

Rob McCordy

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HIGH SCHOOL

Division II Gamer

Marion Harding claims Division I boys bowling state runner-up trophy

In its fifth straight trip to the Division I boys bowling state tournament, Marion Harding finished a best-ever second place.

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COLUMBUS — Moments after it was all over, Marion Harding junior Jordan Hensley said the school needs to add a new trophy case for the bowling team's haul.

Without a doubt, Athletic Director Sean Kearns will have to make room for more hardware and clear more wall space in the gym.

The Presidents brought the Division I boys bowling state runner-up trophy back to Marion Friday night.

"This is the ultimate goal, bring home another banner," junior Jayden Combs said.

Marion Harding wasn't as sharp as it's been in its last three tournaments, but that didn't matter. The Presidents were good enough, finding ways to make the cut and get victories in the bracket finals until paired with Centerville in the championship match.

The Elks prevailed 3-1 in the best-of-five Baker games with the fourth game showcasing the highest level of bowling. Centerville, making a record ninth state appearance, won that final game 260-245 to claim its first championship since 2008.

"They bowled great. They had a good team," said Elks retiring head coach Andy Parker of the Presidents. "We've bowled like this all season. This makes the eighth tournament we've won this year. A lot of the time people don't get one tournament win, and we've had eight. We've had a great season."

In Baker games where each bowler in the lineup cycles through the game eventually completing two frames, Centerville won the first one 209-183, but Harding answered back with a 232-187 victory.

Lane 28 proved to be the tougher setup compared to Lane 27 for Harding as the Elks romped to a 201-136 win in the third game to take a 2-1 lead.

In the fourth, Harding posted nine strikes with a pair of spares, but a tough-luck split in the fourth frame proved to be the difference. Centerville countered with nine strikes and spares coming in the

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fourth and fifth frames.

"When you face a good team like that in any sport, you can't give away pins," Harding coach Corey Chatman said. "We gave away some. You shoot a 245 (and) nine out of 10 times you're probably walking away with the win. Just didn't go our way today. We made them earn it."

Centerville, which was state runner-up in 2020 but failed to get out of last year's quarterfinals, won a national championship last year.

"We said we're going to win state this year," Parker said. "This is my last year coaching for Centerville and the guys all knew it. We said we're going to try to win our last four tournaments, so we won sectionals, we won districts and now state. We now need to defend our title at nationals in Louisville."

As for Harding, there was a feeling of accomplishment that was lacking a year ago.

"I wish we would have got first, but second is still good. The emotions are high," Harding senior Caden Millisor said.

Last year, the Presidents entered the bracketed Elite Eight finals as the top seed after rolling through the three qualifying games and three qualifying Baker games with a 3,582. While they beat Nordon 3-1 in the quarterfinals, the Prexies lost to rival Ashland 3-2 with a gutting 182-177 loss in the fifth game of the semifinals, setting for third place.

"It's odd. We improved and came up short, but it almost feels better," Combs said, the 2021 individual state champion. "Last year was very emotional. We were so close. Now we took the extra step and ran into the best team in the state."

After crushing the competition all season in the Mid Ohio Athletic Conference, including winning a fifth straight MOAC Tournament, the Presidents dominated the Division I sectional and then won a second straight district championship.

Unlike those occasions, Harding struggled comparatively most of Friday.

They posted a second-best qualifying game in the first round with a 1,026, but followed it up with an 873, which was 14th best out of 16 teams in the second game and put them in sixth place. Harding rebounded in the third game with a 968 to end with a 2,867 for fifth place entering the three Baker qualifying games.

"We knew coming into today that there were going to be ups and downs and peaks and valleys. We had to grind," Chatman said. "They've been grinding all year, and I didn't expect any less other than to give everything they had. And they did."

Harding shot a 200 in the first Baker game, but dropped to a 164 in the second, before finishing with a 190. The team's 3,421 was good enough to earn the fourth seed in the eight-team bracketed finals.

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"We always stress being able to move on and just bowl in the present — no anticipation," Combs said. "All the way through we had a really bad second game and we knew we needed to have a somewhat decent third game to keep us in it. We bowled mediocre in Bakers, but I knew we were in."

Added Chatman: "We asked them to make the cut. You make the cut, it doesn't matter if you're eighth or first, just make the cut because anything can happen, and we got there."

In the quarterfinals against No. 5 seed Parma Padua, Harding won 3-0, but didn't run away with any of games, posting scores of 169, 172 and 197. The Prexies edged Padua by three pins in the second game.

"We left a lot of pins out there, especially in the match plays. We left a lot of pins," Millisor said. "We definitely weren't sharp."

Against top-seeded Nordonia, the Prexies weren't at their best, but they were certainly good enough. Harding won it 3-1 after shooting 188, 169, 170 and 210 to Nordonia's 154, 165, 210 and 156.

"Against Padua we were basically handed three matches. Nordonia was tougher, but we bowled a little better. We put the pressure on them, and they didn't handle it," Combs said.

That put the Presidents in the finals where they were guaranteed a trophy despite facing No. 2 seed Centerville that needed five games to get by Boardman in its semifinal match.

"We gave it the best we could," Combs said of the final match. "They gave it the best they could. They got one more break and they beat us. Nothing to be ashamed of shooting 245. We beat Nordonia, and we knew we were bringing home a trophy. It was just a matter of which one."

Millisor agreed.

"Nordonia was a good team, but Centerville was really good," he said. "For us to shoot a 245 and we lost, that's big. We gave it our best shot. Last year was way worse because Ashland is our rival. The feeling was way worse last year. This year we got a trophy so we're bringing it back to Marion."

Harding was making its fifth straight trip to state, and the runner-up finish was a best-ever for the program.

Millisor capped his senior year by finishing 15th to earn the final All-Ohio honorable mention spot with a three-game series of 241-170-213 635 to get it by two pins.

"Being a senior, he grinded through, and when we needed him the most, he came through," Chatman said of his left-hander's day. "It was a heck of a ride for him, and that's all we ask for. Give us everything you've got and let the chips lay where they lay."

Combs settled for 40th with a 181-181-213 575, while Hensley was 45th with a 225-179-164 568, senior Gage Warren was 52nd with a 183-157-212 552 and junior Cameron Rayner was 58th with a 196-186-155 537. Warren was making a record fourth straight trip to state, tying him with former teammate Eli Cox who graduated last year.

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"We put it together," Combs said.

Now it's time to make more room in the trophy case and on the gym wall for the Prexies — and that's a good problem to have.

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SOFTBALL

Regional Softball: Cardington clobbers Tinora to make Elite Eight

Cardington downed Tinora 29-4 in a D-III regional semifinal softball game Tuesday in Elida. The Pirates will play in a fifth regional final Friday.

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ELIDA — Tod Brininger has been doing this for more than 10 years, and he's never seen a game quite like the one experienced Tuesday night in Elida.

Not a regular season game. Definitely not a tournament game, let alone one as deep as the Sweet 16.

"Never been a part of something," the Cardington softball coach said. "(The Tinora Rams) are a really good team. That pitcher can bring it. I've never been a part where nine players have been focused in. They remember last year (an 11-1 loss to Sherwood Fairview in the regional final). They talked about it. They were all focused in and making things happen. The dugout had great energy. Everyone was ready to go. Against a really good team, I've never seen anything like it."

The final score at the Division III regional semifinal was Cardington 29, Tinora 4. That's not a misprint.

"It was crazy. Coming into tonight we really weren't expecting this," Cardington senior outfielder Dana Bertke said. "We were hoping to come through with the dub obviously, but even in regular season, we played teams that we did really well on, but nothing like this. This was a crazy experience."

Tinora came into the game with a 19-3 record after having upset Otsego, Division III's No. 3 ranked team in Ohio, 2-1 in the district championship game. Pitcher Scylea Zolman had great velocity for the Rams, too.

