



HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS SCENE
KEEPING KIDS IN THE NEWS

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
p1hornak@gmail.com
989-331-1168
- **Editorial**
John Raffel
john.raffel@gmail.com
616-894-2936
- Butch Harmon
616-655-9058
- Dave Cook
- **Photographers**
Skip Traynor, Eric Sawatzki,
Marvin Hall, Jaymee Beard,
John Raffel, Jason Barden,
James Traylor, Yoland Hayward,
Rachel Rosales, Kyle Curtis,
Bailey Miniard, Rylee Turner,
Joe Vozar, Kim Larner,
Donovan Ort, Russ Pierce,
Ali Bauman

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Hello sports fans, it's another great day here at High School Sports Scene Magazine.

With the weather turning cooler along with the leaves, the 2024-25 high school sports season is in full swing. Area athletes are hard at work making a name for themselves both on the local and the state level.

The football season is off to a strong start. The area is stocked with outstanding football teams from Division 1 through Division 8 along with some outstanding 8-man football teams. With the state playoffs quickly approaching the area will have some outstanding teams to follow on their trail to Ford Field for the state finals. Look for teams like DeWitt, Portland, Chesaning, Davison, Frankenmuth, Beal City, Freeland and Ithaca to make deep state tournament runs along with several more squads. This year's state playoffs promises to be exciting to say the least.

Area runners are also off to blazing starts. Several area boys and girls cross country teams are ranked in the state and are led by some of the fastest runners in the state. Look for the area to be well represented at the state cross country finals in early November.

On the soccer field, the Alma soccer team is off to a strong start this season as is the DeWitt, Mason and Lansing Christian soccer teams who are all poised for a big state tournament run.

Area volleyball teams are also off to a strong start with several outstanding teams in the area.

The mid-Michigan area is always home to some great golf and this season is no different. The area has several outstanding teams and individuals who are looking to make their name in the upcoming state tournament highlighted by an Okemos team that is ranked number one in the state in Division 1.

While the state tournaments are quickly coming up, there is still plenty of time to get out and see some of the outstanding teams and athletes showcase their skills this fall. While the weather is still decent, get out and catch an area football game or soccer match or head inside for some outstanding volleyball action.

A big thank you to all our advertisers and sponsors, without you there would be no High School Sports Scene Magazine.

See you at the games!



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

Balanced Offense Has Ithaca Football Team Off To A Strong Start This Season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Led by an explosive offense that features balance and an improving defense, the Ithaca football team is off to a fast start this season.

The Yellowjackets reeled off five straight wins to begin the season. Included in the wins are a thrilling 30-22 win against Standish-Sterling and a 35-14 win against Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

Offense has been a highlight for Ithaca in the early going as the Yellowjackets are putting up 42.2 points per game. Defensively, Ithaca is showing steady improvement and is allowing 7.2 points per game.

"We are 5-0 so far and at a good point right now," said Ithaca coach Jordan Hessbrook. "Our offense has been a strong point. We have shown the ability to run and throw the football and that makes us much tougher to defend. Defensively,

we have some young guys who are getting experience at the varsity level and our older guys are stepping into their roles and embracing their roles."

On offense, the Yellowjackets are led by senior quarterback Jackson Conn. A talented dual-threat quarterback, through the first five games this season Conn has completed 56% of his passes for 687 yards and 12 touchdowns. Conn has also rushed for 374 yards (5.4 avg.) and scored 12 rushing touchdowns.

Conn has a variety of receivers to throw to. Senior Nathan Mikesell has caught 11 passes for 236 yards (21.5 avg.) and five touchdowns while senior Rylee White has hauled in 11 passes for 100 yards and two touchdowns. Junior wide receiver Riley Guild has stepped in with 10 catches for 78 yards and two touchdowns while sophomore wide receiver Gibson Rondy has 10 catches for 161 yards and three

scores.

Nathan Mikesell leads the Yellowjacket running game. Mikesell has rushed for 605 yards and scored five touchdowns this season.

"Jackson is putting up decent numbers running and passing," Hessbrook said. "Nathan Mikesell has played well running and receiving. When you look at our receivers we are pretty balanced. Rylee White, Riley Guild, Connor McMurphy, Gibson Rondy and Elijah Smith can all catch the ball. We have quite a few guys we can throw to out there."

Paving the way for the backs and receivers is an outstanding offensive line that continues to improve.

"Our line is starting to gel into a unit," Hessbrook said. "We have three returning starters in Nicholas Mikesell, Lloyd Stoneman and Broden Peska. Nicholas is a three-year starter and Broden is a four-year

starter. Junior Kenny Daniels and sophomore Broghan Bupp round out the line and are doing a good job for us."

The Yellowjacket defense is also rounding into form.

"Nathan Mikesell is our leading tackler at inside linebacker," Hessbrook said. "Roman Hurosky has stepped up at outside linebacker. Our defensive line of Broden Peska, Nicholas Mikesell, Karter Araujo and Aiden Smith has played well. We start a couple of sophomores in the defensive backfield and they are starting to get their feet under them."

Nathan Mikesell leads the Ithaca defense in tackles with 59 along with six tackles for loss while senior Roman Hurosky has 49 tackles. Senior Karter Araujo and sophomore Broghan Bupp have 22 tackles apiece. Sophomore Aiden Smith has 21 tackles while senior Nicholas Mikesell has 20 tackles. Bupp and Smith also have four tackles for loss apiece. Sophomore defensive back Elijah Smith has two interceptions.

With the season heading into the home stretch, the Yellowjackets have some key games coming up including a week seven game against



The Ithaca football team is off to another strong start this fall as it began the season with five straight wins.

an unbeaten Saginaw Nouvel team and a week eight non-league game against Tecumseh, a much larger Division 4 team.

DeWitt Football Team Treating Fans To Exciting Season With High-Scoring Offense

David Cook Sports Scene

If your looking for entertainment on a Friday evening, taking in a DeWitt football game would be a good option.

Not only is DeWitt off to a fast start this season with a 5-0 record, but the Panthers are doing it in exciting fashion with an offense that is averaging an unbelievable 59.6 points per game. Not only are the Panthers scoring points in bunches, but they are doing it against some of the top competition around. Among the teams DeWitt has defeated this year are Hurricane, West Virginia, one of the premier teams in West Virginia, East Lansing, ranked eighth in the state in Division 2 and Mason, ranked seventh in the state in Division 3 as well as a solid Haslett team.

"We're very happy at where we are

at right now," said DeWitt coach Rob Zimmerman. "We are 5-0 and doing it against very, very good competition."

One of the games that sticks out the most was the 70-63 win against Hurricane, West Virginia in week three. DeWitt quarterback Elliott Larner turned in a record-setting effort in that game as he ran the ball 20 times for 279 net yard and five touchdowns. Larner's 279 yards broke Mike Cowdrey's long-standing record of 275 set in 1989. Larner's five touchdowns in a game tied the record for touchdowns in a game with Trav Moore from last year. The Panthers also set a new record of 70 points in a game, breaking the record set in game one against Haslett. DeWitt sophomore kicker Vincent Rose also set a new record as he was 10-of-10 on extra points to set the Panther record for consecutive extra points in a game.

"That was just an unbelievable game," Zimmerman said. "It was the most points I ever seen scored in a high school game. The West Virginia team has a great quarterback and running back and is probably the best team we will play this season."

Panther quarterback Elliott Larner is turned in a huge season both passing and running the football. Larner has passed for 931 yards and 16 touchdowns and has run for 929 yards and 12 rushing touchdowns.

At receiver, Abram Larner has hauled in 20 passes for 554 yards and 10 touchdowns. Junior running back Trav Moore is turning in a big season with 554 yards rushing and 10 touchdowns and has caught nine passes for 122 yards and four touchdowns.

Paving the way for the DeWitt offense is a solid offensive line anchored by juniors Luke Nolen (5-

8, 235) at guard and Drew Rumsey (6-2, 265) at tackle.

"Our offensive line is doing a nice job as a unit," Zimmerman said.

On defense, the Panthers are young and improving. The Panthers have nine underclassmen starting on defense.

"Defensively, I do think we can be a lot better," Zimmerman said. "We are not where we want to be yet. In our game against East Lansing we did close out the game well."


Junior linebacker Cooper Chambers leads the defense with 36 tackles while junior Max Holtz has 31 tackles. Senior Charlie Winsor has 26 tackles followed by junior Jacob Schorffhaar with 24 and junior Jadon Bender with 23 tackles.

"Our goal is to get better every week," Zimmerman said. "Each week we need to continue to improve and



The DeWitt football team began the season with a 5-0 record and is averaging 59.6 points.

we need to execute at the highest level once the playoffs begin. I've had a great time coaching this team. This is a great group with tremendous character. I will be exciting to see the rest of the season play out and I like the potential of this team."




B4 you give up, stop and reach out!

The B#4 Foundation honors the life and achievements of Brady Hessbrook, who tragically took his own life on January 27, 2023. The B#4 Foundation strives to promote mental health awareness and suicide prevention through education, outreach initiatives, advocacy, and community service.

Suicide Prevention

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or visit the Lifeline Chat (<https://988lifeline.org/chat/>) to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

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St. Johns Football Team Opens Season On A Winning Note

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Thanks to strong line play and consistency on both offense and defense, the St. Johns football team is off to a strong start this season.

The Redwings cleared every hurdle in the first five weeks of the season as they built a 5-0 record. St. Johns opened the season with a 48-21 win against Okemos and then won close games against Hamilton (27-26) and Fowlerville (21-14) before picking up win number four against Lansing Eastern (47-8) and turning back Williamston in week five.

"It's been a good start," said St. Johns coach Andrew Schmitt. "We've been able to win a couple of close games in week two against Hamilton and in week three against Fowlerville. It feels good to win both of the close games as in the past we may have let one slip away."

Schmitt points to a number of strong points of this year's team as reason for the early success.

"We've had some good line play and some good quarterback play," Schmitt said. "We have also been doing a good job defensively of doing what we are supposed to do. Our defense is doing a good job of keeping us in ball games."

St. Johns likes to run the football on offense and the offensive line is doing a strong job of paving the way for the running backs. The St. Johns offensive line is getting strong contributions from linemen Isaiah Cobb, Robbie Andretz, Jackson Armstrong, Gavin Moreno, Kyle Lockwood, Luke Tracy and Brody Abendroth along with solid play from tight end David Frisbie.

Operating behind the line are running backs Brandon Schomisch, Thomas Putmon and Michael Oberlin and quarterback

Bryce Pratl. Spencer Nobis leads the receiving corps.

Pratl is an efficient quarterback who has completed 55 percent of his passes for 217 yards and six touchdowns. Schomisch leads the ground game with 299 yards (6.4 avg.) and five touchdowns while Oberlin has added 286 yards (8.9 avg.) and four touchdowns.

"Our offense always has a heavy emphasis on the run," Schmitt said. "Brandon is our leading ball carrier and Michael is also having a good year. Our quarterback Bryce Pratl is also doing a good job of running the offense and making plays."

On defense, the Redwings rely on a total team effort to get the job done. Up front, Frisbie is at defensive end with Greyson Osborne, Cole VanEtten, Lockwood, Tracy and Abendroth all contributing along the defensive line. The linebacking corps is led by Brady Heibeck, Schomisch and

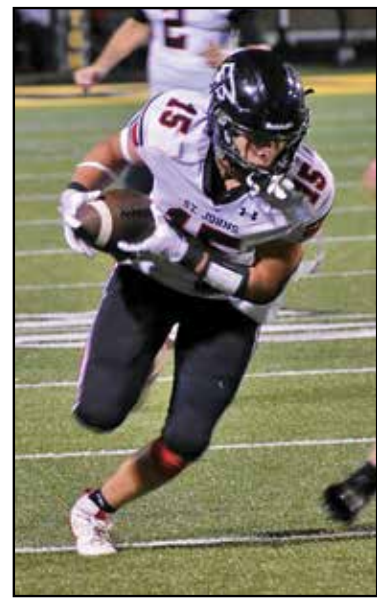
Cobb. The defensive backfield is comprised of Tyson Smith, Gus Kaiser, Ian Smith and Oberlin.

