

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE
KEEPING KIDS IN THE NEWS

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Football has become a game that consumes us year-round, whether we like that or not.

From roughly five days a week of football at all levels — high school on Friday nights, college football on Saturdays and the NFL on Thursday, Sunday and Monday — the game is constantly in our newsfeed, whether it's games during the fall and early winter; national signing day, the scouting combine and free agency in February and March; spring college practice; the NFL draft in late April; or training throughout the summer.

Like clockwork, the game stole headlines again earlier this year right before March Madness as the NFL acknowledged that there's certainly a connection between concussions and chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

According to Dr. Ann McKee, 176 people have been diagnosed with CTE since 2009. That number includes 90 of 94 former NFL players tested for the disease, 45 of 55 college players and an astounding six of 26 high school players.

It took a few years for the most powerful sports league in the country to acknowledge such a connection, but now that it has, the insurance funding for retired players should increase above the current \$1 billion available.

In light of the recent findings, by the NFL, basically discussing things we already knew, the The Michigan High School Athletic Association released its concussion data on the spring sports season earlier this summer with some surprising results.

The MHSAA's data showed that girls soccer was the runaway leader in potential concussions for the 2016 season.

During the fall and winter sports seasons, 2 percent of the approximately 100,000 prep athletes in each season reported potential concussions. That fell to 1 percent in the spring.

Of the potential concussions reported, 53 percent were from girls soccer, which featured 12 percent of the spring participants. Softball reported 19 percent (12 percent participants) and boys lacrosse 11 percent, despite having just 5 percent of spring participants.

Meanwhile, girls soccer had 58 percent more concussions than boys soccer, despite having fewer players. In addition, boys lacrosse had three times as many potential concussions as girls lacrosse.

The MHSAA released a comprehensive report near the end of August, verifying the numbers of confirmed concussions. More on their findings at a later date.

In light of all the concussion issues with the game of football and other sports, football players are taking better care of themselves when it comes to big hits in the NFL, as well as in college football, where players are ejected for targeting an opponent above the shoulders.

But what about high school football, which is the art of the game at its purest form? The high school game was the last one to levy a penalty on players "taking aim with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders to initiate contact above the shoulders, which goes beyond making a legal tackle, a legal block or playing the ball."

Although implementing penalties for such blows at all levels is a step in the right direction of trying to reduce concussions, the nature of the game still leaves players vulnerable to brain damage.

It doesn't matter at what football level you play, you're at risk for CTE from repeated blows to the head.

I'm sure old-school fans and insiders don't enjoy what they're seeing today at all levels of the game due to the physicality slowly being eased out of the game to better protect the players, but that's how it should be.

Football shouldn't be viewed as a gladiator sport any longer, especially when people are dying from the effects of concussions throughout their careers — whether short or long.

With that said, now is the time for empathy when it comes to football — for the authorities trying to create rules to make it safer, for big-time players who step away, for families that choose not to participate.

This game that we all love — myself included — is killing people; people who I grew up studying and learning about, people that I grew up watching on TV. Props to all of the people at all of the levels for making sports a lot safer for the pros and student-athletes.



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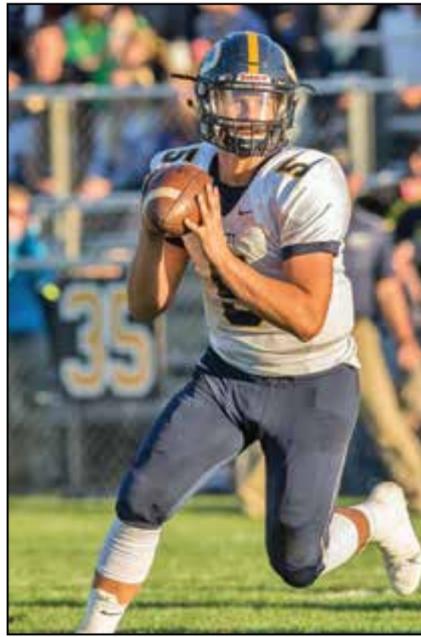
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Nagel Continues Steady Play For DeWitt

David Cook
Sports Scene

With a veteran quarterback at the helm, the DeWitt offense has been sizzling so far this season.

In his third season on the varsity, DeWitt senior quarterback Will Nagel is at the controls of an offense that has scored 42 points or more in three of its first four games this season.

So far this season Nagel has passed for 778 yards and nine touchdowns. Even more important than the statistics has been the leadership that Nagel brings to the team.

"One of Will's strongest points is that he doesn't get rattled," said DeWitt coach

DeWitt quarterback Will Nagel continues to impress under center for the Panthers. (Marvin Hall, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Rob Zimmerman. "He has a very even-keeled demeanor. He doesn't get too wound up. It doesn't matter the type of game, he plays with the same level of composure."

Nagel has plenty of experience; he came up to the varsity and started five games as a sophomore when Jake Johnson was injured, and then started all of last season as a junior. This season Will is also a team captain for the Panthers.

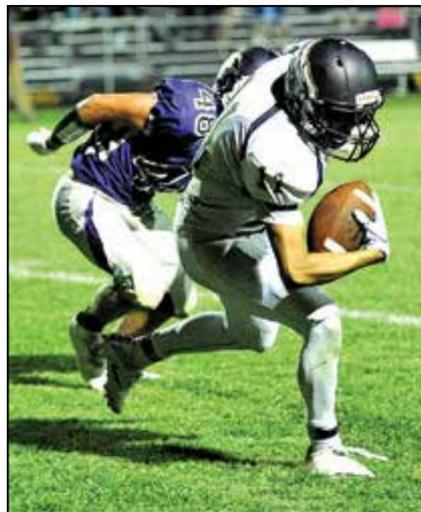
"Having a quarterback as a captain is certainly important," Zimmerman said. "The experience he has and his leadership is a plus for our offense."

Along with his play at quarterback, Will is also DeWitt's punter and is one of the top punters in the state. A first-team, all-state punter last year, Will has improved this year and is averaging 43.3 yards per punt.

Also an outstanding baseball player in the spring for the Panthers, Will has options at the next level where he can either punt or play baseball at the collegiate level.

The DeWitt offense also has plenty of talent around Nagel. Senior JD Ross, a three-year veteran, is having an outstanding season at running back/slot back. Up front, senior offensive linemen Cam Feguer, Dawson Heath and Cole Ozbun anchor a solid offensive line.

"I'm very happy with the offense," Zimmerman said. "We've been playing extremely well on both sides of the ball. We have a veteran offensive line that has been doing a good job and a lot of young skill-position players who have blended well together. Cam, Dawson and Cole have anchored the line up front and have done a good job. JD is also having an outstanding season. We have executed well the last couple of weeks and we look to keep it going."



Shepherd Eyes Football Playoff Spot

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Shepherd football is back.

The Bluejays have started out 3-2 and are looking at possibly their first playoff season since 2005. Shepherd struggled with 1-8 records for five straight season before going 2-7 last year.

The only two losses have been to Alma and Freeland, both should be playoff teams this season. Victories have been 54-6 over Gladwin, 47-19 over Midland Bullock Creek and 40-20 over Carrollton.

The Gladwin victory, "was a good start for us," Shepherd coach Nathan Ferency said. "We were coming off 2-7 and 1-8 records the last couple of years. It was nice to come out with a win. Then we lost to Alma, a 3-1 school, which lost a close score to fifth-ranked Freeland. We played well against Alma. We just didn't make enough plays. But we thought

we played well enough for about three quarters to win the game."

But other tough opponents are coming up with the likes of Freeland and Ithaca.

"We're moving forward with our program to build a winning season," Ferency said. "If we can eliminate mental mistakes, eliminate mental errors and play well, I think we can play with anybody."

In past seasons, Shepherd has been a run-oriented team.

Blake Opdycke is a first-team conference running back leading the attack for the Jays.

"He's having an excellent season so far," Ferency said. "The real story this year is our quarterback has gotten better and we're able to throw the ball more than we have in the past. We're 50-50 so we're pretty balanced offensively right now. That's proven to help us by getting defenses out of the box and open up running lanes for Blake. We're getting

some yards in the air with some good receivers."

Shepherd's quarterback is senior Joey Yuncker. Among his favorite receivers is junior Johnny Lynch, who has caught five touchdown passes. Cole Fitzpatrick is a strong possession receiver and has caught two touchdowns.

Leading the defense is AJ Pardy, who is leading the team in tackles, while Opdycke has two interceptions and a lot of tackles.

"Blake is a workhorse on both sides of the ball," Ferency said.

Shepherd entered the season with the goal of making the playoffs. The need is for a 5-4 record to be eligible and a 6-3 mark to automatically qualify.

"We think that goal is attainable," Ferency said "We're on the outside looking in for the conference race. We need some help. We'll just take care of it one week at a time."

"Big" Line Paves Way For P-W's Smith

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

After tearing up the record books last fall, Pewamo-Westphalia senior running back Jared Smith is off to another big season this fall. Through the first four games of the season Smith has rushed for more than 700 yards and scored 12 touchdowns.

While Smith is one of the most talented backs in the state state, his offensive line has been key to his production. Comprised of senior tight end Jason Smith, senior tackles Dominic Spitzley and Nolan Hagen, senior guard Nick Jandernoa, junior guard Isaiah Schafer and senior center Devon Pung, the Pewamo-Westphalia offensive line has been paving the way for their record-setting runner and relishing in his accomplishments.

"They take a lot of pride in it," said Pewamo-Westphalia coach Jeremy Miller. "Jared is a very

down-to-earth kid and he knows without them (the offensive line) nothing would happen. With a running back as selfless as Jared, who only wants what is best for the team, it's so much easier to get these kids to work. He always gives praise to his offensive linemen and they take a lot of pride in what he has been able to do on the ground."

The Pirate offensive line is comprised of linemen with good size in Schafer (6-2, 250), Spitzley (6-2, 240) and Hagen (6-5, 220) but also has scrappers like the 5-foot-9, 165-pound Jandernoa who is also a starting cornerback. Jandernoa was pressed into service at guard due to some adversity when returning senior guard Austin Thelen suffered an ACL

injury on the first play of the first game of the season.

"The kids really picked up the slack after Austin was injured," Miller said. "Nick is actually our cornerback. He is a little undersized but he is a scrappy blocker who plays real hard."

The Pewamo-Westphalia offensive line is a collection of brains and brawn. Not only do

the linemen put in plenty of time in the weight room, but they are also a cerebral group that incorporates everything their coaches tell them.

"They are very smart and very coachable," Miller said. "You tell them something once and they fix it right away. They do a nice job with our blocking schemes. They are coachable, tough kids who block to the whistle and take a lot of pride in their work."

Pewamo-Westphalia has had

a history of producing strong offensive lines and that process begins in the offseason.

"It all starts in the weight room," Miller said. "We've had solid lines the past five or six years and the key to be solid up front is putting in the time in the weight room. The fact that these guys put the time in the weight room getting bigger and stronger has been the key to our offensive lines."



Pewamo-Westphalia offensive linemen (left to right) Isaiah Schafer, Devon Pung, Dominic Spitzley, Nolan Hagen, Nick Jandernoa and Jason Smith have paved the way for record-setting running back Jared Smith this season. (Submitted Photo)

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Ithaca Football Continues To Rewrite Record Books

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

When measuring sustained success in high school football in the state of Michigan, no high school has ever matched the run put together by the Ithaca Yellowjackets.

From the first game of the 2009 season through the first three games of this season, the Ithaca football team compiled a record of 97-3, the best all-time record for a high school team in the state over a 100-game span. Included in the run have been five undefeated, 14-0 state-championship teams.

For a community the size of Ithaca, the achievement is something that many factors and many people have come together to accomplish. At the heart of the success has been the hard work put in by the players and coaching staff.

"I feel that we have been successful for many reasons," said Ithaca coach Terry Hessbrook. "We have players that have committed themselves to football. We have coaches that are very good and work very hard without caring who gets the credit and we also have a school and community that support our efforts."

Ithaca is not a program that produces four and five-star recruits. Instead, it relies on hard-work-

ing players that maximize their talents.

"We don't always have the best players on the field," Hessbrook said. "I think that people outside our community think we have Division 1 talent all over the field. We have been blessed, no doubt, but that is not the case. What we have done is instilled in our players that we can be the hardest-working team. We can be in excellent physical condition. We can only control so much. I don't want to diminish our players abilities, but our players work very hard at being good."

While the amount of wins and winnings streaks are impressive, it is not something that the players or coaches think about.

"We honestly try not to worry about streaks or records," Hessbrook said. "Every team we play presents us a certain challenge. We have to try to meet that challenge. All of the teams we play have players that can make plays. We just have to try to limit their success."

Hessbrook also points out the role of the community in the success of not only the football team but all of the athletic teams at Ithaca.

"I am very happy that we have been given this opportunity to coach here at Ithaca," Hessbrook said. "Our community is very strong and truly is the secret behind our success. They support our athletic teams across the board."



Ithaca continues to rewrite the record books, having compiled an 88-1 record over the last six plus seasons. Prior to press time Ithaca was 5-0 this season and tied for the top spot in Division 5 with Menominee. (Randy Miniard Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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Bentley Is Ithaca's Quiet Leader

David Cook Sports Scene

The more things change the more they remain the same.

That seems to be the case at the quarterback position at Ithaca. From one standout quarterback to the next, the Yellowjackets seem to constantly make a smooth transition at the quarterback spot.

Joey Bentley is the most recent addition to Ithaca's long running list of star quarterbacks. A junior, Joey has led the Yellowjackets to a 5-0 start to the season in his first year starting at quarterback.

"Joey Bentley has played very well so far," said Ithaca coach Terry Hessbrook. "He has made good decisions with the football in his hands." "I think we all knew that he was going to be good. I think that he has managed games better than we thought he would since he doesn't have a lot of game experience. However he did start for us last year at

Ithaca junior quarterback Joey Bentley continues the long line of successful Yellowjacket signal-callers in recent seasons. (Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene Photos)

receiver. I think sometimes that pays big dividends."



Like Ithaca quarterbacks of past years, Bentley is dangerous both with his arm and his legs. Through the first four

games of the season Bentley has completed 33-of-59 passes (56 percent) for 480 yards and seven touchdowns. As a runner he has carried the ball 68 times for 375 yards (5.5 avg.) and scored six touchdowns.

This is Bentley's second full season on varsity. As a freshman, he came up to the varsity late in the season and played a few games on defense, where he had an interception in the playoff game against Laingsburg. Since then, he has proven to the coaches that he has what it takes both mentally and physically to lead at the varsity level.

"He has a strong arm and very good feet," noted Hessbrook. "He is very intelligent with a 4.0 grade-point average in the classroom. He is a quiet leader who prefers to lead by example."

Bentley's leadership is certainly showing as the Yellowjackets look like they are headed on yet another playoff run with a new quarterback at the helm.

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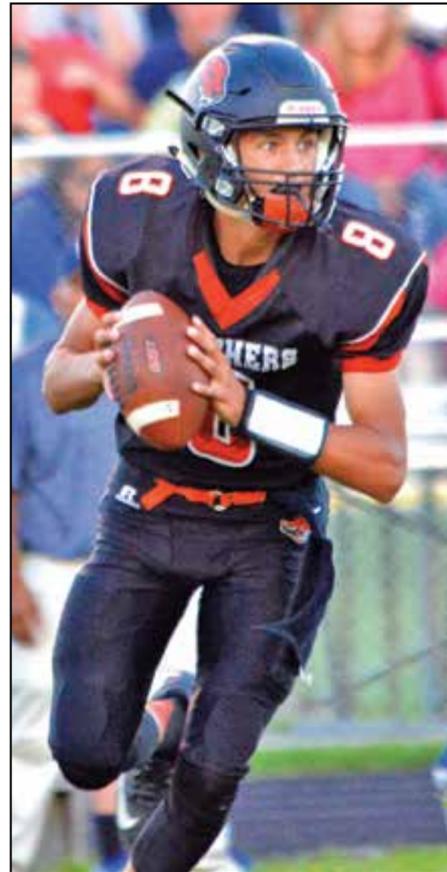


Humm-ing That Winning Tune: Brothers Playing Key Role For Alma Football

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Alma's Humm brothers are making plenty of noise for the Panther football team this season. They're two key reasons the Panthers have started off 4-1.

Anthony Humm leads the rushing attack with 690 yards. After five games, Drew Humm is 62-of-87 for



761 yards, eight touchdowns and four interceptions.

Anthony has been a starter on the varsity team for three seasons; last year, he was first team all-conference. He's at both running back and safety for the Panthers. He pointed to safety as being his best position.

"I feel I tackle well and I have good instinct and I'm able to go to where I'm supposed to be," Anthony said.

As a sophomore, "it was a little bit of a learning year," he said, adding that as a junior, "I was stronger and a lot more confident. I believe I've studied better and this summer I went to camps and really improved my technique."

As a running back, Anthony indicated he had "good vision in making the cutback and I'm hard to bring down."

He's excited about his team's 4-1 start.

"We've been playing well, our defense is strong," he said. "We lost to Freeland, who is ranked. We're hoping to win out, host a playoff game, and make a run at the playoffs. We've have a lot more commitment. Everyone is buying into the team."

Drew is in his first varsity season. He learned in late spring that he would be joining the varsity for 2016.

"It's very exciting," Anthony said. "It kind of feels like when we were little."

"I was excited," Drew added. "But I knew it was going to be tough and I would have to work hard to prove I should be able to be on varsity."

But after five games, the younger Humm has more than proven he deserves to be on varsity.

