

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON FOOTBALL



Addix All-Star Football Classic A Success

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Come the second Friday in September, the Lowell football team annually breaks out the pink jerseys for the annual Pink Arrow Game to raise funds and awareness in the fight against cancer.

This June, Lowell football coach Noel Dean again helped lead the attack against with the founding of the Addix Football All-Star Game. The game was played at the new Davenport University football field and featured players from across Western and Central Michigan. Like the Pink Arrow Game, the Addix Football All-Star Game was staged to raise funds in the battle against cancer. The game raised more than \$20,000 for Gilda's Club of Grand Rapids, which provides emotional health care for cancer patients and their friends and families.

More than 2,200 spectators came

out for the game and were treated to a close battle that saw team Stripes defeat team Stars 17-9.

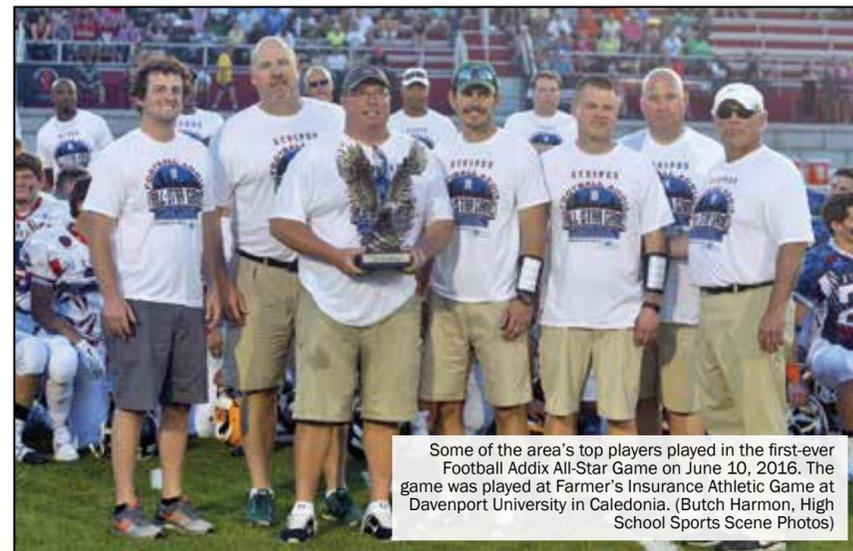


The game initial game was considered a major success by Dean, who created the game and intends to make

it an annual event.

"I thought it was fantastic," Dean said. "We had a fantastic crowd and everything went better than expected. We had great support from Addix and Fifth Third Bank and Davenport University. It was just an awesome experience. We will grow from this and make it even better in the years to come."

A total of seven graduated seniors from Lowell made this year's roster, including Alex Anschutz, Mitchell Davis, Max Dean, Zeth Dean, Karson Murley, Ryan Stevens and Kenny Vanderwarf. Also on the rosters were Jackson Ammon, Quinn Nordin and Cole Shuple from Rockford; Cameron Umphrey and Taylor VanDyke from Cedar Springs; Kyler Simon and Jalon Simpson from Portland, Dillin Biella from Ionia; Trent Braman from Central-Montcalm; and Jeffrey Davenport from Big Rapids.



Some of the area's top players played in the first-ever Football Addix All-Star Game on June 10, 2016. The game was played at Farmer's Insurance Athletic Game at Davenport University in Caledonia. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON TRACK



Mt Pleasant Sacred Heart will return its entire team next season after finishing 12th at the recent state meet. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photos)

Sacred Heart Girls Track Team Looks Solid For The Future

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart's cross country team won a state title last fall, and there were high hopes it would also transfer into a strong 2016 track season.

"We knew we had our distance running pretty well locked up," Coach Jamie Slate said. "It was going to be how we put together our (other running events) and field events. It ended up being a well-rounded team. There were some injuries and some unfortunate performances at that time that didn't work out in our favor at the end of the season. If you look at the whole team, we ended up being a pretty well-rounded team. We were pretty happy about that."

At the state meet, the 3,200 meter relay team of Alexis McConnell Megan Nowak, Cammie McConnell and Scout Nelson was third (9:51.50) and Nelson placed seventh in the 400 meter dash (1:00.69).

With the 3,200-meter relay, "we ended up having a couple of girls on there we didn't expect," Slate said. "They ended up doing a really nice job this year."

The Irish scored a lot of points in the 3,200-meter run with the McConnell sisters. Alexis McConnell

(junior) placed second (11:22.51), Bailey McConnell (sophomore) took seventh (11:41.16) and Cammie McConnell (freshman) was ninth (11:44.62).

"Two have three of them in the top 10 is really impressive," Slate said.

Jodi Houck cleared the bar 5'0" in the high jump.

"We were really happy that our high jumper ended up placing at the state meet," Slate said. "She's qualified for state before, but that was the first time she actually placed."

The 2017 season for Sacred Heart looks extremely bright.

"We are not losing a single girl on the entire team," Slate said. "We're completely reloaded for next year and we're even adding a fourth McConnell sister. Having three sisters does wonders for the distance team. We had other girls that did well."

Their dad, Rob McConnell, is an assistant coach.

"We're going to be strong next year. We had some girls that were freshmen throwers and did a nice job," Slate said. "Throwing is such a senior-dominated event. As they get older, I expect them to place as well."



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Fowler Wins D4 Championship

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It was like old times for the Fowler Eagles girls track team. Coach Jill Feldpausch's squad was holding the first-place trophy after the Division 4 track and field state meet June 4 at Grand Rapids' Houseman Field. The Eagles were runners-up last season, as they were in 2009 and 2010. But they were first place this year, as they were in 2011 and 2012.

Feldpausch has been coach for nine seasons.

"This is just as talented of a group as I've ever had," Feldpausch said. "They broke four school records this year. They really came together as a team. I sat down with them before the state meet and laid it all out. We had 26 individual points all together. Every one of these girls came through for the team and knew we would need their points."

The Eagles posted 56 points at this year's meet to finish ahead of Concord at

44 points. The 4x800 relay team of Kiah Becker, Morgan George, Madison Koenigsnecht and Julie Thelen took first with a time of 9:38.0. Sidney Horak, Madison Koenigsnecht, McKenzie Koenigsnecht and Thelen won the 4x200 relay (1:46.57).



Madison Koenigsnecht was third in the 400-meter dash (59.43). Thelen took a third in the 800 meters (2:23.64). Becker was sixth in the 3,200 meters (11:41.09). The

Eagles won the 4x400 relay with Madison and McKenzie Koenigsnecht, Thelen and Taryn Schafer (4:08.23).

In the field events, Ciera Weber took third in the pole vault (9'6"), Alyssa Vandegriff took fifth in the high jump (5'0") and Sidney Horak placed sixth in the long jump (15'11.5").

"We were hoping for top two," Feldpausch said. "Nothing is ever a given. We had to work hard and put forth our best effort. That's what they did."

Seniors Julie Thelen and Madison Koenigsnecht were on three first-place relay squads and also had individual third places.

"My seniors really came through for us," Feldpausch said. "My other girls, the underclassmen, really stepped it up."

Fowler graduates several seniors.

"But we have a great group of underclassmen," Feldpausch said. "Our field events scored 11 points, and those came from a sophomore and a freshman."



The Fowler girls tracked team scored 56 points to finish ahead of Concord (44) to claim the recent Division 4 title. Fowler was runner-up a year ago and went back-to-back in 2009 and 2010. (Submitted Photos)



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Greenville Pole Vaulter Breaks State Record

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Much was expected of Greenville's Landon Kemp when she entered three events in the Division 1 state finals at Hudsonville.

She delivered, all three times.

Kemp placed in all three events, setting a personal record in all three. She set a new state record by clearing 13'4" in the pole vault.

"Going in, I didn't expect to PR in all three of my events," she said. "Obviously it's a goal to PR, and at the state meet, that's huge. The pole vault took so long. We started at 9 a.m. I didn't wind up coming in until about 2 or 3 p.m. So I was able to get my hurdles and long jump. I was then able to focus on pole vault, which was nice. It was a perfect day for all of those."

Kemp competed on June 19 in the New Balance Outdoor Nationals and placed fifth at 13'3/4".

Her pole vault and long jump efforts at the state meet really put a smile on Kemp's face.

In the pole vault, "as the day went on, there was more of a head wind," she said. "I was mentally prepared for this meet. I was visualizing what I wanted this vault to look like. I imagine myself clearing like 13-1 and the state record and higher. That helped my mentality."

Kemp placed second in the Division I state long finals at 18'5.5".

"I was getting great height off the board and working on my technique for the landing," she said.

She placed fifth in the 100 hurdles with a time of 14.87.

"With the hurdles, there were a lot of girls who were struggling because there were girls that had run faster times than what they had in the prelims and finals. There was a strong head wind and a lot of girls were getting messed up with that," Kemp said. "It felt good to run against faster girls. That's what helped me PR."

She'll be doing some other vaulting during the summer.

Next year, "I want to break the pole vault record again and make it as high as possible," she said. "Hopefully, I can win long jump next year and run the best race I can in the

hurdles."

Belding's Dynasty Continues

The dynasty continues for Belding's girls track team, coached by John Carlson. Belding has now won four OK Blue Conference titles, 22 OK Blue duals and 29 dual meets overall in a row. Top performers included juniors Johanna McCully, Hallee Breimayer and Summer Eubank and sophomore Lauren McDowell with a school record of 50.46 seconds and were sixth in the state.

"This unit got healthy at the end of the season," Carlson said. "They really clicked on their handoffs."

There was senior Greta Wilker, who was fifth in the state in the shot put and threw it 42'11" at the West Michigan Metro Health Scholarship Meet, was regional champ in the shot put and discus, the four-time regional champ in the shot put; won the OK Blue shot put and is a four-time OK Blue Champ in the shot put.

McCully was all-state in the 4x100 relay, was OK Blue Champ in the long jump, 100 meter dash, 4x100 meter relay, 100 meters (12.99) and long jump (15-10 3/4").

Lauren McDowell was all state in the 4x100 relay; OK Blue Champ in the 400-meter dash; conference runner-up in long jump; Daily News Classic all star meet four first places (4x1, 4x2, 4x4 and 200 dash); second place at MITCA Team State in the 4x200; had a season's best long jump (16-10) and season's best 200 meters (27.33 seconds).

Senior Emma Jakeway placed 14th in the state in the 4x200 relay, with a 26.8 split; had the school record in the 300-meter hurdles with (47.04), to win the Metro Health Scholarship Meet, was all conference in the OK Blue; and was team captain.

Breimayer was all-state in the 4x100 relay (split 12.4 at finals), OK Blue Champ in the 4x1 relay and all-conference OK Blue.

Eubank earned an all-state title in the 4x100 relay; OK Blue Conference champion 100-meter high hurdles and 4x1 relay; team captain; team most dedicated, and started the 6 a.m. workout club.

Sophomore Alyssa German was in the pole vault and sprints. She broke the school record with a vault of 9'7" and took 18th in the state



Greenville's Landon Kemp set a new state record during the recent Division 1 finals held in Hudsonville by clearing 13 feet, 4 inches in the pole vault. She also set personal records in the long jump and the 100m hurdles. (Jamie McNich, High School Sports Scene Photos)

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Lansing Waverly Sneaks Out Division 2 Title

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It was oh-so close in the Division 2 standings for the girls track and field state champions, but Lansing Waverly prevailed with 42 points, edging second place Flint Powers Catholic with 40.

Waverly needed every point.

The Warriors got a first place from Trachele Roberts in the 100 meter dash (12.55). She was the anchor of a first-place 4x200 relay team which also included Teaghan Thomas, Jazlynn Wilcox and Maya Garrett (1:43.88). Roberts anchored the first-place 4x100 meter relay (48.70) that also included Teaghan Thomas, Jazlynn Wilcox and Garrett.

Malin Smith took second place in the shot put (42'3.75") and fifth place in the discus (132'1").

The team is coached by Rex Wilkes.

"We were trying to gradually build up throughout the season rather than

ended up with a smaller team than we had last year. But we a ton of quality girls there working hard. They were stronger and faster. They were state champs in 4x100 last year and knew this year, they could only get faster. They had to work on handoffs."

The state meet obviously featured a close finish.

"I knew we had a chance of winning it, but I don't know if the girls did," Wilkes said. "We were seeded first in the 4x1 and 4x2 and Roberts was seeded third in the 100, Smith was seeded in top eight for discus and sixth in the shot put. I knew we could put up over 30 points. I told the girls if we scored over 40 points we could win the state championship. I didn't know much Flint Powers and the other teams would do.

"Smith was sitting in sixth place going into her final throw. Her final throw moved her to second place, and that put us over. There were so many small, different things that happened during the meet. Roberts edged out some pretty fast girls in the 100 to claim the 100 meter title by one-100ths of a second. If she doesn't lean over just enough, we would lose two points and wind up tied for first."

build up for immediate success in the beginning," Wilkes said. "I started their exchange zones small, and I gradually moved them further and further back; back to where we were at the acceleration zones.

"It set them off for breaking the school record in the 4x1. I've been trying to keep them grounded. I feel like they've been under the radar. They are pretty young. There's a bunch of Division 1 schools in the area, teams like East Lansing and Grand Ledge, that kind of overshadow us at times. It was kind of their coming out party at the state meet. That was great."

It was Waverly's first state title. Teaghan Thomas is the only one on this year's team who previously was place finishers.

"I knew I had a bunch of girls I could insert into the relays," Wilkes said. "I didn't know how much depth we were going to have. We lost some stragglers during the season. We



Lansing Waverly won the Division 2 Girls Track and Field scoring 42 points to edge Flint Powers by a mere two points to win its first-ever girls track championship title. (Submitted Photo)



Mason High's Track And Field Team Is A Leader In The 'Field' Portion

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Mason High School's graduating senior, Justin Scavarda, won Division 2 state titles in the discus (182'6") and the shot put (57'5"), and there is a reason why competitors may have fallen back.

"It's kind of a primal instinct of taking heavy implements, and throwing them as far as you can," said Scavarda, who was also a two-way lineman on the Bulldogs' football team, and to boot was a long-snapper on the

punt squad.

Scavarda helped to lead Mason High's track and field squad to a second place finish at the state meet, only a narrow two points behind Orchard Lake St. Mary's, 46-44. Fellow senior Jarrett VanHavel, Mason football's star passing quarterback for four seasons, put both arms to use in winning the pole vault at 15'3".

Other points at the state meet came from a pair of seniors in the running events. Sprinter Joel Grundstrom placed fourth in the 200 meter dash (22.49) and fifth in the

100 (11.18), while Ben Geer was fourth in the 800 (1:56.61).

Justin has a scholarship to Grand Valley State University, where he intends to major in criminal justice. He said he chose Grand Valley over offers from major universities - including Michigan State - because he values a "family atmosphere" of staying close to home.

He said his in-season workout routine - 15 to 20 daily throws in both the discus and the shot put - was aided by both the mobility and "explosiveness" that he gained from playing football.

Justin was a main blocker for Jarrett VanHavel, who will move ahead on a football scholarship to the University of Mount Union in northeast Ohio after achieving a Mason High School record in passing yards under his father and longtime coach, Jerry VanHavel.

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Staying Balanced in the Off Season

School's out for summer! This equals time in the sun, hanging out with friends and most importantly, no homework. If you're a student athlete however, the summer is not all fun and games (well, maybe some games). The student athlete knows that this is the time to train for fall sports to get a leg up on the competition. Exercising daily in the heat or sometimes twice daily can really take its toll. Making sure you are properly fueled for training is key to success in your future season.

The Building Blocks of Off Season Training Before Practice

Ensuring that you are properly fueled before your workout is key. Try to time your meals so that you will be eating two hours before

practice. If this doesn't work for you at least get a small snack in 30 minutes prior.

Pre-Practice Meal Ideas:

- Oatmeal made with low fat milk, add nuts and berries if you like
- Cereal with low fat milk
- Scrambled eggs and toast
- Yogurt parfait with granola and fruit
- Waffles with peanut butter and a glass of low fat milk

Snack Ideas Include:

- Deli Rollups – turkey + cheese
- Greek yogurt
- Dried fruit + almonds

- Cheese stick + crackers
- Cottage cheese + grapes
- Half of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich

During Practice

Ensuring that you are hydrated throughout helps your performance and prevents issues such as dehydration and cramping. The heat is no joke! If you don't drink water, you could get overheated and pass out. Water will work just fine unless you are working out for over 45 minutes. If that is the case, you may want to drink one of your favorite sports drinks during the workout. **may want to make note of why a sports drink and why it makes sense after 45 minutes such as the important electrolytes. This could be a good lead into why CM makes sense after a workout.**

After Practice

Fueling up after practice is just as important as the work you just put in during practice. Fueling within 30 minutes helps muscles recover, decreases soreness and helps fuel your body for the next workout. Chocolate milk is the perfect drink for recovery after an intense workout. It provides the perfect balance of carbohydrates and protein to speed recovery, refuel and repair muscles and electrolytes to replenish and rehydrate what has been lost in sweat. Bone building calcium is just the cherry on top of this nutrient rich drink maintaining strong bones and preventing stress fractures. Don't forget to refuel your body with a nutrient rich meal a few hours later.

Cross Training

Summer is the perfect time to take advantage of all the trails, lakes and rivers that Michigan has to offer. Think outside the box and change up what you normally do for practice a couple of days a week.

- Try kayaking or swimming; the water adds resistance and trains different muscles that you may not normally hit with your typical training.
- Explore with mountain biking or hiking. Not only is it a great adventure to see new sites, you will be training muscles in a different way by going up and down hills.
- Improve flexibility with a yoga class once or twice a week!

Rest

Making sure you are getting 7-9 hours of sleep per night also has an important impact on your performance. While we sleep our body recovers from the exercise we put it through. As we sleep, growth hormone is naturally released, improving muscular recovery and regeneration preparing you for the next day's workout. The brain also recharges as you sleep and a rested brain is a motivated and focused brain. Get better sleep by:

- Turning off all screens, including; cell phones, TV and other distractions
- Keep the bedroom dark, cool and quiet
- Keep a bedtime routine; shower, drink tea or whatever calms you
- Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime

Eating well and knowing when to rest are the keys to success in off-season training. Be sure to eat a balanced diet during summer training and you will be well on your way to a successful season. Visit milkmeansmore.org for more information on healthy eating as well as more about Nature's Sports Drink, chocolate milk. Here you can learn more about the benefits of chocolate milk along with other sports nutrition tips from Registered Dietitians!



Mt. Pleasant's Perry Makes Most Of Return To The Sport To Claim High Jump State Title

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

Kaleb Perry made the most of his return to the sport of track and field this spring.

The Mt. Pleasant senior came back to the grand oval after a year off and claimed the Division 1 state title in the high jump. Competing in a wide-open field, Perry cleared 6'7" to become the last competitor standing June 4 at Hudsonville High School.

Perry, who had career-best of 6'8" earlier in the season, went out at 6-9 at the state finals after barely clipping the bar on his second attempt.

"I played baseball as a junior," said Perry. "But I was really good at track, so I came back as a senior. I

didn't have a very good state meet as a sophomore and got all mad at myself. I'm glad I came back this season."

Perry qualified for the Division 2 state finals as both a freshman and sophomore in the high jump. He claimed 12th at the state meet as a freshman (6'2") and sixth at state as a sophomore (6'4").

As a senior, Perry finished the season undefeated at invitationals in the high jump, winning titles at the Gary Rathbun Invitational, Ithaca Blue and Gold Invite, Mason Invitational, Cavaliers Classic True Team Invitational, Davison Twilight Classic, Davison regional, Saginaw Valley League conference meet and Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun Meet of Champions to go along with his

state title.

Over in the long jump pit, Perry also leapt to an outstanding season with eight victories, two runners-up and a fourth-place finish in the long jump in a career-best 22-8.

As a sprinter, he rotated time on the Oilers' three sprint relay units while recording personal bests of 11.54 in the 100 meter dash, 23.65 in the 200 and 55.17 in the 400.

"I really wanted to come back strong this season and try to win the state championship," said Perry, who will play football at Western Michigan University. "I also thought that this would get me in shape for football. I am so glad I came back. Winning the state title is a dream come true."



Mount Pleasant's Kaleb Perry captured the 2016 Division 1 state title in the high jump after not competing in track and field last season. (Dan Stickrad, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Fenton's Jacob Lee Lives Dream As A State Champ

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

HUDSONVILLE — Jacob Lee set some really high goals for himself this season this season and the Fenton senior achieved them.

Not only did he want to reach the podium with a top-eight finish at the Division 1 state finals, but he wanted to break the tape at the finish line with a state title.

On June 4 at Hudsonville High School, he did just that. Lee pulled away from the pack to win with a blistering 9:07.72 clocking. The effort ranks in the top 50 all-time in Michigan history and shattered the school record set by Chris Gilbert 39 years ago.

"My goal with as to try to come here and win it," admitted Lee. "I was only

21st last season. I knew I could do much better. I trained so hard for this race and made my dream come true. It was really hot, but when I took the lead, hardly anyone went with me. I knew I had to finish strong because there are so many great distance runners in Michigan and I knew that they could catch me if I let up."

Lee finished three seconds ahead of Rockford's Isaac Harding in a race that saw all top-eight medalists dip under 9:15 and nine runners go under 9:20.

Lee was also undefeated in the 1,600 this season, posting a career-best of 4:22.99 at the Brighton Invitational back in May. He knew his meal ticket was the 3,200, so he concentrated on that event at the state meet.

He also qualified in the 3,200-meter relay, but pulled out and was replaced by a

teammate so he could run the 3,200 fresh in the heat.

Lee also finished eighth in the 2-mile at the New Balance Outdoor Nationals June 18 in 9:16.76 — an event that is 18 meters longer than the 3,200.

Lee finished 19th at the D-1 cross country finals and 27th at the Footlocker Midwest meet. His career best in cross-country is 15:29.

Now, Lee will depart for the University of Michigan, where he will compete for the Wolverines in both cross country and track & field.

"I can't wait to get to Michigan and train with all of those great runners and see what I can do," said Lee. "It's been a dream of mine to run in the Big Ten. I am grateful to have that chance and see all of the hard work has paid off."

Fenton's Jacob Lee surged ahead of the pack to win the Division 1 state title in the 3,200 meters. (Dan Stickrad, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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St. Louis Runner Evan Goodell Doesn't Take Vacation Days

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

St. Louis High School's Evan Goodell gave his all en route to achieving the Division 3 state championship in the 3200 meter run. He drove himself to the limit in eight trips around the 400-meter track and finished with a time of 9:21, leaving the nearest competitor 100 meters behind in his rearview mirror.

So how did Evan celebrate the next morning? With a sleep-in and then a big breakfast?

No. For more than the 1,000th consecutive day, he ventured outdoors and ran. But he did sort of take a break. "Only" a mile or so, when a typical workout might be 10 times that many.