None of it mattered against the Pirates.

"We've seen a lot of upsets happen this year, so we're just trying to focus on one game at a time and never underestimate a team," Cardington senior shortstop Riley Burchett said of their mindset. "Just make sure you come in focused on your at-bats and have a lot of energy in the field, that's what we've been focusing on this year."

The tone was set in the top of the first inning when all nine batters in the lineup appeared at the plate as the Pirates staked themselves to a 3-0 lead.

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"We came in knowing that they were going to be great competition and a great team," senior outfielder Hailee Edgell said. "We knew we had to come out on top in the first inning by hitting hard, and I think our team produced that first inning and that produced so much energy. That's what kept the game rolling."

Cardington essentially ended it in the second inning, scoring 11 runs on seven hits to take a 14-0 lead. Six more came in the third inning for a 20-0 edge.

"I think our coaches prepared us a lot for this game," Edgell said. "We had practices where we focused on hitting and bunting. We knew going in that we would have to adjust our swings. Coming out of the district finals, we knew she was going to be throwing a spin and that she was going to be coming in with some speed, I think our coaches prepared us really well and allowed us to have a good mindset."

Cardington didn't score in the fourth inning, but in the fifth with Brininger substituting liberally, the team still managed nine runs on seven hits.

"I told Al (Adams, Cardington assistant) that we need four or five runs to win this game. I thought that's where it would be, and I thought it would be a one-run game. I never expected us to hit that kid that well," Brininger said.

To get ready for a pitcher the caliber of Zolman, the coach backloaded his late-season schedule with games against Central District powers like Lancaster, Gahanna, Watkins Memorial, Marysville and Jonathan Alder.

"We knew we were going to face this pitching. We wanted to see it. Every kid got 14 or 15 at-bats against really good pitching last week which is a huge thing," Brininger said.

Edgell had a hall-of-fame kind of day, hitting two homers, a triple and two singles to end with eight RBI and five runs scored. Bertke doubled twice and singled for two RBI and four runs. Burchett doubled and had three RBI. Genevieve Longsdorf hit a home run, double and single for two RBI. Ari Simpson singled three times and doubled for two RBI. Morgan Powell came off the bench for two singles.

In all, the Pirates claimed 23 hits. On defense, they were clean with no errors behind the pitching of Longsdorf, who finished with four runs on seven hits, no walks and 10 strikeouts over five innings.

Brininger said the team had until midnight to feel good about what they accomplished, but then it was time to move on.

Up next for the Pirates (23-3) is one-loss Van Buran, a newcomer to the regional finals. The game is set for Friday at 5 p.m. at Elida with the winner gaining a Division III state tournament berth.

"After this game, we have to forget this game," Edgell said. "It feels good to have this big win under us, but we know we can't keep focusing on this game. We have to look to the new one, and we don't know what they're going to bring. We've never faced them before. We know we're going to have to bring everything we have and come with full force no matter what and never let up no matter what."

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It will be a fifth straight regional championship game for the Pirates as they won it three straight years from 2017 to 2019. The 2020 season was canceled due to the start of the coronavirus pandemic and last year they were run-ruled by the eventual state champions.

"Last year I think we came into the game expecting to win," Burchett said. "This year it makes us want to stay focused for each game and not underestimate anyone."

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HIGH SCHOOL

State Cross Country: Mount Gilead takes home championship

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OBETZ — Nerves? Everyone feels it the morning of the state cross country championships, especially when toeing the line before the firing of the starter's pistol.

It's what Mount Gilead did with those nerves that changed their fortune.

"It's excitement. We don't like to call it nervous. We like to turn it into excitement, and we definitely did that today," Mount Gilead junior Parker Bartlett said minutes after emptying his stomach into a trash can due to all his "excitement" following the race.

Unlike the previous four seasons where the Indians finished fifth, second, third and second in the Division III boys team standings at the state meet, this group stood atop the podium Saturday at Fortress Obetz.

"It's mostly relief. I'm super happy, but I'm so relieved that I've finally done it," MG senior Reed Supplee said, adding, "It feels amazing to finally be a part of that team to be able to finally do it. To get second twice over my career, obviously it didn't feel so great to be that close, but it feels amazing to have finally done it. I'm super excited."

While other seasons featured bad luck or drama-filled moments at state, this one went about as well as Mount Gilead could have asked. A top two team all season with Ottawa Hills and the pre-state favorite in the final Division III coaches poll, garnering 11 of 12 first-place votes, the Indians lived up to their advance billing.

Mount Gilead won the state championship going away, scoring 82 points to beat Ottawa Hills in second place by 69 points. Finishing third was Cincinnati Summit Country Day six points behind OH with 157 points, while Botkins was fourth with 167, Maplewood fifth with 188, Columbus Grove sixth with 235, McDonald seventh with 242, Black River eighth with 248, Belpre ninth with 257 and Bluffton 10th with 266. Northmor was 20th in the boys D-III meet with 436 points.

"We just tried to stay relaxed, knowing we'd run 12 meets and we can go out and do what we've done this whole season and be all right," Mount Gilead sophomore Will Baker said.

That's exactly what they did.

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In the first 450 meters, Mount Gilead surged to the lead ahead of Maplewood, Ottawa Hills, Botkins and Black River. At the mile, the Indians unofficially checked in with 57 points ahead of the 110 by Ottawa Hills, 127 by Botkins, 145 by Maplewood and 180 by Country Day.

With a little over a mile left, MG held its spot with an unofficial tally of 70 points as Ottawa Hills couldn't slice into it with 118, nor could Country Day with 148, Botkins with 155 and Maplewood with 190.

"We definitely tried to get out really tough and strong," Baker said. "It worked out really well. Our top three guys are obviously in the top 20 and doing really well working together as a team."

In the first mile, MG's top five runners were all inside the top 35 as the game plan was to take the lead early and force their opponents to play catchup.

"It was to stay composed and to stay close together," Supplee said of the strategy. "I know me and Parker tried to stay side-by-side for a good bit of it, but we're competitive."

Added Bartlett: "We wanted to put three kids out there and make a statement early on. We have a lot of trust with our 4, 5, 6 and 7 (runners). We all know we're going to go out and do our best, so we might as well go for it."

The top 20 runners get on the podium with the top 30 earning All-Ohio honors. Befitting of a state championship squad, the Indians had three podium All-Ohioans as Baker was 10th in 16:16, Bartlett 13th in 16:20 and Supplee 14th in 16:24.

But without the efforts of the other two scorers — senior Aaron Gannon who finished 37th in 16:47 and freshman Owen Hershner who ended 73rd in 17:21 — the Indians are not celebrating Saturday afternoon.

"I trust Aaron," Supplee said. "Aaron is a great runner and an amazing person. I love him to death. Owen, I don't know as much, but I was also that freshman that ran at state. I wasn't the fifth guy, but I knew he could do it. I knew it was in him. He has a great older brother in Cole, and I know he led him into state real well."

For the top three at MG, they were key member's of last year's state runner-up finish behind East Canton. Baker was 18th in 16:18, Supplee 22nd in 16:23 and Bartlett 57th in 16:57 a season ago at Fortress Obetz. But for Gannon and obviously Hershner, this was uncharted territory.

Mount Gilead coach Jake Hayes marveled at his team's poise considering the pressure of expectations foisted upon them all season and especially the four newcomers to the state experience as junior Nathan Smith was 174th in 19:16 and freshman Gage Baker was 182nd in 19:49 to round out the squad.

"For Owen to be a freshman and it's Aaron's first time at the state cross country meet, for them to keep

hard they worked this season. We wouldn't have been here without them that's for sure," Hayes said.

For the coach, a Mount Gilead alum who once competed at state as a high schooler, and later returned as an assistant coach under longtime mentor Denny West before taking over the program five years ago, it was went according to Hoyle for once.