Reading the defense, is among his strengths, Drew indicated, "and being able to have more than one option when I'm throwing the ball. I've done a lot of film study with the quarterback coach. We know what the coverages are doing and what routes will be open."

Drew is particularly proud of his performance against Swan Valley. It was a 26-0 victory and he was 13-of-19 in passing for 143 yards and two touchdowns.

Alma's Humm brothers Anthony (top) and Drew (left) have propelled the Panthers to a 4-1 record to start the season. Anthony is a starting running back and Drew is the starting quarterback for Alma. (Randy Miniard and Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)



"We knew they were a really tough team and we were going to have to make sure we didn't make any mistakes," Drew said. "We did pretty well against them."

Drew hopes to improve his running game as the season progresses.

It's the first time the two brothers have played on the same team.

"He's probably the hardest working player on the field all the time," Drew said of his brother.

Alma Has Sights On Long Playoff Run

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It's beginning to look a lot like a hugely successful season for the Alma Panthers.

It's a 4-1 start for the Panthers, who appear poised to make another playoff appearance.

Victories over Birch Run, Shepherd, Swan Valley and Bullock Creek have sparked the team the first half of the schedule. The only blemish was a 12-6 loss to Freeland that has Alma 3-1 in the TVC.

"I'm pretty happy so far," Coach Dan Falor said. "We have a core of seniors, five of them have been with us for three years. We have that senior leadership now. All five of them play on both sides of the ball at different times. That's been a key to our success."

Ryan Cornejo is a linebacker and tight end while Anthony Humm is a running back and defensive back, Konnor Vedroba a receiver and defensive back, and Troy Bastien, and Tristan Villalobis are two-way linemen

"Ryan is kind of the motor of the team," Falor said. "He's a high energy guy. He flies around on defense.

He's one of the best linebackers in the league. He makes some big plays and gets the guys pumped up. He's that motor guy for us."

Bastien, Falor said, "Is probably the biggest kid on the field, at 6-4, 280, most games. He commands a presence, especially on D. He's a tough matchup for most teams we've see this year. He physically dominates people."

Falor also added that Villalobis "is one of those undersized O-line, D-line guys. He's just a positive kid. He's one of those leaders that says the right things at the right time. He never really makes any major mistakes. He's solid as our center. We're in shot gun a good chunk of the game. We rarely have any bad snaps. He's a solid, good teammate."

After five games, Drew Humm is 62-of-87 for 761 yards, eight touchdowns and four interceptions.

Anthony Humm leads the rushing attack with 690 yards, followed by Brec Alward with 119. Vedroba had 22 catches for 274 yards.

"Konnor is a big play threat out there as a receiver," Falor said. "I think most teams when they're scheming up their defensively are always putting up their

best defensive backs. Sometimes we saw some double coverage so far this year. Defensively, he's a solid player all around.

Cornejo leads the defense with 61 tackles, followed by Anthony Humm with 31.

"I like to pursue to the ball and fly around," Cornejo, a wide receiver and linebacker said. "If I can bring some energy to the team, that helps a lot."

"Anthony Humm is the type of guy who will give us everything he's got every game," Falor said. "He's one of the hardest workers I've seen. The kids see that and the hard work he puts in. You know you're going to get everything out of him every game."

Falor is excited to see what this team might be able to accomplish before the season ends.

"If we play the way we're capable of, we hope to be right in the mix for the league title," he said. "Losing to Freeland in a close one, we'll need a little bit of help for that league title. It's a tough league. Freeland still has to play their games. Last year, we made it back to the playoffs for the first time since 2011. It was really the goal of our team, now that we got back there, to be a playoff team year in and year out. If we play the way we're capable of, we'll definitely be back in the playoffs and hopefully make some noise there."

"We usually have a really good attitude at practice," Cornejo added. "We're trying to achieve what our next goal is. We're trying to make it to playoffs again."



Top: Alma's Ryan Cornejo has played a major role on both sides of the football this season for Alma. Bottom: The Panthers are off to one of its best starts in recent memory and hopes a possible playoff spot is in their future. (Randy Miniard and Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)

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Breckenridge Football Team Off To Historic 5-0 Start

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It's been quite a start for the Breckenridge football team. Coach Kris Robinson's team is off to a 5-0 start after a 62-12 topping of Coleman on Sept 23. The Huskies have also had big wins over Ashley (48-0) and Montabella (56-6) and tight triumphs over Houghton Lake (38-29) and Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart (40-34).

This is Robinson's fourth season as head coach.

"It started a year ago," he said. "We've got a real good commitment with the kids in our weight room. The kids are bigger and they're faster. It also helps that we have the numbers. We combine that with a couple of nice sized classes and good athletes and we're not bad."

The six-point win over perennial Mid-State Activities Conference power Sacred Heart was a big one for the Huskies. Breckenridge opened the year with the win over Houghton Lake, which won its next three after that loss.

Sophomore quarterback Carter Staley played for the varsity as a freshman.

"The first three games, we had over 300 yards running combined," Robinson said. "The last game, we had 300

yards in the air and 150 running. A strength of the offense is we can do whatever they give us."

The defense has been very effective in stopping the run.

"Outside of a scramble in the Houghton Lake game where the quarterback scrambled 60 yards on us, we haven't given up over 100 yards rushing in a game," Robinson said. "They had like 120 yards in week one. We are really good in stopping the run."



Hunter Collins has been an explosive runner. "He's a pretty quick kid," Robinson said. Gavin Ostrander and Spencer Brown are on the outside.

"They're big guys and block remarkably well," Robinson continued. "They really don't drop balls thrown to them. I haven't had to throw to them lately."

Breckenridge also has two excellent slot players in Lukas Ebright and Caleb Hurt.

Despite the fast start, the Huskies are still working to improve in various

areas.

"We're working on shoring up our secondary and getting people in the right positions," Robinson said. "That's our major emphasis right now along with getting crisp across the board on the offensive side of the ball. We need to keep getting better every week."



It's Breckenridge's first season in the MSAC.

"The fact we got through Sacred Heart is big," Robinson said. "You don't win MSAC titles without beating them. We got that one. But they lost to Carson City-Crystal before us and we have them coming up, plus Vestaburg."

The 4-0 start was the first in more than 40 years, but no Breckenridge team had started out 5-0.

Until now.

Robinson is also anticipating a lot of community and student support coming up in future weeks as the team continues to rack up wins.

The Breckenridge football team has already made history this season becoming the first team in school history to start a season 5-0. (Chuck Prikasky, High School Sports Scene Photos)



Greenville Riding High During First Half Of Season

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Legacy Field has been an exciting place to be in Greenville on Friday's nights this fall.

Led by first-year coach Eddie Ostipow, the Yellowjackets opened the season with a number of outstanding efforts and have been taking on some neighboring rivals in the new-look OK White Conference.

Greenville opened the season with a big win over long-time neighboring rival Belding in a non-league game. Greenville then edged Kenowa Hills 21-14 before dropping a decision to their neighbor to the west, Cedar Springs, in the conference opener.

Greenville followed that game with a thrilling 35-34 win against Forest Hills Central before falling to Lowell, ranked second in the state in Division 2.

"We have the makings of a good

team," said Ostipow. "We have just got to clean up the mistakes and quit shooting ourselves in the foot."

In his first year at Greenville, Ostipow is still implementing his new system on both sides of the football.

"Our kids, to a degree, are still learning the system," Ostipow said. "We have a totally new offense and totally new defense and there is a learning curve. I thought our defense played a real good game, especially in the second half, against Lowell."

Greenville dropped a 35-10 decision to Lowell and the game against the powerhouse Red Arrows provided Greenville with a good measuring stick of the progress they are making.

"We have to give our kids ore opportunities to grow and learn," Ostipow said. "These are good learning experiences. We have come a long way since the beginning of the season. You know Rome was not built in a day."

• The Greenville volleyball team is

turning in a solid season. The Yellowjackets reached the halfway point of the season with a 17-5-1 overall record and began league play with a 2-1 mark. Among the highlights so far this season was winning the title at the Carson City-Crystal Invitational. Greenville defeated Charlotte in the championship match. Kaylee Wilcox led the Yellowjackets against Charlotte with 17 assists, 13 digs, seven kills and three aces. Greenville defeated Carson City-Crystal in the semifinal match behind some strong play by Emma Fowler who totaled seven kills and a pair of aces.

• Thanks to a stingy defense, the Rockford soccer team has moved to the forefront of one of the toughest soccer leagues in the state. The Rams went a perfect 6-0 during the first half of the season in the OK Red Conference. Unbeaten in its first 12 games this season, the Rams allowed just two goals during the opening dozen games. Seniors Jake DeVries and Denny Anderson have anchored the Ram defense while the goalkeeper tandem of senior Brendan Morse and sophomore Aaron Carr has been outstanding. Rockford's strong start has the Rams ranked third in the state in Division 1 this fall.



Greenville's Evan Plate (6), Kyle Lorenz (8) and Casey Rigney (66) get ready to battle Lowell during a game earlier this season. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Lowell Reloads

Red Arrows Off To Another Impressive Start

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

With just three starters returning from last year's Division 2 state finalist team and facing a rugged schedule to begin the season, a rocky start was a possibility for the Lowell Red Arrow football team.

Five weeks into the season, and it's business as usual for the Red Arrows. Instead of a slow start, Lowell reeled off five impressive wins to start the season.

"Our kids have all been working hard," said Lowell coach Noel Dean. "It's very surprising to start 5-0. We played a tough Catholic League team (Warren De La Salle), a tough OK Red team in Rockford, our rival East Grand Rapids and we went up to Greenville. The kids have played well but there is a lot of room for improvement."

Lowell began the season in a big way

with a 36-19 win against Warren De La Salle in the season opener. The Red Arrow defense was in mid-season form as he held De La Salle standout and Syracuse recruit Allen Stritzinger to just 24 yards on 12 carries.

On offense, the Red Arrows needed to break in a new quarterback. Junior David Kruse, a standout on the Lowell wrestling team, has stepped right in and carried on the tradition of outstanding Lowell quarterbacks. Kruse passed for 124 yards and rushed for 110 yards while accounting for two touchdowns in the De La Salle win. Kruse also came up big in Lowell's 21-10 win against Rockford with 183 yards passing and 96 yards rushing.

"David has been doing a nice job," Dean said. "I feel he is running and throwing the ball well. The exciting thing about David is there is so much room for improvement."

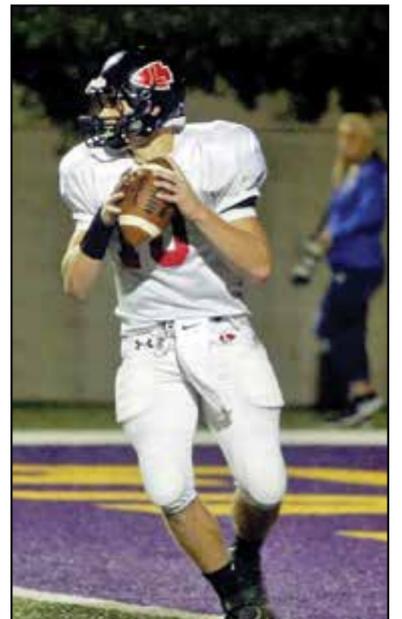
He is capable of doing so much more. The glass is half full and it will be fun to fill up the other half of the glass."

The Red Arrows have also run the ball with success all season. Senior Mate Stephens, who rushed for 105 yards and two touchdowns in the season opener, has led the ground game. Junior brothers Connor and Brady Douma have also provided the team with a spark.

Lowell has also received outstanding line play from a number of outstanding linemen including Mike Doyle, John Rogalke, Joey Schaefer and Logan VanderMeulen.

"We still have a lot of room for improvement," Dean said. "We have to clean up the turnovers and penalties and have so many things to do better. We are going to continue to work on thing and at getting better down the road."

Lowell junior David Kruse has stepped right in at starting quarterback and has guided the Red Arrows to a 5-0 start this season. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene Photo)





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Breckenridge spoiled Montabella's homecoming after defeating the Mustangs 56-6 Sept. 16.. Page 13: Millington started the season 4-0 before losing to Frankenmuth in week five, while Portlnd remains undefeated at 5-0. Meanwhile Grand Ledge and DeWitt squared off in the first game of the season. (Staff Photos)

FOOTBALL ROUNDUP

Some Things Never Change Ithaca, Lowell Continue To Find Success On Gridiron

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Through Week 5 of the high school football season, the biggest surprise thus far isn't the fact that Ithaca High School is ranked No. 1 in their respective Division in the recent Michigan High School Athletic Association State Rankings.

But where the Yellowjackets are ranked is a little surprising

Ithaca, the winner of five of six Division 6 titles is currently tied with Menominee atop the Division 5 rankings. This doesn't mean the Yellowjackets will make the jump to D5 when the playoffs begin, but it does mean that the Hessbrook Express is on a collision course to make another run at a possible state championship.

You can't deny the fact that Ithaca is 88-1 over the last six and half years, but what is more impressive is the revolving door of players that Ithaca has continued to do it with over the years.

Terry Hessbrook and his coaching staff continues to turn heads with the talent pool that walks through the halls of the small farming town in Central Michigan. So what is more impressive the fact that Ithaca will likely run the table during the regular season and finish atop of the D5 rankings, or the fact that the Yellowjackets continue get the job done with

various talent through the years?

It's a tough act to follow, but it has been nice to have a front row seat watching Ithaca week after week getting it done on the field of play. That's just what dreams are made of.

Freeland's Clash For The Cure Raises Cancer Awareness

Freeland's seventh annual "Clash for the Cure" game versus Alma was another success for the Falcon faithful.

Both teams were undefeated prior to the Sept. 16 game, but Freeland used a strong defensive effort to walk away with the 12-6 victory over the Panthers.

Freeland's defense finished with three interceptions by Zach Townsend, Garhet Metiva and Max Kubiak, and added three quarterback sacks by Kubiak, Drew Bakos and Tobias Niedzwiecki.

Metiva gave Freeland the early lead with a 1-yard TD run, but Alma blocked the extra-point kick for a 6-0 lead. Alma answered with a 5-yard TD pass from Drew Humm to Ryan Cornejo on fourth-and-goal from the five. The extra-point kick, however, hit a post and bounced out for a 6-6 tie.

Freeland scored the final touchdown with just 29.7 seconds remaining. On fourth-and-1, Metiva broke

through the Alma line and ran 21 yards for the touchdown. The two-point pass was incomplete.

The Clash for the Cure game is an annual event at Freeland that raises money for cancer research and to assist families fighting cancer. In its first six years, the Clash for the Cure game has raised \$101,500.

Lowell Continues To Impress

The Red Arrows, led by Hall of Fame coach Noel Dean lost on a last second hail-mary during the Division 2 finals a year ago. Well this year losing eight starters on both sides of the football, Lowell was expected to be in a rebuilding phase this season. Think again.

Lowell has started the season 5-0 earning impressive victories over Rockford and Greenville to start the season. It looks like the mad scientist is at it again. Dean has the ability to get his players to play at a level that is second to none by most coaches standard. The idea of winning at all levels of the game are instilled in his players at a young age. Don't be surprised to see another Lowell vs. Detroit King matchup in the finals in D2 this season. It's pretty amazing to see what Dean accomplishes with lesser teams. The man knows what it takes to build a championship football team and when the Red Arrows are on it sure is fun to watch.

How About Those Huskies

So when was the last time Breckenridge was ranked in the top 10 in football? My guess a very, very long time ago.

The Huskies finally cracked the top 10 during the Sept. 27 football rankings in Division 8. Breckenridge has started the season 5-0, including blowout victories over Ashley, Coleman and Montabella, spoiling the Mustangs' homecoming. The other two victories were close calls against Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart and Houghton Lake.

Moving into the Mid-State Athletics Conference from the Tri Valley Conference West Division has definitely been a positive move for both the Huskies and for Merrill. The two teams are primed to make a playoff spot and could make some noise during the Division

8 playoffs. It's nice to see a feel good story every so often and seeing Breckenridge having success is good to see.

MHSAA State Rankings (Sept. 27)

Division 1
1. Detroit Cass Tech, 2. Detroit Catholic Central, 3. Utica Eisenhower, 4. Dearborn Fordson, 5. Grandville, 6. Saline, T-7. Warren Mott, T-7. Davison, T-9. Clarkston, T-9. Rochester Adams

Division 2
1. Detroit Martin Luther King, 2. Lowell, 3. Walled Lake Western, 4. Midland Dow, 5. Birmingham Groves, 6. Traverse City Central, 7. Temperance Bedford, 8. Portage Central, 9. Bloomfield Hills Brother Rice, 10. Farmington Hills Harrison

Division 3
1. Muskegon, 2. Edwardsburg,

3. Allen Park, 4. Grand Rapids Christian, 5. Chelsea, T-6. Battle Creek Harper Creek, T-6. Orchard Lake St. Mary's, 8. Trenton, 9. DeWitt, 10. Byron Center

Division 4
1. Detroit Country Day, T-2. Grand Rapids Catholic Central, T-2. River Rouge, 4. Marysville, 5. Corunna (5-0), 6. Benton Harbor, 7. Escanaba, 8. Hudsonville Unity Christian, 9. Hamilton, T-10. Grosse Ile, T-10. Alma

Division 5
T-1. Ithaca, T-1. Menominee, 3. Grand Rapids West Catholic, 4. Frankenmuth, T-5. Freeland, T-5. Portland, 7. Montague, 8. Ida, 9. Lansing Catholic, 10. Algonac

Division 6
1. Negaunee, 2. Schoolcraft, 3. Grass Lake, 4. Laingsburg,

5. Maple City Glen Lake, 6. Millington, 7. Roscommon, 8. Quincy, 9. Leroy Pine River, 10. Calumet

Division 7
1. Traverse City St. Francis, 2. Pewamo-Westphalia, 3. New Lothrop, 4. Saugatuck, 5. Detroit Loyola, 6. Hudson, 7. Elkton-Pigeon Bay Port, 8. Iron Mountain, 9. Ubly, 10. Clinton

Division 8
1. Muskegon Catholic Central, 2. St. Ignace, 3. Climax-Scotts, 4. Lake Linden-Hubbell, 5. Frankfort, 6. Ottawa Lake Whiteford, 7. Norway, 8. Gaylord St. Mary, 9. Newberry, 10. Breckenridge

Division 8 Player
1. Powers North Central, 2. Deckerville, 3. Cedarville, 4. Crystal Falls Forest Park, 5. Battle Creek St. Philip



Midland Dow Gridders Surge Behind Big-Yardage, No-Mistakes QB

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

During preseason football practices, Midland Dow High School was a prime Division 2 pick for a big season. The Chargers at season's start in August were coming off a 10-2 record last fall, and their first district crown since 1997, with all-state athlete Bruce Mann back at quarterback.

