Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Livonia Ladywood, Stevensville-Lakeshore, Swan Valley, Wayland.

Top area teams: Swan Valley, Bullock Creek, Portland.

Top area players: Lauren Addy (ss), Swan Valley; Kennedy Clyde (inf), Bay City Glenn; Becca Curtis (3b/c), Swan Valley; Brooke Dillon (3b), Tri-County; Rylie Kalina (inf), Bullock Creek; Olivia Roe (2b), Portland; Greta Wilker (inf), Belding; Elly Wythe (of), Eaton Rapids.

Breaking it Down

Swan Valley is ranked among the top five in the state in Division 2 this season. Swan Valley returns a pair of all-state players in Lauren Addy (ss) and junior Becca Curtis (c/3b). Jenna Baase returns at first base while sophomores Kalynn Gulliver and Callie Burgess lead the pitching staff.

Bullock Creek is also a top 10 team in the state. Bullock Creek has a strong group of returnees led by senior pitcher Megan Robinette and junior Rylie Kalina, a returning all-state player. Seniors Kelsi Jacobs and Savannah Lambert are also skilled veterans returning.

Bay City John Glenn boasts one of the most potent offenses in the area. Kennedy Clyde is a returning all-state athlete who hit .548 as a sophomore last season with 15 home runs and 73 RBI. Senior outfielder Jenai Laporte hit .417 last season.

Portland won the CAAC White last year and reached the state quarterfinals. The Raiders return plenty of talent led by all-state second baseman Olivia Roe. Sophomores Abby Grys and Shelby Battley lead a powerful pitching staff.

Eaton Rapids also welcomes back a number of standout players. Junior outfielder Elly Wythe is a returning all-state player. Seniors Shelby Steele (p/ss) and Mandi Prieskorn (c/1b) are a pair of returning all-conference players.

Ionia also returns plenty of talent. Senior pitcher Keegan Kelley and catcher Ashley White are all-conference performers while junior third baseman Samantha Challenger is another all-conference player.

Central Montcalm won its first league title since 1987 last spring and is loaded for another big year. Junior Courtnee Nicholson (of/2b) is a returning all-conference player who hit .469 last year. The Hornets also return all-conference pitcher Mallory Morgan

who had a 0.50 ERA last season and power-hitter, and Emaleigh Taylor, who belted 12 home runs and hit .423. Sophomore pitcher Lily Doyle is another standout, along with Kenzie Rutz who brings another power bat to the lineup.

Chippewa Hills has another talented squad this spring. Bailey Wilson is a dangerous hitter and strong pitcher while junior Elle Lalonde is a two-time, all-conference player and Rachel Lobert is a talented infielder. Sydney Wright and Sadie Metcalf also bring strong bats to the lineup along with Mackenna Purdy.

Alma turned in a winning season last spring, and the Panthers have a strong core of young players to build around. In the circle, Alma has a pair of talented pitchers in freshman Danielle Shaw and sophomore Amanda Efaw. Efaw will also play first base and fellow sophomore Kimmie Shunk is a talented outfielder and good hitter. Emmy VanBlaricom (ss) is a strong hitter while Morgan Johnson, Aaliyah Wilson and Sarah Gadde also boost the offense.

This and That

Howard City Tri-County is also loaded this year. Senior Brooke Dillon hit .588 last year with 61 RBI. Sophomore catcher Dayoni Mahlich hit .432 a year ago. Junior Alexis Holappa also had a big year last spring as she hit .432 with 56 runs scored. The Vikings also have strong pitching with Skylar Reed.

Belding is also looking strong this season. Greta Wilker is a returning all-state player who provides plenty of power. Senior pitcher Paige Ledin provides strong pitching while Brooke Linebaugh and Krista Hull are two more standout returnees.

DeWitt won a district title last season and will be solid again this season. Seniors Ally Hawkins (ss) and Abby Vanlake (c/inf) lead the team.

Haslett has a talented young squad led by junior Keelin McManus (p/3b) who hit eight home runs last season and Sam Munson (p/ss).

Fowlerville is led by senior catcher Hannah Powell who hit .430 last season with outstanding defensive skills. Sophomore shortstop Sarah turned in a huge freshman season as she hit .521 with 42 runs scored.

Look for Owosso to be improved this season. Senior Madelyn Irelan returns at catcher and sophomore Maegan Jodway and Hannah Ardelean give the Trojans a pair of strong pitchers. Owosso also returns juniors Sally Armstrong (1b/of) and Katelyn Jones (ss) while Ashley Abrams, Tabitha Elliot and Ardelean offer more punch at the plate.

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DIVISION 3 SOFTBALL

Can Any Area Teams Knock Off Monroe St. Mary From D3 Throne?

David Cook Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Monroe St. Mary, G.P. University Liggett, Montague, Clinton.

Top area teams: Farwell, Beaverton, Reese, Ithaca, New Lothrop, Shepherd

Top area players: Kylee Chaffin (p), Ithaca; Brooklyn Dolloff (of), Ithaca; Carlee Selle (catcher), Reese.

Breaking it Down

Led by a strong senior class, the Ithaca softball team should remain competitive this season.

Senior centerfielder Brooklyn Dolloff is a returning all-state, honorable-mention who hit .542 last season with 39 stolen bases and 16 doubles. Senior pitcher Kylee Chaffin is a dominating hurler in the circle and is also an impact player at the plate. Fellow seniors Madison Pung (of) and Aaruna Woodrow (catcher) also return while sophomore Kayla Belles is another standout for the Yellowjackets. Freshmen Raylynn Delo (p/1b) and third baseman Bailey Miniard add depth to the Ithaca team this season.

Clare is also looking solid this spring. The Pioneers have strong pitching with Bailey



Carbeno and Hailey Hochstetler. Carbeno and Hochstetler also lead a strong offense that includes Bailey Hubbel, Molly Merillat and Cami Miller.

Alma turned in a winning season last spring and the Panthers have a strong core of young players to build around. In the circle, Alma has a pair of talented pitchers in freshman Danielle Shaw and sophomore Amanda Efaw. Efaw will also play first base and fellow sophomore Kimmie Shunk is a talented outfielder and good hitter. Emmy VanBlaricom (ss) is a strong hitter while Morgan Johnson, Aaliyah Wilson and Sarah Gadde also boost the offense.

St. Louis has a deep and promising squad this spring. Nicole Koczenasz and Alexis Beeson provide the Sharks with good pitching. St. Louis also has plenty of offense with a number of contributors including Olivia Anderson, Meghan Clark, Kamrie Filipiak, Laurel Hrabel, Aynslee Koutz and Alyssa Shigwadia along with Koczenasz and Beeson.

New Lothrop moves up to D3 this year. The Hornets have a solid group of seniors led by Briana Sevcech (p), Shelby Vincke (catcher) and Maddie Bitterman (2b/ss).

At Carson City-Crystal, the Eagles have a promising young team led by pitchers Whitney LaVictor and Kendall Norton. At the plate Carson City is led by Sydney Kipp, Taylor Reeder and Hailey Lutherloh along with Norton.

Laingsburg won the CMAC last season and have another strong team this season. Seniors Lindsey Smith (1b) and Faye Bayer (of) and juniors Katie Eppard (p/ss) and Tyler Adkins (p/sb) lead the way for the Wolfpack.

Saranac will be among the challengers in the CMAC led by the senior tandem of Madelyn Miller (of/p) and Josie Manion (p/ss).

Pewamo-Westphalia will also challenge in the CMAC with senior all-conference player Mackenzie Thelen (ss/2b) leading the way along with Allysa Nurenburg.

Bath has a talented young squad. Junior pitcher Emma Kees and freshman pitcher Rachel Orr head up a solid pitching staff while junior Taylor Buck (ss) and sophomore Taryn Peru (3b) anchor the infield.

Edmore-Montabella is led by pitcher Hanna Stockwell. At the plate Montabella is led by Cheyenne Fuller, Kendra Stockwell, Dani Hunt and Madi Cutler.



Photos by Skip Traynor and Randy Miniard

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DIVISION 4 SOFTBALL

USA Seeks To Repeat In D4; Many Area Teams Capable Of Making Long Post Season Runs



Photos by Skip Traynor and Randy Miniard

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Top teams statewide: Unionville-Sebewaing, Kalamazoo Christian, Indian River Inland Lakes, Coleman.

Top area teams: Coleman, Waterford Our Lady, Fulton-Middleton, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart.

Top area players: Connor Proctor (p), Fulton-Middleton; Taylor Schmitt (inf), Fowler; Cassidy Tucker (2b), Coleman.

Breaking it Down

The chase is on in Division 4 to catch defending state champion Unionville-Sebewaing. The Patriots return one of the finest softball players in the state in senior pitcher Nicole Bauer who has committed to Stanford University. Last season Bauer went 26-0 with a 0.38 ERA and 191 strikeouts. Bauer also hit .463. The Patriots also return all-state shortstop Kayla Gremel.

Coleman reached the state quarterfinals last season and has another solid team this spring. Cassidy Tucker is a returning all-state second baseman for the Comets. In the circle Coleman has Laken Berthume and Jaden Berthume who are both solid at the plate as well. Carley Starnes, Grace Staley, Kaylie Scott and Liz Dana also add to a potent offense.

Fulton-Middleton is led by all-state pitcher Connor Proctor. Proctor set school records with 313 strikeouts

also leads a strong offensive lineup that includes catcher Chloe Fife, all-conference outfielder Kirsten Maniez, Ryanna Plank and Morgan Warnke.

Breckenridge has a deep squad this season with an offense led by Bre Gillis, Kylie Federspiel, Makayla Young, Nicole Olander and Kayli Sanger. Breckenridge also has a pair of solid pitchers in Alison Willman and Madison Smith.

Merrill is led by talented sophomore Olivia Fleming. Fleming is a solid hitter and can also pitch, along with Emma Carlson. Kaylie Brown is another solid bat in the lineup.

Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart will again be among the top Division 4 teams in mid-Michigan. Sacred Heart will feature a potent offense led by Jordan Fox, Hadyn Terwilliger and Alexis Jackson while Linde Bolle provides the team with strong pitching.

Beal City has a number of outstanding hitters this season including Paige Lorenz, Andrea Esch, Alexia Lynch and Lily Steffke. Lauren Turner handles the pitching.

Vestaburg is led this season at the plate by Jacie Bissell, Ashley Jerome, Madison Garcia, Caitlin Clouse and Jennifer Denman while Kelsey Jourdan is a promising pitcher.

Fowler is one of the top teams in the CMAC this season. Senior infielder Taylor Schmitt is a returning all-state infielder. The Eagles also return senior infielder Kalli Feldpausch and senior outfielder Ashley Sillman.



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Six More Yellowjackets Sign National Letter Of Intent; Seniors Continue To Rewrite Record Books

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Anyone who has ever known or spoke to Ithaca football coach an Athletic Director Terry Hessbrook knows how passionate he is when he's talking about football and student-athletes in general.

This year is even more exceptional, so if he apologizes because he's been talking non-stop for a couple of minutes don't get alarmed when he is taking a deep breath.



Aaron Barnes is the fourth football player from Ithaca's 2015 Division 6 state championship team that will continue his career at the next level. Barnes will play his college football at Alma College.

"I'm sorry for rambling," he says. "I'm just passionate about this."

Hessbrook and the rest of the Ithaca community have every right to be passionate and supportive of their athletics as six more student-athletes from the Yellowjackets senior class signed their National Letters of Intent on April 27 in the Media Center at Ithaca High School.

Spence DeMull, Aaron Barnes, McKenzie Kench, Abby Workman, Erica Sheahan, and Brooklyn Dolloff

all signed their National Letters of Intent on April 27 at Ithaca High School. Those six athletes, along with runners Blaire Showers and Alyssa Mankey (Lansing Community College), football players Jake Smith (Harvard), Jace Demenov (Grand Valley) and Grant Gimmy (Olivet College) who signed earlier this year gives Ithaca a total of 11 seniors in the class of 2016 that will move on to the next level.

"It's not just the football players, it's our entire athletic department and our coaches that have gotten our kids to the next level," Hessbrook said. "Over the last eight or nine years the kids have bought into what we are teaching and bringing their tough work ethic to school everyday. Not to mention they are excelling in the classroom as well. I couldn't be prouder of the class of 2016."

So the notion that Ithaca is a little town just receiving acknowledgments because of its football program is far from the truth. Not to mention, if you are a student-athlete looking for the best opportunity to receive a college scholarship, you need to play for one of the elite programs in the state.

"Compared to how things are now to when I was in college, unfortunately there's a lot of misinformation out there," Hessbrook said. "Playing at the Division III level is almost equally as grueling as athletes competing at the Division I level. You really have to buckle down at any level you are playing at."

Seeing a school the size of Ithaca pump out talent on all levels is impressive, and getting the parents to buy into a program is the important part.

Some misinformed parents truly believe college coaches are only visiting certain schools or - the one that really bothers me - that a



Wednesday, April 27 was a historic day at Ithaca High School as six more seniors signed their National Letters of Intent. Those athletes that signed from (Left to Right) included Spence DeMull (basketball, Michigan Community College), Aaron Barnes (football, Alma College), McKenzie Kench (volleyball, Lansing Community College), Abby Workman (soccer, Cornerstone University), Erica Sheahan (track, Western Michigan University) and Brooklyn Dolloff (softball, Lansing Community College). With the six signees Ithaca's total for the year is 11. (Scott Keyes Photos)

coach has a magic formula to get kids scholarships.

Barnes, who helped Ithaca two Division 6 state titles and a runner-up finish in 2014 said to be a part of a senior class that has 11 athletes moving on to the level is pretty incredible.

"I couldn't be happier to be a part of this senior class," Barnes said. "We all work hard and to be able to send 11 athletes on to college is pretty incredible." Here's the question, though: Are those programs churning out Division I players because of their visibility and the work they do in selling their players, or simply because through open enrollment and transfers they're getting a majority of the elite players to begin with?