"We play good assignment football on defense," Schmitt said. "Our cornerbacks do a really good job of man coverage and that allows our defensive line to pin their ears back and come after the quarterback. Our defensive line and linebackers also do a really good job of stopping the run."

Brady Heibeck leads the Redwings in tackles with 21 closely followed by Schomisch and Tyson Smith with 19, Isaiah Cobb and Gus Kaiser with 16 apiece and Frisbie with 15. Heibeck, Schomisch and Frisbie also have one sack each. Heibeck has a total of two tackles for loss while Kaiser also has an interception.

With a strong start to the season, the Redwings are focused on keeping the momentum going into the second half of the campaign.

"I'm really happy with the way we are executing so far," Schmitt said. "We have to continue to fine tune things and continue to get



St. Johns football team opens season on a winning note

better. We have to focus on getting better every day. We have a stretch of difficult teams coming up so we really have to make sure we prioritize making plays when they are available, playing good football and limiting the mistakes. We have to make sure we get better week to week."

Fowler Football Team Ranked Among The Best In Division 8

David Cook Sports Scene

The Fowler football team opened the season strong and has not let up.

The Eagles began the season by reeling off five straight wins and have soared to No. 2 in the state in Division 8.

Fowler opened the season by taking on one of the top teams in the state in Division 7 and came away with a 20-6 win against Hudson. The Eagles have been strong on both sides of the football. On offense, Fowler is putting up 43.4 points per game while the defense is allowing 4.2 points per

game. The Fowler defense has also posted shutouts in three of the five games it played.

"We got the season off to a great start with a big win over a physical, well-coached Hudson team," said Fowler coach John Spicer. "Senior leadership is a big strong point to our team as we have 14 seniors on the team."

One of those seniors is quarterback Jacob Halfmann who also plays a key role on defense as a defensive back. Fellow senior Asher Koenigsnecht is another key player on offense at slotback and outside linebacker on defense. Senior Ford Phillips heads up the ground game at running back.

Senior Ben Kohagen lines up at wide receiver on offense and defensive back on defense. Nate Spicer is another key player on offense at slot back and is an outside linebacker on defense. A junior making an impact is Trevor Spicer who plays H-back on offense and linebacker on defense. Anchoring the lines on both sides of the ball are senior Alex Halfmann and junior Joe Epkey.

While the Eagles have started



The Fowler football team opened the season with a 5-0 record and is ranked second in the state in Division 8.

the season strong, they still have plenty of challenges ahead before beginning play in what should be a highly competitive battle for the Division 8 state title once the

playoffs begin.

"The key to continued success this season is for the kids to keep working hard and improving every day," said Spicer.

Mason Football Team Rounding Into Form With Group Of New Players

David Cook Sports Scene

The Mason football team turned in the best season in school history last fall capped off by a trip to Ford Field for the state championship game. A great senior class was a big key to the magical season and with those seniors having graduated, a retooling process is in the works this season.

With a large group of new starters and contributors, the Bulldogs are seeing plenty of progress the reloading process. The Bulldogs opened the new season with four wins in the first five weeks of the season and a 3-0 start to the conference season.

Mason opened the season with a

big 26-7 win over rival Holt in their annual showdown. After falling to a loaded DeWitt team in week two, the Bulldogs rebounded with wins in week three against Williamston (34-20) and a dramatic 30-24 win against Haslett in week four.

"The season has started off with a very tough schedule and we are a very young team," said Mason coach Gary Houghton. "This is probably the youngest team in school history. We have started 3-1 and hope to reach one of our goals to become CAAC Red champions."

With a young team, improving from week to week is high on the list of team priorities. So far, the Bulldogs are doing just that.

"The strongest point of this team is the great continued improvement,"

Houghton said.

While the Bulldogs graduated a number of key players from last year's state finalist team, they do have some outstanding players back from last year's squad. One of those players is senior quarterback Cason Carswell. In his final high school season before heading to Western Illinois University, Carswell is pacing an offense that has totaled over 1,300 yards of total offense in the first four games of the season.

Logan Doerr and Joey Schild are two more key returning players who lead the way at fullback on offense and linebacker on defense. Carson Chapin, Gavin VanKirk and Dom Rodriguez have been leading the ground game at the tailback position.

At wide receiver, the Bulldogs

have been getting strong play from Luke Goss, Sam Corey, Troy Peters and Wyatt Ball.

Up front, the offensive line is developing into a major strength led by Isaac Branton, Zeb James, Joe Price, Jared Kline and Rory Wendt.

"Our entire offensive line has made huge improvement since week one," Houghton said. "The team has improved to the point on offense that we have over 1,300 yards of total offense after four games."

On defense, the Bulldogs are led by Caleb Vaughn, Doerr, Schild and VanKirk at linebacker. Sam Corey is a leader at defensive end. In the secondary defensive back Troy Peters and free safety Wyatt Ball are among the leaders.

With improvement priority one, the Bulldogs are looking to close out the conference season in a big way with St. Johns Fowlerville looming on the schedule the first week of October and in the patch of another league title. Mason then closes out



After reaching the state finals last season the Mason football team started the new season with wins in four of their first five games.

the season with a pair of rugged non-conference games against Walled Lake Western and Fenton who both started the season with 4-0 record.

"The key to continued success is focusing on ourselves and not who we are playing," said Houghton.

Chesaning Football Team Picking Up Where It Left Off Last Season

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

After turning in one of the most successful seasons in recent years last fall, the Chesaning football team is picking up where it left off last season.

Chesaning turned in a 9-2 record last year and reached the district title game in the state playoffs. This year, the Indians are off to another fast start reeling off five straight wins to begin the season. Chesaning opened the season with a 52-12 win against Bath and followed that up with wins against Lakeville (50-0), New Lothrop (47-22), Mt. Morris (54-23) and Birch Run (17-9).

So far this season Chesaning is checking all the boxes as contributions are coming from all areas of the team.

"We are off to a great start," said

Chesaning coach Matthew Walter. "Our offense is clicking right now with all 11 guys doing their job. Max Volk and Brayden Florian are both off to a phenomenal start but they could not do it without the stellar play of our offensive line and wide receivers blocking. Defensively we are just as strong and have held teams in check all game. The coaching staff has done an excellent job preparing these guys every week. Our program has taken more strides from last year's team and continues to get better every day."

Success is nothing new for the Chesaning players as the players on the football team have experienced plenty of success in other sports at Chesaning as well.

The Chesaning offense has scored 50 or more points in every game this season and has been piling up some impressive numbers. Quarterback

Max Volk has passed for 794 yards and tossed 12 touchdown passes. Volk is a dangerous dual threat as he has also rushed for 228 yards and six touchdowns. Running back Brayden Florian is also off to a big season rushing for 563 yards and four touchdowns. At receiver Brady Sager leads the way with 329 receiving yards.

Paving the way for the offense is a stand out offensive line anchored by Seth Schlicht, Braydon Wendling, Andrew Reiber, John Talbot and Braden Burtch.

"I believe our offensive and defensive lines have been very strong this year," Walter said. "We have guys on the line that have been on varsity for two and three years so it's great to have that experience and they can

The Chesaning football team reeled off five straight wins to open the new season.

make adjustments on the fly. Our pass protection has been great so we are able to throw the ball more."

Chesaning has shown good balance on offense this season. The Indians have totaled 1,885 yards on offense with 1,104 rushing yards and 794 passing yards.

Defensively, Chesaning is led by outside linebacker Cal Frasier who has totaled 21 tackles along with seven tackles for loss and four sacks. Defensive end Braydn Wendling is also having a big year with six quarterback sacks.

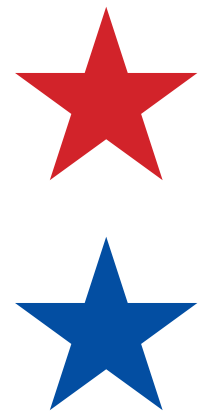
While the team has started fast, plenty more challenges lie in the

weeks ahead and remaining focused and improving is at the top of the priority list.

"The key for us is 'don't let up'," Walter said. "Our guys have to keep getting better every day. We have a tough schedule coming up and have to stay focused. We have to keep practices intense and go with the underdog mentality every game."

Among the big games coming up for Chesaning are a home game against Montrose on October 4 and a road game at Ovid-Elsie on October 11.

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High School Football Teams Turning In Big Seasons As Season Reaches Midway Point

Butch Harmon and David Cook Sports Scene

Division 1

Davison's season started on a sour note thanks to a 21-3 loss to powerhouse Warren De La Salle, but the team was able to rebound quickly with a 41-37 victory over Grandville and they have not looked back. Further wins over Traverse City Central, Heritage, and Saginaw have put the Cardinal's in a comfortable 12th spot in the playoff standings with a 4-1 record. Davison's offense is scoring at a high clip, averaging 39 points per game, and have received plenty of help from a defense which is holding opponents to 18.8ppg. Tough games await the Cardinals in the second half including East Lansing in week six, Grand Blanc in week eight, and Lapeer in the season finale.

Grand Ledge has established themselves as one of Division 1's best area teams thanks to a 4-1 start to the season that featured wins over West Ottawa, Battle Creek Lakeview, and Holt. The Comet's only loss coming in a competitive 38-21 game against CAAC-Blue rivals East Lansing. The Comet's are 15th in the playoff standings thanks to an offense which is averaging 33.8 points per game. A tough three game stretch awaits starting in week six against Everett and continues with games against DeWitt and Detroit Catholic Central.

Holt is pushing for a return to the post-season with promising results. The Rams are 3-2 and hold the 28th spot in the playoff rankings thanks to victories over Swartz Creek, Carmen-Ainsworth, and Okemos. Holt's defense has been a bright spot this year, giving up just 16.4 points per game against tough competition. They will need to keep it up in the second half with tough matchups against DeWitt, Everett, and East Lansing still to come.

Rockford was off to a great start early in the season with an opening day victory over Detroit powerhouse Cass Tech 30-23 followed up by wins over Muskegon and Grandville. However, week four saw the Rams lose their first regular season game since 2019 to a rejuvenated Hudsonville side 28-21 and it was followed up by a shocking 15-14 loss to Jenison at home. The Rams are 22nd in the playoff rankings with a 3-2 record and will need to turn things around fast as the second half of the schedule includes road trips to Caledonia, West Ottawa, and East Kentwood.

Division 2

East Lansing has emerged from a difficult first half of the season with a 3-2 record. A 31-7 win over Portage Central to start the season was followed by a 14-13 loss to West Michigan power Hudsonville in week two. The Trojans were able to rebound in week three with a 38-21 win over Grand Ledge and followed it up with a win at Okemos before losing a 42-35 shootout to DeWitt in week five. East Lansing is well balanced with the offense scoring 33.4 points per game while the defense has held opponents to an average of 16.8ppg. The second half of the season does not let up for the Trojans with road games against Davison, Lansing Everett, and Holt still on the schedule.

Flushing is making a statement in Division 2 with a 4-1 record that includes three shutouts and a 27-21 win over West Michigan power Zeeland East, the Raider's only loss coming to Linden in a 14-13 heart-breaker. Flushing is performing well on both sides of the ball, scoring 38 points per game while averaging just 7 allowed per game. The Raider's, who sit 20th in the playoff standings, have conference games against Swartz Creek and Fenton to look forward to as they push for their first postseason appearance since 2020.