"Every day that I don't train, the competition is going to get a little bit better than me," Goodell explained.

Maybe take a day off, especially the day after winning the state championship?

"It's just sort of automatic at this point," he said.

He defeated the statewide competition to conclude his junior season, after finishing eighth as a sophomore and 16th as a freshman, but his main competitor is himself.

His state title is a highlight, of course, but in competing against himself, he gives equal significance to a midseason victory -- a career-best 9:13 to capture the top prize at Shepherd High School's Bluejay Invitational.

Goodell is not someone to lay back in the pack, waiting for a so-called "rabbit" runner to set the pace with an early lead. He maps his plans for pacing and does not hesitate to be the frontrunner. In his state championship run, he

was out ahead after the first lap.

With no "rabbit," he might force himself to imagine that a competitor is ahead of him.

"I prefer to have competition to race against," Goodell said. "At the state meet, it would have been more fun. But I can run by myself if need be."

The son of Stephen Goodell and Shada Bibani-Kanine modestly said he chose distance running because he "is not what you would call an athlete" in the more popular sports. He started by running cross country in sixth grade at the St. Louis T.S. Nurnberger Middle School.

"You can go at your own pace," he said, "and runners are a part of a great wider-ranging community. I can push myself to see how much better I can become."

In cross country, he finished 15th in the state as a sophomore and sixth as a junior. His goal this fall is to notch a cross country state crown to pair with the distance title that he has achieved on the track.

He says cross country sometimes offers a bigger challenge because coaches are less able to offer pre-planned distance interval times, similar to what they provide on a track.

"You can't get as much feedback," he explained.

Regardless of whether it's track or cross country, Evan joins Coach Jay Puffpaff in offering basic advice to younger teammates.

"Never stop working," Goodell said. "Never get discouraged."

Apparently, "never stop working" means exactly that - especially the morning after you win a state championship.

Goodell is evaluating college scholarship offers and intends to pursue a career in biochemistry.



St. Louis's Evan Goodell capped a strong junior season by winning the 3200 meter run at the Division 3 finals held at Comstock Park High School. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Banner Season For Yellowjackets

Ithaca Relay Teams Provide Keys To Girls D3 State Crown

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

They employed a great passing game and they won the championship.

We're talking about the Ithaca High School girls track team, not the statewide-famous football squads of recent years.

Coach Gene Lebron's Lady Yellowjackets passed the baton for a trio of top relay finishes that paved the way to this spring's Division 3 championship.

Ithaca accumulated 57.5 points to nose out Adrian Madison High with 54, Traverse City St. Francis High with 46 and Clare High with 45. This is the first girls track title in the school's history.

with senior team leader Erica Sheahan.

A fourth place in the 4x400 featured Showers, Kalisek, Allen and junior Amelia Freestone.

It wasn't all relays, of course. Individuals also did their share.

Erica Sheahan capped an outstanding career by defending her state crown in the long jump, stretching for 17'10.5". She captured second in the 200 dash (a school record 25.51) and third in the 100 (12.59), accounting for 24 individual points to go with her sprint relay anchor leg.

In the 800, Courtney Allen was third (2:19) and Blaire Showers tied for sixth (2:21), and in the 300 hurdles, Emily Foster was fifth (46.87).

Track athletes - neither girls nor boys - do not block and tackle, but Coach Lebron still finds a connection with Ithaca's 69-wins-in-a-row landmark football streak.

"Instead of having jealousy (regarding attention to football), the girls are motivated by it," he said. "They're friends with football players, who have created a winning culture. In terms

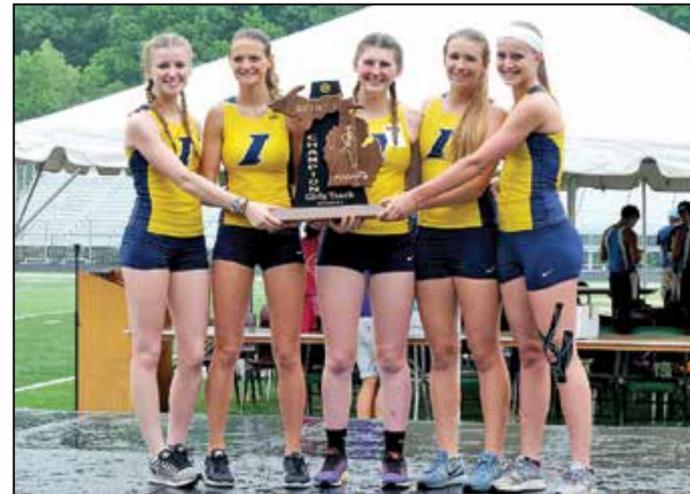
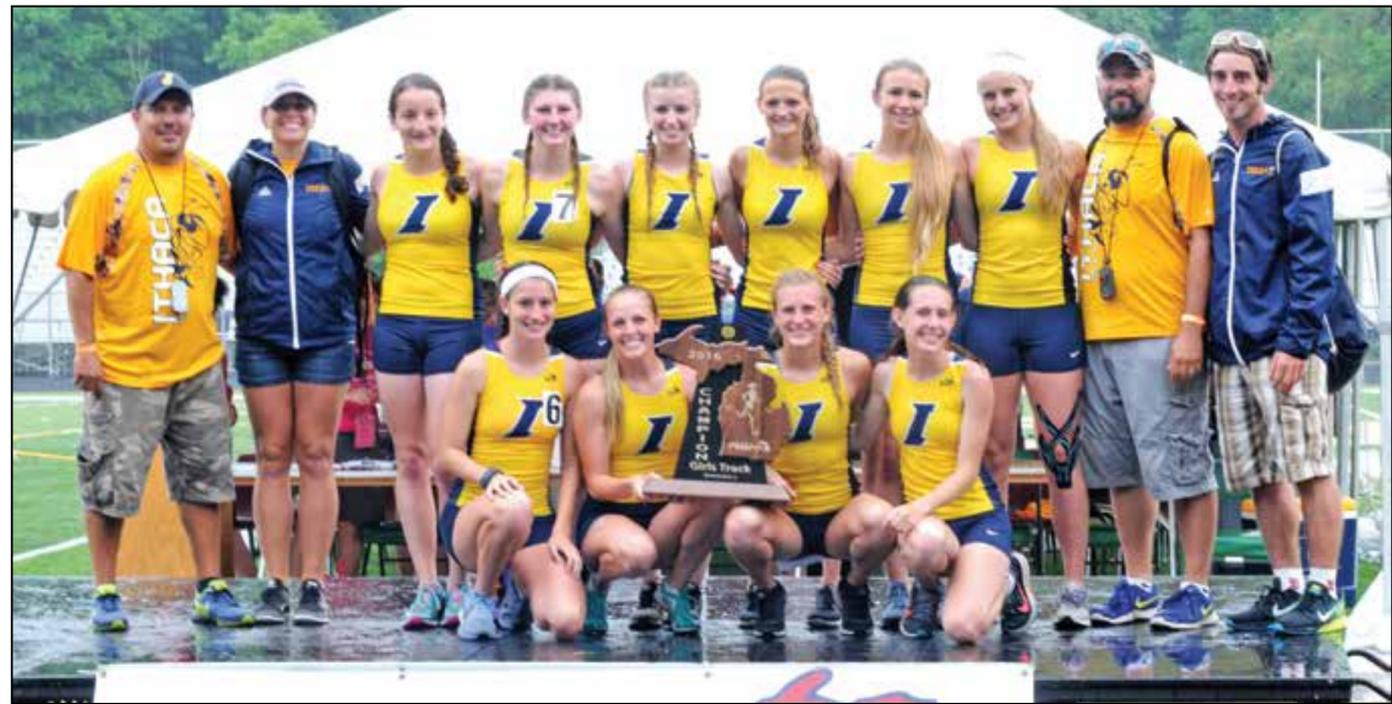
of winning, the girls tell themselves, 'Shoot, why not us as well?' At the same time, they are very talented and they want to cast their own shadow."

Another link is rigorous weight training that is a football basic, but less common in girls' sports.

"At 6:30 in the morning in the weight room, the girls will be in there lifting, right alongside the guys," Coach Lebron said. "For both cross country and track, that gives us an edge, on top of all the miles that we run (in practice)."

He also coaches the girls cross country team, which won a state crown in 2014. Even track sprinters such as Erica Sheahan also participate in cross country in order to build strength and endurance.

Team members are not resting on their laurels. Six of them recent took part at the Greensboro National Scholastic Meet in North Carolina - Sheahan, Showers, Kalisek, Mankey, Allen and Kindal.



The Ithaca girls track team made history in June, giving the Yellowjackets its third MHSAA title for the 2015-16 school year. Ithaca also won championships in football and girls bowling, while losing in the girls basketball semifinals and boys basketball quarterfinals. Yellowjacket pride was at an all-time high and teams are already looking to defend their respective titles. Meanwhile, girls track coach Gene Lebron is celebrating his second title in two years, as he led the Yellowjackets to a state cross country title in 2014. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photos)

Merrill High State Champ Links Gymnastics With Pole Vaulting

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Merrill High School's Jacob Kulhanek, the back-to-back state Division 4 champion in the pole vault, has based his track and field participation on regular four-day-per-week visits to Saginaw's Gym Jesters Gymnastics Center in Carrollton Township.

As he entered seventh grade, an uncle - Al Osinski - viewed his graceful efforts in gymnastics and suggested his skills would be an ideal match for pole vaulting.

He started with the bar set at a modest 6 feet. Was he scared?

"Very," he admitted, with a chuckle.

By the close of his senior season, he was clearing 13'9" to win the state finals. His winning height was 13'7" as a junior, the year he completed his big turnaround. His personal best is 14 feet even, and he was undefeated during his junior and senior seasons.

"During my freshman year, I cleared 11 feet, then in my sophomore year, 11'10", but I was not improving as much as other vaulters," Jacob explained. "My parents (Troy and Noreen Kulhanek) reached out and found a coach."

The mentor is former Alma College vaulter Kyle Payne, who coaches during spring seasons at Nouvel Catholic High and during winters tutors several indoor vaulters from regional schools in skills that range from faster approaches to improved planting of their poles.

"Without Coach Payne, I would not be where I am today," Jacob said.

Merrill Coach Christian Wiley is grateful for Payne's assistance. Like many high school track coaches, he is not experienced in pole vaulting, the most unique of all track and field events, along with the shot put and the



Merrill's Jacob Kulhanek repeated as a state champion in the pole vault during the recent Division 4 state track finals. Kulhanek will continue his track career at Saginaw Valley State University. (Submitted Photo)

discus. Coach Wiley praised Jacob for making the extra effort to engage in additional training, and for practicing year-round in his specialty event.

To make the challenge even more difficult, Merrill High lacks track and field facilities due to repeated voter defeats of millage proposals, which means Jacob has lacked the opportunity to practice on his own at his home school.

"When I was not able to train with Coach Payne, my Uncle Al served as my coach at my meets, and as my trainer," Jacob said. "He created many drills in his pole barn, including a 20-foot rope to climb."

Jacob also takes inspiration from his elder sister by six years, Sarah Kulhanek, a 2010 Merrill High School graduate who ran track and cross country, and played volleyball, at Merrill. He played football through his junior year, but then gave up the gridiron to focus on pole vaulting.

This fall, he will enroll at Saginaw Valley State University and try out for the track team as a walk-on. He will find himself far more acquainted with the campus, and with the athletic facilities, than a typical freshman.

After all, SVSU's Ryder Center was the location of those twice-a-week workouts with Coach Payne. If Jacob repeats his high school improvement, and maintains the extra workouts, he hopes to qualify for athletic scholarship aid. Regardless, he plans to study medical laboratory science.

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TC St. Francis Runner Wraps Up Legendary Career With Three More State Trophies

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

After winning state championships in the 800 and 1600 meters as a freshman and as a sophomore, Holly Bullough of Traverse City St. Francis High School was not happy about her pair of runner-up finishes as a junior.

She redeemed herself at this spring's Division 3 state meet - and then some - to close one of the most stellar careers in Michigan track and field annals.

Holly returned to the winner's circle in the 800 (2:12.22) and the 1600 (a state record 4:52.63), but that wasn't all. She also anchored a winning 4x800 relay effort (9:23.95) and ran and anchored a runner-up finish in the 4x400 (4:03.7), sparking St. Francis to a third-place overall team finish behind Ithaca High School and Adrian Madison High School.

More remarkably, Holly did it all through the pain of a stress fracture in one of her feet. For example, her state record time in the 1600 was five seconds above her personal career best.

"Between every race, she put the boot back on," said Coach Julie Duffing, marveling at the effort.

The coach explained that she "gave Holly the option" to drop out of some of the events, and that her star runner insisted that the relay races were her top priority over the individual events.

"She's all about her teammates, more than herself," Coach Duffing said. "That's been the case for all four years."

Other points came from junior Emmalyne Tarsa with a fourth in the 400 (59.58) and a sixth in the 100 hurdles (15.94).

Emmalyne also took part in the 4x400 quartet, along with juniors Anna Clear and Emma Fifarek.

The winning 4x800 foursome included Fifarek, freshman Katelyn Duffing (the coach's daughter) and sophomore Joyana Tarsa and Bullough as the closer.

St. Francis' third-place effort comes on the heels of a disappointing 10th place in 2015, the school's first season of an enrollment move-up to Division 3. In Division 4, the team had achieved a state championship and a pair of runner-up finishes.

Coach Duffing said competition against the larger schools has proved to be a major challenge, but that the outlook for next season is positive with Holly Bullough as the lone graduating senior.

In addition to her track and field accomplishments, Holly also is a two-time state cross country champ and Division 3 state record-holder (17:41.8 for 5,000 meters), winning as a senior by a whopping 37 seconds. As a junior, in contrast, reflecting her career-long improvement, she needed a final sprinting kick to win by a narrow two-tenths of a second.

Holly's cross country effort during fall 2015 - similar to track and field - also reflected her team spirit. She led St. Francis High School to the team state title, with Katelyn Duffing placing fourth, Emmalyne Tarsa in fifth and Jayana Tarsa at 11th.

Holly is the daughter of Shane and LeeAnn Bullough, and is well-known for her Michigan State University connections. Shane was a standout MSU linebacker during the middle 1980s and three sons - Max, Riley, Byron - have followed in his footsteps. Holly is the youngest sibling.



Traverse City St. Francis' Holly Bullough capped her stellar high school career by winning three more trophies during the recently completed Division 3 Girls Track Finals held at Comstock Park High School. Bullough won the 800m, 1,600m and anchored a winning 4x800 relay effort. She also helped St. Francis to a runner-up finish in the 4x400 relay. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Brighton Caps Season With School-Best Fifth-Place Finish At D1 Finals

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

Geri Gee knew what type of girls track and field team she had months ago. The Brighton squad was reaping potential and had a plethora of talented athletes capable of qualifying for the state meet.

Some eight months after watching Brighton's girls cross-country team earn a state runner-up finish at the Division 1 state finals, Gee's track team followed that up with a fifth-place finish in the D-1 state meet June 4 at Hudsonville High School —

which is believed to be the school's best finish to date in the sport.

"We just have great collection of girls that are talented and hard-working," said Gee. "I (knew we had) the talent to be a top 10 team. No doubt."

Brighton's season saw the Bulldogs win the KLAA Lakes Conference meet with 128 points. The Bulldogs were also second at the Saline Golden Triangle Invitational, Brighton Invitational and Milford regional and sixth at the Dexter Spring Showers Invitational to go along with a 5-0 dual meet record in the

KLAA West Division.

Erin Dowd led Brighton at the state finals, earning second in the 300 hurdles (43.72) and third in the 100 hurdles (14.76). Jenna Sica also crossed sixth in the 3,200 meters (10:48.25).

Brighton also placed in two relays at the D-1 finals.

Dowd teamed up with Cassidy Newburg, Maddie Brown and Maggie Samanich to place fourth in the 1,600 meter relay (3:54.47). The unit of Sica, Samanich, Brown and Sam Fusik recorded a fifth-place showing in the 3,200

meter relay (9:21.54).

The Bulldogs competed in five other events at the finals but did crack the top eight in those events.

"We'll lose some very good seniors, but we have some good athletes coming up," said Gee. "I know we'll be good in the distance races because our cross country program is so strong. We hope to keep developing athletes in the future. We are really looking forward to developing some field events. That's the one area where we did not score much at the big meets."



Brighton's Jenna Sica ran a leg on the Bulldogs' fifth place 3200 meter relay team and aided in her school's fifth place finish in the team standings. (Dan Stickrad, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Northville's Chloe Abbott Blazes Trail Of Glory At D1 Finals

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

Chloe Abbott is not shy by any stretch: She can sing; she can act; she has great stage presence and has quite an outgoing personality.

And boy can she run.

The Northville senior enjoyed "the best day of (her) life" June 4 when she claimed a pair of individual state championships, anchored another state championship relay and placed on another relay to help her Mustangs finish third overall at the Division 1 state finals with 50 points at Hudsonville High School.

"She's an amazing athlete," said Northville co-coach Tim Dalton. "You look at what she did in the (1,600) relay. She's a born competitor to be able to make up that much ground."

Abbott, who ran with Morgan Kloosterman, Yasmine Affes and Lindsay Walters, received the baton in 1,600 relay in fifth place and quite a distance behind the leaders. The Purdue-bound Abbott chased down the front pack to help her team win in a photo finish with a 52.9-second split. The Mustangs clocked 3:50.581 to post an upset by three one-hundredths of a second.

Favored Oak Park, the defending champs in the event, clocked 3:50.584.

"It means so much, to be able to do this for my team. I've never done something like this before," said Abbott, who owns a multitude of school records for Northville, including the 100, 200, 400, 800 relay and 1,600 relay. "I just knew I had to do it."

Abbott sang a championship tune in the 200 meter dash (24.03) and the 400 (53.10),

while anchoring Northville's 800-meter relay unit to a fourth-place finish (1:41.31) to emerge as the top performer at the D-1 state meet.

In the 200, she dethroned three-time state champ Sekayi Bracey of East Kentwood. In the 400, she surpassed defending state champ Taylor Mason of East Lansing during the final 100 meters of the race with another stellar performance.

"I could have never imagined this," said Abbott. "I mean winning three events this way...it's a special feeling."

Dalton said her state finals performance will be legendary.

"We told her that she's not only one of the best in the state, but one of the best sprinters in the country," he continued. "She's going to the Big Ten for a reason."



Northville's Chloe Abbott captured the Division 1 state titles in the 200 and 400 meter dash while anchoring the Mustangs' state champion 1600 meter relay unit. (Dan Stickrad, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Area Track Teams Find Success During Finals Bonanza

Dave Cook Sports Scene Division 1

Paced by its relay teams, the Rockford boys placed second to Oak Park at the Division 1 finals. Johnny DeHaan won the pole vault for the Rams while Cole Johnson earned all-state honors in the 1600 and 3200 meter races. Walled Lake Western also performed strong in the relays at it placed eighth as a team.

Top 20 area teams: Rockford (2nd, 46 points), Walled Lake Western (8th, 18), Mt. Pleasant (12th, 15), East Lansing (14th, 13), Novi (18th, 12.5).

All-state individuals: BAY CITY WESTERN

Evan Vorwerck, Loren Appold, Matthew Billette, Brendan Nesbitt; 5th, 4x800 relay.

BRIGHTON

Evan Litch; 5th, shot put; Chip Osborne; 6th, 3200 meter race.

DAVISON

Jacob DeBoer; 3rd, discus; Nick Sleeman, Zack Sleeman, Ethan Onweller, Jacob Turgeon; 6th, 4x800 relay.

EAST LANSING

Kentre Patterson; 1st, 110 hurdles; 6th, 300 hurdles.

FENTON

Jacob Lee; 1st, 3200m

GRAND BLANC

Carter Merrell; 8th, 200 meter dash

LANSING EVERETT

Marice Allen; 4th, 200 meter dash

MT. PLEASANT

Kaleb Perry; 1st, high jump; 4th, long jump

NOVI

Joost Plaetinck; 5th, 3200 meter run; Scott Sawyer; 4th, pole vault;



5th, high jump

OKEMOS

Elliot Kadrofske; 8th, 1600 meter run; Saano Murembya; 6th, 800 meter run

ROCKFORD

Logan Anderson; 7th shot put; Jonny De Haan; 1st, pole vault; Isaac Harding, 2nd, 3200 meter run; Cole Johnson; 3rd, 1600 meter run, 5th, 800 meter run; Melvin Mosely, Marcus Remtema, Josh Patterson, Tyler Brenner; 3rd, 4x200 relay; Grayson Harding, Isaac Harding, Cole Johnson, Matthew MacGregor; 1st, 4x800 relay

SAGINAW HERITAGE

Sean Beckom II; 3rd, 100 meter dash

WALLED LAKE CENTRAL

Adetokunbo Ogundeji; 2nd, discus

WALLED LAKE NORTHERN

Joe Albright; 8th, pole vault.

WALLED LAKE WESTERN

Jackson Bleibtrey; 6th, 1600 meter run; Jack Dodge; 5th, 200 meter dash; Jesse Williams, Kyle Thomas, Jackson Bleibtrey, Jack Dodge; 3rd, 4x400 relay; John Saieg, Jackson Bleibtrey, Kyle Thomas, John Petruno; 4th, 4x800 relay.

Division 2

Thanks to some dominating performances in the field events, Mason took second place at the Division 2 state finals, just two points behind Orchard Lake St. Mary's. Justin Scavarda won both the discus and shot put while Jarrett VanHavel captured the pole vault.

Top 20 area teams: Mason (2nd, 44 points), Corunna (7th, 27), Lansing Sexton (10th, 24), Lansing Waverly (13th, 18), St. Johns (13th, 18), Lakewood-Lake Odessa (16th, 15), Remus Chippewa Hills (17th, 14).

All state individuals:

CEDAR SPRINGS

Remington Sawade; 5th, pole vault

CORUNNA

Ben Jacobs; 6th, 1600 meter run; Noah Jacobs; 1st, 3200 meter run; Jacob Trowbridge; 6th, 3200 meter run; Ethan Quinn, Corey Mort, Owen Walter, Spencer Mort; 6th, 4x200 relay; Jacob Trowbridge, Blake Watson, Kyle Mesh, Noah Jacobs; 2nd, 4x800 relay

DEWITT

Matt Meagher; 8th, 110 hurdles

ESSEXVILLE-GARBER

Josiah Morse; 8th, 400 meter dash

FREELAND

Nathan Whitting; 3rd, high jump

LAKE FENTON

Isaac Golson, Jacob Fletcher, Elijah Bourdeau, Thomas Mueller; 7th, 4x800 relay

LAKEWOOD-LAKE ODESSA

Noah Caudy; 1st, 110 hurdles; 4th, 300 hurdles

LANSING SEXTON

Dariyon Gregory; 3rd, 200 meter dash; 6th, 100 meter dash; Devin Taylor, Dijimon Slaughter, Dariyon Gregory, Cody Blankenburg; 1st, 4x100 relay; Dijimon Slaughter, Cody Blankenburg, Devin Taylor Dariyon Gregory; 4th, 4x200 relay

LANSING WAVERLY

Keshaun Harris; 7th, 110 hurdles; Alex Owens, DaVarie Halliburton, Tommy Herring, Wanya Sanders; 2nd, 4x100 relay; 2nd, 4x200 relay

MASON

Ben Geer; 4th, 800 meter run; Joe Grundstrom; 4th, 200 meter dash, 5th, 100 meter dash; Justin Scavarda, 1st, shot put; 1st, discus; Jarrett VanHavel; 1st, pole vault

REMUS CHIPPEWA HILLS

John Wixson; 2nd, 300 hurdles, 3rd, 110 hurdles

ST. JOHNS

Steven Linton; 1st, 400 meter dash; Gabe McClain, Joren Ruhf, Jake Eaton, Steven Linton; 2nd, 4x400 relay.