"Don't get me wrong. There are high school programs that do a better job of building relationships with college programs and thus have a greater number of players getting college offers," said JC Shurburt, national recruiting analyst for 247 Sports. "But if you're a good enough football player there is no requirement for you to go to a school that has a tradition of putting a bunch of guys to the next level."

"You just have to be good enough. It's hogwash to think you have to be at a bigger program to get noticed."

Some will argue that it's not the elite players who need the exposure of playing at the best programs but the

Erica Sheahan, last year's state champion in the long jump is pictured with friends and family as she announced she will be running track next season at Western Michigan University.

mid-level kids who will have a better chance of being noticed if they're at a school like a Rockford or the private schools, which attracts college coaches by the dozen.

Ithaca has proven that notion to be wrong.

It's not nearly as difficult as it was 15 to 20 years ago where you didn't have access to all the video. Kids are identified so much earlier now. You necessarily have to be playing at a program that churns out 20 players a year.

Recruiting has become a monster, fed by star ratings and insatiable media coverage. The pressure to get noticed - and have a college education paid for - is greater than ever. The best programs will continue to attract elite players, those programs will boast about the number of recruits they send to Division I schools and the next wave of kids will want to be part of that.

Basically if you're a football prospect you will be noticed.

Sheahan believes by winning an individual state championship a year in the long jump at the Division 3 finals and being a part of Ithaca's cross country team that won a state championship two years made her a more marketable candidate for landing a Division I college offer. People and recruiters see the success that Ithaca has had and they build a solid relationship in years to come.

"First off, Western Michigan will give me every opportunity to run and academically it has every thing that I will need to be successful," Sheahan said. "Coach Lebron and my teammates have pushed me to make me better runner and to be a part of this senior class is amazing. Our seniors push each other at practice and we all would love to end or high school careers winning another state championship and hopefully a couple more individual state titles. You couldn't ask for a better way to go out than that."



Alma Girls Soccer Team Off To A Solid Start

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Nick O'Neil is encouraged by the start from his Alma Panthers girls soccer team.

The Panthers are 4-1-3 after their first eight games.

"I'm pleased with how the season started," the soccer coach said. "We had a nice win in our championship game of our tournament on Saturday. It's the first time our girls have won their own tournament so that was exciting for them. I was pleased with how they had performed."

"We've had a pretty difficult early season schedule, playing teams like Montrose, Birch Run and Bullock Creek, that have been tough contests for us," O'Neil added. "There's a few more ties than I would like, like a 0-0 tie with Ovid Elsie. Overall, I'm pleased with where we're at."

Alma was 7-10-4 last year.

"We lost two starters off of last year's team," he said. "Both were midfielders. Most of our players are returning starters. We also have a strong freshmen class that came in, a number of girls that are

contributing to the varsity early."

Goalkeeper Abby Schmieder, is a sophomore who already has four shutouts.

"In the games we struggled in last year, she was missing and that had a huge impact on our season, so we're hoping to keep her healthy," O'Neil said. "Our strongest defensive players are both senior captains. Calli Ackels is our starting center back and a senior captain. Playing in front of her and holding the midfield spot is Maggie Bever."

Two returning sophomores and standouts on offense are Sydney Hanson at attacking midfielder and Tia Everdeen, the leading goal scorer from last season as a freshman, and is already at 10 goals. Hanson is leading in points with 13.

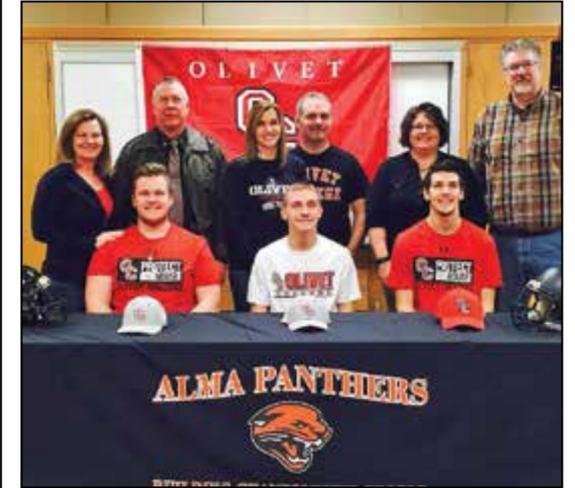
"Hansen has taken over the career assist record," O'Neil said. "She's going to be up in that number quite a bit over her career."

"We have a couple freshmen that are contributing already offensively. But the other girls are like the backbone of my team, the standouts early on," he said. "As



young as we are, I expect us to get better as the season goes on. We have an extremely difficult district this year. Freeland is one of the most talented teams in the state. Hemlock has probably their best team they've ever had, with a number of college level soccer players.

"We're looking to improve as much as we can from now until districts," he added. "We hope to compete not only for a divisional championship in our conference but also make some noise in the playoffs as well."



Alma seniors Dan Waber, Darren Olejniczak and Justin Doyle recently signed their National Letters of Intent to play football at Olivet College starting this fall. (Submitted Photo)



Alma's Matt Leppien has committed to continuing his football and academic career at Alma College in the fall. (Submitted Photo)



The Alma girls soccer team is off to a solid start during the 2016 season. (Zip Widman, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON LACROSSE

BOYS LACROSSE PREVIEW

Powerhouse Teams Look To Continue Stranglehold On Sport

Dan Stickardt
Sports Scene

This is the 12th year that the Michigan High School Athletic Association has sponsored boys lacrosse after the coaches association hosted the tournament previously.

If there is one trend that has been apparent in this stretch, it's the club of the state's elite is very difficult nut to crack.

In Division 1, only one school has won a state title and a total of five programs have even competed in the state finals. In Division 2, only four schools have won state championships over 11 seasons and just seven have enjoyed a state finals appearance.

This season a total of 114 programs will be MHSAA postseason-eligible with six more newer club programs that won't be eligible until next season. Both divisions will compete with 57 schools, which is the most to date.

To reach the summit, a team must pass up a short list of state powerhouses that have held a tight grip on the sport even before the MHSAA began governing boys lacrosse in 2005.

TOP DIVISION 1 TEAMS — Birmingham Brother Rice, Novi Detroit Catholic Central, Hartland, Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern/Northern Unified, Rockford.

HSSS TOP DIVISION 1 TEAMS — Novi Detroit Catholic Central, Hartland, Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern/Northern Unified, Rockford, Lake Orion, Brighton, Clarkston, Grand Ledge.

LAXPOWER DIVISION 1 POLLS — 1. Birmingham Brother Rice; 2.

Novi Detroit Catholic Central; 3. Hartland; 4. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern/Northern Unified; 5. Rockford; 6. Lake Orion; 7. Brighton; 8. Clarkston; 9. Grand Ledge; 10. Plymouth Canton.

DIVISION 1 OUTLOOK: All roads must pass through Birmingham Brother Rice. It's a road that doesn't appear to be on any state maps, either, has nobody has been able to find it since boys lacrosse has become an MHSAA-sanctioned sport.

Brother Rice has captured 11 straight MHSAA titles in Division 1 and only four other programs have even been privileged to become bridesmaid to the Warriors.

Novi Detroit Catholic Central has finished as the state runner-up a record five times, including the past two years. Detroit U-D Jesuit has record three runners-up finishes, while Forest Hills Eastern/Northern Unified has claimed two runners-up trophies and Ann Arbor Pioneer one to date.

Brother Rice dominated the coaches' association state tournaments for more than two decades before the MHSAA took over in 2005. The nationally-ranked Warriors appear to have the talent to go for a 12th straight title.

There are several other programs that have become much stronger in recent years, among them Catholic Central, Hartland, Forest Hills Eastern/Northern Unified, Rockford, Lake Orion, Brighton, Clarkston, Grand Ledge, Plymouth Canton, plus a host of others have been ranked in the past couple of years.

In 2014, Division 2 Detroit Country Day ended Brother Rice's run in terms of regular season wins against

in-state opponents. Brother Rice had ventured more than a decade without losing to a Michigan school.

TOP DIVISION 2 TEAMS — Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central, Birmingham-Detroit Country Day, East Grand Rapids, Okemos, Pontiac Notre Dame Prep.

HSSS TOP DIVISION 2 TEAMS — Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central, Okemos, Lowell.

LAXPOWER DIVISION 2 POLLS — 1. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central; 2. Birmingham-Detroit Country Day; 3. East Grand Rapids; 4. Okemos; 5. Pontiac Notre Dame Prep; 6. Lowell; 7. Battle Creek Harper Creek; 8. Grosse Pointe South; 9. Orchard Lake St. Mary's; 10. Grosse Pointe Woods University-Liggett.

DIVISION 2 OUTLOOK: East Grand Rapids, Detroit Country Day and Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood have each captured three state titles and Forest Hills Central has won two state championships in the past 11 years.

With defending state champion Cranbrook (the Cranes are 3-2 all-time in MHSAA state title games) in a major rebuilding mode, Forest Hills Central, Country Day and East Grand Rapids hold down the top three slots in the polls, with Okemos, Notre Dame Prep and Lowell lurking in the next three slots.

Cranbrook edged Okemos 10-9 last season and also won in 2013. The door is wide open for a new champion to be crowned and host of schools are in the mix this season.

Forest Hills Central began the year 8-0-0 to claim the No. 1 spot. The Rangers claimed crowns in 2012 and 2010.

Country Day last won in 2014 and is 3-1 in title matches, while East Grand Rapids has played in six total D-2 title games, going 3-3.

Okemos, Notre Dame Prep and Orchard Lake St. Mary's have all finished as the state runner-up once and all are ranked this season. Lowell and Battle Creek Harper Creek are slated for their best seasons to date.



Grand Ledge and Lansing Waverly square off in an early season lacrosse battle. Waverly lost the game 8-7. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



GIRLS LACROSSE PREVIEW

Defending Champions Will Compete With Large Target

Dan Stickardt
Sports Scene

This is the 12th year that the Michigan High School Athletic Association has sponsored girls lacrosse and the sport has enjoyed steady increase in growth and popularity.

This season, a total of 74 programs will be MHSAA postseason-eligible with six more newer club programs that won't be eligible until next season. There will be 37 teams each in Division 1 and Division 2 this season.

East Grand Rapids, Rockford and Birmingham United have each recorded four state championships during the first 11 seasons of the MHSAA Tournament. Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart owns three titles and both Grosse Pointe South and Okemos have claimed two titles apiece.

TOP DIVISION 1 TEAMS — Rockford, Grand Rapids Forest Hills United, Birmingham United, Birmingham Marian, Plymouth, Grosse Pointe South.

HSSS TOP DIVISION 1 TEAMS — Rockford, Grand Rapids Forest Hills United, Northville, Hartland, Clarkston, Brighton.

LAXPOWER DIVISION 1 POLLS — 1. Rockford; 2. Grand Rapids Forest Hills United; 3. Birmingham United; 4. Birmingham Marian; 5. Plymouth; 6. Grosse Pointe South; 7. Northville; 8. Bloomfield Hills; 9. Hartland; 10. Holland West Ottawa.

DIVISION 1 OUTLOOK: Rockford sat atop the Division 1 top 10 by *LaxPower.com* at the end of April — and for good reason. The Rams are gunning for their fourth straight D1 title and fifth in seven seasons.

Last year Rockford held on for a 10-9 victory over Birmingham Marian in the finals to finish 21-3-0. Rockford did drop a 11-10 contest to defending D-2 state champion East Grand Rapids on April 21, but has a good amount of talent back in uniform to make another push in 2016.

The Rams return a total of 12 players. Senior Alex

Vandermolen, an all-state first team and all-american selection last season, is back alongside sophomore Brooklyn Neumen and seniors Ryann Deuel and Zoe Newmann, all of whom scooped up All-State accolades last season.

The Rams have already defeated No. 2 Forest Hills United this year. Birmingham United and Birmingham Marian are on the other side of the state currently padding their own resumes.

TOP DIVISION 2 TEAMS — East Grand Rapids, Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood, Okemos, Grand Rapids Catholic Central, Caledonia.

HSSS TOP DIVISION 2 TEAMS — Okemos, Williamston-Haslett Unified, DeWitt, East Lansing.

LAXPOWER DIVISION 2 POLLS — 1. East Grand Rapids; 2. Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood; 3. Okemos; 4. Grand Rapids Catholic Central; 5. Caledonia; 6. East Lansing; 7. Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart; 8. Spring Lake; 9. Farmington Hills Mercy; 10. Grand Rapids Christian.

DIVISION 2 OUTLOOK: East Grand Rapids is coming off of four straight state championships and going for title No. 5. The Pioneers are locked and loaded from their top-ranked position.

EGR graduated a large class of players, and bolsters a roster anchored by juniors and sophomores. If there is a year to unseat the Pioneers based on their apparent youth, it's now.

Several other schools have their targets set for long postseason runs. Cranbrook-Kingswood, Okemos, Grand Rapids Catholic Central, Caledonia, East Lansing and Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart are all quality teams with visions of making the final day of the campaign in June.

LAXPOWER SUPER 20 POLL — 1. East Grand Rapids; 2. Rockford; 3. Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood; 4. Birmingham United; 5. Bloomfield Hills; 6. Grand Rapids Forest Hills United; 7. Birmingham Marian; 8. Grosse Pointe South; 9. Okemos; 10. Clarkston; 11. Grand Rapids Catholic Central; 12. East Lansing; 13. Northville; 14. Troy; 15. Caledonia 16. Hartland; 17. Holland West Ottawa; 18. Plymouth; 19. Lake Orion; 20. Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart.



