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555 E Downie St
Alma, MI 48801
(517) 202-1808

www.highschoolsportsscene.com

- **Publisher**
Randy Miniard
randy@highschoolsportsscene.com
517-202-1808
- **High School Liaison**
Paul Hornak
paul@highschoolsportsscene.com
989-331-1168
- **Northern Michigan Sales**
Scott Salowich
ssalowich@yahoo.com
313-408-4410
- **Sales**
Patricia A. Rempp
patriciaaremp@gmail.com
989-620-4600

Caleb Walden
waldenc24@gmail.com
989-436-3825
- **Editorial**
John Raffel, David Cook,
Dan Strickrandt, Butch Harmon,
Scott Salowich, Ben Murphy,
Nate Schneider, Scott Keyes
- **Photographers**
Chuck Prikasky, Doug Bargerstock,
Zip Widman, Russ Pierce,
Morgan Taylor, Skip Traynor,
Dana McCann, Bob Campbell,
Gary Williams, Don Goostrey,
Kim Larner, Yolanda Hayward

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

It's a great day here at High School Sports Scene Magazine! A new school year is in full swing and area athletes are turning in some amazing performances so far this fall season.

On football field across Mid-Michigan communities are coming together and supporting their local athletes in what is shaping up as a thrilling football season. The beat continues in Ithaca where the Yellowjackets continue to extend their regular-season winning streak. Down the road in Alma the young Panthers are rolling behind their talented running back Brec Alward while St. Johns junior running back Konner Near turned in a Friday night to remember with his record-breaking exploits up in Cadillac.

What about the success story of Cooper Rush! One of Mid-Michigan's very own from Charlotte, Rush provided plenty of thrills while in high school at Lansing Catholic Central, went on to a stellar career at Central Michigan University and is now a backup quarterback with America's Team, the Dallas Cowboys. It just goes to show are young athletes that with a dream and plenty of hard work anything is possible for a high school athlete from Mid-Michigan.

On the cross-country courses Mid-Michigan teams are blazing the trails with four local teams ranked number one in their respective divisions and runners like Lansing Catholic Central's Olivia Theis and Okemos' Paul McKinley posting some outstanding times.

On the links, the Midland Dow golf team is on a mission to repeat as state champions while individuals like Alma's Megan Radaz, Lauren Kim of Okemos and Abby Murray of St. Johns have been posting some outstanding rounds.

Inside this fall area volleyball teams are off to strong starts. Rockford is atop the state rankings in Class A, Lakewood-Lake Odessa is second in Class B, Saranac is seventh in Class C and Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart and Fowler are both in the top ten in Class D.

What is hard to believe is that we are entering the home stretch for the fall season. The state tennis and golf finals take place Oct. 20 and 21 and the state football playoffs begin a week after.

While the leaves are starting to turn and the days grow shorter, there still is time to get out and support you local athletes and teams. High school sports is still one of the most inexpensive forms of entertainment and a great way to connect with friends and neighbors along with supporting the local schools. So get out and show up. Who knows, you may even be watching a future Dallas Cowboy somewhere in Mid-Michigan.



Randy Miniard
Publisher/Owner
517-202-1808
randy@highschoolsportsscene.com

Kayla Belles cover photo by Christine Crumbaugh



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Area Football Teams Gearing Up For Stretch Run Of Season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

After winning the Division 7 state championship last year, what can the Pewamo-Westphalia Pirates do for an encore this season? So far, the answer is plenty.

After dropping its season opener to Monroe St. Mary, Pewamo-Westphalia has been on a roll winning four straight games. The Pirates are averaging 44.4 points per game with an offense led by senior quarterback Jimmy Lehman. The 6-foot-4 senior has turned in a lot of impressive efforts this season including a 268-yard, two-touchdown pass game against Monroe St. Mary and a 219-yard, four-touchdown pass game in a win against Saranac.

The Pirates have also been playing some outstanding defense. P-W has allowed just seven points in its four league games this year and is allowing just seven points per game all season.

The Wolfpack of Laingsburg opened Central Michigan Athletic Conference (CMAC) play with a 4-0 record. Quarterback Nick Putnam has thrown three touchdown passes in two league games this year while running back Aaron Rutilla rushed for 242 yards and two touchdowns in a win against Fowler.

Saranac is another CMAC team off to a strong start. The ground game is paying big dividends for Saranac led by Taven Haskens. Haskens rushed for 337 yards and six touchdowns in a win against Dansville. Saranac is off to a 4-1 start this season, the best start since 2011.

Okemos is another team off to a strong start. The Chieftains opened the year with four straight wins before dropping a close battle to Grand Ledge. Defense has been a big key for Okemos as the Chieftain defense turned in

shutouts in three of the first four games this season. Dominating nose guard Charles Arrington has been leading the defense along with standout linebacker Drew McGaughy, defensive end Patrick Nugent and defensive backs Jason Pridgeon and Damian Hudson. The Chieftain offense is also putting up 39.6 points per game led by Pridgeon at quarterback, McGaughy at fullback, Nugent at tight end and Dom Clerkley who has been providing game-breaking plays along with Hudson on the perimeter.

After dropping a 38-30 decision to Grand Rapids Christian in the season opener, the DeWitt Panthers have rolled to four straight wins. DeWitt placekicker Jack Horan had a game to remember in the 59-12 win over Waverly. Horan kicked eight consecutive point-after touchdowns in the game, just one shy of the state record, and added a 26-yard field goal to finish the game with 11 points.

Portland is the lone unbeaten team in CAAC White play this season. Portland quarterback Austin Allison turned in a near perfect game in a 42-7 win against Fowlerville as he completed 5-of-5 passes for 95 yards and three touchdowns.

Haslett has already matched last year's win total for the season as it won four of its first five games this season. The Vikings picked up win number four on Homecoming night with a 38-13 win against Charlotte in a game that was highlighted by an 80-yard kickoff return for a touchdown by Nate Magnusson.

After dropping its first two games of the season, Carson City-Crystal regrouped with three consecutive wins. The running game was key to the rebound as junior running back Drew Stout rushed for 238 yards and three touchdowns in a win against Ashley

and junior Noah Lopez ran for 140 yards and two scores in a win against Coleman.

Mt. Pleasant junior quarterback Jackson Ostrowsky has been putting on a passing show for Oiler fans this season. Ostrowsky passed for 199 yards and four scores against Lapeer and went 10-for-15 for 173 yards and four touchdowns against Saginaw. Ostrowsky also passed for 240 yards and a pair of scores against Midland.

Senior running back James Daniel has been providing plenty of explosive plays for Belding. In a win against Wyoming Lee Daniel rushed the ball 22 times for 2262 yards and three touchdowns and caught four passes for 144 yards and two more scores. Daniel also had a 256-yard rushing, four-touchdown effort in a win against Muskegon Orchard View.

Junior running back Brand Thelen is putting up some impressive number for the Fowler Eagles. Thelen ran for 210 yards and three touchdowns against Fulton and rushed for 191 yards and a touchdown against Parkway Christian. Thelen is averaging 6.4 yards per rush this season.

Ionia quarterback John Meyer did all he could in the Bulldogs' 35-34 overtime loss to Williamston. Meyer passed for 296 yards and three touchdowns in the overtime thriller.

Breckenridge is off to a 4-1 start and 4-0 mark in the Mid-State Athletic Conference. Junior quarterback Carter Staley has been putting up some strong numbers this season. In the win against Montabella, Staley passed for 175 yards and two touchdowns and added 35 yards rushing and two touchdowns. The Breckenridge defense has also been outstanding led by senior middle linebacker Hunter Smith who totaled 20 tackles against Montabella and senior lineman Kenyon Story who added 13 tackles and a quarterback sack.

Holt senior running back Troy Jordan put in a long night of work in the Rams' 29-27 win against Jackson. Jordan carried the ball 51 times for 263 yards rushing and four touchdowns.



Area football teams from Portland to Breckenridge have enjoyed success on the gridiron during the first half of the 2017 season. Portland upset Lansing Catholic in Week five and Breckenridge improved to 4-1 and is looking for its second consecutive playoff berth this season. (Randy Miniard, Marvin Hall and Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene photos)

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Lowell Defense Turning In Big Efforts Against High-Powered Offenses

David Cook Sports Scene

Over the years, Lowell football has produced some of the most productive offenses in the state. While the exploits of offensive stars like Gabe Dean, Keith Nichol and Ryan Stevens are well-known, the Red Arrows have also put together some impressive defenses.

One of Lowell's best defenses of all-time was the 2004 defensive unit. The 2004 defense allowed just 6.3 points per game and played a key role in Lowell's perfect 14-0 season.

This year, the Red Arrows have the makings of a defense

that is as good as any in recent Lowell history. Through the first five games of the season Lowell is allowing just 9.6 points per game. Those numbers have come against some high-caliber competition including a 14-0 shutout of Division 1 powerhouse Rockford, holding Warren De La Salle to six points and allowing 16 against an undefeated East Grand Rapids team.

The Red Arrow defense served notice of its ability in the opening game of the season when it shut down a potent De LaSalle offense. Lowell held De La Salle to 110 yards rushing and created three turnovers that paved the way for the 36-6 win

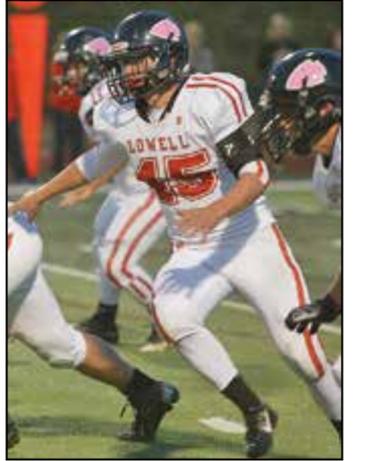
in the Prep Kickoff Classic at Wayne State University. Since losing that opener, De La Salle has reeled off four straight wins and averaged 37.8 points per game in the process.

Lowell followed that win with the shutout at Rockford. The shutout was the first suffered by Rockford since the fifth game of the 2014 season. Lowell's defense held Rockford to 114 yards rushing and held the Rockford passing game to just 83 yards through the air.

The key to Lowell's defensive success is a total-team effort on the defensive side of the football. The Red Arrows have

no dynamic all-state or blue-chip recruit leading the way, rather, the Red Arrows rely on a defense by committee approach. George Gonzales led Lowell's defense against Rockford with eight tackles and one quarterback sack while Addison Buckius added seven tackles, Austin Whaley seven tackles and two sacks, Garrett Pratt six tackles, Cody McGee five tackles and a fumble recovery and Connor Douma an interception.

While the defense has started the season strong, it has some more major tests coming up. Lowell faces a Cedar Springs team that is averaging 42.4 points per game on Sept. 29, has a showdown with an undefeated Forest Hills Central team that is averaging 44.4 points per game on Oct. 6 and faces a Forest Hills Northern team that is putting up 32 points per game on Oct. 13.



Lowell's defense is allowing just 9.6 points per game this season, including a 14-0 victory over Division 1 power Rockford earlier this season. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene photo)



Cody Carone is another in a long line of top offensive linemen to come out of Rockford High School. (Butch Harmon, High School Sports Scene photo)

Cody Carone Continuing Legacy Of Outstanding Rockford Offensive Linemen

David Cook Sports Scene

Over the years, the Rockford football team has been known for producing high-caliber offensive linemen. This season, the Rams' offensive line is anchored by another standout lineman that is looking to add his name to the list of Rockford offensive line standouts.

Senior lineman Cody Carone is in his third year as a starter along the Rockford offensive line. Carone played center his sophomore season before moving to tackle last season. This

year, the 6-foot-4, 296-pound senior anchors the Ram line from his tackle position.

Along with excellent size and strength, Carone is a versatile lineman and team leader.

"Cody can play any position on the offensive line," said Rockford coach Ralph Munger. "He takes great pride in his footwork. He is a very good run blocker and his pass protection skills have improved significantly. He is a big body but he has excellent lateral movement and agility. He is also like another coach on the field."

With his combination of

size, athleticism and technique, Carone is being looked at by many colleges. Carone has made visits to Michigan State, Central Michigan, Kent State and Miami (Ohio) and is being looked at by a number of GLIAC schools including Ferris State.

Carone was also recently selected to play in the Blue-Grey All-American Bowl for high school seniors. The game will be played at AT&T Stadium, the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys on Dec. 18.

Carone is continuing a legacy of outstanding linemen from Rockford. Rockford's most

famous offensive line graduate is Joe Staley, a Pro-Bowl offensive tackle for the San Francisco 49ers. Prior to Staley, Adam Kieft also made it to the NFL, where he played for the Cincinnati Bengals before injuries derailed his career. Parker Ehinger, who played at the University of Cincinnati, is currently on the Kansas City Chiefs while Ben Braden, a starter for the University of Michigan the last three years, is on the practice squad of the New York Jets.

"They are all very special young men," Rockford coach Ralph Munger said. "All three of them are, without question, outstanding men and football players who are playing at the highest level, and we had a fourth, Adam Kieft, who played with the Bengals before his career was cut short by injury."

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St. Johns Running Back Konner Near Turns In Record-Breaking Performance

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

The St. Johns football team was not on holiday when it made the trip north to Cadillac over Labor Day weekend. Instead, the Redwings and running back Konner Near were on a record-breaking mission.

Near, a junior running back, broke several records as he helped St. Johns claim a 56-43 win against Cadillac. Near rushed for 354 yards to break the school record set by Steven Linton. Near also scored six touchdowns to break the school record of five touchdowns in a game that was shared by former Dale Knight, an all-state player in 1949 and member of the 1952 Michigan State national championship team and Andrew Mullikin. Near

added four two-point conversions to finish the game with 44 total points breaking the previous record held by Knight.

"We really have a couple of good running backs this year," said St. Johns coach Dave Mariage. "We have Peyton Workman and our fullback Keegan Neller and they are also good backs. It just so happened that in the Cadillac game Konner had the hot hand so we kept giving the football to him. He is a very, very tough runner and is difficult to bring down. He may not have elite speed but he is fast enough when he gets in the open."

Paving the way for Near was a veteran offensive line that is another strong point of this year's team.

"Kyler McNamara is a junior and

he's our big tackle," Mariage said. "Cole Paseka is a guard we have back and Tyler Second is back at center. Those are three guys back from last year. Junior Reece Armbrustmacher is our main pulling guard. There were three blocks by Reece that clearly sprang Konner for touchdowns during the game."

St. Johns opened the season with a 2-2 record but could easily be 4-0 if not for a one-point loss to East Lansing and a four-point loss to Haslett.

"We had a couple of disappointing losses," Mariage said. "East Lansing and Haslett were a couple of close games where we made a few too many mistakes. We are going to keep working and keep getting better. I like this team. It's a good bunch of guys."



St. Johns' Konner Near carries the ball during a recent game against East Lansing. (Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene photo)

Garber's Ben VanSumeren Can Do It All

Ben Murphy Sports Scene

Throw the ball. Run the ball. Catch the ball. Essexville Garber senior Ben VanSumeren can do everything on the football field.

"I love playing all over the place, really I just like playing football," VanSumeren said. "I think it shows my versatility and that I'm able to learn all the positions and that I'm able to play them all at a pretty high level."

On offense, through the first four games of the season at quarterback, running back and wide receiver, VanSumeren was 9-of-19 passing for three touchdowns passing. He rushed 42 times for 267 yards and four touchdowns and he made 26 catches for 344 yards and three touchdowns.

He plays linebacker on defense and has 21 tackles, three for a loss and three

quarterback sacks.

He's also the team's punter and has pinned the opposing team inside the 20-yard line eight times already this year.