Lansing Everett is using the momentum of last year's playoff appearance to make another surprising run to the postseason this year. An opening week shutout of rivals Sexton was followed up by an impressive 23-7 win over Detroit Jesuit and the Vikings continued to roll with wins over Okemos and Waverly before a tough 35-21 loss to powerhouse Grand Blanc. The Vikings will need their stifling defense, which is allowing just 11.2 points per game, in the second half of the season with games against Grand Ledge, East Lansing, Holt, and DeWitt to close out the regular season.

Midland is on top of the Saginaw Valley-North after a 4-1 start featuring shutout wins over Cadillac and Bay City Central along with a 14-13 win over Traverse City West. Midland's one loss came at the hands of Southwest Michigan power Portage Northern. The Chemics have an elite defense which is giving up only 11.8 points per game which has given them a comfortable position in the playoff standings at number 11. Tough tests remain with games against Traverse City Central, Saginaw Heritage, Mt. Pleasant,

The Grand Ledge football team is off to a 4-1 start this season

and Dow still to come.

Saginaw Heritage has reached the half-way point of the season with a 3-2 record and sit 18th in the playoff standings after a gauntlet of a first half. The Hawks took off to a fast start with wins against Mount Pleasant and Midland Dow before a heartbreaking 22-21 loss to Grand Blanc in week three. A loss to Davison in week four was followed up with a 10-7 win over Lapeer in week five. The second half of the schedule includes a week seven matchup against Midland and a week eight game against Detroit Jesuit.

Division 3

DeWitt is setting the pace atop Division 3 and are doing so in exhilarating fashion. The Panthers kicked the season off by outscoring Haslett 69-42 and followed that up with a 55-21 win over Mason. After beating Lansing Waverly in week three, DeWitt hosted West Virginia powerhouse Hurricane coming out on top in a thrilling 70-63 victory. The excitement continued in week five when the Panthers outlasted the Trojans of East Lansing in a 42-35 shootout. DeWitt's offense has reached prolific heights this year, scoring a ridiculous 59.6 points per game which has made them early D3 favorites for a trip to Ford Field. Expect more high scoring football as the Panthers face tough tests against Division 1 powers Holt and Grand Ledge in weeks six and seven respectively.

Lowell's first season in the new River Cities Alliance has been a rollercoaster. After

an opening week loss to East Grand Rapids, the Red Arrows posted a 28-point shutout of Mattawan in week two. They then rebounded from a tough 35-27 loss to Coopersville with wins over Marquette and Cedar Springs to bring them to 3-2 and a respectable 15th position in the playoff standings. Lowell features a hard-nosed defense which has kept them in games allowing 19.2 points per game. Conference matchups against Kenowa Hills, Allendale, Sparta, and Greenville await the Red Arrows in the second half of the season.

Mason's quest to return to Ford Field is off to a good start after a 4-1 start to the season. The Bulldogs opened the season with a 26-7 win over Holt before losing a high scoring affair in week two against DeWitt. They quickly rebounded however with gritty wins over Williamston and Haslett in weeks three and four and a shutout of Lansing Eastern in week five. The Bulldogs offense remains electric, scoring 33.8 points per game and they will need to continue their form in the second half of the season. Mason has a show-down with surprise CAAC-Red co-leaders St. Johns in week six and games against east side powers Walled Lake Western and Fenton to close out the regular season.

Mount Pleasant got off to a rocky start to the season with a win over Saginaw in week two sandwiched between a season opening loss to Saginaw Heritage and a week three defeat to Midland Dow. The Oilers were able to rebound however in week four with a 35-14 win over Traverse City Central and followed that up with a dominant 49-6 win over Bay City Central. Mount Pleasant currently sits 20th in the playoff standings and will look to use their momentum to move up with games against Traverse City West, Midland, and Linden offering plenty of opportunities



for points.

St. Johns has been this year's surprise team in Division 3, sprinting out to a 5-0 start and sharing the CAAC-Red lead with Mason. The Redwings kicked off the season with wins against Okemos, Hamilton, Fowlerville, and Lansing Eastern before proving themselves with a 45-21 win over perennial power Williamston in week five. St. Johns has gotten it done on both sides of the ball, scoring 37.6 points per game and allowing 18ppg on defense. The Redwings face a tough second half with games against Mason, Haslett, and Ionia upcoming but with a seventh-place position in the playoff standings, St. Johns is primed for their first postseason appearance since 2020.

Division 4

Big Rapids is leading the way in a tough Central State Activities Association-Gold with a 4-1 record which sees them 20th in the playoff standings. After allowing 32 points in their season opener against Paw Paw, the Cardinals defense rebounded by holding both Fruitport and Reed City to 14 points each in week two and three victories and continued that dominant form in a win over Chippewa Hills. Battles with CSAA-Gold rivals Tri-County and Newaygo will determine who comes out on top in the conference before the Cardinals host a tough Coopersville side in Week eight.

Freeland has established themselves as one of Division 4's best teams this year with a 5-0 start to the season, putting them 10th in the playoff standings. After a season opener win over Saginaw, the Falcons shut out their next two opponents in Bridgeport and Swan Valley and continued their dominant form against Flint Powers and Alma. The Falcons are scoring at will against opponents with a whopping 51.4 points per game and the defense has been just as stellar on the other side, giving up just 12 points across five games. Freeland takes on John Glenn in week seven before a TV-Red showdown with fellow undefeated Frankenmuth and a trip to Cadillac in the season finale.

Ionia is in playoff contention again this year thanks to an impressive 20-6 win in their season opener against Belding along with victories over Eaton Rapids and Charlotte. Competitive losses to Portland and Olivet are promising for a Bulldog team that is looking to improve on their 29th ranked spot in the playoff standings. Ionia will need

their defense, which is holding opponents to 16.4 points per game, to keep it up going into the second stretch of the season as they face Lansing Sexton, Lansing Catholic, and St. Johns in a three game stretch.

Owosso is making a surprise playoff push this year thanks to a 3-0 start to the season featuring wins over Eaton Rapids and Cranbrook-Kingswood. Losses in weeks four and five to Corunna and Goodrich put the Trojans at 3-2 and 30th in the playoff standings. The second half of the schedule is tough with games against Ortonville Brandon, Lake Fenton, and Macomb Lutheran North still to come, but a couple more wins could see the Trojans in the playoffs for the first time in four years.

Portland has come out of a difficult first half of the season uncashed notching victories against the likes of Detroit Country Day, Olivet, Ionia, and Lansing Catholic which sees them 7th in the playoff standings and in sole possession of the CAAC-White lead. The Cardinals offense is scoring at a clip of 36.8 points per game and are playing shut down defense, allowing only 13.2ppg. The second half of the schedule includes matches against playoff hopefuls Lansing Sexton and Whitehall in weeks eight and nine respectively.

Division 5

Belding stumbled at the start with a 20-6 loss to county rivals Ionia to kick off the season before going on a four-game tear with victories over Spring Lake, Kelloggsville, Holland, and Fruitport. The Black Knights currently sit atop the OK-Silver and are tenth in the D5 playoff standings. They feature a deadly one two punch of offense and defense, scoring 45 points per game while allowing only 15.2ppg. Belding faces Muskegon Oakridge in week seven before a season finale against Hopkins to determine who comes out on top in the OK-Silver.

Clare started the season with four straight wins including victories over Bullock Creek and Gladwin before sustaining a tough loss to Jack Pine rivals Ogemaw Heights in week 5. The Pioneers hold the 14th spot in the playoff standings thanks to an offense which is putting up 41.4ppg and a defense which has kept opponents to just 16.6ppg. Standish-Sterling awaits in week 6 and the Pioneers will play host to current undefeated Petoskey in the final week of the season.

Corunna has maintained the dominance of last year's state runner up team, going 5-0 to start the season and are the current pacesetters in the D5 playoff standings. The Cavalier's feature a high-powered offense that is scoring 38.8 points per game and a strong defense which has held the likes of Owosso, Lake Fenton, and Ortonville Brandon to 17.4ppg. Games against Goodrich and Armada in weeks 6 and 9 respectively will prepare the Cavalier's for another postseason run as they look to return to Ford Field.

Frankenmuth is having yet another great year as the Eagles sit 5-0 and occupy the number four spot in the playoff standings at the halfway point. A 22-point shutout of Goodrich in the season opener set the tone for an Eagles side that is scoring 37.2 points per game and shutting down opponents on defense, allowing only 34 points all season. Showdowns with TVC-Red rivals John Glenn and Freeland will determine whether Frankenmuth can retain their conference title while 2022 state finals opponent Gladwin awaits the Eagles in the regular season finale.

Midland Bullock Creek is looking to make it back-to-back playoff appearances and are off to a promising start with a 3-2 record and a grasp on the 29th playoff spot. The Lancers defeated Sanford Meridian in the season opener then beat Carrollton before losses to Clare and Standish-Sterling but rebounded in week five against Sheperd. The back half of the schedule is daunting with Ogemaw Heights, Gladwin, and Swan Valley standing in the way of consecutive postseason appearances.

Division 6

Central Montcalm has harnessed the momentum of last year's playoff appearance to start the 2024 season 4-1. Wins against Chippewa Hills and Berrien Springs highlight the Hornet's season so far while their only loss came to a tough Newaygo side. Central Montcalm's offense is scoring an impressive 39.4 points per game and is complemented by a defense which is allowing 14.2ppg. The Hornets will look to improve their playoff position, which currently sits at 18, with games against conference rivals Kent City and Lakeview still to come.



Frankenmuth is one of the premier teams in Division 5 with a 5-0 record.

Chesaning has continued last year's success with a 5-0 start that sees them 8th in the D6 playoff standings. The Indians started the season by avenging last year's loss to Bath and followed it with a 50-point shutout of Otisville Lakeville before further victories over New Lothrop, Mt. Morris, and Birch Run. Chesaning boasts a well-balanced team that is scoring 44 points per game while holding opponents to 13.2ppg. A tough three game stretch awaits the Indians with Montrose, Ovid-Elsie, and Durand upcoming which will determine who will come out of the Mid-Michigan Activities Conference on top.

Lansing Catholic is on their way towards improving on last year's 4-7 record as the Cougars are 3-2 at the halfway point including a hard-fought opening day victory over Williamston. The Cougars sit 16th in the playoff standings behind an offense that is scoring 28.8 points per game. A difficult finish to the season awaits with games against CAAC-White rivals Ionia and Olivet before the Cougars host Pewamo to finish the regular season.

Olivet has bounced back dramatically after last year's 3-7 finish. The Eagles kicked off the season with a 49-21 win over Chippewa Hills followed by a tough loss to Division 4 power Portland before pulling off three straight wins including victories over two D4 playoff hopefuls in Ionia and Lansing Sexton. Olivet's defense has propelled the Eagles to the number three spot in the playoff stand-



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ings, giving up only 12 points per game. The second half of the season includes games against CAAC-White rivals Charlotte, Lake Odessa, and Lansing Catholic.

Ovid-Elsie has established themselves as one of the top teams in Division 6 with a 5-0 record including a couple of impressive 42-7 wins over Durand and Montrose. The Marauders have an electric offense that is posting an eye-watering 50 points per game while the defense has held opponents to merely 11.2ppg. Sitting 6th in the standings, a 5th straight postseason is all but secured yet the Marauders will look to make a statement in the back half of the season with games against Standish-Sterling and Mid-Michigan Activities Conference co-leaders Chesaning still to come.

Division 7

Evert began the season with a hard-fought victory over Beaverton before a tough loss to Lake City in week 2. The Wildcats then pulled off three straight wins to put them at 4-1 and 21st in the Division 7 playoff standings. Evert's high-powered offense is scoring 42 points per game and will need to continue that performance as the second half of the season is tough. Games against Beal City, McBain, and Harrison await the Wildcats in their push for the playoffs.

Ithaca is having another big year as they stand as the co-leaders of the Tri-Valley White alongside Saginaw Nouvel and hold the 7th spot in the playoff standings. The Yellowjackets posted three shutout wins to go along with victories against Standish-Sterling and Michigan Lutheran. The offense is scoring 42.2 points per game while the defense is posting a stifling 7.2ppg. Playoff hopefuls Valley Lutheran is up next before a showdown with T-V White co-leaders Nouvel in week 7.