Two of the top teams in the state, Okemos and Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood squared off in April 25 contest on the Chieftains home field. Results of the game were not available before press time. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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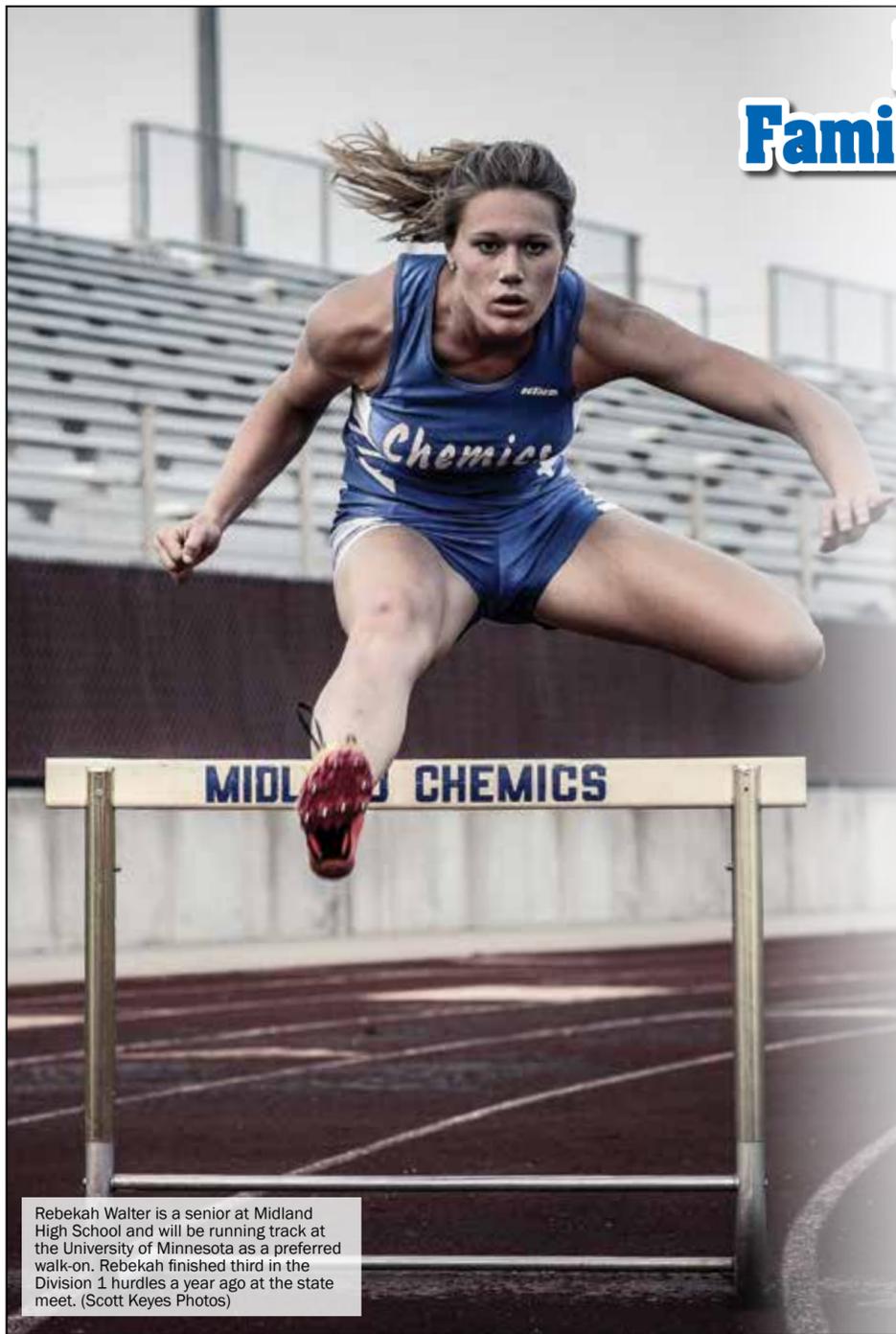
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Rebekah Walter is a senior at Midland High School and will be running track at the University of Minnesota as a preferred walk-on. Rebekah finished third in the Division 1 hurdles a year ago at the state meet. (Scott Keyes Photos)

Midland's Walter Family Rich In Sports Background

John Raffel Sports Scene

The Walter family in Midland lives and breathes sports - and for three very good reasons.

D'Andra Walter and her husband, Dave, who were both athletes and graduates of Michigan Tech, have certainly been trying their best and succeeding in being loyal sports fans for their one son and two daughters.

D'Andra (Poyfair) played basketball and Dave played football at Michigan Tech; both are in the school's Hall of Fame. Their children have obviously inherited their parents' athletic skills.

Their son David played football at Michigan Tech for three seasons and will receive his Masters degree in December after graduating with a bachelors in three years. Jess played basketball for two seasons at Indiana University, and recently committed to Northern Kentucky University, but unfortunately a coaching change at NKU had reopened her recruitment. Meanwhile, Rebekah is a senior at Midland High School and runs cross country and track, and plans on running track at the University of Minnesota.

"We enjoy watching them," D'Andra said. "We try to get to as much as we can. That's pretty much what we're doing for our entertainment these days, traveling. Football and basketball run over a little bit. So we divide and conquer from home."

It's actually a longer trip for them to go to Houghton, Mich., than Bloomington, Ind.

At Tech in 2014, David was named to the GLIAC Academic Excellence team and had two catches for 20 yards. Last season as a junior, in the team's 4-0 start, he was the leading receiver with 20 catches for 253 yards and five touchdowns. After 10 games, with the team finishing 7-3, Walter had 51 catches for 576 yards and eight touchdowns.

"We're off to a good start," he said after the first four games. "This is first year I've been a starter. It's a lot of fun to contribute. I've been happy with what's going on so far. It's all about keeping our winning streak going."

Tech runs a pro style and has a 50-50 mix on running and passing, David said.

At Midland, he spent time at wide receiver and tight end, and safety, and also played in basketball and track.

"I take pride in my route running," Walter said, "and also with my hands. The program up here emphasizes hard work and earning everything you can get."

Jess played two seasons at Indiana, and then decided to transfer to NKU in April. She is hoping to find the right fit for her over the two next years.

For Indiana during the 2014-15 season, Jess appeared in all 31 games with four starts and averaged 7.4 points per game while shooting 41.7 percent from the 3-point area and 73.8 percent from

free throws.

"Things went good last year," she said after her first season. "We did not have the season we wanted. We were young last year and we've all gained some experience. Having some good competitive games will bode well for us coming into this year."

Walter led all Big Ten freshmen and was fourth overall in the conference in 3-point field goal percentage, while scoring in double figures in 10 games and connecting on three or more 3-pointers in six contests.

She had tallied nine points in her collegiate debut off the bench against Gardner-Webb, and had 16 points while shooting 6-of-9 from the field and 4-of-5 in 3-pointers.

Walter, in Big Ten action, led Indiana with 14 points against Ohio State on Jan. 8, 2015, while netting four 3-point field goals. Her first career start featured 11 points with two rebounds, a steal and an assist vs. Wisconsin.

"It's definitely a big adjustment switching from high school to college," she said prior to her sophomore season. "You have to stay confident in yourself in knowing what you can do. It's fun to play with players who are at such a high level and they just make you better every day in practice. That correlates into the game."

As a senior at Midland High, Walter was a runner-up for Miss Basketball in the state of Michigan in 2014 and was an all-stater High School Sports Scene Magazine Dream Team co-Player of the Year.

She set school records for most points in a season, most 3-pointers made in a year and most assists in a season while leading Midland to a 21-3 record with a conference and district title in 2013-14 while averaging 18.0 points, 5.9 assists, 4.1 rebounds, 3.9 steals and 1.3 blocks per game. The previous winter, she averaged 20.9 points, 5.4 rebounds, 5.2 assists and 3.4 steals per game. In her freshman season, Walter helped Midland gain the school's first ever regional championship.

"I think I see the court very well and anticipate what's going to happen next," she said. "My 3-point shot has been a strength."

Playing Big Ten basketball "has been an incredible experience," Walter said. "It's something I've always dreamed about. It's something that's really cool."

But after her sophomore season, Walter decided to move on. The school's student newspaper reported in late March the 6-foot guard announced via Twitter that she would be transferring. For the 2015-16 season, she appeared in 32 of 33 games, starting in five after battling back from a preseason concussion. Walter scored just 2.8 points in 16.4 minutes per game.

"Hoosier Nation," Walter tweeted. "I have built some life-long bonds and have met some incredible people. I am very proud of the growth of this team and will continue to wish

the rest of my teammates the utmost success. However, after much consideration and prayer, I have decided to continue my career elsewhere."

Rebekah "has been a little different than the other two," D'Andra said. "She has a black belt from Taekwondo in Midland. She dabbled around in different things to find something she loved. She found Taekwondo and it took off from there as far as her athletic interests."

Track is the top high school sport for her and the 300 hurdles has been Rebekah's specialty. She was third in the state last season in 44.37 seconds.

"She just loves running those hurdles," D'Andra said. "There's quite a few schools looking at her now."

It's her senior season. Rebekah ran cross country last fall and indoor track during the winter.

"Track is my main sport," she said. "Cross country is for fun and to get endurance for track."

The third-place state finish has been a top highlight. "Our team has also done well," Rebekah said. "Right now, coming off last year I'll be ranked second in the state. I want to compete for first and second. I hope to improve my personal best. Right now, I'm 0.8 seconds away from the school record in the 300 hurdles. Our 4x1 last year did really well and qualified for states. We didn't do as well as I think we can for state because of a bad handoff. We're returning all those girls. I think we can qualify again and do really well."

Her strength in the hurdles is "good technique and speed," Rebekah said.

She does run the 100 hurdles, but not often because of her participation in the relays.

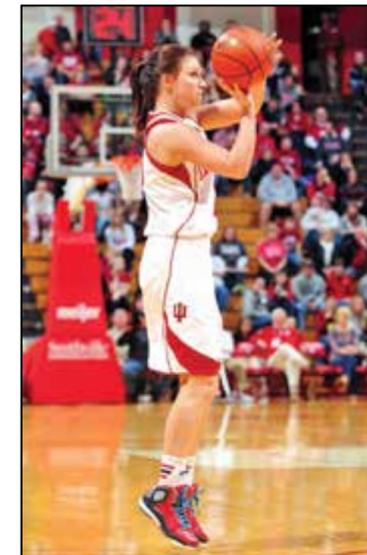
Rebekah announced in mid-April she would be running track at the University of Minnesota.

All three Walter athletes enjoy being in a sports-enthused family.

"It's a lot of fun for me," David said. "I know my parents and my sisters ... it's a lot of fun to talk to them about it. It's good to have a nice support network. Everyone tries to come to as many games as they can. I try to get to as many of my sisters' basketball games and track meets as possible. I like that aspect of it."

"The family support through my athletics journey has been a blessing," Jess said. "I couldn't ask for a better family. Watching my brother and sister and having my parents go through college and knowing from their own experience and offering advice is really invaluable. We always give our best and try our best. That's all you can ask for."

"It's really fun," Rebekah said. "Everyone is super competitive. All of our vacations involved being active, running around and doing things. It's all really fun."



Jess Walter recently concluded her sophomore season at Indiana University, but has elected to transfer. She has currently reopened her recruitment with the hopes of landing with another school in the coming months. (Submitted Photo)



Former Midland High standout David Walter enters his senior season at Michigan Tech University. Walter will graduate with his master's degree in December. (Photo Submitted by Michigan Tech)



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Division 1 & 2 Boys Track Preview

Distance Runners Key Success At Corunna, Rockford

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Division 1

Top teams statewide: Rockford, Plymouth Salem, Davison

Top area teams: Rockford, Davison, Bay City Western, Grand Ledge

Top area athletes: Sean Beckom II (sprints), Saginaw Heritage; Tyler Brenner (mid-distance), Rockford; Isaac Harding (distance), Rockford; Christian Hubaker (distance), Grand Ledge; Cole Johnson (distance), Rockford; Cole Rechsteiner (hurdles), Bay City Western.

Breaking it Down

Rockford has a loaded team this spring. Distance runners Isaac Harding and Cole Johnson lead the way along with Nick Isley in the hurdles and Tyler Brenner in the 400 and high jump. The Rams are strong in the field with Johnny DeHaan in the pole vault and Dakoda Pankratz and Logan Anderson in the throws.

At Davison, Nick Sleeman leads the distance crew while Ethan Onwell, Austin Pifer and Anthony Fordham are mid-distance standouts. In the field events look for Graham Hungerford and Corran Thornton in the jumps and Jacob DeBoer and Jeven Tyce in the throws.

Senior hurdler Cole Rechsteiner leads Bay City Western. Juniors Evan Vorwerck and Brendan Nesbitt are a pair of talented distance runners along with Loeren Appold in the 800 and 1600. In the field events, look for Dylan Jeffrey in the high jump and Kane Wendling in the throws.

Grand Ledge is paced by standout distance runner Christian Hubaker. Senior Austin Edwards leads in the sprints along with Evan Shelton (300 hurdles) and Nathan Goschka (800). Juniors Colton Stephens and Steven Davis are strong in the pole vault.

Walled Lake Northern has a solid squad this season led by sophomores Carter Merrell (200),

Anthony Kim (400) and junior Larry Popyk (800). Midland is led by senior Conner Legge (3200), senior Evan Haase (pole vault) and junior Vince Walker (high jump).

DIVISION 2

Top teams statewide: Grand Rapids Christian, Zeeland West, Zeeland East.

Top area teams: Corunna, Williamston, Lansing Waverly, St. Johns

Top area athletes: Keshawn Harris (hurdles), Waverly; Steven Linton (sprints), St. Johns; Spencer Mort (sprints), Corunna; Justin Scavarda (throws), Mason; Ben Whitting (high jump), Freeland; John Wixson (hurdles), Chippewa Hills.