SOUTH LYON EAST

Josh Smith; 3rd, 400 meter dash

WILLIAMSTON

Dayton Munce; 4th, pole vault

Division 3

Thanks to its talented group of sprinters, Sanford-Meridian captured the D3 state title. Sanford-Meridian won a pair of relays while Christian Petre took second in both the 100 and 200-meter dashes. Frankenmuth placed third thanks to some strong efforts in the field events and relays. Chesaning also finished in the top five as a team led by its long jumpers and sprinters.

Top 20 area teams: Sanford-Meridian (1st, 39 points), Frankenmuth (3rd, 33 points), Chesaning (4th, 28 points), Clare (12th, 19.50), Saranac (20th, 23).

All state individuals:

BATH

Cole Trevino, Jakob Cain, Zack Blanchard, Elliott Lipe; 8th, 4x800 relay

BYRON

Hunter Berecz; 8th, shot put

CHESANING

Sam Forsyth; 2nd, long jump; Brandon Keys; 5th, long jump; Bryan Moore; 7th, 100 meter dash; 7th, 200 meter dash; Zach McFarlan, Brandon Keys, Sam Forsyth, Bryan Moore; 2nd 4x200 relay; Paxton Ruddy, Hayden Giesken, Sam Forsyth, Zach McFarlan; 5th, 4x400 relay

CLARE

Levi Boynton; 2nd, discus; 4th, shot put; Chase Field; 5th, pole vault; 6th, 4x200 relay

FRANKENMUTH

Grant Bronner; 3rd, high jump; 7th, 110 hurdles; Dan Stone; 2nd, shot put; 4th, discus; Jonathan Worden; 5th, 300 hurdles. Jonathan Worden, Grant Bronner, Stephen Messing, Alec Yagiela; 5th, 4x100 relay; Micheal Crary, Jake Rummel, Alec Yagiela, Stephen Messing; 5th, 4x200 relay

HARRISON

Jeremy Fillhard, 5th, pole vault; Tyler Head; 8th, 110 hurdles; Adam Scherrer; 7th, high jump

HEMLOCK

Kurt Sollner; 4th, 800 meter run; Ryan Hilbrandt, Landon Honsinger, Tyler Salo, Kurt Sollner; 7th, 4x800 relay

LAINGSBURG

Kevin Koenig; 5th, shot put

LANSING CATHOLIC

CENTRAL

Ryan Ruitter, Noah Alvarado, BJ Myrick, Nick Peters; 4th, 4x400 relay

OID-ELSIE

Isaiah Medina; 7th, 300 hurdles

PERRY

Charles Dunn, Jordan Miller, Max Walasek, Bryce Weldon; 4th, 4x400 relay

SANFORD-MERIDIAN

Christian Petre; 2nd, 100 meter dash; 2nd, 200 meter dash; Monte Petre; 6th, 100 meter dash; Christian Petre, Miles LeViere, Monte Petre, Andre Smith; 1st, 4x100 relay; Christian Petre, Matt Hoffman, Miles LeViere, Monte Petre; 1st, 4x200 relay

SARANAC

Joe Conley; 1st, high jump; 8th, 100 meter dash

SHEPHERD

Cole Fitzpatrick, Blake Opydyke, True Conroy, Jeremiah Salisbury; 8th, 4x100 relay

ST. LOUIS

Evan Goodell; 1st, 3200 meter run

Division 4

Led by Jacob Gray in the throws and a pair of relay teams, Saginaw Nouvel finished in the top ten in D4. Merrill placed 11th as a team. Merrill was led by Jacob Kulhanek who won the pole vault while Levi Gross took third in the high jump



and Ruben Haggerty fifth in the discus.

Top 20 area teams: Saginaw Nouvel (7th, 24 points); Merrill (11th, 20), Big Rapids Crossroads Academy (18th, 14)

All state individuals:

BIG RAPIDS CROSSROADS ACADEMY

Tayo Fadayomi; 5th, 800 meter run; Billy Wojnowski; 1st, 100 meter dash

CARSON CITY-CRYSTAL

Re'Anna Blair; 7th, 400 meter dash; Taylor Manson; 2nd, 400 meter dash, 5th, 200 meter dash; Re'Anna Blair, Brianna Wells, Kayla Gibbs, Taylor Manson; 3rd, 4x200 relay

GRAND BLANC

Quiara Wheeler; 1st, discus

GRAND LEDGE

Jenna Magness; 4th, 1600 meter run

GREENVILLE

Landon Kemp; 1st, pole vault; 2nd, long jump; 5th, 100 hurdles

MIDLAND

Amy Smith; 8th, 800 meter run

MIDLAND DOW

Amanda Kline; 5th, high jump; Maija Rettelle, Anastasia Tucker, Beth Hoffman, Emily Wall; 4th, 4x800 relay

OKEMOS

Sophia Franklin; 2nd, pole vault; 4th, 100 hurdles; 5th, 300 hurdles; Daria Richards; 4th, high jump

ROCKFORD

Tony Perez, Casey Ervin, Logan Moyle, Sam Neyer; 7th, 4x800 relay

POTTERVILLE

Ross Schmiedeknecht, Kody Smith, Tyler Vermillion, Sam Corbin; 5th, 4x800 relay

SAGINAW MICHIGAN LUTHERAN

Daniel Gensmer; 7th, 800 meter run

SAGINAW NOUVEL

Jacob Gray; 2nd, shot put; 7th, discus; Carlos Arroyo, Tyler Sprague, Sergio Molinar, Jason Russell; 4th, 4x200 relay; 6th 4x100 relay

VESTABURG

Zach Johnston; 4th, 400 meter dash

Area Teams Leave Lasting Impression On Finals; Ithaca, Waverly, Fowler Walk Away State Champs

Division 1

Led by Erin Dowd, who placed in the top three in both hurdle races and was part of one of two relay teams that earned all-state honors, the Brighton girls track team finished in the top 10 in the state. CAAC Blue teams Okemos and East Lansing both placed in the top ten as well. Greenville's Landon Kemp also earned all-state honors in three events highlighted by her win in the pole vault.

Top 20 area teams: Brighton (5th, 26 points), Okemos (6th, 22), Greenville (6th, 22), East Lansing (9th, 20), Grand Blanc (16th, 10), Rockford (16th, 10).

All-state individuals:

BAY CITY WESTERN

Morgan Witzgall; 8th, long jump

BRIGHTON

Erin Dowd; 2nd, 300h; 3rd, 100h; Jenna Sica; 6th, 3200 meter run; Cassidy Newburg, Maddie Brown, Maggie Samanich, Erin Dowd; 4th, 4x400 relay; Jenna Sica, Maggie Samanich, Sam Fusik, Maddie Brown; 5th, 4x800 relay

EAST LANSING

Re'Anna Blair; 7th, 400 meter dash; Taylor Manson; 2nd, 400 meter dash, 5th, 200 meter dash; Re'Anna Blair, Brianna Wells, Kayla Gibbs, Taylor Manson; 3rd, 4x200 relay

GRAND BLANC

Quiara Wheeler; 1st, discus

GRAND LEDGE

Jenna Magness; 4th, 1600 meter run

GREENVILLE

Landon Kemp; 1st, pole vault; 2nd, long jump; 5th, 100 hurdles

MIDLAND

Amy Smith; 8th, 800 meter run

MIDLAND DOW

Amanda Kline; 5th, high jump; Maija Rettelle, Anastasia Tucker, Beth Hoffman, Emily Wall; 4th, 4x800 relay

OKEMOS

Sophia Franklin; 2nd, pole vault; 4th, 100 hurdles; 5th, 300 hurdles; Daria Richards; 4th, high jump

ROCKFORD

Tony Perez, Casey Ervin, Logan Moyle, Sam Neyer; 7th, 4x800 relay

POTTERVILLE

Ross Schmiedeknecht, Kody Smith, Tyler Vermillion, Sam Corbin; 5th, 4x800 relay

SAGINAW MICHIGAN LUTHERAN

Daniel Gensmer; 7th, 800 meter run

SAGINAW NOUVEL

Jacob Gray; 2nd, shot put; 7th, discus; Carlos Arroyo, Tyler Sprague, Sergio Molinar, Jason Russell; 4th, 4x200 relay; 6th 4x100 relay

VESTABURG

Zach Johnston; 4th, 400 meter dash

Division 2

With sophomore Tra'chele Roberts leading the way, the Lansing Waverly girls captured the Division 2 state title. Roberts won the 100 meter dash and was also a member of two relay teams that also claimed state titles. Malin Smith added some key points in the field events as she placed in the top five in both the discus and shot put. Flint Powers finished a close second and was paced by Nikole Sargent who won both the discus and the shot put.

Top 20 area teams:

Lansing Waverly (1st 42 points); Flint Powers (2nd 40), Saginaw Swan Valley (7th 21).

All-state individuals:

FLINT POWERS

Greta Wilker; 5th, shot put; Hallee Breimayer, Johanna McCully, Summer Eubank, Lauren McDowell; 6th, 4x100 relay

BRIDGEPORT

Andriana Smith; 6th, 100 meter dash; Payten Williams; 6th, 200 meter dash; Mar'cedes Townsend, Andriana Smith, Marissa Rockett, Payten Williams; 6th, 4x200 relay

BULLOCK CREEK

Stephanie Schumacher; 8th, discus

CORUNNA

Myah Kelly; 3rd, pole vault

DEWITT

Ashley Shipp; 7th, 3200 meter run; ESSEXVILLE-GARBER Cheyenne Williamson; 4th, 100 hurdles

FLINT POWERS

Lyndsey Braman; 5th, 800 meter run; Nikole Sargent; 1st, discus, 1st, shot put; Julia Vanitvelt; 3rd, 1600 meter run; Lyndsey Braman, Olivia Bennett, Libbie Gleason, Julia Vanitvelt; 1st, 4x800 relay

FREELAND

Jenna Gregory; 5

Individual Track Briefs

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Corunna's Jacobs Goes The Distance

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Any distance runner must possess a deep inner drive. But does Corunna High senior-to-be Noah Jacobs, a state and national champion, possess something special? Just ask Coach Jason Beldyga about motor travel to a national competition.

"So I stop for a few minutes to get gas, and simply to take an overall short break," the coach said. "Noah slips on his shoes, runs a mile or two (in whatever direction). He's well into completing 1,000 straight days of running. It's a part of him now, at this stage of his life."

At the state Division 2 meet in the 3200 meters, Noah broke the state record and shattered the nine-minute barrier with a personal-best 8:55.57. He not only trounced the nearest competitor by 30 seconds, he also beat his sophomore championship time by 32 seconds.

This may feed the impression that Noah is a young runner with loads of experience in the 3200 event. Actually, Coach Beldyga enters him only about a half-dozen times per season in track and field's maximum distance, often opting for 400 or 800 meters, either in relays or for individual events.



"This is to train him in different aspects, such as working on speed development," the coach explained. "This also ensures that he doesn't get bored through the season."

The next false impression is that Noah's speed in shorter races means that he flashes a lightning fast kick on his closing laps.

"He has speed, but he's not going to blaze past anyone at the close of a race," the coach noted. "Because often a closing spring indicates that the runner held back too much energy during the bulk of the run. Noah finishes his races completely exhausted."



His national crown was achieved two weeks after the state meet, at a National Scholastic Athletics Foundation event sponsored by New Balance footwear at North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro. Noah's winning time in the two-mile -- a slightly slower distance than 3200 meters -- was 9:03.71, higher than the state title clocking, but

Coach Beldyga said the effort was at least equally impressive.

"Sometimes a race is more tactical in nature," the coach said, "and Noah has the knowledge to run with different strategies."

He's a team player. At the state meet, he joined a runner-up 4x800 relay team - with seniors Jacob Trowbridge and Blake Watson, and junior Kyle Mesh - that clocked a blazing 7:56.76.

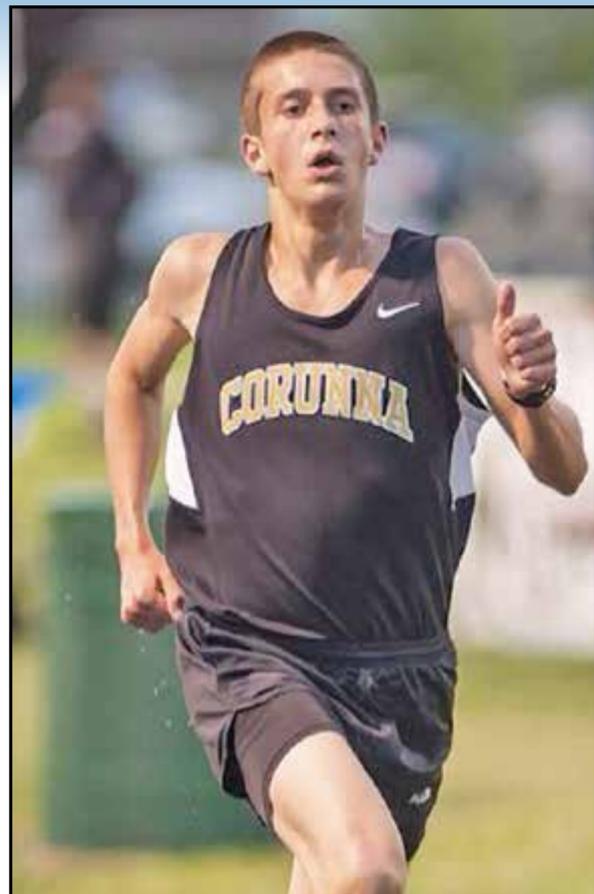
"He ran something like a 1:53 split," Coach Beldyga said. "That's still the record he's most proud of."

Noah also is proud of his younger brother, freshman Ben Noah, who finished sixth in the state in the 100 (4:23.34) and 13th nationally in the mile run.

Meanwhile, the Corunna team won a state crown in an event organized through the Michigan Interscholastic Track Coaches Association that measure team depth more highly than the traditional MHSAA format.

"We had eight runners qualify (based mostly on competitive times) in the 3200," Coach Beldyga said. "This reflects the depth of our program."

Corunna's Noah Jacobs, one of the top distance runners in Michigan, capped his junior season by winning the 3,200m race during the recent Division 2 boys track finals. (Submitted Photo)



INDIVIDUAL TRACK BRIEFS

Compiled by
John Raffel,
Dan Stickradt
& Scott Keyes

Oxford's Connor Bandel Earns His Place As One Of Michigan's All-Time Best In The Throws

Dan Stickradt
Sports Scene

Connor Bandel departs the prep scene at the top of the charts.

The recent Oxford grad leaves the Great Lakes State as one of the very best throwers in the shot put and discus in Michigan history, with many accolades, accomplishments and records.

"I don't think when I came in as a freshman I could have really imagined this," said Bandel, who will depart for 2016 NCAA champion University of Florida in August. "You dream about one day being a state champion and being successful. But like this ... I don't know if I could have really expected this."

Bandel accomplished a feat few do as a freshman: Win conference meets in both shot put and discus. That was only the beginning.

As a lanky, 6-foot-2 freshman, Bandel won the OAA Red Division meet in the shot put and discus, throwing 47'3" in the shot put and 138'2" in the discus back in 2013.

"We knew the potential was there," recalled Oxford throws Coach George Schraut. "He was very raw back then. He used to throw it like a baseball. I used to tell him that it's the 'shot put' not the 'shot throw.' He finally learned how to throw correctly and he's matured over the years. He's come a really long way."

"We finally got him to start lifting weights more seriously after his sophomore year," continued Schraut. "He took the basketball season off his junior year and he got a lot better. Now, he's one of the state's best."

That's an understatement.

Bandel has been dominant, not losing to a single in-state competitor in the outdoor track and field season in two years.

His resume has become quite impressive. He departs with the four furthest throws all-time in Michigan in shot put. Over

in the discus ring, he is one of just a fistful of competitors to throw over 200 feet, and he did it twice this season.

"I started to see that I had potential and I needed to listen to my coaches more and start working harder as a sophomore," recalled Bandel. "I think I saw a big difference between my sophomore and junior year."

While he did not qualify for the state finals as a freshman — he placed third in the shot put and fifth in the discus at the Ortonville Brandon regional that season — he was impressive nevertheless in the weight events traditionally dominated by seniors and juniors.

His sophomore season, he racked up numerous top-flight finishes and eventually placed fourth in the shot put and 18th in the discus at the D-1 state meet in 2014.

Today, Bandel is a muscular 6'4" and 230 pounds, and has nearly perfected the spin move in the ring.

This season, Bandel set conference records in both events (62'3" in the shot put and 196'5" in the discus) and became a four-time league champ in both events — the first male to accomplish that feat in the 22-year history of the OAA.

He won both events at the Oakland County Championships (67-2.5 and 192-0). His shot put mark broke the existing all-time state record by two inches — and Bandel went on to break that mark three other times.

At the Division 1 state finals at Hudsonville, his 67'5.75" toss is now the Michigan all-division state-meet record, while the 198'11" discus efforts ranks amongst the top five state-meet efforts.

Bandel continued to excel at the Midwest Meet of Champions, where again he brought home both titles with a 67'4.25" throw in the shot put, a meet record, and 185'9" in the discus.

Recording a career-best of 204-2 in the discus at the Oxford Invitational back in April under ideal conditions, Bandel capped the season at the recent New Balance Outdoor Nationals. He won the national title in the discus (202'7") and placed



Oxford's Connor Bandel departs as the state's all-time best in the shot put. (Dan Stickradt, High School Sports Scene Photo)

fourth in the shot put with a stellar throw of 68'10.75", which broke his all-time Michigan record by over a foot.

Bandel is not your typical football lineman-turned-thrower. He is an agile soccer goalkeeper, starting for Oxford's varsity all four years while earning all-league and all-district honors as a senior. He also played on one league championship and one district title-winning squads during his solid career on the soccer pitch.

In basketball, Bandel played varsity ball as a sophomore and senior.

He is looking forward to the next chapter competing at the NCAA level.

"I'm really looking forward to it. The weight (of the shot put and discus) are different, heavier, and it will be an adjustment," said Bandel, who was heavily courted by several of the nation's premier collegiate programs. "I will go in there and listen to what the coaches there, work hard, and see what I can do."

Lakewood Sophomore Wins by a Nose



Lakewood High School's Noah Caudy was only a sophomore, but in future years, he may find it difficult to remember duplicating his success from his 10th-grade track and field season.

In the Division 2 110-meter high hurdles state finals, Noah crossed the finish line in a school and per-

sonal record 14.70.

It took a photo finish to show that Noah had beaten his three closest competitors by less than one-tenth of a second.

"I had no idea (if I'd won)," Noah said afterward, looking forward his junior and senior seasons. "I had

a gut feeling that I won it and I am very happy that that feeling was true."

Coach Jim Hasselt said, "I've been wrong before where it was so close, and when they actually look at the camera you never know if they are going to say someone leaned more than someone else."

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INDIVIDUAL TRACK BRIEFS

Compiled by John Raffel, Dan Stickradt & Scott Keyes

Not Her Favorite Sport, But She's Best In The Discus

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

A young athlete is embracing the full experience when she has the ability to win a state championship in what was her fifth favorite childhood sport.

That's the story of recent Frankenmuth High grad Keri Frahm, who captured the Division 3 discus crown with a career-best hurl of 138'4". She also was runner-up in the shot put with a toss of 40'1.25". Montrose High's Brooklyn Klopf kept the shot put title in the neighborhood, edging Keri for first place by 2 inches.

While growing up in an athletic family, Keri's main games were basketball, volleyball, soccer and softball. Track was a sort of keep-busy spring diversion.

Even then, sprints -- not the field events -- were her main activities. She discovered the shot put in middle school, and then the discus as a Frankenmuth High freshman.

"At first, it was like track was a season off," Keri said. "We would do all that running in volleyball and basketball, and needed some

time off. Throwing is not quite as hard on your body. But we had such an awesome track team (including a state team title in 2014), I found myself feeling more competitive."

Coach Mike Snyder said Keri's status as senior captain reflected her team spirit.

"Keri is intelligent, a hard worker, a motivator in showing by doing, a natural leader on the team, respected by everyone, a friend to everyone," Coach Snyder said. "She is goal-oriented and never takes short cuts. Even though the team did not win a state championship this season, we are winners simply because we have athletes on the team who are like Keri - they have character, attitude, and a strong work ethic."

To add to Keri's accomplishments, she was invited to join Team Michigan for a post-season meet in which top seniors compete against peers from Ohio and Indiana. She placed fifth in the discus.

As a strapping 6-footer, Keri has been told she does not fit the image of a squat and powerful performer in the field events.

Frankenmuth's Keri Frahm capped her high school career by winning the discus and finishing second in the shot put during the recent Division 3 track finals held at Comstock Park High School. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



"They take a lot of power, but strength isn't the only thing you need," she explained. "Especially in the discus, speed across the ring is just as important."

Still, basketball will be her focus at Ferris State University. Her initial status is walk-on, but she has already taken part in team workouts and has received a vote of confidence from Coach Kendra Faustin.

She played an inside position in high school, but as a small forward in college she will find herself on the perimeter more often. She's working on her mid-range game, but having "never made a three-pointer in my career," she doesn't expect to start chucking from downtown.

The daughter of Thomas and Gail Frahm is following family tradition. Siblings Renee, Michael and Ashley preceded her through the Frankenmuth High ranks, with Michael (Michigan Tech) and Ashley (Miami of Ohio) also participating on college track teams.

"It's not like I find huge differences between the sports anymore," Keri said, looking ahead to her future at Ferris State, where she will major in hospitality management, "but I've been playing basketball for my whole life, and I'm excited to be able to continue."

Crossroads Sprinter Takes State Title

John Raffel Sports Scene

Billy Wojnowski of Big Rapids Crossroads Charter Academy truly saved his best for last as a senior sprinter.

Wojnowski ran the last race of his career on June 4 at the 2016 Division 4 outdoor state track and field finals at Grand Rapids' Houseman Field, winning the 100 meter dash with a time of 11.15 -- a personal best, breaking his own school record.