Montrose started their season with a close loss to unbeaten Riverview Gabriel Richard before going on a three-game winning streak highlighted by 20-14 win over Durand. A loss to Ovid-Elsie in week five currently puts the Rams at 3-2 on the season and a comfortable 17th in the playoff standings. Games against Chesaning and Ann Arbor Gabriel Richard await in the second half of the season as the Rams look to make it 15 straight postseasons.

Pewamo-Westphalia has not missed a step this year. After winning a dogfight in their season opener against North Muskegon

8-7, the Pirates rolled to 5-0 and 14th in the playoff standings. Pewamo's always reliable defense has given up an astonishingly low 13 points so far and currently have a three-game shutout streak while the offense is putting up 45.4 points per game. The second half will be a gauntlet for the Pirates with road games against Fowler, Saranac, and Lansing Catholic standing in the way of a 21st straight playoff appearance.

Saginaw Valley Lutheran is well positioned to reach their first playoff appearance since 2020 as they reach the halfway point with a 3-2 record and occupy the 27th spot in the playoff standings. The Chargers were hot out of the gates with shutout victories over Lutheran Northwest and St. Louis, but have stumbled recently with losses to Nouvel and Michigan Lutheran. Their mettle will be tested in the second half of the season with games against Ithaca, Maple City, and Pinconning offering plenty of opportunities to earn more valuable playoff points.

Saranac is putting together another quality season this year with a 4-1 start which puts them 19th in the playoff standings. After winning their opening match against Cheboygan, the Red Hawks lost a tough game against Fowler before winning their next three games. Saranac is scoring 40.8 points per game complemented by a defense which has allowed 19.2. Potterville, Bath, and Pewamo await the Red Hawks as they look to make it back-to-back postseason appearances.

Division 8

Beal City is 4-1 with two wins on either side of a heartbreaking week three loss to conference rivals McBain. The Aggies are scoring 38 points per game and have a shutdown defense which has allowed only 10.4ppg. A 6th straight playoff appearance looks likely with Beal City currently occupying the 7th spot in the postseason standings. The latter half of the season will see the Aggies face tough tests against Evert and Reed City.

Fowler is back to business as usual with a 5-0 record including an impressive opening day victory against Division 7 power Hudson. The Eagles sit 4th in the playoff standings and are atop the Central Michigan Athletic Conference with rivals Pewamo-Westphalia. Fowler possesses an electric offense which is scoring 43.4 points per game while the defense has only given up 21 points all season. Next up for the Eagles is a showdown against

conference rivals P-W for CMAC bragging rights.

Saginaw Michigan Lutheran has reached the halfway mark with a 3-2 record including a shutout of Saginaw Valley and losses to Tri-Valley White co-leaders Ithaca and Nouvel. The Cardinals have a well-balanced team that is scoring 31.6 points per game while only giving up 14.4 which has propelled them into a playoff spot at number 21 in the rankings. A tough finish to the season lies ahead with matches against Reese and Cass City ahead as the Cardinals hope to make it to their third straight playoffs.

Saginaw Nouvel has already bested last year's record after a hot start that sees them sitting atop the Tri-Valley White alongside Ithaca at 5-0. The Panthers have one of the best defenses in Division 8; allowing a mere 10.4 points per game. Sitting second in the D8 playoff standings, a return to the postseason looks likely for the Panthers. The second half of the season is highlighted by a trip to Ithaca which is sure to be a dog-fight for conference bragging rights.

8-Player Division 1

Blanchard-Montabella leads the Central Michigan 8-Man Blue with a 3-0 conference record and are 3-2 overall with losses to Mt. Pleasant and Grand Rapids Sacred Heart. The Mustangs are a mere 1.4 points outside the playoffs and will look to make a statement with games against Coleman and Morrice still to come.

Coleman is off to a respectable 3-2 start with their two losses coming to the D1 and D2 leaders Alcona and Portland St. Patrick. They are on the outside looking in for the playoffs, but there are plenty of opportunities for the Comets to move up in the second half of the season with conference match ups against Merrill and Blanchard-Montabella along with Sacred Heart in the season finale.

Fulton-Middleton got off to a scorching hot start to begin the season outscoring their first four opponents 230-13 before being shutout by Morrice. They currently sit 13th in the playoff standings with 24.8 points and a 4-1 record. The second half of the season will be a gauntlet for the Pirates with games



The Beal City football team is off to a strong start and is ranked in the top ten in Division 8.

against Sacred Heart, St. Patrick, and Muskegon Heights.

Merrill had an up and down start to the season and currently sit 3-2 with victories over Vestaburg, Breckenridge, and Carson City alongside losses to Blanchard-Montabella and Morrice. The Vandals are currently outside the playoff picture, but have a manageable second half schedule that could see them make a strong push for the postseason.

8-Player Division 2

Morrice is having another good year in Division 2. After winning their first three games, the Orioles stumbled on the road against D2 leaders Portland St. Patrick before posting an impressive 22-point shutout of Fulton. The Orioles sit tied for 7th in the playoff standings with 26.6 points. The second half of the season will see the Orioles face fellow D2 stalwart Sacred Heart in Mt. Pleasant.

Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart is putting up another solid season this year with a 4-1 start, their only loss coming against division leading St. Patrick, and sit tied for 9th with 29.4 playoff points. The Irish face a tough start to the second half with back-to-back games against Fulton and Morrice.

Portland St. Patrick is setting the pace in Division 2 with a perfect 5-0 record and a division leading 32.8 playoff points. The Shamrocks are averaging 48.6 points per game and have notched impressive victories over Sacred Heart and Morrice. They will be tested in the second half of the season when they go on the road to Fulton.

Clare Football Team Utilizing Team Speed For Fast Start To New Season

David Cook Sports Scene

Thanks to some excellent overall team speed, the Clare football team is off to a fast start this season.

The Pioneers opened the new season by coming out of the gate quickly with a 51-7 win against Grayling. Clare followed that up with a 43-0 win against Sanford-Meridian, a 53-14 win against Midland Bullock Creek and a 26-21 win against Gladwin in a key Jack Pine Conference matchup.

A big element to Clare's fast start is some excellent team speed.

"So far the strong points of our team is our overall team speed and athleticism," said Clare coach Steven Spranger, "but as a coach, what's been most impressive is the way the guys are coming together and playing for one another."

While the Pioneers have started the season fast, they still have a big second half of the season awaiting them along with a number of goals to accomplish.

"Obviously, we're happy with the way the season has started," Spranger said, "but we're nowhere near accomplishing our goals and still have a lot of our season ahead of us."

Another big factor in the success the team is enjoying is a deep and talented group of seniors.

"We have a very strong senior class that's been through a lot of big games," Spranger said, "and we will continue to lean on them as the season progresses."

Jayden Arthur, the team's quarterback and a defensive back, is one of those senior leaders. Arthur is off to a strong start this season as he has passed for 781 yards through the first four games. Arthur is completing 68% of his passes and has also thrown for 12 touchdowns. Arthur has also rushed for 139 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

"Jayden is our third year starting quarterback and has been tremendous for us in the off-season and has carried that into the season with his play and his leadership," Spranger said. "He's always getting us in the right spot,

and making the right reads. His calm demeanor and presence is exactly what you want in a quarterback."

Senior wide receiver/running back/defensive back Ryan Louch is another senior leader. Louch has caught 15 passes for 232 yards and four touchdowns through the first four games. Louch also leads the team in tackles with 38 including a pair of tackles for loss.

"Ryan is another third-year starter for us that we can move all around the field and can count on him making an impact on the game," Spranger said. "Defensively, he's our most physical player and is able to go sideline to sideline making plays."

Up front, senior Chase Randall is a leader in the trenches both along the offensive and defensive lines.

"Chase is another third-year starter that made the move from tight end to tackle to fit our needs and has become a leader of both of his position groups," Spranger said.

Senior offensive and defensive

lineman Dawson Babcock is another leader in the trenches who has made a position switch for the good of the team.

"Dawson is another senior who moved positions to fit the needs of the team," Sprang said. He moved from right tackle to center and has done a tremendous job."

At running back, senior Aiden Van bonn has taken over the bulk of the ball carrying duties. Van bonn is also a leader on defense at linebacker. Van bonn has rushed for 365 yards (7.3 avg.) and scored five touchdowns. On defense he has 33 total tackles and a pair of tackles for loss.

"Aiden is a senior who has waited his time to take over the bulk of the carries, and has done a tremendous job for us," Spranger said. "With the athletes that we have on the edge, he gets forgotten about at times and that's when he's able to bust off a long run."

Senior Joey Bouchey is a linebacker on defense and running back on offense. Bouchey is one of the leaders of the Pioneer defense.

"Joey is the guy in the middle of our defense who is making all of our checks and making sure that we're in the right spots defensively," Spranger said.

A junior turning in a big season is Jacob Halicek who lines up at wide receiver on offense and defensive back



The Clare football team started the season strong with four straight wins.

on defense. Halicek is a big-play target in the passing game with 11 receptions for 270 yards and three touchdowns.

"Jacob is a two-year varsity player that is doing a great job as our deep threat and has made some big catches for us," Spranger said.

While the Pioneers are pleased with the fast start, they know that they have plenty more work ahead of them.

"In order to continue our success, we need to continue to win the turnover battle and limits opposing team's big plays," Spranger said. "We also have to capitalize on our ability to make the big plays, all while continuing to improve all across the board."

Traverse City St. Francis Football Team Turning In Strong Season

David Cook Sports Scene

Over the years, the Traverse City St. Francis football team has been one of the premier programs in Division 7 football. This year, the Gladiators are back among the best in the state in Division 7.

St. Francis opened the season with wins in five of their first six games. The Gladiators are also ranked seventh in the state in total playoff points in Division 7.

As usual, St. Francis plays a rugged schedule. This season the Gladiators defeated Lawton 31-14 and fell to Berrien Springs 28-14 in big non-

league games and still has a matchup with defending Division 7 champion Jackson Lumen Christi coming up. St. Francis is a perfect 3-0 in the conference.

St. Francis is averaging 42.7 points per game with powerful ground game leading the way along with the ability to strike through the air. The Gladiators

spread the ball around as Cam Sellers, Evan Belanger, Harrison Shepherd and Braxton Lesinski are among the top rushers on the squad. Up front, the offensive line is led by seniors Beau Belanger, Garrett Gillespie, Warren Asher and Benjamin De Carolis along with junior Zack Winowiecki.

St. Francis also has a solid defense that is allowing 16.2 points per game. Among the standouts on defense are senior linebackers Eli Biggar and Matthew Rialson, junior linebackers Michael Frederick and Evan Belanger and senior defensive back Harrison Shepherd.



Brothers Beau Belanger (left) and Evan Belanger (right) are part of a Traverse City St. Francis team that opened the season with five wins in the first six games.

Fowler Grad Mason Pline Working At Making His Mark With San Francisco 49ers

David Cook Sports Scene

It is a long way from the Central Michigan Athletic Conference to the National Football League, but former Fowler basketball standout Mason Pline is showing that journey can be accomplished. A 2018 graduate of Fowler High School, Pline is a member of the San Francisco

49ers practice squad this fall as a tight end after being signed as an undrafted free agent this past spring.

A standout basketball player for Fowler, Pline played three years of basketball at Ferris State University. Pline then decided to go out for the football team as a tight end where Ferris State football coaches thought he could make an impact with his size (6-foot-7, 255 pounds) and athletic

ability at the position and urged him to give football a try. After playing for the Ferris State football team, where he helped lead to team to a national championship in 2021, Pline used his final year of collegiate eligibility last year at Furman University in South Carolina. Pline had a noteworthy season last fall as he caught 31 passes and scored four touchdowns for Furman.

