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**PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

Hey Sports Fans!

It was another great year at Sports Scene. Well, first a big Happy New Year's Thank You is in order for everyone that has supported us since August, 2009. Thank you for your continued support and in 2017 we will continue to bring you the best possible high school sports coverage we can.

As you know, at the beginning of every year you have a New Year's Resolution. Whether it is to get in better shape, call your mother more and to be more open to suggestions, just to name a few, almost everyone starts the year with a new set of goals.

I have to admit something as 2017 is just hours old: I'm a sports fanatic. It might be a mild addiction, but I love sports. I guess that's why I have coached for so long, not to mention the relationships you build with student-athletes and their families.

The past year was a memorable one for hundreds of athletes, coaches and fans across mid-Michigan. 2017 promises even more of the same.

As we move into January the winter sports season amps up to full speed. Boys and girls basketball offers plenty of entrainment the next couple months with teams like the East Lansing boys, Midland Dow and Saginaw Heritage girls, Pewamo-Westphalia boys, Beaverton boys, Okemos girls and Big Rapids boys among the best in the state. Plenty of outstanding individuals will also be showcasing their skills led by sensational talents like Brandon Johns of East Lansing, Layla Hartman of Okemos, Matt Beachler of Lowell, Ellie Taylor of Midland Dow, Malik Ellison of Flint Beecher and Kayla Belles of Ithaca.

The wrestling season is also heading to a sizzling finish as Lowell goes for the four-peat in Division 2 with a roster full of outstanding wrestlers. Wrestling teams at Chippewa Hills, DeWitt, Bay City Western, St. Johns and New Lothrop also have championship dreams.

Area hockey, ski, competitive cheer, gymnastics, swimming and bowling teams are also rounding into mid-season form with the heart of the season coming up.

Once the snows of winter leave the spring season promises plenty of excitement on the baseball, softball and soccer fields along with the tracks, tennis courses and golf courses.

Before you know it summer will come and another football season will be close behind. Living in Michigan, there is nothing like football season. From the area high schools, to Michigan, Michigan State, Central Michigan and all the D1, D2 and D3 schools around the state and the Detroit Lions, there is nothing like football season in Michigan.

So area high school sports fans, get out there and support the local kids and coaches who do their best to compete and grow as athletes and individuals during their high school days.

Win or lose it doesn't matter. It's fun no matter what the cost.

It's sports; it's what we do



Randy Miniard
Publisher/Owner
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SPORTS SCENE'S WRESTLING RANKINGS DIVISION 3

103 pounds:
Sean Spidle, Flint Powers
Curtis Perry, Lakeview
Jacob Porter, Perry
Jordan Rodriguez, Chesaning
Mason Spiess, Ovid-Elsie

112 pounds:
Anthony Gallagher, Perry
Mitchell Christensen, Essexville-Garber
Cole Jackson, Lakewood-Lake Odessa
Bray Hayes, Chippewa Hills
Alec Ventimiglia, Freeland

119 pounds:
Dakota Greer, Howard City
Tri-County
Stuart Massa, Hemlock

135 pounds:
Mason Breece, Birch Run
Alex Rosas, Alma
Austin Spedowski, Chippewa Hills
Austin Young, Chippewa Hills
Joseph Wilber, Montrose

152 pounds:
Kaden Ellis, Chippewa Hills
Jarrett Ferman, Alma
Kyle Schaaf, Clare

125 pounds:
Reese Wallis, Montrose
Eric Spidle, Flint Powers
Jacob Spiess, Perry
Amonte Young, Clare
Mason Hayes, Chippewa Hills

140 pounds:
Trevor Robinson, Shepherd
Trevor Biggs, Corunna
Parker Martin, Howard City
Tri-County
Quintin Lopez, Williamston

130 pounds:
Nolan Saxon, Chippewa Hills
Ben Behrenwald, Howard City Tri-County
Devin Miller, Portland
Charlie Newton, Essexville-Garber
Kyle McCreery, Alma



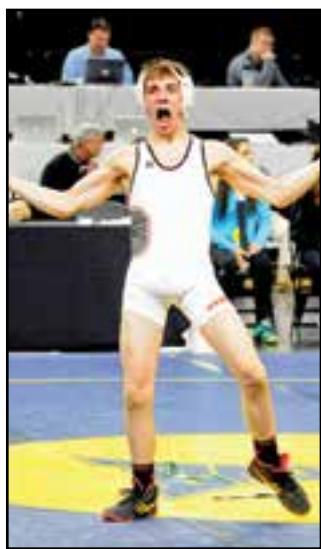
189 pounds:
Glenn Beardsley, Farwell
Brady Payne, Millington
Sage Gonzales, Alma
Ethan Orweller, Perry
Hayden Maus, Portland
Isaiah Dole, Clare

160 pounds:
David Dumond, Corunna
Trevor Patterson, Chesaning
David Spedowski, Chippewa Hills

145 pounds:
Brad Payne, Montrose
Wade Muma, Beaverton
Jake Britton, Howard City Tri-County
Zach Harris, Ovid-Elsie

171 pounds:
Hunter Gasper, Chesaning
Kolten Lauer, Perry
Hart Smalley, Clare
Mitchell Ward, Belding
Brandon Poland, Williamston

215 pounds:
Andrew Vinton, Chippewa Hills
Luke Tromp, Lakewood-Lake Odessa
Luke Cortez, Corunna
Greg Simmons, Alma
Morgan Miller, Chesaning



Perry's Anthony Gallagher returns to defend his state championship for the Ramblers this season.
(Staff Photo)

SPORTS SCENE'S WRESTLING RANKINGS DIVISION 4

103 pounds:
Carlito Lilly, Laingsburg
Logan Wolford, New Lothrop
Nolan Datema, Carson City-Crystal
Viktor Bedaine, Fowler
Modestie Hitchcock, St. Louis

112 pounds:
Brenden Spencer, Roscommon
Logan Zell, New Lothrop
Jamison Ward, Carson City-Crystal
Carson Dalrymple, Blanchard-Montabella
David Johnson, Houghton Lake

119 pounds:
Aiden Adkins, Carson City-Crystal

135 pounds:
Connor Krupp, New Lothrop
Danny Rowe, Roscommon
Isaac Howd, St. Louis
Owen Hilgendorf, Fulton-Middleton
Cody Elliott, Fowler

140 pounds:
Jayce Kuehnlein, St. Louis
Austin Wolford, New Lothrop
Jonathon Dennings, Braxton Seida, Carson City-Crystal

125 pounds:
Anthony Mack, Dansville
Ethan Crawford, Edmore-Montabella
Austin Rios, St. Louis
Austin Barnette, New Lothrop
Kohlton Blasher, Carson City-Crystal

145 pounds:
Jake Davis, St. Louis
Justin Carnahan, New Lothrop
Nash Akin, Carson City-Crystal

130 pounds:
Calvin Moten, Flint Beecher
Ryan Downs, St. Louis
Tyler Hatfield, Roscommon
Preston Brisette, Saginaw Nouvel

152 pounds:
Konor Holton, St. Louis
Zach Riley, New Lothrop
Gavin Morgan, Mt. Morris
Anthony Warchuck, Blanchard-Montabella

160 pounds:
Johnny Stid, Dansville
Hunter Sweatland, St. Charles
Austin Wendling, New Lothrop
Jonathon Dennings, Michigan Lutheran Seminary

140 pounds:
Erik Kuehnlein, St. Louis
Austin Wolford, New Lothrop
Jonathon Dennings, Braxton Seida, Carson City-Crystal

125 pounds:
Ethan Noreyko, Roscommon
Jonathan White, Saginaw Valley Lutheran

145 pounds:
Randall Blemaster, Fulton-Middleton
Ernie Diaz, St. Louis
Mason Rife, Webberville

130 pounds:
Brian Yeakey, Carson City-Crystal
Matt Sullivan, Saginaw Nouvel

189 pounds:
Alex Bauer, Michigan Lutheran Seminary

171 pounds:
Zolton Olajas, Laingsburg
Logan Hurst, Breckenridge

215 pounds:
Thomas Tiepel, Roscommon

285 pounds:
Preston Graf, Dansville
Kyle Allen, Saginaw Nouvel
Taylor Wilson, Carson City-Crystal

215 pounds:
Aaron Wine, Michigan Lutheran Seminary

215 pounds:

Bay City Western's Noah Schoenherr Aims To Sail To School's First Two-Time Individual State Title

Dan Stickratt
Sports Scene

Noah Schoenherr found a great way to get himself out of class this past spring.

He picked up ... sailing.

One of four Bay City-area teens to be selected for the inaugural Sea Scholar program, a study-abroad program put on by BaySail, a Bay City-based non-profit, the Bay City Western student left his normal surrounding in the wake for a little more than one month. Schoenherr was taken out of his comfort zone and got a chance to sail some 2,200 nautical miles aboard a 65-foot schooner boat that, over 33 days, cruised from Key West, Fla., and up into the Great Lakes and eventually to Wenonah Park near downtown Bay City.

"It was a great experience," noted Schoenherr. "I didn't know much about sailing. I had a little bit of an interest in it, but not much experience."

Schoenherr, along with the vessel's staff and three other high school-age students, learned

quite a bit while on the ship all while gaining some valuable time away from his comfort zone.

Carrying a near-3.7 grade point average with one semester to go, the Bay City Western senior is now back on soil and back into very familiar territory — the wrestling room.

The defending Division 1 130-pound state champion, who will likely wrestle 135 or 140 this season, is aiming to become the school's first two-time individual state champ. He is a perfect 14-0 on the season heading through the Holiday layoff.