"We've had a lot of drama-filled state days with people dropping out (of races) or the live results not working or people being out (for state)," he said of previous state results. "I was like we need one year where everything goes smooth. With the exception of how slowly the results came up at the end (today), it was about as drama-free as we could ask for. It was a good day."

It was also an emotional one for Hayes as he reflected on the accomplishment and what a state championship meant to the school and program.

"These kids have worked so stinking hard for it and not just those guys. It's Kyle and Casey White, Trevor Ball and Michael Snopik," he said while taking a moment to clear his throat and wipe his eyes while mentioning recent MG greats who have since graduated. "It's a bunch of people over the last five years. The fact that they were able to come out and do what those guys started a lot time ago, it means a lot."

They quelled their nerves and turned it into fuel for their run to a state championship — even the coach.

"For me, I thought I would feel different. The disappointing thing is it doesn't feel any different," Hayes said of finally breaking through with a title. "I was standing out there and we won and I was hoping it would feel cooler, but I stopped feeling sick to my stomach. That's about the best thing."

Kurt Snyder

Division II
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Warrior Rugby still perfect after clash with fellow state champ Olentangy

POWELL — As the weather worsened Friday, Warrior Rugby just played better.

Warrior Rugby has excelled with a mantra of playing anyone anywhere, and the A side did not back down in a battle of unbeatens. Warrior Rugby grinded out a 15-8 victory in a rainy, muddy mess against host Olentangy Rugby to win the Capital City Conference Championship.

"It's just more fun. Any sport once it gets muddy out, it's a little bit more fun," senior Joshua Cangelosi said. "It was a nice little dogfight. You see what you are made of in the elements."

The defending Division II single school state champions ran its winning streak to 18 games and take the top seed in the upcoming postseason, setting up its pursuit of a repeat title.

Warrior Rugby answered an early three points with a try from senior Dominic Solomon, who barreled through the defense and across the line. The defense did the job from there, allowing Olentangy just its single try during the final seconds.

"It's really fun. We have a great team and a hard-working culture," said Solomon, a first-year player, who will play football at Tiffin University. "(Running the ball) is the best part. They like

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to feed me, and I get to play defense. It's the best of both worlds."

Warrior Rugby prefers to use a wide-open attack, and an adjustment had to be made on a slow track that was made worse when the rain picked up during the second half. Warrior Rugby's defense led by Solomon, Jacob Eicholtz, Zac McDermott and Beau Abbott, who left late with a shoulder injury, frustrated Olentangy each time it moved deep into the Warrior territory.

Leading 5-3 early in the second half, Logen VanHoose provided Warrior Rugby with breathing room. VanHoose sliced through Olentangy attack, intercepting a pitch and taking it more than 50 yards for the try.

"I come up and hit on defense, but I look to get my little picks," said VanHoose, who made two similar plays during a recent record-setting performance of seven tries against Perrysburg. "I made that my game. That is what I try to do."

An offense directed by Griff Wilson and fueled by Joey Romshe, Joey Apel and VanHoose knocked on the door for Warrior Rugby throughout the second half. Finally, it was power that got the offense across the line.

Advancing off a line out, Ryan Shull pushed a scrum almost 20 yards for the try, giving Warrior Rugby an insurance score with less than 10 minutes left.

"It feels great," VanHoose said. "When we play our game of rugby, we have all of the faith in each other. We came out here and survived. The weather was not in our favor, so we had to

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be smart and control the ball. Now, it's just towards the playoffs."

Warrior Rugby knocked off the defending Division I club state champions in a game that proved it can win in a low-scoring defensive struggle. Confidence is at an all-time high.

"Everyone can be good when it's a nice beautiful day out," Cangelosi said. "It takes a good team to do it in weather like this. We are building something special."

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Culver's memory boosts Sheridan football to thrilling win at Licking Valley

HANOVER — Paul Culver understandably had trouble keeping his emotions in check Friday.

His Sheridan football team kept its cool, and gave its coach a memorable victory. The Generals drove 96 yards early in the fourth quarter to score the tie-breaking touchdown in a 35-28 victory against Licking Valley at Randy Baughman Stadium.

"The analogy I kept coming back to is it's not a boxing match, it's a hockey fight," said a teary-eyed Culver after addressing his team. The Generals were playing their first game since the death of Culver's father, legendary Sheridan coach Paul Culver Jr., last winter.

It was a victory that would have forced Paul Culver Jr. to flash a smile. Sheridan shut out Valley in the second half, overcoming a 28-21 deficit with two physical ball-control drives.

The Generals' defense clinched the victory with a fourth-down sack of junior Hayden Rodgers with 1:35 left.

"Don't get me wrong. (Valley) has incredible technique and an incredible game plan. Trying to stop his offense is a nightmare, but it's just like two guys who grab each other's jerseys and punch each other repeatedly for 48 minutes," Culver added. "It was incredible to watch. I am exhausted, and I didn't play a down."

Rodgers threw for 231 yards and three scores in the first half. Two of those went to senior Ayden Stalnaker, but the Sheridan defense slowed Valley's attack in the second half.

"We had some opportunities. We just didn't always capitalize on them," Valley coach Randy Baughman said. "They were moving the ball on us in a couple situations where we maybe needed to make a stop. We didn't quite get it done."

Sheridan drove 75 yards on 12 plays to begin the third quarter. Senior Alex Poirier scored on a 3-yard run to tie the game at 28.

After the teams traded punts, Valley moved to midfield as the third quarter ended. Facing a fourth-and-4, Rodgers quick-kicked, pinning Sheridan inside its 5-yard line for the second time.

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The Generals then drove 96 yards on 13 plays. Poirier had an immediate 18-yard run, and Caden Sheridan hit A.J. Winders for 22 yards before Poirier eventually dove in from the 1.

"That drive was for Paul Culver Jr. Tonight's game was dedicated to him," Sheridan senior lineman Zizek Hunter said. "We wanted to make him proud."

Much of the first half was an offensive showcase. Each team scored on its opening drive with Rodgers hitting Stalnaker for 11 yards for Valley and Reid Packer running 19 yards for Sheridan.

Packer then hit Austin Clifton for a 12-yard touchdown following a Justin Munyan interception. Valley answered when Rodgers hit Stalnaker for an 81-yard score.

The first of Poirier's three scores covered 7 yards. Rodgers hit sophomore Kam Walker for 35 yards for a tying score before senior Theo Walsh scored on a 3-yard run to give Valley a 28-21 lead just before halftime.

"Everyone got their money's worth, that's for sure," Baughman said. "Everybody likes to see offense. I would be happy with an 8-6 game, but that's not going to happen nowadays."

Rodgers was 17-for-25 with 257 yards and ran for 76 yards on 13 carries. Colton Carr added 56 yards on 13 carries, and Stalnaker caught seven passes for 150 yards.

Poirier ran for 83 yards on 18 carries, one of four ball carriers with at least six attempts for the Generals. Packer rushed for 66 yards and threw for 40, and Sheridan threw for 49 as they split time at quarterback.

"Twenty-one seniors," Culver said. "We sold them on the plan. We had to win it in the fourth quarter. There was no way we were putting them away. ... We were riding people. We won this game in February. They have a great off-season program. In a lot of ways, they are what escalated our off-season program 20 years ago when this war started."

Granville girls cross country marches to second OHSAA state gold

O BETZ — When an opponent sees one Granville girls cross country runner, more are never far behind.

Senior Ella Johnson took the challenge to lead the way Saturday, racing to an All-Ohio finish, and the pack soon followed to the finish line. After being edged out a year ago, Granville left no doubt, winning the Division II state championship at Fortress Obetz.

"It's a pretty cool experience," said Johnson, whose time of 19:13.4 on another windy and unseasonably warm Saturday earned her 13th place. "We really emphasize our team, so I just went out there and fought for every single one of them."