Breaking it Down

Standout senior sprinter/long jumper Spencer Mort leads Corunna. Jacob Trowbridge, Dakota Hundley, Noah Jacobs and Ben Jacobs lead an outstanding distance crew. Max Nations and Cooper Clapp are strong in the throws with Ethan Quinn and Owen Walter helping in the sprints.

Lansing Waverly is paced by standout hurdlers Keshawn Harris and Jordan Robinson. Eric Johnson is a standout sprinter and Alex Owens is one of the top high jumpers. DaVarie Halliburton and Tayveon Henry excel in the long jump.

Williamston has a strong core of distance runners in Nathan Maurer, Aaron Davis and Josh Bowen. Steffan Smalley (400), Jacob

VanDeuren (hurdles) and Garrett Smith (800) will also score big points. In the field the Hornets are strong with Maddox Maki (throws), Adam Nichols (long jump), Dayton Munce (pole vault) and Tom Dutcher (pole vault/discus).

St. Johns is paced by standout senior sprinters Steven Linton along with Levi Hayworth (throws) and Sean Akins (long jump).

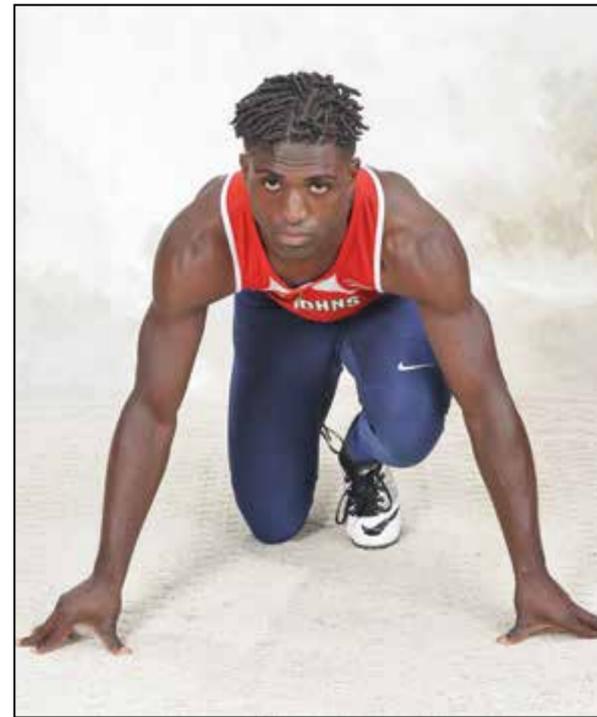
Mason has the premier thrower in the state in senior Justin Scavarda. Joe Grundstrom is a standout sprinter while seniors Ben Greer (distance) and Jarrett VanHavel (pole vault) will also score plenty of points.

St. Johns Steven Linton currently holds five school records and is considered one of the top sprinters in the entire state. Linton is planning to continue his running career in college. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

YOUNG OWOSSO



Corunna is off to a fast start in 2016 after winning the Blue and Gold Invitational at Ithaca High School. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



DIVISION 3 & 4 BOYS TRACK PREVIEW

Shepherd, LCC Stacked In D3; Beal City Continues To Find Success In D4

David Cook Sports Scene

Division 3

Top teams statewide: Clare, Adrian Madison, Dundee.

Top area teams: Clare, Shepherd, Lansing Catholic, Harrison.

Top area athletes: Levi Boynton (throws), Clare; Evan Goodell (distance), St. Louis; Konnor Maloney (400), Lansing Catholic; Christian Petre (sprints), Sanford-Meridian; Walker Priest (distance), Shepherd.

Clare boasts a deep squad led by senior Alex Dysinger (400/jumps), Levi Boynton (throws) and Chase Field (pole vault). Freshman Brenden Sersaw is strong in the sprints and junior Ben Haupt is a standout distance runner.

Breaking it Down

Shepherd features an outstanding group of distance runners led by Walker Priest, Owen Howard and Tyler Travis. Jeremiah Salisbury is a standout in the jumps as is Josh Yarnell in the hurdles. Freshman Kyle Gates (hurdles) and juniors Blake Opdyke (200) and CJ Spencer (800) will also be key.

Sanford-Meridian is again led by its outstanding sprinters. Senior Christian Petre is one of the premier sprinters in the state along with Monte Petre and Matt Hoffman in the 400.

Lansing Catholic has a solid squad led by Konnor Maloney (400), Garrett Fedewa (hurdles), distance runners Ethan Markey and Nick Listermann and Nick Peters (200/long jump).

St. Louis is led by one of the premier distance runners in the state in Evan Goodell.

Chesaning also has an outstanding group of sprinters led by Bryan Moore and Zach McFarlan.

Chesaning will also get major points from Sam Forsyth (400/long jump), Paxton Ruddy (800), Zick Zubek (hurdles), Brandon Keys (long jump)

and Jacob Redmond (throws).

Hemlock is paced by a pair of strong distance runners in seniors Landon Honsinger and Ryan Hilbrandt along with middle-distance runner Kurt Sollner.

Pewamo-Westphalia is led by freshman Cameron Wirth (400), junior Jared Smith (hurdles) and sophomore Isaiah Schafer (throws).

Division 4

Top teams statewide: Saugatuck, Petersburg-Summerfield, Sand Creek.

Top area teams: Beal City, Morrice, Saginaw Nouvel.

Top area athletes: Levi Gross (high jump), Merrill; Jacob Kulhanek (pole vault), Merrill; Gavin Marr (800), Breckenridge; Jacob Smith (throws), Carson City-Crystal; Robi Stuart (throws), Saginaw Nouvel.

Breaking it Down

Beal City features a strong group of hurdlers led by Curtis Straus and Max Nelson. Ethan Schafer leads the distance crew while Nash Reeves and Tristan Smith are solid in the throws.

Saginaw Nouvel has a solid group of throwers led by Robi Stuart and Jacob Gray. Jason Russell and Cam Fluder lead the sprint crew. Payton Hirschenberger (jumps) and Donovan Gomez (800) are also key returnees.

Morrice is led by an outstanding group of seniors. Brennen Wright is a top sprinter and long jumper. Jake Rivers will score points in the pole vault and 800 while Joe Wesley is an outstanding thrower.

Breckenridge has a strong distance crew led by juniors Alex Giles and Hunter Chovanec and senior middle distance man Gavin Marr.

Merrill is strong in the field events with junior Levi Gross in the high jump and Jacob Kulhanek, who is one of the top pole vaulters in the state.

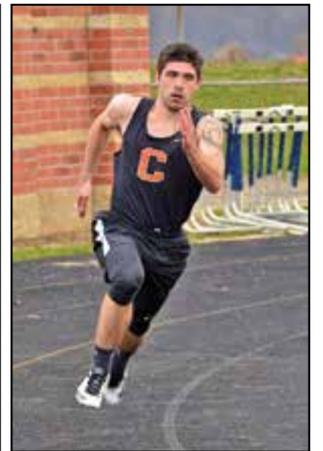
Carson City-Crystal is led by distance runner Kaleb Barrett along with Jacob Smith (throws) and Zachary Pringle (long jump).



St. Louis' Evan Goodell is considered one of the top distance runners in Division 3. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Breckenridge is off to a fast start in Division 4. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Chesaning nearly defeated Corunna in the recent Blue and Gold Invitational held at Ithaca High School. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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DIVISION 1 & 2 GIRLS TRACK PREVIEW

Talent at a Premium in D1 and 2; Rockford looks strong in D1; St. Johns looks for repeat in D2

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Division 1

Top teams statewide: East Kentwood, Plymouth, Macomb Dakota.

Top area teams: Rockford, Davison, Bay City Western, Grand Ledge, Midland.

Top area athletes: Landon Kemp (hurdles/field); Sydney Nesbitt (distance), Bay City Western; Olivia Rademacher (hurdles), Rockford; Morgan Witzgall (sprints), Bay City Western.

Breaking it Down

Rockford is paced by outstanding distance runners in freshman Ericka VanderLende and senior Morgan Benoit. Senior Doofan Nyamor is a standout sprinter, as is freshman Jillian Roney. Molly Weir and Caleigh Dunn lead the middle-distance, and junior Olivia Rademacher is a standout hurdler. The Rams are strong in the field with Amanda Eslinger (high jump), Morgan Korf (pole vault) and Cassandra Smiegel (throws).

Davison has a solid group of middle distance runners headed by sophomores Lily Kelsey, Olivia Thiel and Ellie Crandall. Victoria Ostrander leads the distance runners while Claire Stoddard is a standout sprinter. Sam Pfiffner is solid in the throws.

Bay City Western has an outstanding team led by junior hurdler Alana Heinz, freshman sprinter/long jumper Morgan Witzgall and freshman distance runner Sydney Nesbitt. Western is deep in the distance races with senior Laura Estrada and junior Alyssa Zettle. In the field events, look for Lexie Mapes in the pole vault and Brooke Fielder in the high jump.

Midland has plenty of talent led by junior sprinter Jayden Williams and senior Rebekah Walter in the hurdles. Senior Amy Smith returns in the 800 while Madison Tarnowski (long jump), Sarah Wing (pole vault) and Bethany Wilson (throws) lead in the field.

Grand Ledge is led by senior Nicole Novak in the mid-distances and Jenna Magness in the distance races and Mara Clark in the throws.

Greenville has one of the state's best all-around

athletes in junior Landon Kemp who excels in the sprints, hurdles, long jump and pole vault. Paige Hallock is a standout thrower.

Okemos has some talented freshmen in Laya Hartman (sprints/long jump) and Bria Telemaque along with Mia Nash in the throws and Sophia Franklin in the pole vault.

Division 2

Top teams statewide: Grand Rapids Christian, Hamilton, Middleville.

Top area teams: Williamston, Belding, Ionia.

Top area athletes: Laura Huebner (sprints, hurdles), Swan Valley; Joelle Humpula (mid-distance, hurdles); Hannah Jones (mid-distance), Williamston; Greta Wilker (throws), Belding.

Breaking it Down

Sophomore mid-distance runner Hannah Jones and junior hurdler Grace Lounsbury lead Williamston. Other key contributors for the Hornets are Haleigh Hunt (sprints), Julia Henderson (sprints), Taylor Kotecki (pole vault) and Gabby Berger (throws).

Belding is solid all-around with Greta Wilker (throws), Alyssa German (pole vault) and hurdlers Summer Eubank and Emma Jakeway. Johanna McCully is a top sprinter and long jumper while Lauren McDowell is also a top long jumper and mid-distance runner.

Ionia has a strong all-around team with Allison Flanagan (hurdles), Kiersten Reeves (800), Camryn Klein (800), Chloe Wandell (distance), Hannah Howard (high jump) and Larissa Piggott (throws). Mason is paced by seniors Zoe Glass (400), Caitlin Niswonger (throws) and Dani Jones (long jump) and freshman Cecilia Stalzer (distance).

Corunna has a talented young group paced by freshmen Maddie Birchmeier (200), Lexi Mort (hurdles) and sophomore Myah Kelly (pole vault).

Haslett is strong in the field with senior Shannon Twichell (throws) and junior Selah Rowe (high jump).

St. Johns is led by an outstanding group of distance runners that includes seniors Milah Montle and Jennifer Eaton and freshman Lauren Lasceski.



St. Johns was a surprise state champion in Division 2 a year ago. Minus standout runner Karrigan Smith, who is currently running at Michigan State University, the RedWings still return a lot of talent this season to hopefully make another run at another state title. (Submitted Photos)



Oak Park won the Division 1 state championship a year ago and should be contenders this season. (Submitted Photos)

DIVISION 3 & 4 GIRLS TRACK PREVIEW

Ithaca, Montabella Have Much Needed Depth To Make Title Runs In '16

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Division 3

Top teams statewide: Ithaca, Adrian Madison, Clare.

Top area teams: Ithaca, Clare, Shepherd, Pewamo-Westphalia.

Top area athletes: Courtney Allen (distance), Ithaca; Amber Gall (distance), Shepherd; Paige Gould (hurdles), Clare; Emma Schafer (hurdles), Pewamo-Westphalia; Erica Sheahan (sprints), Ithaca.

Breaking it Down

Ithaca is stocked with talent this season led by senior Erica Sheahan (sprints/long jump), Courtney Allen (distance), Emily Foster (hurdles) and Kurstin Kalisek (mid-distance). Ithaca also returns Blaire Showers (mid-distance), Amelia Freestone (400), Madison Brock (hurdles), Mikayla Fairchild (sprints) and Taryn Ostrander and Claire Reeves in the throws.

Shepherd is a deep team as well, led by



Pewamo-Westphalia won the Division 3 championship a year ago and is expected to be strong this season for a possible repeat. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

standout distance runners Amber Gall, Kylie Hutchinson and Haley Hegenauer. Ashtyn Snyder is a top sprinter and long jumper while Katelyn Hutchinson (mid-distance), Rivers McNeel (200), Sarah Bellinger (pole vault) and Holly Straus (throws) will also score major points.

Clare has a talented squad led by Paige Gould (sprints/hurdles), Ellie Johnson (sprints), Jasmine Harper (distance), Kasey Staley (pole vault) and freshman distance runner Lainey Venkant.

Pewamo-Westphalia is again led by its outstanding relay teams. Brenna Wirth (200, 400) is an outstanding runner while Emma Schafer is an outstanding hurdler and is strong in the shot-put. Audrey Pohl leads the distance crew.

St. Charles has outstanding young sprinters in freshman Mikayla Williams and sophomore Najiyah Holden along with Audrey Pumford in the 200.

Division 4

Top teams statewide: Saugatuck, Edmore-Montabella, Reading.

Top area teams: Edmore-Montabella, New Lothrop, Beal City, Morrice, Coleman.

Top area athletes: Claudia Freed (throws), New Lothrop; Kensington Garvey (distance), Edmore-Montabella; Ashley Reihl (hurdles/long jump), Beal City; Maliena Sheehan (hurdles/jumps), Edmore-Montabella.