"That's the goal. I guess no one in our school history has been able to win back-to-back titles," said Schoenherr, who comes from a legacy of wrestlers.

Schoenherr was also the state runner-up at 119 two years ago, so he is aiming for his third state medal come March.

"He's a great kid and he works so hard," said Bay City Western coach Isaiah Thomas. "The one thing I can say about Noah is that he is relentless."

He does not stop working out on the mat. He just wears people down ... Even in practice, he's always going a million miles a minute."

That's his style.

"I think sometimes it might be close after the first period. I always try to wear people down after that, really go after them in the second and third periods," said Schoenherr, who finished a fine 48-2 last season. "I feel like I am in great shape. I am really looking forward to some good competition coming up."

Bay City Western, ranked 10th in Division 1 with a 7-2 overall record, will be going after its eighth straight team district title this winter with a seasoned bunch. Schoenherr's brothers were also a part of that aforementioned run before graduating in 2012 and 2015, respectively.

Oldest brother Andrew graduated in 2012, while twins Tom and Chris were both state placers during their careers, with Chris winning a state title in 2015 at 145.

"I learned a lot from them," said Schoenherr, who also has a sophomore brother Victor now wrestling at 135. "And I hope my younger brother can learn some things from me."

With a 160-27 career record, Schoenherr ranks amongst the school's all-time best. He thanks his older brothers for that success — at least for toughening him up.

"We have a wrestling mat down in our basement," he said. "We spent a lot of time down there

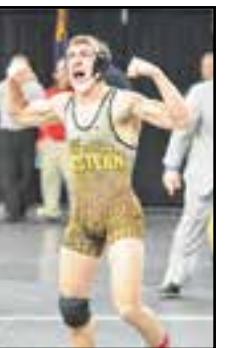
practicing and goofing around. I think it helped us all. We're a wrestling family."

Noah Schoenherr could become the most successful of all of his clan before it's all said and done.

"He could have a chance at 200 wins and I don't know if anyone has had that many at our school. The records are kind of scattered," admitted Thomas. "But one thing's for sure, he's a very talented young man."

"I'll just take it one match at time and hopefully I'll be there at the end with another title," added Schoenherr.

That would be an accomplishment to sail off into the sunset with and into Bay City Western wrestling lore.



Bay City Western's Noah Schoenherr looks to become Bay City Western's first-ever two-time state champion. (Staff Photo)

Sharks Nearly Perfect Kuhn Has St. Louis Wrestling Believing

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

Over the last couple seasons, the St. Louis wrestling team has come within inches of making it out of regionals and onto the Division 4 state finals.

New Lothrop, Hudson and Hesperia always seemed to stand in the Sharks' way. This year is no different as the same foes will be fighting for a spot in the finals.

However, this year might be the year St. Louis makes its way back into the finals under Coach Kevin Kuhn.

"Everyone knows that a lot of

things have to happen and fall into place to get one of those top spots at state," Kuhn said. "Do I feel like we have a team that can finally make that jump into state? Yes I do. Do I like where we are currently? Definitely, but there is still a lot of work to be done to make all of that happen."

However, St. Louis is well on its way to making that happen after heading into the holiday break a perfect 10-0 after defeating Shepherd in a mid-day brawl Dec. 21.

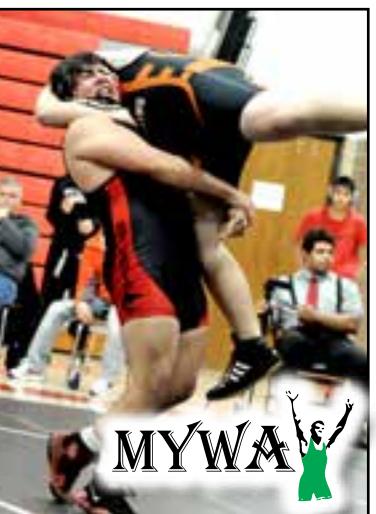
The Sharks, who opened the season ranked 10th in Division 4 according to michiganrappler.com, won nine of the 14 bouts at Shepherd's Assembly Dual en route to a 51-26

victory over the host Jays.

"It's a good way to go into break but we usually roll pretty well through December," Kuhn said after the Shepherd victory. "Last season we got out to the same kind of start, but we're still giving up too many points. Twenty-six points is too much to give up, and if we're going to reach our goal of winning a regional title it's going to come down to staying off our backs and not giving up bonus points."

St. Louis kept the momentum going during the Dec. 30 15-team Bob Threloff Invite hosted by the Sharks.

Chippewa Hills won the invite with 334.5 points followed by the Sharks with 167.5 points, while Swartz Creek was third with 158 points. Alma's 'B' team was ninth with 53 while Montabella was 10th with 47. Ithaca landed 11th with 43 while Fulton was 13th with 34 and Breckenridge was 15th with six points.



St. Louis has taken care of business on the mat this season as coach Kevin Kuhn's squad has a perfect 10-0 prior to break. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Chippewa Hills Wrestling Back For More

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Chippewa Hills' wrestling team enjoyed a taste of Division 3 state championship contention last season.

This winter, the Warriors are once again working their way to the state championship with visions of victory at the front of their minds.

Coach Nate Ethridge's Warriors were state runners-up last season. They lost in the finals 40-16 to Dundee, following a 31-27 win over Lake Fenton in a dramatic semifinal victory.

Key returners include Bray Haynes (42-13), a regional qualifier; Mason Hayes (41-14), who placed sixth in the state; Kaden Ellis (44-10), a state qualifier; Brandon Russell (25-25), a regional qualifier; Austin Spedowski (30-13), a state qualifier; Nolan

Saxton, a transfer from Lakeview, who placed fifth in the state a year ago; Austin Young (19-9), a regional qualifier; Jaycob Sharp (51-7) state runner-up; David Spedowski (42-12), who placed sixth in the state; Luke Henderson (39-17), a state qualifier; Billy Koepf (51-7), who finished sixth in the state; and Andrew Vinton (40-16), who placed seventh in the state.

Being second in the state was a significant mark for the program last season.

"Every program in the state, whether you win it or lose it, they want to be wrestling on Saturday night at team state," Ethridge said. "That means you're putting yourself in an opportunity to win a state title."

The Warriors have gotten off to an impressive start and had a big day on Dec. 17 at their home Joe Loren Memorial Invitational. They scored 345 points to finish ahead of Clinton (184.5), Tri County (176) and Traverse City West (160).

The Chippewa Hills Red team was fifth with 135, followed by Shelby (134), Berrien Springs (106), Beaverton (102), Battle Creek Pennfield (95), Lakeview (85), Farwell (52.5), Onaway (29), Chippewa Hills Blue (28) and Benzie Central (27).

"We had seven champs and five other kids in the finals, and that was just our A team," Chippewa Hills coach Nate Ethridge said. "Whatever team they were on, we placed a lot of kids."

The first places came from Austin Spedowski (135), Nolan Saxton (140), Jaycob Sharp (145), David Spedowski (160), Robert Granberry (171), Luke Henderson (189) and Billy Koepf (215).

The Joe Loren tournament usually provides tough competition for the Warriors.

"Clinton is ranked fifth in Division 4 right now," Ethridge said. "We obviously lost some teams because of the weather. It was still a great tournament."

Chippewa Hills has been ranked fourth in Division 3 since preseason.

Sharp is a junior who took second place in the state individual finals.

"It was a solid season," Sharp said. "I didn't wrestle too well at the team state tournament. But I had a pretty good individual state tournament. The kid I lost to is at Iowa State right now."

He was at 145 pounds last season and Sharp is set to be at 145 or 152 this year.

Sharp had a productive offseason.

"I didn't really wrestle but I train a lot," he said.

Sharp and other Warriors wrestlers have enjoyed working out in the new wrestling building across from the high school on the east side of M-66.

The Warriors were second in the state last season and, "only time will tell," Sharp said, if they can move one step upwards this season. "We need to train hard."



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New Lothrop Continues Legacy Of Small Powerhouse School

Dan Stickradt
Sports Scene

all.
Dating back to the school's first state championship in wrestling in 1967, the Hornets have captured 15 total state championships between Class C, Class C-D and Division 4. New Lothrop has also finished as the state runner-up four times overall (1976, 1983, 1996 and 2007).

Combining league, district, regional and state championship teams — it's quite a high number.

"It's up there," said Campbell. "I honestly don't know how many unless I look up at all of the banners on the gym wall. We've done very well in wrestling over the years. New Lothrop has done very well in a lot of sports over the years. It's a great community."

The small Class C school of 298 students in grades 9-12 is a product of legacy, hard work, community involvement and decades of blood, sweat and tears when it comes to athletics — the town's pride and joy. The tiny agricultural town, which also boasts many auto industry workers in the Saginaw and Flint region, has taken great pride in its high school facilities and teams, where wrestling has emerged as the most successful of them



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teams in Division 4 — the Hornets hope to win their fourth straight state title for the first time since winning four straight from 1984-87.

"It's very hard to repeat, but I think with the type of schedule we wrestle year-in and year-out prepares us to make a run," said Campbell. "We compete in a very good league for wrestling. We have schools like Goodrich, Montrose and Lake Fenton in there. The (Burton) schools, Durand and Corunna have all had some good wrestlers over the years. It's a great league for wrestling."