Granville totaled 130 points, well ahead of runner-up Kenston's 155. The Blue Aces who were runners-up two of the last three seasons, have a championship trophy to match the one earned in 2014.

Johnson, who ran in state meets with the Blue Aces her first two seasons but was not a member of the varsity lineup in 2021, returned with a vengeance this fall. The state race became a literal crowning achievement.

"I was feeling strong and just thinking back to all of the work we've put in this season," Johnson said. "Just the bond we are able to have together is pretty awesome. It's something we are all going to cherish forever."

Seniors Zoe Lehman 30th (19:48.9), Sophia Cotts 47th (20:08.9) and Lillian Eckels 55th (20:16.9) and sophomore Sophia Poling 67th (20:28.8) rounded out the scoring. Junior Kara Bergeron, who ran most of the race with one shoe, 81st (20:37.9) and sophomore Anne Weis 131st (21:36.3) were displacers.

Coach Tanner Ernest said his "Racin' Aces" have embraced their role as ants, working toward one common goal. What they accomplished together Saturday can never be matched.

"It's amazing. I am very emotional at the thought of making it here again," said Cotts, who competed in the 2020 state meet but also was not in the lineup last season. She worked her way back this fall and was at her best during the postseason.

"This is huge," Cotts added. "I am so proud of all of the teams here today and especially proud of my girls."

Johnstown junior Reece Savage finished 54th (20:15.5).

Rafferty runs with best

Corey Rafferty did not let his experience go to waste. The Lakewood senior used his past state trip a year ago and his regional race a week ago to boost him to All-Ohio honors.

With a strong kick, Rafferty secured 19th place with a time of 16:25.2 despite the challenging conditions.

"I raced pretty smart today. I started off closer to the back and just tried to pass people," Rafferty said. "I didn't run as fast as I wanted, but it's pretty windy."

Rafferty had a breakout track season after finishing 85th in the 2021 state cross country meet. He carried that momentum into the fall, winning the Licking County League championship before his postseason run took him to the podium.

"You are with people all of the time, and they are pushing and shoving," Rafferty said. "I wasn't really as used to it last year, and I was surprised. I was expecting it (Saturday), and people just go out so fast here."

Granville senior Eli Kretchmar placed 34th (16:45.2), leading the Blue Aces to a seventh-place finish. Sophomores Lane Hannahs 49th (16:59.7) and Cohen Stump 52nd (17:01.8) were next.

"It feels great to come here and be a part of this. I haven't had the season I wanted to, but I got here with the help of my teammates," Hannahs said. "It was a slow course. There was a lot of wind, but I threw a surge in right about the end of the first mile. I definitely felt it at the end, but it was worth it."

Senior Andrew Harms 98th (17:31.5) and junior Owen Kirkham 110th (17:41.7) rounded out the scoring for the Blue Aces, who finished just 16 points out of the top five. Freshmen Callum Sproul 151st (18:16.4) and Sebastian Rodgers 168th (18:56.6) got a taste of the state meet.

Lakewood senior Caleb Rafferty finished 53rd (17:03.9), and Heath junior Tucker See took 62nd (17:09.9).

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'Dogs crush 'Cats at century mark

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Aaron Gross

Division II Gamer

Content

NAPOLEON — Last year's 7-0 shutout of Napoleon was a flashback to gritty days of Defiance football yore.

A year later, the Bulldogs put together an even more vintage performance as Defiance picked up its first consecutive victories over rival Napoleon since 2000-01 on Friday at Buckenmeyer Stadium with a 28-7 rout in the 100th meeting between the two river rivals.

Defiance (1-0) won by its largest margin in the series since a 28-7 victory in 2001 as the Bulldogs forced a pair of Napoleon turnovers and saw junior running back Brogan Castillo batter his way to 128 yards rushing.

"We executed the game plan to perfection," said Defiance coach Travis Cooper, who starts his DHS coaching career 2-0 against Napoleon. "Our guys were gritty, they were tough and even though we're way undersized, we were flying around. Offensively, we had a good mix of run and pass with different guys stepping up and making plays.

"It was a complete team win."

Up just 6-0 at the break, Defiance imposed its will in the second half from the opening kickoff. The Bulldogs drove 65 yards in 10 plays, highlighted by chunk plays on screen passes to Castillo for 12 yards and speedy sophomore Anthony Wilder for 27. After Castillo pushed forward to the Napoleon four, sophomore QB Brez Zipfel rolled out and found Wilder for a touchdown that put the Bulldogs up 14-0 following a conversion pass to Christian Commisso.

After stifling a Wildcat drive in six plays, the Bulldogs again had Napoleon's number with a nine-play, 60-yard march down the field, fueled by the bruising Castillo.

The 6-1, 179-pound junior, who led the team with 403 yards a season ago, carried the ball on six of the nine plays, tallying 48 of the 60 yards before Zipfel found Commisso for a toe-tap seven-yard touchdown pass in the back of the endzone with 39 seconds left in the third quarter to go up 21-0.

Castillo's unrelenting run game was nothing new to Cooper, however.

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"There's times where there's a big hit (in practice), whether he dishes it out or someone gives it to him and he'll be laughing," said the DHS mentor of his bellcow back. "I'll hear him going back to the huddle and he's like, 'I love football.' He's a kid you love to coach ... he's hard to bring down and a lot of people underestimate him. I know there were some different people that said some things he'd heard about him and his gameplay and he had extra motivation this week to prove he's a tough runner."

"Physicality, it's my favorite thing about football," said Castillo. "I love hammering the ball down their throat but I couldn't do that without my line. I had those good blocks to set me up and they gave me gaps right to the linebackers that I could just take through."

Napoleon had its comeback hopes come alive early in the final period as QB Blake Wolf guided the 'Cats downfield for a 71-yard touchdown drive, highlighted by a 28-yard completion to Andrew Williams to the Defiance 15. Senior Masen Switzer punched it in from seven yards out to cut the deficit to two scores at 21-7 with 9:43 left.

However, Defiance had one more counter punch left.

After eating up precious clock time with a drive from their own 28 to the Napoleon 27, a declined holding penalty set up a fourth-and-seven situation from the Wildcat 20 for Defiance.

The Bulldogs went for the dagger and made it count as Zipfel heaved a fade down the right side that landed in the arms of senior Brian Phillips for a game-clinching TD with 2:13 to go. The DHS defense, which has now allowed just seven points in the last eight quarters against the Wildcats, wrapped things up with an interception in the endzone by junior Antonio Lopez to keep the River Rock Trophy on Palmer Drive for another season.

"These guys wanted to prove something tonight," said Cooper. "We're just a bunch of little guys that a lot of people looked at us and said gosh, with the monsters Napoleon has ... our guys, they took that to heart and they wanted to prove something tonight."

The first half saw hard hits and harder-fought yardage, recalling the 7-0 slugfest of a season ago that went the Bulldogs' way.

Defiance forced a Napoleon punt with less than two minutes in the first quarter in a scoreless contest and drove into Napoleon territory. A third-down heave from Zipfel to Wilder down the left side of the field was broken up in the endzone but a pass interference call put the Bulldogs at the Wildcat 11 with a fresh set of downs.

Another third down conversion from Zipfel to Phillips got the Bulldogs to the Napoleon one and one play later, the bruising Castillo burst through for the first touchdown of the 2022 season for the Bulldogs.

Napoleon dodged disaster late in the first half as junior Garrett Rodenberger recovered a Wildcat fumble with 2:14 left in the second period at the DHS 42. The host defense held firm and forced a three-and-out to preserve the 6-0 margin.

Zipfel finished with a stellar line of 166 yards, three touchdown passes and no interceptions on 18-of-22 tossing, completing eight passes to Phillips for 77 yards and a score with five throws to Wilder for 59 yard and a TD.

