



# SCHOOL NEWS

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HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

DECEMBER 2023

## Middleburg High, Wilkinson Junior High to offer AICE, Pre-AICE programs

AICE program now offered in all county district schools

By Jack Randall  
jack@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG – The AICE (Advanced International Certificate of Education) program developed by the University of Cambridge in England will be offered at Middleburg High next fall. Completion of the accelerated course load and passing the AICE examinations grants hardworking students an AICE diploma upon graduation, which automatically guarantees the Bright Futures Scholarship.



Nate Warmouth

Martin Aftuck

The AICE diploma is a ticket to higher education as much as it is a testament to dedication in the classroom. Principal Martin Aftuck at Middleburg High is proud of what the implementation of AICE means for his school.

“We already offer dual enrollment (DE) and advanced placement (AP) programs, but now, with AICE, we’re offering another opportunity for prospective students,” he said.

He cited his daughter, who went through the AICE program at Fleming Island High, as evidence of the program’s success. He was thankful for how well she resonated with the program.

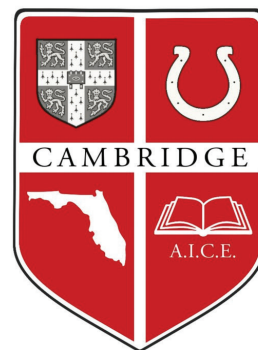
The principal is anticipating 90 students from the 9th-grade cohort to enroll next fall. The AICE program is an opportunity for more resources for high school students, such as dedicated learning environ-

ments. Aftuck is confident in his teachers’ abilities to transition to the AICE classroom and for his students to succeed. He wanted to emphasize that the challenging program would be a fruitful endeavor.

“It’s going to be a great opportunity for students to get some experience at the college level,” he said. “Just because it is AICE, kids will have the opportunity to still be kids. There’s going to be homework, but they won’t be drowning in it. They’ll still have the ability to be involved in the (extracurriculars) they’re interested in.”

Principal Nate Warmouth of Wilkinson Junior High shared Aftuck’s enthusiasm. Warmouth is eagerly anticipating the implementation of Pre-AICE programs at Wilkinson Junior High, the primary feeder school to Middleburg High.

“Clay County does school choice. In the past, we’ve lost members of our student



## Middleburg High School

Advanced International Certificate of Education

Starting 2024-25

body who were zoned for Wilkson that opted instead to pursue opportunities at other district schools,” Warmouth said.

The principal is dedicated to providing the best educational opportunities for his students, and he sees the Pre-AICE program at Wilkinson Junior High in conjunction with AICE at Middleburg High as just one more step forward.

“Wilkinson has climbed academically from bottom three to top three in the county,” he said. “Academically, we are moving the needle. The decisions we make must continue to be made in the student’s best

interests. We want to give each student the opportunity and academic advantage we can.”

He continued.

“This means getting their feet wet in the ‘Cambridge experience,’ getting them acclimated to accelerated learning and setting them up for success in Middleburg High.”

Aftuck invites all incoming, interested 9th-grade students to reach out to him with any questions at martin.aftuck@myo-neclay.net

“Go, Broncos!” Aftuck said.



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## Congratulations

CLAY COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR SEMIFINALISTS 2023-2024




## Congratulations

CLAY COUNTY SCHOOL-RELATED EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR SEMIFINALISTS 2023-2024





**Farm City Week at Doctors Inlet Elementary School**  
The University of Florida Clay County Extension Office helped celebrate Farm-City Week with Doctors Inlet Elementary. Students learned about fresh Florida grown mini cucumbers and did a Florida Veggie Crunch taste test.



## Students in for a Reality Check at Keystone Heights Junior High

By **Natalie Gilstrap**  
For School News

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Capital City Bank and Keystone Heights Junior High held their third annual Reality Check event in the school's gymnasium.

"It is a somewhat immersive financial planning program for students," said Assistant Director of Community Partnership Schools Isaac Morford.

During the event, eighth-grade students had the opportunity to learn about financial literacy and start preparing for their future.

Students received an envelope containing their jobs, marital status, family, and income. They were directed to the bank, housing and utility tables before being allowed to visit the other booths. Doctors, furniture, clothing, insurance and groceries were some of the tables available. Students learned how to balance their checkbooks and budget their income and taxes.

The school incorporated law enforcement, which allowed students to learn about fines and the importance of having a vehicle tag and insurance.

"This is a one-day event, but it's an event that we are teaching those skills that they are going to have in real life," Morford said.

The event was a success, as more than 500 students participated.

"That's a big increase over the last few years," Morford said.

Students said they found it engaging and asked to return for another session.