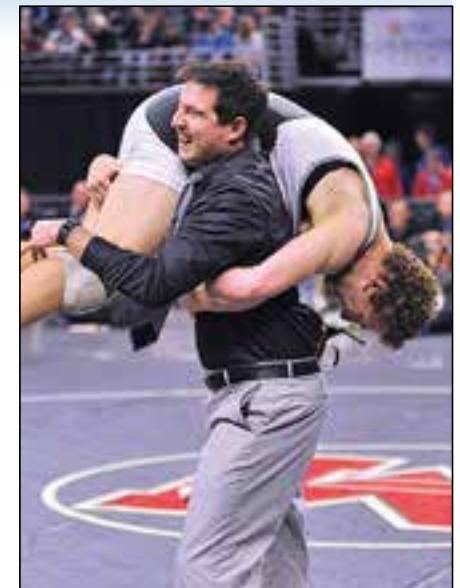
"We also will compete in a lot of very good tournaments this season, where we will go up against some of the best teams in the state from all divisions," added Campbell. "When we get to the tournament, we're very tested."

Another characteristic to the Hornets' success is the fact that the specialization poison has not invaded the athletics department.

"A lot of our guys play football in the fall and in the spring a lot of our guys run track or play baseball, too," said Campbell, who also contributed the success to a youth wrestling program, Hornets Wrestling Club, that dates back to the 1970s. "For a lot of our guys, they are not wrestling all year long and not getting burnt out. But when it's wrestling season, they are all in."

With around 20 kids on this year's roster — and a very talented group of seventh and eighth graders

New Lothrop is gearing up to defend its Division 4 championship. The Hornets have won the last three D4 titles. (Staff Photo)



Sophomore Sensation Laya Hartman Leading Okemos To Big Season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by one of the premier sophomores in the state, the Okemos girls basketball team is enjoying a strong season and has an even brighter future ahead of it.

With sophomore wing Laya Hartman leading the way, the Okemos girls opened the season winning four of its first five games. Hartman, who is averaging 20 points per game this season, has already attracted the attention of Division 1 recruiters and has over 10 Division 1 offers.

Hartman is a versatile player

that excels both on the offensive and defensive ends of the floor.

"Laya understands the game very well," Rasmussen said. "She is long and tall and has a lot of things about her game that are great. She can score from outside or catch and drive to the basket or hit the open teammate with a pass."

Hartman and her Okemos teammates are off to a strong start in the CAAC Blue, where they are challenging East Lansing for the top spot. Okemos also avenged a pair of double-digit losses against Grand Ledge last year with a nine-

point win over Grand Ledge this season.

"That was a very, very exciting win," Rasmussen said. "We have a really balanced team and it helps Laya out with a great group of teammates beside her."

Those teammates include a trio of freshmen with plenty of upside of their own. Jasmine Clerkley is a 5-foot-11 forward/center who is also being recruited by Division 1 schools. Freshmen Leah Zaleski and Maddie Sermak are a pair of freshmen point guards who have been doing an outstanding job of running the offense.

Okemos also has a strong group of seniors. Senior Skylar Westfall starts at a wing with Mackenzie McClelland a starter at forward and Oke Johnson a backup in the post.



Mo-Money Joiner Lifts Heritage To Victory In Roundball Classic

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Ohio Solon was up. Then it wasn't.

"There was no question who was going to take that last shot," Heritage coach Bonnie Delong said.

"Mo found an opening, took her shot and fortunately for us it went in and we got the victory. To come down here and get a win over a team like Solon, it's a great confidence boost for our team."

Being down 1, Heritage's

Hayley Brefka (No. 1) drives to the hoop during the Hawks victory over Solon Ohio Dec. 30 in a game played at Detroit Northwestern Collegiate Prep High School. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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things are once we get back after it."

Even through the pain Joiner came through, and a statement was made.

"It was a big win and a big reality check," Delong said. "We won't face a team as good as Solon until we see Midland Dow in a few weeks. We've got to get everybody to buy into the process, and we're going to be good. But we have a lot of things that we need to work on. We had too many missed layups and I think there were too many missed opportunities. We got the win, but there is still a lot of work to be done. We never quit. You just keep after it."

Mallory McCartney also had a solid game for Heritage scoring eight points to go along with three assists and five steals.



GIRLS BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

Season Featuring Plenty Of Outstanding Area Teams

**Butch Harmon
Sports Scene**

With a month in the books, the girls basketball season in Mid-Michigan is shaping up as a special one with a number of teams off to strong starts. Following is a look at some of the top teams in the High School Sports Scene Magazine coverage area.

CLASS A

SAGINAW HERITAGE: Led by sophomore sensation Moira Joiner, the Hawks are off and running this season as they reeled off five straight wins to open the year. A returning all-state who will be in the conversation for Miss Basketball, Joiner is a dynamic talent. Joiner is far from the only option in the Heritage lineup as Courtney McInerney (6-foot-2) is a solid presence in the post and junior guard Jessi Bicknell adds to a deep backcourt.

MIDLAND DOW: Like Heritage, Dow is another Saginaw Valley team that is loaded with talented players. Senior Ellie Taylor (5-9) is a multi-dimensional guard that can score in a variety of ways. Dow also has a premier post player in senior Kaylee Wasco (6-0). Wasco scores in a variety of ways and is a strong post presence. Dow is a deep team that can also look to sophomore Maizie Taylor and Molly Davis for points and rebounds.

EAST LANSING: Class A girls basketball in the Lansing area is loaded this year and the Trojans of East Lansing are one of the best. East Lansing reached the state quarterfinals last season and has the talent to make a deep run this year provided it can get out of a loaded district that it will host this March. Talented junior forward Jaida Hampton (6-0) leads the way for the Trojans along with talented junior forward Aazhenii Nye.

DEWITT: Despite some key graduation losses, the Panthers have re-loaded in a big way. DeWitt has started the season with six straight wins including wins over teams like East Lansing, Grand Ledge, Mason and St. Johns. The Panthers are an athletic and quick team led by Mackenzie Dawes and Jessah McManus and junior forward Grace George (5-10).

GRAND LEDGE: The Comets have a young team with plenty of potential. Senior Allyson Hunt (5-9) provides the team with a steady, veteran presence while sophomore

Heritage and East Lansing High School have picked up where each left off a year ago and both should be there to the end, competing for a Division 1 state championship in March. (Staff Photos)

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The Midland Dow girls basketball team along with Heritage will battle all season long to determine winners of the Saginaw League North Division. The Chargers are led by seniors Ellie Taylor and Kaylee Wasco. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

MICHIGAN: The Hornets feature an explosive backcourt led by junior guard Maddie Watters (5-7) who helped to lead Williamston to the regional finals last season. In the post, junior Allison Peplowski (6-2) is a force paint both on the boards and with a solid offensive game.

FREELAND: The more things change the more they remain the same in Freeland. This year's Freeland team is off to a sizzling start as it reeled off seven straight wins to open the season. Defense has been the key for the Falcons as they held their first seven opponents to less than 40 points. Lily Beyer provides Freeland with outstanding shooting while Olivia Farrell is a dominating post presence. Jessica Piper is a dynamic point guard and Alyssa Argyle has a versatile, all-around game.

ALMA: With three-time, all-conference point guard leading the way, Alma is off to a strong start this season. The Panthers are a well-rounded team with Tayla Guerrero, Breanna Howey and Olivia Apple providing the team with plenty of balance along with Northwood bound senior Kenzie Seeley.

ITHACA: Ithaca enjoyed a memorable season last winter that ended with the Yellowjackets reaching the Class C state semifinals where they fell to the eventual state champion. This season is developing into another special one for Ithaca fans as junior center Kayla Belles (6-3) is picking up where she left off last year. One of the top post players in the state, Belles and

Freeland's Jenna Gregory and Heritage seniors Courtney McInerney and Haley Brefka are leading their teams to a perfect record thus far this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

the Yellowjackets will face a bigger challenge once the state tournament rolls around as they will be playing up in Class B this season where they will play in the Alma district.

CENTRAL MONTCALM: The Green Hornets will also be at the Alma district and have the potential to be the surprise team. Central Montcalm is off to a strong start this season with strong post play from Libby Ledford and steady perimeter play from Hannah Putnam and Kenzie Rutz.



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Alma's Kenzie Seeley

Ithaca's Maddie Brock

GIRLS BASKETBALL ROUNDUP - CONTINUED -

CLASS C

LAINGSBURG: A veteran team that knows how to win, Laingsburg reeled off six straight wins to begin the season. Senior guard Kenedy Franks (5-6) is one of the premier guards in the CMAC while junior forward Alex Randall (6-0) gives the Wolfpack strong play in the paint.

PEWAMO-WESTPHALIA: The CMAC title chase is sizzling this season and the P-W girls are one reason why. The Pirates opened the season winning five of its first six games including an impressive win against Ithaca. P-W is led by the dynamic backcourt of senior Brenna Wirth and junior Emily Spitzley while senior forward Kenzie Hengesbach (5-10) provides post scoring.



The St. Louis girls basketball team has started the season 5-1 prior to the holiday break. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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Freeland Girls Star Heading For Lake Superior State

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

Most young athletes and scholars don't think much about college until they reach high school, or at least middle school.

But Freeland High basketball standout Jenna Gregory had her mind set as early as fourth grade.

Jenna started playing in third grade, and quickly discovered how much she enjoyed the sport. The next year, she asked her parents, Terry and Robyne Gregory, if they would enroll her on a summer travel team.

"They just wanted me to be happy and to enjoy what I was doing, so that I could play in college," Jenna said. Past summers have included frequent road trips to sites including Lake Orion, home of the First String girls travel team. Indeed, Jenna is on target to continue her career at Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie next winter.



Freeland's Jenna Gregory drives to the basket against Ithaca last season. Gregory will play her college basketball at Lake Superior State University. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

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offense while engaging in lock-down defense.