Breaking it Down

Edmore-Montabella features plenty of depth and experience, and is led by junior Maliena Sheehan (hurdles/jumps), distance standout Kensington Garvey, high jumper Bri Carson and Brynn Lobert (200/400). Montabella also returns Marisol Bucuo (hurdles), Kim Buskirk (distance), Katrina Buskirk (pole vault/discus) and Ashley Swartz (high jump).

New Lothrop has a talented young team led by field standouts Claudia Freed (throws), Spence Malone (throws) and Olivia Johnson (high jump). Freshman Caitlyn Bruff is a standout sprinter while freshman Samantha Kulhanek is a top hurdler. New Lothrop also returns sprinters Skye Nancarrow (sprints), Alex Bedrosian (sprints) and sophomore Courtney Krupp (distance).

Beal City is paced by Natalie Gross (hurdles/long jump), Hannah Steffe (distance), Madeline Steffe (distance), Kayla Bierschbach (200/400), Ashley Reihl (hurdles/long jum) and Amy Schwerin (400).

Breckenridge has an outstanding group of throwers led by freshman Brooklyn Federspiel along with Alicia Gutierrez and Natasha Netzley. Chloe Brittain (800/1600) and Claire Laurenz (hurdles) are also key returnees.

Fowler has solid all-around team led by distance runners Kiah Becker and Ashley VanElls and middle distance runners Madison Koenigsnecht and Morgan George. Fowler will also count on Ciera Weber (hurdles), Sidney Horak (200/long jump) and Julie Thelen (400/long jump).

Fowler is paced by sophomore Megan Struble (hurdles/long jump), freshman Destiny Johnston (200) and senior Jenna Wolfe (400).

Morrice has a solid squad led by Taylor Hewitt and Tori Rose in the sprints and Ashleys DeFrenn in the shot put.

Coleman has an outstanding freshman to watch in MaKailyn Monson (sprints). Carson City-Crystal is led by senior distance runner Taylor Ward.

Ithaca, led by seniors Blaire Showers and Erica Sheahan recently won the Ithaca Blue and Gold Invitational. The Yellowjackets have depth in a lot of areas to contend for Division 3 championship this season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



A St. Louis hurdler competes during the recent Blue and Gold Invitational at Ithaca High School. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Clare is also considered one of the top girls track teams in Division 3 this season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Chippewa Hills Girls Track Team Eyes More Championship Success

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Chippewa Hills girls track team seems poised for another championship season. Coach Sally Schafer's Warriors have won 13 consecutive conference title, five consecutive regional titles, and were MITCA team state champs for the second straight year. The 4x200 relay team was state champs at the MHSAA state meet.

The Warriors won the MHSAA title in 2014.

Key graduation losses from last year were Kylie Schafer, Emily Starck, Ariel Esch, Jacki Sheaffer, Emonee Anderson, Riley Reyes and Michaela Whipple.

The Warriors have exceptional talent returning, including senior Nicole Snyder in the 200 and 400, relays, Joelle Humpula in the 100 hurdles, 300 hurdles and relays; Rachel Baldwin in the shot put, high jump and pole vault, Jennifer McNeal in the 400, high jump and relays; and Rebecca Fuller in the throws.

Standout sophomores include Hannah Todd in the 100, 200, 400 and relays, Payton Ethridge in the 100, long jump and relays and Hannah Fiegel in the 200, 400, 800 and relays.

"We have a group of athletes that think about the team first, individual second," said head coach Sally Schafer. "We have some strong returning seniors. They have experienced much success over their high school careers. They know what it will take to continue the success and will hopefully be good role models for the upcoming athletes."

Schafer added that "staying healthy and strong leadership" will be the keys for the team to have success.

The Warriors are now in the Central State Activities Association Gold Division, but Schafer expects a strong conference race.

"Everyone will bring some quality to the table," she said. "We're looking forward to another competitive season. I'm excited to see some of the first-year athletes compete and hopefully have some surprises."

Humpula is among the athletes off to a high-flying start and expected to score a lot of points for the Warriors.

Her team competed in the Saginaw Valley Track Indoor Invitational in late March and Humpula had a strong performance, taking fifth in the 60-meter hurdles (10.01), 10th in the 400 (1:02.65), and sixth in the 4x300 relay (2:59.90).

Humpula won't soon forget the 2015 season. The Warriors didn't win the MHSAA crowns, but took MITCA again and still had a fabulous season.

She's looking to be in the relays and the hurdles again. She was eighth at the Division 2 state meet last spring (16.18) in the hurdles.

"I'd like to move up in the state for the hurdles and come back strong in the 4x1," Humpula said, adding the 100 hurdles is her best event. "In that, I'd like to get a 15.2. It will take lots of hard work."

Humpula added that the key to success all season will be the steps she takes between hurdles.

The Warriors were 2014 MHSAA state champs and took sixth last season. Humpula likes this team's potential.

"We have a good team, we just have to do more work," she said.

Chippewa Hills is also hoping McNeal will get healthy. She hasn't competed as of mid-April because of an injury.



Chippewa Hills' Hannah Todd (right) hands off to Warrior teammate Grace Issette during the distance medley at the Morley Stanwood Mohawk Invitational. (John Raffel, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Greenville Pole Vaulter, Hurdler Set To Be State Championship Contender

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Landon Kemp's impressive achievements as a pole vaulter for Greenville's girls track and field team continue, and it's only her junior season.

Kemp was fifth at the state finals in the pole vault as a sophomore at 11-0. She was fourth in the long jump (17-0 3/4) and fifth in the 100 hurdles (14.95 seconds). As a freshman, she took third in the pole vault and fourth in the long jump.

"It's going pretty well so far," Kemp said. "It's early in the season. It's all building up to the state meet. That's what we train to do, track especially. You build up for the state meet so you peak at the right time, especially with the pole vault. I feel good."

She has also been competing in national competition.

Already this season for Greenville, Kemp set the school record with a vault of 12-9 outdoors. Jeff White is

Greenville's pole vault coach.

"I've been working with Landon four or five years now," White said. "I started out as a volunteer in Greenville. She used to come up and hang out with one of the vaulters I had. We talked her into trying pole vault and she loved it. She's a great worker. She tries to get better every day. She sets high goals and tries to achieve them."

White said Kemp also goes down to Maple Valley to work with instructor/coach Jerry Sessions.

"She's improved probably six inches to a foot every year," White said. "She's very coachable. I think she obviously wants to win in competition and set a state record."

The state record is 13-2 feet and

Kemp has already cleared that height this year at an indoor state meet. She hopes to go for that mark this season.

"I was a gymnast for seven years. Growing up, I did gymnastics," Kemp said. "When I quit that, someone said 'hey, you'd be a good pole vaulter. You're fast and you're strong. I tried it. I stuck with it and it came natural. I have no fear of it because gymnastics taught me not to be scared of it.'"

She's placed in national competition in past years. She has vaulted 12-4 3/4 two years in a row at the New Balance nationals in New York (indoor) and North Carolina (outdoors).

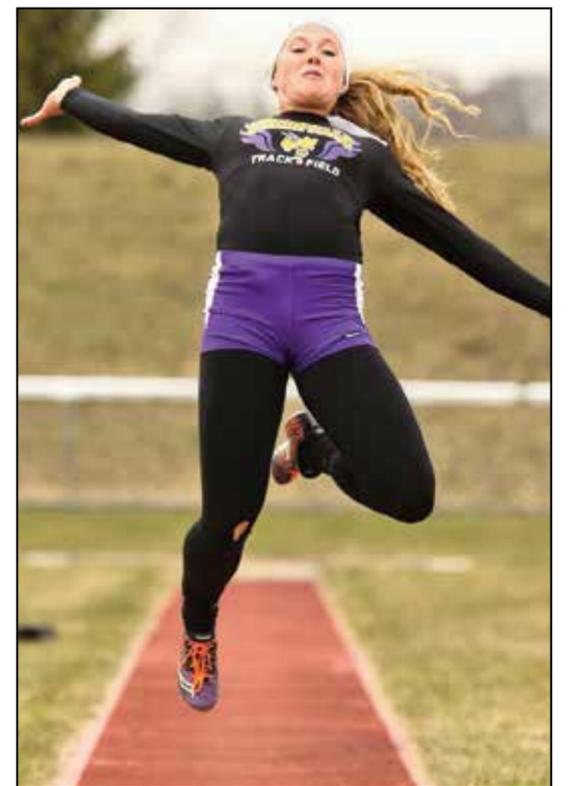
Kemp also does the long jump, high hurdles, relays and sprints.

"She's very good at all of them,"

White said. "She has a very good future."

Michael Woods has been Kemp's hurdles coach in high school. He's coached hurdlers since 1987.

"She is without question one of the most outstanding hurdlers I have coached, boys and girls," Woods said.



"She is extremely intelligent, is dedicated, hard working and extremely athletic. She's on par to run faster this year."

Woods said Kemp is explosive out of the blocks.

"She has terrific form," he said. "She just powers through each hurdle."

"I've been working pretty hard with those," Kemp added. "Last year, I ran a 14.95 (in the 100s). I hope to be in the mid 14s by the time state comes around."

Speed and technique is critical in having success in the hurdles, Kemp said.

"What I like about my events is they're all technique events," she said. "You have to be fast but if you don't

have the right technique, your speed won't get you anywhere."

Woods sees a relationship between the hurdles and pole vault.

"She puts a lot of time into both events and you see the results," Woods said. "You pretty much have to ask her to leave the track, because she's going to stay out there as long as she can. She'll stay out there and continue to work until she gets it right."

Kemp also plays basketball. But the focus right now is on track. She has her senior year ahead and is hoping to get 13-6 in the pole vault.

"A lot of girls don't peak until they go into college," she said. "I'm hoping to jump about 13-6 and maybe somewhere close to 14 feet by the end of my senior year."

Greenville's Landon Kemp is considered on of the top pole vaulters in Michigan regardless of division. (Jamie McNich, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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St. Louis Runner Comes Back From ACL Injury

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Megan Brown has had special reason to want a successful 2016 track season.

The St. Louis senior missed the 2015 track season after she tore her right knee's ACL during basketball.

She was top 15 in the cross country regionals last fall, running 20:58.6 and qualifying for the state finals.

So far this season, highlights were a 1:10.2 in the 400, a 2:46.96 in the 800, a 4:39.06 in the 4x400 relay and a 10:45.8 in the 4x800 relay.

Coaches had decided to switch

Brown's events from her sophomore season, when she specialized in the 100 meters, 200 meters, 4x100 relay and 4x200 relay. She went to the state finals in the 4x200 as a freshman.

"I'm doing more mid-distance, distance stuff this year," Brown said. "With my cross country background, I talked it over (with my coaches) and they wanted me to try some mid-distance stuff because they think I can be really competitive at (those events)."

She considers the 400 as her best event, followed by her 4x400.

"If I stay focused and work hard, we have the potential of qualifying for the state meet," she said. "It's hard to say right now. Teams are not set in stone at this point. We've only had two meets so far."

Brown said the strength of her race is her finish.

"I usually try to kick at the end," she said. "That's usually where I give it everything I've got, the last 100 meters."

Brown's junior year of cross country was her best, with a personal record of 20:24. She qualified for state her junior and senior seasons.

For the 2016 track season, she considers herself to be at 100 percent.

"It definitely took some time to adjust over the summer," Brown said. "When

I was getting ready for cross country season, it was hard getting back into it. Going from the best shape of your life to being out of shape was really disheartening. I'd compare my times from my junior cross country season to my senior year and I wasn't happy with my performance. It made me stronger as a person. It was hard, definitely. It was the most difficult thing I've done so far in my life."

She injured the knee in a basketball game and had surgery. She decided not to play basketball and perhaps risk injury again.

"I jumped up to catch the ball and my knee just gave out," Brown said.

The track team "is young, we have a lot of underclassmen and freshmen," she added. "Once they get into the groove of everything, we'll be strong. We have a lot of potential."

Brown said her team's training is "geared for the end of the season for the regionals and state meet."

Brown started running competitively in the seventh grade. But when her senior season ends, she'll keep running. She signed last February to run cross country and track and field at Spring Arbor University.

"I really loved the team atmosphere I felt there," Brown said. "It reminds me a lot of my team back here in St. Louis. I don't want to go to a large school where no one knows my name."

When her high school season ends and she gets ready for Spring Arbor, "I'll definitely put in more miles," Brown said. "I'll follow the training plan, get some miles in and definitely weight lift when I can."

Jay Puffpaff is Brown's cross country coach at St. Louis and also coaches the boys track team.

"She has done an outstanding job coming back from that tough injury," he said "It's a long process coming back from ACL surgery. She's handled it very well. It's a tribute to her toughness on how fast she's been able to bounce back."



St. Louis senior Megan Brown has returned from a torn ACL which she tore last season during basketball season and has picked up where she left off before the injury. Brown, who is also the class Valedictorian is one of the top distant runners in the area. (Scott Keyes Photo)



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON TENNIS

A Smashing Success Williamston's Sara Daavettila Continues To Rewrite MHSAA Record Books; Eyes Third Straight D3 Title

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Growing up in Williamston, Sara Daavettila began hitting tennis balls back and fourth with her mom Breita in their Williamston driveway.

Fast forward more than 10 years and Daavettila is not only one of the premier tennis players in the state, but is also one of the best in the nation as well.

A two-time state champion in Division 3 at No. 1 singles, Daavettila did not loose a game last season and entered her senior year having won 245 straight games.

Along with being a top high school player Sara has also played with some of the top women tennis players in the world at the Dow Corning Tennis Classic. Daavettila also played in the main draw in the event.

Playing in the Dow Corning was a highlight of

Daavettila's young but impressive career.

"I was super excited," Daavettila said. "It's a great tournament and it was an honor to participate in it."