"He is a freak athlete and can probably play all positions on the field and be great," Garber head coach Jake Coquilard said. "He is extremely unselfish and is a team guy first. His work ethic and effort are off the charts. We have to stay on him and make sure he doesn't lift too many times during the day, he is an absolute weight room warrior."

While he's seen success at many positions, VanSumeren admits one sticks out to him as his favorite.

"I like running the option as our quarterback," he said. "I just like having the ball in my hands and being able to read the defense."

And as for his warrior-like mentality in the weight room?

"Football means a lot to me so the only way I'm going to excel and get better at it and do the things I want to do is through hard work," VanSumeren said. "We're 1-4 right now, but I'm hoping to get some momentum going and get things going."

VanSumeren also carries a 3.6 GPA. That, coupled with his football ability have attracted the attention of several colleges.

"I plan on playing in college, I'm just trying to look for a place that I can develop, a place that I'm wanted and can be used in the offense or defense the way I want to be," he said. "Right now, I'm deciding on what position (for college) and hopefully in the next month I'll be able to decide on a college. Right now, I've been recruited at a bunch of different positions, though what position a school wants me at won't be much of a factor in my decision."



Essexville Garber's Ben VanSumeren is a jack of all trades for the Dukes football team. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene photo)

Rochester Adams Football Getting Defensive

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

With how well Rochester Adams was playing defensively to date this season, the play was entirely out of character.

In a 10-10 game with the fourth quarter just underway, the Highlanders had West Bloomfield backed up to its own 1-yard line facing a third-and-all.

The consensus throughout the Highlanders coaching staff, players and home faithful was likely that they were going to force a punt and end up with great field position.

Not so fast.

Rochester Adams suffered its first loss of the season largely due to what happened next as Lakers quarterback Bryce Veasley found Tre Mosley on the left sideline. While the pass was already good

enough for a first down, Mosley would break a tackle and use his speed to race in front of the Highlanders bench all the way to the end zone for an improbable 99-yard touchdown.

"For 99 percent of the plays, our kids played great defense and shut their Division I kids down," Rochester Adams head coach Tony Patriitto said. "We had one breakdown on one play and look what happens."

Adams did end up scoring with 2:34 left on a 3-yard TD run by Chase Kareta, but after a timeout the Highlanders went for a 2-point conversion and failed as they suffered a 17-16 loss.

Even so, the game highlighted everything the Highlanders are about: a clock-chewing rushing attack and an in-your-face defense that propelled them to

four convincing wins before the heartbreaking defeat to West Bloomfield.

In week one, Adams blasted rival Rochester 38-6 for its 20th consecutive victory in the series. That was followed by a 39-8 triumph over Lake Orion and a 33-13 win against Oxford before recording perhaps its most convincing win of the season thus far, a 54-14 shellacking over Bloomfield Hills.

"I don't care who we're playing against," Patriitto said. "It doesn't matter who is on the other sideline. Our gameplan is our gameplan. Play great defense, make first downs with the run game, keep possession, take advantage of heavy lines and throw the ball on play-action. That was our game plan the first four weeks and it wasn't going to change just because of the caliber of athletes West Bloomfield has."

The Highlanders ended up rushing for 295 yards on 57 carries in the contest, with senior quarterback Zach Soldan gaining 124 on 20 carries.

Meanwhile, they showed their defensive prowess by limiting West Bloomfield to only 57 yards in the first half and continued to make life tough in the second half aside from a couple plays including the 99-yarder.

Adams finished 6-4 last year to snap a two-year playoff drought. The schedule continues to be difficult the next two weeks with Southfield and Clarkston on tap before the Highlanders wrap up the regular season versus struggling programs in Troy Athens and Stoney Creek.

"You can't be happy about this game," Patriitto added. "My big deal is get better every week and



Rochester Adams players rush the field during the start of its recent game against West Bloomfield. (Nate Schneider, High School Sports Scene photo)

we kind of took a step backwards this week in terms of execution on offense especially. I'm never happy with that, but we have another huge test next week and we've got to get better to meet that challenge."

Former LCC, CMU Standout Cooper Rush Earns Spot With Dallas Cowboys

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

Undrafted rookies in a National Football League training camp are typically viewed as extra bodies and afterthoughts.

Sure, they will be evaluated and given a fair look as everyone else on the roster does but eventually it usually leads to being cut or at the very best placed on the practice squad.

Such was the case after former Lansing Catholic Central and Central Michigan quarterback Cooper Rush went undrafted and signed with the Dallas Cowboys. He was viewed as a longshot to make the roster, with a good case scenario being that he would impress enough that maybe he would

land a gig elsewhere.

But Rush had one thing going for him and that was a Dallas quarterback situation which is thin after starter Dak Prescott. Kellen Moore entered the preseason as the backup and Rush was going to receive a fair shake at the third-string role if he excelled during his game action.

Boy, did he ever.

Rush went 38-for-51 in four preseason games with an NFL-high six touchdown passes, no interceptions and 398 yards.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones announced the day after the fourth preseason game versus the Raiders that Rush would be added to the 53-man roster.

For a brief period of time, Rush was even promoted to backup as Dallas waived Moore before bringing him back the following week ahead of the regular season opener.

Rush was inactive for the first two Dallas games this season and it will take an injury to Prescott plus ineffectiveness from Moore for him to see the field. Even then, the Cowboys could instead take the drastic measure of calling former All-Pro quarterback Tony Romo out of the TV booth and back onto the field.

Regardless, Rush making the Cowboys roster against all odds after a standout prep career at LCC and an outstanding collegiate career at CMU further cements his legacy as one of the Lansing area's current premier athletes.



Former Lansing Catholic and Central Michigan University quarterback Cooper Rush made the 53-man roster of the Dallas Cowboys. (Courtesy Photo)

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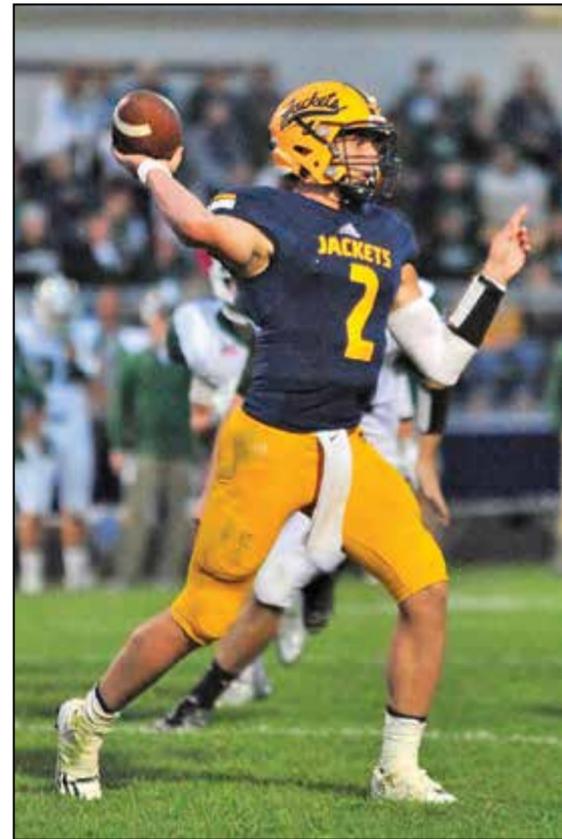
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Putting Ithaca's Historic Regular Season Football Streak Into Perspective

Nate Schneider
Sports Scene

The last time the powerhouse Ithaca High School football team lost a regular season game on Oct. 16 of 2009, Alex Niznak was the junior quarterback for the Yellowjackets.

Niznak has since become well-traveled, first going to Central Michigan University before transferring to Southeast Missouri State. After graduating from college, he has embarked on a world tour playing football in Sweden and Brazil last year before finding a new football home in Japan this season.

The fact that it was Niznak, not even in his senior year of high school yet, who was behind center when St. Charles defeated the Yellowjackets 42-28 in week eight of the regular season in 2009 shows just how long and impressive this entire thing truly is.

Since then, the program has rolled out several more standout quarterbacks including brothers Travis Smith and Jake Smith followed by current signal-caller Joey Bentley.

Ithaca won its 69th straight regular season game Friday night when it trounced Saginaw Valley Lutheran. The number 69 is also significant because it is the number of overall wins the Yellowjackets recorded in a row before losing the 2014 Division 6 state title game to Monroe St. Mary Catholic, making it the state's second-longest win streak in history.

As for the regular season win streak, it does not necessarily include all the marquee wins that the overall streak did but it is an unbelievable accomplishment nonetheless.

"When you sit back and look hard at it, it's a little bit overwhelming," Ithaca head coach Terry Hessbrook said. "That happens when you take the time to look back at it, but to be honest we don't spend a lot of time looking back at it. You're focused on your next opponent. When Friday night ends, the next week begins."

The 69-game regular season winning streak is the third-longest in MHSAA history, trailing only Hudson (81 games, 1968-77) and Montrose (80, 1988-97).

The Yellowjackets entered the season loaded with

talent, returning a bevy of players who as juniors made the jump up to Division 5. Last year ended with a 28-20 loss to Frankenmuth in the regional finals, a disappointing finish but also a good bit of experience with so many pieces returning and a likely drop back into D6.

"Right now, all our so-called experts are predicting we'll fall into Division 6," Hessbrook remarked. "But I don't know that anyone truly knows until that last weekend in October."

Through the first four games this fall, the senior Bentley is 49-for-79 for 844 yards with 10 touchdowns and four interceptions. He also has 49 carries for 470 yards and six TDs, rushing for at least 100 yards in three games.

After enjoying a huge junior season culminated by a couple massive playoff performances, Bentley has taken his game to another level this season.

"We knew going into last year we were going to be really young at key spots and Joey was going to be very important for us," Hessbrook said. "He played huge in some big games and gained some great experience from that. Since this time last year, he's added a lot of muscle. He's probably 20 pounds heavier than a year ago. He worked very hard in the offseason to improve arm strength and his mechanics. And with that frame, he is more equipped to take a lot of hits. Our quarterbacks take a beating and the added muscle can only help with that."

Senior wideouts Devin Barnes (10 catches, 294 yards, 2 TDs) and Seth Davis (14 receptions, 266 yards 2 TDs) have contributed heavily, while fellow senior wide receiver Colton Campbell has three touchdown catches.

If Ithaca is to win out during the regular season the win streak would be extended to 73 games. Among the toughest remaining tests will be Ovid-Elsie in week seven and Carrollton in week nine, both of which began the season 3-1.

"Players and coaches have done a good job of keeping their focus," Hessbrook added. "Each team you play presents a certain challenge and you have to prepare for that challenge."

Prior to press time the Ithaca football team ran its regular season winning streak to 69 games after a victory over Valley Lutheran. The Yellowjackets last regular season loss was a 42-28 defeat in week eight in 2009 against St. Charles. (Randy Miniard, Skip Traynor and Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene photos)



Breckenridge's Football Team Is Back On Track

John Raffel
Sports Scene

Breckenridge's football team is having a unique season.

The Huskies are coming off of 2016 when they had the 9-0 regular season, which had been preceded by a 0-9 mark in 2015.

The 2017 season started off with a 29-8 loss to Beaverton.

Coach Kris Robinson's team then came out strong with four straight big wins over Ashley (60-0), Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart (27-7), Montabella (48-9) and Coleman (44-6).

"We responded pretty well [after the loss to Beaverton]," Robinson said. "We're doing OK. Our athleticism across the board really helps. We're a pretty athletic team. We're starting to come together well. We improved every week. That's our goal, to get better every week and add more dimensions to what we can do. They're responding really well to it."

Curtis Staley is the team's quarterback and leader in rushing attempts.

He has 191 yards rushing in 47 attempts. He has also passed for 330 yards with three touchdowns and has five touchdowns rushing.

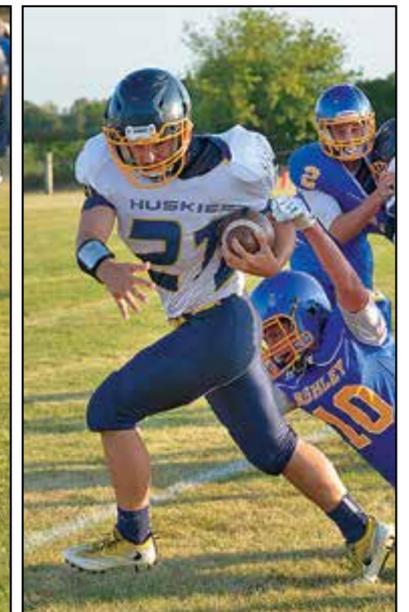
Hunter Collins has been the team's primary back with 450 yards on 44 attempts and six touchdowns. Lucas Ebright is an all-around runner. He has 11 yards rushing and three touchdowns and 188 yards receiving with three touchdowns.

Kenyon Story leads the defense in tackles. Middle linebacker Hunter Smith had 20 tackles against Montabella.

Robinson expects Carson City-Crystal in a home date to be a tough test.

The Huskies also play Merrill, Vestaburg and St. Louis to close out the regular season and are likely to be in the playoffs. Last year's 9-0 regular season was followed by a 21-6 loss in the first playoff game. Robinson and his players are hoping the loss to Beaverton will prove to be a blessing and make the team tougher for the rest of the regular season and perhaps in the postseason.

The Breckenridge football team picked up where it left off a year ago and has started the season 4-1. The Huskies only loss was so far this season was a week 1 loss to Beaverton. (Chuck Prikasky, High School Sports Scene photo)



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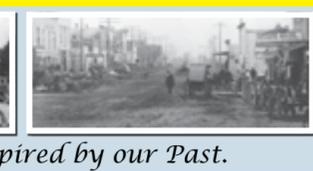
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Alma's Brec Alward A Threat To Score At Any Time For Versatile Panther Offense

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Be it offense, defense or special teams, Alma's Brec Alward is a threat to take it to the house anytime he gets his hands on the football.

A junior with plenty of speed and quickness, Alward is off to a sizzling start this season. Alward is a true triple threat for the Alma football team as a starting running back, cornerback and kick returner. Through Alma's first four games this season Alward has scored touchdowns in each area.

"Brec has great speed and is the fastest running back we've had in quite a while at Alma," said Alma coach Dan Falor. "On top of that he is very elusive and has very good vision. He makes very good cut to get out in the open and after that he is tough to catch."

Through Alma's first five games this season Alward has rushed for nearly 800 yards and 13 touchdowns. Alward. He has also returned two kicks for a touchdown and scored a defensive touchdown on an interception.

While Alward is a big part of Alma's offense, his contributions on defense are also a big part in Alma's 5-0 start to the season.

"Brec is a cornerback for us and he can run with any wide receiver out there," Falor said. "As a sophomore last year teams tended to go at him. He led the team in interceptions last season and already has a couple this year."

When teams kick the ball to the Panthers, they face a dilemma as wide receiver Brandon Huff joins



Alward as a kick returner, giving Alma a pair of home run hitters in the return game.

"Brec and Brandon are a pretty good one-two combination," Falor said. "Either one of these guys is a handful once they get their hands on the ball."

Huff is part of an Alma passing game that gives the Panthers a versatile offense. Huff has caught nine passes for 290 yards and three touchdowns. Chase Albaugh has added 12 pass receptions for 236 yards and three touchdowns.

Quarterback Drew Humm pilots an Alma offensive attack that is putting up 33.8 points per game. Through the first four games of the season Humm has passed for 590 yards and six touchdowns.

Paving the way for the offense is a rebuilt offensive line that is coming into its own.