She's 5-foot-10, but she's not a standard frontcourt player. First, she's speedy enough to hold Freeland girls track and field records in the 400 meters and as part of all three sprint relay teams, as well as in the high jump. Second, she focuses on passing the ball and helping to guide the offense even when he means departing the low post for the perimeter and the wings.

"Playmaker,"

was her first

modest response, when she was

asked to describe her style of play.

"I try to create energy on the floor,

looking for assists, looking for

steals, and to start the fast break.

I'm not a ball hog; I don't shoot a

whole lot."

Jenna's favorite pro is Kevin Du-

rant -- versatile for his height, able

to move with speed past a bigger

defender and to post up a shorter

opponent. Her ideal highlight is

not any particular individual play,

but instead a full game in which

she is able to help lead the way on

the court.

Jenna maintains a 3.4 grade

point average, as she aims to

student forensic sciences at Lake

Superior State.

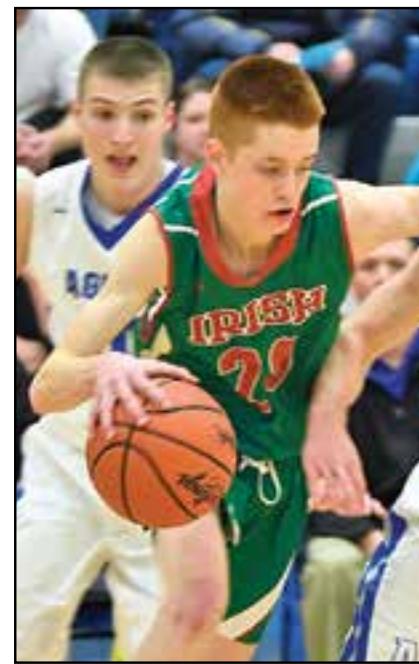
and another of the team's toughest defenders.

Speaking of defense, Coach Zolinski was proud that his squad held each of their first seven opponents below 40 points.

"We knew we had a lot of talent, but the defense has really picked up," he said. "During our preseason drills, we invested a great deal of time on it."

The early seven-game winning streak including victories over a pair of top Tri-Valley Conference rivals, Alma and Swan Valley, along with two larger schools from the Saginaw Valley League, Midland High and Bay City Western.

"We have been playing a tough schedule," Coach Zolinski said. "We've been challenged, and we like where we stand."



Sacred Heart Girls Picking Up When They Left Off A Year Ago

John Raffel Sports Scene

The season is only five games in for Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart's girls basketball team, but it looks like it's going to be another good season for the Irish.

It would be tough to beat last season when the Irish were state runners-up after losing to Pittsford in the Class D state title game. They were trying to get their second state title in the last three seasons.

Coach Damon Brown's team has started out 5-0. The Irish scored wins over Vestaburg (60-10), Morley Stanwood (57-36), Carson City-Crystal (23-17), Coleman (52-36) and Beal City (62-17).

"We have kind of a veteran

The Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart girls basketball team has jumped out to a 5-0 record prior to press time. The Lady Irish advanced to the Class D semis a year ago. Meanwhile the boys team were 1-3 before the break. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photos)

group back from last year, of course we lost Averi Gamble, who was the Class D player of the year (and is now at Central Michigan University), we have to fill that hole," Brown said. "The others have stepped up their game. I didn't think we would be undefeated at this point. But the girls have worked hard and we're getting to a different speed and tempo that they've played in the past. The girls have embraced that and have had success so far."

Top players for the Irish have included Scout Nelson and Sophia Ruggles, returning all-state players who have "upped" their game, according to their coach. They've both been averaging close to 16 points a game.

"We have to focus on getting better today," Brown said. "We only have eight players on varsity

ball," Brown said. Ruggles scored 31 against Beal City.

"Our goal is to control the tempo on both ends of the floor," Brown said. "If we can disrupt teams on what they want to do on the offensive game, they puts us in the position to be successful defensively. The girls have done a great job on putting defensive pressure on teams with full-court and half-court and has made it difficult for teams."

Returning players Hadyn Terwilliger, Megan Nowak and Grace Reetz have also been putting in impressive performances.

Brown expects to face key challenges the first week in January when the Irish have home games against Clare (4-2) and Merrill (5-1). Later in January there's a test against Saginaw Nouvel.

"We have to focus on getting better today," Brown said. "We only have eight players on varsity

so it requires everyone to step up and do their part."

Boys basketball

Sacred Heart's boys basketball team is hoping for a strong January after enduring a 1-3 record in December. The Irish defeated Coleman 57-35 but lost to Carson City Crystal 57-50, Lansing Christian 71-59 and Beal City 59-55.

It would be tough to beat last season when the Irish were state runners-up after losing to Pittsford in the Class D state title game. They were trying to get their second state title in the last three seasons.

Top players for the Irish have included Scout Nelson and Sophia Ruggles, returning all-state players who have "upped" their game, according to their coach. They've both been averaging close to 16 points a game.

"We have to focus on getting better today," Brown said. "We only have eight players on varsity

land Dow, Mount Pleasant and Saginaw Heritage.

Ingram and Ricumstrict have established themselves as the go-to players for the Oilers.

They are both excellent baseball players with Ingram having committed to Northwood and Ricumstrict to Cincinnati. Both averaged more than 16 points per game last season. Ingram broke the school's all-time single game scoring record with a 44-point postseason performance over Midland Dow. In a 61-44 victory over Bay City Central, Ingram had 26 points and Ricumstrict added 13.

His children have carried on the Huntley name in championship ways. Oldest daughter Ashley was an all-state athlete in volleyball and a standout in

basketball. She led her volleyball team to a state title, then went on to an All-American volleyball career at Ferris State University.

Huntley's oldest son, Tyler, was also a three-sport standout and played at CMU. His second daughter, Alexis, was all-state in volleyball and basketball, and led her team to state titles in both sports and was even named Sports Scene Female Athlete of the Year. She was a top player for Ferris in both volleyball and basketball.

But right now, Nic, a senior,

is in the final year of a long line of Huntleys, and is focusing on helping his team earn title success.

Nic's a senior and has kind of been around for a while," Morley Stanwood coach Bob Raven said.

"We kind of lean on him. He does a lot of things for us."

Now the youngest of the

Huntleys, Nic, has led Morley Stanwood's basketball team to a 4-0 start. He was a standout quarterback for a football team that made it to the district finals.

He was 65-of-110 in passing for

869 yards and rushed 166 times

for 679 yards. He was the most

outstanding player in the Central State Activities Association's Silver Division.

As a senior, Huntley is in his fourth season and is looking for this one to be his best.

"I'm trying to be more of

a team player and not take as

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"This team gets along better.

We're not as selfish. We're

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Being a leader, scorer, re-

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"We're playing pretty well as

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Beecher Standout Stand Up To Tall Tasks

**Scott Keyes
Sports Scene**

It is a difficult challenge for a 5-foot-8 male high school athlete to make the grade in simply even one college sports, but Flint Beecher's Malik Ellison holds tight to his dream of playing both football and basketball in college.

And why not? He was all-state in both as a junior, and is aiming to repeat the individual feats as a senior.

Still, so far, only the small colleges, and a few mid-majors, have shown interest. If that's how the story is going to go, Malik will accept any opportunity for a two-sport opportunity. His main goals are to get a solid college education and, at the same time, to enjoy his expanded athletic career.

Both of his coaches -- Courtney Hawkins in football and Mike Williams in basketball

-- say Division I coaches in either sport may be making big mistakes if they write off the 170-pound fireball because of his comparative small size.

In statewide circles, Ellison is best known for his basketball achievements, because the Beecher Bucs have won four of the past five Class C state crowns, including 2015 and 2016 with Malik running the show at the point. He even earned some national fame 10 months ago when his Steph Curry-style 30-foot buzzer-beating bomb not only knocked out Detroit Loyola at Michigan State's Breslin Center, 60-59, but also made No. 6 on ESPN's nightly Top Ten.

But Malik mainly concentrates on assists, along with some steals on the defensive end.

"Most people's game plans are to stop me, and so I get the ball to the other players," said Ellison, who is thankful to Coach

Williams. "I was more selfish when I was younger, but coach said we need to play for our teammates and for our community. He put that fire in all of us."

Malik has high hopes for more hoops success this season.

"We have a lot of pieces in place already," he said late in December during the holiday break. "We actually are developing more quickly than in past years."

His personal football highlight didn't make ESPN, but it's still a good one. Way back when he was a sophomore, he caught a long last-minute pass during the final minute in a desperation 3rd-and-20 situation, and Beecher won the Genesee Athletic Conference championship with a come-from-behind victory over Montrose Hill McCloy.

Ellison maintains a 3.2 grade point average and aims for a career in business. Meanwhile, he shows sports coaching leadership with younger brother Mehki, age 12.

"I have to teach him the ways of the Ellison family," Malik said.



Flint Beecher's Malik Ellison looks to lead the Buccaneers to their third straight Class C Championship this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

St. Louis Seniors Adapt To Coaching Changes

**Scott Keyes
Sports Scene**

Four years, four different coaches.

That's a lot for any team to endure, but for the St. Louis girls basketball team, it's something that its seniors have faced during their high school career.

To their credit, they learned to adapt and the results this season have shown their progression under new coach Gary Keyes.

Prior to the holiday break St. Louis was 5-1, with its only blemish coming in a 30-29 loss to Ithaca and star junior Kayla Belles.

"It was one of those games that could have went either way," said St. Louis senior Jaelynn Block. "A

bounce here or there we could have won that game, but overall I couldn't be prouder of how we opened the season. Starting 5-0 under another coach just shows how much of an impact Gary has made on the program in a very short period of time."