PHOTO BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

Eighth-grade students at Keystone Heights Junior High cashed in on Capital City's Reality Check, where they learned financial literacy. They were given life obstacles and the tools to navigate through the challenges, like balancing their checkbooks, paying rent and utilities and budgeting for groceries.

They also thought it was informative because they could speak with professionals and gain insight on various subjects for their futures.

Reality Check was made possible through local businesses, organizations, and individuals volunteering to operate the booths and answer any questions.

"Thanks to our sponsors, volunteers, staff and students. We were able to give over 500 students, from all grade levels, an opportunity to practice the financial realities they will be facing in their not-too-distant future," said Morford.

# Fleming Island leads Clay success at state band competitions

By Don Coble  
don@claytodayonline.com

Senior tuba player Seth Massey celebrated the success of Fleming Island High's second-place finish last Saturday instead of ruminating about not finishing first.

"We gave 100%, and that's all you can ask for," Massey said. "We were very pleased with our finish. It will make them work twice as hard (in the future)."

Fleming Island earned 87.1 points after being judged for music and visual effects in three categories – ensemble, individual and general effects. Orlando's Timber Creek was awarded 90.85 points. According to Assistant Director of Bands Alexander Buck: "The icing on the cake was the Best Individual Visual Caption award, recognizing the students' exceptional mastery in maneuvering and handling their bodies while marching."

Long-time Band Director Mara Rose said this year's championship ended her career on a high note.

"I am so proud that this group of students got to be my last," she said.

Fleming Island was one of five Clay County schools to finish among the top nine in their classifications. Oakleaf was fourth in Class 5A, while Orange Park was fourth to Pembroke Fines Somerset Academy in 3A; Ridgeview was seventh to Hialeah Gardens in 2A and Middleburg was ninth to Wesley Chapel Wiregrass Ranch in 1A. "We were very satisfied with our show because we did the best we could do," said Chau Tran, drum major for Fleming Island. "I'm proud of our medals. It was really interesting to see the ideas other schools came up with."

The Eagle Band One's season isn't over. After marching in the New Year's Day parade in London to kick off the year and finishing second in the state competition,



PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY FLEMING ISLAND HIGH

Fleming Island started working on its routine for the Florida Marching Band Championships months ago, and its "This Human Heart" earned Eagle Band One a runner-up finish the Class 5A competition last Saturday in St. Petersburg. Oakleaf finished fourth in 5A, while Orange Park was fourth in 3A, Ridgeview was seventh in 2A, and Middleburg was ninth in 1A.



Fleming Island will march on to one of the most famous stages in the world. The school will play at Carnegie Hall in New York City in April.



## CLAY COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOLS

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## DISTRICT Highlights

- ★ Graduation rate is 95% for the District's seven traditional high schools.
- ★ School Resource Officer at every school and increased security measures to keep students and staff safe.
- ★ Named 2022 Academically High Performing School District by the Florida Department of Education.
- ★ CCDS offers 34+ Career and Technical Education programs.
- ★ Ranked 5th Best School District in Florida by Niche in 2023.
- ★ Expanded School Choice options including Montessori and Pre-AICE programs.
- ★ All students have digital access through Chromebooks and Wi-Fi at every school.
- ★ All high schools have accelerated programs.
- ★ Opened 43rd school, Spring Park Elementary in August 2023.
- ★ Fleming Island Elementary recognized as a 2022-2023 Purple Star of Distinction school for supporting our military families.

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# Six Clay County school earn Purple Star School of Distinction awards

For School News

CLAY COUNTY – The Purple Star School of Distinction Designation established by the Florida Legislature and signed into law in June 2021, recognizes schools that support the unique needs of military families. This school year, six Clay County schools have now been designated by the Florida Department of Education as a Purple Star School of Distinction. To earn the Florida Purple Star School of Distinction Designation, schools are required to maintain the following:

- A school military point of contact to serve as the central liaison for military families.
  - A school webpage for military students and families that includes resources like academic planning, transition planning and educational opportunities.
  - A student-led transition program to assist military students coming into the school.
  - Staff professional development to identify and respond to the needs of military families.
  - Five percent percent open enrollment seats for military students and families.
  - Three additional activities to support military families such as participating in a service project to connect the school with the military community, hosting an annual military recognition event or offering a JROTC program, among others.
- Last year, Fleming Island Elementary received the honor, and the district announced the distinction for the following



six schools for this year:

- Discovery Oaks Elementary
- Doctors Inlet Elementary
- Oakleaf High
- Plantation Oaks Elementary
- Robert M. Paterson Elementary
- Tynes Elementary

“Clay County District Schools is committed to being a military-friendly school system and providing military students and families support and I am proud of how our schools serve our military communities,” Superintendent David Broskie said.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL

R.M.Paterson Elementary faculty, staff and students show their support for veterans and their families.