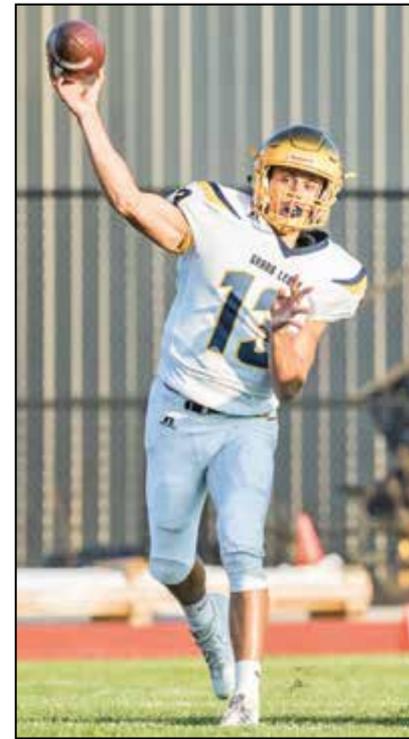
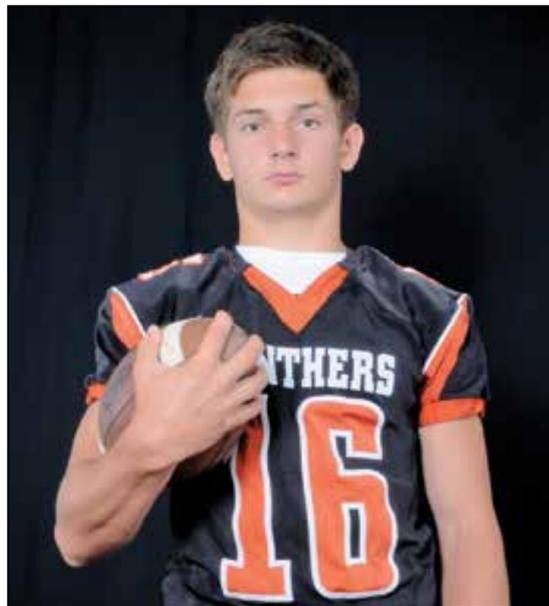
"Our offensive line has been a work in progress," Falor said. "We lost a couple of three-year starters so early on we had to make some changes. We've mixed and matched but we've figured things out and settled on a line that is improving each week."

Alma is also showing improvement on defense. Colton Schworer leads the Panther defense with 42 tackles while Huff has added 36 tackles and

an interception. Brock Milan has totaled 32 tackles and an interception while Albaugh has 29 tackles and six tackles for loss.

"We've played well as a team," Falor said. "The team has been working hard and getting better each week. We just want to keep improving as we have some tough games coming up."

Through the first five games this season Alma junior Brec Alward has rushed for nearly 800 yards and 13 touchdowns leading the way for the Panthers offense. (Randy Miniard, Scott Keyes and Don Goostrey, High School Sports Scene photos)



Nolan Bird A Model Of Consistency For Grand Ledge Football

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

Nolan Bird was only a youngster when he had a chance to meet one of college football's all-time great players - former University of Florida two-time BCS national champion and Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Tim Tebow.

Many years before Bird would emerge as a three-year starting quarterback at Grand Ledge, his father Matt took him to a Florida practice in 2009 when Tebow was a senior and putting the final touches on a remarkable career.

Matt Bird, the head coach at Grand Ledge, did not realize at the time how much his son was taking in despite being in the middle stages of elementary school.

"Sitting back and watching your little guy run around with the Heisman Trophy winner - you realize now how much he took in from some pretty amazing individuals," Coach Bird said. "It was an encounter that I didn't think he was paying attention to, but now you see much rubbed off on him in how you handle playing the position. It's about being in control of your head and persona. I didn't realize how much he was a sponge in those situations and embraced that."

Nolan Bird winds up and zips the football in the season opener against DeWitt. DeWitt went on to win the game 14-7. (Marvin Hall, High School Sports Scene Photo.)

Nolan inherited a senior-laden team in 2015 as a sophomore and showed he had the ability to be a game-changer right from the start, helping lead the way to a 12-1

record and a Division 1 state semifinals appearance where the Comets lost 48-21 to Romeo.

Bird guided Grand Ledge to 478 points as a sophomore, a school record. He began getting serious recruiting inquiries as a freshman, even receiving a phone call from former LSU offensive coordinator Cam Cameron.

With so much graduating from the 2015 roster, last year took a bit of a downturn as the Comets slipped to a still very respectable 7-3 and scored 26.1 points per contest.

"His sophomore year there was so much focus on him being comfortable," Coach Bird explained. "We had a great group of seniors around him, so we really enjoyed it. His junior year, may have made the mistake in putting too much pressure on him. Now we're taking a step back and enjoying it more again. We have a big crop of seniors again who can take on some of those leadership responsibilities so we don't have to put so much on Nolan."

Coach Bird is not taking anything for granted in having the chance to coach his son at the prep level for several years.

"The best part is that I get to play catch

with my son every day at practice," Matt Bird beamed. "How cool is that as a dad? That's been a really special thing we've really enjoyed in having all this extra time to spend around each other."

Grand Ledge is 4-1 this year after fending off visiting previously unbeaten Okemos by a count of 28-20 on September 23. Bird threw the go-ahead touchdown pass a 13-yard strike to tight end Matt Vary midway through the third quarter.

The Comets have also posted wins this season against Hudsonville (41-14), East Lansing (48-13) and Lansing Sexton (27-14) while suffering their lone defeat versus always-tough DeWitt (14-7).

Nolan, listed at 6-foot-2 and 175 pounds, has received moderate interest from Michigan and Michigan State along with out-of-state schools such as LSU and Pittsburgh. But he also has considerable interest from Division II powerhouse Ferris State and plenty of other programs.

As of now, he has not made a decision as to where he will attend school next year.

"He hates it," Coach Bird added. "He says, 'This is ridiculous.' And I tell him, 'It's just business, bud.'"

Whichever college football program lands Nolan Bird will get a player who has shown to be a proven winner in his high school career and has the ability with his arm plus overall athletic ability to succeed at the next level.

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Area Teams To Watch

Pringle Takes On New Challenge With Owosso Football

John Raffel Sports Scene

Devin Pringle is taking on another rebuilding project as a football coach. The current one could be his most challenging.

Pringle, since the late 1990s, has been coaching area football with two separate stints at Carson City-Crystal and one at Lansing Waverly.

Now it's time for another rebuilding project at Owosso.

"Up until this last school year, I was head football coach (at CC-Crystal) for three years again," Pringle said. "I was running the alternative ed. program and was a secondary administrator, coaching football and baseball. Last year,

they asked me to take over the athletic department when Larry Farmer moved on. So I had to step down from coaching football and baseball and was doing the AD's job."

But after stepping away from coaching again, Pringle determined it wasn't where he wanted to be.

"I wanted to be back out working with kids on a daily basis," Pringle said. "I took the AD's job because that's what the district asked me to do for the good of the organization."

The opportunity came up to coach football and teach physical education, weight training and strength conditioning at Owosso. But the football program at Owosso has been struggling.

"When we took over, it was a 27-game varsity losing streak," Pringle said. "They did not have a JV team last year. They didn't have enough bodies to have a JV team. We were a Class A school that had a freshman team, a varsity team and was on a 27-game losing streak. We had 21 returning kids come to the program. There were 11 seniors coming back and 19 juniors. We had 21 kids coming to the varsity."

In 10 years, Owosso has had just two wins against teams with winning records.

"We're kind of starting back to where we did years ago at Carson and Waverly," Pringle said.

The Trojans have started out 0-5, losing games by 31

points or more.

"We have 35 kids on the varsity, and have a healthy JV team with 22 kids and a healthy freshman team with 22 kids," Pringle said. "So we're fielding three teams. We have our youth program for the first time coming around. We have them running some of our base sets and will support that program to be where we want to be."

"I wish there was a magic switch you could flip to be instantly competitive. I'm pleased with our kids' effort and desire and their willingness to be competitive. I'm confident we can move this thing in the next year or two to be competitive."



Devin Pringle has been a staple in the football coaching community for many years. He brings his talents to Owosso after coaching most recently at Carson-City-Crystal. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene photo)

New Lothrop Off To Flying Start Once Again

John Raffel Sports Scene

Here they go again.

The New Lothrop Hornets, as expected, are making a run for another banner football season. They have started out 5-0. They have won 10 games for more for the last seven seasons.

The Hornets have stormed through the first five games after a close call in a 26-22 win over Lake Fenton to open the season. The Hornets are expecting challenges in their final four regular season games including from the likes of Detroit Vouyaguer (4-1), Flint Beecher and Saginaw Michigan Lutheran Seminary which handed New Lothrop its only regular season loss in 2016 by a 24-20 score in week nine.

Clint Galvas is coaching the team for his ninth season.

"We're pleased with where we're at," he said. "We just have to take steps forward to improve. We continue to do that. It will be one-game-at-a-time obviously. Lutheran Seminary is ranked on our schedule as one we're looking forward to."

Senior captain Mason Ruddy, free safety-running back, is in his third varsity season and has been a leader of sorts.

Sophomore quarterback Avery Moore has been having a strong season for the Hornets. In a 56-28 shootout win over

Flint Hamady, he ran for six touchdowns and passed for another to lead a New Lothrop team that totaled 537 yards.



Head coach Clint Galvas

"Our offensive line, as a whole, has been playing pretty well together. There's only one senior on the offensive line and the rest are juniors," Galvas said. "With those four juniors, three played varsity last year, and they're getting more experience. That's contributed to our success.

Defensively, we've been doing a pretty good job. This week we probably gave up more points

than we'd like against a Hamady team. But when you play teams with good athletes and give them some space, that's what happens."

Cross Country

Freshman Carson Hersch has been having a strong season for New Lothrop's cross country team. His personal record was an 18:01.6 at the Genesee Invitational. He also had an 18:31.7 at the 33rd annual Chesaning Invitational.

For the New Lothrop girls, it's Courtney Krupp's senior season and she's having a good one. In three of her first five meets she was first at the Carrollton Invitational, the Genesee Invitational and the GAC Jamboree No. 1 meet. She was second at the 33rd annual Chesaning Invitational. Her personal best was 18:53.8 at the Genesee Invitational.



Clint Galvas has New Lothrop thinking playoffs once again as the Hornets are currently 5-0 prior to press time. (File Photo)



Sparrow Carson Hospital Presents Fall Stat Leaders

FOOTBALL

PASSING YARDS

- Josh Czarnota, Fenton 1,144
- Charles Garrett, Bridgeport 1,151
- John Meyer, Ionia 1,079
- Hunter Bridenbaugh, Essexville-Garber 1,034
- Zach Sawyer, Corunna 1,010
- George Waterhouse, Linden 975
- Joey Bentley, Ithaca 931
- Jackson Ostrawsky, Mt. Pleasant 862
- Nolan Bird, Grand Ledge 820
- Drew Humm, Alma 799
- Jackson Barnes, Lansing Sexton 778
- Connor Charamella, East Lansing 774
- Jimmy Lehman, Pewamo-Westphalia 774
- Blake Gatfield, DeWitt 764
- Geoff Knaggs, Fowlerville 751
- Michael Lynn III, Lansing Catholic 744
- Jackson Pollak, Williamston 718
- Kaden Kelly, Clare 675
- Cade Schafer, Chippewa Hills 640
- Seth Stratton, Vestaburg 589
- Jericho Herblet, Ovid-Elsie 573
- Hyrum Tibbitts, Haslett 529

RECEIVING YARDS

- Chase Setzke, Fenton 683
- Ben VanSumeren, Essexville-Garber 536
- Kari Brooks, Lansing Sexton 473
- Blake Underwood, East Lansing 463
- SirQuarius Ball, Bridgeport 442
- Noah Johnston, Vestaburg 435
- Seth Mackenzie, Chippewa Hills 409
- Spencer MacGregor, Mt. Pleasant 398
- Matt Grand-Girard, Ionia 393
- Brandon Huff, Alma 384
- Corbin Sines, Linden 370
- Noah Koenigsnecht, DeWitt 368
- Austin Schemenauer, Corunna 340
- Jaden Thelen, Haslett 336
- Devin Barnes, Ithaca 299
- Neal Prince, Lansing Sexton 276
- Seth Davis, Ithaca 266
- Drew Bowen, Williamston 250
- Mic Munderloh, St. Louis 247
- Andrew McFadden, Fowlerville 244

RUSHING TOUCHDOWNS

- Taven Haskins, Saranac 14
- Drew Stout, Carson City-Crystal 11
- Parker Smith, Lakewood-Lake Odessa 11
- Konner Near, St. Johns 11
- Brec Alward, Alma 10
- Troy Jordan, Holt 9
- Korbin Knapik, Hemlock 9
- Josh Czarnota, Fenton 8
- Dom Ghiardi, Charlotte 8
- Tariq Reid, Davison 8
- Jacob Umholtz, Grand Ledge 8
- Joey Bentley, Ithaca 7
- David Kruse, Lowell 7
- Carter Lowe, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 7
- Garret Metiva, Freeland 7
- Zach Sawyer, Corunna 7

TOUCHDOWN PASSES

- Josh Czarnota, Fenton 16
- Zach Sawyer, Corunna 15
- John Meyer, Ionia 14
- Charles Garrett, Bridgeport 13
- Joey Bentley, Ithaca 12
- Blake Gatfield, DeWitt 12
- Jackson Ostrawsky, Mt. Pleasant 12
- Kaden Kelly, Clare 11
- Jimmy Lehman, Pewamo-Westphalia 11
- Jackson Pollak, Williamston 10
- Hunter Bridenbaugh, Essexville-Garber 10
- Connor Charamella, East Lansing 10
- Drew Humm, Alma 9
- Nick Putnam, Laingsburg 9
- Cannon Hall, Davison 8
- George Waterhouse, Linden 8
- Jackson Barnes, Lansing Sexton 7
- Nolan Bird, Grand Ledge 7
- Travis Courter, St. Louis 7
- Spencer Pnacek, Coleman 7



RECEPTIONS

- Ben VanSumeren, Essexville-Garber 38
- Chase Setzke, Fenton 29
- Corbin Sines, Linden 25
- Seth Mackenzie, Chippewa Hills 24
- JT Maybee, Fowlerville 21
- Andrew McFadden, Fowlerville 21
- Brenden Sersaw, Clare 21
- SirQuarius Ball, Bridgeport 20
- Matt Grand-Girard, Ionia 20
- Noah Koenigsnecht, DeWitt 18
- Mic Munderloh, St. Louis 18
- Blake Underwood, East Lansing 18
- Noah Johnston, Vestaburg 17
- Kari Brooks, Lansing Sexton 16
- Quay Humphries, Swartz Creek 15
- Seth Davis, Ithaca 14
- Jayce Kuehnlein, St. Louis 14

INTERCEPTIONS

- Colin Day, Lansing Catholic 5
- Josh Kramer, Lansing Catholic 5
- Ben Davis, Essexville-Garber 4

RECEIVING TOUCHDOWNS

- Chase Setzke, Fenton 10
- Noah Koenigsnecht, DeWitt 7
- Matt Grand-Girard, Ionia 6
- Noah Johnston, Vestaburg 6
- Blake Underwood, East Lansing 6
- Ben VanSumeren, Essexville-Garber 6
- Seth Mackenzie, Chippewa Hills 5
- Austin Schemenauer, Corunna 5

TACKLES

- Peter Smith, Mt. Pleasant 71
- Trevor Brock, Fowlerville 68
- Gabe Ellis, Davison 68
- Marcel Colwyne, Bridgeport 65
- Brandon Genwright, Bridgeport 63
- Zach Hessbrook, Ithaca 61
- Phoenix Dickinson, Linden 56
- Sam Thompson, Corunna 54
- Tyler Huenemann, Mt. Pleasant 53
- Tommy Arends, Mt. Pleasant 51
- Michael Dalzell, Essexville-Garber 50
- Daniel Smith, Carson City-Crystal 50
- Colton Hyble, Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart 49
- Mason Bamfield, Williamston 47
- Karl Brooks, Lansing Sexton 47
- Billy Koepf, Chippewa Hills 47
- Cole Smallwood, Mt. Pleasant 47
- Nate Stone, Frankenmuth, 47
- Nathan Bellinger, Ithaca 46
- Cade Dickson, Linden 46
- Ryan Pummell, Clare 44
- Connor Hahn, Hemlock 43
- David Spedowski, Chippewa Hills 43