Another highlight in Daavettila's career came when she won the Division 3 state title as a sophomore when she defeated current University of Michigan sophomore Alex Najarian. Najarian entered the match an undefeated, three-time state champion and the loss to Daavettila was the only loss of her high school career.

Daavettila has been committed to playing her college tennis at the University of North Carolina. Daavettila chose North Carolina over offers from college tennis powers like Stanford, UCLA, Tennessee, Texas, Michigan, Alabama, Ohio State, Northwestern and Vanderbilt among others.

Daavettila grew up learning the game of tennis from her mother who was also her coach until the age of 12. That was when she began training with



Williamston's Sara Daavettila, who will play tennis at the University of North Carolina, is shooting for her third consecutive Division 3 championship at No. 1 singles in 2016. Daavettila, had offers from tennis powers Stanford and the University of Tennessee, but elected to attend Tar Heel country to continue her tennis career. (Scott Keyes Photo)

Mike Flowers of Court One Athletic Club in Lansing.

Daavettila began gaining some experience at a professional tennis event as she played in a tournament in Evansville, Ind.

"I played in a tournament in Evansville that was not that big," Daavettila said. "It was not as great as Midland. I looked at Midland as my first real tournament. I had a lot of family come up for the tournament. It was a really big deal for all of us and I was super

excited."

Being a highly-ranked national player, Daavettila has been asked why she still plays high school.

"The girls, I love them and I do it for the school," said Daavettila, at last year's state finals. "It's great and supporting. Getting ready, that is how it is going to be in college. The USTA, it's single so it's a lot of individual. It's nice to be on a team."

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GIRLS TENNIS PREVIEW

Usual Suspects Should Battle For Net Gains

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

By glance at the state rankings over the past several years, Northville has been a state power in girls tennis for a long time. Yet the 2015 season was somewhat different than any other for the Mustangs. Northville captured its first state hardware of any kind in the sport.

The Mustangs had never won or even finished as state runner-up in the girls or boys tennis until last year when Northville rang up 33 points, five ahead of Midland Dow and a host of other state powers.

It is no surprise that Northville opened the year ranked No. 1 in Division 1 in the coaches association poll and one of the best teams regardless of division.

While Northville is far away from the top of the pyramid in terms of dominance, the Mustangs will compete for glory again this season.



DIVISION 1

TOP TEAMS: Northville, Midland Dow, Bloomfield Hills, Grosse Pointe South.

HSSS AREA TOP TEAMS: Northville, Midland Dow, Rockford, Novi.

DIVISION 1 COACHES POLL: 1. Northville; 2. Bloomfield Hills; 3. Midland Dow; 4. Grosse Pointe South; 5. Ann Arbor Huron; 6. Ann Arbor Skyline; 7. Ann Arbor Pioneer; 8. Troy; 9. Traverse City Central; 10. Rockford.

OUTLOOK: With six returning starters, plus a strong influx of younger talent, and Northville will be in the picture of repeating. Midland Dow might have something to say about that, as the Chemics return eight regulars and are trying to formulate the winning potion.

Never count out Bloomfield Hills, which is in its third year after the merger of Lahser and Andover. Lahser earned six runners-up state finishes and Andover was a top 10 fixture for decades. Together, they are just as talented as Northville and Dow.

Grosse Pointe South has won three of the last eight tournaments in Division 1, where six different schools have claimed top honors in the past seven years. You have to go back to 1999-2000 to find a school repeating, as Port Huron Northern was the last school to pull that trick.

The usual suspects will also be factors in the race for top 10 finishes, as Ann Arbor Huron, Ann Arbor Skyline and Ann Arbor Pioneer are all solid, while Troy, Traverse City Central and Rockford will all field quality units.

Port Huron Northern and Clarkston appear headed for rebuilding campaigns this season.

DIVISION 2:

TOP TEAMS: Birmingham Marian, Birmingham Sealholm, East Grand Rapids, Portage Central, Okemos

Utica's Davina Nguyen graduated as a three time state champion in Division 1. (File Photo)



HSSS AREA TOP TEAMS: Okemos, Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central, Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern, Holly

DIVISION 2 COACHES POLL: 1. Birmingham Marian; 2. Birmingham Sealholm; 3. East Grand Rapids; 4. Portage Central; 5. Okemos; 6. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central; 7. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern; 8. Holly; 9. Birmingham Groves; 10. (tie) Grosse Pointe North, North Farmington, Petoskey.

OUTLOOK: Birmingham Sealholm edged Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern by one point (29-28) last season to earn the state title, with Marian and Okemos also scoring over 20 points each.

Okemos' Emily Struble, who currently attends Miami of Ohio graduated as a four-time state champion for the Chieftains. (File Photo)

Seaholm returns a bevy of talent, but does not lock down the No. 1 spot. Those honors go to another Birmingham-Bloomfield area rival, Birmingham Marian. The Mustangs already own a 6-2 win over Seaholm this season and is the early favorite.

If Marian or Seaholm falter, expect East Grand Rapids, Portage Central or Okemos to be their in the midst, as that trio bolster experienced squads with impressive finishes during the season's first month of play.



Bloomfield Hills Academy of Sacred Heart celebrates its third Division 4 title in four years. (File Photo)

DIVISION 3:

TOP TEAMS: Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood, Birmingham Detroit Country Day, Holland Christian

HSSS AREA TOP TEAMS: Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern, Williamston.

DIVISION 3 COACHES POLL: 1. Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood; 2. Birmingham Detroit Country Day; 3. Holland Christian; 4. Grand Rapids Christian; 5. Grosse Ile; 6. Allegan; 7. Pontiac Notre Dame Prep; 8. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern; 9. Sturgis; 10. St. Clair, Chelsea.

OUTLOOK: Winners of five straight state titles, Cranbrook-Kingswood has the talent to keep its stranglehold on the team trophy.

Local rival Detroit Country Day and Holland Christian are the only other quads that have realistic chances of cracking the top two.

The host of usual top 10s will likely have to vie again for those spots, including, Grand Rapids Christian, Grosse Ile, Allegan, Pontiac Notre Dame Prep and Forest Hills Eastern.

DIVISION 4:

TOP TEAMS: Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart, Traverse City St. Francis, Ludington

HSSS AREA TOP TEAMS: Portland, Flint Powers Catholic, Lansing Catholic Central.

DIVISION 4 COACHES POLL: 1. Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart; 2. Traverse City St. Francis; 3. Ludington; 4. Portland; 5. Kalamazoo Christian; 6. Flint Powers Catholic; 7. North Muskegon; 8. Ann Arbor Greenhills; 9. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Eastern; 10. Lansing Catholic Central.

OUTLOOK: Sacred Heart outscored runner-up St. Francis 34-27 at last year's Lower Peninsula Division 4 state finals.

Here's a scary thought. Sacred Heart returns 11 of 12 starters and the Gazelles are expected to run past the field this season.

If injuries were to plague Sacred Heart, St. Francis and Ludington should be in the picture. Portland, Kalamazoo Christian, Flint Powers Catholic and North Muskegon have hopes for a top five finish.



Williamston's Sara Daavetilla is gunning for her third D3 state championship this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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DIVISION 1 & 2 SOCCER PREVIEW

Abundance Of Area Talent Among D1-D2 Teams This Season

David Cook
Sports Scene

Division 1

Top teams statewide: Grandville, Brighton, Grand Blanc

Top area teams: Brighton, Grand Blanc, Walled Lake Northern, Novi, Midland.

Top area players: Chloe Allen (fw), Novi; Marle Bringard (mf), Midland; Madison Gould (gk), Brighton; Lexi Trudeau (mf), Grand Blanc.

Breaking it Down

Brighton won the KLA West title last season and the Bulldogs are hunting for even more this season. Senior goalkeeper Madison Gould returns along with fellow senior Kirsten L'Esperance and junior Grace VanKannel. Sophomore standouts Ellie Saladin and MacCulley Berry also return.

Grand Blanc is poised for another big season. The Bobcats have a strong all-around team led by senior midfielder Lexi Trudeau and junior defender Alexandra Childers.

Look for Novi to have a big season as well. Senior forward Chloe Allen is a returning all-state player as is senior midfielder Megan Riley.

Walled Lake Northern has a solid squad this season led by all-state midfielder Devyn Brough.

Division 2

Top teams statewide: Bloomfield Hills Marian, DeWitt, Livonia Ladywood.

Top area teams: DeWitt, Linden, Fenton, Midland Dow, Mt. Pleasant; Lowell.

Top area players: Maddie Brown (fw), Mt. Pleasant; Charley Campbell (d), Haslett; Danielle Stephan (mf), DeWitt; Olivia Trombley (mf), St. Johns.

Breaking it down

DeWitt is ranked among the top two teams in

the state and boasts a lineup loaded with talent. Junior midfielder Danielle Stephan is a returning first-team, all-state player. The Panthers are solid in midfield with all-conference players Erika Curley and Allison Sims also returning. The defense is stout with the return of honorable mention, all-state players Brianna Bishop and junior Jessah McManus. Junior forward Mackenzie Dawes leads the offense.



Saginaw Heritage has had a rough start to the 2016 season including dropping a recent home game to Linden. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

St. Johns is another deep and talented squad. Junior midfielder Olivia Trombley is a returning all-state player while junior forward Chelsie Smith is an all-conference forward. Senior Lexi McPherson and junior Abby Scheulke return to pace the offense while junior Sadie Wilson and sophomore Taylor Warnaar anchor the defense.

Mason returns a solid group of players. Senior forward Kali Thompson paced the offense with junior midfielder Caitlin Rebera and senior defender Marissa Pease anchoring the defense.

Mt. Pleasant is led by standout senior forward Maddie Brown. The Oilers will also be one of the top teams in the SVA this season.

Linden is one of the top 10 teams in the state led by junior midfielder Alia Fredrick, who is a returning all-state athlete. Junior forward Madeline Zayan also earned all-state honors last season, as did junior goalkeeper Madison Paige.

Fenton features a solid group of veterans led by all-state senior midfielder Bri Costigan and senior midfielder Chloee Foor.

Owosso has a young and promising team this spring. Junior goalkeeper Ellie Hood and senior defender Caitlin Bensing anchor the defense while junior Taylor Porter and sophomore Anna Raffaelli head up the midfield.

Midland Dow has another solid squad. Junior forward Ashton Brooks is an offensive catalyst along with Audrey Niederstadt



Mason is considered one of the top Division 2 teams in 2016. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



East Lansing and Lansing Catholic battled to a 2-2 tie in a recent CACC contest. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Grand Blanc High School made it all the way to the Division 1 finals a year ago before losing to Saline in the championship game. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

DIVISION 3 & 4 SOCCER PREVIEW

Area Teams In Mix To Bring Home Possible D3 Title; Lansing Christian, Nouvel Stacked In D4

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Division 3

Top teams statewide: Hudsonville Unity Christian, Detroit Country Day, Flint Powers.

Top area teams: Flint Powers, Freeland, Williamston, Hemlock.

Top area players: Kalyn Breckenridge (gk), Birch Run; Leah Davis (mf), Williamston; Erin Emmert (mf), Flint Powers; Taylor Farrand (fw), Swan Valley; Sierra Grodsinsky (fw), Hemlock; Michelle Herring (mf), Freeland; Grace Kraft (gk), Williamston; Rachel Phillpotts (d), Flint Powers.

Breaking it Down

Flint Powers reached the state semifinals last season and a return trip is possible again this year. Junior defender Rachel Phillpotts is a returning all-state player as is senior midfielder Erin Emmert. Juniors Abbey Clothier (mf) and Sydney Wilhoite (d) are also highly skilled.

Freeland also reached the state semifinals last year. Junior midfielder Michelle Herring, a first-team, all-state athlete, returns to lead the way along with sophomore forward Mackenzie Stroebel. Autumn Kloha and Kayler Radaz also key the offense.

Williamston will be solid again this year. Senior goalkeeper Grace Kraft is an all-state keeper while senior midfielder Leah Davis is a returning first-team, all-state player. Up front, senior Renee Sturm and junior Paige Lanier lead the offense. Senior Sarah Tuggle (mf) and junior Kloe Hitchcock (d) are also key returnees.

Hemlock returns one of the premier offensive players in the area. Senior Sierra Grodsinsky, who is headed to Oakland University, totaled 43 goals a year ago. Her sister, freshman Sydney Grodsinsky is another promising offensive player. Hailey Marietta and Olivia Watson are also key returnees while Hannah Bauer is a solid goalkeeper.

Birch Run has a promising young squad. Junior goalkeeper Kalyn Breckenridge anchors the defense with junior forward Madison Enderle leading the offense.

Alma's team will be young and improving this season. Sophomores Tia Everdeen and Sydney Hanson are key offensive players along with Kennedy Davis and Emma Licina. Abby Schneider is in goal while seniors Maggie Bever, Reynad Widman, Bailey McCarthy and Madison Ramirez also contribute. Big Rapids has a solid squad. Senior forward Hannah Davis paces the offense while junior Abbey Woodruff is a standout in the midfield.

Division 4

Top teams statewide: Lansing Christian, G.P. University Liggett; Kalamazoo Christian.

Top area teams: Lansing Christian, Saginaw Nouvel; Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes.

Top area players: Lauren Champney (d), Saginaw Nouvel; Kasey Jamieson (fw), Lansing Christian; Jenna Li (d), Lansing Christian; Natalie Nitschmann (mf), Saginaw Valley Lutheran; Paige Renshaw (mf), Montrose; Alex Troy (mf), Waterford Our Lady.

Breaking it Down

Lansing Christian was runner-up in Division 4 last season and another big year is possible this spring. Sophomore forward Kasey Jamieson is a returning all-state player while sophomore Jenna Li anchors the defense.

Saginaw Nouvel has won 18 straight district titles and looks to add to that number this season. Junior standout Lauren Champney returns to anchor the defense along with goalkeeper Mallory Benkert. Senior captains Ally Gregory and Ryan Fila also lead the way with fellow captain Emily Felton. Madison Graham and Sierra Ritz add to the offense.