They have more than met expectations with a 5-0 record when our newspaper went to the printer. Bruce is passing nearly 20 times per game and hitting roughly two-thirds of them, for average gains of more than 20 yards.

Meanwhile, the defense has grown more stingy as the season has moved forward.

"We want to have confidence, but you can never assume anything," said Coach Jason Watkins, who has served for 19 years in the school's football program (also as a math teacher) and is in his eighth season as head coach, with a 55-22 overall mark.

Coach Watkins noted that Dow's main graduation losses were among Mann's receiving corps, along with the defensive backs. The new coming regulars are mostly seniors, but they started the season with scant game experience.

"They spent most of last season getting scout team reps in practice, but they have

come through for us," he said.

The front seven of the defense is deep, however, led by a trio of third-year seniors -- Kevin Murray and Devan Anzarut on the line and Spencer Stephens at linebacker. Stephens doubles at running back, while Murray also is part of the offensive line.

Football, of course, it a team sport, but a main player is the quarterback. Bruce Mann is on track to duplicate last season's 2,000-plus-yards passing performance, and he's also the team's leading rusher with a potential 1,000 yards in sight. Most remarkably, Bruce threw zero interceptions in his first five games this season after tossing only four all of last year in 198 attempts, 138 for completions. Coach Watkins said his QB, at 6-foot-2, is a definite top college prospect, and he noted that his offensive coordinator, John Streeter (also Dow's new athletic director) emphasizes fundamentals.

"The biggest thing is that Bruce is a student of the game who watches a great deal of film," the coach said. "This leads to good decisions."

The son of Bruce (his coach during his younger years) and Michelle Mann said he avoids pass interceptions -- while still racking up big yards and stats -- with a focus on reading his pass receivers' breaks and throwing "on time and on target." Often he chooses to throw to a safer and shorter "underneath"

pass route instead of throwing a riskier long ball. Wisdom and patience.

Bruce once threw a "pick six" interception -- in football parlance, a defense back return for a touchdown -- as a freshman player. He learned from the disaster. Is it possible he could continue his career, through the high school season and even into college, never throwing another pick?

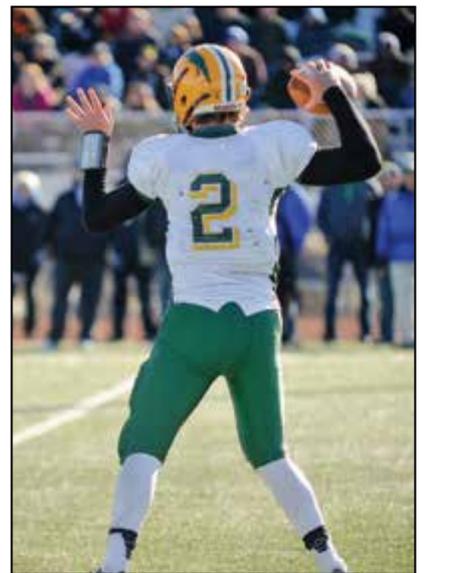
"That would be awesome," Bruce said, with a chuckle at the question. "But interceptions are part of the game, when maybe you are passing to a receiver on a one-on-one route."

With his combined passing and running the ball, Bruce said his pro football role model is the Carolina Panthers' Cam Newton.

"He has some cockiness," Bruce said, "and he throws the ball really well."

He still is measuring college football scholarship offers, while aiming to pursue a career in criminal justice.

Dow has high hopes for a repeat playoff run this fall that goes beyond district competition, but Coach Watkins is keeping matters



Midland Dow senior quarterback Bruce Mann is capable of making all of the throws for the Chargers. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

in perspective.

"We strive to build a system and a culture," he said. "But we don't measure success in just wins and losses. Only eight teams (in the state playoffs) get to win their last games."

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Davison's Fast Start Lighting Up Scoreboards, Turning Heads

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

All those around Davison's football program have been pointing to 2016.

And for good reason. Behind a veteran lineup of 23 seniors, plus some rising juniors and sophomores in the mix, and the Cardinals were 5-0 through the first five weeks of the season with some eye-catching team statistics.

Davison outscored its first five opponents by a commanding 274-53 margin to put the Cardinals into the position as one of the favorites in the Saginaw Valley League Blue Division.

"When we took over in the (spring of 2014), we kind of pointed to this year," noted Davison head coach Kyle Zimmerman, who previously coached for five seasons at Pontiac Notre Dame Prep before heading north. "We kind of saw the talent and knew that we could be a very good team in a couple of years."

Davison was 5-5 last season, including a 34-26 setback to then-unbeaten Lapeer in a Division 1 pre-district. A majority of the starters are back, along with some talented newcomers that have everyone in and around the Davison program thinking big.

This season, a seasoned, veteran team has recorded lopsided wins over Saginaw Arthur Hill (62-12), Mount Pleasant (49-14), Flint Carman-Ainsworth (56-21), Flint Southwestern Academy (56-6) and Saginaw (51-0) with no signs of slowing down.

Midland, Lapeer, Bay City Western and

Flint Powers Catholic still remain on the schedule should provide a challenge for this group.

Junior running back Tariq Reid, a transfer from Burton Atherton, racked up 16 touchdowns with over 820 rushing yards through Week 4 and leads the talented Cardinals. The bruising, 6-foot, 205-pound back has thrived behind the mobile wide bodies in the trenches — seniors Zach Slezak (270 pounds), Justin Bishop (260), Austin Henderson (260) and Calvin Adams (250).

Reid is gaining attention from the likes of Michigan State and Ohio State, while several other Davison players on the radar of college scouts at NCAA Division I, Division II and Division III schools.

Senior Brenden McRill is a third-year starter at quarterback and a heady leader of an explosive bunch that averaged 54.8 points through five weeks.

On defense, where Davison has yielded only 10.6 points an outing, seniors Cam Tomczak (defensive back), Colin McMillan (linebacker) and Corran Thornton (defensive line) are all third-year starters. Junior defensive back Chase Chittick, senior linebackers Kyle Dymowski and Dave Ellis, sophomore Cal Steffano (defensive back/wide receiver) and Arron Gilmore (defensive lineman) have all emerged as key contributors.

"We have very good athletes on this team. We have wrestlers, and they are tough; we have basketball players, baseball players, track athletes," noted Zimmerman. "We have very athletic kids that are good football players and that is making a difference."



Davison outscored its first five opponents by a commanding 274-53 margin, including a recent victory over Mt. Pleasant earlier this season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Merrill Football Looking Like Team Of Old

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

In a way, Coach Mel Skillman has returned to the Merrill High School football program. The coaching troubadour -- who seems to have worked at more mid-Michigan schools than not -- departed Merrill in 2004, but his influence remains.

For seven seasons back surrounding the turn of the millennium, Skillman brought his pass-first spread offense to Merrill and amassed a 52-22 record.

Nowadays the coach is Christian Wiley, who was an Alma College pass receiver during the mid-1990s during the same time that Skillman was learning the spread as a Scots' assistant for wideouts. When Skillman started at Merrill during the later 1990s, he hired Wiley as an assistant, and he has been at the school ever since. He's in his second year at the varsity helm.

Merrill has switched to the smaller-school Mid-State Activities Conference this season, which resembled the former Jack Pine Conference. In the interest of balanced competition, Merrill departed from rivals with larger enrollments in the Tri-Valley Conference West Division, and by midseason the Vandals had built a 4-1 record, with three dominant

Merrill has started the season 4-1 after making the switch to the Mid-State Athletics Conference this season. (Chuck Prikasky, High School Sports Scene Photo)

shutout victories and a lone 44-20 defeat at Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart in a lightening-delayed game that finished near 1 a.m. Vandals' triumphs have been 29-0 over Marlette, 53-0 over Ashley, 37-12 over Coleman and 46-0 over Blanchard Montabella.

Mid-State foes may not have expected to face a pro-style 6-foot-4 quarterback, but that's what they have encountered in Jake Knierim, who is averaging well over 200 yards per game through the air and also is a running threat. Top standouts on the receiving and rushing corps are Levi Gross, Sutin Letts and Jaden Reiber. A defensive leader in the recent shutout over Blanchard Montabella was Rique Hernandez.



YOUNG OWOSSO Presents The Shiawassee County Sports Update

Shiawassee County Football Teams Start Season Strong

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

The football season has been full of excitement for Shiawassee County football fans. Heading into the middle of the season, four Shiawassee County teams had posted 4-0 records. Corunna, New Lothrop and Laingsburg all started 4-0, but what has been the big surprise has come at Durand, where the Railroaders also began the year 4-0.

The 4-0 start is the best start by a Durand football team since the 1982 squad that went 9-0 during the regular season.

The team concept has been key to the start along with a larger overall team.

"We have increased our numbers significantly and the players have really held to a family-like atmosphere," said Durand head coach Jason Gray. "They hold each other accountable in a positive way."

Durand has been getting the job on both

sides of the football. The offense has scored three or more touchdowns in all four wins while the defense has posted a shutout and held another team to one touchdown.

The Railroaders have boasted a strong ground game led by Remi Wurtz who has rushed for 840 yards in four games. Wurtz also leads the team in tackles on defense.

Durand has taken a new attitude toward football and they are focusing on building on the early success down the stretch.

"We expect to compete every game we play," Gray said. "We never pin a win-loss goal on our season. We take it day-by-day, literally. We feel if we get better each day than the wins and losses will take care of themselves. Our goal is improve each day and put ourselves in a position to compete with the better teams on our schedule."

• After turning in an 8-2 record last season and winning a share of the league title, the Corunna football team has picked up where it

left off. Corunna has scored 31 or more points for all four of its wins. Corunna features a balanced offense led by quarterback Jerod Fattal who has passed for 551 yards and six touchdowns. Senior running back Owen Walter has rushed for 507 yards and five touchdowns while David Dumond has added 286 yards and four touchdowns and Zach Sawyer has rushed for 256 yards and six touchdowns.

• A potent offense and a defense that has been stingy at times has been the key to Laingsburg's 4-0 start. The Wolfpack has scored 20 or more points in each game this season while the defense has posted a pair of shutouts. Junior quarterback Nick Putnam is off to a strong start as he has completed 38-of-58 passes for 698 yards and 11 touchdowns. Lucas Fraidenburg has been a standout on both sides of the line. Fraidenburg has rushed for 293 yards and five touchdowns and recorded 26.5 tackles and four tackles for loss in the first four games.



Corunna is off to a 5-0 start in the 2016 season. (Mike Schutt, High School Sports Scene Photo)

New Lothrop QB Opens Up Offense

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Some things change, and some things stay the same.

New Lothrop High is a football powerhouse once more this fall. That's the same. The change is that they're throwing the football nearly twice as often.

This doesn't mean the fall skies in the Genesee County outpost suddenly are filled with oblong spheroids. The Hornets still air it out only about 15 times per contest, but in the past, they usually were down in single digits.

The key difference maker is senior quarterback Erik Birchmeier, a returning starter. Coach Clint Galvas described Erik's performance as "heads and shoulders over last season" -- which isn't bad, considering the young man threw for more than 1,000 yards as a junior and rushed for another 1,000.

"His stats aren't by accident," Coach Galvas said. "He puts in a lot of work. He has become more

precise in his throwing, and also more like a coach on the field."

Through late September, New Lothrop boasted a 58-game regular season win streak but had not reached a state championship game at Ford Field. The increased passing could offer a more versatile attack against tougher opponents deep in the playoffs.

Erik explained that he attended several instructional quarterback camps during the summer and took the helm in light summer scrimmages with seven players on each side of the ball, as allowed under state rules.

"I think when he saw us in the seven-on-sevens, we persuaded Coach to throw the ball more often," Erik said.

His best passing game to date was 14 for 19 for 223 yards and two touchdowns in a 33-8 win over a respected Saginaw Nouvel Catholic program. More in the ground game mode, in a 51-16 rout over Flint Hamady, he ran 23 times for 143 yards and connected on 8 of 12

throws for 89 yards. He accounted for five TDs, all on QB keepers.

And if Coach Galvas has always wanted to avoid turnovers by running the ball, Erik isn't throwing any interceptions, either.

He's a classic two-sport athlete who captured the Division 4 state wrestling crown last winter at 171 pounds (he since has beefed up to 190), but he said he favors the team play involved in football, while wrestling is "more individual" and "harder, more of a grind."

Wrestling helps build endurance and strength for football, he said, while football enhances quickness and agility for wrestling.

New Lothrop High has emerged as a football school during the past decade, but the school's wrestling tradition goes farther back. Erik is the son of Kevin Birchmeier -- outsiders may ask whether half of the folks in New Lothrop are Birchmeiers -- and the former Cathy Severin, whose five brothers and multiple cousins have represented the mat men. Austin Severin is currently wrestling for the Central Michigan University team. Erik has opted for wrestling as his winter sport, while older brother Bryce and younger brother Garrett have followed their dad's



New Lothrop senior quarterback Erik Birchmeier has helped open up the Hornets offense this season leading the team to a 5-0 prior to press time. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

lead onto the basketball court. But whichever sports they choose, all of these boys have received strong support from their families and their extended families.

Erik hopes to receive a college football scholarship offer. He said he realizes that at 5-foot-11, he does not fit the tall Tom Brady or Peyton Manning model, but he points to pro star Russell Wilson and former college standout John-

ny Manziel as proof that shorter QBs can make the grade.

He added that if a college coach won't put him at quarterback, he also plays defensive back. And if football doesn't work out, wrestling can be a fallback for a college sports scholarship and career. Erik's 4.15 GPA also could help pave the way for college aid. He aims for a career as a physical therapist, a physician's assistant or in nursing.

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Swan Valley's Boehler Continues Rich Running Back Tradition For Vikings

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Over the last decade, no position has defined a school more than the running back position at Swan Valley High School.

First it was Jared Briguglio, who was short in stature but his ability to make you miss was impeccable. He was a man among boys; however, between his junior and senior seasons the recruiting trail cooled down and he would later go on to have a respectable career at Northwood University.

Then came Johnathan Grace, who rushed for a respectable 1,790 yards during his senior season before moving on to Michigan Tech. But Johnathan gave up the game after his sophomore season and will be graduating from Ferris State University soon.

Johnathan then kept the seat warm for his little brother Alex Grace, who set numerous state and school records during his stay at Swan Valley.

During his sophomore season Grace gained 2,163 yards plus running for 27 scores.

Alex set the Michigan high school rushing record as a junior, running for 2,962 yards for a team that reached the Division 4 quarterfinals before losing to Lansing Sexton,

26-21. He ran for 236 yards against Sexton. He finished his junior season with 39 touchdowns

For an encore during his season senior, Alex rambled for another 2,426 yards and was runner-up in the Mr. Football voting to Birmingham Brother Rice's Alex Malzone.

Needless to say, the Grace name will be present in the Swan Valley record books for years to come.

Fast forward to this year.

Junior Emmett Boehler is quickly becoming another hot commodity at the running back position for the Vikings.

Through five games Boehler is averaging 7.4 yards a carry gaining 604

yards on 82 carries while scoring 10 touchdowns.

At 5-foot-8, 185 pounds Boehler is taking carrying the load in the backfield along with sophomore Chase Mendoza. Although Boehler might be a little undersized he still packs a punch and he continues to get better everything he carries the ball.

It's hard knowing the other guys who came before him might be watching, but Boehler is more than capable of carrying on the running back rich tradition at Swan Valley.

Boehler and Mendoza are definitely up for the challenge.



Swan Valley's Emmett Boehler (No. 26) has become another successful runner for the Vikings averaging nearly 8-yards a carry this season for the Vikings. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON VOLLEYBALL

From A Basketball Family, DeWitt High Star Chooses Volleyball

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

For DeWitt High School's Lexi Nordmann, the first sport in grade school was basketball. She was among the taller girls in her class, and her father, Matthew Nordmann, had played four years of college hoops -- two at the Naval Academy, and then two at George Washington University.

So when she shifted her passion to volleyball starting in seventh and eighth grades, Lexi wondered how her dad might feel.

She need not have worried. "He's been great," she said. "He had never watched volleyball before, but he's been very supportive. He has enjoyed learning about volleyball and has become a huge fan of the sport."

Her mom, Sherri, also has an athletic background from a time when high school sports was just beginning

to grow, in basketball and softball. Younger sister Ashley, an eighth-grader, has opted to multi-sport in volleyball, basketball and tennis.