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Wolf was 12-of-21 for 160 yards while leading the Wildcats on the ground with 49 yards on nine carries.

Commisso was the leader of the defensive unit for the Bulldogs with 12 tackles, seven solo, while Gavino Gomez had eight tackles and 1.5 sacks. Jacob Aguilar led the Wildcat defense with 11 tackles and a sack.

Defiance will look for its first 2-0 start since 2018 in its home opener in week two against St. Marys while Napoleon will look to regroup with a trip to county rival Liberty Center.

DHS NHS

First Downs 22 17

Rushing Yards 34-110 28-107

Passing Yards 166 160

Total Yards 276 267

Passing 18-22-0 12-21-1

Fumbles-Lost 0-0 1-1

Penalties 1-22 2-16

Defiance 0 6 15 7 — 28

Napoleon 0 0 0 7 — 7

D — Castillo 1-run (kick failed).

D — Wilder 4-pass from Zipfel (Commisso pass from Zipfel).

D — Commisso 7-pass from Zipfel (Gmutza kick).

N — Switzer 7-run (Bickel kick).

D — Phillips 20-pass from Zipfel (Gmutza kick).

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Defiance — Castillo 24-128; Wilder 3-6; Zipfel 7-(-24). Napoleon — Wolf 9-49; Williams 9-18; Switzer 4-14; Seibel 2-13; Speaks 3-7; Dietrich 1-5. **PASSING:** Defiance — Zipfel 18-22-0-166. Napoleon — Wolf 12-21-1-160. **RECEIVING:** Defiance — Phillips 8-77; Wilder 5-59; Commisso 2-10; Castillo 1-12; Walter 1-5; Kellermeyer 1-3. Napoleon — Williams 7-98; Rubinstein 3-41; Dietrich 1-12; Stoner 1-10.

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District baseball: Defiance rallies past Napoleon, returns to regionals

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Content

ARCHBOLD — Though perhaps not the textbook definition of a perfect win on the baseball diamond, Saturday’s Division II district championship game was as close to by-the-book as it gets for Defiance.

The bottom half of the batting order came through in a sixth-inning rally for the No. 1 Bulldogs as Defiance broke through with three runs to claim a 4-2 comeback win over rival Napoleon and reach regionals for the first time since 2016.

“That’s why they call it a team,” said DHS coach Tom Held, who has led the program to the regional level 13 times. “They’ve known since day one we’ve had 13 starters, 13 guys that could play.”

The Bulldogs will face either Tiffin Columbian or Celina/Wapakoneta in a Division II regional semifinal on Thursday June 2 at Carter Park in Bowling Green at 2 p.m.

To get there, the Bulldogs battled back from early adversity as Napoleon plated a pair of runs in the second inning thanks to a leadoff single from sophomore Lucas Gerken, who was driven home two batters later on a double to center field by Luke Hardy. Hardy then came around to score from third when a two-out pickoff throw to second base went to center field and put the Wildcats up 2-0.

Defiance answered back in the bottom of the frame with an RBI single off the bat of eight-hole hitter Wade Liffick to halve the lead but with runners at first and second, the Bulldogs were held to just the one run.

For the next three innings, hurlers Bradyn Shaw of Defiance and Tanner Rubinstein of Napoleon dueled with three straight goose-eggs put up on the Memorial Park scoreboard. Defiance drew a pair of walks in the fourth inning but was unable to advance the runners while leading base stealer Jacob Howard was wiped out at second base in the fifth.

In the sixth inning, however, Defiance finally had its chance to break through and the top-ranked team in Division II did so, spurred by a leadoff single from junior Tyler Frederick, who beat out an infield single to reach. After a pop-out bunt attempt and Frederick’s steal of second, junior

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Aidan Kiessling came through with a base knock and as Frederick rounded third and slowed on a late stop sign from the coaching box, the play at home was bobbled, allowing the DHS outfielder to score and tie the game.

On the next at-bat, Rubinstein's pickoff throw to third was mishandled and Kiessling sprinted home for a go-ahead run. Senior Kam Brown grounded to second and was able to reach via error, keeping the Bulldogs' run alive with two outs.

"Coach Held always says we've got to put the pressure on them," said Kiessling. "I was down in the count, I got a curveball and luckily I stuck the bat out there and got a hit ... We stayed positive the whole time, we knew we had it and we just kept competing to break through one time and we did it."

"That's tournament baseball and you have to play at a very, very high level," said Napoleon coach Jason Holubik of the heartbreaking loss that saw his Wildcats finish with four errors and just one hit in the final five innings. "You're playing against the No. 1 team in the state and in a very pressure situation. We had great effort there ... that's baseball, the margin of error is very thin and you just tip your cap to them."

On the second pitch of his at-bat, Liffick came through again, blasting a Rubinstein pitch to deep center field for an RBI triple and a key insurance run.

"He had four RBIs the entire season coming into this weekend and then he has six in the districts," said Held of the district breakout for the senior first baseman, following a two-hit, four-RBI effort against Ottawa-Glandorf in the district semifinals Friday. "Wade comes to work every day, he's a great teammate, he's a coach's dream and we couldn't be happier for a guy to have the success he had this weekend."

Just as he had for 14 of the previous 15 at-bats, Shaw came through in the top of the seventh on the mound to cap off a 94-pitch complete game, striking out the last two batters he faced in a 1-2-3 frame.

Shaw finished with four hits allowed, 11 strikeouts and no walks in the gem for the Bulldogs, improving to 7-0 on the year.

For Defiance, the 28th win of the year ties the 2022 Bulldogs with the 2015 state championship team and the 2007 regional semifinalists for the third-most single-season wins in program history (2013 31-1, 205 and 2012 30-2, 2010 and 2016 29-2).

The six-year drought, including the 2020 canceled season, was the longest span between district titles in Held's tenure (1999-present) and the second-longest in program history (1951-1991).

"We had these guys do the banner walk, looking through the banners and talking about each team and these guys knew everything about the '13, '15 and '16 teams," said Held. "They were all eight, nine years old and it's been in their heads and couldn't wait to get to high school. I'd say they've still got a long way to go but they got us back to the regional, something that hasn't happened in a while."

For Napoleon, the setback marked not only the final game for seniors Kaleb Woods, Dylan Mussel, Angelo Gonzalez, Landon Eberle and Tanner Rubinstein, but also for Holubik, who

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will be moving out of the district in the near future for family reasons. His resignation was accepted by the Napoleon Board of Education Wednesday, effective at season's end.

"It's gratifying," said the Napoleon skipper of his tenure with the Wildcats, including a 16-13 mark this season and 59 wins in his seven seasons with the program. "When I got here, I realized right away this is a tough league, a tough area for baseball so I wanted us to be respected. I wanted teams to respect us and know we had a good program. This year, everything started to click, the JV team finished 19-5 this year and you want to leave it better than what you found it and I feel that way."

Napoleon 020 000 0 — 2 4 4

Defiance 010 003 x — 4 5 1

Records: Defiance 28-2, Napoleon 16-13.

Winning pitcher: Bradyn Shaw (7 innings, 2 runs, 1 earned, 4 hits, 11 strikeouts, 0 walks).

Losing pitcher: Tanner Rubinstein (6 innings, 4 runs, 1 earned, 5 hits, 8 strikeouts, 4 walks).

Leading hitters: (Napoleon) — Luke Hardy double. (Defiance) — Wade Liffick single, triple, 2 RBIs.

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Antwerp wins one for the ages

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Content

LIBERTY CENTER – In a season full of memories and historic feats, Antwerp added perhaps the most lasting memory of their unbeaten 2022 run.