RUSHING YARDS

- Drew Stout, Carson City-Crystal 1,148
- Taven Haskens, Saranac 852
- Parker Smith, Lakewood-Lake Odessa 762
- Brec Alward, Alma 747
- Brand Thelen, Fowler 689
- Konner Near, St. Johns 685
- David Spedowski, Chippewa Hills 669
- Dom Ghiardi, Charlotte 666
- Troy Jordan, Holt 648
- Aaron Rutila, Laingsburg 622
- Tariq Reid, Davison 605
- Korbin Knapik, Hemlock 581
- Luke Burns, Blanchard-Montabella 560
- David Kruse, Lowell 556
- Emmett Boehler, Swan Valley 504
- Zach Sawyer, Corunna 493
- Joey Bentley, Ithaca 481
- Jacob Umholtz, Grand Ledge 474
- Garret Metiva, Freeland 432
- Josh Czarnota, Fenton 429
- Peyton Workman, St. Johns 426
- Luke Bushey, Saginaw Valley Lutheran 392

VOLLEYBALL

KILLS PER GAME

- Grace Rekeweg, Midland 4.8
- Lindsey Taylor, Rockford 4.3
- Noelle Duley, Freeland 4.0
- Elizabeth Norris, Corunna 4.0
- Jordan Valley, Haslett 3.8
- Kristen Huebner, Swan Valley 3.6
- Sara Majerle, Rockford 3.6

BLOCKS PER GAME

- Isabella Pizzo, Lansing Waverly 2.3
- Main Smith, Lansing Waverly 2.1
- Grace Ross, Midland Bullock Creek 2.0
- Katie Lehman, Pewamo-Westphalia 1.5
- Bre Deloye, Okemos 1.4
- Rachel Hiler, Saranac 1.3
- Isabel Waldie, Midland Bullock Creek 1.3

DIGS PER GAME

- Jayce Jordan, Clare 7.0
- Grace Szykowski, Morley-Stanwood 7.0
- Lori Cook, Bath 6.8
- Lesley Barker, Portland 6.1
- Brooke Franco, Eaton Rapids 5.0
- Jordan Valley, Haslett 5.0
- Jill Fidler, Lowell 4.8
- Brenna Berry, Morley-Stanwood 4.5
- Maddie Birchmeier, Corunna 4.5
- Catherine Irwin, Okemos 4.4



ASSISTS PER GAME

- Betsy Cook, Freeland 10
- Hailey Delacher, Rockford 10
- Peyton Hubel, Clare 10
- Lexi Mort, Corunna 10
- Alexandria McMath, Midland 9.7
- Allison Couturier, Saranac 9.5
- Brooke Birkley, DeWitt 9.1

CROSS COUNTRY

BOYS

- Paul McKinley, Okemos 15:40
- Chandler Lorf, Flint Powers 15:41
- Cole Johnson, Rockford 15:46
- Ben Jacobs, Corunna 15:53
- Dillan Haviland, St. Johns 15:55
- Ransom Allen, Ithaca 15:56
- Dayton Brown, Rockford 15:56
- Evan Meyer, East Lansing 16:01
- Chris Davis, Fowlerville 16:05
- Audagna Moritz, Holt 16:08
- Jorden Sowash, Owosso 16:08
- Alex Penski, Holt 16:08

GIRLS

- Olivia Theis, Lansing Catholic 16:59
- Jaden Theis, Lansing Catholic 17:26
- Ericka VanderLende, Rockford 17:43
- Anna Jensen, Midland Dow 17:57
- Cecilia Stalzer, Mason 18:02
- Amber Gall, Shepherd 18:05
- Ashley Shipp, DeWitt 18:28
- Anastasia Tucker, Midland Dow 18:29
- Alexa Keiser, Fenton 18:35
- Lainey Veenkant, Clare 18:35
- Lauren Cleary, Lansing Catholic 18:38
- Camryn Gabriel, Rockford 18:49

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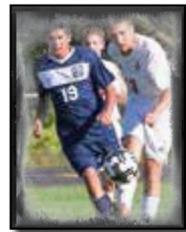
• Quarterback Blake Berent threw a touchdown pass to give first-year coach Rick Weisbarth his first win as the St. Charles coach 20-12 over Valley Lutheran.



• Haley Jankowski, of Big Rapids Crossroads Charter Academy, has been among the area leaders at the net with several kills and blocks per game this season.



• Lainey Veenkant of Clare's girls cross country team, a junior has won the Sparta Invitational and the first Jack Pine Conference jamboree so far this season. She had a personal record of Sept. 23 at the Cougar Falcon Invitational at the Eagles Nest.



• Bruno Gomez, Lakeview (19), has been among the leading scorers for a Wildcat boys soccer team, which has been a factor in the Central State Activities Association this season.



• Hannah Todd, of Chippewa Hills has had a cross country season's best of 20:02.0 at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational. She's trying to beat her personal best of 19:23.5 from last season. She's been second twice at the CSAA Gold jamborees.



• Corey Bowers of Cedar Springs has been his team's top cross country runner this season. He was first at the Central Montcalm Hornet Invitational. He had a PR of 18:48.2.



• Olivia Anderson of St. Louis, is looking to be a state qualifier again this season as a junior. She qualified last year by shooting 105 in the regionals. Her lowest 18-hole score is an 88. Her bent nine-hole score has been a 42 at Ithaca. She's playing No. 1 for the Sharks.



• Meghan Langworthy, of Big Rapids, started out the season with a personal record of 18:51.8 at the Benzie Central Invitational. She has won both CSAA Gold jamborees with times of 19:51.4 and 19:33.2. She was sixth at the MSU Invitational.



• Clarkston senior running back Joshua Cantu had 148 rushing yards and three touchdowns in a 34-20 home victory in week three over Bloomfield Hills, while also scoring on a 23-yard reception. He missed the next two weeks with an injury. The Wolves are 3-1 on the season.



• Aiden Nelson of Morley Stanwood finished with 69 yards and five touchdowns to lead 5-0 Morley Stanwood past Holton 41-7 on Sept. 22. Nelson has been the top weapon in Morley Stanwood's single wing offense.



• Bryce Hallman, of Tri County, is in his junior season and passed for 200 yards against Reed City on Sept 22 in Central State Activities Association Gold Division football action.



• Pontiac Notre Dame Prep senior setter Lauren Burnick has led the way to a 30-2-2 start. She has accumulated 547 assists (7.4 per set), 167 digs and 16 aces thus far and is poised to be a big part of a team that has potential to make a deep postseason run.

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE SCENE STEALERS!



• Mt. Pleasant senior linebacker Peter Smith has racked up double-digit tackle numbers in each of the first four games this season, averaging 13 per game. He registered a season-high 15 stops in a 34-13 loss to Midland on September 15 and had 14 tackles in two other games.



• Shepherd juniors Morgan Yates and Olivia Raymond are the backbone of the program, helping the Bluejays reach the state finals in 2016. Yates was first team All-TVC last year, while Raymond was second team All-TVC. Yates averages a 44 per nine rounds this year, while Raymond is scoring at a 45 average.



• Mackenzie Stroebel, a Division 3 all-state soccer player who helped lead the Falcons to the state championship girls soccer game and to the Class B girls basketball state semifinals. This fall the 5-foot-7 girls soccer All-Stater can be found kicking extra points for the boys football team.



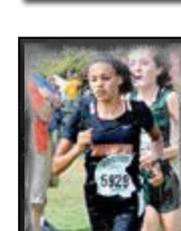
• Coleman senior running back Truman Webb has rushed for 368 yards on 54 carries with four touchdowns through the first four games, helping the Comets to a 2-2 record. He also has two receiving TDs. Webb rushed for 215 yards and three scores on 18 carries in a 42-34 win over Vestaburg.



• Through five games this season Carrollton is 4-1 and is led by senior standout Jalieil Warren. The Cavaliers only loss was a 17-14 last play lost to Swan Valley in week three.



• Bridgeport senior quarterback Charles Garrett is having a monster season. Garrett has already thrown for 1151 yards and 13 touchdowns in the team's pass-heavy spread offense. He is also the team's leading rusher with 232 yards four touchdowns.



• Northville freshman Yasmine Mansi has already won four races this year including a tri-meet versus Brighton and host Howell on September 19 as she ran a 19:18. The lone race she didn't win was the loaded Spartan Invitational, where Mansi was 15th in a personal-best time of 18:44.3.



• In the fourth quarter of its 18-14 win over Carrollton, Swan Valley ran 19 offensive plays ... 16 were carries by senior Emmett Boehler. In the final nine-play drive, Boehler ran nine times. In the win Boehler ran 40 times for 236 yards, two touchdowns and a two-point conversion.



• Saginaw Heritage's Sydney Esparza isn't your prototypical middle-hitter, considering her height on the front-line, however she makes up for her loss of size with speed, quickness and ability to get to the open ball. She is putting together a solid season for the Hawks.

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Ithaca Volleyball Finds Way To Move On After Belles Injury

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

Ithaca volleyball was dealt a crushing blow before the season ever started.

Over the summer while playing basketball at Adrian College, 6-foot-4 senior Kayla Belles suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her knee which ended her season before it ever started.

Belles, who committed in August to play basketball at Michigan State University, was not only primed to have a phenomenal senior year in hoops but prior to that she was expected to be a major contributor to the Yellowjackets' volleyball team.

As a junior, she became the second player in school history to achieve All-State honors in volleyball as she was honorable mention in Class B. Belles completed the season with an astounding 629 kills, 167 blocks, 49 aces and 139 digs as Ithaca finished the campaign 24-25-2.

Undoubtedly the expectations for a bigger season from not only Belles but the Yellowjackets as a team were higher this season, but those were tempered due to the unfortunate injury.

"It was obviously a big blow," Ithaca coach Karla MacDonald said. "She was a huge player for us. She was being recruited Division I for not only basketball, but also volleyball. When you lose a player like that, what we were trying to do is tell the girls that they're not Kayla Belles but we have to fill the spot. They had to do what they're capable of doing."

It has been a transitional time for sure and the adjustments on the fly have produced results that were probably expected due to the absence of such a dynamic and athletic threat on the court as Belles presented. Ithaca lost at home to Saginaw Valley Lutheran on September 21 to drop its record to 6-15-2, not the season that was envisioned before Belles was lost for the season.

Ithaca has focused more on defense without its

shot-blocking aficionado in the middle, with that approach leading to some victories and keeping other matches relatively close.

Belles remains an integral part of the roster, serving as captain and attending each practice and match.

Adapting has taken time, but MacDonald does not allow the Yellowjackets to harp on what could have been or think about Belles not being out there with them.

"To be honest, we don't even discuss it," MacDonald said. "We don't say anything like, 'Well, if Kayla was out there...' or whatever. We stay in the moment and play with what we have."

Ithaca is led on the court by sophomore setter MacKelle Thompson, who was a second team All-Tri-Valley Conference West performer a year ago after accumulating 605 assists along with 126 aces and 186 digs while serving 90 percent.

Thompson, the daughter of Yellowjackets boys basketball coach Jim Thompson, has taken her game to the next level in 2017.

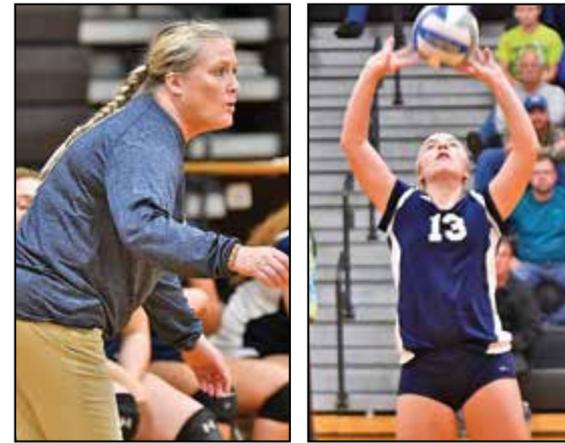
"The way I look at it is that it doesn't matter what class year you are," MacDonald explained. "It's about how much varsity experience you have. If you're a sophomore and it's your second year on varsity, you have just as much varsity experience as some seniors."

Kayla's younger sister, Emma, is in her second year on varsity and as of the middle of September she was averaging 2.3 kills and 0.72 blocks set.

The breakdown of the entire Ithaca roster is three seniors, eight juniors and two sophomores which shows there is plenty to build with as the program makes strides forward.

"We're focusing on improving those skills and having fun as we get better," MacDonald added.

The Yellowjackets will travel to Breckenridge for Class C districts next month, dropping down after spending last year in Class B.



Ithaca coach Karla MacDonald and the rest of the Yellowjackets have managed to put together a solid season thus far after losing All-State player Kayla Belles to a knee injury in the summer. As a junior, Belles became the second player in school history to achieve All-State honors in volleyball as she was honorable mention in Class B. Belles completed the season with an astounding 629 kills, 167 blocks, 49 aces and 139 digs as Ithaca finished the campaign 24-25-2. (Randy Miniard, Skip Traynor and Don Goostrey, High School Sports Scene photos)

Belles Makes Decision To Continue Hoops Career At Michigan State

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

Kayla Belles had no shortage of college suitors lining up giving their best pitch.

In the end, the Ithaca 6-foot-3 standout center chose to continue her basketball career at Michigan State University as she verbally committed to the Spartans in mid-August.

Belles committed to MSU the night before undergoing surgery for a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her knee, suffered during a summer camp at Adrian College.

The injury will keep Belles out of action the entirety of the 2017-18 school year at Ithaca which deprives her of a senior year of volleyball, basketball and soccer.

Belles has been a dominating force on the basketball court since her freshman year with the Yellowjackets, highlighted by a 25-point and 36-rebound game against Sanford-Meridian in Class C districts. The rebound total makes as second-most in a game in MHSAA history.

After earning Class C first team All-State honors as a freshman with averages of 14.5 points and 13.2 rebounds per game, she upped the totals to 18.3 points plus 13 rebounds and four blocked shots per as a sophomore to again capture All-State honors.

Belles also had the opportunity to play on her future home court of the Breslin Center in March of 2016, guiding Ithaca to the state semifinals where they lost to top-ranked Ypsilanti Arbor Prep.

The Yellowjackets bumped up to Class B for the 2016-17 campaign and Belles led the way to a regional finals appearance with a young roster around her. She garnered All-State honors once again, putting in 19.4 points along with 12.2 rebounds, 3.4 blocks and 2.6 steals.

With the rest of the Ithaca roster gaining in experience around her heading into this winter, losing Belles for the season was devastating for everyone involved.

Belles is expected to make a full recovery upon joining Michigan State next fall, where she will be coached by 11th-year head coach Suzy Merchant. The Spartans finished 21-11 overall and made the NCAA Tournament for the eighth time under Merchant last March.



Kayla Belles announced in August she will continue her basketball career at Michigan State University next fall. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photos)

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Ithaca and St. Louis volleyball teams are two teams that have put together solid starts to the season thus far in 2017. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photos)

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON VOLLEYBALL Corunna Volleyball Team Keeps Piling Up Wins Despite Loss Of Miss Volleyball

Butch Harmon
Sports Scene

With last year's Michigan Miss Volleyball Meredith Norris now playing on the college level at Michigan State, it would be easy for the Corunna volleyball team to go into rebuilding mode this season. Instead, the Cavaliers are continuing their winning ways.