Keyes took over the Sharks' program after last year's coach Ty Warczinsky left to take over Ithaca's girls team when coach Jessie Reyburn stepped down after leading the Yellowjackets to the Class C semis a year ago.

Block feels this year's transition was a lot different than in previous seasons.

"I think everyone on the team saw it coming and were prepared for it," she said. "We all would love not to have to go through another



change, but Coach came in and prepared us the best he could. The girls on the team responded and I am happy with how we came out this season ready to play."

Senior Kamrie Fillipak agrees.

"We have battled through the changes in recent years and I think they have only made us a stronger team," Fillipak said.

Fillipak's play during the early season hasn't gone unnoticed by Keyes.

"Kamrie, she's been our leader this year," Keyes said, after the Ithaca loss. "Along with Jaelynn, they've been our heartbeat. We're going to need that going forward. We've made it to where we are by playing sound defense. That's how we've made it this far with only one

loss."

Fillipak was huge against Ithaca, scoring 14 points, while amassing five steals. Block and Fillipak's defense was also solid in the loss.

They expect the strong play to

continue as the season progresses. "We will continue to get the job done on both ends of the court," Block said. "You will always have some minor bumps in the road, but how you get through them will only make you a better team."

Seniors Ryan Cornejo (above) and Kenzie Seeley are hoping to lead their respective teams to conference titles this season. (Skip Traynor, Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photos)

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Panther Pride...



Life After Carl Alma Adapts After Losing Its Big Man To Graduation

**Scott Keyes
Sports Scene**

Alma coach J.T. Cleveland isn't going to sugarcoat it, Dylan Carl meant a lot to the Panthers during his four years at Alma.

So did all of the seniors who graduated a year ago.

Darren Olejniczak, Than Wood, Justin Doyle and Matt Leppien all played a role in Alma's recent success. In 2014-15 the Panthers went 18-5 overall and 12-2 in the Tri-Valley Central Conference. Alma followed that up with an even better season in 2015-16 as they went 19-4 and 13-0 in conference.

"Every year a team loses that much it's going to take some time to get back to where you need to be, but this year's team has fought through the adversity and learning to adapt without those guys," said Cleveland.

"We have a lot of guys back who have played minutes, but now they have to step into bigger roles for us. Take Ryan Cornejo who had 19 rebounds in our opener. Last year we looked for him to defend (the opposition's) best post player and rebound. With the graduation of (Dylan) Carl, who was the best rebounder in this program's history, he's going to have to do more."

Cleveland also mentioned other players that will play a key role in continuing the team's success this season.

"Damon Anguiano was the back-up point guard last year and now he's the starter who we're going to look towards to get the offense going," he said.

"Anthony Humm played a lot of

minutes the last two years but now we're going to need him to be a focal point, someone who scores and rebounds and gets out on the break. The only one filling the same role is probably Konner Vedrode."

One year ago Vedrode earned first-team All-TVC Central honors as he averaged 13 points, three rebounds, two assists and two steals per game. Cornejo was an All-TVC Central second teamer as he averaged seven points and seven boards.

Add the quickness of Anguiano to the equation as well as Humm's athleticism and the good overall games of Brandon Huff, CJ Thompson and Troy Bastian and you end up with a solid core to build with not to mention Brec Alward, who is also expected to play a key role coming off the bench this season for the Panthers.

"All our guys will play critical roles for us," said Cleveland. "We feel like we're super-talented team that goes at least 10 deep. We're going to have to find our way early and we're not there yet, but we're going to be."

Seeley Leads way

The Alma girls basketball team enters the season after winning back-to-back district titles.

The Panthers are led by senior Kenzie Seeley, who will continue to hoops career at Northwood University.

Seeley has continued to lead the way for Alma including dropping 26 in a 58-26 victory over rival Shepherd in early December.

Alma entered the break 4-2, with its only losses coming against Swan Valley and Freeland.

Seniors Ryan Cornejo (above) and Kenzie Seeley are hoping to lead their respective teams to conference titles this season. (Skip Traynor, Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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BOYS BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

Familiar Faces Dominating As Boys Basketball Season Gets Into High Gear

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

As 2017 gets going, the boys basketball season cranks into high gear as area teams get deep into conference play. The boys basketball season in mid-Michigan is looking strong with many familiar teams racing out to strong starts. Following is a look at some of the top boys basketball teams in the High School Sports Scene Magazine coverage area.

CLASS A

EAST LANSING: The Trojans went a perfect 20-0 during the regular season last winter. Led by junior sensation Brandon Johns, East Lansing is picking up where it left off as the Trojans have raced out to a 5-0 record in December. The Trojans have an outstanding core of seniors back on the perimeter led by Caleb Hoekstra (6-2), Westin Myles (6-4) and Deandre Robinson (6-4) that form a dynamic combination with Johns on the inside. Among the wins this season were impressive efforts against Everett, DeWitt, Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills and Jackson.

LANSING EVERETT: Everett will provide East Lansing with a major hurdle both in the league and at the district. Senior Diego Robinson (6-6) is a dynamic forward that impacts the game in a number of ways.

HOLT: The Rams are another challenger in the CAAC Blue. Led by senior post player Jaron Faulds (6-10), the Rams have a dominant big man along with some outstanding athletes on the perimeter.

DEWITT: Led by the dynamic junior duo of Tanner Reha (6-4) and Luke Hyde (6-6), the Panthers have the talent to claim the top spot in the CAAC Red. The Panthers will only get stronger as the season progresses and have shown the type of potential they have with a win over Williamston.

ST. JOHNS: The Redwings are off to a strong start this season winning four of their first five games with the lone loss coming against Holt. Seniors Ben Feldpausch (6-1) and Caleb Paksi (6-5) lead the way for the Redwings with junior Jacob Dorn (6-3) making an impact in the early going.

SAGINAW: The Trojans look to be the class of the Saginaw Valley and opened the season with four wins in five tries with the lone loss coming against Chicago Orr. Senior guard Ronquavious Southward averaged nearly a triple double in points, assists and steals last year and combines with Chaz Woods to give the Trojans a dominant backcourt. Up front, Henry Speight (6-4) is a matchup nightmare for opponents while Eddie Thigpen (6-6) is taking his game to another level.

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CLASS B

HASLETT: The Vikings may have been hit hard by graduation, but their strong start this season shows they have reloaded quickly. Senior guard Evan Block (6-2) is a steady source of offense while senior forward Avery McKinney (6-5) gives the team an impact player along the front line.

WILLIAMSTON: The Hornets have jumped out to the front of the pack in the CAAC White as they won five of their first six games. An outstanding backcourt led by senior Sy Barnett (6-1) and junior Cole Klever (6-0) has been a big key to the strong start. Up front, sophomore Sean Cobb (6-7) is a rapidly improving player who can provide points in the paint.

ITHACA: Regional champions in Class C last year, Ithaca bumps up to Class B this season. The Yellowjackets have the talent to make an impact led by the powerful one-two frontcourt punch of Levi Lehman (6-6, 255-pounds) and Isaiha Hoag (6-5, 225-pounds). The duo is a double-double machine every night out and Lehman has already recorded and 31-rebound game this season. As the perimeter players gain experience the Yellowjackets will only improve.

ALMA: Winners of two consecutive district titles, Alma returns plenty of talent to make a run at a third straight district. Senior Konner Vedorde (6-0) is a returning all-conference guard while senior forward/center Ryan Cornejo (6-4) is another all-conference player. Senior CJ Thompson (6-4) also returns up front with sophomore guard Brec Alward and senior Anthony Humm adding option in the backcourt.

BIG RAPIDS: The Cardinals advanced to the Class B state semifinals last season and with the talent on hand another deep tournament run is a strong possibility. Two-time conference player of the year Demetri Martin (6-5) leads the way. Martin recently scored his 1,000-career point and is averaging a double-double in points and rebounds. Big Rapids features a prolific front court with junior Braeden Childress (6-4) and sophomore Jake Martinson (6-4) joining Martin. In the backcourt, Martin's younger brother Dorian Martin is stepping in to run the point.

FREELAND: The Falcons opened the season with five straight wins and have their sights set on a third straight district title. Senior forward Drew Bakos (6-4) leads a balanced squad that includes Zac Anderson and Theo Galbraith.

FRANKENMUTH: The Eagles feature one of the top juniors in Mid-Michigan in Mario Whitley (6-4) who is pouring in 24.8 points per game this season. Frankenmuth also has plenty of balance with senior Grant Bonner and junior Sam Gray both averaging in double figures.

PERRY: The Ramblers are off to a strong start behind their senior duo of forward Reese Middleton (6-6) and guard Max Walasek (5-10). Look for Perry and Lansing Christian to battle it out for the top spot in the Greater Lansing Conference.

Saginaw High, Ithaca and Alma are among a few area teams that are more than capable of making runs toward conference championships in 2017. (Scott Keyes, Randy Minardi and Skip Traynor High School Sports Scene Photos)



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BOYS BASKETBALL ROUNDUP - CONTINUED -

CLASS C

FLINT BEECHER: The Bucs are going for the three-peat this season after winning the past two Class C state championships. With senior Malik Ellison (5-8) back, the Bucs have the quarterback that can lead the way on the floor. Senior Levane Blake (6-8) is an improving player with plenty of upside.

PEWAMO-WESTPHALIA: The Pirates have opened the season in overdrive. P-W won its first four games by a combined 24.75 point average. The Pirates play solid defense and can fill it up on the offensive end. Senior guard Ryan Smith returns in the backcourt along with junior Brice Thelen (6-0). The frontcourt is just as impressive led by junior Jimmy Lehman (6-4) and rapidly improving sophomore Andre Smith (6-6).