"He had the best of them and took home the championship. It was a great," CCA Coach Ben Talsma said.

"Wojnowski was third with 10 meters left in the race. He had a great lean at the line."

In his last race at home the previous week, Wojnowski took first in the 100 at the Mitchell Creek Meet of Champions (11.34). His best time came in the Division 4 regionals at Saugatuck (11.32). He was also the West Michigan D league champ in the meet on May 11 (11.34).

Wojnowski also won the league title in the 200 (23.94) with a personal record, and was the anchor of the 4x100 that took first in the regionals (46.42).

At the 2015 state final last season, Wojnowski was sixth in the 100 (11.21). But this year, he

saved his best for last.

"I'm planning on winning it this year," he said a week before the finals. "I'm seeded fourth as of now."

Wojnowski said prior to the meet that the pressure and adrenaline from being at the state meet would be a major advantage.

"Great competition really helps me," Wojnowski said. "My acceleration after 25 meters is when I close in. My end of the race is my strength."

This is his third season at CCA. He was at a Detroit-area school as a freshman.

"It's been pretty successful," he said of his tenure at CCA. "I've gotten better from my sophomore year on. It's built on and I've matured. Last year was my best year because I got my personal best. But I'm planning on beating that at state this year."



INDIVIDUAL TRACK BRIEFS

Compiled by John Raffel, Dan Stickradt & Scott Keyes

From Football to Track, East Lansing's Star Athlete Is a Winner

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

East Lansing High School's Kentre Patterson doesn't need to be concerned with being tackled during the spring. That's the season when the standout wide receiver runs the hurdles in track. But Kentre makes a connection, and he concluded his junior year with a Division 1 state title in the 110 meter

hurdles, clocking 14:03

Running the hurdles is a "craft" that helps to build his "speed and flexibility" on the football field, said Kentre, who also placed sixth in the 300 meter hurdles to achieve all-state status.

His senior season lies ahead, but he's already thinking ahead to college, with hopes of competing both in football and track at the next level.



Wixson Caps Off Outstanding Season At Chippewa Hills

John Raffel Sports Scene

Chippewa Hills' John Wixson didn't win a state title in track and field, but he came awfully close while capping off an impressive career as a hurdler.

Wixson placed second and third for Chippewa Hills at the Division 2 state finals on June 4 at Zeeland.

The 300 meter hurdles was won by Richard Bowens, of Orchard Lake St. Mary's, in 37.46 to set a new record breaking the old mark from 2001 over 37.84. Wixson's second place time was 37.86.

"He ran very clean and ran very well," Chippewa Hills coach Casey Russell said. "Even though he's not a state champion, I'm very ecstatic for his day."

He took third place in the 110 meter hurdles at 14.65 seconds, trailing Noah Caudy, of Lake Odessa Lakewood, (14.21) and Zach Stadnika of Macomb Lutheran North (14.32).

Wixson, a senior, earned all-state honors last season in the 110-meter hurdles and 300 hurdles. This was his fourth varsity track season. He's planning on continuing his track career at Central Michigan University.

"Last year was definitely a highlight," Wixson said coming into the season. "I've been to individual states every year."

He was in both hurdles events again.

"My goal is to be a state champion in both," Wixson said. "I was real close last year and just missed out. I'll be in a couple of relays with my teammates and want to help them get to state and help some younger guys get some experience. I need to work hard, listen to coach (Casey) Russell and have fun."

In the 100 state final in 2015, Wixson placed third with a time of 14.77 seconds, finishing behind Lakewood sophomore Noah Caudy (14.76) and Hamilton junior Kyle Dams (14.76). In the 300 state final, he placed fifth (39.43), while Orchard Lake sophomore Rich-

ard Bowens was first (38.42).

Russell was expecting a lot from Wixson in the hurdles.

"John is looking to improve and have a stellar senior year," Russell said going into the season.

Wixson was also confident heading into the season.

"I've always been pretty consistent going into the hurdles," he said. "I've always been a pretty fast kid, and I work hard in practice. It helps to get in shape and stay in shape all season."

It was evident how talented Wixson would be when he competed on March 23 at an indoor meet at Saginaw Valley State University, where he placed third in the 60 meter hurdles (8.25).

"I was doing indoor track this winter so I think I've gotten my form a little better and have improved some of the small things I want to get better at," Wixson said.

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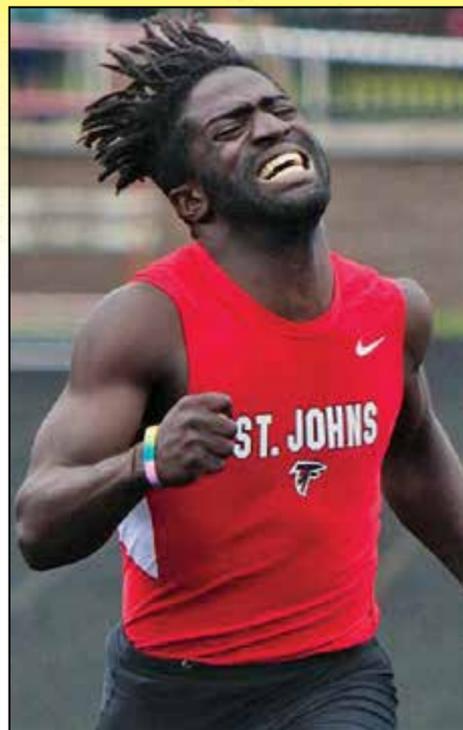
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St. Johns Sprint Champ Puts Team First

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Senior Steven Linton of St. Johns High finished his career by defending his Division 2 state championship in the 400 meter dash, but he said his biggest highlight was the regional meet in Williamston.

"Our team won our first regional since 1996," he explained.

Steven was a major reason, with four regional first places -- the 100 (11.1), the 200 (22.40), his best event, the 400 (49.49) and the anchor leg in the 4x400 relay (3:27.66). His teammates on the relay quartet were freshman Gabe McLain and fellow seniors Joren Ruhf and Jake Eaton. Another top regional contributor was Javin Ross, the discus titlist (134-4) as St. Johns topped a 15-team field.

At the state meet, Steven defended his individual 400 crown with a career best 48.26. The relay team improved its regional time by more than 5 seconds (3:22.36) to take second place.

Steven said he did not reach his ultimate goal of circling the track in 47 seconds flat, but that he is proud of his

progress in the difficult event.

"There were times that I would go out too fast and then come back too slow, and then other times go out too slow," he said, explaining the challenge of slightly pacing oneself for the long sprint.

The son of Robert and Patricia

Linton started playing football in sixth grade, and with his speed he made a natural transition to track in ninth grade.

He has gained scholarship aid to attend Olivet Nazarene University in the fall, 60 miles south of Chicago, majoring in nursing anesthetics.



Saranac High Jump State Champ Started With A Front Flip

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Saranac High School's Joe Conley, Division 3 state high jump champion, always considered basketball as his favorite sport. Then, in his freshman year during track team highlights, there was a shortage of high jump candidates. His first attempt was an awkward front-flip cartwheel over the bar, but eventually he learned the standard back flip.

"My first two years, my technique was not very good," he admitted.

Conley eventually became good enough to set the school record with a leap of 6-8, which he repeated for good measure. His state title jump was 6-6.

The youngest of three sons of Sean and Lisa Conley, in fact, became a master of the style aspects.

"The main goal is to keep everything the same, from the run-up to the bend over the bar," Joe explained.

Some high jumpers are slow and studious, similar to various golfers or baseball pitchers, but Joe does his work with quick dispatch.

"Come meet day, I don't think too much about it," he said.

Proof of his consistency came during his senior season, when he was undefeated in all of his competitions under Eric Smith, the boys coach, and spouse Diana Smith, the girls coach.

He also achieved all-state in the 100 dash with an eighth-place finish.

Joe remains undecided on a college choice while considering several offers for scholarship aid. He intends to study management information systems.



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON LACROSSE

Catholic Central Can't Solve 12-Time State Champ Brother Rice

Dan Stickradt
Sports Scene

Trying to solve the Rubix Cube has become a frustrating riddle for many for more than 30 years.

Things are starting to play out the same way in prep boys lacrosse in Michigan. Teams simply cannot solve Birmingham Brother Rice in the sport, especially in the postseason.

The top-ranked Warriors captured their 12th MHSAA Division 1 state title June 11 at Howell Parker Middle School with a 10-8 victory over second-ranked Novi Detroit Catholic Central.

Brother Rice has not lost a tournament game since the MHSAA adopted the sport in 2005, and has only regular season loss to an in-state foe over the past 12-plus seasons.

The Warriors own several other state and Midwest titles in boys lacrosse through the coaches association-sponsored tournaments prior to 2005.

The win marked the third straight season that Rice (20-2) downed Catholic Central in the state finals. Brother Rice has defeated CC six times in the state finals overall, while Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern-Eastern

Unified (twice), Ann Arbor Pioneer (once) and Detroit U-D Jesuit (three times) have come up short in quests to dethrone the mighty Warriors.

The expansion and constant growth of lacrosse in Michigan is apparent as teams are gaining ground on Brother Rice, which defeated CC by 16 goals two years ago, nine last year and only two goals this year.

"Catholic Central came into the game inspired, well-prepared and playing like a team that really wanted to beat us," noted second-year Brother Rice coach Ajay Chawla. "Dave Wilson has done a nice job with that team. He had them ready. We expected a (great match) from them."

Catholic Central (17-5) scored first and both teams traded off three goals each in the first period. Brother Rice held a 2-1 advantage in the second quarter for a 5-4

halftime lead.

Both teams could only muster one goal apiece in a defensive fourth quarter, giving Brother Rice the upper hand.

Morgan Macko scored what proved to be the game-winner in the third period and added four assists for the Warriors. Nick Dudley scored four times for Brother Rice.

Peter Thompson netted the hat trick for Catholic Central.

"We need to go on a run in the third (quarter) and we were able to do that," said Chawla. "I think that was the difference. And we played great defense (down the stretch) allowing CC to score one goal over the final (15) minutes.

"I am proud of our team for the way we played. There is pressure winning so many straight titles," continued Chawla. "We found a way to win in the end."



Detroit Catholic Central lost to Birmingham Brother Rice 10-8 during the June 11 Division 1 finals held in Brighton. (Submitted Photo)

Rockford Wins Fourth Straight D-1 And Fifth In Seven Years

Dan Stickradt
Sports Scene

Rockford wasn't always this good in girls lacrosse. It took a few years to reach the pinnacle.

Now, the Rams are firmly planted on top.

Rockford captured its fourth straight Division 1 state title June 11 at Brighton High School, topping Birmingham United, 12-9. The win marked the Rams' fifth state title in seven years, while the program has reached the Final Four seven straight times.

Since the MHSAA adopted the state tournament in

2005, Rockford now has the most D-1 state titles with five, followed by four from Birmingham United, two by Grosse Pointe South and one by Brighton.

The lacrosse program is less than 15 years old.

"We never really had a winning record before 2008 when I took over," said Coach Mike Emery. "There was a club team for a few years and a varsity for one year before I took over. So I would say that we have come a long way as a program."

Rockford, which will host a University of North Carolina satellite camp this July for

the entire state of Michigan in efforts to continue to grow the sport, has pumped out plenty of talent through its well-nourished pipeline in recent years. This year's unit included two All-Americans, four MHSGLCA All-State First Team honorees, one All-State Second Team selection and two more players that garnered All-State Honorable Mention status.

Brooklyn Newman (North Carolina) and Alex Vander-Molen (Ohio State) are the two All-American selections for Rockford, which finished the campaign 20-2.

"I couldn't be more proud of this group. It is not easy defending a state title, but they worked hard all season and had an outstanding season," said Emery, whose team finished the campaign ranked third in the Midwest. "We lost to East Grand Rapids by a goal early in

the season, then came back and beat them 9-3 later in the season. Our only other loss came against (Chicago) Loyola Academy (Illinois) and that game was 12-10 and was called due to bad weather. We were really coming at them when the game was called."

Rockford saw six starters graduate in June, but there is plenty of talent in the program returning next year and no reason to believe that the Rams will fall away from the group of contenders in 2017.

"We started three freshmen and three sophomores in the championship, and we have some other nice players coming up," noted Emery. "I truly believe that we will be one of the top teams again next year. I'm excited for that."

The mark of a quality program.



Rockford won its fourth straight Division 1 lacrosse title after defeating Birmingham United 12-9 in the finals. (Submitted Photo)

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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON BASEBALL



Former Bullock Creek and Western Michigan University standout pitcher Keegan Akin was recently drafted in the second round of the Major League Baseball draft by the Baltimore Orioles. (Submitted and Staff Photos)

Homegrown

Ex-Bullock Creek Star Keegan Akin Shows Guts, Determination; Drafted In Second Round Of MLB Draft By Orioles

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

The close of Keegan Akin's college baseball career helped to open the door for the lefty pitcher to play pro ball. Keegan is a Bullock Creek High School product who finished his junior season at Western Michigan University as the most valuable player in the Mid-American Conference tournament. On only three days' rest - two fewer than normal - he hurled six gutsy shutout innings in a championship victory over Kent State.

A few days later, the Baltimore Orioles selected Keegan with their second-round pick, 54th overall, in the major league draft.

"I believe [the MAC tournament performance] helped to show that I was willing to go out and take the team on my back," he said.

Western Michigan Coach Billy Gernon said Keegan's effort was the pinnacle of his three-year career as a "great teammates" with the Broncos.

"He wanted the baseball," the coach said. "I wasn't going to do it (on short rest), because we had never taxed him like that. But he was amazing - nine strikeouts, only one hit, 78 pitches. And throwing 92, 94 miles per hour."

Keegan's first assignment is in the Class A rookie league with the Aberdeen IronBirds, based in a small town 20 miles from Baltimore. The owner is Orioles legend Cal Ripken Jr., and the nickname derives in part from his "Iron Man" record of 2,632 consecutive games.

Akin grew up in Alma and moved to the Midland area six years ago with his family -

parents Kevin and Carrie, and younger sister Karrigan. He was a two-time all-state athlete at Bullock Creek High, compiling a 19-0 career record.

His father was into sports, having wrestled at Central Michigan University and later serving as Alma High School's athletic director. Dad installed a batting cage in the back yard, and Keegan's traveling Little League ballgames became family vacations across the Midwest.

"We spent lots of time in the vehicle and in hotels," he recalled.

At home, he would throw in a pole barn owned by Dean Kreiner, a Mount Pleasant baseball enthusiast, and under the tutelage of Dar Peska, who was the Alma High School softball coach.

"It was year-round baseball, a lot of work," Keegan said.

Despite all his preparation, his years at Western Michigan did not begin smoothly. He posted a solid freshman season, but struggled as a sophomore, in part

because of a sore abdominal muscle on his throwing side. It wasn't until his junior year that he came into his own, attributing his success to improved command of off-speed pitches in tandem with his always-jumping fastball.

In addition to winning the conference tournament MVP this season, he was a MAC first-team athlete both overall and on defense, and a third-team All-American. His 133 strikeouts obliterated the prior school record of 99, and he posted scoreless streaks of 30 innings and 22 in-



nings, with an earned run average of 1.82 and an opposing batters' average of .192.

Keegan is 6-foot-1, 220 pounds, during an era when many pitchers are taller. He said his professional outlook will hinge on a "lively fastball and competing in the strike zone" with all his pitches.

"I realize that I'm undersized for an average pitcher," he said, "I just try to find a way to get it done."

Coach Gernon says Keegan is typically modest in his self-description: "He absolutely dominated this season - 16 straight starts, 14 of them amazing and the other two simply really good. His fastball is electric with late life to it, and his secondary pitches just keep getting better and better. Plus he's an extremely coachable kid, very humble. It's impossible not to like him."



Liggett Too Much For New Lothrop; Hornets Shutout In D3 Finals

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

The Genesee Area Conference had a rough few days against Grosse Pointe Woods University-Liggett during the MHSAA finals weekend.

First Montrose dropped a 1-0 de-



cision to University-Liggett during the Division 4 soccer finals. Then Liggett shutout New Lothrop 12-0 in the Division 3 baseball finals.

New Lothrop (41-4) threw three different pitchers, but none of them could find the groove against the potent Liggett bats. The Knights racked up 12 hits, drew six walks and every member of the lineup reached base at least once.

Dan Cimini, who is in his 13th year at Liggett led the team to its fourth MHSAA baseball championship since 2011.

"We had our best pitcher on the mound, we're probably the best fielding team in the state as far as

I'm concerned, and the bats came alive. We hit the heck out of the ball. That's a recipe for a win every single time," Cimini said.

New Lothrop coach Ben Almsy was impressed by the Liggett squad. "I would say they're a top five team out of all divisions, and they're going to be just fine," he said. "Can we play D1? We're a small school and we do the best we can. We moved up this year (from Division 4) and we made a nice run."

The Knights, who were ranked No. 1 throughout the season and finished 32-4, collected 12 hits in the game. The Hornets, who won the Division 4 championship in 2014, finished 41-4.

Quentin Taylor, Cam Pope and Carter Hangesberg had two hits each for New Lothrop.

Liggett scored in every inning and its lead was 8-0 by the bottom of the third.

The New Lothrop baseball team made it all the way to the Division 3 championship game before losing to Grosse Pointe University-Liggett 12-0 in the finals. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

St. Patrick Claims Second Place In Baseball's Division 4

John Raffel Sports Scene

Portland St. Patrick found itself in the state title game for baseball for



the first time since 1993. But Sterling Heights Parkway Christian stole the show with a 10-3 victory in the state title game on June 18 at Michigan State University.

The Shamrocks ended their season at 23-8.

"It was a great run through the playoffs and we ended up losing to the best team we played with great athletes, great lineup," said Coach Bryan Scheurer. "There's no shame in that. I couldn't be more proud of our team who maximized their potential as ballplayers, teammates with senior leadership and quality individuals. It energized our whole community. We made some unforgettable life-long

memories, and that's what it's all about."

Parkway Christian had a big second inning with five runs for a 5-0 lead and cemented the deal with three runs in the sixth. Travis Moyer, who had a sparkling season on the mound, went two full innings and took the loss. Catcher Brendan Schrauben led the St. Patrick attack with two hits and two walks.

Scheurer was happy with the team's hitting in the title game.

"Garrett Pline smoked the ball all day but only had a single to show for it," Scheurer said. "Brendan Schrauben had two singles and a couple of walks on the day. Travis Moyer had an RBI single and missed a two-run homer by inches down the left field line."

St. Patrick had a 2-0 semifinal win over Gaylor St. Mary on June 17. The

Shamrocks scored single runs in the first and fifth innings.

Dan Mackowiak had an RBI single in the first inning and Brandon Scheurer had an RBI single in the fifth. Nathan Lehnert was the winning pitcher and Travis Moyer got the save.

"Nathan Lehnert, a freshman, really was a grinder," Scheurer said. "He didn't have his best command early. I'm sure some of it was nerves, big stage, MSU and Kobs Field, but he was able to get out of two bases loaded jams in the second and third innings. From the fourth through sixth innings he settled down, worked ahead in the count and was himself. Travis Moyer took the ball in the seventh to lock down his fourth save of the year."

"Offensively, we didn't have our best day but found a way to scratch a few runs. Defensively, we were yet again

solid and even mixed in the spectacular," he continued. "Dan Mackowiak at second base made the defensive web gem of the year with a backhanded diving snag, taking away a sure double that would've given them runners on second and third, with nobody out, early in the contest. It was a game changing play. Brandon Scheurer was automatic at shortstop and handled some of the game's most pressure filled moments with ease."

A memorable win was in the quarterfinals on June 14 at Central Michigan over defending champs Muskegon Catholic Central 3-2.

"Clearly Travis Moyer was a stud," Scheurer said. "He was working ahead in the count, throwing all of his pitches for strikes and was very efficient. His demeanor and body language were top notch, the usual for Trav."

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Rockford Drops Heartbreaker In Baseball Quarterfinals

John Raffel Sports Scene

Rockford had realistic hopes for its first state title since 2011 in Division 1 baseball, but one bad inning against Traverse City West in the quarterfinals on June 14 led to a 5-4 loss and the end of the Rams' season.

Rockford, which won the state crown in 2011, had a 31-8 record, was ranked No. 4 in the state, was 1.19 in team ERA prior to the game, and had 12 seniors.

Rockford had a 3-0 lead going into the fifth. Brock Weston started for Rockford and was cruising along until he walked two batters to load the bases with no outs. An error and walk made it 3-2. Two more runs scored on an error and a fifth run came home on a single.

Rockford didn't use its top two starters, Jack Weisenburger and Bryce Kelly, both going to

Big Ten schools, to save them for what the Rams hoped would be appearances in the semifinals and finals later in the week.

Keegan Kenney threw 119 pitches on the previous Saturday but picked up the save against Rockford. The Rams were trailing 5-3 at the top of the seventh and had the bases loaded. Grant Erbes walked to make it 5-4, but Kenny fanned Wyatt Huffaker to end the game.

"We had 10 hits, but it would have been nice to put a few more runs on the board," Rockford coach Matt Vriesenga said. "That's how the game of baseball goes. We had our opportunities. I thought we pitched well. We did everything we needed to do. I can't think of anything else other than we walked a couple of guys and didn't make a couple of plays and that's the game."

Key errors also impacted the Rams in the key fifth inning.

"It's just one of those innings," Vriesenga said. "We had an inning like that against Hudsonville, but we were up 8-0 at the time. This one was a hit, a couple of walks, bases loaded

and we have a double play but we dropped the ball and a ball to first base that's dropped and throw it away. In the state tournament, the team that executes is the one that's going to win. Traverse City West executed, put pressure on us and that's what you have to do in baseball."

As for the season, "it was great," Vriesenga said. "We had a great group of guys. We had a great defense all year, had 12 seniors and they're going to be missed. I'm super proud of our guys. We won conference and competed like crazy."

Khale Showers, Rockford's third baseman and leading hitter as a sophomore, will be returning. Logan Lee is among the hurlers returning.

"I think our pitchers are going to be pretty good next year," Vriesenga said. "We'll have



Led by 12 seniors, the Rockford baseball team fell to Traverse City West 5-4 in a Division 1 quarterfinals game played June 14 at Central Michigan University. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

some young guys coming in, trying to play positions. It will be fun. We may not have the talent we had this year, but it's also about work ethic."

First team all-conference players were Nolan Bryant, Nick Ignatoski, Kelly, Showers, Seth Stevens and Weisenburger.

Hartland Falls Short In Repeat Bid

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

Unlike any other sport, repeating as a state champion in prep baseball has proved to be the most difficult.

In Class A/Division 1, it has only happened once since the MHSAA began sponsoring the state tournament in 1972 — and that was recent with Bay City Western pulling the rare feat in 2013 and 2014.