Pline caught the attention of NFL scouts

leading up to last April's draft and shortly after the draft signed a free agent contract with the 49ers.

After going through training camp in August, Pline was signed to the 49ers' practice squad where he continues to work on his game in hopes of making an impact in the future with the team that features an all-pro tight end in George Kittle.



Former Fowler standout Mason Pline is part of the San Francisco 49ers organization as he is looking to make his mark in the NFL.

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Winning Tradition Continuing This Season For Midland Dow Boys Tennis Team

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Year in and year out, the Midland Dow boys tennis team is one of the premier tennis teams on both the local and the state level. This season, the Chargers are keeping that winning tradition rolling.

Ranked number one in the state in Division 2, Dow has won the past two Division 2 state championships and has a total of state tennis championships to its credit.

This year is no different for Dow which is off to a strong start with the state tournament coming up soon.

"The season is going really well," said Dow coach Terry Schwartzkopf. "We are 21-1-1 and our only loss came due to cramps on an extremely hot day so we ended up losing two flights I think we would win under normal circumstances. Austin (King) and Nimai (Patel) are still undefeated and I have two other flights that have a shot at a number two seed at states. We lost a ton of players last year and our doubles is brand new, so our success is a bit of a happy surprise."

Along with totaling 21 wins, Dow has turned in some impressive efforts so far this season. Dow has defeated most of the top-ten teams in the state in dual format matches and also won the title at the Grosse Pointe North Invitational.

"What is cool about this team is there seems to be a different hero each match that pulls it out for the team," said Schwartzkopf.

Dow is led this season by a standout group of singles players. Leading the way is Austin King at No. 1 singles. King started the season with a 27-0 record.

"Austin is a real candidate for Mr. Tennis," Schwartzkopf said. "He won last year at one

singles without dropping a set and is on his way again this year. He broke the career 0,0 record this year. He is a fantastic leader and has the strongest will of anyone I think I have ever coached."

At No. 2 singles, Yassin Elsaadany opened the season with a 19-5 record.

Yassin's losses are to the top seeds in the state and, unfortunately, isn't a true reflection of his ability," Schwartzkopf said. "He has had a few medical issues that have impacted some matches or I think you would have seen that loss column drop by three to four. I am proud of Yassin as he has fought through some difficult moments and pushed himself to a high level of success."

Nimai Patel is also off to a strong start this season. Patel has not lost a match in over two years and is 24-0 this season. Patel is also a two-time, individual state champion.

"I have confidence that Nimai has the ability to win another state championship," Schwartzkopf said. "He is another great leader for us in both action and attitude."

Sid Venkatesan rounds out the singles lineup. Venkatesan has compiled a 23-2 record this season.

"Sid went from a reserve last year to a true warrior," Schwartzkopf said. "Sid has battled all season and has an incredible record that anyone would be proud of. He is a real boon to this team and a foundational reason we continue to win after losing as much as we did."

In doubles play, the No. 1 doubles team of Matthew McGaugh and Nathan Song have put together a 17-7 record.

"This team was half of three and half of four doubles last year," Schwartzkopf said. "That is a huge jump and these guys have done it admirably. Three of the four losses were close

third set breakers. They have beaten top competition in the state. These guys are the real day and have impressed me with their abilities this season."

At No. 2 doubles, Dominic Griffin and Ian Koh have fashioned a 22-4 record.

"I expect these guys to be one of the top seeds," Schwartzkopf said. "They are both coming off reserves last year, and I think it may be the best jump anyone has ever had from reserves in all of my coaching experience. These guys play hard, have fun, and work their tails off. I could not be prouder of what they have already accomplished."

Raymond Chai and Jack Elwell are at No. 3 doubles and have put together a 13-6 record while playing tough all season.

"These guys are the tie-break team," Schwartzkopf said. "It seems every match goes to tie breaks. That shows me is that they can play with anyone in the state, regardless of seed or record. Both are new to the team and the experience and the stress that comes with playing for Dow High. Their growth has been fun to watch and I expect big things from them in the future."

Rounding out the doubles lineup are Vettel Xu and Jashwanth Thamminana who have turned in a 12-7 record at No. 4 doubles.

"These guys are raw and new but with incredible potential," Schwartzkopf said. "They have the game and the consistency will continue to improve. They could be dangerous in October."

With the season winding down, the Chargers are poised to accomplish their goals.

"The expectation is that we finish with 22 or



The Midland Dow tennis team and coach Terry Schwartzkopf are looking for a third straight state title this season.

23 wins, sweep the SVL and the plan is to sweep regional," Schwartzkopf said. "That will put us in a good position for seeds at state. There are about five to seven teams that have a legitimate shot at the state title and we are one of them. The seeds and draw will have a gigantic impact on the champion this year."

Dow suffered heavy graduation losses from last year and winning a third straight title will not be easy but the team has responded.

"We lost seven starters last year," Schwartzkopf said. "That means we have seven reserves and newbies taking over positions on a team with back-to-back championships and have maintained the number-one ranking the entire season. I think that is a testament to our team leaders, the environment of the program, and the families and parents who invest in our program. Our boys come back and work with the new guys to help establish tradition and expectation. I am blessed to have had former, current, and future players who buy into what we are doing here, the expectation of the program, and the investment in one another. I don't know how the state tournament will end up this year, but either way, the Lord has blessed this old coach for sure and all glory goes to Him for the consistency of success, team atmosphere, and player health through the years."

Alma Tennis Team Looking For Improvement

John Raffel Sports Scene

Alma tennis coach Todd Brasher entered the 2024 tennis season eyeing plenty of improvement.

"We were 2-9-1," Brasher said. "The No. 2 doubles team of Trey Craige and Andrew Brasher were honorable mention all-conference. Gideo Sacco advanced to the second round of regionals,

eventually losing to the regional winner.

"We lost two seniors: Ian Roe at 1 doubles and Trey Craige at 2 doubles. Trey Craige was honorable mention all-league."

Key players for Alma included seniors Gideo Sacco, Clark Lux, Andrew Brasher Nei Shiflet. Juniors are Zakary Schloff and Shayne Zimmerman and

sophomores are Landon Huntoon, Tuckery Crystal Collin O'Neil, Griffin Dunlap; Nathaniel Scates and Caleb Palmer.

"We're currently 1-3-3," Brasher said. "We're led by our seniors Clark Lux at one singles and Gideon Sacco at 2 singles. Lux is 7-3 and Sacco is 9-1. Their experience has been instrumental in helping us be successful this

season. We have a full roster this year, which is allowing us to pick up points that we couldn't last year.

"We have 7 athletes that are playing varsity tennis for the first time. My goals are to get them comfortable swinging the racket and to keep building experience for future seasons. Our strength lies in our singles competitors and our 1 doubles team. That's where all our

experienced players are competing.

As I mentioned earlier, we have a lot of inexperienced players. I want them to get comfortable playing tennis and to keep building their endurance for next season."

The league favorites are Saginaw Nouvel. They have a great roster from top to bottom. I would like to see either Lux or Sacco compete for a league title."

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Lansing Christian Soccer Team Off To Strong Start And Atop The Polls In Division 4

Butch Harmon Sports Scene

Ranked number one in the state in Division 4, the Lansing Christian boys soccer team is off to a strong start this season.

The Pilgrims began the season reeling off 15 straight wins before dropping matches to DeWitt, the number two-ranked team in the state in Division 2, and Haslett, another Division 2 squad.

During the first 15-game span Lansing Christian totaled 89 goals while allowing just eight goals.

The start of the season has gone really well for us," said Lansing Christian coach Tommy Ziolkowski. "We have started the year scoring a lot of goals and defending hard. The boys have learned the system and style we want to play very quickly which has helped us get some good results early on. Returning eight starters from last year's regional

finalist team has also helped with the start of the season."

Among the returning players are a trio of players who have club soccer experience in the offseason.

"Having three club players in there has really made a difference," Ziolkowski said. "Those guys are the engine of the team. Having such a strong midfield allows us to play the way we want."

Senior forward Owen Resch leads the way for the Pilgrims. One of the top players in the area, Resch is a three-time, all-state player and a Mr. Soccer candidate this season. Through the first 15 games this season Resch has totaled an astronomical 45 goals with 11 assists.

Junior attacking midfielder Cullen MacKay is also having a huge season. A two-time, all-state player, MacKay is a talented playmaker who leads the team in assists with 25 and has totaled nine goals.



The Lansing Christian soccer team is ranked number one in the state in Division 4 and opened the season with 15 straight wins.

Junior winger Alex Binioris has added nine goals and 10 assists.

Sophomore central midfielder Carson Block earned all-state honors last year as a freshman and has totaled seven goals and nine assists this season.

Senior centerback Payton Allaire has six goals and three assists and sophomore wing Own Andrus has eight goals and three assists.

The Pilgrims also have a solid defense led by senior defensive midfielder Josh Mead, senior outside back Collin Leavitt, senior centerback Mitch Cochran, senior

outside back Isaac Cisk and freshman outside back Andrew Toy. Lansing Christian is also strong in goal with junior goalkeeper Brady Carmichael who is a returning all-state keeper.

Along with having plenty of talent on the roster, the team also has a special team chemistry that makes the Pilgrims difficult to stop.

"Something else that makes this group special is how close they are as a group," Ziolkowski said. "The group hangs out together all the time at school or after. I think this has been an important part of our

success so far."

With the stretch run of the season coming up along with the state tournament, the Pilgrims are looking to continue to learn and improve.

"The key to continue success this fall will be to continue to develop our backline," Ziolkowski said. "With one returner from last fall, this is the most inexperienced position group we have. So far they have developed into a strong unit but we need to continue that development by the time the postseason starts to hopefully make a run."

Holt Eyes Another Strong Soccer Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Coach John Conner has been looking forward to another strong Holt boys soccer season.

Qualifying for Gold Cup, and defeating Mason (state finalist) 2-1 to go to the Gold Cup Final was a highlight in 2024.

Josiah Demond, team captain,

four-varsity player, starting central midfielder and Justice Germain, leading scorer, were key graduates.

"Furaha Djumbe is a returning starter, he contributes significantly in our attack and

defensive nature," Conner said. "Carrick Christensen is critical to our creative nature on offense, and ability to organize our pieces, and is

creative on set pieces.

"Andrew Holland, starting center back, senior leader, reads the game very well.

"My expectations of all of our players is to work every day to get better at your craft, give everything for your team and community, while striving academically on the daily."

The goal for the team, Connor

said, was "to finish in the top three of our

league, and get to a district title game."

He said senior leadership, grit and determination, youth are strengths.

"They're in high school, they need to work on technical/tactical and mental fortitude," he said; "Our conference is top ten in the state, I see us finishing in the top 3. Dewitt is tops currently, a very solid, well coached team."



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P-W Golfers Having Strong Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Lisa Bartlett has put together a strong Pewamo-Westphalia girls golf team this season.

"Last year we took first place in the Lakewood Invitational and one of our golfers, Brooke Spitzley qualified for state individually," Bartlett said. "This was only our second season in school history to have a girls golf team. Taylor Nurenberg is in her third year and is our

lowest score golfer. I expect big things from her this year, leading the team with low scores and experience.

"I have Ayla Thelen who is also in her third year and comes with experience and hard

work. Summer Wirth is in her second year and has a solid game into the home stretch along with new golfer, Reylee Thelen who has impressed me this year as a beginner golfer on varsity."

P-W was looking to be league contenders.

"We are looking to compete within the league and expect to finish near the top. A solid performance by my top golfers can put us in a spot to make it to states," Bartlett said. "We have 19 players this year, in just the third



2024 Pewamo-Westphalia girls golf team.

year of girls golf at PW. This gives me an opportunity to have several players available to move between JV and varsity. I have some beginner golfers this year who have really impressed me with their ability to learn the game quickly

and work to improve that game.