Corunna is picking up wins in bunches this season. The Cavaliers went 6-0 en route to winning the Clio Tournament and then went 5-1 at the New Lothrop Tournament, falling to Birch Run in the title match. Corunna also won its own tournament defeating Howell in the finals.

A strong team effort is propelling Corunna to success this season despite the loss of their standout. Up front, hitters Elizabeth Norris and Rylee Thayer are averaging close to seven kills per set. Junior setter Lexi Mort is putting the offense in motion with her 9.9 assists per set. Corunna is also playing sound team defense led by senior Myah Kelly and junior Maddie Birchmeier who are averaging close to a combined eight digs per set.

• DeWitt reached the Class A regional finals last season and the Panthers are

looking to take things a little farther during this year's state tournament. DeWitt opened the season with 15 wins in its first 19 matches and is a perfect 4-0 in the CAAC Red. DeWitt has posted impressive wins over Portage Central, Gull Lake, Saline and East Grand Rapids and took the No. 1-ranked team in Class A, Rockford, to three sets in the finals of the Portage Central tournament. DeWitt is a veteran team led by senior setter Brooke Binkley who is averaging nine sets per set and senior libero Stephanie Starr who leads the team in digs. Senior outside hitter Grace George and junior middle hitter Desiree Becker are averaging close to a combined seven kills per game for the defending conference champions.

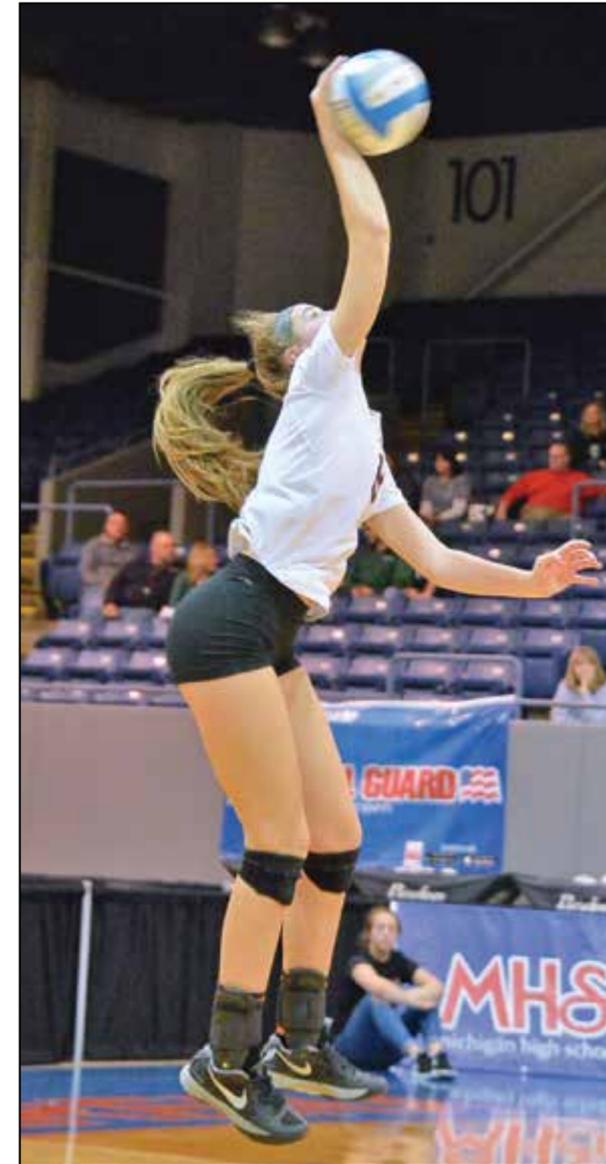
• Okemos is on a mission to capture the CAAC Blue title after taking second place last season. The Chieftains have a veteran team led by senior middle hitter Bre Deloye who is averaging three kills per set and senior outside hitter Sage VanAlstine. Senior libero Catherine Irwin leads the team in digs with 4.4 per set. Sophomore setter Natalie Thom is turning in a big season averaging 7.6 assists and 1.2 aces per set.

• The Alma volleyball team is picking up steam as the season rolls on. Alma defeated Swan Valley, ranked sixth in the

state in Class B, in three sets at the St. Louis Tournament and picked up a big win against Shepherd that improved its record to 13-6-2 for the season. Hailey Leister is turning in a big season as an attacker and is also an excellent server. Tia Everdeen paces the team in assists while Abigail Mellinger and Olivia Apple lead the defense. The Panther offense is also receiving strong efforts from Kammie Shunk and Jasmine Everett.

• The Saranac volleyball team is ranked seventh in the state in Class C. Saranac has tested itself against a number of bigger schools and has wins against Zeeland West, Lansing Waverly, Belding, Grand Rapids West Catholic and Grandville Calvin Christian. Senior outside hitter Emma Pachulski leads the squad with four digs and 3.4 kills per game. Senior setter Ally Couturier is adding 8.2 assists and 3.7 digs per game while Ave Lamp is adding 2.6 digs and 2.2 kills per game. Saranac is also receiving strong play from a pair of sophomores as Layna McElvain is adding 2.6 digs and Lauren Desjardens is adding 1.7 kills per set.

• The Fowler volleyball team has climbed to seventh in the state in Class D. The Eagles have turned in many strong showings this season highlighted by winning the title at the Breckenridge Tournament. Seniors Mckenzie Feldpausch, Sidney Horak, Kenedy Koenigsnecht and Jolie Wieber are leading the way for a veteran team.



Rockford Volleyball Team Ranked First In The State In Class A

Nate Schneider
Sports Scene

After reaching the Class A state championship match season and falling just short, the Rockford volleyball team is determined to take the final step this season.

With plenty of talent back and taking on a challenging schedule, Rockford is off to a strong start this season. Rockford is ranked first in the state in Division 1 this season as it opened the season with 29 wins in its first 31 matches.

Veteran Rockford coach Kelly Delacher has a squad loaded with talent. One of Delacher's best players also happens to be his daughter Hailey Delacher. A returning first-team, all-state player, Hailey Delacher is a talented setter that keeps the Ram offense humming. Hailey, a senior, will be continuing her volleyball career next season at Bradley University.

Hailey Delacher has plenty of tall and talented options to feed the ball to led by senior outside hitters Sara Majerle (5-11) and Zoe Anderson (6-1). Anderson has already committed to play her college volleyball at Ferris State.

Rockford is one of the top teams in Division 1 this season. The Rams made it all the way to D1 finals a year ago before losing to Novi in the championship match. (Courtesy Photos)

The Ram defense is led by the return of senior libero Mykayla Vallad.

"We have a very experienced core of players," Kelly Delacher stated. "We have offensive weapons everywhere and will need to get better defensively if we want to be mentioned with the contenders."



The Rams also have some talented newcomers that are blending in with the veterans. Junior outside hitter Lindsay Taylor (6-2) is a big-time hitter who has already committed to Miami University of the Mid-American Conference. Fellow juniors Emmy Webb and Claire Phillips are a pair of 6-footers that add even more height along the front line.

Rockford has been showing just how talented it is thus far this season with many strong efforts.

The Rams won both the Portage Central Tournament and the East Kentwood Classic in early-season action. Majerle also connected on her 1,000th career kill at the Portage tournament.

"We are off to a great start," Delacher said. "We have played some tough competition early and performed very well."






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Poljan Family A Sports Staple In Lansing Community Brothers Help Pave Way For Little Sister At LCC

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

Carving your own legacy in the Poljan family comes with its challenges.

Rebecka Poljan, a senior volleyball star at Lansing Catholic Central, comes from a family full of fantastic athletes.

Both Poljan parents were standout collegiate athletes, her mother Amy at Indiana after a Hall of Fame softball career and her dad Rick as a Central Michigan football player.

One of seven children, Rebecka watched her older brother Tony excel as a quarterback at Lansing Catholic Central through 2015 and now as a redshirt freshman at Central Michigan he is the likely future multi-year starter at the position.

As for Rebecka, she adores her brother and everyone in her family but she is not content with playing second fiddle to anyone.

"When I was younger I was really into basketball," Poljan said. "I wasn't

really good at volleyball until my freshman year and I really started focusing on it my sophomore year. Before that, I wanted to play basketball at MSU. In third grade I was like, 'You know what, I'm going to go play basketball at Michigan State and then go on to the WNBA.' I would motivate myself by thinking that, but then I got into high school and I fell in love with volleyball."

Poljan, who stands at 6-foot-2, did not need the sport of basketball to get her athletic scholarship to Michigan State as volleyball has provided her the same avenue. She verbally committed to the Spartans in the spring of 2016 and has remained firm in her desire to play for the green and white.

In having the dream of playing for Michigan State, she has endured some gentle ribbing from family members.

"My family doesn't dislike Michigan State, it's nothing like that," Poljan said. "But it's kind of funny, every time it's brought up my brother is always ribbing me and asking why

I'm going there. Everyone thinks because we live so close that we're Michigan State fans, but the rest of my family are actually fans of Central Michigan. But I love Michigan State and I'm very happy with my commitment."

While starring on the volleyball court at Lansing Catholic Central, Poljan is consistently reminded of Tony's accomplishments as a Cougars quarterback.

"I love Tony to death," Rebecka said. "He's been a big role model in my life. I work out with a trainer who hangs Tony's 'Gatorade Player of the Year' trophy up in his gym, so I see that every day. I use it as motivation more than anything."

After being coached the last three years by Ryan Miller, Poljan and Lansing Catholic Central now have a new head coach this year in Dale Wethy. He coached the previous three seasons at Lansing Christian.

Wethy has opted to move Poljan to the left side more frequently as opposed to mostly in the middle, adding versatility to her game as she

prepares for the college level. "She's a game-changer in the sense of being the type of player that is a physical dominant force who intimidates opponents," Wethy said. "You see her and are like, 'Oh crap, she's hitting at me.'"

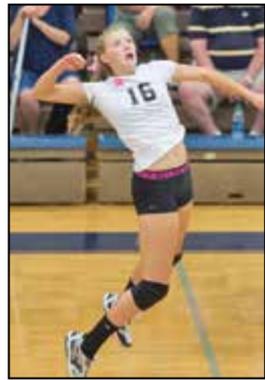
Additionally, Wethy is a huge fan of the leadership she has brought to the table in his first year at the helm.

"Becka is a teacher of the game," Wethy added. "She's very much willing to give her knowledge of everything she's been taught. She's very much a coach's player. When she's in the game, she's very much pushing them to where they need to be on the court. She's my voice because her and I are very much on the same page."

The Cougars swept their matches on September 19 and Sept. 21, defeating Ionia at home in four sets and sweeping Eaton Rapids in three sets to improve their record to 9-5-2.

After falling in district action last year, Poljan has huge hopes to achieve a second district championship in three years and perhaps more once the postseason rolls around next month.

"We'd like to go as far as we can," Poljan added. "Volleyball is an up-and-down sport and it kind of



Rebecka Poljan has come into her own on the volleyball court leading the way for the Cougars during her senior season. (Alan Holben, High School Sports Scene photo)

depends on if you show up mentally every day. We were talking about this as a team [last week]. We all want to take that next step. It's a team goal. We all want to put in the work in practice and we can do that if we stick true to it."

Lansing Catholic Central will head to Fowlerville for Class B districts late next month.

Laingsburg Eyes Strong Volleyball Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Laingsburg's volleyball team has been ranked in Class C this season and coach Tennille Whitmore sees a lot of potential in her Wolfpack this fall.

The team is 15-7-2 overall going into late September.

"We got off to a little bit of a slow start," Whitmore said, "trying to figure out lines and some other things. They seem to be more comfortable on the court together, figuring out our opposition.

"We have a number of girls with the ability to put a good swing on the ball. I've been impressed with our

service ability too at times. Those are two on our strengths."

But as the season progresses, Whitmore is hopeful of seeing loads of improvement.

"I'd like to see consistency," she said. "When we put all of our skills and abilities together, we do great. The small things help us bring all the skills together. Part of that is concentrating on the responsibilities and our roles and making sure we're doing them every time and doing it consistently."

Sophie Strieff is key all-around player for the Wolfpack.

"She's all-around solid for us and has a huge swing on the outside," Whitmore said. "She has great ball

control both as a hitter and also as a passer. She

has a consistent jump serve as well. She dislocated her shoulder the first week, so we were without her the first few weeks. Having her presence back on the court is huge."

Maya Ferland is another all-around player for Laingsburg.

"She's probably our leading serve receiver in terms of passing percentage," Whitmore said. "She makes a big difference in the front row and back row and is a very effective blocker."

Alex Randall has been on the team the past few years, but is taking on some new roles.

"Not only is she giving up height

and swings and blocks in the front row but has also stepped into the role of serve receive, passing and playing defense, and is doing quite well there," Whitmore said.

The Wolfpack are looking to win the Central Michigan Athletic Conference but will see tough teams like Pewamo-Westphalia and Saranac late in the season.

"Conference, we have a great shot at that," Whitmore said. "We're defi-



Laingsburg's volleyball team has been ranked in Class C this season under longtime Tennille Whitmore. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene photo)

nately setting our sights on districts. It's a home event this year. We have a great shot there. As far as regionals, I think we'll run into some state ranked teams whom we'll see before that (during the regular season)."

Selfless Erin O'Leary Builds Unique Legacy As State's Premier Player

Dan Stickkratt Sports Scene

On most Mondays, Erin O'Leary heads down to a local church to partake in activities with YoungLife ministries.

The national, non-denominational Christian club is a youth-aged ministry that is growing in popularity. O'Leary, a current senior at Novi High School, serves as a student leader in a Novi-based chapter of the group.

"We get together, play games, sing songs, help each other and then at the end we have a (Gospel) Jesus talk," offered O'Leary. "It is a big part of my life."

A humble teenager who enjoys serving others and putting others' needs in front of her own, Erin O'Leary is not your typical teenager.

Not even close.

She's a great student with a 3.98 GPA, great leader in the classroom, away from the classroom and on the playing surface. And, oh — she's also Michigan's top-ranked prep volleyball player.

Not to mention she's also an All-America prep player, one of two setters in the country that reached that elite status last school year.

"You wouldn't know it by talking to her," said Jennifer Cottrill, Novi's head volleyball coach since 2012. "She's not just a great volleyball player but even a better person. It's not about winning a state championship with her. It's about how our team can be better the next game. It's how she can help make her teammates better. She is so humble. She's such a great leader."

The sure-handed O'Leary, who stands 5-foot-10, is understandably Michigan's heavy favorite to win the 2017 Miss Volleyball award, given annually by the Michigan Interscholastic Volleyball Coaches Association. The

award is about performance during the high school season with an emphasis on the player's senior year and who represents the characteristics of scholarship, sportsmanship and citizenship.

O'Leary clearly represents those attributes — and more.

"She's the top candidate, but that is not why Erin plays volleyball. Awards are not her focus," said Cottrill. "She loves the game, loves her teammates. I can't say enough about her and the example she leaves — and she'll be the first to (deflect) the attention away from



Erin O'Leary and a friend posing with medals.

her." Committing to the University of Michigan during her sophomore school year, O'Leary still drew interest from many of the nation's elite collegiate volleyball programs. But playing club volleyball on the campus of U-M at an earlier age helped keep her heart close to home.

Novi has enjoyed tremendous success with O'Leary, a three-time All-State First Team honoree, in the lineup.

In 2014, the Wildcats finished as the Class A state runner-up. In both 2015 and 2016, Novi captured state titles.

O'Leary grew up playing multiple sports, including lacrosse, basketball, soccer and volleyball. Her dad, Brian O'Leary, is a very successful math

teacher and soccer coach, leading the Wildcats to five state titles in girls soccer and one state crown in boys soccer over the past two decades.