## Paterson Elementary honors veterans during ceremony


By Jack Randall  
jack@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Veterans and their families were honored at the Veterans Day ceremony at R.M. Paterson Elementary on Thursday, Nov. 9. Principal John O’Brian expressed gratitude during opening remarks on a pleasant, sunny morning.


Four students read from their handwritten, heartfelt essays that expressed admiration and appreciation for the country. Veterans of all branches were

in attendance, and each branch of the U.S. Armed Forces was honored with its official marchpast during an Armed Forces Medley. “The Army Goes Rolling Along” was played for the Army; “Anchors Aweigh” for the Navy; “The Marines’ Hymn” and “The Wild Blue Yonder” represented the Air Force, and “Semper Paratus” was played for the Coast Guard. Afterward, a bright orange Coast Guard helicopter circled overhead, with Guardsmen waving to cheering students and their families.

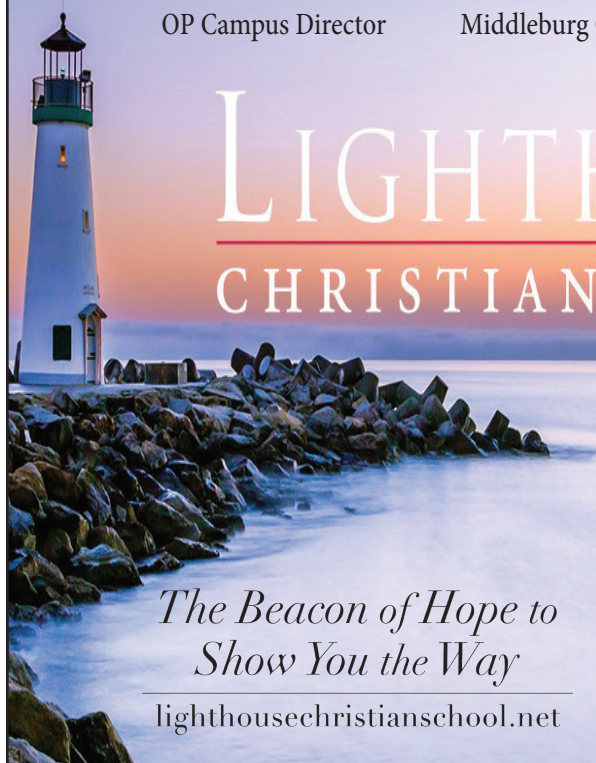




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# News4JAX selects Ridgeview's MCPO Sha'Reff Rashad as its Hyundai Hometown Hero

Naval Science Instructor presented with a new car during Wednesday's ceremony

*Courtesy of News4Jax*

ORANGE PARK – In a heartwarming surprise event at Ridgeview High on Wednesday, News4JAX presented Master Chief Petty Officer (MCPO) Sha'Reff Rashad with the prestigious title of Hyundai Hometown Hero. The unsuspecting MCPO, renowned for his dedication to his country and community, was further delighted when he was informed that he would be the new owner of a brand-new 2023 Hyundai Tucson.

The News4JAX crew, headed by producer Tom Swider and photographer/producer Marshall Malone, made their entrance mid-school day. Principal Becky Murphy graciously escorted them via a golf cart to the rear of the campus, where MCPO Rashad and his cadets stood at attention. Breaking from the usual routine, Swider, microphone in hand, approached Rashad to deliver the thrilling news. The Master Chief's initial response was a mix of surprise and laughter, followed by heartfelt gratitude expressed towards News4JAX, the school's principal, and a nod to the divine.

"Wow! Well, first of all, let me thank God for it, as well as News4JAX for the opportunity and the principal for the chance to serve the kids at Ridgeview High School. It is truly an honor. Again, thank you all for your support," said MCPO Rashad.

As the exchange unfolded, Lt. Cmdr. Robert Peterson, a colleague of Rashad, shared, "Master Chief is wonderful with the children at Ridgeview High School. I don't know if he mentioned it, but he was a Navy Counselor, which means he counseled sailors. So it's a perfect job for him to have here after retiring because he's excellent at counseling the young men and women, the people that we work with."

Principal Becky Murphy also praised

Rashad's impact on the school community, stating, "He has a great impact on our school community and the community as a whole. He preaches in our local community. Our students look to him for advice just in everyday life and their classes. He's someone that I go to a lot to just ask questions."

Rashad's wife, who nominated him for the Hyundai Hometown Hero award, declined to appear on camera but shared her sentiments in a letter to News4JAX. The letter highlighted Rashad's 27-year military career, his commitment to community service, and his 19-year tenure as a Naval Science Instructor at Ridgeview High.