"We have to improve on consistency. Performing at some of the harder

courses will be key for our success," Bartlett said.

In the conference, "Bath has been the strong favorite for the past few years and with Fowler having a girls program this year, I see PW close to a (top finish)," Bartlett said.

Alma Soccer Having Impressive Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Alma High School's Nick O'Neill is varsity Boys Soccer Head Coach and has had a competitive year in the Tri Valley Conference.

Alma last year was Regionals Champions - (20-5-0) overall record; TVC Red Champions - (11-1-0) conference record 17 Consecutive Wins 213 Career Goal Differential.

"Last year's senior class as a whole was the most successful group in program history with: 1st Regional Championship; 3 District Championships 1st TVC Red Conference Championship (59-19-7) record over 4 years.

2023 Seniors (graduated 9 seniors and 6 starters)

Leo Richter - Forward - 1st Team All State - Career Goals Record (91)

Daniel Ash - Defender - 2nd Team All State Aidan O'Neill - Midfielder - All State H.M. - 2 time Captain

Eli Haller - Defender - All District / All Conference

Collin Helinski - Defender - All District / All Conference H.M.

Ethan Bailey - Defender - 2 year starter

Ayden Marks - Midfielder - 2 year starter

Key players this year:

Noah Vega - Sr - Keeper - 4 year starter - 3rd Team All State

Ashton Wilson - Sr - Wing - 2 year starter - All State H.M.

Keegan Crowe - Sr - Wing/Defender - 3 year starter - All Region

Jack Lemerand - Jr - Midfielder - 3 year starter - 2nd Team All State

Brayden Truman - Jr - Forward - 3 year starter - All State H.M. - Top returning goal scorer

"Expectations are high despite graduating a talented group of seniors," O'Neill said. "The TVC Red will be as difficult as ever and should help prepare us for a potential postseason run. We have a very talented offensive group and a seasoned all-state keeper that should help us be competitive in most matches. We also have a number of players

who have worked hard and patiently waited their turn behind the graduating seniors. These players are excited to make their own mark on the program.

"We anticipate being strong offensively and in net. It may take some time for new starters in our back 5 defensively to gel and get up to full speed.

"I've been coaching the program for 21 years and I am just as excited to coach this group of boys as any we've had come through the program.

They are great kids from great families and will represent our school and program with pride."



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Okemos Girls Golf Team At The Top Of The Chart In The State Division 1 Poll

David Cook Sports Scene

With one of the premier golfers in the state leading the way, the Okemos girls golf team has risen to the top of the polls in Division 1.

One of the top teams the past several years in the Mid-Michigan area, the Wolves are also a team to watch come the middle of October at the state golf finals. Okemos placed ninth in the state at last year's Division finals and is looking for an even loftier finish this season.

"We are really happy with the season we've had up to now," said Okemos coach Dan Stolz. "We have a super-nice group of kids and I enjoy being with them every day. From the scores I've seen out there, I feel like we are a top five team in the state."

The Wolves have turned in several noteworthy performances this season including winning titles at the Holt Invitational, the

Capital Area Activities Conference (CAAC) Open and the Gull Lake tournament at Bedford Valley Golf Club. The Wolves turned in their best performance of the season at the CAAC Open where they set a school record with a 308 team total.

Leading the way for the Wolves is senior Alena Li. Not only the top player on the squad, Li is also one of the premier golfers in the entire state. A three-time, all-state golfer, Li is turning in a huge senior season as she is averaging 68 for the season and is an amazing 35-under par for the entire season.

"To be 35 under par for the season just blew my mind," Stolz said. "Anytime you have a round under par that is an accomplishment. Alena has had two rounds of 64 this year. She is just a really terrific player. We are really fortunate to have her. She is just an amazing player. She won the state junior amateur this summer, she competed at the

junior amateur in California and the junior PGA in Maryland. She has had a really great year."

Li has been on a roll each year of her high school career as she has finished in the top ten at the state meet in all three of her previous seasons.

"Alena rarely gets into any trouble," Stolz said. "She hits the ball long and straight. Her short game is very good. She can chip up and one putt. She is also a good putter and if you are going to score you have to be able to putt."

Okemos also has plenty of talent rounding out the lineup led by freshman Anika Srivastava.

"Anika has gotten better and better," Stolz said. "She shot around 80 the first three matches but lately she has shot 75, 72 and 75. She has a 78 average and for a freshman she has done a terrific job stepping in."

Rounding out the Okemos lineup is Emma O'Shea who



The Okemos girls golf team of (left to right) Anisha Pabbathi, Zoey McArdle, Lorelei Weinrick, Emma O'Shea, Anika Srivastava and Alena Li have led the team to the top of the state rankings in Division 1.

is averaging 86.8, sophomore Anisha Pabbathi is averaging 95 and freshman Zoey McArdle is averaging 97.6.

"After Alena we are a pretty young team," Stolz said. "We have a freshman, two sophomores and a freshman. We are pretty young but our young golfers are doing a really

nice job." With the conference tournament, regional and state finals coming up, the Wolves are primed to finish strong.

"It's been a fun season," Stolz said. "We're hoping for a strong finish and to do well the rest of the season."

Alma Girls Golf Team Enjoys Strong Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Steve Kettler is the Alma girls golf coach whose team has had a strong season.

"Last year we struggled to get enough girls to consistently fill out a team. We did end up building up to five girls, but it took some time for us to get to that point," he said. "We lost two first year seniors, Emma Bott and Ava Northrup. They

helped us to fill out a team and if both had played prior, I think they had a lot of potential.

Here's the top Alma girls from this season.

Ava Vogt - Senior - Returning 1st team all conference - 4th year

Kaleigh Johnston - Senior - Returning 2nd team all conference - 4th year

Olivia Holt - Senior - 3rd

year varsity

Maggie Lux - Junior - returns after a year off

"They hope is to continue to improve and to work towards climbing up the conference standings," Kettler. "We certainly have a lot of fun and do work hard to improve."

What are some things this team needs to work on?

"Consistency," Kettler said.

All the girls put together some good shots/holes and have shown the capability. It is just a matter of staying consistent.

"Our conference is very strong at the top. Freeland is one of the top teams in their division in the state. Frankenmuth and Ithaca also have very strong and experienced teams. We hope to finish in the middle to top half of the 9 team conference."



The 2024 Alma golf team Left to right - Samantha Allison, Ava Vogt, Maggie Lux, Kaleigh Johnston, Jaicee Lewis, Olivia Holt

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Senior Class Helps Lead Grand Ledge Girls Golf Team To Top-Ten Ranking In The State

David Cook Sports Scene

Led by a solid senior core, the Grand Ledge girls golf team is turning in a big season.

Ranked 10th in the state in Division 1, the Comets have their sights set on a strong finish to the season. Last season Grand Ledge capped an outstanding campaign by placing 12th in the state in Division 1 and this year's team is poised to do even better.

"We've been having a nice year so far," said Grand Ledge coach Jeffrey Miller. "The team has come together quite well. We are currently second in our league and

second in our region."

Being second in the league is no small feat as the No. 1 team in the state in Division 1, Okemos, sits in first place in the league.

Grand Ledge has turned in several big efforts on its way to a top-ten state ranking. The Comets placed second at the Perry, Big Rapids and Holt invitationals this season while going up against some of the top teams in the state.

Leading the way for the Comets are a trio of talented seniors led by Isabel Kelly. A returning all-state golfer who finished in the top ten individually at last year's state finals, Kelly has posted some

impressive efforts this season. One of those was a round of 71 and a second-place finish at the Capital Area Activities Conference (CAAC) Open. Kelly also won the Lady Cardinal Invitational title at Big Rapids with a score of 76.

"Isabel drives the ball well and has a really nice short game," Miller said. "She also has that 'it' factor. When things are not going the best, she is able to really grind and never give up. She drives the ball well and putts and chips well."

Following Kelly in the lineup is fellow senior Aubrie Parish, junior Erin McGinnis, senior Meghan Zann and sophomores Eleni Parish and Kimberly Xiong.

"We have a deep team," Miller said. "We have one very, very excellent player in Isabel and three or four players who on any given day can shoot in the low to mid 40s. We also have an experienced team. We have three seniors, one junior and two sophomores."

With the combination of talent and the experience that the Comets have, a strong post-season is within reach.

"All of the girls are dedicated

and work hard," Miller said. "They always do the best they can. They also like to have fun. They enjoy playing and I enjoy being around them."



The Grand Ledge girls golf team of Isabel Kelly, Erin McGinnis, Aubrie Parrish, Eleni Parish, Kimberly Xiong and Meghan Zann have led the Comets to a top-ten ranking in Division 1.

DeWitt Girls Golf Team Carrying On Winning Tradition This Season

David Cook Sports Scene

Over the years, the DeWitt girls golf team has been one of the premier teams in the Mid-Michigan area. This season is no different as the Panthers have been posting some consistently low scores.

Heading into October and with the state tournament looming, DeWitt is ranked seventh in the state in Division 2. The Panthers are also in third place in the ultra-competitive Capital Area Activities Conference (CAAC) Blue Division that includes Okemos, ranked first in the state in Division 1, and Grand Ledge, ranked 10th in the state in Division 1.

Leading the way for DeWitt

this season are a pair of seasoned seniors who bring a wealth of experience and talent to the course. Seniors Courtney Novak and Cate Piesko are both four-year varsity players and are leading the way for the Panthers. Novak is averaging 42.6 for nine holes while Piesko is close behind with a 44.0 average for nine.

DeWitt is also receiving a strong contribution from junior Sydney Ferguson. In her first year of playing golf for the Panthers, Ferguson is averaging 46.8 for nine holes.

DeWitt started the season strong with an impressive performance at the Sydney Carfine Memorial tournament at The Meadows on the campus of Grand Valley State

University. In a field loaded with top teams from across the state, the Panthers placed eighth out of 18 teams.

A couple weeks after that, the Panthers turned in one of their top performances of the season. That is when they placed third behind Okemos and Grand Ledge at the Holt Invitational. DeWitt finished just two strokes behind second-place Grand Ledge and seven shots behind first-place Okemos. DeWitt scored their lowest team total of the season at the Holt Invitational and placed five golfers in the top 17 individually.

DeWitt was led at Holt by Ferguson who placed sixth with an 85. Novak also finished in the top ten as she placed eighth with an

87. Hannah Kukulski took 11th with an 88, Piesko placed 13th with an 89 and Sophie Beland placed 17th with a 92.

DeWitt also placed second at the Coldwater Invitational where they were led by Beland and Novak who both placed in the top ten individually.

The Panthers are gearing up for the state tournament that is closing in. The regional is slated for October 8 at the Coldwater Golf Club. The regional is stacked with state-ranked teams including No. 2 South Lyon, No. 3 Dexter, No. 6 Mason, No. 10 Fenton and the Panthers. DeWitt has won back-to-back regional titles and adding a third is the goal.



Members of the DeWitt golf team include (left to right) Hannah Kukulski, Courtney Novak, Cate Piesko, Sydney Ferguson, Sophie Beland, and Ryleigh Hanlin.

"If the girls find a way to stay relaxed, enjoy the moment and play to their ability, there is a good chance we can steal one of the state finals spots," said DeWitt coach Chris Thelen.

A total of three teams from the regional qualify for the state finals.

St. Patrick Runners Look To Be Strong Again

John Raffel Sports Scene

Portland St. Patrick has established a strong cross country program and coach Dan Lawless was hoping for more of the same this year.

Last season, "the boys team earned a trophy at the Saranac Invitational, the first boys team cross country award since the mid 1960's and Isaac FoxElster qualified for States, he also earned academic all-state.

Seniors who graduated in 2024 were Laynie Meredith, Olivia Pung, and Arianna FoxElster.

Meredith was a three-year state qualifier.