Lexi has chosen to give single-sport, year-round focus to volleyball. This fall, the 6-foot-1 senior middle hitter has led DeWitt to a top ranking in Class A, and she is among 10 finalists in the running for Michigan Miss Volleyball. She will spend other seasons with the Warren-based Michigan Elite club team, and she has achieved a scholarship to Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

"I really love the team aspect of volleyball, the energy it gives you," she said. Basketball, of course, it a team sport also. But in volleyball, the six players congregate after virtually every play for hand slaps and high fives.

Lexi for sure is a team player, in spite of her individual second-team all-state status. Her career highlight goes back to her sophomore season,

when DeWitt achieved its first-ever Class A district championship.

"I've tried to become more dominant at the net," she said, "and at the same time, see what is happening on the entire court, both on my own side with my teammates and on the other side."

Individually in her career, Lexi has is third in state history for most blocks in a season with 269, and fifth with 39 kills in a single match.

She will join an SMU program that last season won the American Athletic Conference crown and earned its first-ever NCAA tournament bid. Coach Lisa Seifert, entering her 21st season, took over a losing 7-24 squad in 1996 and has built a winning 338-280 career record.

Lexi is a three-time state All-Academic honoree with a 4.076 GPA. She still is choosing between engineering and business as a career goal.



DeWitt's Lexi Nordmann is one of 10 players nominated for Miss Volleyball. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photos)



The Admiral's Teammate

Matthew Nordmann is proud to be the father of DeWitt High School's Lexi Nordmann, one of the state's top volleyball players and a finalist for Michigan Miss Volleyball.

But he also has another claim to fame. As a freshman college basketball player during the late 1980s at the Naval Academy, his teammate was one of the superstars on the planet, a future Hall of Famer with the NBA's San Antonio Spurs, David Robinson.

"A truly great guy, that's the type of person he is," Matt said.

When they have occasional reunion encounters, Robinson, the Admiral, recognizes his former Navy teammate. They

have good chats, even while autograph seekers approach the more famous of the two.

"David was an incredible athlete," recalled Matt, who alternated between small forward and the No. 2 guard. "In a 7-foot-1 body, he moved and played more like 6-foot-1, just so fast and agile. All we had to do was throw the ball (near the post position on offense) and he would go and get it."

Matt sort of rode David Robinson's coattails back in college.

"We played a game on national television against Kentucky," Matt said, "People still tell me that they remember seeing me on TV."

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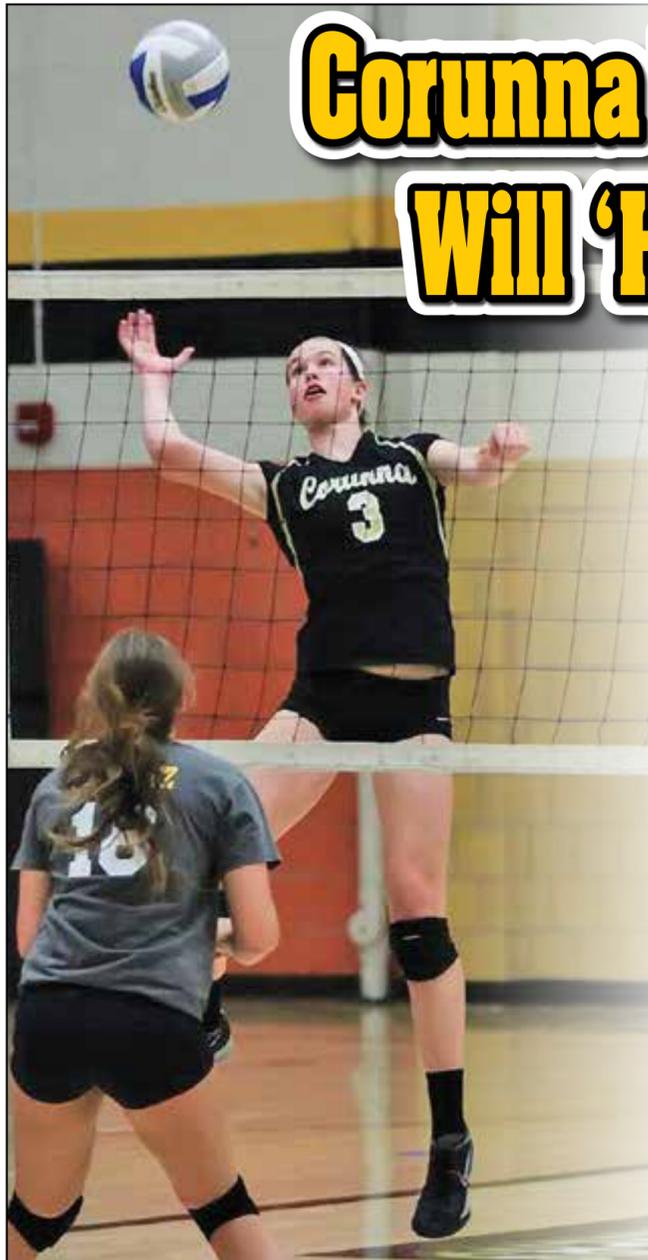
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Corunna Volleyball Standout Will 'Head Home' To MSU



Scott Keyes Sports Scene

All of her volleyball kills are not spikes. Corunna High's star outside hitter, Meredith Norris, stands 6-foot-3. She owns the state record of 56 kills in a single match, breaking her own past standard of 53. And so it's easy to imagine Meredith, with her tall and powerful frame, spiking volleyballs into and through rival defenses.

Indeed, she can do that. But volleyball is a thinking lady's sport -- especially for someone with Meredith's vast experience -- and so intelligence, strategy and finesse often are more important than pure height and strength.

"It's all about knowing where the center (of the defense) is and knowing where it's going to go, and where the open places will be," she explained. "Are you going to go straight down (spike) with it? Or maybe, if the defenders are back on their heels, a tip?"

Another option is if one or two defenders are leaping at the net for a block, to hit the ball off the sides of their hands and arms so that it will carom out of bounds for a point.

"I hit the ball to places where the other players are not," she said.

'EVER SINCE I WAS A BABY'

Meredith Norris has proven that she knows what

she's talking about. She's a two-time first-team all-state athlete and she is among 10 finalists this fall for the statewide Miss Volleyball honor. She's been a standout since sixth grade for her offseason traveling club team, Warren-based Michigan Elite Volleyball Academy, and a regular participant in nationwide summer camps organized through the U.S. Olympic Developmental Program.

And that's not all. She was a mere toddler when she started to attend matches at Michigan State University, where she will continue her career upon signing a letter of intent in November. Her father, Dr. Robert Norris, has served as team physician for volleyball and for other sports squads.

"Ever since I was a baby -- I was so little that I don't even remember the first game, I was barely walking -- I started going to the volleyball matches and to the hockey games," she said.

Her primary learning experience was that her mother, Nikki Smith Norris, was Corunna High's volleyball coach at the same

time. Nikki now is the school's athletic director. She literally grew up on the same floor where she now takes part in -- and dominates -- Corunna's home matches.

When asked the main asset of her game, she answered, "My (volleyball) IQ. I feel I know a lot about the game, having grown up around it."



Corunna's Meredith Norris, who will attend Michigan State University next year, is among 10 candidates nominated for Miss Volleyball this season. At 6-foot-3, Norris holds the state record with 56 kills in a single match. (Mike Schutt and Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)



FAMILY GENES AND ROOTS

Knowledge, of course, must merge with athleticism. Meredith and her younger sister, Elizabeth, who is a freshman teammate on the Corunna High varsity, have loads of talent. At Alma College, their father played basketball and their mother ran track.

Under Coach Kari Carnell, the Corunna High volleyball team has made steady gains during Meredith's four seasons, and this fall has gained a Top 10 statewide ranking in Class B. Meredith has high hopes for team success during her senior season. Even with her state record for individual single-match kills, she first and foremost is a team player. She supports the coaches by handing out constructive advice, teen to teen.

"They not only are my teammates, they are my best friends," she said. "I want them to continue liking the sport, and the best way to do that is to

continue improving and to win."

BRIGHT OUTLOOK AT MSU

When she begins at Michigan State University next year, she will face a similar scenario. The MSU program has shown gradual improvement under veteran Coach Cathy George, with a Top 25 ranking early this season.

Coach George is in her 12th season, and Meredith has already had a lengthy chat with her future coach.

"She explained what my role would be on the team and how everything would play out," Meredith said. "Plus I will be at home."

Meredith is an 'A' student at Corunna High. She will major in kinesiology at MSU with career options in physical training and therapy, as well as coaching. She also dreams of one day playing for the U.S. Olympic team.

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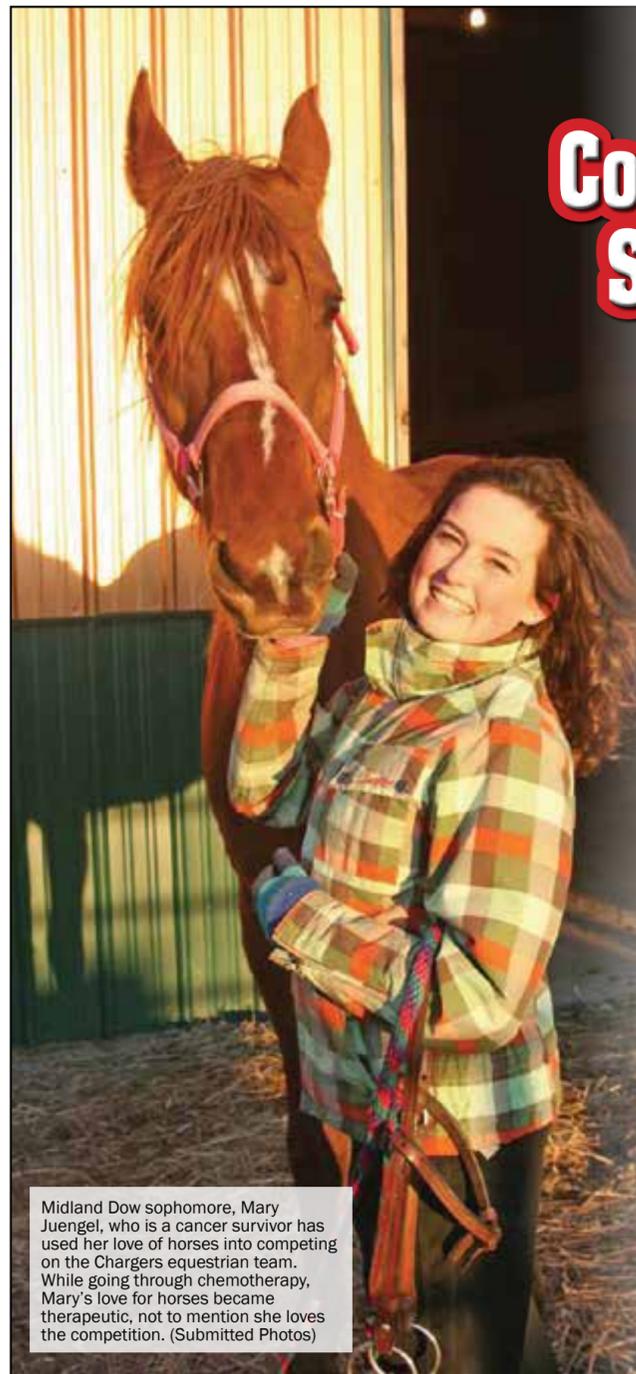
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High Riders: Equestrian Continues To Grow At High School Level In Michigan

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

Mary Juengel grew up in a family where basketball was king.

"My father played and he's a coach. My sisters and brothers played... It was all about basketball," recalled Juengel, who is a current 16-year-old sophomore at Midland Dow High School. "My brother even played in college. So much of my family revolved around basketball."

While it is not uncommon that several members of a family play or coach in the same sport, it was an unusual way for her to depart from the usual path of her family to pick up another growing sport: Equestrian.

"I never had a horse before a couple of years ago," offered Juengel. "I love my horse (Angel). We have such great chemistry. But if something never happened to me, I would have never got into riding."

It was in 2011 when Juengel was in middle school and when she came down with a rare form of acute leukemia. She ended up missing an entire year of school while spending another year as a home-schooled student to keep up with her studies. A long road of nearly 2.5 years of chemotherapy and radiation treatments was enough to dampen the spirits of any youth.

The good news ... actually there is plenty: First, Juengel is now cancer free; second, she is in love with her new favorite sport — riding horses in competition as a member of Midland Dow's equestrian team.

"It has become a huge part of Mary's life — all of ours," said

Marni Juengel, Mary's mother. "Going to practices and competitions. She loves it. (Equestrian) is so unique. There isn't anything like it. There's some real sense of family with it."

A family friend, Shelley Smith, had a horse that she was going to sell. She ended up giving the horse to the Juengel family in 2013.

"It's so therapeutic for Mary," continued Marni Juengel. "She's so happy with her horse and going to practice and competing. She's met so many new friends. Being sick, she couldn't compete in basketball. But having a horse and getting into equestrian, she could still compete."

GROWING

In the past 10 years, a total of 346 schools have fielded teams in Michigan, although that has fluctuated from year-to-year based on the numbers schools entering riders. The teams hail from traditional public, private and charter schools, along with special education schools and even home-school units.

A participant must compete for the school that he or she will graduate from. Although dominated by females riders, males also compete in the competitions, which are co-ed in scoring at meets.

Mary Juengel is one of the thousands of high school and middle school athletes that are involved in the sport across the state this school year. While equestrian shares similarities with sports such as bowling, skiing, hockey and cross country, where competitions are mainly held off campus and away from school facilities, equestrian is the only high school

sport in Michigan that involves both athletes and animals.

Throughout the season, all competitions fall under the leadership of governing body Michigan Interscholastic Horsemanship Association (www.miha.org), which was founded back in the 1970s.

"It's huge," said Marni Juengel. "I never knew much about it until Mary got involved. We were never around horses. But when you go to meets, there's a lot of people."

And horses and trailers, too. "Sometimes you will see families camping out for the weekend," said Dennis Barthal, whose daughters compete for Freeland High School, which won Class C state titles in both 2014 and 2015. "There is a really cool atmosphere with it. In a way, it is like a party."

For competitions, teams are placed into classification brackets based on the amount of riders at the school, not enrollment. Some of the larger schools in the state might split into two squads and have a varsity and reserve unit for competition.

The breakdown is that Division A is open for teams of 11 or more riders; Division B is geared for teams of 5-10 riders; Division C team is for 3-5 riders; and Division D is for teams with just 1 or 2 riders, giving teams of the smallest size a chance to compete against one another — even one-rider teams.

"It works really well," said Arlene Koenig, Chairperson of District No. 6 and co-coach at Bay City Western High School in Auburn. "We have close to 15 teams in our district. Some years it's more and some years it's less. It all depends on how many

schools have riders.

"We had 19 riders at Bay City Western this year, and a school like Freeland only had two riders," continued Koenig. "So while we all might be at the same meet, a school like Freeland will only compete against really small teams. Last year they had more riders, so they were up a division."

SET-UP

Equestrian at the high school level usually involves 1-2 judges per event, depending on the competition. Riders are limited to up to eight of the 17 events at the competitions unless there is an exemption.

"I guess the best way to describe it is equestrian is a lot like track. You can only compete in so many events at a meet," noted Karen Logan, chairperson at District No. 2 which encompasses parts of Genesee, Lapeer, Oakland and Macomb counties. "Unless there is an exception, riders cannot compete in every event. They must spread out the riders."

There are maximum amount of slots for each team at a competition — 63 slots for Class A, 42 slots for Class B, 24 slots for Class C and 16 slots for Class D. An invoice point system for the top eight scorers in each event is in place to help tabulate a final team score at the conclusion of a competition.

The coaching staff for each team will assign class slots to each rider. Each rider shall not participate in more than eight events in any one meet unless unusual circumstances, such as a one-rider team in Class D. Exemptions must be filed before each competition. There are other exceptions available in the other three classes, again boiling down to the number of riders entered.

Schools that have 15 or more riders can split into two squads, although they cannot compete in the same class at a particular meet.

In a rare event that a school has 25 or more riders, or even 31 or more riders, the school may split and enter in multiple divisions. No rider may interchange between teams. Cooperative teams of multiple riders from several schools are not allowed (complete rules are found on the MIHA website rulebook link.)

STATE GATHERINGS

There are 20 districts in the state each year and five regions. The top two teams in each district from each of the four classes advance to the regional Oct. 7-8.

The top two teams in each regional from each of the four classes will advance to the final weekend of the 2016 season. The state finals are a four-day extravaganza and will take place Oct. 13-16 at the Midland County Fairgrounds.

Caledonia (Division A), Grand Haven (Division B), Freeland (Division C) and Breckenridge (Division D) are the defending state champions.

TEAM FORMATION

Interested in starting a team in 2017? Head to the MIHA web site (www.miha.org) to register. Even one-rider teams are accepted at tournaments and a way to kick start interest at a given school.

Directories of district chairpersons are also found on the website, so interested athletes and coaching candidates can reach out and register.

New teams must also apply with the state's executive board, which is also listed on the governing body's website.

LOOKING BACK

In 1968, a group of parents in the northwestern suburbs of Detroit were involved in an equestrian census to get a handle on the potential of developing the sport at the high school level. After realizing that there were more than 10,000 horses in Oakland County, equestrian enthusiasts Ed Cheyz, Kelly Lawrance and Carmi Edwards purposed a school sponsored horsemanship program to the Huron Valley School Board. The school board recommended holding a horse show to determine the extent of interest in a horsemanship program.