In the lower divisions and classes, repeat performances has only happened in a fistful of occasions. Grand Rapids Christian (D-2, 2012 and 2013), Dearborn Divine Child (D-2, 2004, 2005), Madison Heights Bishop Foley (D-3, 2011, 2012 and 2013),

Blissfield (D-3, 2002, 2003; and Class C, 1976, 1977), Beal City (D-4, 2009, 2010), Climax-Scotts (Class D, 1976, 1977) and Cheboygan Catholic (Class D, 1973, 1974).

That's nine times combining all tournaments.

Hartland, which finally broke through with its first state title in 2015, entered the 2016 postseason one of the state's hottest teams. But the Eagles were finally cooled by fellow state powerhouse Saline, falling June 16 by a 5-3 count to the Hornets at Michigan State's Old College Field.

Hartland's ousting again proved that repeating is not a lock in base-

ball, regardless of how much talent a program has within its ranks.

"It's really, really difficult," admitted Hartland coach Brian Morrison. "This is probably why it's happened only once in Division 1."

Morrison was not disappointed in his players whatsoever. His Eagles just lost to a quality program and were not an upset victim.

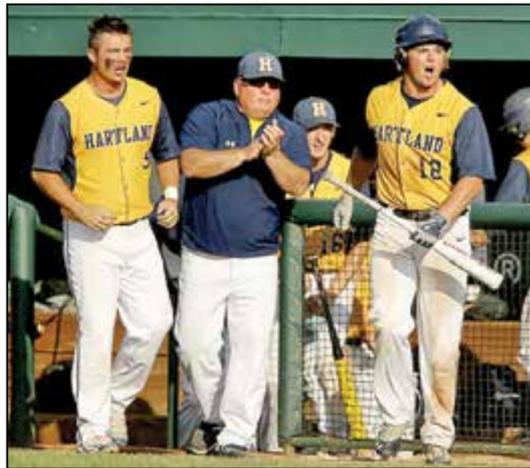
"I've never been disappointed in [the seniors in this program] in their whole career," said Morrison. "I'm certainly not going to start doing that now. I am very proud of them. I thought they defended their [state championship] with class. It was very difficult just making it back."

Hartland finished the season 36-6. The Eagles began the season 1-3 then only lost two more games over the final two months of the regular season before losing in the semifinals.

The Eagles defeated White

Lakeland (11-1) and Milford (5-5) in the districts, then downed Livonia Stevenson (11-0) and Novi Detroit Catholic Central (3-1). Hartland's last victory was a 6-0 shutout over Rochester in the D-1 quarterfinals.

"We had another nice run," said Morrison. "It's so hard in baseball. (In a lot of years) the best teams don't always make the finals. There were a lot of ranked teams that didn't make it out of their districts."



Hartland's quest for a repeat in Division 1 came up short losing to Saline in the semifinals June 16 at Michigan State University. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Holland Christian Holds Off Linden For First Title

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

There is a first for everything.

Holland Christian and Linden had the grand opportunity to play for their respective communities' first baseball state title.

Third-ranked Holland Christian made the most of the opportunity, rallying past Linden, 8-5 on June 18 at Michigan State University's Old College Field for the Division 2 state title.

It marked Holland Christian's first-ever trip to the Final Four and first title. Linden had reached the D-2 title game in 2004 only to fall short.

"We told them to focus on the little things," offered Holland Christian coach Jim Caserta. "Focus on the ball, catch and throw the ball, make the plays and try not to think about it being the state final."

Holland Christian (36-6) scored three in the sixth to break a 5-5 tie. Brandon Riemersma perfectly laid down a suicide squeeze to plate Chris Mokma for the go-ahead run.

It marked the fifth time in the postseason that the Maroons had successfully enacted the squeeze play.

"We have been successful with that all season," said Caserta. "It seemed like right time to do it and it worked again."

Holland Christian scored three in the bottom half of the second and added another run in the third to take a 4-0 lead.

Linden erupted for five runs on three hits and three errors in the top of the fourth to take a 5-4 advantage. Only two of the five runs were earned.

The Eagles (29-10-1) could not sustain the momentum and eventually succumbed to the Maroons.

In the bottom of fourth, Holland Christian knotted the score at 5-5 when Chris Mokma walked and later scored on an RBI Single to right by Riemersma.

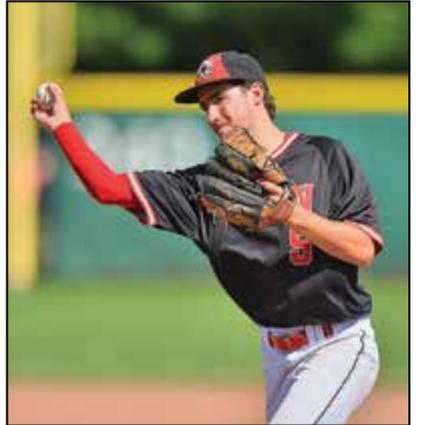
"When we got down, when a couple bad things happened, our guys didn't panic, and that's what it takes," offered Caserta. "All year long that's what we've done — don't panic and keep grinding and make something good happen."

Holland Christian's grinding became Linden's misfortune.

"We had a couple of bad innings. Holland Christian is a good team and they took advantage of (the opportunity)," said Linden coach Steve Buerkel. "We scored all of those runs in the same inning, but we couldn't hold the momentum. Good teams will come back at you. They are a very good team, well-coached, with some very good pitching. Our pitching was very good all season long, too, especially in the tournament. But again, we had a couple of bad innings (in the finals) and it cost us. I'm not disappointed in our effort."

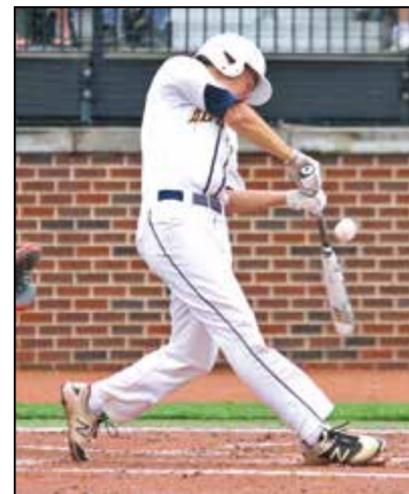
Linden's dominating run in the postseason included a pair of shut-outs in the district rounds (6-0 over Goodrich and 4-0 over Flint Powers Catholic). In regionals, the Eagles twice ventured into extra innings to down Frankenmuth (2-1) and Clio (4-0).

Finally in the quarterfinals, Linden toppled Gaylord (2-0) for its third shutout of the postseason before outlasting powerhouse Dearborn Divine Child in the state semifinals (5-2).



Linden finished the season 29-10-1 after losing to Holland Christian 8-5, June 18 at Michigan State University's Old College Field for the Division 2 state title. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Fifth-ranked Linden yielded more runs in the finals than it had in its previous six tournament games. The Eagles outscored the opposition 23-3 entering the finals.



DeWitt's baseball team finished the season winning district and regional titles before losing to eventual state champion Holland Christian 4-3 in the Division 2 semifinals. The Panthers finished the year 30-10-1. (Kim Larner, High School Sports Scene Photo)

DeWitt Baseball Squad Falls In State Semifinals

John Raffel Sports Scene

It was definitely a tough year for DeWitt's baseball team to end what was a banner season. The Panthers lost 4-3 to Holland Christian in the Division 2 state semifinals at Michigan State on June 16.

DeWitt built a 2-0 lead in the bottom of the fourth with Josh Robinson scored on a passed ball and Noah Koenigsnecht rapped an RBI single. Holland Christian tied it with two runs in the top of the fifth. Donovan Tarn had an RBI double for a 3-2 Panther lead in the bottom of the fifth. But Holland Christian came back

with single runs in the sixth and seventh innings.

Catcher Cade Preston led Holland Christian with five hits and two RBI, and Tarn and Koenigsnecht with two RBI apiece.

Michael Stygles went seven strong innings for DeWitt, allowing one earned run on five hits and two walks, while striking out four. DeWitt ended its season at 30-10-1 under Coach Alan Shankel.

"We reached some goals we had set early on," Shankel said. "They wanted to win a district and regional. They were able to do that. It was the second time in our program's history we

won district and regional titles three years in a row. That was pretty special to them. They did want to win a state championship, of course. We fell a little short of that and felt we had a real shot at doing it. It feels like there's more work to be done. I guess it's up to the next team to try to pick up that."

DeWitt won state titles in 1983 and 1993 and was state runner-up in 1996 and 1997. This was DeWitt's seventh appearance in the Final Four.

Holland Christian went on to win the title game 8-5 over Linden.

"We were able to get on their starter and were hitting the ball very well," Shankel said of the semifinal game. "I think the biggest key was the pitching change that was made to bring in (Holland Christian's reliever) and shut us down. We didn't

make a couple of plays we normally would make. I thought our pitcher, Michael, did a great job of getting some weak ground balls. That's baseball, you're going to get breaks. You have to take advantage where you can."

DeWitt had two Division 2 all-state players first team with Styles, also a junior outfielder, and Tarn.

"We'll lose Donovan who is an outstanding player and leader," Shankel said. "Back in 2014, we went to the semifinals and had 12 seniors and a lot of them started. We were thinking 'what are we going to do now?' Donovan and Michael shows up. We've been fortunate to have players pick up where they left off. We lose three seniors and two starters. We were young to begin with. We had some sophomores who played a lot."

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Mercy Shuts Down Top-Ranked Dakota For First State Title

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

To be the best, you have to beat the best.

Farmington Hills Mercy proved that theory over the last three weeks. The Marlins' journey ended Saturday at Michigan State University when second ranked Mercy blanked top-ranked Macomb Dakota, 4-0, for its first MHSAA Division 1 state championship.

After beating honorable mention teams White Lake Lakeland (3-0) and Walled Lake Northern (11-1) in the regional round the previous weekend, the Marlins topped No. 6 Lake Orion (11-7) in the quarterfinals and No. 4 Mattawan (9-6) in the semifinals before shutting the door on Dakota.

Overall, Mercy outscored its seven postseason teams by a commanding

64-14 margin.

"We played against at least one team in each of the (state) finals," reminded Mercy coach Alec Lesko. "Every year we try to play as toughest schedule as we can to prepare for runs like this. It paid off this year. We finally (captured) the state title. And that's the way it should be, playing against the top teams this late in the tournament, and to beat them at this stage. We had to beat three very good teams (in the) final week."

After yielding a combined 13 runs in victories in the state quarterfinals and state semifinals earlier in the week, senior Andrea Elmore put the Clamps down on the high-powered No. 1 Cougars.

Facing 27 batters and firing 101 pitches, Elmore scattered five hits, struck out five and walked one in helping Mercy finish a sterling 43-2.

"I have the confidence in my teammates that we would do this," said Elmore. "I think when we gave up some runs the past couple of games, it helped me focus more. This

was my last game and I knew I had to step up for my team."

As a unit, Mercy played flawless ball behind Elmore and had some timely hitting to win the title.

Mercy scored what proved to be the game-winning run in the top of the first when Anna Dixon walked and scored when Sophia VanAcker smacked an RBI triple to left.

Elmore finally gained three more insurance runs in the top of the seventh to back her fine pitching effort.

The second baseman blasted a towering home run over the left field fence on the first pitch of the frame for a 2-0 cushion.

Elmore helped her own cause with a double and pinch runner Julia Kleismit later scored on a sac fly to right by Megan Satawa.

Shannon Gibbons, who singled, eventually scored the final run on a throwing error to the plate, a play that saw Dunford injured and leaving the game.

Elmore pitched a 1-2-3 seventh inning to put the finishing touches on Mercy's state title. The Marlins had previously lost in the 2002 state



Farmington Hills Mercy celebrates its first-ever Division 1 softball title after defeating Macomb Dakota 4-0 in the championship game June 18 on the campus of Michigan State University. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

finals.

"I can't say enough about this group of girls," said Lesko. "Ever since last year when we lost (in the semifinals), they have worked so hard to get back here and this time the result was different. We played solid ball all season long and even in game ames where we faced some adversity, someone always came through for us."

Leadoff hitter Corbin Hison had three hits for Dakota (38-3), while Kendahl Dunford and Julia Salisbury had the other hits for the Cougars.

Dunford pitched 6 2/3 innings before leaving with a foot injury at the plate. She suffered the loss, giving up four hits, three earned runs with four strikeouts and one walk.

Shepherd's Dream Season Ends In Heartbreaking Defeat In D3 Quarters

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by a talented core of seniors, the Shepherd softball team turned in a memorable season. The Bluejays, who finished the year with a 34-7 overall record, went on a thrilling post-season run. Shepherd won a district title and then avenged an early-season loss to Reese by defeating the Rockets to win a regional title before dropping a 1-0 decision to Millington in the Division 3 state quarterfinals.

"It was a real good year with a great group of kids and a great group of parents," said Shepherd coach Bobb Servoss. "With the

herd was the senior class led by Haley Buckley, Ali Ardecki, Bailey Brown, Tessa Cline and McKayla Foster.

Buckley provided the Bluejays with an ace in the pitcher's circle. Buckley totaled 243 strikeouts in 243 innings pitched. Buckley finished the season with a 1.35 ERA and opposing batters hit just .186 against her.

"Haley kept us in pretty much every game," Servoss said. "She was the heart and soul of our team."

Along with the pitching of Buckley, Shepherd also featured a productive offense. Ashley Bryant, Adri Nelson and Bailey Brown all hit over .400 for the season while Ali Ardecki, Haley Buckley, Tessa Cline, Rynne McKenna and Carrie Smith all hit over .300.

"Our team batting average was .382 this season," Servoss said. "Last year's team broke the school record with 17 or 18 home runs

and this year we hit 29 home runs. We also had seven different girls hit home runs this year when you usually just have two or three who can pop it over the fence."

While the seniors will be missed next year, the Bluejays will have a strong core of players to build around.

"We are losing five seniors, and all five of them contributed to our success," Servoss. "We are just going to have to move on and reload. You can't worry about who you don't have back, you just have to concentrate on who you have coming up. Hopefully we will have some players up from the junior varsity that will pick up the slack."

Shepherd's season ended with a 1-0 defeat to Millington during the Division 3 quarterfinals held at Saginaw Valley State University. (Kevin Gregory, High School Sports Scene Photo)

girls and the parents we had this year it would've been a fantastic year even if we had a .500 record. I also want to mention my assistant coach Terry Lynch. We couldn't have done it without him."

As it was, the Bluejays won more than 30 games and claimed both a district and regional title.

"I really didn't expect us to win a regional," Servoss said. "I was pretty confident we would get through the district but we were going up against a good Reese team in the regional that be us during the season 8-2 at the Beaverton tournament. It was a tall task but we did it."

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Moving On Five Questions With Bullock Creek Grads Megan Robinette, Kelsi Jacobs

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

From Bullock Creek High School's softball squad, pitcher Megan Robinette and catcher Kelsi Jacobs both have achieved athletic scholarships to Cleary University in Howell. They aim to retain their longtime friendship and their status as diamond batterymates, but they not see much of one another in the classroom because they are opting for separate majors - Megan in human resource management and Kelsi in medical administration.

What is your favorite thing about softball?

Kelsi: It's when you get the opportunity to play against a good team. I love playing in suspenseful games, and pushing myself to do the best I can do and cheering on my teammates, whether it's picking them up from a bad at-bat or error, or

cheering them on as they accomplish something great.

Megan: I like the intensity that softball can bring. When there's a full count on the batter our team goes crazy in the dugout or when we're on a hitting streak. Pitching allows me to control the pace of the game. I enjoy the battle between the batter and me.

What is your least favorite thing about softball?

Megan: All the cancellations we have due to the weather. Most times we try to fit in those games in the beginning of the season and it can be cold and rainy but sometimes it gives us the energy we need.

Kelsi: Softball is underrated as a sport. A lot of times people think softball is a sport where you don't have to work hard or run. They think it is a sport that is easy to pick up and playing it takes little effort. But they clearly have never played on a softball team run by Coach Kalina, or have been parented by my dad, they have both pushed me to be a better player since the beginning of my softball career.

What is your favorite thing about one another?

Kelsi: We have grown up together. We have played softball together since I was 8 years old, and we have been best friends for as long as I can remember. I think we have always pushed each other to be better ball players and to make smart choices in life. I know that I can always depend on Megan to pick me up on a bad day, and give me truthful advice.

Megan: Kelsi and I've been best friends since I could remember. We are more like sisters. She's always got my back and can pick me up when I need it most. Most times we're always laughing and usually it's about something that really isn't even funny.

What is your least favorite thing about one another?

Megan: Kelsi always looks good wherever we go, especially her hair!

Kelsi: Megan is really depending on me to gain that freshman 15 ... Every time I wear an outfit she likes she says, "Can I have that when you're done with it?" I always tell her that I'm done growing but I just get the sense that because she knows that I eat a ton of junk food, she's not talking about my height!

Who is your favorite athlete?

Kelsi: A toss-up between Sierra Romero (U-M



Long-time friends and teammates, Megan Robinette and Kelsi Jacobs of Bullock Creek High School will continue their softball careers together at Cleary University in Howell in the fall. (Submitted Photo)

softball) and Miguel Cabrera. They are both outstanding hitters who are very helpful additions to their respective teams!

Megan: Jennie Finch (Arizona, U.S. national team), because she's a pitcher and she's achieved so much. I think she is a great role model to girls who love the game.



Rockford Softball Team Enjoys Trip To Quarterfinals

John Raffel Sports Scene

It's a softball season Rockford coach Brad Thomas and his players will remember for a long time. But future seasons could be just as memorable. The Rams had a 31-11 team that went to the Division I state quarterfinals and graduate only five seniors from a team that had four sophomores and nine freshmen.

In the quarterfinals at Central Michigan University against Mid-

land, the Rams lost 8-1 to end the season at 31-11.

"Midland did a very good job of coming up and hitting the ball well," Thomas said. "They were very aggressive on the base paths. Their pitcher did a good job of hitting her spots and kept us off stride the whole game. We didn't play the best defense in the world today. Midland did a good job of putting the ball in play. I'll give all the credit to Midland. They won the game."

The Rams lost the game 8-1. Rockford had seven hits but committed four errors and left five runners on base. The Rockford hitting attack was led by Jenna Davis and Chelsea Chesebro, who each had two hits while Whitney Card had a double as well. Chesebro collected the only RBI for Rockford.

Jenna Davis took the loss for the Rams.

"I'm really proud of the girls this year," Thomas said. "This is very young team. They over-achieved during the year. It was a very good hitting team. Defensively, they got better throughout the year. We had a pitching staff that battled for us every game."

All OK Red Conference players included Jenna Davis and Paige Creasey. Davis is a sophomore and Creasey a junior.

The future is especially bright for the Rams.

"We started this year three seniors, three juniors, two sophomores and one freshman (Lauren Lamphear)," Thomas said.

The Rams hope to be back in the quarterfinals for another crack next season.

It's only the second time in Rockford's history that a softball team has gotten this far," Thomas said. "The first time was 2008. We hope to make it a more regular appearance."

Swan Valley Loses To Escanaba In D2 Quarters

Scott Keyes Sports Scene



Every year it seems that the Swan Valley softball team is snake-bit as it advances further into the Division 2 playoffs. This year was no different.

Escanaba's Kathleen Ross hit two homers and a double, giving the Eskymos

Swan Valley's season came to a close after losing to Escanaba 5-2 in a Division 2 quarterfinals game held at Saginaw Valley State University. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

"The team that played the best won," Swan Valley coach Tom Kennelly said.

The Eskymos, ranked third in the state, followed Ross on offense. The junior designated hitter drove in three runs and scored two, with one of her homers hitting the SVSU scoreboard in straightaway center field.

"We haven't K'd like that all season," Kennelly said. "We scouted her, and we were expecting high and hard. She

threw high and spinning. We had trouble against her rise ball. I don't think we struck out more than six times in a game, and we had 11, 12 this game.

"We had girls who only struck out two or three times all season striking out," he continued.

The Vikings scored first with a run in the first inning when Lauren Addy singled, stole her 89th base of the season and scored on a single by Becca Curtis. Escanaba answered in the bottom of the first with a solo homer by Ross.

Swan Valley threatened again in the second, putting runners on second and third with nobody out. But Rathe struck out the next two batters, intentionally walked Addy and got a grounder to first to get out of the inning.

Swan Valley cut into the lead when Madison McLeod's double scored Bailey Gosen. But with runners on second and third and two outs, Rathe got a strikeout to end the Vikings' final threat.

McLeod led the offense, going 1-for-1 with a double, RBI and two walks. Callie Burgess suffered the loss on the mound for the Vikings, allowing eight hits, five runs and two walks, striking out five.

The Vikings, who were ranked No. 1 in the state, lose just three seniors from the softball team. Swan Valley finished 39-2.

"We had a good season, played pretty well against some pretty good teams," Kennelly said. "But that's a good team over there and a good pitcher."

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Alma Softball Bounces Back With A District Title -- And Then A Bonus

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Alma High School's Division 2 softball district crown signaled a breakout from nearly a decade of frustration. A stunning regional championship was gravy.

Alma softball went through a deep slump near the beginning of the decade, including a one-win season in 2013. Coach Phil Block took the helm in 2014, and the program regained some respectability at 8-20. Last season's mark was 18-13, and the 2016 regular season record again was slightly over .500 until the unexpected tournament run pushed it to 24-17.

The climax was an 8-6 regional title victory over Lansing Catholic High, following a 4-2 nail-biter over No. 8-ranked Portland High for the district crown.

"The Alma community had a tradition of producing good elementary-age players, said Coach Block, but during the deep-dark losing years, the girls started to give up and quit when they reached high school. The school's most recent district title was achieved in 2008, and the last regional crown goes back to 2002.

"The biggest thing has been getting the



youth to come back," he explained. "Now the kids are enjoying themselves again."

A first step was to bring in a pair of assistant coaches who are experts in their specialties - Fred Efaw for pitching (rise balls, drops, fastballs, changeups) and Ken Shunk for hitting (practice squaring up by hitting off of a tee and get the hands in front more quickly).

In the district finals, heavily-favored Portland pushed across a pair of runs in the top of the first inning, creating a situation in the past in which the Lady Panthers would have fallen apart. But Efaw's daughter, sophomore Amanda Efaw, and the Alma defense blanked Portland the remainder of the way, and the team rallied for four runs in the bottom of the fourth inning to rally for the win.

The district crown was a sign of progress, but Coach Block pointed to another benchmark late in the regular season that onlookers may find odd - a doubleheader defeat, 6-0 and 5-0, at the hands of Swan Valley High.

"Swan Valley is such a powerhouse," he said, "that to hold them down like that, we knew our kids were coming together."

In the regional victory over Lansing Catholic, also an underdog upstart, the Lady Panthers took a 5-0 lead and then held on in the clutch.

Among team standouts, along with Amanda Efaw, are junior catcher Emmy VanBlarcum, sophomore centerfielder and leadoff hitter Olivia Apple, freshman outfielder Hailey Leister and freshman pitcher Daniella Shaw. Senior first baseman Taylor Kinnunen, has signed on to play for Muskegon Community College.