"I am pretty self-motivated, I think all of my siblings are too," said O'Leary, who gave up the other sports in ninth grade. "But I learned a lot from my dad. He's a great guy and a great coach. He taught me an awful lot and how to keep my (priorities straight). I think he taught me that there is more to winning or losing. There's more than winning state championships. All of those things are good. But at the end of the day, there's so much more to life."

"When I was growing up, everyone thought I'd be a good soccer player because my dad was such a successful coach," recalled O'Leary. "But when I told him that my main interest, my best sport was volleyball, he supported that. He wasn't disappointed. I think he knew."

Just like the state of Michigan knows about Erin O'Leary and Novi's volleyball program. Currently sidelined by numerous injuries, Novi is still a top-10 ranked team in Class A with high expectations.

The Wildcats are good enough to earn a rare three-peat. The last school to win at least three straight state titles in Class A was Portage Northern, which captured four straight from 1992-95.

"Sure, we would love to win it again. That would be very exciting," said O'Leary. "But we cannot focus on that right now. We need to focus on getting healthy because we've had a few players out with injuries. We need to focus on coming together as a team and getting better. If we do that and we end up winning it all, that is great. If we play our very best and don't win it this year, that is fine too."

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Swan Valley's Kristen Huebner Having Fine Encore Campaign

Dan Stickrad Sports Scene

Kristen Huebner entered Saginaw Swan Valley's variety lineup in 2015 as a fast-rising sophomore with endless potential.

Now the 5-foot-11 senior middle hitter who plays all-around is going to depart as one of the school's all-time best volleyball players.

Already committing to Division II Saginaw Valley State University, the third-year starter ranks amongst the very best in

Swan Valley's Kristen Huebner will continue her volleyball career at Saginaw Valley State University. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene photo)

numerous single-game, season and career statistical categories at Swan Valley with half of her senior campaign still to go.

Last season Huebner was a standout in the Tri-Valley Conference, not just earning Team MVP honors but All-TVC First Team, All-Region and Class B All-State Second Team status. She finished in the top 10 in the state in kills after leading her team to both league and district titles.

"Kristen is an outstanding

player," said Swan Valley coach Kristin Palmer. "She is a hard worker as a stellar student as she is a volleyball player. She usually is the first one to practice and the last to leave. She loves the game — playing it, practicing it, and analyzing it. She is a player everyone loves to watch. She is explosive from the front row and the back row. She is the go-to hitter and even three blockers can't stop her most of the time."

Through Sept. 23, Huebner had amassed 336 kills and a .431 hitting percentage, as

over 40 percent of her attacks have resulted in kills. Through 2.5 seasons, Swan Valley has accumulated a 133-26-7 record with Huebner as one of the main threats, including 28-7-2 this season. That includes one tournament win and losses in the semifinals in two others.

Huebner also carries 3.8 GPA in the classroom and on the volleyball court has led her team to the Class B regional finals the past two years, losing to North Branch (2015) and Corunna (2016).

Bridgeport Football Having Resurgence

Scott Keyes Sports Scene

It was a loss, but the Bridgeport football team showed just how far its program has come on Friday, Sept. 22. The Bearcats built a 42-21 lead in the fourth quarter of its game against third ranked Frankenmuth, only to see it spiral away into a 47-42 loss.

"I am very happy with the team, we just had some miscues Friday," head coach Kevin Marshall said. "We should have won that game but things just didn't go our way for us. Those are things we can learn from and prepare for next week."

The Bearcats fell to 3-2 after the loss, but if their strong play continues, they could be eyeing their first

winning season since 1999, also the last year they made the playoffs.

"Last year was my first year here so I was basically just trying to get rid of the losing mentality," Marshall said. "These kids are kids that I coached when I was I middle school and they only lost one or two games then, so now they are in high school with a year of varsity experience and they're showing what they can do."

The Bearcats started last season 2-1 with wins over Valley Lutheran and North Branch. The team lost its final six games of the year, although four were within eight points or less.

The 2017 season started with a 28-6 loss to a strong Ann Arbor Gabriel Richard team, then racked

up wins over Garber, Ogemaw Heights and Caro.

Senior quarterback Charles Garrett is in the middle of a monster season, having already thrown for 1151 yards and 13 touchdowns in the team's pass-heavy spread offense. He is also the team's leading rusher with 232 yards four touchdowns.

"It all starts with our quarterback, he's Mr. do everything," Marshall said. "We have a great receiving core too and we have some outstanding linebackers. These guys are the leaders on this team."

He has a talented receiving core, including the likes of Sir Quarius Ball, a 6'5" junior, Charles' younger brother Markele Garrett, a speedy junior and 6'3" junior Diquavon Moten and senior speedster Jalen Jones. Ball leads the group with 20 receptions for 442 yards and five touchdowns.

"The guys have been working hard ever since last season,"

Marshall said. "The guys came back and are playing hard and it has shown all summer long and through the first few games. They trust in our system and the process. Even after the hard loss to Frankenmuth they can see that we're going in the right direction."

Though Bridgeport has a tough schedule the rest of the fall, with games against Millington, North Branch, Birch Run and Chesaning, it isn't shying away from its ultimate goal.

"Basically, we are just going to take it one game at a time but it is our goal to make the playoffs and end the year on a positive note," Marshall said. "We're going to play hard and continue to play well. We want to show them that this type of football is here to stay."

Marshall is holding out hope that the 2017 season will become the norm at Bridgeport; not the exception.

"The future is bright over here,"



Former Saginaw High and Grand Valley State University standout Kirk Carruth is part of Bridgeport's coaching staff this season and has helped with the Bearcats resurgence this season. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene photo)

he said. "With the youngsters we have coming up from the junior varsity level and even on the varsity this year, of our 34 boys only nine are seniors so we have a lot coming back the next few years so the future is very bright."



As of Sept. 19, the Irish were 18-3-4. Sophie Ruggles had 190 kills and is hitting .260 with 67 blocks. She is also a standout performer for Sacred Heart on the basketball court too. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photo)

Ruggles Giving Sacred Heart Volleyball Major Spark

John Raffel Sports Scene

Sophie Ruggles is having a strong volleyball season and is expected to be a standout for the Sacred Heart basketball team.

Ironically, Ruggles has been contacted by Michigan State about playing for the row team.

Sacred Heart's standout senior is in her third postseason of volleyball. She's been a middle hitter every year. A key aspect to her top-notch play, she indicated, has been her court awareness.

"I'm being smart in where I put the ball so I can make those shots," she said. "This season is a little different. We have a freshman setter and a senior setter I have been hitting with. We'll see. Volleyball is such a team sport. I'm more focused on winning and getting our team better than my own stuff."

The Irish have boasted teams that have made impressive runs in past seasons. With Ruggles leading the way, the Irish

have also been competitive this season.

"We jell very well together and are getting good chemistry," Ruggles said. "We're all competitive and want to win. I'm very excited about this year and this whole season."

Sacred Heart coach Krista Davis has enjoyed watching and coaching Ruggles.

"She's such a strong middle hitter," Davis said. "She's the best hitter on our team actually. If the team is looking for a kill or a block or to convert on a point, the team will get it to her whether she's in the front row or back row. She's a very dynamic player. She's a smart player, and probably the best player who has come through my program. It's my fourth season."

Ruggles has improved from last year, Davis has observed.

"She has a good court awareness," Davis said. "She's also a leader on the court who makes everyone else around her better. She will take a younger player and help them with technique. They look up to her and respect her and take her

advice."

As of Sept. 19, the Irish were 18-3-4. Ruggles had 190 kills and is hitting .260 with 67 blocks.

"She played travel ball, two sports," Davis said. "She's probably the star basketball player at our high school as well."

Ruggles has achieved plenty of success in both basketball and volleyball.

"They're probably about the same for me," she said.

Michigan State bowling coaches attended one of Ruggles' AAU basketball tournaments.

"They said they were taking athletes because there's not that many rowing programs," Ruggles said. "It's exciting for me because it would be a chance to compete on the Big Ten level and be a Big Ten athlete."

"She's keeping her options open," Davis said. "I think she could play either basketball or volleyball if she'd like to. She's an athlete, a good person and a good student. She's the total package."

St. Louis Building Another Volleyball Power

John Raffel Sports Scene

St. Louis has traditionally had strong volleyball teams and this season appears to be no exception.

Jennifer Jaeck is coaching the Sharks, who are 21-6, and will be competing for a strong postseason in Class C.

"Right now, we are playing very well together," she said. "We only lost one senior last year and added in a junior this year, so it seems the makeup of our team is pretty much the same. As a result, we're playing very well."

Jaelynn Block, an all-state setter graduated, leaving huge shoes.

"We bring in a 6-2 offense, so that's

two setters and with (junior captain) Megan Greenup for the last two years," Jaeck said. "She set as a freshman and a sophomore, and this year as a junior. This year, she stepped right in to set that 5-1 offense. We've replaced Jaelynn that way by grooving Megan Greenup into that position for the last two years."

Also playing well for the Sharks has been (senior captain) Paige Young at libero.

"She provides for that passing consistency for our team," Jaeck said.

Laurel Hrabal is a senior outside hitter. "Those three girls have really been providing the consistency for our team and keeping our team a cohesive unit," Jaeck said. "We also have a senior middle hitter Marlee Goetzinger. She kind of brings a

competitive fire to our team. When she gets the ball, she loves to put it down. She's that fire-up emotional player."

Plenty of volleyball is left and Jaeck is confident her team can achieve a lot of things.

"We're looking to once again be competitive in our league," Jaeck said. "Our league every year comes down to us playing Valley Lutheran for the conference championship. I hear this year St. Charles is doing some great things. We have them on our radar as well."

"We go over to the Breckenridge area for districts. That will be a good district for us. I hope to do great things in the league and districts and go on from there."



Prior to press time St. Louis was 21-6 and the Sharks are looking forward to possible making a long post season run in the coming weeks. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photo)

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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON CROSS COUNTRY

Area Runners Turning In Some Impressive Times Early In The Cross Country Season

David Cook Sports Scene

The Mid-Michigan area has long been a hot bed for talented cross-country runners and this fall is no different. Four area teams are ranked number one in the state in their divisions including the Corunna boys in Division 2, the Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart boys in Division 4, the DeWitt girls in Division 2 and the Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart girls in Division 4.

• The DeWitt girls cross country team is off to a strong start behind the veteran trio of seniors Katie Vitou and Hannah Adler and junior Ashley Shipp. The trio claimed the top three spots individually in helping Haslett win the Laingsburg Early Bird Invitational with Shipp finishing first in 18:28 followed by Vitou and Adler. DeWitt also took second at the Bath Invitational with Vitou placing sixth as an individual. Haslett also placed seventh out of 42 teams in the Elite Division at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational. Shipp led DeWitt as she placed 27th individually at MSU.

• The Corunna boys have been on a roll this season. Corunna began the year in high gear as it won the Medium School Division at the Corunna Invitational. The Cavaliers turned in an impressive performance as senior Dakota Hundley placed third individually followed by junior Charlie Bruckman in fourth, junior Ben Jacobs in fifth and senior Miles Petersen in sixth. Corunna also placed eighth in the Elite Division at the MSU Spartan Invitational with Jacobs leading the way by placing 14th as an individual.

• In Division 4, the Breckenridge girls are off to a strong start this season. Breckenridge

placed third at the Ithaca Yellowjacket Invitational led by senior Chloe Brittain who placed third overall and sophomore Annie Laurenz who placed sixth. Breckenridge also placed third at the Shepherd Bluejay Invitational with Brittain taking fourth and Laurenz placing 10th.

• Lansing Catholic Central senior Olivia Theis is off to a blazing start this season. Theis took first place in the Elite Division at the MSU Spartan Invitational with a time of 16:59. Sophomore Jaden Theis placed third overall and junior Lauren Cleary placed 14th to help the Cougars to a fourth-place finish at the talent-filled event. Lansing Catholic Central is ranked second in the state in Division 2.

• It's been a productive season for runners from Shepherd as both the boys and the girls teams are ranked ninth in the state in Division 3. The Shepherd boys won the title at the Bluejay Invitational and also placed sixth out of 40 schools in the Bronze Division at the MSU Spartan Invitational. Junior Dane Nestle led the way at MSU as he placed 22nd overall while junior Seth Schafer led the way at the Bluejay invite with a fifth-place finish. Junior standout Amber Gall is leading the way for the girls. Gall placed ninth as an individual at the MSU Spartan Invitational and won the title at the Bluejay invite.

• The St. Johns boys cross country team is ranked fifth in the state in Division 2. The Redwings won the Large School Division at the Corunna Invitational and placed 19th in the Elite Division at MSU. Senior Dillan Haviland is leading the way for St. Johns. Haviland took first place at the Corunna invite with a time of 16:05 and finished 16th at the Spartan Invitational.



Many area teams took part in the early bird runs to start the season for local runners. (Don Goostrey, Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photos)



Achieving Greatness Sacred Heart CC Continues To Overwhelm Competition

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

Achieving what Sacred Heart has in girls cross country as a small Class D school is almost unfathomable.

The Irish shattered their own Division 4 state record for the lowest point total ever achieved at the state finals last year when it scored 34, beating their previous mark of 52 points set when they won the state title in 2015.

Sacred Heart lost one of its top two runners from the back-to-back state championship teams in Alexis McConnell due to graduation, but her three younger sisters – senior Bailey, junior Cammie and sophomore Desiree – have all returned to the fold in the bid for a third consecutive D4 state crown.

Additionally, the Irish return three other key components in juniors Lauren MacDonald and Scout Nelson along with senior Rowan Fitzpatrick who all competed at the state finals the last two years.

Regardless of Alexis being absent from the fold, this is still an extremely talented



Although Sacred Heart has lost one of its top two runners from the back-to-back state championship teams in Alexis McConnell due to graduation, her three younger sisters – senior Bailey, junior Cammie and sophomore Desiree – have all returned to the fold in the bid for a third consecutive Division 4 state crown. The Irish are currently ranked No. 1 in D4. (Don Goostrey, Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photos)

and experienced Sacred Heart roster with its sights set squarely on achieving a third straight state championship.

“What I like about the team is the depth that we have,” Irish head coach Mark Zitzelsberger said. “We have eight girls, even after graduating Alexis, that we believe can get under 20 minutes. In Division 4, that’s what you’re racing to get under by the end of the season. Get under 20 minutes, you’ll be All-State.”

The Irish already have three runners in Bailey McConnell (18:53.9), Nelson (19:08) and Desiree McConnell (19:46.2) who have run under 20 minutes this year. A fourth runner in MacDonald ran a 20:03 at the Michigan State Spartan Invitational and ran a 19:43 at last year’s state finals, so it should only be a matter of time before she eclipses the mark.



One source of concern is with Cammie McConnell, who has been absent with a leg injury and is scheduled to undergo an MRI in the next week or so. If the MRI shows everything in good order, she could get back to running soon after and be ready for the state finals.

Cammie placed fourth overall at the 2016 state finals with a time of 19:10.6.

“Our hope is that we get Cammie back,” Zitzelsberger said. “She is a huge part of this team. We’re not worried about her getting up to speed if she’s cleared. She ran 350 miles over the summer. But we’re not going to push her if she isn’t healthy.”

While the group of four McConnell sisters have drawn much of the headlines, the contributions of runners such as Nelson and MacDonald have played a major role in turning the Irish into a dominant force.

“Scout and Lauren have stepped up huge this year,” Zitzelsberger remarked. “Most people don’t even realize that one of our top runners hasn’t even raced this year. I know I sound greedy, but it’s unreal the amount of running talent one little school has been able to manufacture.”