By 1972, a horsemanship committee was formed and the first ever "Father's Day Show" was held. A portable arena and public address system were used to hold the show in front of Milford High School. The show was so successful that it brought in 1,200 spectators, 600 entries and a profit of around \$1,700. The success justified establishing an educational horsemanship program.

The first equestrian team competition in Michigan was held in the fall of 1973 at the Bogie Lake Country Club indoor facility near Milford between 5 schools — Hartland, Howell, Holly, Fenton and Milford — under the guise of the Huron Valley Interscholastic Horsemanship Association.

By 1976, the renamed Michigan Interscholastic Horsemanship Association (MIHA) held its very first state championship, where Romeo captured the open class state title at the Oak Ridge Stables in White Lake Township.

Over the years, traveling trophies for each division are passed out at each state finals, showcasing the proud winners.

Over the past four decades, the sport has added four divisions and a complex scoring system that has attracted a growing amount of interest of schools, riders, coaches, parents, judges and overall popularity to reach its current status today.

"The sport has come a long way," offered Dee Shephard, veteran coach at Oxford High School who has watched her team advance from 16 straight district competitions and win two state titles to along the way. "It has improved in a lot of ways over the past 20-

plus years. The riders are more talented, the coaching is better. There is a lot more awareness of the sport, which I think has helped it grow across the state."

Although mainly funded by clubs and fundraisers, many schools offer varsity letters to competitors who represent their school, just like other sports. Some schools even have banners placed on the gymnasium walls honoring past district, regional and state championship teams.

"When you go to schools like ours, you can see the banners up, just like the other sports," beamed Shephard. "I know a lot of schools out there do this. It is so nice to see the sport gain respect."

Stacy Gaffke, co-coach at Midland Bullock Creek, believes the sport's uniqueness that creates a family feel has helped it grow in popularity.

"When you have so many schools, so many riders around each other all the time, I think friendships are formed," said Gaffke, who also has had children compete in MIHA competitions. "Although kids compete against each other, there is a closeness that you might not see with other sports."

SEASON NEARING ITS END

For Mary Juengel and her Midland Dow teammates, there won't be a regional or state finals competition this season, as the Chargers finished third at the recent Class A Midland district. Other uber-talented squads will steal the limelight down the stretch of the 2016 season.

That's O.K. with Mary Juengel, who competes for a team without any seniors.

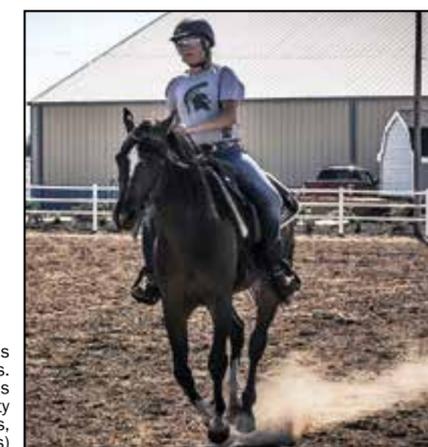
"I may go out and watch the state finals because you can pick up things up from other riders. Plus, it's so close being in Midland and all," she laughed. "I will probably have friends (from other schools) competing, so I can go cheer them on."

Mary, who has not competed in basketball for five years since her original diagnoses with leukemia, may return to that sport this winter. But her heart is now with her horse Angel, her teammates, her coach, her new-found friends — and the sport she calls No. 1, even though hoops may reign supreme in Juengel family.

"I can't imagine not being involved now," added Mary. "I love everything about this sport. And just think, if I didn't get sick I wouldn't be here today."

It was meant to be.

Freeland eighth grader Riley Newbold is an up and coming rider for the Falcons. Newbold's older cousin Tori Jankoska is a senior on the Michigan State University Women's Basketball Team. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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VOLLEYBALL ROUNDUP

Block, Greenup Solid 1-2 Combination For Sharks

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Led by the talented one-two punch of senior Jaelynn Block and sophomore Megan Greenup, the St. Louis Sharks volleyball team has been turning in some impressive performances this season.

St. Louis started out conference play in the TVC West with some impressive wins and have also been making an impact at a number of invitationals.

With Block and Greenup leading the way, the Sharks took second place at their own Sunset Invitational, where they fell to state-ranked Saginaw Swan Valley. St. Louis reached the finals after a 2-1 mark in pool play and wins over Beal City and New Lothrop in the quarterfinals and semifinals. Block, a returning third-team, all-state player, totaled 39 kills and 36 digs for the tournament while Greenup added 46 assists, 35 kills and 36 digs.

St. Louis also reached the semifinals at the Mitten Bay Invitational at Bay City Central. Block and Greenup combined for 76 digs and 59 kills on the day while Paige Young added 36 digs and six serving aces. The Sharks have also received strong efforts from a number of players this season including Marlee Goetzinger, Laurel Hrabel and Allyssa Roberson.

The Alma volleyball team is also off to a strong start this season. Alma won the title at

the Big Rapids Invitational with a three-set victory against Bullock Creek in the finals. Abby Mellinger, Olivia Apple and Danielle Bastian were among the team leaders at the tournament and have also helped Alma to a 2-0 start in conference play. Alma also reached the semifinals at the Portland Invitational with strong efforts from Kaylynn Brecht, Hailey Leister, Jasmine Everitt and Kenzie Seelye.

The Saginaw Swan Valley volleyball team is ranked among the honorable-mention in the state in Class B. Swan Valley opened TVC play with a pair of wins and it ran its mid-season record to 19-5-2. Lauren Abby, Emily Buska, Kristen Huebner and Madison McLeod have been among the team leaders for Swan Valley.

The DeWitt volleyball team is following up a 44-4-1 season last year with an even stronger start this year. The Panthers are ranked No. 1 in the state in Class B. Senior Lexi Nordmann is leading the way for the Panthers along with junior setter Brooke Binkley. Nordmann, who has committed to SMU for college volleyball, is one of 10 finalists for the Michigan Miss Volleyball award.

The Edmore-Montabella volleyball team is off to a solid start this year. Edmore-Montabella defeated Fulton-Middleton in five sets to earn its fifth-straight dual match win and has a 3-0 start in conference play. McKenna Harrison, Taylor Peabody and Kendra Stockwell have been leading the way for the Mustangs.



St. Louis' Jaelynn Block is the lone senior on the Sharks team this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON CROSS COUNTRY

Four McConnell Sisters Highlight Sacred Heart Team

John Raffel
Sports Scene

It's a one-two-three-four punch with the McConnell sisters this fall at Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart.

Coach Mark Zitzelsberger has another Division 4 cross country state championship contender on his hands at Sacred Heart.

Last season at the state meet, the Irish won without a single senior on the team. Alexis McConnell (18:55.6) and her sister Bailey McConnell (19:11.4) placed fourth and fifth respectively. Alex was a junior and Bailey a sophomore. Their younger sister, Cammie, a freshman, placed 17th (19:31.2). But the third Sacred Heart runner was Scout Nelson (19:19.4), who took 10th. Also back are sophomore Lauren MacDonald and juniors Rowan Fitzpatrick and Megan Nowak.

But a fourth McConnell sister, Desiree, freshman, is on the 2016 team.

In the first Mid-State Activities Conference meet on Sept. 21, Alexis, Bailey, Nelson and McConnell took the top four spots. Desiree was seventh.

Alexis' PR is an 18:02.8 this season, which she achieved at the Mount Pleasant Oiler Earlybird Invite. Bailey got her PR 18:59.5, at the same meet, as did Cammie with an 18:45.7. Desiree had her best, a 20:22.1 at the Michigan State Invitational as the team's fifth runner.

Four sisters, four different classes, on one varsity cross country team? How often does that happen?

Zitzelsberger laughed at the question.

"Not often, it's a perfect storm we've got going on," Zitzelsberger said. "Alex has been all-state three years in a row. So we'll be in the fight to win it this year. I think the top three McConnells have the talent and put in the mileage last summer so they could possibly finish in the top five. You have to run the race. Each one of those girls put in close to

500 miles last summer. They prepared themselves.

"Desiree, we think she'll get under 20 minutes, and that's pretty darn good for a freshman. Her last three races, she's dropped major times in each race. She had a little injury so she was cross training a lot early in the season."

Nelson was in the 19 minute range last year and is expected to be there by the end of the season.

Depth has never been better.

"Rowan Fitzpatrick was all-state athlete her freshman year," Zitzelsberger said. "Last, she was on target. She was running 19:30s but got sick three days before the state finals. She raced on Saturday and ran in the high 20s, which I thought was amazing. She has all-state experience too."

Nowak was No. 6 or 7 last year and got under 19 minutes.

"For a small school like ours to have eight great runners is almost unheard of," Zitzelsberger said. "We put seven runners in the top 15 at Michigan State."

Alexis McConnell admits she is ready to have a memorable season.

"I want to improve from where I was last year and possibly breaking the 18s and see where that puts me at the state meet," she said. "I'd like to go 17:59, just try to get close. I'll have to get out to a pace and stick to it. The third mile is a little bit tougher."

Having three sisters on the same team definitely makes it a unique season.

"It's fun," McConnell said.

"It can be really competitive. We practice at home together and throughout the summer. We work hard. We go one-two-three and see the fourth sister. It's fun to see how that's coming along."



The Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart girls cross country team is looking to repeat as Division 4 champions this season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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Goodell, Teammates Boosting Strong St Louis Cross Program

John Raffel
Sports Scene

St. Louis cross country coach Jay Puffpaff has a fine runner in Evan Goodell. But the key to Goodell's success has been the quality of the runners on his team who have been pushing him.

Goodell is in his senior season. "He was a little banged up at the beginning of the season," Puffpaff said. "So we had to take a long-term approach. We have him back healthy now. So we're getting him back into some harder work and some harder training. We're getting ready for the end of the season."

Because of his early year challenges, it's tough to tell if Goodell is on line to have his best running season.

"We have several weeks, though, and we'll use up those weeks," Puffpaff said. "The goal is to be ready by the end of the year."

The Sharks coach has been impressed with Goodell's consistency.

"Every day, he's doing exactly what he needs to do to be the best he can be," Puffpaff said. "That started all the way back in the seventh grade and continues. He has a consecutive days of running streak that goes back to the end of his eighth-grade year. He has a consistency of putting in work and doing the right things that has put him in a situation to be successful."

In track, Goodell ran 9:13 in the 3,200-meter run last season and won the Division 3 state title. For cross country, his PR last season was 15:38.

"I think the whole guys cross country team in general has rallied behind Evan, especially when he was banged up early in the season," Puffpaff said. "They kept him in the right frame of mind. They took over some of that responsibility of getting everything to where it needs to be."

At the most recent TVC West jambo-

ree, St. Louis was first with 41 points, nine ahead of Ithaca. Goodell won the race with a season's best of 17:43.12. Cologio Alghire took fourth (18:29.89). The Sharks then took places 11 through 13 with Jeffrey Blackwell (19:37.97),



St. Louis senior Evan Goodell (top row far left) is one of the premiere distance runners in Michigan. He gets a tremendous boost from his teammates and coach Jay Puffpaff. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Austyn Rhines (19:40.28) and Brandon DeRosia (19:48.80), while Michael Wert placed 17th (20:41.32), Austin Rios 21st (21:00.050) and Austin Aldrich 23rd (21:20.09).

"They pulled it together for that meet," Puffpaff said. "We still have a lot of work to do. But they're focus on the process of getting better every day, and are trying to get ready for the end of the season."

Goodell could have a post-high school cross country and track career.

"He's talking to several schools, so he's in that process right now," Puffpaff said.

"He has a list of schools he's looking at next year. I would say he's equal in both (sports). He's a distance runner and does more of the longer distances in track. He holds his own. He won the state championship in the 3,200 and made significant improvement over the winter from the cross to the track season. We're trying to continue that progression."

Goodell is anxious to see how it will be get by the end of the season as he strives to get healthy.

"We're getting there," he said. "At the end of the season, it would be good."

Giles On Record-Setting For Breckenridge Cross Country Squad

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Alex Giles wouldn't mind having a memorable cross country season for Breckenridge as a senior. He's headed in the right direction.

Giles' season has been a 17:45.4 at the Gratiot County Cross Country meet. He was first. He was second at a MSAC jamboree in 18:15.

He's coming off a strong junior season when he had a PR of 17:07.2 at the Alma College Scottie Classic. He was eighth in 17:27.0, at the regional meet and 69th in 17:46.4 at the Division 4 state final.

"We have a system, and we go through that system with training during the summer," he said. "The

hay's in the barn. Now all we have to do is a little more speed work hard, stay healthy and trust the system, it usually comes through. Trust the coach and the training."

Giles had also competed at the state finals as a sophomore and was 80th in Division 4. A highlight for him that season was going as a team.

Usually in a race, it's Giles' strategy to stay back in the first mile and let the other guy lead.

"I'll trust the system," he said. "I'll push the pace in the second mile. In the third mile, training is all you have. You have to give it everything. The rest is heart."

He's been running cross country since sixth grade.

Going to the state finals as a

team, "is a very big goal," Giles said. "That's something we discuss very often. We're looking good this year. We have a lot of young talent."

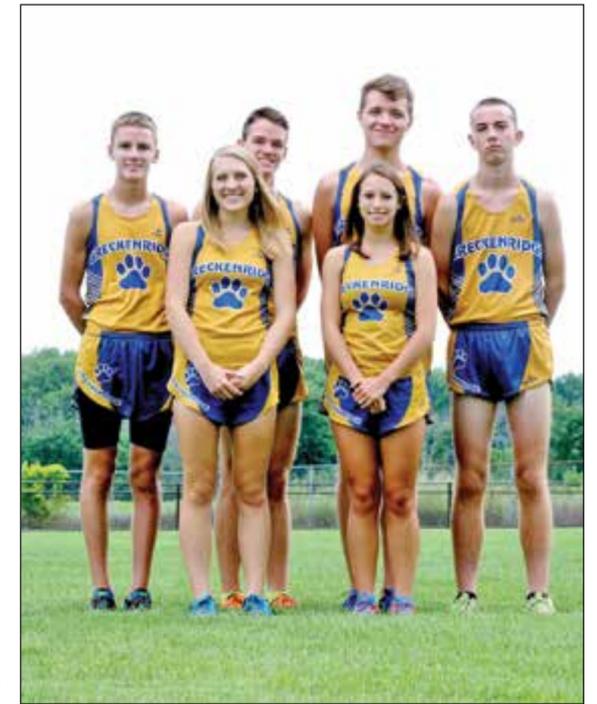
"Individually, I'm being realistic. The state championship seems a little out of reach. Top 20 or top 15 is what I have my sights on."

Giles also runs the distances in track.

"I prefer cross country," he said. "I do a lot of trail running at home in the woods and down sand roads. It's what I'm used to. I like the energy of it all."

Giles said this Breckenridge team is close to what the Huskies had in his sophomore season.

"Right now, it's not the best team I've been on, but it's very close," Giles said.



The Breckenridge seniors lead the way for the Huskies Cross Country team. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Ithaca High Girls X-Country Aims To Maintain Tradition

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Ithaca High School's girls cross country team is in the middle of what Coach Gene Lebron calls a "rebuilding year," but the goals still are high.

The Lady 'Jackets are aiming for a top 10 finish at the season-closing Division 3 state meet.

Coach Lebron's long distance runners won the state championship in 2014, the school's first state crown in any girls sport. They finished fifth last fall, and some of the girls were members of the spring 2016 state champi-

onship team in track and field, also coached by Lebron.

He calls this is a rebuilding year because a pair of his veteran runners -- Blaire Showers and Alyssa Mankey -- have graduated and have moved ahead to Lansing Community College, the nation's top-ranked junior college squad.

Ithaca's remaining aces -- veterans of the 2014 title team -- are Courtney Brown, a three-time all-state athlete, and Amelia Freestone. Other senior mainstays are Adriana Santana and Kara Kindell, who is holding her own in spite of waiting until 12th grade to try out for

cross country. Samantha (Sam) Vermeesh is a leader among the younger prospects.

The Lady 'Jackets are three-time defending Tri-Valley Conference West Division champions and won this season's first TVC West "jamboree" meet. They also placed third among 35 schools at Michigan State University's Spartan Invitation-al.

"We're getting better every week," Coach Lebron summarized. "I'm optimistic."

Meanwhile, Coach Tim Lambrecht's Ithaca High boys cross country team is aiming to restore past excellence with a sixth-place team finish in 2012. The team leader is Landon Strong, who qualified for last season's state meet and is aiming for a return.



Ithaca's cross country team is led by a deep group of seniors including Amelia Freestone and Courtney Allen. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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CROSS COUNTRY ROUNDUP

Corunna's Jacobs Won't Be Denied

Considered One Of The Top Distance Runners In State

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Corunna High School has been known for years for producing strong cross country runners. Few however, can match the accomplishments that senior Noah Jacobs has produced during his years with the Cavaliers.

When Noah Jacobs came onto the scene as a freshman he posted a best time of 18:59. Since then, he has continued to lower his times. Noah, now in his senior year, has a personal best of 14:59, a four-minute improvement, and he has established himself as one of the best distance runners in the state.

Hard work has been at the core of Noah's improvement.

"Noah keeps working harder and getting better," said Corunna coach Bryan Heid. "It has happened a little bit at a time due to him constantly trying to be better today than he was yesterday. He is much faster at this point this year than last year."

The key to Noah's success, according to Heid, is his love of competition and his willingness to put in the work required.

"Noah is a great tactician and is prepared with race strategy," said Heid. "He also has physically prepared to handle any course or any condition."