BEAVERTON: Beaverton is off to another strong start this season with its only loss in the first five games coming at Class A Midland Dow. Senior Carter Johnson is one of the premier Class C guards in the state and leads the way along with Logan Gerow and Nick Hartner.

CARSON CITY-CRYSTAL: The Eagles have a solid squad paced by senior standout Kaleb Barrett (6-3). An all-conference player, Barrett impacts the game in a variety of ways. Senior guard Avery Earls (5-10) also returns while sophomores Brody Mikula (6-5) and Drew Stout (6-2) have plenty of upside for a team that will only get better as the season rolls on.

CLASS D

FULTON-MIDDLETON: The Pirates reached the Class D state semifinals last season and have started strong this year. Senior Caleb Walden (6-2) is a well-rounded wing player who can hit from outside, crash the boards and play strong defense. Senior Zach Walden (5-9) heads up the backcourt with strong play on both ends of the floor. Junior Evan Barton (6-0) has also been making a big impact this season both on offense and defense.

LANSING CHRISTIAN: The Pilgrims are off to a fast start winning four of its first five games with the lone loss coming against Class B Lansing Sexton. Lansing Christian has as good a senior trio as any team in Class D in Preston Granger (6-4), Matt Havey (5-11) and Forest Bouyer (5-11). Havey is averaging 26.6 points per game this season while Bouyer is adding 14.8 points per game.

FOWLER: Few teams in Class D can match the one-two frontcourt combo of junior Mason Pline (6-6) and senior Jeremy Pung (6-7). Pung is a four-year varsity player while Pline is a talented junior with good athleticism.

Fulton rolled to an early season victory over Ashley. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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Super Mario Has That "Wow" Factor For Frankenmuth

Scott Keyes
Sports Scene

As a freshman, Frankenmuth's Mario Whitley burst on the local basketball scene with his dynamic dunks and his highlight reel moves to the basket.

Fast forward to his junior season, Whitley still dunks the ball like a man-child, but he has developed into a veteran leader, a teammate, not to mention his jump shot has gotten pretty scary as he has Frankenmuth thinking about a possible long post season run as March looms.

"Where do I begin when talking about Mario," said Frankenmuth coach Andrew Donovan after the Eagles defeated Heritage 75-60 Dec. 22 in a non-league victory.

"He has all the moves. He can dunk. He can pull up from three and nail it. He hits his free throws. Mario has worked on his game so much over the last year and so far he has shown he is more than a player that dunks the ball. He is the total package."

Whitley's skills were on full display against Heritage scoring 32 points in the victory. Whitley feels he is just hitting his stride in his development as a player.

"Every summer since I got to high school I have dedicated myself to be a better basketball," Whitley said. "The hard work is paying off thus far. You can never rest on the court. You have to continue to be aggressive until that whistle blows. Tonight was a team win, and it was great to have that balanced scoring as well."

Whitley wasn't the only Frankenmuth player to put up impressive numbers against Heritage. Sam Gray finished with 16, Jared Davis with 12 and Grant Bronner with 11.

The Eagles took control in the third quarter, outscoring the Hawks 24-6.

"We didn't do anything too complicated, we were just really solid," Donovan said. We held them to one shot, forced contested shots and forced some turnovers."

Frankenmuth didn't play during the holiday break and will be itching to get back on the court and pick up where it left off prior to break.

"This time off is good for us because we only had about a week and a half before our first game because the football team went deep in the playoffs," Donovan said.

"We have some time to work on fundamentals and put some new things in, so it will be a good two weeks for us."



Frankenmuth's Mario Whitley throws down a monster dunk in the Eagles victory over Heritage Dec. 22. Whitley is averaging 24.8 points a game for Frankenmuth this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Huskies, Sharks Tangle At Palace; Breckenridge Comes Away With Win

**Scott Keyes
Sports Scene**

When you come from a small town such as Breckenridge or St. Louis, being able to play on the same court as former Detroit Piston greats like Isiah Thomas, Bill Laimbeer, Chauncy Billups and Ben Wallace just to name a few is something you only dream of.

But this season, that dream became reality for both the Huskies and the Sharks on Dec. 28 as they traveled to Auburn Hills to play a game on the Pistons' home court.

Both teams gave up a home game in order to play at the Palace, but according to Breckenridge coach Jeff Ostrander, it was an experience his team will never forget.

"First, I want to think St. Louis and Coach Dan Nealy for accepting the invitation to play in this game," Ostrander said after Breckenridge defeated St. Louis 65-43 at the Palace.

"When I approached Coach Nealy about playing in the game, he didn't hesitate and wanted to be a part of it. We both knew what the experience was going to be like for our kids and we knew what kind of excitement it would create for our communities. It was something our kids will never forget."

And for Breckenridge's Jack Staley he



showed other area teams why he is considered one of the top big men in the area as he dominated the paint against the Sharks in the win.

Jack Staley scored 25 points, grabbed 11 boards and had seven blocks in the victory while senior guard Gavin Ostrander had 10 points and seven assists while Carter Staley added nine and Kenyon Story chipped in eight.

The Huskies controlled the game from the start, breaking through the Sharks' press to go up by 11 at the break. After the half, the Huskies continued to limit St. Louis' offense and extended their lead.

"I thought (we) played outstanding defense," Ostrander said, adding that Carter Staley also helped lead the Huskies to victory. "Our goal is (to hold opponents to) 10 points a quarter. We figure if we hold teams to 40 (in the game), we'll win. Defensively, I was really happy. Breaking the press, we continue to do a really good job. (There were) a lot of good things, a lot of things we did right."

Ostrander added that the players and the coaches enjoyed being able to play in the Detroit Pistons' home arena.

"It was very cool," he said. "It's a nice thing that the Palace does. We had a really nice fan base there, and so did St. Louis. It was a fun game."

Despite the loss, St. Louis did have something to cheer about, as Steven Garza scored on a last-second half court shot to end the game.

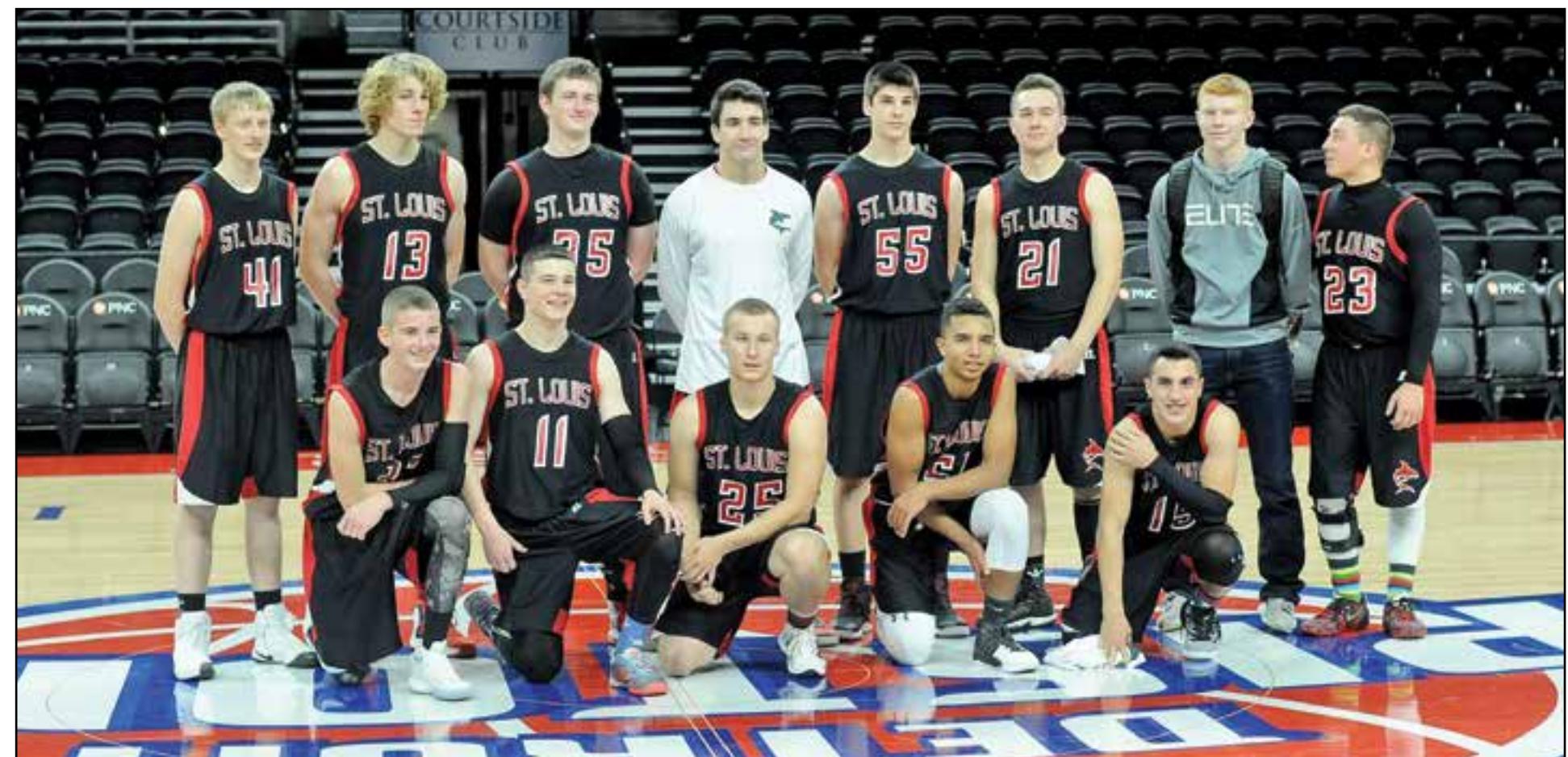


Breckenridge and St. Louis hooked up in non-conference game Dec. 28 at the Palace of Auburn Hills. Breckenridge won the game 65-43. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photos)



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Lowell Senior Matt Beachler Wrapping Up High School Career As Best In School History

David Cook Sports Scene

When it comes to selecting the best wrestler or football player in Lowell history, hours of debate would be needed. When it comes to naming the best boys basketball player in Lowell history, that question is answered in a matter of seconds.