Junior standout quarterback Carson Altimus was knocked out in the fourth quarter of Saturday's Division VII Region 26 semifinal against Gibsonburg at Liberty Center's Kip Kern Field at Rex Lingruen Stadium, only to return from a lower leg injury to orchestrate a game-winning drive as the Archers stayed unbeaten with a 35-27 triumph.

"Our guys fight, fight, fight," said Antwerp head coach Jason Hale of the second straight playoff heart-stopper for the Archers (13-0). "What a great performance by our leaders. Guys stepped up and made plays and we played a great team tonight. Our guys responded and played team football, it was great to see."

The win propels Antwerp into the Region 26 finals against Lima Central Catholic (9-4) at a site to be determined on Saturday, Nov. 19. LCC ousted top-seeded McComb 30-26 to advance.

Getting there was the battle as a gritty hard-nosed team from Gibsonburg (10-3) held Antwerp scoreless for nearly the entire second half after the Archers put up 27 first-half points in a back-and-forth affair.

However, with 8:04 left in regulation and Antwerp leading by eight points, Altimus went down after converting a third and short, holding his left leg. After being helped off, his Archers converted a first down but saw their drive stall near midfield, punting away to Gibsonburg with 4:09 remaining.

Star running back Conner Smith, who had already put up 205 yards and two TDs to that point, made the opportunity count for the Golden Bears, ripping off runs of 40 and 32 yards before punching it in from three yards out with 2:50 left. A conversion run by QB Camden Mooney tied things at 27 and Antwerp's dream season seemed in jeopardy of ending.

Enter Altimus.

The junior signal-caller took the field noticeably limping but took the reins for a key late drive.

On third down, Altimus lofted a ball down the right side to junior Landon Brewer, who snared the ball over the top of a Gibsonburg defender for a 30-yard gain. Two plays later, Altimus stepped up in the pocket and fired a strike across the middle to senior Parker Moore to the Gibsonburg goal line for a 21-yard gain. Running back Reid Lichty tallied the final yard for his second rushing TD of the game and Altimus hit Brewer for a two-point conversion with 1:14 remaining.

"At first when I came to the sideline, I had no idea what was going on but eventually time kept going and I just knew I had to get back in," said Altimus, who dazzled with 373 passing yards on 21-of-28 passing while rushing for 55 yards on nine carries. "It's been amazing because nobody thought we'd be here ... after losing 14 seniors last year, nobody thought we'd be here and we surprised everyone."

"He's the heart and soul of our football team and he's our leader, bar none," lauded Hale. "Guys follow him, he leads by example. For him to come out and have a drive like that, hats off to him. He's a great kid, first and foremost, he's a great athlete and he's the leader of our football team for a reason."

Gibsonburg's final shot started at their own 35 and after two Smith runs, a third-down pass from Mooney towards the right side of the field landed right in the arms of junior defender Xander Smith for a game-clinching interception.

"Our coaches said never give up until the final whistle is blown, especially in this game," said senior center/defensive tackle Kendric Robinson, one of just two seniors on this year's roster, along with Moore. "We knew it was going to be a dogfight because they're a great team but we came out swinging harder than them and came out with the win."

In the first half, Antwerp seemed to move the ball at will, racking up 254 pass yards and 304 total yards offensively. Altimus got things going early, connecting with Brewer on a 73-yard rainbow down the left sideline to paydirt on their fifth play of the game. The Archers tallied gains of 73, 29, 62, 31 and 18 yards in the first half and went into the break with momentum after driving 60 yards in just 40 seconds in the final minute of the second quarter, capped by a 14-yard TD pass from Altimus to Moore.

In the third quarter, however, Antwerp had back-to-back drives stall. The Archers wound the first 5:19 off the second-half clock but turned the ball over on downs at the Gibsonburg four. Despite picking off Mooney and starting at the Golden Bears' 10, again the Archers were unable to find the endzone and ended a drive at the Gibsonburg 14 with 2:47 left in the third period.

Both teams were making history with their first seasons ever with two playoff victories and with the win, the Archers will continue the longest run in school history with a record 13 victories. Lichty finished with 49 yards rushing and three touchdowns while catching four passes for 40 yards. Brewer had five catches for 123 yards and a score while Cam Fuller tallied four receptions for 102 yards. Moore had six catches for 69 yards.

"Gibsonburg's a really physical, well-coached team. They know how to play and how to win," said Lichty, who played double duty at running back and linebacker. "Our line has been so amazing and dominant and I've been able to run behind them so many weeks now and I cannot be more proud of them and the progress they've made"

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The contest also saw the final game of Smith’s career and his 31 carries for 287 yards and three TDs capped off a staggering statistical output. The Gibsonburg senior, also a wrestling state qualifier, finished the 2022 season with 3,431 rushing yards and 47 TDs. The season yards are fourth-best in OHSA history and the TDs are sixth-highest all-time in a season.

Smith’s career numbers are equally impressive with 7,024 yards and 98 rushing TDs. The TDs tie Smith with Hubbard’s Larry Scott for 12th-most in state history and the yards make him the 14th player ever to rush for more than 7,000 yards.

GHS AHS

First Downs 13 16

Rushing Yards 45-343 23-109

Passing Yards 16 373

Total Yards 359 482

Passing 2-4-2 21-29-0

Fumbles-Lost 0-0 0-0

Penalties 5-31 5-40

Gibsonburg 6 13 0 8 — 27

Antwerp 6 21 0 8 — 35

A — Brewer 73-pass from Altimus (run failed).

G — Smith 4-run (kick failed).

A — Lichty 12-run (Lichty run).

G — Smith 8-run (run failed).

A — Lichty 3-run (Jackson kick).

G — Mooney 7-run (Waugeman kick).

A — Moore 14-pass from Altimus (kick failed).

G — Smith 3-run (Mooney run).

A — Lichty 1-run (Brewer pass from Lichty).

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Gibsonburg — Smith 31-287; Hoover 7-28; Mooney 6-20; Owens 1-8. Antwerp — Lichty 11-49; Altimus 9-55; Fuller 3-5. **PASSING:** Gibsonburg — Mooney 2-4-2-16. Antwerp

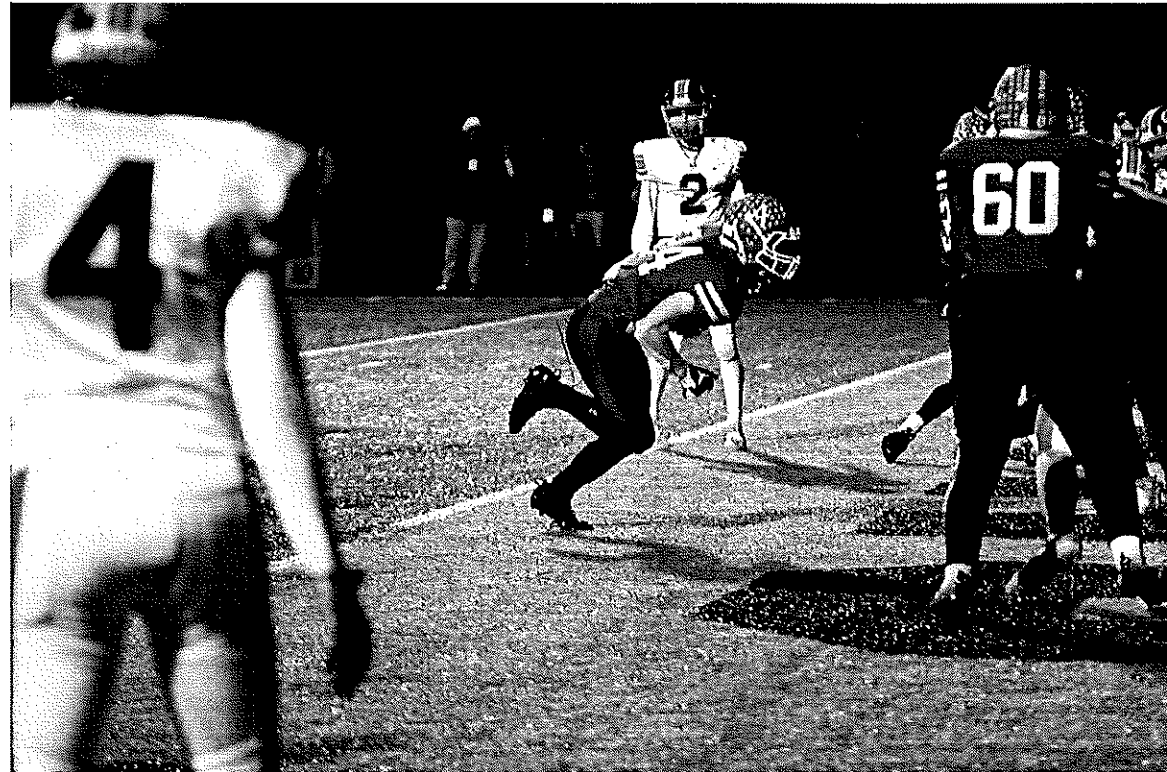
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— Altimus 21-28-0-373; Fuller 0-1-0-0. **RECEIVING:** Gibsonburg — Hoover 2-16. Antwerp — Moore 6-69; Brewer 5-123; Fuller 4-102; Lichty 4-40; Winslow 2-21.