The goals are high this season for Jacobs as he is a favorite to be the Division II state champion and possibly add Mr. Michigan in cross country this fall. Noah is also likely to qualify for both the Foot Locker Nationals and the National Champi-

Corunna's Noah Jacobs is on pace to possibly repeat as Division 2 cross country champion in 2016. (Gary Williams, High School Sports Scene Photo)

onships in San Diego.

"Noah should not lose a race this season," said Heid.

Jacobs has plans of competing in Division I cross country in college and is looking at five schools right now. The sky is the limit for Noah Jacobs, but he is not focused on himself. Instead, Jacobs' top goal for his senior season is for Corunna to be state champions.

"Noah is a great teammate and wants more than anything for our team to be state champions," Heid said. "That means a lot more to him than being the individual champion."

- The Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart girls cross country team is off to a blazing start this season. Ranked No. 1 in the state in Division 4, the Irish showed their strength in the first league jamboree of the season when the quartet of senior Alexis McConnell, junior Bailey McConnell and sophomores Cammie McConnell and Scout Nelson all broke the 20-minute mark.

- The Pewamo-Westphalia boys are ranked No. 1 in the state in Division 4. The Pirates displayed their depth and talent by winning the Chesaning Invitational with six Pirates placing in the top 15 individually. Senior Bryce Thelen led the way as he placed third in a time of 16:43 while sophomore Mitch Nurenberg placed 10th and senior Zach Schmitz 11th.

- The Shepherd girls are off to a strong start in Division 3. The Shepherd girls placed one through four individually in their first TVC Cen-

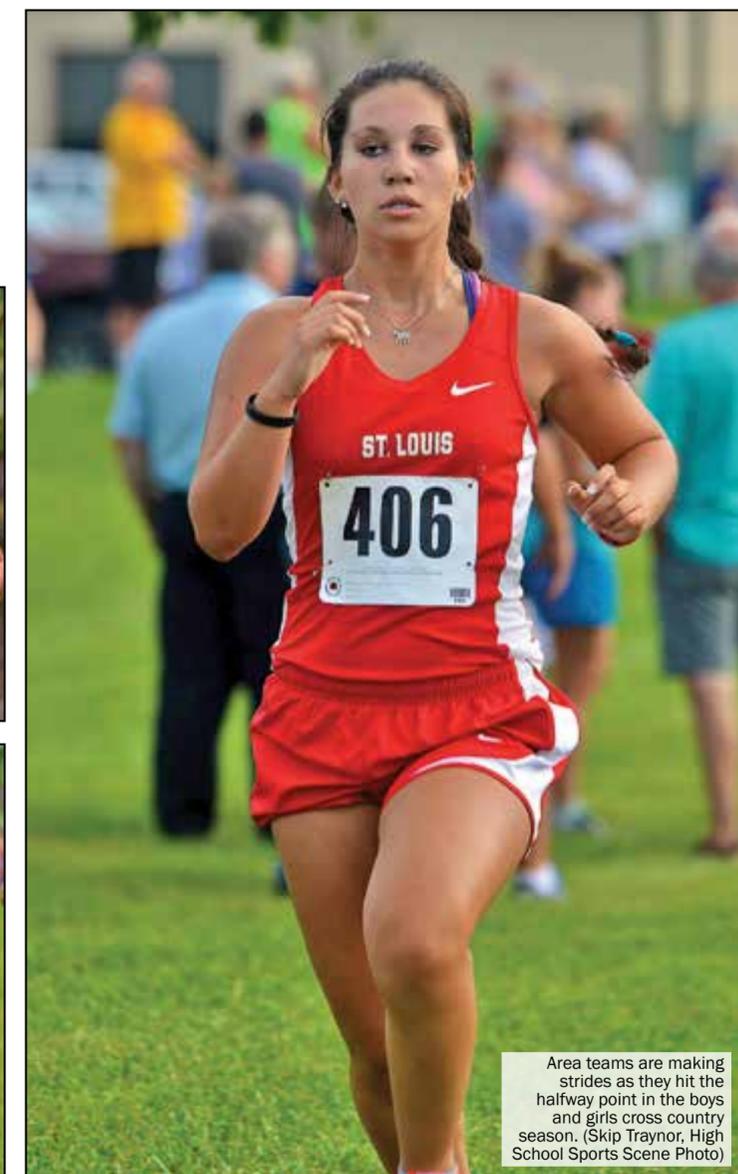
tral jam of the season. Sophomore standout Amber Gall led the Bluejays with a time of 19:38 followed by seniors Kylie and Katelyn Hutchinson and sophomore Haley Hegenauer.

- The DeWitt girls began the season ranked third in the state in Division 2. Juniors Hannah Adler and Katie Vitou have been among the leaders for the Panthers this season.

- The Pewamo-Westphalia girls are also turning in a solid season. The Pewamo-Westphalia girls took first place at the Chesaning Invitational led by freshman Aubrey George

who placed second in a time of 19:24 and senior Brenna Wirth who placed third with a time of 19:53.

- The St. Johns girls have a talented young squad this year. Ranked 13th in the state in Division 2, the Redwings won the first CAAC Red jamboree of the season. Freshmen Taryn Chapko and Addie Somers both set p.r.s and finished in the top ten at the jamboree while senior Brecken Simon and sophomore Lauren Lasceski also placed in the top ten.



Area teams are making strides as they hit the halfway point in the boys and girls cross country season. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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For the past five or six years the Lansing area has become a hotbed in boys soccer. This year is no different as Mason, Okemos, East Lansing and Lansing Christian are all vying for possible state championships this season. (Marvin Hall and Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photos)

SOCCER ROUNDUP

Powerhouse Teams Again Near The Forefront As State Tournament Approaches

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

The more things change, the more things stay the same. This best describes the prep boys soccer scene in Michigan over the years. While many of the traditional state powerhouse teams still thrive as they did some three decades ago, the talent growth and shifts has allowed the pool to spread to all corners of the Lower Peninsula.

In the Lansing area, East Lansing has become one constant example of a program never falling off the map as more and more schools statewide have added soccer or have garnered respect.

Since winning the Class A state title in 1987, East Lansing has captured five titles with two state runner-up trophies to boot. The MHSAA adopted boys soccer in 1982, while the coaches association ran a small state tournament from 1974-81 for the scant amount of programs around at the time.

The Trojans have captured legions of conference and district championships as well and are perhaps the most successful program all-time in the Lansing area. As of late September, East Lansing sat comfortably in the No. 2 position and again is a threat to make a run at another state title.

Here is a look around the state at the teams that could make some noise when the state tournament begins on Oct. 17.

Some districts offer up several ranked squads, while others have schools under the radar waiting for the moment to spring an upset.

LANSING-CENTRAL MICHIGAN AREA

Division 1 — Okemos, which has captured two titles, is often one of the most heralded teams in Central Michigan. Grand Ledge is a team on the rise and could make a lengthy run with a couple of upsets.

Division 2 — Behind East Lansing, defending D-2 champ Mason has won four titles all-time and is always a threat. Haslett could be a sleeper pick, while DeWitt can never be taken for granted.

Division 3 — Even in a rebuilding year, Williamston has risen up the ladder in the D-3 top-20. Lansing Catholic, Ithaca and Ovid-Elsie are other teams that are capable of some postseason noise.

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Division 4 — Lansing Christian is seemingly a permanent resident in the top-20 and currently resides in the penthouse atop the charts.

BAY CITY-SAGINAW-MIDLAND-FLINT AREA

Division 1 — Although the team is not ranked, Grand Blanc has never finished below .500, while Midland Dow also has plenty of talented players and will be a threat.

Division 2 — A host of teams, including state-ranked Fenton and Linden, are quite capable of advancing deep. Goodrich can never be taken lightly.

Division 3 — Freeland is enjoying another fine season, as is Flint Powers Catholic. Saginaw Swan Valley could surprise, the same as Montrose.

Division 4 — Burton Genesee Christian ran the tables last year and captured the D-4 crown.

OAKLAND COUNTY

Division 1 — This tradition-rich region counters with dozens of schools with quality sides. OAA-Red schools Rochester Adams, Troy Athens, Troy Rochester, Rochester Stoney Creek, Clarkston and Berkley are all good teams. Novi out of the KLAA and CHSL-member Novi-Detroit Catholic Central are also a threats for deep runs. Never count out Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham Brother Rice, Walled Lake Central or Walled Lake Northern.

Division 2 — Auburn Hills Avondale and Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook are both capable of reaching the Final Four. Orchard Lake St. Mary's and Ortonville Brandon are also on the radar, while Detroit Country Day, with 14 state titles, can never be left out the discussion. Pontiac Notre Dame Prep, South Lyon or Madison Heights Lamphere could also break loose.

Division 3 — Clawson has perhaps its best team since the 1990s and is dangerous.

Division 4 — While not as strong as in the past, Auburn Hills Oakland Christian, Birmingham Roeper and Royal Oak Shrine are always strong and could catch fire.

MHSSCA STATE RANKINGS (Late September)

Division 1 — 1. Portage Northern; 2. Canton; 3. Rockford; 4. Rochester Adams; 5. Fraser; 6. Brighton; 7. Troy Athens; 8. Northville; 9. Novi; 10. East Kentwood;

Division 2 — 1. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern; 2. East Lansing; 3. Spring Lake; 4. Auburn Hills Avondale; 5. Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook Kingswood; 6. Holland Christian; 7. Lowell; 8. Coldwater; 9. Mattawan; 10. Tecumseh;

Division 3 — 1. Grosse Pointe South Christian; 2. Paw Paw; 3. Grand Rapids Catholic Central; 4. Flint Powers Catholic; 5. Hudsonville Unity Christian; 6. Williamston; 7. Grosse Ile; 8. Ann Arbor Gabriel Richard; 9. Tawas; 10. Gladwin;

Division 4 — 1. Lansing Christian; 2. Muskegon Western Michigan Christian; 3. Grosse Pointe Woods University-Liggett; 4. North Muskegon; 5. Leland; 6. Monroe St. Marys Catholic; 7. Grand Rapids Covenant Christian; 8. Burton Genesee Christian; 9. Ann Arbor Greenhills;



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(Marvin Hall and Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene Photos)

Lansing Area Is A Hotbed For Premiere Soccer Teams

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

Lansing has been a leader in the state of Michigan when it comes to producing quality soccer teams. This season is no different as a number of Lansing area teams are among the top teams in the state in their respective divisions.

This season, Lansing Christian has found itself ranked No. 1 in the state in Division 4. Perennial power East Lansing is ranked second in the state in Division 2 and Williamston is ranked sixth in Division 3.

Lansing Christian has been putting up impressive records consistently over the years with each new group of players. This year's team lacks the number of seniors seen at other schools, but it has not slowed the team down.

"We lost a lot of quality seniors from last year and have a host of new guys filling important roles," said Lansing Christian coach Joel VandeKoppe. "We knew it would be a learning process this year and we've focused on getting better every game, which we have done."

After graduating a number of key players from last year's team, the Pilgrims have relied on the returning seniors to guide this year's young squad.

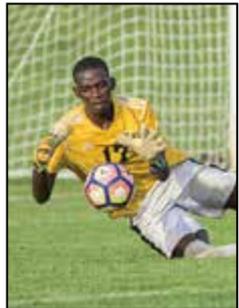
"We knew the beginning of the year we could face some adversity," VandeKoppe said.

Leading this year's team has been a core of seniors that includes Noah Usiak and Nick Jamieson up front, Preston Granger and Luke Hagy on defense and keeper Jack Gillespie. Under the leadership of the seniors, Lansing Christian has been on its way to putting together another impressive season.

"I wouldn't say my expectations have been exceeded because I expect a lot of our teams," said VandeKoppe, "but I am encouraged with where we are."

Lansing Christian is just one of a number of Lansing-area soccer teams that have been turning in great seasons recently.

"The Lansing area is a strong soccer community because of a couple of things," VandeKoppe said. "First there are a lot of families who are committed to having their kids play at a high level so they get them involved with the many high level teams around. Second, the coaching at the high school level in the area is top notch. It starts with Nick Archer at East Lansing, but there are a number of really strong coaches who have built and sustained quality programs for a number of years. Programs like this are something that kids want to be a part of and excel in."



Mr. Underrated: Freeland's Alec Pilon Emerging As One Of State's Top Backstops

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

Alec Pilon will never forget last season's run to a district championship and a spot in the regionals against mighty Williamston.

Then a junior goalkeeper at Freeland, Pilon was superb between the goal posts and not only backstopped a fine 23-3-0 season, but helped keep the Falcons in their Division 3 regional semifinal against Williamston.

Williamston eventually edged out Freeland 1-0 in a shootout, but not before Pilon turned a few heads in the process with his stellar play.

"We didn't think we could compete with Williamston, but we kept it close," said Pilon. "We hope to get another chance this year, at least win another district."

Now a senior captain in his third

good teams."

Last season, the agile 5-foot-11, 160-pound Pilon made the D-3 All-State Honorable Mention list to go along with all-Tri-Valley Conference, all-district and all-region accolades. This year he's considered one of Michigan's top 10 goalkeepers on the high school scene.

Pilon's talents exceed the soccer pitch, but have appeared evident in the classroom as well. Ranked in the top-20 in his class with a GPA hovering just under 3.8, Pilon is eyeing engineering schools in his near future. Lawrence Tech has already offered, while Pilon is willing to listen to other engineering schools in the Midwest that may have a roster spot for an underrated goalkeeper.

"School comes first, soccer second," said Pilon. "But if a school has a good engineering department and has room (on the roster), I will consider it. I definitely want to go away to school, get out on my own."

Freeland coach Brandon Coleman knows what he has in Alec Pilon, the type of goalkeeper that can be the caboose stoking the red-hot engine.

"He makes the saves you expect, but he'll also make some incredible saves, grab balls or punch them over the crossbar that are headed for the (upper-90)," said Coleman. "This is my first year at Freeland, but I can tell you he's one of the best goalkeepers I've seen this year. If we can make a run, it will be in part of his play in goal."

Pilon, who also plays club soccer for the Midland Fusion, has led Freeland to a fine 10-3-1 record with nine clean sheets and a 0.59 goals-against-average through Sept. 23. A minor thumb injury moved Pilon to the defense for a couple of games in mid-September, but he is determined enough to be in net when the Falcons play top competition.

"It's my senior year. You only have one senior year and I will be there, no matter how much it hurts," said Pilon. "I want to help my team go as far as we can. I think last season was the furthest we've been in something like 10 years. We want to go even further. We have to win our district first, not be an (upset victim)."

With Alec Pilon between the pipes, Freeland's chances for some postseason glory are well within reach.



Freeland's Alec Pilon has become one of the most reliable goalkeepers in the area during his senior season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Lee Scoring Goals In Bunches For Yellowjackets

David Cook
Sports Scene

Varsity soccer player Koby Lee has been making waves in Ithaca this season with his outstanding

performances on the pitch.

A talented forward with a unique ability to finish, Lee has scored 18 goals and added five assists in just 11 games this year as a senior at Ithaca.

Lee is in his fourth year on the varsity team and is capping what has been an outstanding career with the Yellowjackets.

"He is one of the most talented players Ithaca soccer has ever had," said Ithaca coach Doug Strait. "He plays hard all the time and can take over a game all by himself."

Lee has turned in a number of standout games this season

including a four-goal effort in a 4-0 win against Essexville-Garber and the game-winning goal in a 1-0 win against Saginaw Nouvel.

"Koby gets double-teamed quite a bit, but that usually doesn't stop his ability to help the team," Strait said. "My hope is for him to continue to play at the next level because I feel he has the ability to play with the best."



Ithaca's Koby Lee is scoring goals in bunches for the Yellowjackets this season. (Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON GOLF

Watkins, Russell Push One Another On Links

Hopes To Claim Individual Golf Titles In '16

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Seniors Megan Watkins and Moyea Russell both hope to close their high school careers with state golf championships, and they are rooting for one another later this month, but not at their own expense.

That's because Megan, from Frankenmuth High School, competes in Division 4 and Moyea's Lake Orion High School is in Division 1.

Their friendship began a few summers ago when The Fortress golf course in Frankenmuth hosted the Michigan qualifier for the Trusted Choice Big 1 national junior tournament. It's a two-day event and Megan's parents, Scott and Rosien Watkins, offered their home as an overnight billet for Moyea. They renewed the arrangement this past summer, and also spend a week together at the Western Junior Amateur event in Madison, Wis.

They found that they have much in common, in addition to being long and strong right-to-left drawers of their 250-yard tee shots, both say they need to focus on their short games. Both have outgoing personalities and they like to laugh; sometimes even in competition.

At The Fortress, they were paired with one another. Scott Watkins -- who just so happens to be the retired superintendent at The Fortress, a 3-minute drive from the family home -- was following them. As Moyea recalls, Megan mishit a shot. When Megan prepared to play her next stroke, Dad remarked, "Don't chunk it again." And when Megan proceeded to smack a marvelous recovery shot that finished right next to the flag, both girls spontaneously cracked up at the elder's expense.

Not that they're not serious. Megan recalls nosing out Moyea in a competition that came down to the 18th hole, and the sportsmanship that her friendly rival displayed.

"Moyea is bubbly, a sweet girl," Megan said. "Whether she shoots 90 or 72, she has the same attitude."

Megan finished second at last year's Division 4 state meet and has two regional crowns under her belt. She was Saginaw News Girls Golfer of the Year.

Moyea placed third in Division 1 and made the statewide Super Team, consisting of the top eight players from schools of all sizes. She was MLive's Detroit-area Player of the Year.

Both young ladies have shot competitive rounds in the 60s -- Moyea a 68, Megan a 69. But only Megan has a rare double eagle to her credit.