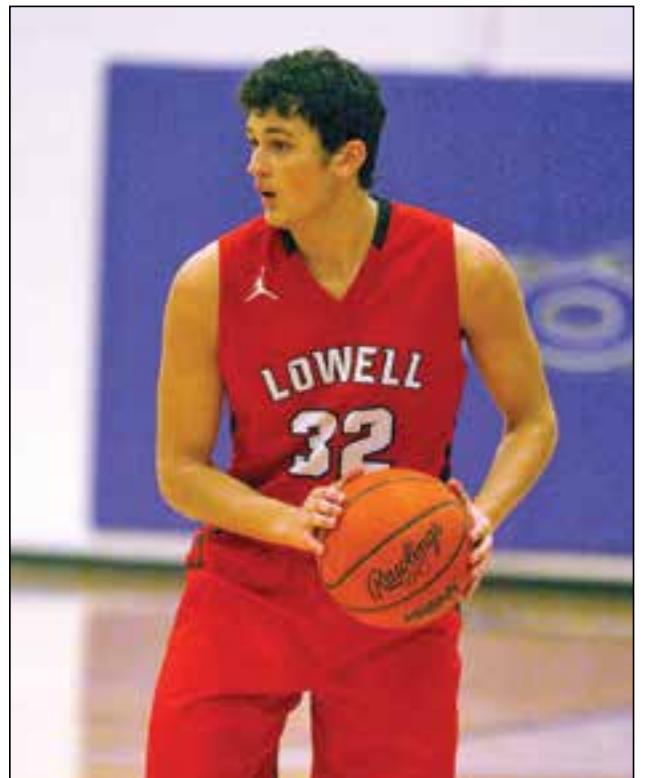
In a school known for its football and wrestling teams, it's easy to overlook Lowell boys basketball, until the past four years that is. Since he first hit the floor as a freshman when he averaged 14 points per game, Lowell senior Matt Beachler has provided plenty of excitement for Red Arrow basketball fans.

Last year as a junior, Beachler averaged 18.1 points per game as he helped lead Lowell to its first boys basketball district title in 32 years. Beachler, 6-foot-4 shooting guard, earned second-team, all-state honors in Class A last season while also scoring a perfect 4.0 grade-point average in the classroom.

Heading into this season, Beachler totaled 1,149 career points and needed just 101 points to set the new school record. Beachler also holds school records for single-game scoring (44 points), three-pointers made in a game (nine) and career three-pointers (160).

That kind of outside shooting has attracted the attention of college recruiters since his freshman season.

Lowell's Matt Beachler recently surpassed Denny DeWitt to become the Red Arrows all-time leading scorer. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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Depth-Laden East Lansing Hopes To Make Some Noise In Class A

Dan Stickradt Sports Scene

No lead is safe.

Just ask Steve Finamore, East Lansing's boys basketball coach.

His Trojans had Lansing Everett on the ropes in a Class A regional final last March before Everett went on a 15-1 run at one point late in the contest and eventually pulled out a 54-48.

The silver lining is that seven returnees, including four starters, are back in uniform and frankly remember that crushing defeat with an Elite Eight appearance on the line.

"Of course they remember. But we can only control what we do now and that is get better every day in practice and every game," said Finamore. "We have high expectations this season — no question. We have four goals and the fourth is to claim a state championship."

With 1,120 students, East Lansing is on the lower end of Class A enrollment. But the Trojans are good — ranking in the top 10 by the Detroit News, Detroit Free Press and StateChampsNetwork.

How good? Well, seven of the top eight players from last season's 23-1 campaign are back on a 12-player roster. The Trojans — 5-0 entering the Christmas break — are considered one of the state's top teams in Class A, along with Detroit U-D Jesuit, Macomb Dakota, Clarkston, Saginaw, Kalamazoo Central, Belleville, Muskegon, Detroit East English Village and Grand Rapids Christian, amongst others.

Brandon Johns and Westin Myles leads the way for the East Lansing boys basketball team in 2016-17. Johns is considered one of the top players in Michigan. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene Photo)

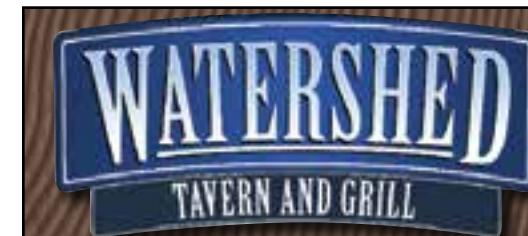


So far this season, the Trojans have posted five wins, including avenging Lansing Everett, 59-53. East Lansing also owns victories over DeWitt (56-44), Jackson (82-65), Haslett (71-31) and Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills (71-48).

The Trojans reached the Class A state semifinals back in 2007, but have had a difficult time escaping some treacherous districts in recent years.

East Lansing's best season came in 1958, the year the Trojans captured the Class B state title. The school was also Class B state runner-up way back in 1945.

"The coach of the 1958 team (Gus Ganakas) is still around and comes to games," said Finamore. "We hope to be able to accomplish the same thing. I think we have the talent to do so. We have the experience, they are hungry, and they play for one another."



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Fulton, Carson City Basketball Teams Start Off Season Strong

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

After reaching the Class D state semifinals last season, the Fulton-Middleton basketball team is rounding into shape for another big season.

With the senior tandem of Caleb and Zach Walden leading the way, the Pirates have a strong veteran core of players returning from last year's district and regional-title winning team that finished the season with a 19-7 overall record.

The Pirates are off to a solid start as they took a 2-1 record into the second "Battle on M-57" game against Carson City-Crystal in an event that raises funds for Sparrow Carson Hospital's Infusion and Chemotherapy Center.

Fulton opened the season with a 70-39 non-league win against Ashley and opened Central Michigan Athletic Conference play with a 61-43 win against Poterville.

Junior guard/forward Evan Barton came up big in the opener against Ashley with 18 points, eight steals and six rebounds.

Caleb had the hot-hand from outside as he drained five, three-point shots and finished with 16 points.

CARSON CITY-CRYSTAL GIRLS: The Carson City-Crystal girls also took a winning record into the "Battle on M-57" as they won three of their first five games.

The Carson City girls opened

the season with a big 51-33 win against Central-Montcalm. Cara Wiles led the way for the Eagles with 15 points and six steals while sophomore Kaylea Stone added 16 points including four three-pointers. The Eagles also notched a big 51-29 win against Saginaw Nouvel. Wiles led the way with 13 points, six steals and six assists while Stone added 13 points and Haleigh Hubbell turned in a double-double with 11 points and 13 rebounds.

A couple of days before the game with Carson City-Crystal, Fulton-Middleton took on Class B powerhouse Ithaca. The Pirates dropped a 45-38 decision in a game that was a defensive struggle. Caleb Walden led Fulton-Middleton with 13 points followed by

Fulton is hoping to make a return trip to the Breslin for the Class D finals. It would be the Pirates third trip in five seasons if they were to accomplish the feat. (Randy Minard, High School Sports Scene Photo)



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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON BOWLING

Division 3 Girls Bowling Title Likely Going Through Ithaca, Alma

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

There is a good possibility that the Ithaca and Alma girls bowling teams will likely square off against one another at some point this season with state tournament hopes on the line.

Ithaca, the defending Division 4 state champion made the move to Division 3 this season. Meanwhile, the Panthers are the defending Division 3 state champs with hopes of possibly repeating.

In the end Ithaca, coach Dan Macha is looking forward to the remainder of the season and the possibility of meeting a rival with everything on the line at the end of the year.

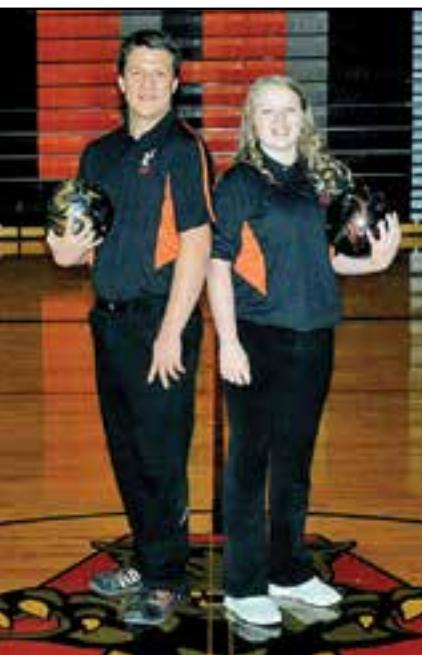
"There is no question we know a lot about Alma and they know a lot about us, and when you get down to crunch time at the

end of the year that is going to be extremely important," Macha said. "I expect both teams to be ready if it comes down to that."

However Alma got the best of Ithaca during the two teams' first meeting defeating Ithaca 25-5 at the end of December. Ithaca actually jumped out to a 4-0 lead and lost the Baker games by 1 pin, but Alma took both Peterson matches to walk away with the convincing victory.

Macha said the Yellowjackets missed a ton of single pin spares after making good shots and that in the end was the difference in the contest. Ithaca did manage to bounce back and defeat Shepherd 29-1 in the second match.