"We had seven sophomores and five freshmen," Coach Block noted. "We were like a jayvee team playing against varsity competition."

That factor made the eventual quarterfinals defeat - 11-0 at the hands of Livonia Ladywood High - easier to swallow.

"Ladywood is a team that we want to strive to be as good as they are," the coach said. "We lost to a team that we hope to emulate. The girls know that they have to get better."

HONORARY CAPTAIN

Alma's magical spring season was dedicated to junior Evelyn VanDeMark, who was out of action during chemotherapy to treat a rare bone cancer.

Evelyn was diagnosed last winter during a routine physical exam, shortly after she had won the state swimming championship in the 500 meters.

She had been the softball team's starting third baseman, and she mustered the strength to attend about half of this spring's games, serving as an honorary captain. The Alma community conducted a May fundraiser to assist the family with medical expenses.

"We pray that Evelyn will be back on the field with us in the future," Coach Block said, "but right now, her overall health comes first. Her strength is an inspiration to all of us."



Alma put together a memorable season by winning district and regional championships before losing to Livonia Ladywood in the Division 3 quarterfinals at the University of Michigan. (Chuck Prikasky, High School Sports Scene Photo)



Core Of Team Will Return For This Year's Midland High State Semifinalists

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Midland High School's softball team enjoyed its best season in 28 years, reaching the state Division 1 semifinals before falling 4-2 to Macomb Dakota High.

Expectations will be high in spring 2017 with veteran third baseman Zoe Manary as the lone departing senior, heading nearby to play for Delta College.

"This season's junior class was to heavily talented," said Coach Robin Allen, referring to a group that made the state quarterfinals as sophomores. "Our focus next spring will be to play hard but to have fun," he said, "to let the wins and losses take care of themselves, not think of championships all the time, just allow things to take care of themselves."

Midland High's standards are higher than when Coach Allen - a district teacher since 2002 - took the helm six seasons ago. Back then, many of the girls played



Midland junior Maya Kipfmiller led the Chemics all the way to the Division 1 semifinals before losing to Macomb Dakota 4-2. Midland will return the majority of its team next season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

simply for a hobby and the social activity. Nowadays, they aim to achieve their top potential.

The Lady Chemics' offense had a rare tough time in the semifinal game. Coach Allen said his hitters managed to make some solid contact, but their foes from Macomb Delta made some outstanding defensive plays. Midland High finished the season at 36-8.

Three of the runs surrendered by pitcher Maya Kipfmiller were unearned, and she finished the year with a 25-5 record. Maya is an early recruit to continue her career at Boston University, and one key to her success is that she doesn't have to pitch to herself. She was the team's leading hitter last spring at a remarkable school-record .664, playing an occasional first base or outfield so that she could get her licks while she wasn't hurling.

Up the middle, twins Julia Gross at shortstop and Tara Gross at second base kept pace. Julie hit .486 in the cleanup

spot and recorded 58 RBIs along with 62 runs scored, while Tara rapped out a .408 average and stole 33 bases. Meanwhile, elder stateswoman Zoe Manary held her own with a .395 batting mark and 45 runs batted in.

Other cores of the team were sophomore Nicole Miller at catcher and speedy Allison Gray in centerfield.

The Lady Chemics showcased their offensive punch in many of their contests, including an 8-1 quarterfinal route of Rockford High, and regional victories of 8-6 over Davison High and 7-1 over Marquette High.

A unique advantage is that a pair of Coach Allen's Midland city men's fastpitch teammates, Rick Engle and Peter Finn, volunteer to hurl batting practice to the girls. (Footnote: mid-Michigan fans many remember Finn's epic 34-inning performance for Midland Valley Mechanical Contracting against Wisconsin's Peter Meredieth, during the 1981 International Softball Congress World Tournament at Saginaw's former Veterans' Stadium. Finn fanned 64 hitters in a 2-1 marathon win.)

"The girls see 70 mile-per-hour rise balls in practice, balls moving 6 or 7 inches," he says, "so when we get to the games, they've seen it all."

Midlands Win Over Rockford Gave Chemics First Semifinal Berth Since 1988

John Raffel Sports Scene

A major highlight for Midland's softball team was defeating Rockford 8-1 in the Division 1 quarterfinals on June 7 at Central Michigan University.

The win put Midland in the semifinals for the first time since 1988.

The Chemics scored five runs and sent eight batters to the plate in the second inning. Maya Kipfmiller went



Midland defeated Rockford in the Division 1 quarterfinals 8-1 in a game played at Central Michigan University. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

all the way, striking out 10 and walking none. She had two hits and improved her record to 25-4.

Maya Kipfmiller pitched a complete game, racking up 10 strikeouts and walking none. She added two hits, and improved to 25-4 on the mound.

Zoe Manary, Allison Gray and Julia Gross each had two hits for the Chemics. Manary and Gray had two RBI apiece.

"I thought the kids played really well," Midland coach Robin Allen said after the game. "I thought they were extremely focused and prepared. We're being aggressive on the bases, we're getting pitching and timely hits. Our team has

a lot of confidence about them. We talk about not being cocky but having quiet confidence and knowing we can win every game we're in.

"We'll be in every game. Up and down the line, I have confidence in all of our girls."

Despite the seven-run victory, Allen was impressed with Rockford.

"They're very good hitters," he said. "We had to switch up our game plan a little bit because they're a good riseball hitting team. You could tell that off the get-go. We adjusted to the umpire's strike zone. It was a little different zone today. But that's OK. You have to expect that. That's part of the game. They're not going to change for us. We have to change for them."

Allen realized it wasn't going to get easier.

"They're ready," he said. "I want these girls to understand it doesn't happen every year. We have to enjoy the heck out of it."



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Breckenridge Sisters Reunite On The Softball Diamond At SVSU

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Breckenridge High School athletes Samantha Willman and her younger sister, Alison, will join forces next spring on the Saginaw Valley State University softball team, but the hookup was not inevitable.

"I didn't want to try to persuade her to play sports in college, because it is such a high commitment," said Sam, Alison's elder by four years. "A main part is, she also wants to go into education (as a career), and Saginaw Valley is a good school for that."

Sam and Alison are the part of an athletically inclined family. Argil Willman is a longtime mens fastpitch softball player, while the former Amanda Paul was a letter-winner in track and volleyball at Alma College. Both attended St. Louis High School. Middle brother Gabe (basketball and golf at Breckenridge High, now attending Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City) and youngest sister Sydney, entering her sophomore year at Breckenridge (volleyball, basketball, softball), round out the family.

Alison notes that she gave some thought regarding whether she wanted to make the special effort of following her sister's path toward the extra effort of playing college softball, but decided, "I love the game a lot. With our Dad, it's something we always have done."

Sam started to practice her pitching around first grade, hand-in-hand with her T-ball debut. Her dad was her first coach, and then some of his friends started to help with tips and advice on how to fling various pitches, including her favorite, a rise ball. She took up the widest array of other sports - soccer, gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, "even pom pon for a year" - but

softball remained her favorite. At Breckenridge High School, she helped the Lady Huskies reach the Division 4 state semifinals as a junior, and then achieved all-state status as a senior.

She sat out her freshman year at SVSU with a pair of shoulder injuries, which means that in 2017 she will be a fifth-year "redshirt" senior. Her recently-completed junior season was her college career best, with an 8-3 win-loss record and a sub-2.00 earned run average. The right-hander hurled a trio of one-hit games, and her favorite took place in the Great Lakes Conference tournament.

"Against Hillsdale College, I was five outs from a perfect game and down to two outs from a no-hitter, but then I guess I blew it," Sam said with maximum modesty.

Alison selected a different softball path than Sam, even while following her older sister to the same college with the same field of career study. Alison opted to play multiple positions, instead of focusing so much on pitching. She also enjoys the challenges of catching or playing first base, and her career highlight isn't a near-perfect game, but rather her first high school home run, as a sophomore against Saginaw's Valley Lutheran High. Her SVSU role likely will be as an all-purpose utility player. Awards for her high school senior year were not yet announced when this newspaper went to the printer, but as a

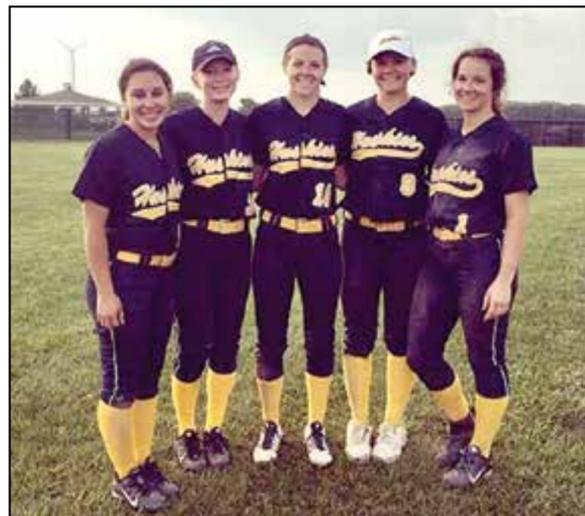
junior she achieved all-Tri Valley Conference honors.

Growing up, Alison caught some of Sam's practice pitches. She recalls the ball coming in mighty fast when they first started, but as she became older she was able to adjust.

They are far enough apart in age that there are no stories of sibling rivalries.

"My parents never really compared any of us," Sam said, summing things up.

Breckenridge sisters Sam and Allison Willman will be reunited on the softball diamond as Allison announced she will continue her education at Saginaw Valley State University and will also play softball. Sam has one year of eligibility remaining as a Cardinal. (Submitted Photos)



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON SOCCER

Area Soccer Teams Quest For Titles Fall Short

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

For the third consecutive year, the Freeland girls soccer team reached the state semifinals. Unfortunately for Freeland, it again ran into the Hudsonville Unity Christian buzz saw.

Unity Christian defeated Freeland 3-0 in the Division 3 state semifinals and then went on to win its 10th state title in the past 12 years.

"I'm proud of our girls," said Freeland coach Lauren DeRoo. "It was a great season for us to get back to the final four, and that's what we worked for."

Freeland ended the season with an 18-3-1 record. The Falcons were paced by junior Michelle Herring, who earned first-team, all-state honors. Junior Jessica Piper and sophomore Mackenzie Stroebel earned third-team, all-state honors while freshman Autumn Kloha was honorable-mention, all-state.

Flint Powers also fell to Unity Christian in its final game of the season as it dropped a 2-0 decision to Unity in the D3 state title match. It was the fifth time that Powers met Unity in a state title match with Unity winning four of the five meetings.

Junior Rachel Phillpotts and freshman Rachel Rasins both earned first-team, all-state honors for Powers while sophomore Sophie Bubnar and senior Erin Emmert earned second-team honors. Junior Sydney Wilhoite earned third-team honors while seniors Marissa Lyon and Jenna Moonan and juniors Abbey Clothier and Sophia Dubiel were honorable-mention.

Williamston reached the D3 regional title match where it dropped a 1-0 decision to Grosse Ile. Seniors Leah Davis and Grace Kraft and junior Kloe Hitchcock earned first-team, all-state honors while senior Renee Sturm and junior Paige Lonier were honorable-mention.

Division 1

Novi defeated Grand Blanc and Brighton by identical 3-2 scores in overtime as it captured a D1 regional title. Novi lost to eventual D1 state champ Rochester Stoney Creek 2-1 in an overtime shootout in the state semifinals.

Pontiac Notre Dame capped a dream season by defeating Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern 2-1 in the Division 2 finals held June 18 at DeMartin Stadium on the campus of Michigan State University. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photos)

Seniors Chloe Allen and Katrina Koomen earned first-team, all-state honors for Novi with senior Jessie Halmaghi and Mmegan Riley earning honorable-mention, honors.

Brighton's season ended in the regional finals where it fell to Novi. Senior Kasey Codd earned third-team, all-state honors for Brighton with sophomore Alexis Shaturu earning honorable-mention honors.

Division 2

DeWitt was ranked among the top two teams in the state for most of the season. The Panthers won a district title before dropping a 2-1 decision to eventual state champion Notre Dame Prep in the regional semifinals.

Junior Danielle Stephan earned first-team, all-state honor for DeWitt while juniors Mackenzie Dawest and Jessah McManus both earned second-team honors. Junior goalkeeper Brooklyn Holley earned third-team, all-state while senior Brianna Bishop and junior Maddie Dickens were honorable-mention.

Mount Pleasant won a district title before falling to eventual state runner-up Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern in the regional semifinals. Senior Hannah Kahn earned second-team, all-state honors while senior Maddie Brown earned honorable mention.

Division 4

Montrose enjoyed its finest season in school history as it won its first ever regional title and reached the D4 state finals before dropping a 1-0 decision to Grosse Pointe University-Liggett. Seniors Paige Renshaw and Alexis Rush both earned first-team, all-state honors. Senior Hailey Sadler earned third-team, all-state honors while sophomores Remington Hobson and Amber Wing were honorable-mention.

Lansing Christian also had its season stopped by University-Liggett when it fell 1-0 in the state semifinals. Juniors Juliana Figueiredo and Abby Krueger, sophomore Kasey Jamieson and freshman Kealeigh Usiak were named first-team, all-state while junior Lydia Sprague, sophomore Alex Hanks and freshman Eliza Lewis were honorable-mention.



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Montrose Falls Short To Liggett In First Finals Appearance

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

In the girls soccer state rankings over the years, Montrose has rarely been a blip on the radar.

The Rams have not enjoyed statewide notoriety since starting its program in the late 1990s, especially in the postseason.

Montrose made some headway this



season by winning just its second district in school history. The Rams added some additional hardware in 2016, making a surprise run to the Division 4 state title game.

Montrose, ranked eighth, eventually fell to fourth-ranked Grosse Pointe Woods University-Liggett, 1-0, in a shootout on June 17 at Michigan State University's DeMartin Stadium.

It was by far the school's deepest postseason run — the school had never been beyond the regional semifinals before this year — and the Rams became just a play away from joining the state's elite.

Liggett captured its first crown since 2005, while Montrose was left hungry for the future.

"I think it was back in 2009 that we really started to turn the corner," recalled Montrose coach Jason Perrin. "We've been averaging (double-digit) for wins the past few years and have done well in our league. But in the postseason, in either D-3 or D-4, we could not get past (Saginaw) Nouvel or (Flint) Powers. They both have strong programs. This year we had one of our best years ever and we beat Nouvel in

the district finals. I knew once we did that, we were capable of making a run."

In the finals, University-Liggett (19-2-1) held a 4-2 edge on the penalty kicks to prevail. During the shootout, Montrose (23-4-1) misfired wide on their first two attempts, while Liggett's Kelly Solak, Maddie Wu, Alexis Wagner and Kate Birgbauer converted their PKs in succession to seal the deal.

It was a case of missed opportunity for Montrose.

While both teams attempted eight shots through 100 minutes of play, the Rams came within inches of earning the win.

The aggressor against Liggett, Montrose had 11 corner kicks in the finals, including sophomore Zoe Robbins' header following a corner kick that was cleared off the goal line by Liggett's Teagan Cornell in the second half.

"I thought it was two very even teams that played a great game," sighed Perrin. "We had our chances and so did they. We just couldn't get one to go in. I don't know how many shots we had, but I think 11 corners and didn't get very many shots off those corners. That's a credit to their defense."

Still, as an unranked team in the preseason, Montrose climbed into the top 10 this year and made plenty of noise. The Rams should be a ranked team next year with a lot of returning talent — and a program that has finally garnered some respect from other state powers.

"We have come a long way in my (13) years here," said Perrin. "We have a lot of our girls playing club soccer now and we're playing a tougher schedule. I think all of that has paid off and the reason why we had such a great season. I don't know how many people out there thought we'd be a goal away from a state title."



Warren University Liggett used a 4-2 advantage in the shootout to 1-0 over Montrose in the Division 4 championship game June 17 at DeMartin Stadium on the campus of Michigan State University. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)

Underdog Montrose Makes It To The Finals In Girls Soccer

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Montrose High School's girls soccer, during the regular season, was not a top-rated team in Divi-

sion 4. Their highest ranking had been eighth place.

This is why the achievement of reaching the state championship game was so remarkable.

Montrose fell in the title contest

to Grosse Pointe University Liggett only on penalty kicks, 4-2. This was the first time in school history that the girls had even made it past the regionals.

Coach Jason Perrin reflected the anti-win-at-all-costs outlook. He described his girls, at turns, as "Hard-working, funny, determined."

Indeed, Montrose had some fantastic tourney victories, such as 3-0 over Muskegon Western Christian. But some of the wins may have seemed lucky or shaky,

such as beating top-rated

Elk Rapids High in the regionals on penalty kicks without a single shot on goal during regular time or the overtime. Coach Perrin praised sophomore goalie Alex Rush, who recorded 21 shutout victories, while the team allowed only nine goals for the season while scoring 113.

For senior co-captains Paige Renshaw, Hailey Sadler, and Ellory Barnett, Coach Perrin said: "Montrose soccer was their lives for four years."

Montrose outshot Grosse Pointe University-Liggett in the Division 4 state championship game, but wound up losing the contest 1-0 after being outscored 4-2 in a shootout. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)





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Freeland Soccer Team Again Falls Short In State Semifinals

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It was another extremely successful season for Freeland's girls soccer team. But once again it didn't quite end the way the Falcons would have preferred. Freeland fell to Hudsonville Unity Christian 3-0 in the Division 3 girls soccer state semifinals on June 15 at Cedar Springs. Unity Christian went on to defeat Flint Powers 2-0 and take the state title for the third straight season.

"I thought the girls played well," Freeland coach Lauren DeRoo said. "We had our strong points and weak points and they were able to capitalize on our weak plays. This was a great season for us to get back to the final four. That's what we worked for. It's not our best game but

it's not our worse. We're going to learn from it and grow from it."

The Falcons had early control but Unity Christian took over with a quick goal.

"I wish we could have kept up that momentum with the kids that we have," DeRoo said. "We kept trying. All you can do is keep taking chances and not give up that's for sure."

"We definitely held them off in the second half. We couldn't be prouder. They didn't get anymore points on us. They got a couple of quick goals on us in a 20-minute mark. For the second half, the girls played well."

Freeland was 7-0 in the Tri-Valley Conference Central Division and 19-3-1 overall.

"It was teamwork," DeRoo said. "The girls

played with a lot of character and a lot of heart. It was a really good team and a good chemistry between the players. You keep working toward a goal. The girls wanted to get back to this point. They wanted to be here. It sucks we fell short. But we worked hard all season."

Top players for the Falcons included Michelle Herring, Autumn Kloha and Makenzie Stroebel. All are returning next season.

"They're great players, all the girls are great players," DeRoo said. "The chemistry this year was great. (This game) shows the competition level and the speed of the play and how mistakes can be capitalized on so easily. You get a taste of what the competition is like when you get to the Final Four. We worked hard to get there."

Freeland lost to Unity Christian in the 2015 semifinals, but DeRoo indicated that "this year, a majority of my girls have a lot more heart. They have so much love of the game. It makes so much difference. My girls just kept going today."



Freeland's Denica Miller (18) fights Unity Christian's Deanna Brouwer for the ball in a D3 quarterfinals game. (John Raffel, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Flint Powers Becomes Hudsonville Unity Christian's 10Th State Finals Victim

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

Call it luck; call it skill; call it determination, but Hudsonville Unity Christian took Flint Powers Catholic's best shot in the Division 3 state finals and still came away with its MHSAA record 10th state title.

Flint Powers, ranked No. 1 entering the postseason, outplayed Unity Christian in nearly every facet, yet still came up empty-handed against the Crusaders.

Second-ranked Unity Christian still posted a 2-0 victory over Powers at Michigan State University's DeMartin Soccer Complex on June 18.

"I thought we dominated play for most of the game," said Powers coach Art Moody. "We had tons of chances, we possessed the ball really well and we pressured them really well. I'm disappointed for the girls because they played a great game. Unity just found a way to win."

Being outplayed by Powers Catholic for virtually the entire 80 minutes, Unity Christian scored a pair of counterattack goals, and the Crusaders' defense, led by Michigan State-bound center back Maddie VanDyke and junior goalkeeper Emily Ponstein, shut the door on Powers.

The title was the third straight and 10th overall for the Crusaders (22-2-1), who made their 13th appearance in the state finals in the past 15 years. Powers

Catholic slipped to 1-6 in state title matches dating back to 2000, in luring 1-4 against Unity Christian in the finals.

Unity Christian owns state finals wins over Powers in 2016, 2012, 2009 and 2007, while the Chargers defeated Unity Christian in the 2011 finals.

"It never gets old," said Unity Christian coach Randy Heethuis. "They are all special in their own way. This win was a little different because we won with defense while some of the others we were really offensive minded. We started the year 3-2 and I don't know how many people thought we'd been back."

Powers outshot Unity Christian by a comming 15-3 margin in the contest, including 8-2 with shots directly on frame, and even held a 4-1 differential on corner kicks.

Still, the Chargers could not solve Unity's backfield and stellar goaltending.

Ponstein recorded eight saves for her 15th clean sheet of the campaign. Ponstein and the Crusaders' backfield, anchored by the stalwart VanDyke, yielded only seven goals in 25 games — a paltry 0.28 goals-against-average.

"We had some great teams and players over the years, like former Miss Soccer (Laura) Hayboer and teams that scored a lot of goals," said VanDyke. "We knew at the beginning of the season we were rebuilding ourselves. But we came a long

way this season and ended it today with another state championship."

Unity Christian scored on its first shot on frame with 11:55 remaining in the first half on a goal by Alaina VanZalen.

Unity Christian tacked on an insurance tally on their only shot attempt of the second half when Alexis Ponstein took the ball from just inside midfield, beat two defenders and dribbled nearly 50 yards before slipping a breakaway shot into the goal.

"Hats off to Unity, because their goalkeeper and defense was very good in this game. (Ponstein) played amazing. You would think that if you had (15) total shots that we would be able to slip one in," said Moody. "Soccer is funny. The team that scores the most goals obviously wins, not always the team that controls play and has the most shots. I thought we had a team that worked their (tails) off the whole season and we had a great effort today. If we scored one earlier, it would have change the (flow) of the game."

"I feel bad for the (seven) seniors because they dedicated so much to this and we played really well all season," continued Moody. "But we hope to be back. We only lose seven players and bring back seven starters. Our junior varsity team had a great season and we have some talented players coming up."



Despite being outplayed all game, Hudsonville Unity Christian still was able to walk away with its 10th girls soccer championship with a 2-0 victory over Flint Powers at Michigan State University's DeMartin Soccer Complex on June 18. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Novi Keeps Up Tradition With Seventh Final Four

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

Over the past 15 school years, which girls soccer program is the most successful in Division 1?

If you picked any schools from Troy, Livonia, Rochester, Plymouth, Canton, Portage, Ann Arbor, Grosse Pointe, Northville or Okemos, you would be incorrect. That honor belongs to Novi.