"A driver and a wedge," Megan explains with a chuckle. "It was only a 400-yard hole, but they called it a par-5, so I don't tell anyone that."

Megan was inspired to take up golf by her older sister, Kaitlyn, who held Frankenmuth High golf records until Megan came along to shatter them and now plays at Western Michigan University. Moyea is the daughter of Tony and Kyongyi Russell, whose mother encouraged her to take up golf after she succeeded in other children's sports.

Moyea has accepted a golf scholarship to Southern Illinois University, where she will study broadcast journalism. Megan, who has yet to choose a school, aims for a career in biology or chemistry.



Meg Watkins (Frankenmuth) and Moyea Russell (Lake Orion) are gearing up for possible championship runs in 2016. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Midland Dow Has High Hopes As Playoffs Near

GOLF ROUNDUP

David Cook
Sports Scene

After taking second in the state in Division 2 last season, the Midland Dow girls golf team is on a mission this season. Dow is ranked No. 1 in the state in Division 2 this season and has turned in a number of strong efforts.

The Chargers turned in a big effort when it first a team score of 315 to take second at its own Frank Altimore Invitational. Senior Stephanie Carras, who was second individually at the state meet last year, fired a school record three-under par 69 to lead the way for Dow.

Dow also dominated the action at the Greenville Invitational. The Chargers won the tournament by 44 strokes as it totaled a 315. Stephanie Carras shot a 73 while Alexis Carras shot a 75.



Midland Dow's Alexis Carras eyes up a putt during the Division 2 finals a year ago. Midland Dow currently ranks No. 1 in Division 2. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

The Okemos golf team is off to another solid season. The Chieftains, who are seeking a sixth straight CAAC Blue title, are ranked third in the state in Division 3. Lauren Kim, who carded an 85 at the Redwing Invitational, has been leading the way for Okemos this season.

Few teams can boast the improvement that the Durand girls golf team has been making. Durand did not have a varsity golf team until the 2014 season. In just their third season, Durand placed second in the Genesee Athletic Conference (GAC) this season. Paige Deisler fired a school-record 86 to lead the Railroaders at the GAC league meet. Jenna Otten added an 89 at the event. Durand also placed second in its division at the Dick's Sporting Good Invitational. Cierra Cole shot a then school-record 97 to lead the Railroaders while Otten carded a 99

and Abbey Edmonds a 103. The Shepherd golf team has been playing some solid golf this fall. The Blue Jays have been strong at league jamborees this season led by Morgan Yates, Maggie Bryant, Holly Strauss and Olivia Raymond.

The Mason golf team is ranked fourth in the state this year in Division 2. The Bulldogs, the defending CAAC Red division champions, have a balanced squad led by Claudia Vondra, Audrey Wassner and Callie Williams who are all averaging under 45 for nine holes this season.

The DeWitt golf team is ranked 10th in the state in Division 2. The Panthers turned in a big effort in winning the Redwing Invitational by 11 strokes. Team leaders Mackenzie Smith and Elaina DeRose both carded rounds of 86 to lead DeWitt.

Radaz Having Strong Season For Alma Golfers

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Steve Kettler has been coaching an Alma girls golf team led by Megan Radaz, who is having an impressive year as a junior.

"She's having a strong year," Kettler said. "In the conference, individuals, she is trailing by one stroke overall. She was leading going into the last one and had a rough day. I'm pretty confident Megan is going to pull it out."

Radaz is averaging 46 strokes for nine holes in the conference. Her best round was a 43 at St. Louis in a jamboree.

From last year, "her average is down a couple of strokes," Kettler said. "She's trying a lot better than that, but

is having a hard time scoring. It's kind of tricky at times. She's had some bouts with the putter a little bit too where she should be scoring a little lower than she is. But she's definitely hitting the ball much better than she was last year."

Kettler noted that Radaz has been working on her overall game.

"She put in a lot of time in during the summer, and went to golf camp at Michigan State," he said. "If she had free time, she was on the golf course pretty much every day. She definitely is putting time in. Last year, she missed going to state by one place in regionals and had a rough day with the putter. She went right home

and started putting in the living room, trying to putt at targets and working on her confidence. Once we get that confidence to where her game is, she's going to be unstoppable."

Radaz is in her third year on the varsity team and has been Alma's low scorer each season.

"She set the goal at the beginning of the year to make it to state finals," Kettler said. "I think she has a really good shot."

"I hope to gain my confidence," Radaz said, "and hopefully start shooting lower and to where my coach and I feel I'm capable of shooting. Fundamentally, I've improved greatly. My scores have improved not as much as I had hoped. I'd definitely say this is my most successful year so far."

Alma's No 2 golfer is CJ Cleveland. "She hasn't played as good as she's capable of," Radaz said. "But she's been No. 2 all year."



Alma's Megan Radaz is having a strong season thus far for the Panthers. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Mid-Michigan Stats Leaders

Football

PASSING YARDS

- Ian Ruggles, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 1,031
- Lucas Leak, Lansing Waverly 968
- Aaron Sarkon, Linden 910
- Drew Stout, Carson City-Crystal 789
- Logan Sella, Essexville-Garber 758
- John Meyer, Ionia 734
- Spence Pnacey, Coleman 734
- Bruce Mann, Midland Dow 722
- Nick Putnam, Laingsburg 698
- Travis Vida, Clare 696
- Michael Lynn III, Lansing Catholic, 657
- Kenny Schmidt, Lansing Everett 619
- Drew Humm, Alma 614
- Will Nagel, DeWitt 613
- Jerod Fattal, Corunna 551
- Eric Birchmeier, New Lothrop 541
- Hunter Helmick, East Lansing 540

TOUCHDOWN PASSES

- Nick Putnam, Laingsburg 11
- Lucas Leak, Lansing Waverly 10
- Ian Ruggles, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 10
- Bruce Mann, Midland Dow 9
- Travis Vida, Clare 8

RUSHING YARDS

- Tariq Reed, Davison 823
- Jared Smith, Pewamo-Westphalia 736
- Gabe Kanouse, Hemlock 584
- Antonio Rush, Grand Ledge 509
- David Spedowski, Chippewa Hills 509
- Owen Walter, Corunna 507
- Andrew Humm, Alma 458
- Luke Burns, Blanchard-Montabella 456
- Cole Stipcak, Fulton-Middleton 420
- Andrew Fox, Ionia 410
- Brayden Shaw, Ithaca 404



RUSHING TOUCHDOWNS

- Tariq Reed, Davison 15
- Jared Smith, Pewamo-Westphalia 12
- Michael Lynn III, Lansing Catholic 10
- David Spedowski, Chippewa Hills 10
- Erik Birchmeier, New Lothrop 9
- Andrew Fox, Ionia 8
- Antonio Rush, Grand Ledge 8
- Gabe Kanouse, Hemlock 7
- Cole Stipcak, Fulton-Middleton 7

RECEPTIONS

- Colton Hyble, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 31
- Drew Shafer, Eaton Rapids 23
- Andy Gruss, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 22
- Preston Axel, Charlotte 18
- Jacob Monaghan, Coleman 18
- Corbin Sines, Linden 17
- Kentre Patterson, East Lansing 16
- Austin Stredney, Midland Dow 16
- Ben Vansummeren, Essexville-Garber 16



RECEIVING YARDS

- Brandon Sersaw, Clare 447
- Jadon Sutton, Lansing Waverly 381
- Preston Axel, Charlotte 371
- Bretten Stanley, Carson City-Crystal 367
- Corbin Sines, Linden 346
- Andy Gruss, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 328
- Konner Maloney, Lansing Catholic 324
- Kentre Patterson, East Lansing 322
- Ethan Quinn, Corunna 319
- Colton Hyble, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 311

TOUCHDOWN RECEPTIONS

- Brenden Sersaw, Clare 6
- Andy Gruss, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 5
- Taven Haskins, Saranac 5
- Konner Maloney, Lansing Catholic 5
- Ethan Quinn, Corunna 5
- Drew Shafer, Eaton Rapids 5

TACKLES

- Mike VanSummeren, Essexville-Garber 68
- Ryan Pummell, Clare 51
- Lucas Williams, Essexville-Garber 50
- Hunter Norris, Mt. Pleasant 48
- Daniel Smith, Carson City-Crystal 42

INTERCEPTIONS

- Jason Beckner, Coleman 3
- Jared Davis, Frankenmuth 3
- Luke Henderson, Chippewa Hills 3
- Zachary Townsend, Freeland 3
- Konner Maloney, Lansing Catholic 3
- Kentre Patterson, East Lansing 3

Volleyball

KILLS PER GAME

- Malin Smith, Lansing Waverly 10.9
- Meredith Norris, Corunna 5.5
- Kristen Huebner, Swan Valley 4.5
- Paige Porter, Lansing Christian 4.3

BLOCKS PER GAME

- Camdyn Odykirk Mt. Pleasant 1.6
- Ryleigh Beyersdorf, Hemlock 1.3
- Maya Ferland, Laingsburg 1.3
- Rachel Lefor, Greenville 1.2
- Kaylee Wilcox, Greenville 1.2

DIGS PER GAME

- Elle Lalonde, Chippewa Hills 6.5
- Hayle Flowers, Lansing Waverly 6.4
- Kelsea McConnell, Greenville 5.8
- Kaitlyn Coons, Cedar Springs 5.7
- Kyra Patterson, Lansing Waverly 5.1

ASSISTS PER GAME

- Isabella Pizzo, Lansing Waverly 13.4
- Gabie Shellenbarger, Lakewood-L. Odessa 10.4
- Hailey Delacher, Rockford 10.2
- Kennedy Franks, Laingsburg 9.8
- Lane Valley, Haslett 9.4

Cross Country

BOYS

- Noah Jacobs, Corunna 15:13
- Cole Johnson, Rockford 15:33
- Saano Murembya, Okemos 15:56
- Ben Haupt, Clare 15:57
- Paul McKinley, Okemos 15:58
- Jordan Eisengruber, Saginaw Heritage 16:03
- Christian Hubaker, Grand Ledge 16:08
- Tyler McCartney, Grand Ledge 16:09
- Evan Meyer, East Lansing 16:14
- Tyler Travis, Shepherd 16:16



GIRLS

- Olivia Theis, Lansing Catholic 17:46
- Alexis McConnell, M.P. Sacred Heart 18:02
- Anna Jensen, Midland Dow 18:09
- Amber Gall, Shepherd 18:22
- Jenna Magness, Grand Ledge 18:27
- Jasmine Harper, Clare 18:28
- Lainey Veenkant, Clare 18:33
- Alexa Keiser, Fenton 18:41
- Jaden Theis, Lansing Catholic 18:42
- Cammie McConnell, M.P. Sacred Heart 18:45

Heritage Swimmer Strives For More Speed In Distance Event

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Swimming's 500-meter freestyle event is similar to a two-mile run in track and field, and Heritage High senior Makenna McCartney constantly aims to lower her best time.

How? She works hard on her endurance, of course, but she's also aiming to become faster.

"During practice, I'm swimming hard 50s, large numbers in a row, with a goal of maintaining faster times," Makenna explained.

She hopes in November to improve on last season's 10th place finish at the Division 2 state meet, and she also is gearing



Heritage's Makenna McCartney is one of the top distance swimmers in Michigan. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

for the 200-meter free, which is more of a middle distance event.

Heritage Coach Kent Howenstine said Makenna already is a powerhouse swimmer who often comes from behind against top competition because of her top-notch endurance.

"She is in outstanding shape," Coach Howenstine said. "She gets started and she just keeps going."

Makenna was in first grade when her parents, Thomas and April McCartney, enlisted her on the Saginaw YMCA Sharks youth team, on which she won zone competitions, qualifying for national meets and a swim camp scholarship.

She was 9 years old -- an age when many

kids would choose the faster spring races -- when she decided to tackle the sacrifices and hard work of distance training.

"For some reason, I just liked it," she remembered.

She comes from athletic family, but she's the only sibling to choose swimming as a main sport. Elder brother Thomas III played baseball at Nouvel Catholic High and also at Holy Cross College, along with high school soccer. Another older brother, Tyler, opted for football at Nouvel. Younger sister Mallory (soccer, basketball) is a sophomore at Heritage.

Makenna hopes to attend law school and to make a career as a defense attorney. She also aims to continue her swim career in college, and Coach Howenstine says she will be ideally suited for longer races that stretched as far as 1,650 meters.

245-1523 or via DellJohnson1122@gmail.com. For other regional CoachUp instructors in other sports, visit coachup.com.

Everyone's Involved On Heritage High's 41-Member Swim Team

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Heritage High School's girls swim team has a strong top corps, with at least five teammates who already have qualified for the Division 2 state meet late in November.

But Coach Kent Howenstine's squad has a full legion of 41 members, the most in his career spanning four decades, and each individual receives his encouragement and attention.

"You might call it the Olympics bump," he said with a chuckle, referring to the recent Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro.

He wouldn't have it any other way. "It's a bit of a logistics issue, but it's pretty cool," he continued. "The more the merrier. Swimming is the best sport for girls, with the strength training and the endurance training."

One of the leaders is senior Makenna McCartney in the 500-meter freestyle. She is a past state qualifier and the top distance

swimmer in the Tri-City area. Makenna also joins Eliza Gorsline and sisters Ariana and Emelia Shokoohi on a state qualifying 400 freestyle relay quartet (3:43.42, a Heritage pool record).

Two other relay teams also are state qualifiers in the 200 freestyle (1:42.45, another pool record) and the 200 medley (1:55.24). On both Eliza, Ariana and Emelia are joined by Kyra Villalon.

In individual Division 2 state meet events, Heritage fans may cheer for Makenna McCartney not only in her favorite 500 event, but also in the 200 free. Ariana Shokoohi, a sophomore speedster, will have her eyes on a prize in the 50 and 100 freestyle races. Eliza Gorsline, a junior, is a butterfly specialist in the 50 and a state qualifier in the 100 butterfly. Senior Kyra Villalon's best event is the 100 breaststroke, in which she's tops in the Tri-Cities, while sophomore Emelia Shokoohi focuses in the 200 and the 100 freestyle events.

Meanwhile, Coach Howenstine keeps all 41 girls involved in practices by deploying



crowded beginner lanes. During competitive events, all have opportunities to take part in preliminary heats, opportunities not available in other sports. Many won't make the finals, but he diligently keeps track of their best times, encouraging each of them to aim for "lifetime best times." He said the full squad averages about 40 "lifetime bests" per meet. After each competition, he labors for on his home computer -- often as late as midnight -- to send updates and honors to each team member and their families.

"For their hard work, it's the least I can do. I'm just as excited when a near-beginner achieves a 'best' as I am when another makes a state qualifying time," said Howenstine,

who is best known for his championship teams -- both boys and girls -- during the 1970s and into the 1990s at Arthur Hill High, before he became athletic director. His career as an educator and coach began in 1969 upon his graduation from Ball State University, where he was a standout sprinter for the college's swim team.

After his Arthur Hill years, he came out of retirement in 2009 to coach the Heritage girls.

"As long as I'm having fun, I'll stick with it," Coach Howenstine said. "High school kids keep you invigorated and keep you feeling younger."

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Sparrow Hospital's PEAK PERFORMERS



Each Day Is A Celebration For Alma High Swimmer

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

When most student-athletes say they love to practice, they are probably fibbing just a little bit, because practice usually is a hard work grind. The actual competitions are the fun part.

But when Evelyn VanDeMark says a practice day is "another day to celebrate," she really means it, for very special reasons.

Alma High School's state champion swimmer -- along with her family and friends -- received some heart-wrenching news shortly after she achieved the Division 3 crown last November in the 500-meter freestyle. A fist-sized cyst, removed from one of her thighs, was biopsied-diagnosed as cancerous.

Imagine going from such a high to such a low. But Evelyn is defeating the cancer monster after chemo and radiation treatments. Now she's back in the Alma High pool for her senior season, and her always upbeat personality is shining more than ever.

Just don't let a teammate gripe about the rigors of practice.

"When you go through something as scary and difficult as battling cancer, you learn to appreciate life. A good day can begin simply with the sun coming out," Evelyn said.

Her advice: "Sometimes you have to play the hand that you are dealt. Try to make the best of everything. I'm thankful now that I get to go to practice. If someone complains about practice, it makes me want to shake them. When you're young, you think you are invincible. Take time for what it's worth."

FIRST SIGNS OF CANCER

The daughter of Joel and Heidi VanDeMark is the youngest of three sisters. The elder, Grace (Alma Class of '09) participated in track and tennis, while Lilly ('13) was Evelyn's immediate role model as a swimmer and a softball player.

At the state meet last fall, Evelyn

and Lilly were sharing a hotel room. Evelyn took note of a lump in her upper leg, and Lilly -- a sports medicine student at Michigan State University -- performed massage, with no results.

At the time, Evelyn dismissed this as a possible strained or torn muscle. She went to the pool without pain and won her long-distance triumph in the 500-meters -- swimming's equivalent to a long distance race -- along with seventh place in the 100-meter butterfly, good for all-state status.

"When I was standing on the podium, it (the cyst in the thigh) was just oblivious to me," Evelyn recalled. "It was crazy to me that this was happening at the same time, but I wasn't worried. What's the purpose in worrying?"

Nonetheless, she consulted her family doctor, who sent her to a specialist, who referred her to an oncologist. Most of winter passed, but then the March 2016 diagnosis: cancer.