Waterford Our Lady of the Lakes is another solid squad. Senior midfielder Alex Troy is a returning all-state player. Junior goalkeeper Karli Flesher anchors the defense while senior forward Allison Maiorana heads the offense.

Laingsburg is primed for a solid season. Senior midfielder Megan Essenburg returns along with Ellie Marshall in goal. Sara Lansour, Sophie Wilsey, Maddy Powers and Olivia Graham will contribute on offense.

Carson City-Crystal is led on offense by Kaylee Reeder with Haleigh Hubbell in goal.



Flint Powers' Erin Emmert is one of the top players in Division 3 this season. Flint Powers made it all the way to the Division 3 semis a year ago before losing to Detroit Country Day. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Lansing Christian lost in the Division 4 finals losing to Grandville Calvin Christian 2-1. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



The Lansing Catholic girls soccer team played East Lansing to a 2-2 tie in a recent CACC contest. LCC is among one of the top teams in Division 3. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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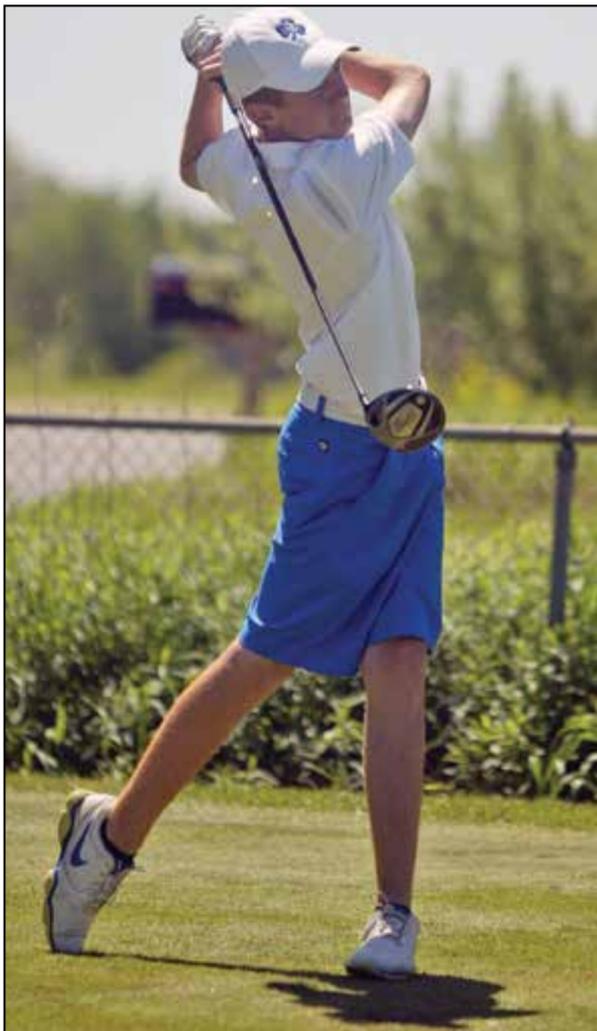
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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON GOLF



DIVISION 1 & 2 GOLF PREVIEW

Area Teams Take Aim At Top Prize In Respective Divisions

David Cook
Sports Scene

Division 1

Top teams statewide: Detroit Catholic Central, Battle Creek Lakeview, Grosse Pointe South.

Top area teams: Midland, Brighton, Grand Ledge, Rockford.

Top area players: Lukas Bunting, Grand Ledge; Mitchell Gardner, Midland; Top Kammark, Midland; Logan Price, Grand Blanc.

Breaking it Down

After placing 15th at the Division 1 state finals last season, Midland is ranked in the top 10 in D1 this spring. Top Kammark, a regional medalist last year, leads a talented group of golfers that includes

seniors Mitchell Gardner and Jordan Miller and sophomore Drew Gandy.

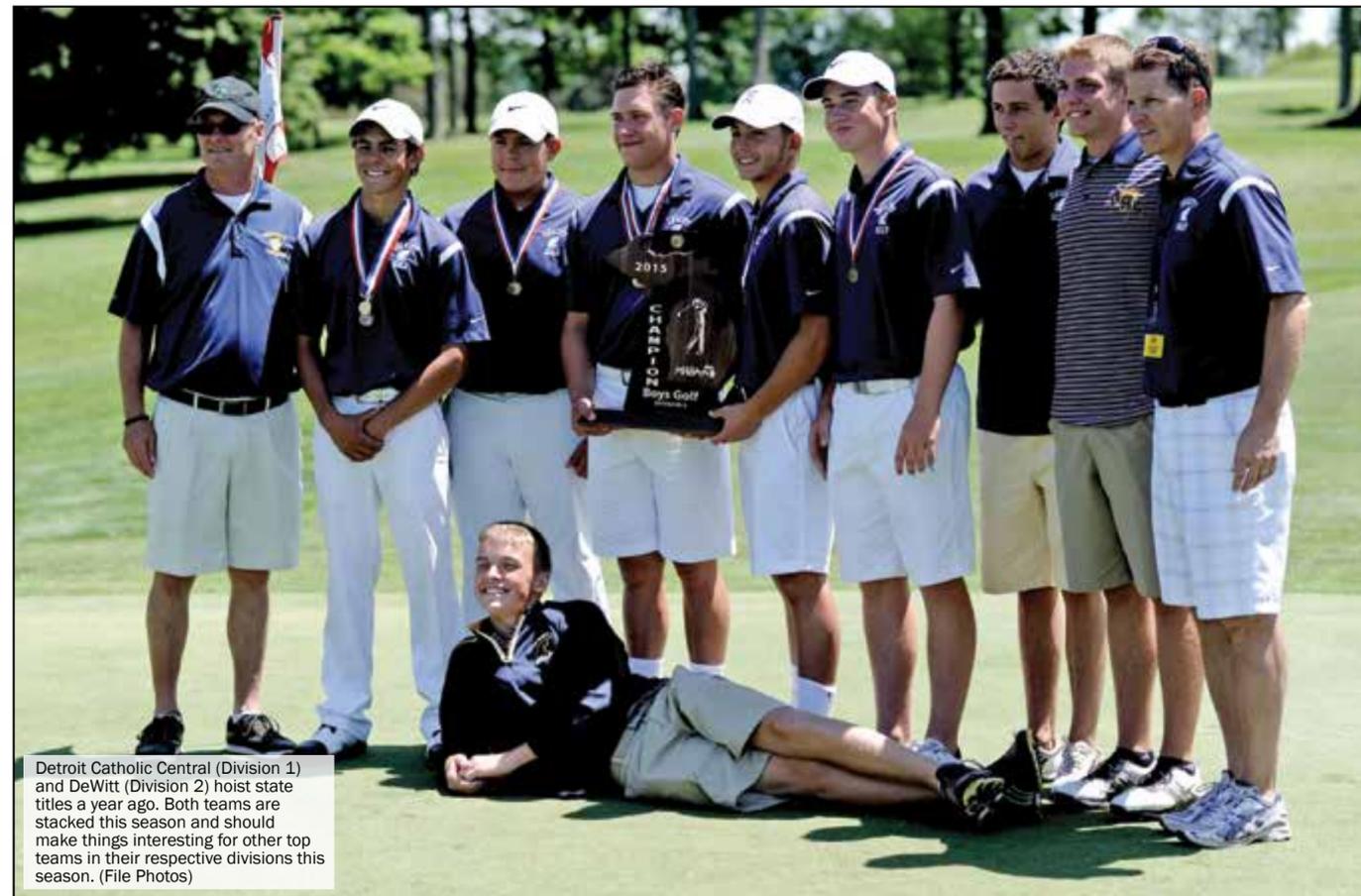
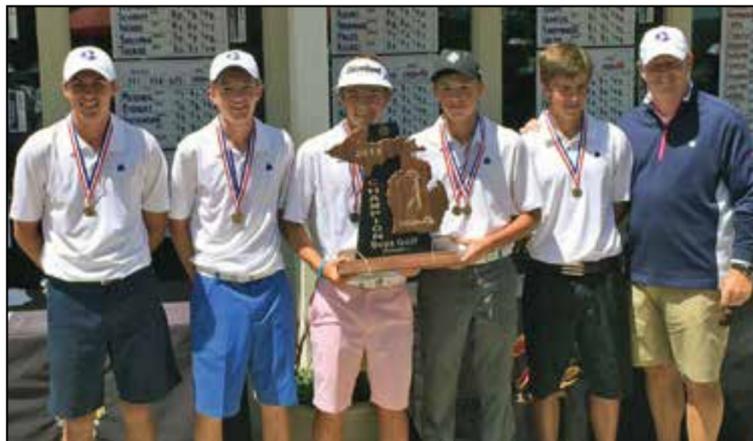
Brighton is ranked in the top ten in Division 1 and boasts a strong lineup paced by juniors Skylar Carleton and Spencer Gehres.

Grand Blanc is led by a pair of talented seniors this season in Logan Price and Noah Troyer.

Junior Lukas Bunting, who placed fourth at the East Lansing invite, and Bubba Chester lead Grand Ledge.

Okemos is another solid CAAC Blue team. Senior Chand Rajendra-Nicolucci and sophomore Avi Rajendra-Nicolucci lead the way along with senior Owen Ruster.

Hartland took fourth at the state meet last year and is rebuilding behind Nick Hoffman, Brendan Ludwig and Duncan Henry.



Detroit Catholic Central (Division 1) and DeWitt (Division 2) hoist state titles a year ago. Both teams are stacked this season and should make things interesting for other top teams in their respective divisions this season. (File Photos)

Division 2

Top teams statewide: East Lansing, Cranbrook-Kingswood, St. Johns.

Top area teams: East Lansing, St. Johns, DeWitt, Goodrich.

Top area players: Ian Carroll, East Lansing; Charlie DeLong, DeWitt; Ian Helm, DeWitt; Scott Campbell, East Lansing; Tony Fuentes, East Lansing; Eric Nunn, St. Johns; Zach Rosendale, St. Johns.

Breaking it Down

After placing seventh in the state last season, East Lansing is determined to make a run at the league title this season. The Trojans return a number of standouts led by senior Ian

Carroll and junior Scott Campbell. Cam Carroll and junior transfer Tony Fuentes give the Trojans a deep lineup.

St. Johns is poised for a big season with a talented group of young golfers. Juniors Eric Nunn and Zach Rosendale both finished in the top 10 at the East Lansing invite. Junior Jack Bouck and sophomore Zeke Ely are two more talented returnees.

DeWitt returns some solid golfers from a team that captured the Division 2 state title last season. Senior Ian Helm and sophomore Joey Croley are a pair of talented returnees while freshman standout Charlie DeLong took second at this year's East Lansing Invitational and is one of the top freshmen in the state.

Mt. Pleasant returns its top two golfers from last year in Jack Pilkington and Mitchell Haines. Pilkington took second at the regional last season.

Haslett returns a solid core of golfers this season led by seniors Derek Choma and Tobias Bepler and sophomore Ben VanGorder.

Fowlerville will also have a solid team led by senior Austin Garrison and junior John Toaso.

Corunna has a solid group of golfers this season led by junior Brandon Crouse. Senior Connor Campbell and sophomore Javen Howes are also solid returnees for the Cavaliers.

Owosso is paced this season by a solid one-two tandem of senior Todd Mieske and junior Warren Bueche.

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DIVISION 3 & 4 GOLF PREVIEW

Lansing Catholic Chases Fourth D3 Title In A Row

David Cook
Sports Scene

Division 3

Top teams statewide: Lansing Catholic Central, Jackson Lumen Christi, Big Rapids.
Top area teams: Lansing Catholic Central, Big Rapids, Flint Powers, Farwell.
Top area players: Joe Coriasso, Flint Powers; Viani Magaswaran, Lansing Catholic Central; Owen Rush, Lansing Catholic Central; Rhett Schrauben, Portland.
Breaking it Down
Lansing Catholic Central has won the past three Division 3 state titles and is positioned to make it four in a row this season. Senior Owen Rush placed third individually at state

last season and has started off this season by winning the East Lansing invite. Seniors Viani Magaswaran and Bobby Reid also return, as does talented sophomore Ethan O'Farrell.
Flint Powers placed fourth at the state meet last season and returns some talented young golfers in juniors Joe Coriasso and Jon Thomas and sophomore Matt Knight. Big Rapids is looking to improve on last year's 11th place finish at state. The Cardinals have a deep and talented team led by junior Tait Morrissey and Pierce Morrissey. Senior Carter Bechaz and sophomores Fletcher Bolda and Ben Fath also return along with Michael Green. Chesaning qualified for the state meet



last season and returns a standout in sophomore Eddie Murphy. Senior Austin James is another key returnee. Frankenmuth is led by the talented junior tandem of Daniel Wagner and Chase Singer.
At Alma, senior Cody Yates and junior Brock Martin lead the way for the Panthers who will be looking to make it back to the regional this season. Laingsburg is paced by a talented pair of golfers in junior Marcel Ball and sophomore Nick LaFontsee. Senior Ben Kusler is another key golfer for the Wolfpack.