The Wildcats again posted another fine season in 2016 to bring its stellar numbers over the past 1.5 decades to seven Final Four appearances.

"We always have high expectations at Novi," noted second-year Novi coach Todd Pfeiffer, who personally coached Ann Arbor Huron to a state championship in 2008. "It was the same all of

those years under Brian O'Leary and nothing has changed now. We always try to field a very competitive team and hopefully can win a district and make a run."

Like in past years, fourth-ranked Novi advanced to the Final Four this season, falling to eventual D-1 state champion Rochester Stoney Creek 2-1 in a shootout. The Wildcats came up short on the PKs in a 4-1 margin.

"This was just two great teams going at one another and unfortunately one team has to lose," said Pfeiffer of the semifinals loss. "That's soccer. We have nothing to be ashamed of losing to a quality program like Stoney Creek on their home field."

Novi has captured five state titles in this recent period (2005, 2006,

2007, 2010, 2011), recorded two more state semifinals appearances (2013 and 2016) and won 10 total district championships in a 15-year span. The Wildcats also advanced to regional play in 2009, 2008 and 2003.

In the five years of this successful stretch where the program did not escape the district rounds, Novi was ousted by powerhouses Northville or Brighton, two more programs with storied pasts.

"Looking at the schools in our area, it's never easy to win a district or regional. This year all four of the schools in our regional were ranked," said Pfeiffer. "I think all of this is a testament to all of the hard-working girls we've had here over the years, the parents, the coaches and the administration—everyone involved. It takes a lot to build a successful program. Brian O'Leary did an incredible job building this program. I thought the girls did a great job keeping our tradition alive this season."



Novi's Chloe Allen (on ground) and the Wildcats reached the Division 1 Final Four in 2016 for the seventh time in 12 seasons. (Dan Stickrad, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Novi's Katrina Koomen Returns To High School Game For Stellar Encore Campaign

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

Like many of the state's top soccer prospects, there are choices to be made. Before her junior season, Katrina Koomen was dangled a temptation in front of her and she decided to attend showcase tournaments with her Michigan Hawks club team.

There was one drawback: Part of the Michigan Hawks' schedule overlapped with the high school season in the spring months, meaning she would be ineligible for the high school competition if she suited up with the Hawks from mid-March through early June.

Then a junior at Novi, Koomen gave it a shot, left her Novi jersey hanging up in the closet, and toured with the Hawks, like a couple dozen other of the state's top players and was quite successful. She earned numerous accolades on the club circuit.

A towering 6-foot stalwart marking back who has added some offensive prowess to her game as well, Koomen was torn by the decision. She opted to come back to Novi's program as a senior.

"We're glad she was able to work it out and come back this year," said Todd Pfeiffer,

Novi's second-year head coach. "With the boys U.S. Soccer Academy and the girls ECNL Hawks, not all of the top kids can play high school ball anymore. The kids are forced into tough decisions. We lost Katrina for her junior season, but we were glad that she came back as a senior. She has made a huge difference for us."

This season, the left-footed Koomen returned to Novi's program and enjoyed a stellar campaign, both as an individual and as a team. She led Novi to its seventh Final Four in 12 seasons — more than any other D-1 program in that time period.

She was also a freshman member of Novi's 2013 squad that reached the state semifinals as well.

"Playing for your community, your school, is such a special thing. I missed it," said Koomen following her team's regional title victory over Brighton, 3-2 double-overtime affair in which Koomen registered a goal and an assist. "I knew we would have a really good team this year. I am glad I was able to come back and be a part of this."

Koomen, who signed earlier this year with NCAA Division I College of Charleston, took a great deal of her team's restarts

this season with her ability to curl the ball into the penalty box or get a shot on net with her accuracy.

She finished with 11 goals and 15 assists in 2016 with several game-tying or game-winning goals and game-winning assists along with her duties as a lock-down defender.

The Wildcats, ranked fourth entering the postseason, lost in the Division 1 state semifinals to eventual state champion Rochester Stoney Creek, 2-1, in a game that reached a shootout.

Koomen earned All-KLAA Central Division, All-District, All-Region and Division 1 All-State First Team honors as a senior this season. Additionally, Koomen, along with teammate Chloe Allen, was named to the 11-member All-State Dream Team by the Michigan High School Soccer Coaches Association.

Koomen also starred on her school's club field hockey squad.

As a sophomore in 2014, Koomen played for Novi and earned All-KLAA and All-District honors the same year that her older sister, Karissa Koomen earned D-1 All-State Third Team status.

Now, the youngest Koomen joins some of the school's all-time greats with her Dream Team status.

"There's a lot that you miss when you don't play for your high school," said Koomen. "I just (wanted to) help my team go as far as I can."



Novi's Katrina Koomen returned to high school sports this season to lead Novi to the Final Four and earn All-State Dream Team honors. (Dan Stickrad, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Oilers Have Another Solid Soccer Season

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Coach John Bunting and his Mount Pleasant girls soccer team put together another solid season this spring. The Oilers were 16-5-1 overall and 4-1-0 in the Saginaw Valley League to take second behind the Midland Chemics.

Mount Pleasant won 3-1 in the district title game over Cadillac, avenging a 1-0 loss to the Vikings earlier in the season. It was the school's fourth district title in the past six years and fourth in program history.

"I feel that this season was one of our best overall in the way that we played more cohesively as a full roster," Bunting said. "We had a wide range of age levels and positioning was challenging at first trying to figure out where the best spots for each player to play in while also figuring out their roles as individuals that would best serve the team. The players responded well to it and accepted their roles and responsibilities making our games more cohesive, yet still dynamic in the way that the individual talents could be used. As far as our results, we played a strong schedule and had some close matches but still put up a pretty impressive season record with our last loss, besides our regional one in early May."

The Oilers had two strong seniors with Hannah Kahn and Maddie Brown.

"Hannah Kahn led our team with points this season with goals and assists," Bunting said. "She was a captain of our team for the past two seasons and did a terrific job of demonstrating hard and determined play to her teammates. Maddie Brown was our leading scorer this season with goals. She was also a captain for our team and led by example of great play and how to be a great example to her younger peers of how to respect

all aspects of the game."

Julia Pung had strong offensive and defensive talent for the team.

"She would be able to move around the pitch to different positions depending on the need of the match," Bunting noted.

Bunting added that he was pleased with the team's post-season performance.

"We were very proud of our post-season play, although it ended earlier than we would have liked, like how a lot of teams feel. We felt our most confidence ever heading into our district

and even when we went into our final, we felt we had a lot of things that we were doing well that helped us edge out that win. Our regional match went how we had planned for it, a close match that was fairly even throughout the duration of it."

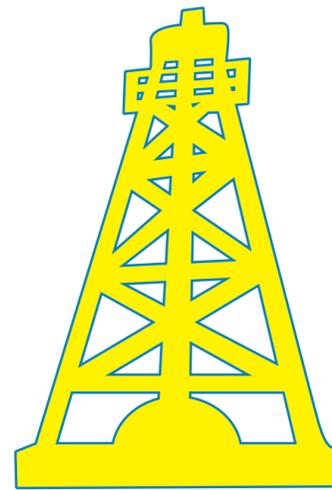
The Oilers got out to a good start against Forest Hills Northern.

"We knew it was going to be the long and close match we had prepared for," Bunting said. "We played really well and had just a couple simple but unfortunately, costly mistakes. When they tied it in the second half on a set piece that went through our wall, we felt we could still get one back. When we

didn't and when overtime started, we knew we had a long 20 minutes ahead of us."

But FHN had a 1-0 scoring advantage in the first overtime.

"We walked away from that game without regret but an understanding and hunger for our young team. Our seniors were proud of themselves and their teammates and we feel that this was one of best teams Mount Pleasant has ever had," Bunting said. "With 20 of our 22 returning, the girls are ready to expand that reputation and even grow upon it."



The Mt. Pleasant girls soccer team finished the year 16-5-1 and finished second in the Saginaw Valley League only behind Midland High School. (Submitted Photos)

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SPORTS SCENE'S **EYE ON GOLF**

Area Teams Find Success On Links; DCC Repeats In D1

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Detroit Catholic Central defended its state title in style as it held off Grosse Pointe South by eight strokes to win the Division 1 team state championship at The Meadows on the campus of Grand Valley State University. Ben Smith and James Piot led the way for the Shamrocks as the duo finished in a tie for fifth individually with two-day totals of 148.

Grand Blanc placed third as a team with a score of 617, twenty strokes behind Catholic Central. Logan Price led the way for the Bobcats with rounds of 74 and 75 to finish 10th as an individual with a 149 total.

Midland finished fifth as a team with a 620 total. Top Kammark led Midland as he placed fourth individually with a 146 total while Drew Gandy finished in a tie of fifth with a 148.

Grand Ledge placed 11th overall with a 641. Bubba Chester paced the Comets with a 151 total while Luke Bunting totaled 159.

DIVISION 2

Mid-Michigan golf teams dominated the action at the Division 2 state fi-

nals at Bedford Valley in Battle Creek. St. Johns won the state title with a 597 team total followed by second-place East Lansing with a 601 and DeWitt in third place with a 611.

Eric Nunn led the way for St. Johns as he tied with Devin Deogun of Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook Kingswood for medalist honors with a 139. Deogun won the playoff on the first hole. Zach Rosendale of St. Johns placed fifth overall with a 144.

Ian Carroll and Tony Fuentes both finished in the top 10 individually for East Lansing. Carroll tied for third with a 143 and Fuentes finished in a tie for eighth with a 146.

DeWitt was paced by Ian Helm who was also tied for eighth with a 146. Charlie DeLong added a 148 for the Panthers.

Jack Pilkington of Mt. Pleasant qualified for the finals as an individual and turned in rounds of 79 and 72 to finish with a 151.

DIVISION 3

Big Rapids was the top local finisher as the Cardinals placed third in Division 3 with a 619, 19 strokes behind champion Tawas. Lansing Catholic Central placed sixth with a 632 while

Essexville Garber took eighth with a 637, Flint Powers Catholic ninth with a 643, Frankenmuth 11th with a 653, Freeland 12th with a 671 and Portland 15th with a 694.

Big Rapids was paced by Carter Bechaz who tied for second with a 147 with Pierce Morrissey totaling 154 for the weekend.

Benjamin Balen of Freeland finished in a tie for fourth with a 148 total. Brennan McNally of Essexville Garber and Owen Rush of Lansing Catholic tied for seventh with a 149.

Portland was paced by Rhet Schrauwen who finished with a 153 total.

DIVISION 4

Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart took fourth place in Division 4 while Saginaw Nouvel placed 11th.

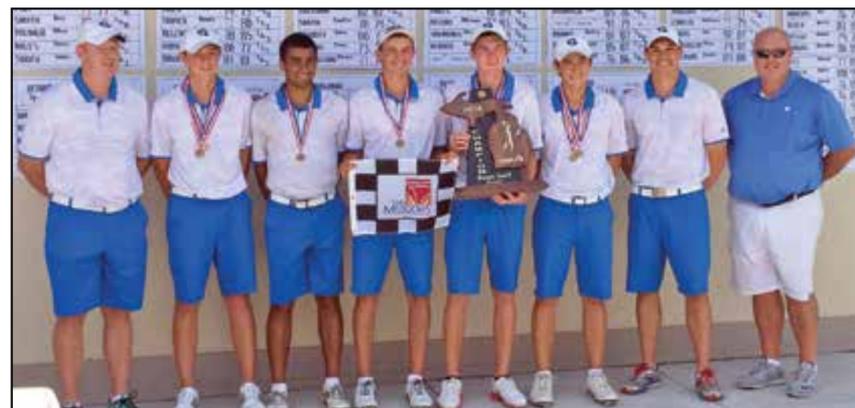
Mt Pleasant Sacred Heart featured a balanced effort as Jake Starry finished with a 168 total, Sam Kindermann totaled 170 and Ayush Mohan totaled 172.

Blake Heinz - 89 - 95 - 184

Individually, Lansing Christian's Parker Jamieson won medalist honors with rounds of 71 and 76 for a 147 total.



Detroit Catholic Central defended its state title holding off Grosse Pointe South by eight strokes to win the Division 1 title at the Meadows on the campus of Grand Valley State University. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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St. Johns Golfers, Long-Time Coach Earn First State Crown

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Simple advice came from Coach Paul Sternburgh while the St. Johns High boys golf team prepared for the Division 2 state finals at Battle Creek's Bedford Valley Golf Course.

"At that point, with a full week between regionals and the state meet, we simply go through some basics such as course management and the short game," he said. "But most of it is mental preparation. At that point, the pressure is off, because getting to the state finals is your reward. There is no elimination at the state meet - that comes earlier in the regionals, and we made it through our regional (in third place). The pin placements are the same, the hole is the same size, so just approach it the same as any other competition."

The Redwings may have taken the same approach, but their performance was their best of the season at the right time in the right place. They scored a two-day total of 597 - an average of 74.6 for eight 18-hole rounds - to nose out a pair of mid-Michigan favorites. Top-ranked East Lansing High School was second with 601 and defending champ DeWitt High

School placed third with 611.

This was the first state golf championship in the school's history. St. Johns finished second in 1961.



Team leaders Eric Nunn (69-70-139) and Zach Rosendale (71-73-144) paved the way. Nate Brown, who averaged in the low 80s for most of the season, moved up to the team's third spot at 79-76 - 155. Next came Jack Bouck at 79-80 - 159. If his scored had counted, Zeke Ely's supportive 81-82 -- 163 still would have kept the squad at least tied for first.

Nunn tied for first individually but fell to runner-up in a one-hole playoff, while Rosendale took fifth place.

Meanwhile, East Lansing's Ian

Carroll was fourth individually with 75-68 (the tournament low round) - 143. Carn Carroll carded 75-81 - 156, matching Scott Campbell at 77-79 - 156.

DeWitt was led by Ian Helm, eighth overall with 76-70 - 146, Charlie DeLong with 77-71 - 148 and Brendan Kahl at 76-79 - 155.

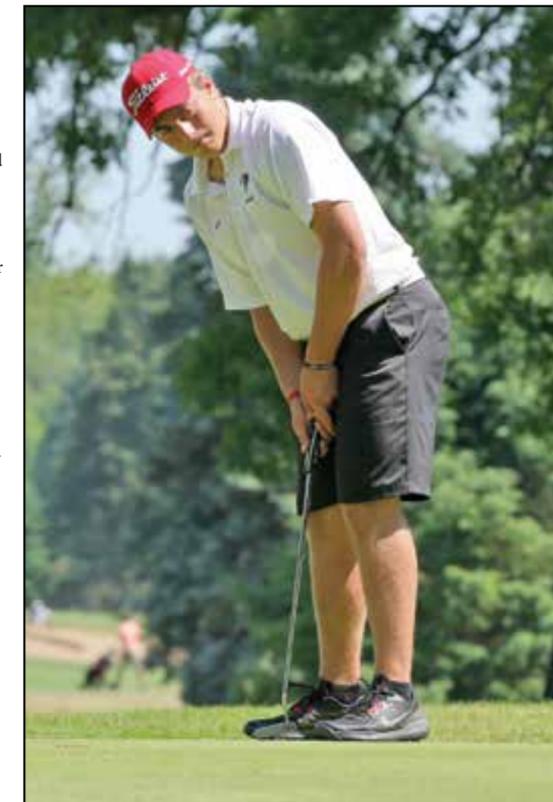
Coach Sternburgh plans to serve his 37th and final season next spring, and his entire team is set to return. Zeke Ely finished his sophomore year and the remaining four were juniors.

"I don't feel there will be pressure to repeat," he said. "We've gotten there (to the state championship), and nobody can take that away from us. Our team slogan this season was 'nothing given, everything earned,' and that will be the case again next spring. Our guys play hard, they never give up, and that's all you can ask."

He was inducted in 2011 into the Hall of Fame for the Michigan Interscholastic Golf Coaches Association. This spring, he was among the first honorees in the newly formed St. Johns High School Athletic Hall of Fame.

Midway between, in 2014, he lost his wife and the mother of their two children, Leigh. One of her final wishes was that he continue coaching, which he describes as "her gift to me."

Finally winning a state championship just shows you that hard work, determination and an angel from above can take a team a long ways in life on the course.



(Top) St. Johns' Zeke Ely watches a shot during Saturday's second round at Bedford Valley. (Middle) Eric Nunn putts on the way to helping the Redwings to the Division 2 title. (Bob Campbell, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Sternburgh Paves Way For St. Johns' Golfers

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Paul Sternburgh does not possess the typical background for a golf coach. He did not play the game as a child in Muskegon Heights. However, during his years at Michigan State University (1968 to 1972), he joined fellow dorm mates who would cross the Red Cedar River and "jump the fence," he said with a laugh, to play during the offseason at a municipal course that no longer exists.

As a result of being self-taught, he said he developed some bad habits that

he corrected by attending clinics and by absorbing various instruction books and videotapes.

He joined the St. Johns School District's teaching staff upon his MSU



graduation and coached girls softball from 1979 to 1999, starting with junior varsity before moving to the varsity in

1985. He retired from teaching in 2007, but has stuck with the golf team.

He has seen fantastic improvement through the years, both in modern equipment and in skill levels.

"During my first four or five years, we didn't have a player to break 40 (for nine holes)," he recalled. "Golf wasn't as big as it is now. The clubs are better, the balls are livelier. Kids hit it so much farther nowadays."

Still, for kids of all ages, Coach Sternburgh offers some basic tips: Make sure the set-up and alignment are on target. Keep the backswing at a slow pace, to allow the unleashing of power on the downswing. Avoid swaying by keeping the back foot planted.

And most of all, while there will be good days and bad days, keep in mind that the hole always is the same size.



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Tawas Wins First-Ever Title In Any Sport; Golfers Win D3 Title

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

It's no secret: Lansing Catholic has owned the Lower Peninsula Division 3 Golf Finals over the past decade. After the Cougars rolled to a double-digit victory over Tawas at their Regional, it looked like they were primed to capture a fourth straight Division 3 title on a course they were quite familiar with in Forest Akers East on the campus of Michigan State University.

Think again. Lansing Catholic wasn't in contention; however, the team that looked vulnerable at Regionals

turned out to be the one everyone was chasing June 11.

Tawas won its first ever MHSAA Finals championship in any sport by overcoming a 13-stroke deficit on the final day.

Tawas shot a two-day score of 600 (303, 297), with Saturday's 297 setting a school record 18-hole round.

Jackson Lumen Christi came in second (603), Big Rapids took third (619), Grand Rapids North Pointe Christian took fourth (625) and Houghton Lake rounded out the top five (631).

"Tawas has never won a state championship in any team sport,"



Coach Keith Martin said. "So we were really excited, but thanks to the tracking we were able to do, we kind of knew we had it."

Martin knows that in tournament play, you never know what is going to happen until the final hole, so to watch his team overcome double-digit strokes was a huge accomplishment – not to mention doing so with a first championship on the line.

It appeared it wasn't Tawas' day through the first nine holes when the Braves fell 13 strokes behind perennial power Jackson Lumen Christi.

"We started out really slow on the front nine, and Lumen Christi was playing really well," Martin said. "One of our kids chipped in for eagle on the 10th, and the positive vibes spread pretty quickly after that. Then we knocked in a couple birdies and really regained our composure."

After shooting 153 as a team on the front nine, sophomore Daniel Shattuck chipped-in on the 10th to start the momentum toward the team's best nine-hole score this season, 144. Martin called that shot the turning point in the match,

Tawas won its first-ever state championship in any sport after putting together a school record round of 297 to secure the Division 3 title in the finals played at Forest Akers West on the campus of Michigan State University. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)

not to mention calling it one of the most incredible shots he's witnessed firsthand.

"We shot 144 on the back which is – that's pretty dang good."

Shattuck said he was mulling through his round, but the shot gave him new life. He wound up shooting the best nine holes of his life.

"It's crazy how things work out," Shattuck said. "All you need is a break or a confidence boost, and that's what happened. I looked up and realized I made eagle in the final round of the state championship. It doesn't get any better than that."

Tawas has a six-man rotation, and two split one of the five spots in the Finals lineup.

Mason Buresh and Kyle Costigan played on Friday and Saturday, respectively, and combined to shoot a 153 – which finished third among the team's five scores.

Buresh shot an 80 on Friday, while Andrew Volk had a consistent weekend with a 152 (74-78), which put him just two strokes outside the individual top 10.

Senior Bryce Myles who led the team with a two-day total of 148

– 73 Friday and 75 Saturday – and finished tied for fourth individually with a 148.

Winning the individual championship was Macomb Lutheran North's Scott Sparks with a 141; he also won an individual title two seasons ago as a sophomore. Dundee's Justin Kane and Big Rapids' Carter Bechaz tied for second at 147, and joining Myles at 148 were Freeland's Benjamin Balen and Jackson Lumen Christi's Will Double.

Myles said there was nothing like saving one of his best rounds of his career for his final high school tournament.

"To be able to win a state championship, finish all-state all in your final high school tournament is an incredible feeling," he said.

As for Lumen Christi, which was tied with Tawas after the first day and at one point held a 13-stroke lead – the Titans settled for their third runner-up finish over the past four seasons.

"Lumen Christi is an amazing program with a Hall of Fame coach," Martin said. "They played really well, but I guess it was our day today."

Clarkston Everest Earns First-Ever Title Winning D4 Golf Title

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Until June 11, Clarkston Everest Collegiate had never won an MHSAA Finals championship in any sport during the school's eight-year existence.

That all changed during a five-hour round of golf, as its boys team lapped the field en route to capturing the Lower Peninsula Division 4 championship at Forest Akers West on the campus of Michigan State University.

The Mountaineers fired a two-day total of 637 followed by Kalamazoo Christian (665). Muskegon Catholic was third at 685, Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart fourth at 690 and Clinton rounded out the top five with a 692.

Everest Collegiate used a strong second day to run away from the field after firing a 317 to take a two-stroke lead into the second round. The Mountaineers were followed closely by Kalamazoo Christian (319) and Sacred Heart (328) during Saturday's round.

Everest Collegiate coach David

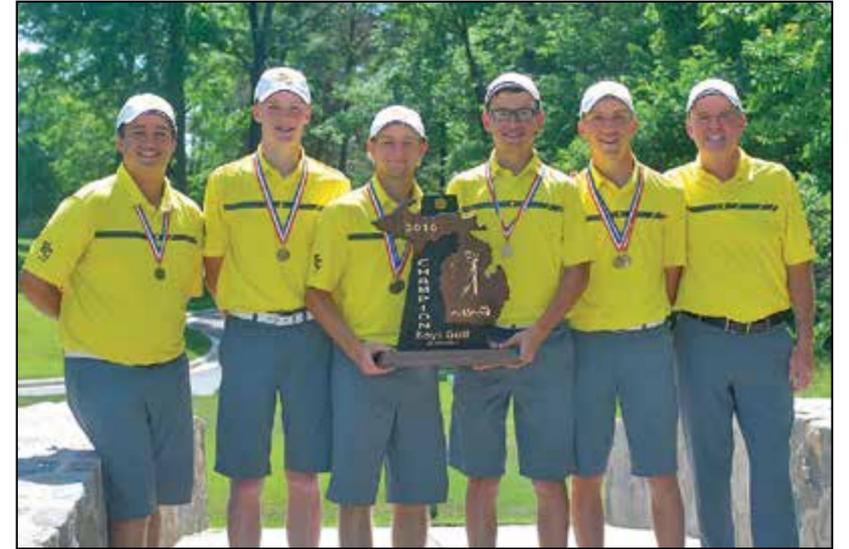
Smith credited the strong start in the opening round to his golfers focus heading into the Final. That, coupled with making clutch shots, allowed the Mountaineers to pull away late in the second round.