Chemotherapy began every three weeks with three-day visits to University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. The therapy took such a toll, Evelyn would be out of it for days on end. Then, with some rest, she could perform some workouts in the Alma High pool and push the school books to maintain her 4.0 GPA. Then it would be time for more chemo, and the cycle would renew anew.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Meanwhile, last spring, her softball teammates saluted their sidelined shortstop as an honorary captain. She mustered the strength to attend their games and to provide support as often as she could, while the Panthers captured the Alma community with an underdog run to district and regional championships. (Footnote: Alma rivals, beware. Evelyn not only has returned to the pool this fall, but she's ready to break out next spring on the diamond.)

During the same May and June

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months that the softball squad was achieving its tournament trophies, Evelyn was conquering her personal conquest. After her fifth U-M Hospital chemo session, she learned that the chemo would be finished. She was winning. No more chemo, simply some follow-up radiation at St. Mary's of Michigan Medical Center in Saginaw.

Evelyn said the end-of-chemo news did not spark an immediate celebration, because she still was maxed out from the therapy, but instead a "sense of relief." But as she gradually gained strength and felt better, some day-by-day mini-parties took place. And of course Evelyn started computer texting with her pals -- we oldsters all know how kids are these days with their gadgets. But Evelyn was no longer a kid, but a young woman made wise beyond her years. The outpourings of friendship, whether by the gadgets or more often in person, brought her to tears. She told her family, "I look at things differently now."

All the while, Evelyn has aimed to divert attention from herself. She has always thanked Alma community groups who gathered for fundraising events to show support and to help to defray the medical expenses. And despite wanting to "shake" swim teammates who despair about the hardships of practice workouts, she has not been preachy. In fact, a main highlight is Evelyn keeping a sense of humor and modesty, all with dignity, all the time when her mother's first word to describe her is "brave."

'IT'S JUST HAIR'

The 17-year-old young lady's former blonde-brown tresses nowadays are just beginning to grow back from the cancer therapy. She had no false pride in posing "bald headed" during August for an excellent Gratiot County Herald feature, compiled and written by staffer Dick Hoekstra, on her recovery and her swimming comeback. She now chuckles when she describes her evolving "buzz cut." The only time she has worn hats as covers, she said, was late last winter -- not because she was embarrassed, but because it was cold outside. She has joked that when she embarks her state 500-meter title this November, she may re-shave her dome just to intimidate her opponents.

She instructs community youth swimming lessons at the Alma High pool, the same place that her parents enrolled her and Lilly first when they were kindergartners.

"I make jokes about myself," Evelyn said. "I'm teaching the swim lessons this summer, and a little boy comes up to me. A 6- or 7-year-old. He says, 'you're bald,' and I tell him 'yes.' He says, 'but you're a girl,' and I tell him, 'yes.' I thought it was hilarious."

Evelyn's summary, from her life experience: "It's just hair."

And Evelyn may just be Evelyn, with her positive outlook, but she has gained and earned wisdom that will make her strong in her choice of college studies -- nothing exact or specific yet, but something within health sciences or possibly animal sciences.

Evelyn VanDeMark is a hero to all of us, high school age or elder. And no longer will we complain about "practice" or a tough workout.



Alma's Evelyn VanDeMark won the Division 3 500-meter title a year ago. She is back this season to hopefully defend her title, even after being diagnosed with cancer shortly after winning her title a year ago. VanDeMark has said "when you go through something as scary and difficult as battling cancer, you learn to appreciate life. A good day can begin simply with the sun coming out."

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NORTHERN REPORT

Clare Football On The Rebound

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

The midway point of the football season is past and the playoffs are still in the picture for five of the eight teams in the Jack Pine Conference.

Roscommon and Clare lead the way, even though both schools missed the postseason boat last year.

The Bucks got off to a 5-0 start and were the league's only unbeaten team.

The Pioneers were 4-1 after five weeks and the only loss was to a little school called Ithaca in Week 1.

"We should have won that game, too," said Clare coach Kelly Luplow.

"We out-gained them and I felt like we out-played them."

The 31-28 loss stung, but it also showed that the Pioneers were on the right track after making some sweeping changes in the wake of last year's disappointing 5-4 finish.

They went on to win the next four, including a hard-fought 20-12 victory over Harrison in Week 4 that avenged a loss to the Hornets at the end of last season.

"That was another tough game," said Luplow. "We got up 20-0, but they are a big, strong team and we ended up having to hang on for dear life."

The sweeping changes Luplow made in response to missing the playoffs appear to be paying off.

"We realized we all had to work harder, coaches and players," Luplow

said. "We had become complacent and we were resting on our laurels and last year was a reality check."

"We changed our approach to the off-season and the kids bought into it. They are more focused and more motivated and they have been playing really well."

Expectations are high.

"We were cautious heading into the season because we are so young, but we have made great strides," Luplow said. "Now, we're planning on getting into the playoffs and we'd like to make a run."

Luplow said quarterback Travis Vida got off to a slow start, but has picked things up of late. A season-ending injury to standout receiver Brenden Sersaw left a big hole in the lineup but, as Luplow said, "good teams respond to adversity and I think we can."

Houghton Lake was also 4-1 after

five weeks. At 3-2, Harrison and Beaverton were in the hunt for six wins and an automatic bid as well.

"What I like about our league is the competition," said Luplow. "In a lot of leagues, the same one or two teams compete for the championship every year. Our league is competitive across the board. I'd say our team is pretty good, we know how tough Harrison is, Houghton Lake and Beaverton look like they have really improved and Roscommon is legit."

"It makes our league more respectable when there is something to compete for every week."

Gladwin and Meridian have been playoff regulars in recent years and, indeed, the Mustangs had the best season in school history last fall. Both teams got off to 1-4 starts, as did Farwell.



Clare's football team was 4-1 prior to press time. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Clare cross teams setting the Jack Pine pace again

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

Clare has dominated its Jack Pine Conference cross country rivals over the years and the Pioneers are off and running again this fall as both the boys and girls teams placed first when Houghton Lake hosted the league's first jamboree on Sept. 21.

"It was a great start," said Clare girls coach Kyle McKown. "We were very happy to have eight girls place in the top 14 positions and we hope to continue to improve throughout the course of the season."

The Pioneers topped the charts with just 18 points. Meridian was second with 52, followed by

Gladwin with 71, Roscommon with 94, Beaverton with 142 and Harrison with 164.

Lainey Veenkant won the race with teammate Jasmine Harper second to lead the champs. Meridian's Hannah Ordiway took third to prevent Clare from sweeping the top five spots, but the Pioneers were right behind her as Olivia Haring placed fourth, Kameron Haag fifth and Holly Pummell sixth.

Gladwin's Grace Volmering was seventh, followed by Mustangs Katie Mapes and Alexis North. Nicole Taylor was 10th for Clare, Madison Wameck 11th for Roscommon, Hannah Brown 12th for Clare,

Jaylynn Slabic 13th for Gladwin and Montana Blain 14th for Clare.

Veenkant's win was the latest in a series of strong early-season performances for the sophomore. She was second in Division 3 at Holly's Duane Raffin Festival of Races with a time of 19:45 and ninth in D-1 at the Bath Invitational. Harper was sixth in 20:46 at Holly, where Ordiway also had a good race for Meridian, taking eighth in 20:56.

Clare's boys won the jamboree with 35 points, followed closely by Beaverton with 48. Meridian was third with 59, Gladwin fourth with 95, Houghton Lake fifth with 141, Harrison sixth with 147 and Roscommon seventh with 189.

Parker Hayes won the race for the Beavers, but the Pioneers took the next two spots and three of the top six to take the team honors. Ben Haupt was second, David Good

third and Jayce Miller sixth. Kaleb Schroeder ran 12th for Clare.

Meridian's Aaron Rice was fifth with teammates Logan Murphy and Joe Miller taking eighth and ninth. Graham Govitz was seventh with Isaac Steele 13th and Elijah Hayes 14th for Beaverton.

Jack Pellerito and Feng Jing Cui went 10-11 for Gladwin.

Earlier in the season, Haupt was fifth in 16:21 at Bath and third in 17:04 at Holly. Good was ninth at Holly in 17:57 and 19th at Bath in 17:01.

Meridian hosted a meet on Sept. 7 where Hayes was third for the Beavers and Rice, Murphy and Miller went 4-5-6 for the home team.

Garver was sixth in 17:03 when Farwell visited the Chesaning Invitational.

Meridian will host the second Jack Pine jamboree of the year on Oct. 5.



Clare's Jasmine Harper continues to be a key contributor to the Pioneers' squad this season. (Gary Williams, High School Sports Scene Photo)

'Power Of Dad' Makes A Difference For Young Man In Saginaw

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

We won't see the name of Bahati Hasan in any of the Saginaw Arthur Hill High athletic record books; but with the support of one of the greatest athletes in the school's history, Bahati is making a comeback in a sport that isn't part of the high school tradition. His sport is the martial arts, and he has achieved top national and state honors in competitions that range from kick boxing to karate.

Bahati is 23, and his mentor is his elder by a generation -- Brian Pruitt, a former Hillite all-state running back and then during the early 1990s, Central Michigan University's first-ever and only All-American griddler.

Bahati also attended Arthur Hill -- or rather, he sometimes attended. He often skipped, choosing instead to hang out drinking and smoking weed. He was not a vio-

lent kid who got in fights or carried the weapons that are the source of so much tragedy among young people, the way he described the scenario was that he was hurting nobody other than himself.

"You only hold back yourself when you're not doing something positive," he explained.

His school-skipping didn't mean he was lazy. He was full of energy. He even tried out for the track team, and for wrestling. The problem was, he was academically ineligible.

As Bahati neared the close of his teen years, his mother, Alima Hasan, steered him to a year-long Job Corps program in Grand Rapids. He returned to Saginaw with a high school diploma, more mature but still feeling that something was missing. That's when he encountered Brian Pruitt, who inspirationally had overcome the disappointment of missing a pro football career because of a rare

spinal disorder. Instead of feeling sorry for himself back during the mid-1990s, Brian evolved into a motivational speaker who oversees the Power of Dad project.

In Brian's first encounters with Bahati, it soon became clear that the young man's conduct had been rooted in the lack of a father figure at home. In other words, Bahati had lacked the "Power of Dad," or at least some sort of male role model.

Bahati said, "We first met (privately) in the Thompson Middle School parking lot (two blocks from Arthur Hill). Brian helped me to understand the reasons for my past behavior. He allowed me to find myself. He helped to restore my self-confidence and self-esteem."

Brian added, "Bahati could have benefited from having a role model, the same thing that I myself or anyone would need at his age."

Bahati is going beyond self-advancement through Power of Dad. He is giving back by enlisting as a mentor. He must sacrifice to make time, because he is in his third year of employment with Flint's Eurest Services, which performs maintenance and other tasks at the community's remaining General Motors facilities. His home for martial arts training and competition preparation is Bridgeport's Che Ko Tae Kwon Do Academy, under a second mentor, martial arts Master Mark Kanaar.

Bahati has volunteered to speak and perform demonstrations for Power of Dad enrollees, and he is making arrangements with Brian to soon begin conducting youth classes in the martial arts, a prospect that Brian described as "full of potential."

"When the kids hit the bags during a workout," Bahati noted, "That's a way for them to release that excess energy."

For more information on Power of Dad, visit powerofdad.org. To view a video featuring Bahati Hasan, see Power of Dad Chronicles -- Bahati Hasan

Ex-Trojan Moves Up Into Personal Coaching

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Dell Johnson admires team sport coaches. He has filled that role himself, in youth recreation leagues. But he also sees value gained from individual coaching, because even the best school and rec league coaches must gear their practices to their entire teams.

That's why Johnson is enlisted with Boston-based CoachUp, which trains and employs local and regionally-based professional coaches and trainers across the nation, serving mostly school-age athletes but also adults. Typical sessions run for about an hour and the varying prices are in the \$35 range.

Dell's specialties are basketball (Saginaw High Class of 1995, followed by a season at Delta College), and strength and conditioning.

"Through personalized workouts, we can concentrate on the fundamen-

tal," Johnson explained. "We structure these sessions based on the individual."

He earned bachelor and master's degrees

from Northwood University, and he continues to work in real estate and property preservation. During his first year with CoachUp, he has enrolled more than 10 students, ranging in age from 4 to 48. Sessions are conducted at the location of the client or family's choice -- for example, Saginaw Valley State University, the Saginaw YMCA or Center Courts in Saginaw Township.

Dell got started after viewing an ESPN story about CoachUp, featuring pro hoops star Stephon Curry as one of the owners.

He already was a workout enthusiast -- in fact, he incorporates strength and conditioning into his basketball coaching sessions -- and so he figured a second career as a personal coach would be right up his alley.

Among his initial protégés are Zack Parman, a senior basketball (and baseball) player at Nouvel Catholic Central, and Zane Parman, a Reese High sophomore

who next month will try out for the junior varsity squad.

Their mother, Kathy Hoekstra, said one of Johnson's top qualities is the manner in which he focuses on specific needs. She explained that Zack is more experienced, outgoing and confident, while Zane is more reserved. Dell first took Zane under his wing when the younger brother felt out of place and was on the verge of quitting his Center Courts rec league team, and Kathy was so impressed that within a few months she also enrolled Zack.

"They are brothers, but they still are two different boys at different ages and skill levels," Kathy said.

"Dell also is highly creative. At one practice, he had Zane sit in a chair and shoot the ball, in order to build upper body strength."

Johnson also is a motivator. Kathy noted that Zack, at a stocky 6-foot-3, is training to jump higher and recently has come closer on dunk attempts.

"He told me, 'I've almost got this down, Mom,'" she said proudly.

Dell Johnson may be reached at (989) 245-1523 or via DellJohnson1122@gmail.com. For other regional CoachUp instructors in other sports, visit coachup.com.



Dell Johnson brings a unique form of personal training into the Saginaw area. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)

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Pictured left to right: Ben Mayne, M.D.; David Bortel, M.D.; Kent Biddinger, M.D.; John Murphy, D.O.; Mark Goethe, M.D.; Denise Stadelmaier, D.O.; Curtis Young, M.D., M.S.

The Story Of Calcium And The Role It Plays In Protecting Our Bones

The story of calcium and the role it plays in protecting our bones (www.milkmeansmore.org/health-professionals) is one most of us are probably familiar with. In fact, you might even be able to recall a parent, teacher or mentor encouraging you to drink your milk when you were younger because of its rich calcium content.

No matter how you discovered the connection, calcium and dairy go hand in hand. Yet knowing that calcium is important and that dairy foods can help you better meet your calcium goals isn't enough. You actually have to drink your milk and eat your yogurt to benefit.

Unfortunately, not everyone is incorporating the recommended amount of dairy necessary to meet their calcium needs. This is particularly true for girls between the ages of 14 and 18 who, on average, only consume about 1 1/2 cups of milk or dairy a day. This is alarming because teenagers have a crucial need to for calcium at this stage of their lives. With a higher need for calcium,

teenage girls face a double-whammy – increased calcium requirements and a tougher time incorporating calcium-rich foods due to a variety of reasons. Busy schedules, increased access to unhealthy food choices, peer pressure, and less family meals together might be just a few of those reasons over 85% of teenage girls fall short on this nutrient in particular.

As a parent, it may seem impossible to encourage your teenager to change the way they eat. Yet thanks to milk and its versatility, you may find that your teenage daughter just needs a little creative inspiration to incorporate more dairy, even just one glass day, into her busy and active life to better meet her daily needs.

To help your teenager incorporate more dairy into her everyday moments, consider the following:

Set the stage. If you want your teenagers to eat well, make sure they have easy access to nutrient-rich foods. When it comes to dairy, this means keeping yogurt,

milk and cheese readily available throughout the week. Keeping these products front and center in your refrigerator can be helpful or even consider having a few dairy-inclusive snack ideas printed out and posted on your fridge. This can help keep dairy top-of-mind when your teenager is looking for a snack in between meals or if hunger strikes after an event at school.

Plan meals together. Odds are good that your teenage daughter is beginning to express her own unique personality through the decisions she makes on a daily basis. With that independence, you may feel like there is less opportunity to impact the choices she makes; however, in reality, you can help foster positive decision making by encouraging her to make positive choices. One way to do that is to invite your teenager to help plan out what foods are available in the home. Does she have a favorite type of yogurt? Does she prefer chocolate milk to white? Giving her the ability to have input in food purchasing and planning decisions can solidify

ownership over those foods, making them much more likely to be a hit in your home. Your teenager may also have great ideas for incorporating a variety of foods into regular meals and, if you aren't already doing so, may increase the likelihood of enjoying family meals together.

Focus on what matters to her. Whether your teenager is active in sports, an honor student, or both, what they eat absolutely impacts their performance. By focusing on what matters in her life, you can begin discussing how foods like milk, cheese, and yogurt can enhance those activities and allow your teenager to perform at her optimum level. It puts some of that "healthy food" knowledge into real life terms, giving context as to why it matters.

Encourage them to conquer. Enjoying dairy-rich foods can be a part of your teenage daughter's story. You can encourage her to conquer her world with a glass of milk in hand by introducing her to Conquer with Milk - www.instagram.com/conquerwithmilk. By following us there, your teenager will have access to teen-friendly recipes, content, and inspiring insights from top female athletes that we've partnered with to share the story of milk. Check it out today – it's really a great place to start.

With these helpful tips, your teenager will be well on her way to incorporating the recommended three servings of milk, cheese or yogurt a day. And even if they don't thank you now, their bones will when they are older.

Kati Mora, MS, RD is a registered dietitian and nutrition communications expert. Kati loves highlighting the benefits of dairy and helping people discover easy ways to incorporate it into their meals and snacks.