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Mt. Pleasant AD Jim Conway One Of The Best In The Business

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

High school sporting events in Michigan, or any state for that matter, do not take place without the tireless work of athletic directors.

One of the staple athletic directors in mid-Michigan is Jim Conway, who has served as AD at Mount Pleasant High School since 2001.

Conway has overseen the growth of the Oilers athletic department during his tenure, including over the last decade since Mount Pleasant became a key member of the Saginaw Valley League in 2001.

The job of an AD includes a plethora of day-to-day responsibilities

the officials involved, everything that surrounds athletics has to be organized well through communication."

Conway is always gradually putting together team schedules for upcoming seasons as well, which is altered even within SVL play with new additions or subtractions to the league seemingly every year.

Prior to taking over at Mount Pleasant High School, Conway was the head baseball coach for seven years at his alma mater of Albion College after playing for the Britons in the 1980s.

He now oversees an athletic department that includes an Oilers baseball program with an illustrious history, including state championships in 2007 and 2014. Mount Pleasant softball coach Ted McIntyre is seventh in state history with 1,043 victories, while you can go through every athletic program at the school and name plenty of positives.

From adding a varsity hockey pro-

gram almost 10 years ago to seeing the boys basketball team make a run to the Class A state semifinals in 2014, the list goes on and on as to what Conway has watched over in his 16 years as Mount Pleasant athletics director.

Joining the Saginaw Valley League was also a major boost for Oilers athletics as it has helped increase the competition level in most sports.

"The great part about the Saginaw Valley League is that every school has its niche," Conway stated.

"We have a competitive sports program across the board. We all know it's based on kids and the level of talent each school has. You're always going to have better years when you have better athletes. But it's been a very strong relationship with those schools. When we made some additions with the south schools, it's taken a little more time to develop those relationships than I envisioned. It's one big league and the natural proximity between



Mt. Pleasant Athletic Director Jim Conway is considered one of the best ADs in the state and keeps going strong after 16 years in that position at the school. (Randy Miniard, High School Sports Scene photo)

schools doesn't allow us to have the relationships with a Flint Powers that we do with a Midland or a Midland Dow. That only makes sense. But we're building it little by little."

Milford CC Back For More

Nate Schneider Sports Scene

You know something special has happened when a documentary is made to put a limelight on your accomplishments.

Such is the case for the Milford girls cross country team, which claimed the program's first-ever Division 1 state championship in 2016 after a couple previous runner-up finishes in 1984 and 2000 plus other close calls.

The documentary, which clocks in at over 26 minutes, is called "One to First" and shares the story of the Milford girls XC team from its infancy to now. It is produced by Rob Paulson and available to view on YouTube.

It provides a historical glimpse at how the first Mavericks girls runner, Jane Foote, truly was a maverick for the program as she was the only girls runner in 1975 and ran every day with

the boys team.

The Milford girls program continued to pick up steam from that point on, culminating with the celebration of the 2016 state championship.

"It was a really cool documentary done by one of our alumni," head coach Brian Salyers said. "We got in touch with [Foote], who competed against the boys before the school was sponsoring girls cross country. The journey from that one person getting this whole thing rolling to finally attaining a state championship is pretty incredible and rewarding."

Salyers, in his 22nd year at the helm, had previously watched the Mavericks' boys cross country team win six state titles since 2003. A girls state crown proved to be more elusive, but with that having been achieved the goals are not lessening for 2017 with the season in full swing.

"They know it's a balance thing," Salyers said. "In a perfect world, if everyone is at their best capabilities and we're at the state finals - we could again be in the mix and that's the dream goal. On the other hand, they're humble enough to realize there are a lot of great teams out there and the state of Michigan is rich in talent. It's a very difficult thing to accomplish."

Milford lost its top runner from the state finals last year as Mallory Barrett graduated, but even so the Mavericks return five of their top seven state finals runners from last year. Back in the fold as well are two other seniors who did not run at last year's state finals but have experience running at the state finals from previous years.

Junior Victoria Heiligenthal leads Milford this season after running an 18:26.6 at the state finals a year ago, good enough for 10th place. Senior Nicole Grindling, junior Natalie Black, senior Regan Lobodzinski and junior Paige Saiz are all expected to be important pieces after placing at the D1

state finals in 2016.

Freshman Elaine Schwendenmann is also showing well in the early season and will continue to be a contributor for the Mavericks.

Heiligenthal finished second at the Averill Distance meet on September 9 with a time of 19:08.7 and will be one to watch the entirety of the season as she is the leader of the pack as Barrett was a year ago.

"We were ranked 10th going into last year and ended up winning the state championship," Salyers added. "All of this has to play itself out and we'll see where we shake out at the end of the season."

The Milford boys squad placed sixth at the state finals last year and returns three of its top six runners - Evan White (29th at state finals, 16:29.1), Nick Martin (43rd, 16:39.7) and Nolan Bailey (84th, 17:03.1).

"It's a fun group of boys and I'm looking forward to continuing to work with them and watch them get better,"



The Milford girls cross country will look to repeat in Division 1 at the state Cross Country Finals held in November. (Courtesy Photo)

Salyers added.

Milford will compete in D1 regionals at Hess Hathaway Park hosted by Waterford Mott on October 28.

Fulton Football Off To Strong Start

Caleb Walden Sports Scene

The 2017 campaign is underway for the Fulton Pirates, and it's been a strong start for the Blue and Gold.

To open up the new year the Pirates took the field, at home, to face off with a non-conference foe in Merrill. The Pirates dominated from start to finish in a 28-6 win against the Vandals. The Pirates then moved on to start conference play with a tough loss at Laingsburg. Fulton was competitive all night but couldn't quite get over the hump, falling to the Wolfpack 28-12.

Fulton would return home, and

return to its winning ways on Sept. 8, in their annual Military Appreciation game against Potterville.

Fulton lead the whole way, winning 49-26 in a high-powered-offensive shootout. Zach Andrews hooked up with Evan Barton for an impressive four touchdown performance as the Pirates moved to .500 in CMAC competition.

Next up for the Pirates were their two big rivalry games. Fulton made the short drive to Fowler on Sept. 15, to play in what turned out to be a slug-fest game between two rivals.

The Eagles and Pirates have been the fiercest of enemies on both on the gridiron for many years, and this year saw no love lost between them. Trailing 20-14 after three quarters, Fulton came up big on defense, shutting out

the Fowler offense.

In addition to their clutch defensive play late in the game, the Pirate offense came alive to score 12 unanswered points. Head coach Paul Hungerford described both squads as having a "line up and try to stop me" mentality, as usual between these two schools. The Pirates walked out of Fowler with an impressive 26-20 victory, putting them at 3-1 overall and 2-1 in conference play. Fulton's most recent game pitted them against the defending Division 7 state champion Pewamo-Westphalia. The Pirates jumped out early and took a 42-0 halftime lead on Fulton.

Though the score could have prompted Fulton to throw in the towel, they never quit fighting. P-W is one of the most dominant teams in the area, and it showed as it knocked off Fulton 48-7.

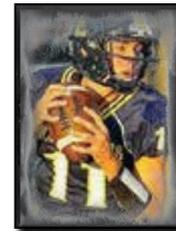


The Fulton football team sits at 3-2 heading into the second half of the season. (Caleb Walden, High School Sports Scene Photo)

MORE HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE SCENE STEALERS!



Corunna sophomore Elizabeth Norris is displaying an all-around game for the Cavaliers. In her second season on the varsity, Norris is averaging 4.1 kills per set, has a 32.8% kill percentage, is a solid defender who is averaging 3.4 digs per match and has a 92.3 serving percentage.



Ovid-Elsie quarterback Jericho Herblet has guided the Marauders to a 4-1 start this season and leads an offense that is averaging 30.8 ppg. A 6-foot-3, 190-pound senior, Herblet turned in a big effort in the win against Pinconning as he completed 11-of-16 passes for 218 yards and two touchdowns.



East Lansing senior Blake Underwood is turning in a big season on both sides of the football. Through five games this season the Miami University commit has caught 22 passes for 463 yards (21.0 avg.) and six touchdowns. On defense Underwood has added 31 tackles and two interceptions.



Carson City-Crystal running back Drew Stout is turning in some memorable performances this season. Stout, a junior, rushed for 281 yards (23.4 avg.) and scored five touchdowns against Montabella. Stout opened the season with a 265-yard, two-touchdown effort against Saranac and added 238 yards and three touchdowns against Ashley.



Laingsburg senior quarterback Nick Putnam is turning in some big games this season for the 4-1 Wolfpack. Putnam, who is completing 59% of his passes this year, threw for 147 yards and three touchdowns against Potterville and was 9-of-10 for 145 yards and three scores against Fowler.

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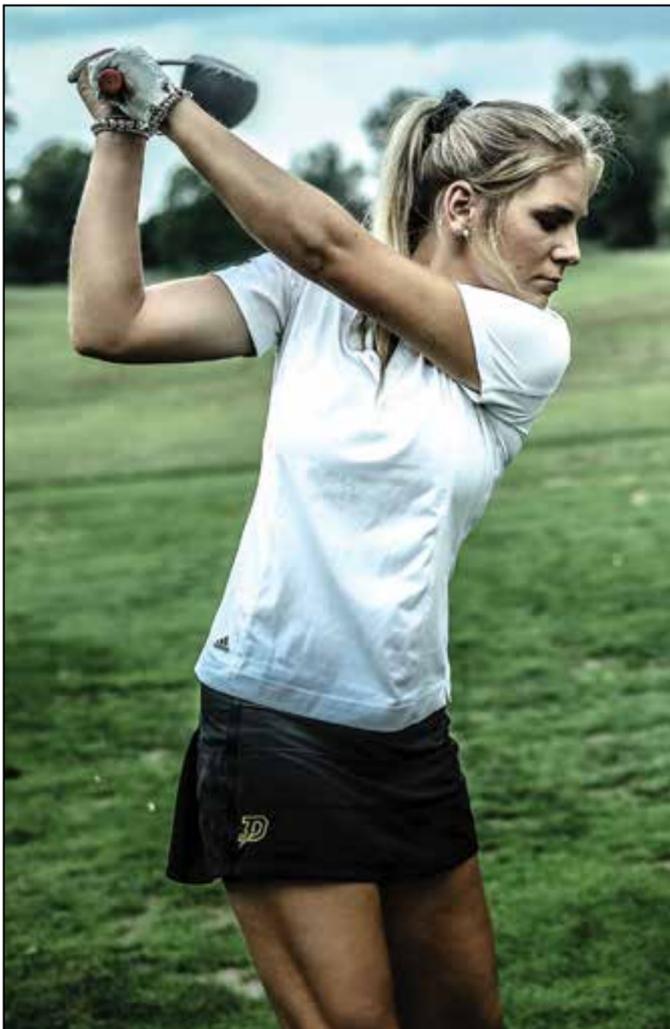
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SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON GOLF



Area Girls Golfers Starting The Season With Strong Efforts On The Links

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Division 2 state champions last season, the Midland Dow girls golf team is on pace to defend its state title.

Ranked number one in the state in D2, the Chargers are off to a strong start this season. Led by standouts Alexis Carras and Rose Hami, Dow has turned in some impressive efforts this season. The Chargers began Saginaw Valley League play in a big way as it won the league's preseason tournament. Carras fired a 79 while Hami added an 80 to lead the way. Dow also placed second at the Frank Altimore Invitational with Carras pacing the team with a 73 and Hami adding an 83.

In the Lansing area, Okemos is off to a strong start. The Chieftains are ranked eighth in the state in Division 2 and opened conference play with a strong effort as they won the CAAC Blue opening jamboree by 20 strokes. Saveria Rajendra Nicolucci led Okemos with an 87 while Lauren Kim was close behind with an 89. Okemos also took first place at its own tournament by nine strokes over Mason. Rajendra Nicolucci claimed medalist honors with a 78 while Kim fired an 82 and Paige Owen an 85.

Look for Grand Ledge to challenge Okemos for top honors in the CAAC Blue. The Comets turned in some solid efforts to start the season by taking second at the Portland

Invitational and second at the CAAC Blue opening jamboree. Kaylee Hirschman placed second overall at Portland with an 86 while Vienne Sereseroz carded an 89.

- The St. Johns golf team is poised for a big season. The Redwings turned in a big effort at the Mason Invitational where they finished just one stroke behind Jackson Lumen Christi for the title. Abby Murray tied for individual medalist honors with a 74 while Alli Eccleton tied for fourth with a 77.

- Haslett is off to an impressive start this season. The Vikings placed second overall at the Dick's Sporting Goods Invitational. Haslett boasted strong balance at the tournament as Reegan Russell shot a 95, Salia Gutierrez a 96 and Teagan Woodworth a 98. Haslett also placed third at the Portland Invitational. Woodworth was fourth individually at Portland with a 90 while Maggi Regan added a 93.

- Alma's Megan Radaz is turning in some impressive rounds this season. Radaz was the small school medalist at the Dick's Sporting Goods Invitational and finished third overall in the tournament that included 20 schools.

- Freeland is looking like a major force in Division 3 this season. The Falcons are ranked sixth in the state in D3. Freeland turned in a strong effort at the Traverse City Central Classic and are led by Olivia Pumford, Grace Pumford and Lily Beyer.

Midland Dow's Alexis Carras is back for her senior season after helping lead the Chargers to a Division 1 title a year ago. (Scott Keyes, High School Sports Scene photo)

SPORTS SCENE'S EYE ON SWIMMING

Alma Swim Coach Keeps Moving Along

John Raffel Sports Scene

Alma coach Jeff Huxley is one of the longest serving high school swimming and diving coaches in Michigan, but just doesn't seem to be slowing down to any extent.

He's won various state championship and other titles but continues to thrive as a coach.

For the boys, Alma won a state title for Division 2 in 2003 and was Division 3 state runners-up in 2004. Under the former Class B-C-D division, Alma won titles in 2001

and 2002, and had a stretch in the early 1990s with a title and two runners-up.

With the Alma swimmers, he's been coaching for decades.

"I have known Jeff since I was a student at Alma," said athletic director Eric Huff, a 2001 Alma graduate. "We won some boys state swim championships when I was in school so I have always known he was a great coach."

Last season for the girls, Alma finished 16th in the state in Division 3. The boys were 15th during the winter season in Division 3.

"My impression of him is that he does an excellent job coaching and motivating students, from beginners to experts," Huff said. "He has a unique style that would be difficult to replicate, and he gets results with it. We have been very fortunate to have him as our coach for so long."

"His strengths is that he knows how to get the most out of his kids if they are willing to make the commitment. I feel lucky to have a coach like Jeff on our staff and am thankful for all he has done for Alma, Alma swimming, and the thousands of swimmers who have been impacted by his coaching."



Longtime Alma coach Jeff Huxley keeps going strong after 40-plus years coaching the Panthers. (Skip Traynor, High School Sports Scene photo)

Heritage Sisters Full Of Success

Ben Murphy Sports Scene

There may be over 40 girls on the Heritage swimming and diving team, but for many reasons, the sister duo of Emilia and Ariana Shokoohi stand out. Emilia, a senior who swims the 200-yard and 100 freestyle, plus several other events and Ariana, who swims the 50 and 100 free, plus several events are both part of the team's record setting 200 and 400 freestyle relays.

"They are both great teammates for the whole team," head coach Kent Howenstine said. "I can tell because they know other swimmers' times and can tell me that their teammate had a best time. With swimmers with their ability, you can as a coach, when swimming other schools, you can place them in any of the 12 events to get points for the team but better yet, get a win in that event."

For Emilia, even though she can compete in just about any event, she feels there are a couple that she excels in.