"The memories from this day will last a lifetime," Smith said. "We will go down as the first state championship team in school history. It doesn't get any better than that."

"It's amazing," he added. "This is such an amazing group of young men to be with."

Everest Collegiate had never played the championship course until Friday. Smith was being honest when he said he didn't know what to expect before the opening round of play. But to see the team grow up this weekend nearly moved him to tears.

"You can teach the kids the basics of the game, but to watch them make shots in critical situations and just watch them grow as players is something you can't teach," Smith said. "My senior Tyler Rozwadowski came in and nearly won the whole thing as an individual player, and he never saw the course before until



now. It's stuff like that which makes this victory even more impressive. I couldn't be prouder."

Taking the medalist honor was Lansing Christian sophomore Parker Jamieson, who fired a 71-76 two-day total of 147. Rozwadowski finished with 149 strokes, followed by White Pigeon's Jordan Olsen, Kalamazoo Christian's Colin Sikkenga and Collin Powers of Muskegon Catholic Central, who all tied for third at 154.

Jamieson, a Lansing native, is no stranger to the Forest Akers courses, and he played West as a veteran over the past two days. Needless to say he is already thinking about next year's tournament, as it will be played at Forest Akers East.

"I can't help not to think about coming back to Forest Akers next season and repeating," Jamieson said. "I really battled the heat out there Saturday, but so did everyone else. I focused on making good shots,

making every shot count out there. It was definitely a grind."

Rozwadowski agree.

"I came into Saturday's round with a number in my mind that I wanted to shoot and I almost hit that number, but I came up a little short," Rozwadowski said. "I would have loved to have won the individual championship, but I wouldn't change anything winning a team title with my guys. This is pretty special."



In only its eighth year of existence, Clarkston Everest Collegiate walked away with the school's first state championship after winning the D4 championship on June 11 at Forest Akers West on Michigan State University's campus. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)

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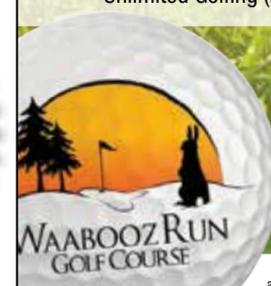
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Okemos Tennis Enjoys Another Solid Season In D1

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by its talented singles players, the Okemos girls tennis team capped the season by placing fifth as a team at the Division 2 state tennis finals.

Okemos players took home titles at both No. 1 and No. 2 singles. At No. 1 singles, Okemos sophomore Alisa Sabotic defeated her friend and training partner Olivia Hanover of Mason in three sets, 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.

"I had a feeling I would face Liv because I know how good she can play," said Sabotic. "I was confident but also worried because I had played her two other times and it was close. It's hard playing a friend, of course, but I don't really look at it like that, it's competition."

At No. 2 singles, Sabotic's teammate Monika Franciscs also brought home a state title as she defeated Breann Lunghamer of Bloomfield Hills Marian in two sets.

Okemos also made its presence felt at the other two singles flights as Sema Colak was runner-up at No. 3 singles and



(Top) Okemos' Alisa Sabotic returns a shot on the way to winning the No. 1 singles title. Okemos finished fifth as a team. (Left) Mason's Olivia Hanover lost to Sabotic at No. 1 singles. (Right) Sabotic and Hanover are all smiles after their No. 1 singles match in D2. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photos)

Anushka Murthy reached the semifinals at No. 4 singles.

DIVISION 2

Home was sweet for the Midland Dow tennis team, as Dow captured the Division 1 state title in Midland.

Dow players claimed a pair of individual titles as Caroline Szabo won the title at No. 2 singles and Sarah Ismail won the title at No. 3 singles. Hadley Camp also reached the semifinals at No. 4 singles.

Dow also dominated in doubles action as Afua Ofori-daroko and Kamryn Matthews won at No. 1 doubles and Meghan Killmaster and Kelly Livingston won at No. 2 doubles. Dow's No. 3 doubles team of Mina Fabiano and Tatum Matthews and the No. 4 doubles team of Maggie Schaller and Marie Marche both finished as runner-ups.

DIVISION 3

Detroit Country Day won a close state final with 32 points followed by Grand Rapids Christian with 31 points and Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood with 30.

DIVISION 4

Bloomfield Hills Academy of the Sacred Heart took home the title in Division 4 as it edged Traverse City St Francis by a single point.

Flint Powers Catholic placed eighth while Portland finished 10th, Lansing Catholic Central 12th and Chesaning 14th.

Powers Catholic was led by Alise Haddad, who reached the quarterfinals at No. 1 singles and Hannah Rahman who reached the quarters at No. 2. The No. 4 doubles team of Anna Rochor and Maddy Tata also reached the quarterfinals.

Lansing Catholic Central was paced by Clare Werner who reached the quarterfinals at No. 4 singles.

Portland was paced by the No. 1 doubles team of Brooke Butterfield and Morgan Wittkopp who reached the quarterfinals at No. 1 doubles.

Chesaning was led by the No. 3 doubles team of Brooke Keck and Taylor Murphy who reached the semifinals.



Holly Quietly Builds Reputation As Power School With Another Top-10 Finish In D2

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

Nestled in the northwest corner of Oakland County is the quiet town of Holly. About the only notable noise out of this burg is the occasional train horn, as the village boasts the intersection of the CSX and Canadian National main lines and double digit trains zipping through the village and adjacent country side on a daily basis.

There is another buzz that has quietly arisen from Holly over the years and while not as resounding as a train horn, it comes from the high school's tennis courts and is powerful in its own right. Holly's girls tennis program has become one of the state's most consistent contingents and has done so the blue-collar way.

"We don't get many kids with the country club type background," noted Holly coach Will Sophiea. "But we have a lot of interest for tennis in the community and we always have hard-working kids that want to succeed. There's a lot of support for tennis here."

Sophiea's program has put up some quality numbers over the years and has clearly become the most consistent school in the Flint area over the past two-plus decades.

The 2016 season was one of the best, as the Bronchos collected league and regional titles to go along with a sixth-place finish at the Division 2 state finals. Holly set multiple school records this season.

Beginning in the 1982-83 school year through the spring 2011 season, Holly captured 29 straight Flint Metro League titles in girls tennis and would have been 30 if not for a scoring change within the league in 2012, when the Bronchos finished a point behind Fenton. Overall, Holly has captured 32 of the past 34 league titles, missing in only 2012 and 2014. In both of those years Holly finished second.

At the regional level, Holly has won two straight regional crowns, including scoring 25 points May 19 to win the title on the Bronchos' home courts to qualify for the Lower Peninsula Division 2 state finals June 3-4. Holly will host the D-2 state finals this season.

Holly, which has placed high at several quality tournaments this season and boasts

a 6-1 dual match record, has had one of its best-ever seasons in 2016.

The Bronchos recorded 19 points at the D-2 finals, sent eight players to the semifinals, and had four flights in the semifinals and five flights in the quarterfinals—all of which are school records.

"A lot of it goes down to seeds," offered Sophiea. "If you can get some good seeds, win a few matches, then you can get into the top 10."

The last time Holly did not make the cut for the state finals was 1997, when the Bronchos landed in a regional with the Birmingham/Bloomfield Hills area schools and finished fourth. They have finished either first or second at the regional tournament for 18 straight seasons.

Holly entered the state finals ranked seventh in Division 2 and recorded second straight top-10 team finish. The Bronchos were 10th in 2015.

Holly's best-ever state finals finish came in 2004, when the Bronchos totaled 15 points and landed in a three-way tie for third overall. Over the past two decades, Holly has cracked the top 10 at the D-2 state finals four times, including 2004, eighth in 1998, 10th last season and sixth this spring.

"It's been a great year," admitted Sophiea. "The girls set some high goals for themselves and they have worked hard to (achieve them)."

Freshman Taylor Barrett is ranked in Southeastern Michigan USTA for her age group and has become a pleasant surprise for Holly at No. 1 singles. There is also great leadership that came from the Bronchos' senior class this season.

Seniors Lily Kossak, Michele Major and Journee Kerner round out the singles lineup, while Sydney Renehan (No. 1 doubles), Haley Crimmins (No. 2 doubles) and three-sport athlete Jenna Pepper (No. 4 doubles) have also held lead this squad. Pepper will play golf at Saginaw Valley State next year.

"We have a great group of seniors this season who have become leaders and want to carry on our tradition," said Sophiea. "This group is like a family. They all get along and when you have great leadership coming from seniors, then you can have success."

The Holly girls tennis team had a solid 2016 season collecting league and regional titles to go along with a sixth-place finish at the Division 2 state finals. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Dow Won't Be Denied; Wins D1 Tennis Title

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

To say the Midland Dow girls tennis team enjoyed a boost playing close to home June 4 would be an understatement.

Dow coach Garrett Turner wasn't about to apologize after watching the Chargers win the Lower Peninsula Division 1 girls tennis championship at the Greater Midland Tennis Center. Dow had last won the title in 2009 and finished second last season and in 2010.

"We came out ready to go. We played a lot of great tennis, and we got the job done," Turner said. "I was proud of what we accomplished seven years ago, and I couldn't be more proud of this year's team. We went out and battled a very tough Northville team and got the win. It's a true testament of how much we worked in the off season to prepare us for this moment. What a year. What

an accomplishment."

Dow finished with 33 points to edge Northville, which finished with 30. Grosse Pointe South was third with 18 points, Ann Arbor Pioneer fourth with 17 and Rockford fifth with 14.

Northville, the reigning Division 1 champion, fought hard right up until the final match. But Dow's Caroline Szabo clinched the title for the Chargers by defeating Northville's Shanoli Kumar 6-2, 6-3 at No. 2 singles.

The win was redemption for Szabo, who was forced to watch last year's Finals from the sidelines because of an injury.

"Sitting out last season was hard to watch, especially when we were close to defeating Northville," Szabo said. "It was hard not being able to help the team. Watching last year, to clinching the title this year, it is pretty incredible."

Northville coach Linda Jones was confident the team would hang

close to Midland Dow heading into the tournament, but she knew it was going to take some stellar performances by her team to get past the Chargers.

"To win it last year and to finish second this year is something that has never happened at Northville High School," Jones said. "These girls have worked so hard to make it this far and just miss winning another state title is extremely gratifying to our team. We knew Dow was going to be tough, but our girls hung in there and fought to the end."

Of the eight flight championship matches, Northville and Dow competed head-to-head in six. Szabo gave Dow a win at No. 2 singles, while Sarah Ismail added a Chargers' win at No. 3.

Ismail beat Northville's Joanne Gao, 6-1, 6-3. Ismail, a sophomore, is in her first year at Dow and on the tennis team. She was home-schooled as a freshman and played in USTA tournaments.

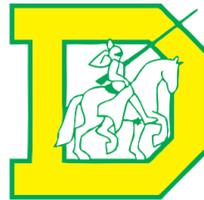


Senior captains Afua Ofori-Darko and Kamryn Matthews repeated as No. 1 doubles champions for Dow, beating Northville's Serena Wang and Maya Mulchandini, 6-1, 6-0 to cap an undefeated season.

Northville earned a win at No. 3 doubles when Neha Chava and Sophie Zhuang outlasted Mina Fabiano and Tatum Matthews of Dow, 6-3, 7-6 (7-2). The Mustangs added a win in No. 4 doubles when Brittany Macaddino and Alexandria Petix defeated Dow's Maggie Schaller and Marie Marche.

As mentioned, only two matches did not include Dow and Northville players facing off.

At No. 1 singles, West Bloomfield's Anika Yarlagadda captured the title with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over Raven Neely of Grosse Pointe South. Michi Ota of Ann Arbor Huron won No. 4 singles with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Emily Roopas of Ann Arbor Pioneer.



Ofori-Darko, a senior, said to end her career with a team championship is something she will always remember.

"I have won three individual titles in my career, but to finally get that team championship in my senior season is just icing on the cake," Ofori-Darko said. "My high school career is now complete."

Dow added another title in No. 2 doubles when the third-seeded team of Meghan Killmaster and Kelly Livingston upset Northville's Reeshma Kumar and Molly Bis.

The Midland Dow girls tennis team won its first Division 1 title scoring 33 points to narrowly defeat a tough Northville team by three points. The win was Midland Dow's first title since 2009. Midland Dow was runner up a year ago. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



NORTHERN REPORT



Petre Leads Meridian To D3 Boys' Track Title

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

As a football coach with limited experience running a track program, Meridian's Mike Bilina had a simple strategy heading into the Division 3 state meet.

Bilina had been notified in the middle of the season by his predecessor Dave Pettyplace that the Mustangs had a great shot to win the state team title and he knew just what to do.

"I call myself the track manager, not the coach," he said. "I filled out the card and got out of the way."

Good strategy.

With senior Christian Petre having a hand

in scoring 36 points, Meridian put up a total of 39 and won the championship. Hillsdale was second with 34.

"It was exciting," Bilina said. "We knew that if we came out and ran the times were were capable of running, we'd have a good shot and that's what we did."

"We only took six guys, which is not as many as a lot of other teams, but they were all studs."

Petre won the 100 meters last year and wound up second to Thomas Robinson of Wyoming Lee with a time of 11.12.

"That kid was a sophomore in his first year in track and he was big," said Bilina. "He was 6-3 and he got us by a lean."

Petre placed third in the 200 last year and moved up to second this time with a 22.26. Robinson got him again by a hair.

"I guess it was disappointing not to win, but he ran two good races," said Blina. "He really didn't have time to brood anyway, because he had a couple of relays to run, too."

Petre joined forces with Matt Hoffman, Miles LeViere and his brother, Monte Petre, to win the gold medal in the 800 relay in a time of 1:29.21.

Christian and Monte then teamed with



The Sanford Meridian boys track team defended its Division 3 championship with its recent victory during the state finals held at Comstock Park High School. (Right) Hailee Stockford won the 100 and 200 meter dashes leading the Mustangs girls squad. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photos)

LeViere and Andre Smith to win the 400 relay in a state record time of 43.14.

Monte Petre also earned All-State honors flying solo, placing sixth in the 100 in 11.41.

"We won the team state championship and set a state record," said Bilina. "It was just a great day for the kids."

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NORTHERN REPORT

Clare Girls Go Fourth At State Meet

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

After winning every dual meet, a regional title, the Jack Pine Conference meet and even the Michigan Interscholastic Track Coaches Association meet, the Clare girls track team headed into the Division 3 state meet with big ideas.

The Pioneers couldn't finish off an epic season with a state title, but they still put on quite a show, placing fourth with 45 points, behind only Ithaca with 57.5, Adrian Madison with 54 and Traverse City St. Francis with 45.

"This has been a special group all season and I was proud of the way the girls stepped up when the pressure was on," said Clare coach Kyle McKown. "Our main objective was to win the state and I thought we could compete and we came close.

"We did well. We were All-State eight times and that's the best we've done since

I've been coaching. The teams ahead of us all performed very well and I congratulate them."

Junior pole vaulter Kasey Staley was second in the state last year and cleared that bar by winning it all this time. She set a state record in the process with a 12-4 effort.

"She works year-round and is just an amazing vaulter," said McKown. "Her best going in was 12-3, so breaking the record wasn't that much of a jump for her. She just had to do it on that day and she did. She continues to get better every year and we're looking for even bigger and better things next year."

The dependable distance duo was next on the hit parade.

Junior Jasmine Harper was second in the 1,600 with a time of 5:04.39, with freshman Lainey Veenkant fourth in 5:06.35.

Harper was third in the 3,200 in 11:09.29 and Veenkant was eighth in 11:21.91.

Veenkant also joined forces with Lexy Harton, Paige Gould and Ellie Johnson to earn All-State honors in the 1,600 relay for running sixth in a time of 4:09.

"Jasmine has been All-State six times in the 1,600 and 3,200 now and she's just been a rock for us for three years," McKown said. "Lainey dropped 23 seconds off her time in the mile between eighth grade and ninth, and she is now our first freshman to be All-

State three times."

Gould, a senior, ran third in the 300 hurdles in 46.06.

"She only missed winning it by three-tenths of a second and she ran the fastest race of her life," said McKown. "Paige sacrificed a lot for the good of the team by running a lot of different events and she is an athlete who has really had to battle. She tore her ACL in her freshman year and started over at ground zero. She is going to continue running at Davenport College and I think her best is yet to come."

Gould grabbed a third All-State medal by teaming with Harton, Johnson and Staley to place third in the 800 relay in a school-record time of 1:46.91.

The Pioneers were a perfect 7-0 in Jack Pine dual meets and cruised to the outright championship by winning the league meet with 191 points. Gladwin was second with 114.5.

They ran away with the regional title as well, finishing on top with 146.5. McBain was second with 82.5.

Clare hosted the MITCA meet, which features full teams who had to qualify to compete.

"That was a crazy day," said McKown. "It was a day for our whole team to shine and we'll never forget it."



Both the Clare boys and girls track teams enjoyed solid showings during the recent Division 3 track finals held at Comstock Park High School. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Beavers Shake It Up With Run To Regional Final

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

With two of the top three teams in the state on the field, the prospects for an upset at Harrison's Division 3 district baseball tournament seemed limited.

Meridian and Clare tied for the Jack Pine Conference championship and one or the other seemed likely to punch a ticket to the regional and, perhaps, beyond.

Beaverton, meanwhile, finished in the middle of the Jack pack with a 7-7 mark. They edged Farwell 6-5 in the first round, on the same day Meridian clubbed Harrison 21-1.

Beaverton bombed Hououghton Lake 12-5 in the semifinals, while Clare and Meridian staged a battle worthy of the hype, which the Pio-

neers won 2-1.

That set up the title bout. The rivals were tied 3-3 heading into the top of the 11th inning when Clare scored two runs.

The Beavers rallied for three in the bottom of the frame and won 6-5 on a walk-off, two-run double by Camron Schneider.

Getting the big hit was poetic justice for Schneider, who pitched the first 10 innings, but did not get the decision.

Sophomore Carson Longstreth got the win in relief. Senior Chad Meilke had two hits and knocked in a pair of runs.

The experts took a pounding on the result, but it didn't come completely out of left field, according to Beaverton coach Mike Cingano.

"Our conference is one of the toughest in the state," Cingano said. "We had two of the top three teams and we lost some close games to both of them. We lost 4-2 and 4-1 to Clare, and I think only three of the runs they scored were earned.

"We kind of beat ourselves in some of our conference games," he continued. "We were making too many errors and you can't do that against good teams."

As the season rolled on, the Beavers focused on fielding and changed up batting practice as well, switching from the cages to live pitching.

"We started playing better toward the end and things really came together," said Cingano. "I knew we were a better team than 7-7 in the conference. I don't know if the kids believed that, but they pulled their stuff together at the end and played the kind of ball I knew they were capable of playing all along.

"It was not a fluke. We weren't favored to win the district by any means, but we knew we could play



with those guys."

The fluke philosophy took another hit the following week at the regional when the Beavers beat St. Charles 3-2 in the semifinals.

It was another nail-biter and another walk-off win, albeit a bit unconventional, as Carter Johnston was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to plate the winning run in the seventh.

"You want to give him credit for taking one for the team and all

that," said Cingano, "but it really just brushed his sleeve. The umpire started yelling, 'dead ball' and we weren't really sure what had happened, but that's how we won it."

The music finally stopped in the final when Standish defeated the Beavers 10-0.

"They had their hitting shoes on," said Cingano, "and we only had four hits. It was still a great experience. We only lose two seniors, so we should be decent again next year."

NORTHERN REPORT

Coleman Softball March Ends In Quarterfinals

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

The big question at the softball Final Four was, "Holton's here ... uh, who?"

Coleman had been a dominant No. 1 all season long and had a gaudy 32-2 record heading into the Division 4 quarterfinals, but dropped a 6-3 decision to Holton to come up short of the ultimate goal.

"We had more hits than they did," said Coleman coach Chad Klopff, "but we didn't get them when we needed them.

"Their pitcher threw a lot of off-speed stuff and we weren't patient enough against her. When we were, we got a base hit or a walk but, when we weren't, we'd pop it right up."

The Comets blasted their way in having won the first four

games of the tourney by a combined score of 68-6, but the bats were baffled most of the way.

"We got two on to start the seventh," said Klopff, "and that was the first time. We started all of the first six innings with an out and that is not like us at all."

The pitching and defense were not exactly as dominant as usual, either.

"We had one inning where there was a complete mental breakdown," Klopff said. "We made more mistakes in one inning than I think we made all season."

Coleman won the state title in 2005, but getting back to that level with a talented group that had never been to the Final Four proved to be a big hill to climb.

"The quarterfinal was a

The Coleman girls softball team wrapped up a tremendous season finishing the year 32-2. The Comets made it all the way to the Division 4 finals before losing to Holton 6-3. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene)



Gladwin's Fennell Ties HR Record For A Little While

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

Gladwin senior Dayna Fennell spent an epic spring chasing the state record for home runs, and got there in the final tournament of the regular season when she clubbed one in each of three games the Flying G's played at Ogemaw Heights.

That gave her a total of 19, good for a tie with Parchment's Cassidy Butler, who set the standard last year.

And then, along came Miss

Softball.

Farmington Hills Mercy rolled to a state championship, led by Abby Krzywiecki who finished the year with 20 bombs and was voted Miss Softball for her efforts.

"It would have been nice if Dayna had been able to hold onto it long enough for them to update the record on the MHSAA website," said Gladwin coach Jill Keefer, "but she will still be on there for second place and she hit 32 in her career, which puts her in the top 10 on

that list as well."

The numbers could have been even bigger.

"She hit the fence another five times, minimum, and some of those were at 225 (feet)," Keefer said. "If she had hit those at our field, she would have had quite a few more."

Fennell also drove in 60 runs and holds every school record for power hitting.

She didn't get many opportunities in the state tournament, as the Flying G's gave up five runs in the first inning of their

have beaten us."

The loss was tough to take, but time will heal the wounds and leave evidence that this was quite a season.

Carley Starnes, Cassidy Tucker, Laken Berthume and Kaylie Scott all earned All-State honors and Grace Staley was Honorable Mention.

"We're disheartened," said Klopff, "but down the road we are all going to remember this as a great year. You can't take anything away from this group."



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