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Bryant Billing

Division II
Gamer

D2 G 09

Russia rockets Price, Lincolnview for state D-IV baseball title

AKRON — Many Lincolnview fans entered Akron's Canal Field wearing shirts with '24-0,' printed large. The shirts, which were produced within the last week, informed any who weren't aware of ace pitcher Landon Price's career record.

Russia made it 24-1.

The Raiders rocked Price, an Ohio State signee, and pulled away in the sixth to a 10-4 victory and the Division IV state championship.

Russia got seven hits off of Price in the first three innings and built a 3-2 lead. Price, who throws with little time between pitches, found himself in battles throughout the day as Russia batters drove up pitch counts by fouling off 27 balls.

Price had to be removed in the sixth after reaching the OHSAA limit of 125 pitches. The Raiders exploded for seven runs after he left to put the game away.

Russia pitcher Xavier Phlipot pitched a complete game on 109 throws.

"Xavier did a better job of battling through the strike zone," Russia coach Kevin Phlipot said. "We were told this was a minor league umpire. He had a tight strike zone. He was consistent and he was outstanding. But it was tighter than high school kids are used to."

Price struck out 10 batters, but Russia gathered eight hits in the 5 2/3 innings he was on the mound. The Raiders also drew two walks and had two batters hit by pitches by Price, who was visibly frustrated on the mound at times and struggled with his command.

"We battled Price and his fastball. We had seven hits in the first three innings. I don't think he's used to that," Kevin Phlipot said. "... We fouled balls off, we battled. We took a lot of pitches. We did obviously chase some, but we battled. Those foul balls helped our base runners and helped get him to get out of the game early.

"He wasn't very sharp, and we jumped all over it."

Xavier Phlipot, a junior, pitched a complete game and threw mostly low in the zone. He gave up three earned runs on eight hits and one walk while striking out five batters.

"I got warned just before the game it was a minor league umpire, so I figured it would be a tight strike zone," Phlipot, who is Kevin Phlipot's nephew, said. "...In the first inning, I kind of struggled a little bit to throw strikes. But after that, I did better, and my defense made great plays. I was able to settle down in the dugout, and then I was able to command the zone and keep the ball low."

The team watched some Division I and II semifinals in Akron on Friday, and Xavier Phlipot said it helped prepare for Price.

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D2 G 09

"It's not about how fast you throw, it's about where you throw," Philipot said. "... We saw guys throwing 90 yesterday, but they kind of had the same problem. They were throwing a lot of balls, and all it took was one hit, because there were runners on base. I had runners on base too, but I was able to keep the ball down, and my defense made great plays."

It was a year in the making for Russia (25-6).

The Raiders returned most of last season's team, which advanced to a regional final before losing 7-1 to Shelby County Athletic League rival Fort Loramie.

The program beefed up this season's nonconference schedule even more than usual, including several tough opponents early. Russia dropped to 8-5 after a loss to Chaminade-Julienne on April 26 but won 17 of its last 18 games — including a 7-1 regional final win over Fort Loramie.

"Everything we did was preparing for this moment," Kevin Philipot said. "It was preparing for a regional game against Loramie, getting over that hump. We knew once we did that, anything can happen. We were obviously ecstatic for that win, but these kids, their mindset, they don't get too excited.

"After getting past that, they were focused, had tunnel vision. They just wanted to keep it moving forward. Don't worry about stuff. We've been through rain delays, we've been through 30- and 40-degree weather, freezing cold. We played once or twice some weeks (due to weather).

"We came here and got delayed (in Thursday's state semifinal), but I told the guys that we're used to it. All we have to do is go out there and play ball."

Like Russia's last four tournament wins, the squad overcame an early deficit on Saturday.

The Lancers scored one run off two hits in the second to take a 1-0 lead, but the Raiders scored two in the bottom half. Zane Shappie hit an RBI single to left center field and Jude Counts hit an RBI single to right in the inning.

Lincolnview scored one run in the third to tie it after two Russia errors and a hit batter, but the Raiders battled back in the bottom half of the inning.

Hayden Quinter singled to right field with one out, then Braylon Cordonnier hit a single along the first-base line. Aiden Shappie then followed with an RBI single to give Russia 3-2 lead.

The score stayed the same the next 2.5 innings, though both squads left runners in scoring position at points.

Russia blew it open in the sixth.

Aiden Shappie led off the inning with a single, but Price struck out the next two batters.

As Price neared his pitch limit, Jude Counts battled in a five-pitch plate appearance before Price hit him on his 125th pitch of the day.

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DZ G 09

Keegan Farris was brought in to replace Price, and the Raiders rocked him.

Farris hit Brayden Monnin with a pitch to load the bases, then walked Xavier Phlipot to walk in a run and give Russia a 4-2 lead.

Hayden Quinter then followed with a 2-RBI double down the left-field line to push the lead to 6-2, then Grant Saunders hit an infield single, and Lincolnview shortstop Dane Ebel committed a throwing error on the play, which allowed pinch runner Felix Francis to score and give Russia a 7-2 lead.

Cordonnier hit a 2-RBI single to right center to push the lead to 9-2 and Aiden Shappie followed with an RBI single before the end of the inning to increase the lead to eight runs.

"They had the top of the lineup coming up (in the seventh), and those guys were on base all day," Kevin Phlipot said. "...A one-run lead was nice, but we weren't too confident until Hayden hit that double down the line."

Russia scored the most runs any opponent had against Lincolnview this season. The Lancers had allowed more than four runs only four times before Saturday.

"We thought it was going to have to be a 2-1 game for us to win," Kevin Phlipot said. "That was our mindset. Obviously, we were wrong. We scored, and we were always able to answer."

"That was huge. Answering them was huge. We were concerned, because we didn't know how dominating he would be. We hadn't seen that quality of fast ball. We've seen good pitchers, but not that type of velocity. We tried to prepare for that in an hour and a half practice yesterday, and we just told the guys to battle the best they could."

The Lancers did score two runs on two hits in the top of the seventh, but Xavier Phlipot coaxed three ground outs to end the inning.

The Raiders hoisted the gold trophy soon after as over 500 Russia fans cheered along the third-base line.

"This is almost the whole community coming out," Xavier Phlipot said. "It was awesome. Love that they were able to watch this. ...They've been here the whole time with the crazy stuff, the air horns. They've enjoyed it all, and we've enjoyed it. They're loud, and that makes us more confident."