"I think I am best I the 200 and 100-yard freestyle," she said. "It has taken me awhile to find out what events I am best in, and sometimes I feel like I am still looking. The 200 and 100 free fit me because they're not full on sprints but not complete distance events either. I love doing all the swimming events, except backstroke. It's always a real treat when I get put in a stroke event."

"What makes me a successful swimmer is hard work, dedication, but also my love for the sport and always having a fun time," she added. "I make sure to put the work in at practices and give it my all at meets. I've had different coaches over the years and I've gained a different perspective of swimming form each of them and they've helped me become who I am today. Also, I find myself always being surrounded by great teammates that I consider family and have pushed me to do my best."

Ariana believes that having her sister on the same team helps make each one their best.

"We push each other a lot, especially since we both swim the 100-yard freestyle," she said. "We always compare times and give each other advice on what to improve on. Also, it's just a lot of fun to be on the same relays together because we can joke around and be serious at the same time."

"I love having Emilia on the same team because she makes it more enjoyable," she added. "I have never swum without her beside me, so coming into high school got rid of some of my nerves because I knew she would be there looking after me."

Emilia feels the same way.

"I love having Ariana on the same team as me," she said. "We swim in the same lane all the time and encourage each other to do our best. We always push each other in the relays and our individual events."

While she is in her final season of high school swimming, Emilia hopes to stay in the pool after she graduates.

"I definitely plan on swimming in college because I know I'm just not ready to give up swimming," she said. "I'm still not sure



where I want to swim yet for college, but I'm in the process of looking at colleges and contacting coaches."

It should come as no surprise, that Ariana, is also hoping to swim in the collegiate ranks someday.

"Swimming in college is one of my goals," she said. "I have a lot of universities in mind so I'm excited to see what the upcoming year brings."

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SPORTS SCENE'S **EYE ON SOCCER**

Flint Powers Boys Soccer Team On The Path To Return To Division 3 State Finals

David Cook
Sports Scene

After falling short to Grand Rapids Catholic Central in last year's Division 3 state championship match, the Flint Powers boys soccer team is on a mission to make it back to the finals.

Powers is ranked second in the state in Division 3 this fall and has served notice that it will be a tough outcome tournament time. Powers kicked off the season in a big way with a 3-1 win over a Linden team that is ranked fifth in the state in Division 2. Bryan Lenzion led the Charger offense with a pair of goals and Garrett DeLamielleure added a goal in the win.

Powers also served notice to the defending Division 3 state champions that it is more than ready for a rematch of the state title match should one come in the state tournament. The Chargers blanked Grand Rapids Catholic 2-0, one of four shutouts on the season by the Chargers who opened the season with seven wins, two losses and a tie.

Powers has also claimed impressive wins over East Lansing (2-1) and Detroit Country Day (2-0).

Traditional soccer powerhouse Williamston is another school to beware of come state tournament time. Williamston is ranked fourth in the state in Division 3. The Hornets return plenty of all-state talent this season in senior midfielder Zachary Jewison, senior forward Eli Richardson and senior defender Alex Scott who all earned all-state honors last season.

- Keep an eye on the St. Johns soccer team. The Redwings are flying under the radar thus far this season as they opened the year with an 8-1-2 record over the first 11 games. The Redwings posted impressive wins against Lansing Catholic Central and Mason and battled Haslett to a 0-0 tie. St. Johns possesses a potent offense led by Nick Hitchens who recorded hat tricks in wins against Mason and Mt. Pleasant and started the season with 17 goals.

- Another talented goal scorer can be found in Lowell. That is where senior Jonny Draigh has been on a goal-scoring tear. Draigh has scored 20 goals this season highlighted by a five-goal outburst against Greenville. Austin Pollock and junior Connor Cater have also stepped up on offense for the Red Arrows who are ranked 11th in the state in Division 2.

- The Haslett soccer team is turning in a strong season and is ranked ninth in the state in Division 2. The Vikings have wins against Grand Ledge and Okemos this season as well as a tie against Lansing Catholic Central. Haslett counts on a balanced offensive attack led by talented juniors Joey Sparkia, Munir Sherahli and Andy Vahng along with sophomore AJ Salazar. The Vikings have also received strong play in goal from senior Nathan Westerlund.

- The Alma soccer team is putting up some impressive numbers this season. The Panthers opened the year with a 9-3-1 record and features an offense that can score goals in bunches.

Saginaw Heritage, DeWitt and Grand Ledge are all enjoying solid seasons as area team prepare for the fall stretch run on the season. (Skip Traynor, Scott Keyes and Marvin High School Sports Scene photos)



Saginaw Heritage is putting together its best season in nearly a decade in 2017. Heritage boasted a quality 10-2-2 record through press time. (Courtesy Photo)

Saginaw Heritage Off To Best Start In Decade

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

With perhaps its most experienced team in a decade, Saginaw Heritage is hoping for some grand success down the stretch of the 2017 boys soccer season.

The unranked Hawks are off to their best start since 2007 and hope to capture both Saginaw Valley League and Division 1 district titles in October.

The Hawks brought back 13 seniors and eight of 11 starters off of last year's 13-5-4 squad that finished third in the SVL. Heritage lost to Midland Dow in last year's district opener.

"We are off to a very good start this year," admitted Heritage coach Brian Lechel, a 2005 grad of Heritage. "I guess when you bring back 13 seniors with a lot of experience, you should be competitive."

Heritage boasted a quality 10-2-2 record through Sept. 21 despite a rash of illnesses and the fact the Hawks lost its best player to injury. Connor Copus, a D-II and D-III college recruit and the Hawks' leading scorer, was lost for the season with a torn ACL in his right knee.

Despite the loss of its field

general from the center midfield position, it's the case of "the next man up" mentality for Heritage, according to Lechel. Heritage is trying to win its first district since 2007, a year the Hawks lost in the D-1 regional semifinals to Rochester, and the team if focused on contending in the second half of the season.

The Hawks are engaged in a heated battle with Midland Dow and Flint Powers Catholic for top honors in the SVL, where 12 of the 15 members boast soccer teams this year. A recent 3-2 setback to Lapeer in a game where Heritage was missing five starters for various reasons relegated the Hawks into second place in the SVL.

"We're still in the hunt," said Lechel. "Dow is the lead. If someone can get a tie with them and we win out, we'll tie. If we win out and someone beats Dow down the stretch, then we'll get it. Powers has a loss and a tie, so they are still in it."

Heritage tied Flint Powers Catholic (2-2) and defeated league leader Midland Dow (2-1) this season. Overall, the Hawks have outscored the opposition 40-15 with four shutouts.

In non-league competition,

Heritage owns a 3-2 win over D-2 powerhouse East Lansing, tied fellow D-2 power Mason (1-1) and suffered a 2-1 loss to Portage Northern in the finals of the East Lansing Invitational.

Only in the short-handed loss to Lapeer have the Hawks given up more than two goals in a single game.

"That loss to Lapeer could come back and hurt us. We were kissing four guys that were out sick, plus we had just lost Copus for the season. I think if we had everyone, we would have been able to win that game."

Heritage is blessed with talented senior and junior classes which has helped with a revival. The Hawks were consistently a top 20 team in Class A/Division 1 throughout the 1990s and early 2000s but have faded from that picture.

The Hawks finished as the 1991 state runner-up in Class A and also reached the Final Four in 1996 among their better state tournament finishes. This season could be a similar scenario if Heritage can overcome any adversity and make a deep run.

Senior John Hoff, who moved from goalkeeper to center back this season, has joined fellow senior defender Ethan Zurger

to anchor the Hawks' stingy backfield. Junior Sam West has become steady between the pipes in his first season as a starter.

Senior midfielder Spencer Schwellenbach is the second leading scorer and has stepped in as a leader following Copus' injury. Schwellenbach is one of the state's top baseball prospects, being clocked at 94 mph as a pitcher over the summer, and will be one of the leading candidates for Mr. Baseball 2018.

"His athleticism definitely carries over to the soccer field," said Lechel. "He's one of our key players and I think with Copus out for the year he'll finish as our leading scorer."

"I really like this group of guys," added Lechel. "We have a lot of talent on this team and a lot of athleticism. Plus, they like playing with each other, which helps. I know our district is wide open this year. Any of the teams in our district could win it — it's wide open. It's been a few years (since Heritage has won a district). We won the SVL-North two years ago and we lost in a shootout in (2012) in the district finals. We're hoping this year's group can lead us (to championships)."

Lowell Making Name For Itself Amongst State Powerhouse Programs

Dan Stickrad
Sports Scene

Climbing to as high as No. 4 in the Division 2 state rankings last season, Lowell enjoyed its best season to date as a program.

The Red Arrows are out to prove that last season is no fluke.

Lowell finished a very respectable 18-4-2 last season and was a third-place finisher in a deep OK Conference White Division behind powerhouse programs Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern and Grand Rapids Forest Hills Central. Through Sept. 23, Lowell was in third place in the seven-school OK Conference-White trailing the two

Forest Hills programs.

Lowell has outscored the opposition 41-18 this season with five shutouts, including league wins over Greenville, Grand Rapids Northview, Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills and Cedar Springs. The Red Arrows have outscored their league foes, 24-8.

"I guess we kind of snuck up on people last season," offered Lowell coach Rich O'Keefe. "I don't think we'll be sneaking up on anyone this year. I really like the way we have been playing overall this year."

Overall, Lowell began the season 7-1 with the sole early-season loss coming against defending D-2 state

champion Mattawan (3-1). Overall, the Red Arrows stand 9-5-0 but all five losses have been to teams ranked in D-1 and D-2.

Lowell, which was ranked fourth in the first D-2 rankings in early September, also has setbacks against Forest Hills Central (3-2), Forest Hills Northern (2-0), East Grand Rapids (2-1) and Caledonia (5-1), the latter against a D-1 ranked opponent.

"We've played a lot of quality programs," said O'Keefe. "I thought one quality win came against Rockford. They won the OK-Red



last year and are always a tough squad. We've had some quality wins this season and we're hoping for more."

Lowell is led by senior center back Elijah Dixon, an All-State Third Team choice last season. What has aided the Red Arrows' explosiveness is senior forward Johnny Draigh, who missed most of last season due to a knee injury

suffered during basketball in February 2016. Now healthy, Draigh chalked up 17 goals over Lowell's first eight games and is among the state leaders with 21 total goals this season.

Senior midfielder Jay Stadt, senior goalkeeper Gabs Bendal and junior midfielder Connor Cater are three more players who have been key for the Red Arrows.

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NORTHERN REPORT



Clare, Beaverton Sit Atop Jack Pine Football Standings

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

It's hard to keep the football clichés straight this time of year.

Defense wins championships, sure, but isn't the best defense a good offense?

Or is it, D before O, except after C?

Whatever the case, points were the path to victory in the first half

The Pioneers were 4-1 overall prior to press time. Clare's only loss came in week one losing to Ithaca 38-14. (Russ Pierce, High School Sports Scene photo)

of the season for the teams in the Jack Pine Conference.

Beaverton was the league's only team to get off to a 5-0 start and the Beavers did it by outscoring the opposition to the tune of 194-45.

Clare was tied for first in the Jack Pine at 3-0 and the only reason the Pioneers were 4-1 overall is that they ran into Ithaca in Week 1.

After that 38-14 loss, the Pioneers promptly racked up four

straight wins by a combined score of (get this) 203-35.

Harrison opened with an overall record of 3-2 and was tied for third with Meridian at 2-1 in the league. In their victories, the Hornets scored 42, 44 and 54 points.

The Mustangs, meanwhile, opened the season with two losses, scored 136 points in two straight victories and then fell to 2-3 overall with a scoreboard-lights-popping 54-16 loss to Houghton Lake.

Gladwin lost its first four games under new coach Shad Fish, but put up a shutout in Week 5 and beat Farwell by a more conventional

score of 23-0.

With four weeks left and the playoffs at stake, only the Pioneers and Beavers seemed like locks to crack the postseason party. The rivals will tune up by facing each other in Week 9 in a game that is shaping up to be the marquee matchup of the season.

Harrison and Houghton Lake both have possibilities, but must win three of their last four games to clinch a spot and the sledding is pretty rough for the rest of the league, until of course you realize that, on any given Friday night... and whip up another batch of football clichés.

Clare Girls Take Top Three Spots In Jack Pine Jamboree

Scott Salowich
Sports Scene

Winning the first Jack Pine Conference jamboree of the season was as simple as 1-2-3 for the Clare girls' cross country team.



Lainey Veenkant dominated the field and won the race in a time of 19:23. She was followed by teammates Olivia Haring, who was second in 21:04, and Kameron Haag, who was third in 21:17.

The Pioneers placed four runners in the top five and six in the top nine to cruise to victory with only 18 team points.

Katherine Haupt was fifth in 21:35, Riley Schroeder seventh in 21:50 and Nicole Taylor ninth in 22:41.

Making matters worse for the opposition, there isn't a senior in the pack. Juniors Veenkant and Haring are the veterans, Haag and Taylor are sophomores and Haupt and Schroeder are in ninth grade.

Gladwin was the best of the rest,

Lainey Veenkant finished All-State last season for the Clare cross country team. (File Photo)

finishing a distant second with 61 points. Meridian was third with 67, Roscommon fourth with 90, Harrison fifth with 152 and Farwell sixth with 168.

Junior Hannah Ordiway ran fourth for the Mustangs in 21:25.

Cracking the top 10 for the Flying G's were juniors Jaylynn Slabic, who was eighth in 22:15, and Grace Volmering, who was 10th in 22:57.

Clare headed into the jamboree on the heels of an excellent performance at the Sparta Invitational on Sept. 16.

The Pioneers put five runners into the top 10 and won the Blue Division championship going away with just 33 points. Lowell was second with 71 and Rockford third with 72.

Veenkant grabbed another gold medal, taking first with a time of 19:01. Haag was sixth, Haring seventh, Haupt ninth and Schroeder 10th.

Meridian ran third at the Beal City Invitational earlier in the season, an event that Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart dominated by claiming the top six spots.

Ordiway was ninth in 21:59. Alexis North ran 18th and Katie Blanchard 19th.

On Sept. 23, Veenkant finished third in the Falcon Division at the Cougar-Falcon Invite at Eagle's Nest in a time of 18:25.

Lansing Catholic took the top two spots and won the team title with 49 points. Clare was fifth with 109. Haag finished 20th and Haring 22nd for the Pioneers.

BOYS

Beaverton hosted the first Jack Pine Conference boys' cross country jamboree of the season and the home course advantage paid off for senior Parker Hayes, who not only has a name that sounds like a Jimi Hendrix song, but also a gold medal after winning the race in a time of 17:32.

After Hayes cleared the finish line, the chase for the team title became Clare, er, clear, er, both.

Clare put five runners in the next six spots and won with just 21 points.

Senior Jimmy Teall was second in 17:58, junior David Good third in

18:02, sophomore Kaleb Schroeder fourth in 18:14, junior Jayce Miller fifth in 18:30 and sophomore Alan Winter seventh in 18:47 for the Pioneers.

The Beavers were second with 50. Sophomore Elijah Hayes was sixth in 18:46 and junior Isaac Steele 10th in 19:00.

Meridian ran third with 85, led by sophomore Brody Ankoviak, who was eighth in 18:49.

Gladwin was forth with 124. Senior Feng Jin Cui was ninth in 18:57 for the Flying G's.

Clare had a big weekend prior to the event, winning the Blue Division at the Sparta Invitational with 58 points. Jenison was second with 65.

Teall led the pack, placing third in 17:11. Good was right there with him and ended up fifth in 17:12. Schroeder finished 11th, Miller was 16th and junior Dylan Marrison was 23rd.

The Pioneers placed fourth in the Falcon Division at the Cougar-Falcon Invite at Eagle's Nest on Sept. 23. Schroeder was 16th, Teall 17th and Good 21st for Clare.

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