Division 4

Top teams statewide: Kalamazoo Hackett, Clarkston Everest, Sutton's Bay.
Top area teams: Saginaw Nouvel, New Lothrop, Pewamo-Westphalia.
Top area players: Josh Balhorn, Blanchard-Montabella; Blake Heinz, Saginaw Nouvel; Parker Jamieson, Lansing Christian; Ayush Mohan, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart.
Breaking it Down
Saginaw Nouvel placed seventh at the state meet last season and brings back

a pair of strong golfers in senior Blake Heinz and sophomore Jack Grant. Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart features a talented veteran team this season led by seniors Ayush Mohan, Jake Starry and Sam Kindermann.
New Lothrop qualified for the state meet last season and returns a trio of solid golfers in senior Brendan Henige and juniors Drew Dice and Tucker Moriarity.
Pewamo-Westphalia has a strong, veteran team led by seniors Alex Klein, Drew Thelen, Michael Simon and Joey LaVoie and will be among the contenders in the CMAC.
Fowler will also challenge in the CMAC led by juniors Marcus Braun and Dustin Armbrustmacher. Fulton-Middleton and Bath both have young golf squads that will challenge in the CMAC. Fulton-Middleton is paced by junior Ethan Craig and sophomore Matt Craft while Bath is led by sophomores Harry Gilstrap and Kyle Wyskowski and junior Andrew Schonfeld.
Blanchard-Montabella is led by senior Josh Balhorn and junior Cameron Nisonger.



The Ithaca boys golf team is off to a solid start this season finishing first at a recent tournament at St. Ives and finishing second at North Star. (Submitted Photo)



Suttons Bay walked away with the Division 4 golf championship a year ago. (File Photo)

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NORTHERN SPRING SPORTS PREVIEW

Clare Baseball Team Wants To Have Fun, Make A Run

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

It was a Friday evening on the eve of a big early-season tournament and Clare baseball coach Skeet Colosky was all business.

Sort of. "You want a burger or one of these Montreal steak things?" Colosky asked his players as they gathered around a charcoal grill for a post-practice feast. That's the way the Pioneers like to roll as they head into what

bowing out with a loss in the regional final.

Like the meat on the grill, the bulk of this year's roster is seasoned. "We have seven returning starters," said Colosky. "We've got a couple of holes to fill, but we had some kids come up who are doing all right. We have a solid squad that could make a pretty good run."

Senior Camden Dice, who was all-district and all-league last season, will see action as a pitcher and shortstop.

They hope is a run to the Jack Pine Conference pennant.

"It usually comes down to Clare, Gladwin and Meridian," Colosky said. "Meridian has won the last three in a row, and hopefully we can change that this year. They are always good, but we're pretty good too and we have more fun than anyone else."

Colosky is heading into his fourth year of coaching. The Pioneers won a regional title the first year, lost during the district tournament in 2014 and then won the district last season before



Clare baseball team after winning tournament Clare hosted Saturday. Beat East Jordan and Shepherd. Final was 6-1 in both games. (Submitted Photo)

"We were in the mix last year for the league title, but we lost a few games we shouldn't have lost, and once you lose two, it is hard to recover," Colosky said. "There's

not a lot of margin for error in our league. It's quick. You play Tuesday and Thursday and you better have four pitchers ready. You have to be ready every week to rock and roll."

Vault Coach Teaches Flying G's To Fly

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

The bar is high for the pole vaulters at Gladwin every year and, with the help of coach Randy Wilford, it keeps going up.

"We've taken a pole vaulter to the state meet every year since 2005," said Wilford. "We usually take more than one and, more times than not, we bring a medal home."

Wilford competed in the event during his high school career at Gladwin and was all-state in 1985 with a personal best effort of 13-4.

He didn't have much interest in the sport after graduation, but said that he, "got back into it when my kids got involved."

His daughter Elizabeth showed an interest and, by the time she was in eighth grade, Wilford was taking her to a camp in Arkansas that was run by Earl Bell.

"He was the man when I was vaulting back in '85," said Wilford. "He was a world record holder at one time and he won the bronze at

worked out really well."

Beecher will continue her career at the University of Wisconsin-Stout next year.

On the boys team, the top vaulter is senior Roger Wilford, a second cousin of the coach, who was all-state last year after clearing 13'6" to finish sixth at the Division 3 finals. He has signed to compete at Lake Superior State.

"He is on track to be our best vaulter ever," Randy Wilford said.

Both Beecher and Roger Wilford came up through the ranks, beginning their careers in Gladwin's junior high program.

"That's where it starts," Randy Wilford said. "We find out who has a talent for it, who likes it and who is going to stick with it. They have a junior high Mega Star event every year and maybe eight or 10 kids from the area qualify in their events. We have half of the kids who make it in the pole vault consistently every year."

Beecher took to her event right away.

"In the seventh grade, I vaulted seven feet," she said. "With pole vaulting, you are either good at it, or you're not."

The best need discipline, dedication and no fear of flying. It



From left to right, Heather Beecher, Randy Wilford, Roger Wilford lead the way for the Gladwin pole vaulting team. (Submitted Photo)

helps if they are fast, too.

"It takes coordination, balance and speed," Wilford said. "You have to be a fearless competitor and the faster, the better. You have

to practice your steps and your technique and the equipment plays a big role but, when it comes down to it, the faster runners are the better vaulters."

Battling The Best Tough Tournament Preps Beaverton, Gladwin Softball Teams

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

The race for the Jack Pine Conference softball pennant is not for the faint of heart; everyone is a rival and everyone is tough.

Take last season, for example. Farwell won the league, but lost to Beaverton in a Division 3 district tournament. The Beavers were then beaten by Harrison in the district final.

Looking ahead to this year, Beavers coach Aaron Wentworth was unable to commit to picking less than five teams that could win the league.

"Gladwin, Meridian, Clare, Farwell and us are all pretty equal," he said. "You just never know. On any day one team can beat another."

In the interest of gearing up for the grind, the Beavers hosted a grueling tournament on April 23 that included the Flying G's in addition to the likes of Reese, Shepherd, Madison Heights Bishop Foley, perennial state power Allen Park Cabrini and defending Division 4 state champion Unionville Sebewaung (USA).

"It's a big-time tournament," said Wentworth. "We're very proud of the level of teams that come here for it every year. Last year, seven of the 12 teams were ranked and at least half of us are ranked this year."

The Beavers headed into the

fray in the top 10 in D-3 and did nothing to endanger that ranking as they knocked off Glen Lake and Ithaca in pool play to advance to the semifinals, where they knocked off

USA 7-1.

Cabrini was waiting in the final and the Monarchs reigned after a 10-3 victory.

"Four games is a lot in one day," said Wentworth. "We played really well in the first three and we hung in there against Cabrini for the most part, but they were better than we were and they beat us."

"It was a great day. The kids had fun and saw some great competition. We need to play teams like this. It's the only way to get better at the end of the year."

Senior Kylie Keeley was honorable mention all-state last year and the third baseman put on a show at the tourney, going 3-for-4 in the final to cap a huge day at the plate.

"She must have had at least eight hits in the tournament," said Wentworth. "She's the kind of hitter where, the better the pitcher she's facing, the better she does."

Junior Makayla Bassage is in her third year as the starting catcher and she had a big day both at the

plate and behind it.

Starring in the circle were sophomore Faith Howe and senior Jordan McCallister.

Gladwin also had its moments at the tournament, but one bad game kept the Flying G's from competing for the championship.

They were leading Shepherd 1-0 late in the first game of pool play, but the Bluejays bats came to life and bashed out a 6-1 victory.

Shepherd went on to lose 8-2 to Reese. Gladwin beat Reese 6-5 to leave each team with a 1-1 record and Reese advanced to the semifinals by virtue of a tie-breaker based on run differential.

"We allowed too many runs in the Shepherd game," said Flying G's coach Jill Keefer, "and that's why we had to play in the Toilet Bowl versus the championship game."

Gladwin made the most of its situation, topping Breckenridge 6-3 in a consolation game.

"It was a great tournament and I will take a 2-1 record against this competition any day," Keefer said.

Gladwin will head into the Jack Pine race led by senior Dana Fennell. She might be at shortstop and she might be at catcher, but she will be in the batter's box launching bombs. Fennell headed



out of the tournament with a total of nine home runs and has already broken her own school season record.

The other top returning seniors are third baseman Lauren Mose, pitcher Allyson Conley and second baseman Mallerie Bittner.

"We feel like our league is open for anyone to take," said Keefer. "It's been that way for the last two or three years. It's anyone's conference to win. There are some little things we have to do if we are going to take it, but I like what I've seen so far."

The Beaverton and Gladwin softball teams took to the field during the April 23 Beaverton Invitational. The Invitational was a showcase of some of the top softball teams in Division 3 and 4. Some of the teams that were present included last year's D4 champion Unionville Sebewaung. (Randy Miniard Photos)

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Harrison Hurdler Ready For Big Season

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

Numbers are an issue for the Harrison boys' track team.

"If I could use the same six kids in 10 events, we'd

Harrison's Austin Lavigne clears a hurdle during recent meet. (Submitted Photo)

be a pretty good team," said Hornets coach Todd Reeve. "Unfortunately, the rules are that you can only run in four events, so that won't fly."

All of which puts a premium on versatility, and that's where junior Austin

Lavigne comes in.

Lavigne specializes in the hurdles. He ran a 16.16 in the 110 highs last spring and just missed a trip to the state meet.

"He is the top returner in the Jack Pine Conference in the 110 highs and he has the best time in the 300 of all the returning hurdlers by two seconds," said Reeve, who has been the head track

coach for eight years and has headed up the cross country program for 23. "He's one of the better hurdlers we've had and we've had some good ones."

With so many other jobs to go around, Reeve can tap Lavigne to fill out a relay or run open events.

At an early season tri-meet, Lavigne won both hurdles and finished second in the 200 meters.

"Whenever I ask him to do anything, he says 'yes' and goes out and does a good job for me," said Reeve. "He's probably our second-best in the 400 meters as well."

"We're going to use him wherever we need him, but we're also going to focus on getting him into top form for the regional and conference meets at the end of the season with an eye on getting him to states."

Hearts And Diamonds Awaiting A Heart Transplant, Meridian's Novak Keeps On Coaching

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

With a lineup full of talented veterans, the Meridian baseball team has ideas of going a long way this season.

The coach, on the other hand, is under strict travel restrictions.

Mark Novak is waiting for a heart transplant and, since a match could suddenly become available at any time, he is never more than four hours away from the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor.

"At any moment, I've got to be ready to get there," Novak said. "If they get a heart that matches this way and that way, they are going to call and I've got to go. Now."

"It's a little scary, but it's a little exciting at the same time."

Novak said the veins and arteries in his heart are small, which

resulted in his having quadruple bypass surgery about 10 years ago at the age of just 38.

He started having problems again and was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Another bypass was ruled out, so in the fall of 2015, a left ventricular assist device was installed to monitor Novak's heart and help keep it beating until a transplant becomes available.

Novak was in the hospital for three months after the procedure.

As his heart recuperated, his thoughts turned to the diamond.

"There were many nights when I laid there in bed and thought about baseball," he said. "I used to coach football and basketball, too, and I had to give those up, but when I asked the doctors if there was any reason why I had to quit coaching baseball, they said that, as long as I wasn't in the middle of the field, it would be good for me to get out."

The device is with him 24/7. He can't get it wet, so showers are out and he certainly can't risk getting into the way of any line drives. So, he coaches from the bench and lets his assistants handle

the on-the-field duties.

Meridian athletic director Mitch Bohn pitches in, along with former Mustangs Tanner Smith and Matt Bowen.

"It's nice to have all four of us together," said Novak. "It helps the kids get a lot of individual time with their coaches."

When Novak was in the hospital thinking about this year's team, it wasn't like he was tossing and turning all night wondering if Meridian would ever win a game.

The Mustangs are loaded.

"We were ranked No. 2 in the state last year for most of the season and we have a lot of returning players," he said. "We also have some new guys who are doing real well for us."

The Mustangs won a third straight Jack Pine Conference pennant last year, but dropped a 13-9 decision to Beaverton in the district semifinals.

"I don't think we gave up 10 runs in a game all season," he said, "and then we turned around and gave up 13."

This year's team is determined to avoid another district demise and got off to an 8-0 start.

The offensive attack begins with senior twin brothers Christian and Monte Petre.

Christian plays center field and was all-state last season. He also brings a hint of speed to the top of the order, as evidenced by the fact that he was the Division 3 state champion in the 100 meters last year.

Monte plays right field and is also tough to keep quiet on the bases, hitting out of the two hole.

Senior Zac Spangler has been the starting catcher for three years; he has been recruited to Alma College and was all-league and all-district last season.

Another senior in his third season in the starting lineup is pitcher/first baseman Ben Blake, who bats in the clean-up spot and was also all-league and all-district last spring.

Senior Nick Arthur is a two-year starter who has made the switch from third base to second. He has already made a big impact this season, hitting a two-run homer in the championship game of the Breckenridge Tournament.

Senior Stryker O'Boyle is back for his third season as the starter at shortstop and freshman Hunter Merillat has taken the lineup by storm with a big bat. He plays third base when he isn't pitching and, when he was pitching at Breckenridge, he took a no-hitter into the fifth inning.

"A lot of people were asking about how a freshman got to start right away on such a veteran team," said Novak, "but I've been watching Hunter play his whole life and I knew what he could do."

The Mustangs will also be counting on the likes of outfielders Jordan Shuler, Parker Reynaert and Nick Vance, pitcher Tommy King and third baseman Mike Bishop.

Junior pitcher Shane Yzquierdo looked sharp in a complete game victory over Bay City All Saints. He allowed just one run and struck out 10.



Meridian coach Mark Novak, who wears a left ventricular assist device everywhere as he awaits a heart transplant, keeps an eye on the action from the dugout. (Submitted Photo)

Novak is looking for all the help he can get.

"We have a lot of guys getting a lot of playing time to get us ready for the Jack Pine season and the state tournament," he said. "Our conference is always tough we have Clare and Beaverton in our district again, so that isn't going to be easy, either."

"Hopefully, we can make it four in a row in the Jack Pine and then make a run in the playoffs."

Goals like that create a zest for life for Novak, a man who is not lacking for motivation to deal with his health issues.

"If you look around, there are a lot of people who are worse off than I am," he added. "I have to carry this thing around, but I still have my family and I am still coaching baseball, which I love."



Sanford Meridian catcher Zac Spangler minds his post during a recent game. (Submitted Photo)

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