Ithaca comes into this season with high expectations as defending Division 4 champions. The Yellowjackets finished second in 2010 and were determined to bring home a title a year ago. The Yellowjackets won their



first MHSAA Finals bowling title in school history by defeating rival New Lothrop by three pins in the championship match, 1,141-1,138.

Ithaca enters this season without former senior captain Channing Gulick, who graduated.

"Everyone knows who hard it is for any team to repeat and having to do it in a Division where you aren't too familiar with is going to be hard," Macha said. "We have a great deal of talent and we know that if we want to advance far into the finals Alma will likely be a team we will have to face."

Alma enters the season with the majority of its team intact that won the title a year ago. Junior Kennie Shunk leads the way for the Panthers and has a strong supporting cast of bowlers that include Hallie Weaver, Sarah Gadde, Morgan Johnson and Aaliyah Wilson, all of which Macha anticipates to help in the Panthers success this season.

"Ken (Shunk) does such a great job with his kids," Macha said. "It's going to be really fun to see how the rest of the season plays out for sure."

NORTHERN REPORT

Jack Pine Bowling Expected To Heat Up After Break

Scott Salowich Sports Scene

There's a 7-10 split in the standings for both the girls' and boys' bowling teams at the beginning of the Jack Pine Conference season.

Among the girls, defending champion Gladwin, Beaverton, Farwell and Meridian are all tied up atop the charts at 2-0, while Clare, Harrison, Houghton Lake and Roscommon are all tied for last at 0-2.

Gladwin is led by the league's top bowler so far, Carley Vantiem who headed into the holiday break with a 178 average. Mackenzie Weston averaged 154, Bailey Weston 150.8 and Kasidy Easlick 150.

Meridian's Emma VanDongen was second to Vantiem with a nice 175 average and teammate Brittany Altman third at 163.

Beaverton is led by Victoria Ivey at 155 and Cheyenne Ficek at 154.

Kaylee Shook and Rebecca Gross are both over 130 for Farwell.

Boys Bowling

On the boys' side of things, it's more of the same with he same four teams at 2-0 and the same four at 0-2.

Harrison might be 0-2, but don't blame Lorne Bush, who leads the conference by a mile with an average of 230.

Meridian's Cole Ordway was next at 203.

Gladwin is led by Ryan Day, who was third in the league at 202, along with Austin Castillo (185) and Aaron Weston (176).

Beaverton's best so far has been Brandon Cernul with a 201, followed by Chase Castro at 196 and Hunter Brink at 181.

Farwell was led by Cody Ison at 159.

The teams will get back into the swing of things on Jan. 7 when Clare hosts the Mid-Winter Singles Classic at Gateway Lanes.



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NORTHERN REPORT**Beaverton Continues Stranglehold On Jack Pine Conference**

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

Defending champion Beaverton is the center of attention again after the first month of the new season for the Jack Pine Conference's boys' basketball teams for a couple of reasons.

The Beavers gnawed through the league with a 14-0 record last season to win the title and are already off to a 3-0 start in conference games, which includes a nice 43-37 victory at Meridian, the school that finished second in the standings last year at 11-3 and was a favorite to win it all this time.

"They were supposed to win our league, so that was a good win for us at their place," said Beaverton coach Roy Johnston. "But with our situation, everybody is going to be bigger than

us, so we are going to have to go scrap every night if we are going to win the championship again."

The coach's grandson, senior Carter Johnston, is off to a roaring start, averaging 25 points per game. He scored 31 in the win over the Mustangs.

Junior Nate Taylor joins him to give the Beavers a strong backcourt, but finding balance up and down the lineup is a high priority during the holiday break.

"We knew we'd be OK at guard with Carter and Taylor back," Roy Johnston said, "but we've got to come up with some other people who can score. Carter is running the point, working the boards and scoring all the points and we've got to start getting more than a total of 10-12 from the rest of the team."

Legend River Rouge coach Lofton Greene holds the state record for victories with 739. Johnston headed into this year in second place with 725, and seems to be headed for the history books.

He's in no hurry.

"I only want this year's team to play as well as it can play," he said. "My JV coach is keeping track of the record, not me. I'm aware of it, of course, but I plan to keep going until I'm at least 80, so I've got a few more years at least."

Beaverton opened the season with wins over Coleman, Houghton Lake and Farwell before topping Meridian, but headed into the break with a hard-fought 36-34 loss to Midland Dow.

Meridian Duo Solid

Seniors Taylor Woodcock and Brett

While working on the title defense on a micro level, Johnston also has a macro mission that is drawing attention from far and wide.

Bohn are leading the way for Meridian this year, along with sophomore Lucas Leuder, who was second team All-Conference last season as a freshman. The Mustangs opened the Jack Pine campaign with wins over Farwell and Houghton Lake and have topped Saginaw Nouvel in non-league play.

Pioneers Stay Hot

Clare is also off to a hot start, knocking off Harrison, Roscommon and Gladwin to match the Beavers at 3-0 in the league.

Junior Tyler Smith has been lighting it up for the Pioneers and had 22 in a 54-46 win over Gladwin.

This and That

The Flying G's fell to 1-2, having earlier lost to Roscommon and beaten Harrison. Junior Max Wentworth and senior Mason Fitzpatrick have been carrying the mail so far for Gladwin.



Beaverton Boys basketball

Gladwin Looks Like Team To Beat Early On In Jack Pine Girls Hoops

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

The first game of the season proved a few points to the Gladwin girls' basketball team.

The Flying G's, who went 14-0 on the way to the Jack Pine Conference championship last year, were taken to overtime by a Roscommon squad that finished sixth in the league with a 5-9 record.

Gladwin escaped with a 62-52 victory and a lesson.

they win."

Cote said her team "welcomes" the challenge, but didn't quite embrace it the way she would have preferred during the off-season.

"Participation in our summer program was not what it had been in the past," she said, "but I thought we looked pretty good once we started practicing and I thought everything was great heading up to Roscommon. We should have beaten them easily, but we ended up in a real battle in overtime. That was a huge eye-opener."

Gladwin headed into the holiday break undefeated in the Jack Pine Conference. (Submitted Photo)

"We're already trying to prepare for the district," said Cote. "We schedule

games, but I think the girls understand what we were trying to get out of them."

Among the items on Cote's Christmas wish list were getting her team to cut down turnovers and improve at the free throw line.

"Our challenge over the break is to make up for the summer practices we missed," she said. "We have to do a better job taking care of the ball and maybe now is the time to shoot those 1,000 free throws so you don't panic when you need to make one at the end of a game."

"I think the girls are going to respond," she continued. "It's a great group. We are led by a bunch of 4.0 students and there is no drama. They just have to realize that it's all in their hands and make it happen."

Seniors Peyton Rellinger, Carley Hickey and Gabby Ries have been showing the way for the Flying G's so far. Junior Kiya Lovett has been making contributions as well, along with sophomore Brooke Marsrow, who had a big game in the loss to Pine River after she "got tired of sitting on the bench," according to Cote.

Gladwin entered the holiday break undefeated in the Jack Pine Conference. (Submitted Photo)

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gains, but I think the girls understand what we were trying to get out of them."

Among the items on Cote's Christmas wish list were getting her team to cut down turnovers and improve at the free throw line.

"Our challenge over the break is to make up for the summer practices we missed," she said. "We have to do a better job taking care of the ball and maybe now is the time to shoot those 1,000 free throws so you don't panic when you need to make one at the end of a game."

"I think the girls are going to respond," she continued. "It's a great group. We are led by a bunch of 4.0 students and there is no drama. They just have to realize that it's all in their hands and make it happen."

Seniors Peyton Rellinger, Carley Hickey and Gabby Ries have been showing the way for the Flying G's so far. Junior Kiya Lovett has been making contributions as well, along with sophomore Brooke



SPORTS SCENE'S **EYE ON COMPETITIVE CHEER**

Breckenridge Aiming For Third Straight State Title

Dan Stickradt
Sports Scene

After six-year hiatus from the Division 4 girls competitive cheer state finals, Breckenridge finally made it back in 2014.

The Huskies finished fifth at state that season and followed that up with back-to-back state MHSAA championships in both 2015 and 2016.

Breckenridge has become one of the most successful small-school programs since the MHSAA became the first state governing body to launch a state tournament for the sport in 1994.

Coach Deb Gaines' Huskies have captured nine state titles overall. Aside from winning the D-4 state title in 2016, 2015 and 2007, Breckenridge also won the Class C-D state title six more times (2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006) as well as claiming the state runner-up trophy in 2003.

Pewamo-Westphalia has won eight total state crowns in the small-school divisions, while Michigan Center has claimed five championships.

Despite losing a lot to graduation, Breckenridge is looking to win its third straight Division 4 competitive cheer championship in March. (John Raffel, High School Sports Scene Photo)

Over the past decade, P-W has made the cut eight times, although the school missed the cut in 2016 and 2014 while finishing in the runner-up slot in D-4 in 2015.

Also in D-4, Merrill has qualified eight times in the past decade, including a third place finish last season and second in 2014.

In D-2, DeWitt has been a consistent qualifier, making the cut five straight times, including second in 2015 and fifth last season.

Ovid-Elsie finished third in D-3 last season after failing to qualify the previous two seasons. O-E has made it to the state finals in six of the previous nine campaigns.

In Division 3 Sanford-Meridian qualified in 2016 for the first time in over a decade, landing fourth in D-3, while Houghton Lake has also qualified three straight seasons in D-4, including fifth last March.

Lake Odessa-Lakewood is coming off back-to-back state finals appearances in D-3, landing sixth last season.

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