Russia finished with 13 hits and committed three errors. Lincolnview had eight hits and committed four errors.

Quinter finished 3 for 3 with 2 RBIs and one walk while Aiden Shappie finished 3 for 3 with 2 RBIs. Cordonnier was 3 for 4 with 2 RBIs and Zane Shappie was 2 for 4. Counts was 1 for 1 with one walk.

The state title comes 51 years after the program claimed its first title in 1971. The program finished as runner-ups in 1975 and in 2017.

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D2 6 09

Volleyball: New Bremen beats Monroeville for 3rd state title since 2017

FAIRBORN — Before the start of each season, New Bremen players gather in coach Diana Kramer's basement and write a poem. They're not allowed to eat a meal cooked by Kramer until she deems the work satisfactory.

The poem the players crafted this year included this line: "Last year's season ended in defeat/we will not let it repeat."

The players made good on their poem's promise on Saturday.

The Cardinals won their third state championship in the last six seasons by beating Monroeville 25-17, 25-23, 25-21 in the Division IV final at Wright State University's Nutter Center.

It was the fifth time in the last six years the squad had advanced to the Div. IV championship match. The lone season they didn't advance came last year when they were beaten 3-1 in a district final by Midwest Athletic Conference foe New Knoxville, which went on to win the state final.

The loss was the first and only of the 2021 campaign for the Cardinals. They vowed in Kramer's basement last summer not to let something similar happen again this year.

They didn't.

The Cardinals (28-1) didn't lose a set in tournament play until a 3-1 semifinal win over Convoy Crestview on Thursday. The Eagles (24-5) posed a challenge on Saturday and built significant leads in each set, but New Bremen always regrouped and pulled away.

"The biggest thing that happens in between every single point, every set, is our team brings it in," senior libero Abi Powers said. "When we go in that circle, we don't focus on what just happened, anything that the other team did. We focus on ourselves.

"I think the reason why we come back and we work together so well is because when we go in that circle and we say to each other to take a deep breath, we do it for each other."

The teams traded runs in the first set. Monroeville built an 11-9 lead, but the Cardinals scored three straight points to take a 12-11 lead and later scored three straight points to take a 21-16 lead.

The Eagles built a 15-12 lead in the second game, but New Bremen pulled within 16-15, then took a 17-16 lead after two aces by Keiria Steininger.

The teams played to a 24-23 score, but Rianna Paul came up with a set-ending kill to give the squad a 2-0 lead.

The Eagles built an early lead in the third set, but New Bremen four straight points to take a 13-8 lead and later scored four straight to boost the advantage to 19-14. Monroeville scored four

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straight points to pull within 24-21 late, but Paul again came up with a set-ending kill to seal the 3-0 victory.

"I think the biggest difference is our expectation that we're going to bounce back, we're going to find a way, we're going to respond to mistakes," Kramer said. "... We know that we're going to make mistakes. Volleyball is a game of mistakes. So bouncing back and responding to those mistakes is incredibly important."

Junior outside hitter Olivia Heitkamp led the squad with 19 kills while Paul, a senior, had nine. Melina Schrader and Mary Rindler each had five.

Powers led the squad with 18 digs while Amelia Dammeyer had 11. Heitkamp had three blocks.

The squad will lose four seniors to graduation, including Powers and Paul. Megan Reinhart and Mia Schmitmeyer are also seniors.

Schmitmeyer suffered a serious knee injury in May and missed the season, but still played a crucial role according to Kramer.

"It's been very trying," Kramer said. "Mia was our dude last year. Mia was an all-Ohio player. She may not show up in (today's) stats, but she was important to everything we did."

Schmitmeyer, who dressed Thursday and Saturday, celebrated with teammates on the court after the final point.

Soon after, the squad hoisted the D-IV trophy while facing its crowd, which had over 2,000 people.

"The coolest thing is just looking up in the crowd and seeing everybody there," Kramer said. "It's a great time to be a Cardinal. The energy in our town is just unbelievable. While the volleyball team won a championship today, more importantly, New Bremen won a championship."

With most of the squad set to return, the Cardinals may win another championship next season.

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Girls basketball: Sidney can't hold on, falls to Bellbrook in district semi

TROY — Sidney's girls basketball squad usually displays fiery tenacity in its up-tempo style, but the squad took it to another level in the first three quarters of a Division I district semifinal on Monday at Troy High School's Trojan Activities Center.

But cold shooting and foul trouble in the last 10 minutes resulted in a 10-point lead turning into a 53-44 loss to Bellbrook, which was ranked No. 8 in Div. I in the final Associated Press state poll.

The Yellow Jackets, which won the overall MVL title, finish 19-6.

"It hurts, but I couldn't be more proud of this group for what they've done all season," Sidney coach Jamal Foster said. "They've answered the call. They've overachieved in a lot of people's eyes. I'm proud of them."

Sidney, which played mainly with five players in the second half of the season, is set to return nearly its entire squad.

In addition to the five players who started on Monday being set to return, junior guard Lexee Brewer and junior forward Regan Clark are expected to be back as well. Brewer, a three-year starter, suffered a season-ending knee injury in the fifth game of the season, and Clark was only eligible to play the first half of the season due to OHSA transfer rules.

Aside from those seven, three other players who saw varsity time this season are expected to return, including freshman forward Kendall Dickman, who played off the bench on Monday.

"It will be good to sub," Foster said with a smile when referring to increased numbers expected next year. "Lexee speaks for herself with what she's done. Regan playing a full season will be great..

"Along with that, we'll get better over the offseason and continue to get girls to buy in, which I think they have. The work that we can do in the offseason and the will we can get from knowing how this feels, the motivation to move on, is big. We want to make something happen next year."

Sidney built a 35-25 lead by the midpoint of the third quarter. After Bellbrook starter Olivia Trusty left the game with an injury, Sidney appeared to have a hold on the momentum.

But the Eagles switched to a full-court press, and Sidney sophomore point guard Kiara Hudgins was soon forced to sit on the bench for a few minutes after picking up her third foul.

Sidney committed several turnovers in the stretch without Hudgins on the floor, and the team's previously hot shooting went cold.

Bellbrook (23-2) scored the last 13 points of the third quarter, then made the first basket of the fourth to cap off a 15-0 run and take a 40-35 lead.

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"Foul trouble kind of got us," Foster said. "We weren't very deep from the beginning, and having a couple of people with three or four fouls really affected the swing of the game."

"Basketball's a game of runs, and we just couldn't answer their good run. That's a really good team."

Hudgins made a basket to bring Sidney within 44-42 with about four minutes left, but the Eagles went on a 6-2 run to take a six-point lead heading into the final minute.

Sidney's five starters in Hudgins, junior guard Allie Stockton and freshmen Jordan Scully, Larkyn Vordemark and Kelis McNeal played the majority of the game, with Dickman and senior Paige Frew playing off the bench.

Foster said he was proud how the young squad played and the tenacity it showed, including Vordemark, who continued to play through back pain that also hampered her in a sectional final win over Beavercreek last week.

"The fought. They wanted it," Foster said. "It wasn't about will. If a couple of shots go our way, things could have turned around. But overall, I'm just super proud of how they played. They gave it their all."

"There was nothing left by them. Everything's left out on the floor. I'm very, very proud."

Stockton, who recently surpassed 1,000 career points, led Sidney with 17 on Monday, 15 of which came in the first half. She finishes the season with 1,108 career points after scoring 423 this year.

Hudgins added nine points and Scully added eight.

Taylor Scohy led the Eagles with 15 points while senior guard Dre Pryce scored 12 off the bench.

Bellbrook scored the first seven points, but Sidney finished the first quarter on a 13-8 run to pull within 15-13 heading into the second. The Yellow Jackets dominated the second quarter and took a 29-23 lead by halftime. They started the third with a 6-2 run to take a 10-point lead.