Standouts for the season figure to be:

BOYS TEAM:

Timothy Chamberlain, junior, third year on varsity, second team all CMAC. Injury kept him from states.
Isaac FoxElster, junior, third year on varsity, qualified for States last year, Nick Pung, junior, third year on varsity.

Francis Austen, sophomore, second year on varsity.

Levi Knoop, freshman, first year on varsity.

Patrick Austen, eighth-grader, first year on varsity.

Nathan Fears, senior first year on varsity.

GIRLS TEAM:

Marian Davlin, sophomore, second year on varsity, Honorable mention all CMAC.

Emma Martin, sophomore, second year on varsity.

Lilly Anthony, first year on varsity.

The team is strong and has some depth. The team, with several veterans and some rookies, has some ambitious goals. They are motivated, ambitious and are a hard working group. Girls Team: With only 3 runners, the team will be



2024 Portland St. Patrick cross country team.

working on individual goals.

For the boys, "we hope to finish in the top 1/2 of the league, this would be our best finish since the program was re-established in 2010," Lawless said.

Lakewood Runners Have High Expectations

John Raffel Sports Scene

"In the 2023 season we had two runners place high in the CAAC," Lakewood's coach Carter said. "For the girls, Emma Tidd finished the season ranked in honorable mention division, and for the boys, Riley Johnson finished the season ranked in 1st team division.

"This year we are expecting great things from the following boys:

Riley Johnson (senior), Hudson Goethals (senior) and Ethan Langmaack (freshman). This year we are expecting great things from the following girls: Emma Tidd (Junior) and Raelin Schrock (Freshman)."

Carter's expectation are high.

"My expectations for this season are to work hard and have consistent improvements," he said. "This team's strengths are centered around the fact they work hard at practice. The upperclassmen push the underclassmen, yet we have enough younger talent that they're challenging the upperclassmen at the same time.



The 2024 Lakewood cross country teams.

"Currently the team is working on finding their own pace so that way they can run their best times. Our conference is very competitive.

The league favorites for the boys are Eaton Rapids and Lansing Catholic, while the league favorites for the girls are Lansing Catholic, Charlotte and Eaton Rapids."

MLS Runners Are Talented

John Raffel Sports Scene

Seth LaBair is coaching a Michigan Lutheran Seminary team that has a lot of talent this season.

"Our boys team qualified for the state meet last year with a third place finish at regionals. Both boys finished fourth and our girls finished fifth in our conference," LaBair said. "We graduated a few seniors that were big contributors to our

team. Jeffrey Harden was a two time MVP and helped our team win a regional championship (2022) and qualify for the state meet (2022 and 2023). The girls lost Amelia Rivera and JoAnna Harden along with some other key contributors.

"Senior Camden Fager returns after being our MVP last season. He was also named second team all conference. Sophomore Amos Norder had a great freshman year. Junior Summer Yuan was also

our number five runner last year. The girls return sophomore Greta Schroeder who was our MVP. Sophomore Aisly Taylor had a strong end to her first year on the team. These two girls should be in our top five from the start."

LaBair added: "Our guys appeared to be ready for another strong season but we've lost a couple of runners that we were counting on. We'll have to have some newcomers step up and fill those gaps. The girls have a lot of

questions. I'm hopeful that some of our incoming girls will be able to add depth and push for varsity spots.

"The girls should have really good depth. We've got a good mix of newcomers and returning contributors. The boys are going to be led by Camden and Amos. It's going to be key for some guys to make some big strides. We are also trying to add more runners to our guys team. As always, we have a lot of runners who have never run cross

country. They will need to build up their mental toughness and work through their first season."

In the conference: "Ithaca will be the easy favorite on both the girls and the guys side. With St. Louis leaving, it takes a very strong school out of our conference. Bullock Creek had also improved, but they're gone too. I think many of the teams in our conference will be fighting for second place."

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Area Cross Country Teams Running To The Top In State Rankings

David Cook Sports Scene

Alma Boys Seventh In Division 2

The Alma boys cross country team is off to a strong start this season. The Panthers are ranked seventh in the state in Division 2 and have turned in some strong efforts so far this season. One of the top performances came at the Michigan State University Invitational where the Panthers placed second in Division 2. Junior Thomas Larson led the way for Alma as he placed first in a time of 15:56.3. Sophomore Ezekiel Baltierra finished in second place with a time of 16:09.4. Sophomore Kevin Terpstra placed 20th individually while junior Elijah Baltierra placed 40th. Alma also won the John Bruner Classic at Shepherd. Larson led the way for Alma as he placed third in 15:43.8 while Ezekiel Baltierra was fourth in 15:49.9. Elijah Baltierra (14th) and Terpstra (15th) both placed in the top 20.

Pewamo-Westphalia Girls Number One In D3

The Pewamo-Westphalia girls cross country

team has risen to No. 1 in the state in the Division 3 rankings. The Pirates have won five invitational this season and finished sixth at the Shepherd invite competing against some of the premier teams in the state in Divisions 1 and 2 along with 3. Senior Whitney Werner is leading the way for Pewamo-Westphalia as she won individual races at five invitationals this season. Werner also placed ninth at the Shepherd invite where she recorded a time of 18:13.06. Sophomore Alyssa Kramer finished second at five invitationals and took 11th at Shepherd where she posted a time of 18:29.9. The Pirates have a deep group of runners with freshman Adelyn Thelen, junior Abbie Schneider and sophomores Delaney Smith and Charlotte Simon all turning in strong times this season.

Ithaca Girls Off To Solid Start

The Ithaca girls cross country team is off to a strong start this season and are ranked eighth in the state in Division 3. The Yellowjackets turned in a big performance at the Michigan State Invitational where they placed fourth in Division 3 & 4. Freshman Khloe Lehnst led the way for Ithaca as she placed fifth as an



The Alma boys cross country team is off to a strong start this season and is ranked seventh in the state in Division 2.

individual in a time of 20:38.2. Sophomore Makinna Foglesong placed sixth individually while freshman Isabelle Strand was 42nd, freshman Amelia Dawe 57th and junior Izabelle LaLone 67th.

DeWitt Girls In Top Ten In State

The DeWitt girls cross country team is turning in a big season. The Panthers, ranked sixth in the state in Division 2, turned in a noteworthy performance at the Michigan State Invitational where they captured first place in Division 2. Senior Ayla Holben led the way for the Panthers as she placed 7th individually with a time of 19:54.5. Senior Mia Williams finished in tenth place while senior Kayla Williams placed 13th, freshman Aurora Doepler placed 17th and senior Autumn Thompson

finished 23rd overall.

Shepherd Boys In Top Ten In State

The Shepherd boys cross country team is ranked 12th in the state in Division 2. The Bluejays have turned in a number of strong performances this season including a title at the Lansing Catholic invite. Sophomore Bryce Cahoon led the way at Lansing as he won the individual title in a time of 16:51.3 while senior Nolan Longuski was third in 17:26. Junior Ian McNeel (6th), sophomore Drew Davis (seventh) and sophomore Jakin Whitney (9th) all placed in the top ten. Shepherd also placed second at the John Bruder Classic it hosted. Cahoon led the way at the Bruder Classic as he took second overall in 15:42.6 while Longuski placed sixth.

currently ranked 28th in our region and working hard to qualify for states. Skylar MacLennan is a freshman and currently ranked 15th in our region. She's working hard to continue getting faster and making a state run."

The goal for the Pirates "is getting as many as we can to states."

"Unfortunately we don't have enough to score so they are working hard at getting better and



getting to states," Biddinger said.

"They have the miles in from working hard over the summer they just need to transform that into getting faster on the course through workouts and hard work."

Fulton Cross Country Expecting Another Huge Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Jeff Biddinger enjoyed an excellent cross country team at Fulton last season and expects another good one this year.

Top moments from a year ago included when Kaydense Ryan qualified for states and made the school's top 10 board. Also Rush Marsden came up just short of

qualifying for states and made Fulton's top 10 board as a freshman

Biddinger lost one key runner from a year ago.

"Kaydense Ryan, she has moved away," Biddinger said. "She was my lone state qualifier last year."

Top athlete from this year are: Boys, Rush Marsden -sophomore; Jacob Vanderveen -junior

Girls: Breanna MacIntyre -senior; Makiya Telling -sophomore; Taylor Woodbury -sophomore; Skylar MacLennan -Freshman

"Rush Marsden is currently a sophomore and is ranked fourth in our Region," Biddinger said. "He's already moved up our top 10 board this year and making great strides. Newcomer Jacob Vanderveen is improving every meet and

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Holt Hungry For Another Strong Volleyball Season

John Raffel Sports Scene

Coach Billie Jo Olcheske had a strong Holt volleyball team last season and is looking for more of the same this year.

Holt won its league and had a 20-7-2 record.

-Setter Sophia Anderson reached a milestone in over 1000 assists.

Holt had some key graduates:

Claire Tobias- fast, scrappy player that just made things happen.

Eleonora Felci (foreign exchange student from Italy)- One of the top ace server in the state last year and a great outside hitter for us.

Top players this year include:

Sadie Laubenthal(SR): 4 year varsity middle; great all around player and fantastic leader.

Sophia Anderson(SR): 3 year varsity setter; well over 1,200 assists and runs the court.

Libby Baswell(SR): 3 years varsity middle; great blocker and energized player.

Jaime Eddington(SR): 2 year varsity outside hitter; smart and always makes great plays.

Brooklyn Kahn Jacques(JR): 2 year varsity libero; quick and makes everyone look good.

Mia LaFave(JR): 2 year outside hitter; fast approach and quick swing.

Chloe Buckley(JR): 1st year fully on varsity(Split last year); smart, hardworking opposite hitter; wonderful block.

Ellie Kinne(SO): 1st year; opposite hitter; quick on her approach and ready for any game.

Madison Brady(JR): 1st year varsity player;DS; small but mighty.



2024 Holt Volleyball Team.

Bullock Creek Runners Show Promise

John Raffel Sports Scene

Midland Bullock Creek cross country coach Shelly Discher has been looking forward to testing her team in the Jack Pine Conference this season.

Highlights last season, Discher recalled, included: Three second place finishes at the Birch Run Early Bird Invitational, the Lancer Invitational, and the Freeland Invitational; individual state qualifier for D3 state finals Mattie Gagne.

Top runners this year include the following:

Mattie Gagne, junior. "Mattie qualified as a freshman and sophomore for the MHSAA state finals. Her personal best time is 19:46," Discher said. "She has had an outstanding start to her

season with a 3rd place, 13th place, and sixth-place finish at her first three meets. She is ranked third in Region 25 (D3) and 26th in Division 3. She is running just one second shy of her personal best and sets the tempo for our team's workouts.

"Autumn Fransen is my No. 2 runner. She is a senior who has been a long time leader on the team. She has put in a ton of work this summer and is looking super strong. She broke into the 20's for the first time at the Northwood Invitational and is currently ranked 7th in Region 25.

"Sarah Nothstine is a freshman who is having a breakout year. I knew coming in that she would add a lot to our team, and she has come out with guns blazing, seeing her times drop by 30-40 seconds each race. She's currently running

3rd on the team and is ranked 14th in Region 25. We're working on getting her to believe she can run with Autumn and that running together will make them both stronger."

Discher added: "I have a young team--my number four and five runners, Sammy Skym and Adeline Ludwig, have tons of potential. I'm excited to see what they will do in the next few meets. Both have winning attitudes and are ready to put the work in. On top of that I have a handful of sophomores that are right on their heels. As a group they push one

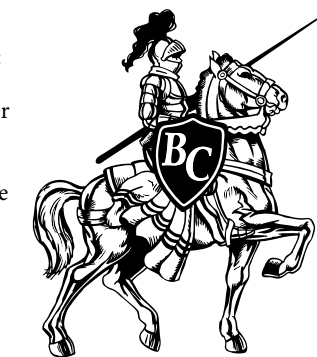
another and the team atmosphere is fun but ferocious."

As for her expectations of this team, " We want to be a competitive force in our new conference, the Jack Pine, and we have a team goal of qualifying for the state meet. Most importantly, we want to capitalize on our team's potential.

"I think one strength is my senior leadership. My seniors are and are ready to put the work in. On top of that I have a handful of sophomores that are right on their heels. As a group they push one

aren't set in stone and I could see those positions shifting--I think the team has strong enough bonds and a "together" mentality to make this an asset. One area that would make us stronger is realizing the power of a pack and running with a teammate in races.

"We are new to the Jack Pine and are looking forward to seeing a different mix of teams. The conference will definitely be a proving ground for us. The competition is tough. Shepherd is a dominate force, but I do think we have what it takes to contend with Gladwin and Clare. We'll need our numbers 4 and 5 to really step up if we want a shot at those two schools. Fighting it out with those teams in our conference meets will be what gets us ready for our competition at the regional."



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Fowler Eyes CMAC Title

John Raffel Sports Scene

Patty Feldpausch is the head varsity coach for volleyball at Fowler and is expecting a strong season.

Last year's team was 22-18-7 and placed fourth in the CMAC and won a District Title.

"We graduated four seniors last year," she said.

Key players are Ella Hufnagel senior all-around standout; Anna Andros senior outside hitter; Rachel Wirth

junior Libero; Skylar Fowler junior middle hitter; Josie Simon junior middle hitter; Neelah O'Rourke junior setter and Paige Thelen junior outside hitter.

"We strive to improve each match, to win our CMAC matches and to have a great postseason run," Feldpausch said. "We are very scrappy and aggressive. There is always something to work on."

The CMAC "is known for having very good volleyball teams. We plan on being at the top of the CMAC."



The 2024 Fowler volleyball team.

Ithaca Volleyball Team Set For Strong Year

John Raffel Sports Scene

Karla McDonald is expecting another strong season from her Ithaca volleyball team which finished second in league action last year.

Last years key players:

Jordyn Smith: four-year setter, "led us to our first league and district championship in 2022," McDonald said. "All league and all region honors. Currently playing for Olivet College.

Jenna Cantu: middle hitter on varsity three years with all league honors.

Returning players: Senior Kennedi

Ryan outside hitter and senior Emma Polash middle hitter. "These two are the only seniors we have this year."

McDonald said they are a young team but looking for some big plays out of:

Emma Rohrs- Junior two-year varsity outside hitter, Junior Chloe Skeith 2 years on varsity defensive specialist/outside hitter.

Alyssa Polash- brought up at the end of the season last year is a sophomore playing middle hitter and will be a player to watch.

Pazlee Donovan- Junior and 1st year setter. Looking for a new leader after graduating Jordyn last year.



The 2024 Ithaca volleyball team.

"My expectations for this team this year is to get a little better everyday. Keep working for the direction forward with this young team," McDonald said. "I am hoping our strengths are playing

good defense. If we can do that I know the offense will come along. Things we are working on is how to play together as a team and to bring out the best in all of us. Our conference is usually really

competitive. I would consider Valley Lutheran to be very good. Jon has a great team every year. and are always very competitive. We are hoping to finish in the top half of the league this year."

Breckenridge Volleyball Out To Hot Start

John Raffel Sports Scene

Breckenridge's volleyball team, under coach Mindy Horman, has fired out to a hot start.

As of the end of September, the Huskies were 25-1-1.

The only blemishes was a 15-25, 25-19 with Shepherd at the Shepherd Invitational and a 10-25, 25-23, 13-15 loss to Midland Bullock Creek.

Brief highlights of the 2023 season were finishing in 2nd place in the MSAC with a record of 8-1 and an overall season record of 26-11-4. Junior Liz McCaw and Senior Emma Tinson received first team All-Conference and All-County honors for their play in 2023. Junior BayLeigh Clapp received

second Team All-Conference. Junior Madi Aldrich and seniors Lily St. John and Kalya Goward received Honorable Mention in the league

"We only graduated one senior last year, Julia Rowe, who played for us in the back row. Julia was a quiet player but a good passer," Horman said. "Junior Liz McCaw is our top outside hitter who brings power and finesse to the game. She plays all the way around and always makes key plays on the court to help our team come out on top. Senior Emma Tinson is our starting middle this season. She is strong, smart, and aggressive at the net. She is an asset to our team."

"Junior BayLeigh Clapp is our libero and is amazing in the back row. She makes "plays" that most

players would let hit the ground and she comes out of nowhere and makes the play. Senior setter, Blair Davenport leads us on the court and has improved from last season. She brings energy and intelligence to the game. I expect a lot out of these players because I see their potential. Liz is the player I turn to when we need points. She can shift the momentum of the game by her attacks at the net in our favor. Emma is the kid who comes with big blocks and hard hits at the net."

Expectations are high.

"This team has set goals for themselves individually and as a team and so far they are achieving them. We are currently 25-1-1 winning every tournament we have attended. I expect a lot out of this group of girls and they continue to amaze me at their drive and



The 2024 Breckenridge volleyball team with one of its many trophies from the season.

determination," Horman said.

"This team's strength is their dynamic and unity with each other. They are fun, and positive and hold each other accountable on and off the court. They work hard and always give 110 percent. When one player is not on, another player picks it up to help. We need to work on being more consistent as a

team and always pushing no matter what level of team we are playing."

In the conference, "I see us as one of the top teams in the league this season," Horman said. "Sacred Heart is always at the top too. This group of girls are great athletes and kids and they deserve a great season because they are working hard for it."

Portland Volleyball Set To Be League Contenders

John Raffel Sports Scene

Portland High School varsity volleyball coach Jason Zeek is upbeat with his volleyball team which hopes to be competitive in the CAAC White this season.

The Portland Raiders finished 21-18-4 on the season, third in the CAAC White.

Portland lost some key players from last year.

Jaylee Pitchford, the lone senior,

graduated after a stellar senior year. She is currently continuing her playing career at Lansing Community College. She earned the Career Serve Percentage record at Portland with 97.2 percent.

Key players are as follows:

Allie Sutberry 5-6, 11th Setter All CAAC-White 2023 1st Team;

Anastasia Seidelman 5-4, 12th Libero All CAAC-White 2023 1st Team;

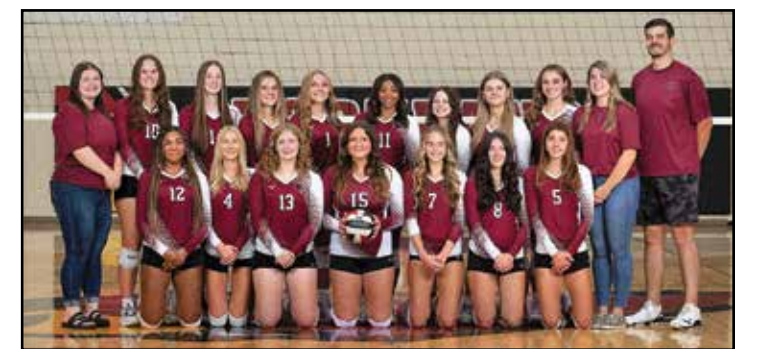
McKenna Boykin 5-8 11th Middle All CAAC-White 2023 Honorable

Mention;

Makayla Evansen 5-7 11th Outside Currently leading the team in kills; Lilli Spenski 5-3 12th defensive specialist, third year varsity;

Lexie Huhn 5-6 12th outside third year varsity.

"Expectations for Portland volleyball are to continue to grow/improve given that they are returning a majority of their team," Zeek said. "It might not reflect in their record, given the step up in strength of schedule compared to



The 2024 Portland varsity volleyball team.

seasons past.

"This Raider team contains a strong back row pairing of LillinSpenski and Anastasia Seidelman, two seniors capable of running the defense. Offensively,

servicing is the double edged sword of this team. The CAAC White conference is becoming more than just top heavy. Portland is trying to maintain or improve from last year's finish."

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DeWitt Volleyball Eyes Another District Title

**John Raffel
Sports Scene**

Carley Robertson had a strong season with DeWitt's volleyball team last season which included a 25-17-3 record and district title.

Key graduates included:

Taya Nordmann and Sophi DeVliieger, multi-year varsity starting middle blockers, hardworking, good teammates.

"We are proud of their contributions to our program, and are excited to see

them continue their volleyball careers at the collegiate level," Robertson said.

Key players for this year are:

Cali Stevons, setter, senior, captain. One of the most well rounded athletes I have coached, consistent with every skill, calming presence on the court.

Payton Terwilliger, outside hitter, junior. Can jump out of the gym, strong server, versatile.

Lucy Roberts, middle hitter, junior, captain. Competitor through and through, strong blocker that works hard

in transition to make herself available on offense.

"We want to be the most connected team in the gym. Rely on our depth and win as many post season games as possible to make a deep run," he said. "We have depth at every position, gritty, connected. We need to find our identity, work on consistent energy, and serve receive."

League favorites "are probably Grand Ledge, Holt. Would love to see us come out on top but very competitive."



The 2024 DeWitt volleyball team.

St. Patrick Volleyball Team Looking To Improve

**John Raffel
Sports Scene**

Nicole Easlick is coaching a St. Patrick varsity volleyball team looking to play a role in the CMAC this season. "Last season the team record was 16-20-3," Easlick said. "We had a competitive season and we won the Webberville Invitational. The girls also made it to the District Finals, but could not pull out a back to back district win."

There were some key losses to graduation.

"Tori Sandborn was our libero for three years on varsity and was a key player," Easlick said. "She

broke a school record last year for career digs with 1,581. We also lost Marley Weems, who was a great middle blocker for us and had a strong presence at the net. Hannah Weller and Sophie Schrauben were the two setters and they will be missed as well. They did a good job of setting up hits and being aggressive.

"Bella Russman is a senior this season and will be a key contributor to the team. She is an outside hitter, that also plays left back. Bella is leading the team in kills so far this season and has a solid hit. She is a strong defensive player as well. Olivia Rockey is playing libero this season and

stepped into the position well. She works hard and is aggressive in the back row. She will be a solid defensive player this season.

"Kennedy Drake is a middle hitter this season as a freshman. She is starting to improve every game. Being a young player on Varsity can be a challenge, but she is handling it well, starting to get her hands on a lot of balls at the net defensively. Her hitting is coming along as well and she will be a key player for the varsity team in the years to come."

Much is expected of this team.

"This season we have a young

team that is learning and growing together. We lost a lot of players to graduation this year and have basically had to start over. We know this may be a tough season, but we are hoping to set a strong foundation for the years to come," Easlick said. "Our strength this season will be our defense. We have a couple of really aggressive players that so far this season are digging the ball well. We also have some solid servers that get us some points each game."

The focus this season is the offense.

"The girls are really working on their technique and timing, so that we can have some strong hitters,"

Easlick said. "Another thing we are working on is our setting. We have some young setters this season that are learning the ropes and getting the hang of things."

"We are in the CMAC and the top teams this season are Pewamo Westphalia and Fowler. With some strong teams in conference we know it will be tough."



Lakewood Volleyball Has New Coach

**John Raffel
Sports Scene**

Brooke Francisco is the new volleyball coach at Lakewood after serving as assistant the past seven years. Her team lost in a tough district championship match last season.

Carter Piercefield is an outstanding libero-defensive specialist for Lakewood who graduated last year.

This year's team includes senior setter and outside hitter Abby Pickard, who is a key player, assist/kill leader, plus Emma Duffey who is a junior setter and outside leader

and has excellent volleyball IQ.

Pickard has committed to Northern Kentucky for the 2025 season. She is a four-year varsity starter and a team assist and attacking leader.

"She wears hearing aids but has never let that stop her," Francisco said.

Francisco expects the team to battle for a league title and be among the top 10 teams in the state. A strength will be tough defense, a competitive edge and excellent team work.

"We are young middles getting better everyday," Francisco said.



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