Retired Master Chief Sha'Reff Rashad spent 27 years in the Navy as a loyal and dedicated Sailor. His military journey included graduating from the Senior Enlisted Academy, Community Service in places like South America, serving as Career Information Program Manager for 10,000 sailors and so much more.

After retiring, he had a strong desire to positively influence the lives of some of the most influential in our community, our youth. He has spent the last 19 years as a Naval Science Instructor (NJROTC) at Ridgeview High. His influence and guidance continue to impact the lives of these young cadets to guide them in positive future endeavors where they can be productive members of our country and their local communities.

Under the guidance of Master Chief Rashad and the NJROTC program at Ridgeview, the unit has been awarded the "Distinctive Unit" award by the Navy seven (7) times. This prestigious award is a result of excelling in areas such as drill team, academic team, PT team, color guard, and community service.

Master Chief Rashad has always ensured that this community benefits from



FOR CLAY TODAY

News4Jax surprised Ridgeview High's Master Chief Sha'Reff Rashad by announcing he won its Hometown Military Hero award on Wednesday. Rashad, who's been with the Navy and Ridgeview for 19 years, won a new Hyundai Tucson.

his program. Under his guidance, his unit has logged over 12,000 community service hours during his time with the program which includes Salvation Army bell ringing, SeaMark Ranch volunteer opportunities, numerous Veterans Day and Christmas parades along with participating in Wreaths Across America to honor our military and events where the presence of color guards show pride for the military in Jacksonville and its active duty and veterans.

In addition to his service to the country as a member of the Armed Forces and an influential role model to the cadets at Ridgeview High, Sha'Reff Rashad is also known as Rev. Sha'Reff Rashad to the congregation where he has served as Pastor of New Mount Moriah AME Church for the last 12 years. His desire to make our com-

munity better also includes saving souls and being of service to his congregation.

Sha'Reff Rashad is truly a Hometown Hero who loves his country and the Jacksonville community!

Nomination Letter from Sharon Rashad

When asked about the person who nominated him, Rashad revealed he knew it was his wife, whom he'd known for 40 years. When asked if he would be taking her out in his new Hyundai Tucson first, in good spirits, he humorously stated, "No! I'll be taking my grandson and keeping the keys at work."

The joyous event showcased MCPO Rashad's positive spirit and well-deserved recognition as a Hyundai Hometown Hero for his unwavering dedication to his country and the Jacksonville community.

## Clay Today Creative Arts Contest

Accepting submissions for fiction, poetry, photography, art

By Jack Randall  
jack@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – Are you creative in writing, storytelling or designing? Are you a high school student excited to get a jumpstart in developing a published portfolio? Do you have a big imagination and a deep desire to share your passion with your community?

How about winning \$100 for your creative work?

Clay Today is reaching out to its readership and the county school system to invite students to submit fiction, poetry, photography and digital artwork for the inaugural Clay Today Creative Arts Contest.

Throughout the year, one finalist from each category will be chosen each month on a rolling acceptance basis. The chosen finalists for each month will have their fiction, poetry, photography or digital artwork published on our website and in the monthly print issue of "School News."

From among the twelve finalists for each category, chosen from each month of the year, the readership of Clay Today will vote for the best work of fiction, poetry, photography and digital artwork for 2024. The entry that wins the most votes for each category will be published in "Best of Clay," and the four winners will be gifted a grand prize of \$100 for their contribution and recognition. The four winners will also win a year's subscription to Clay Today.

All students living or enrolled in Clay County are welcome to apply. High school students interested in careers in fine art or publishing are encouraged. The submission guidelines are as follows:

For submissions in each category, submit an accompanying cover letter with a brief bio (name, grade, the school enrolled) or intention to be published anonymously. You are welcome to share briefly what the piece means to you and the journey of its creation. The content of the cover letter will not influence the judging process.

For fiction, following the cover letter, submit a 1000-to-5000-word narrative in a .doc or .docx format. Work will only be considered in Times New Roman, Calibri, or another professional font. The editorial team will look for work demonstrating a creative command of language, captivating characters and alluring themes. Genre fiction is acceptable, but we are looking for exceptional storytelling ability that leaves a unique impression. If a story is meaningful to write, it will be meaningful to read.

For poetry, following the cover letter, submit one to three independent poems, each on a separate page in a .doc or .docx format. Up to three poems can be included, but only one will be chosen. The editorial team is looking for work containing colorful imagery, powerful emotion, purposeful syntax, and a unique perspective or voice.

For photography, following the cover letter, submit a high-resolution image in a .pdf format. The photograph can feature a landscape, portrait, still life, abstract, macro or any other scene. However, it must be captured with a camera and the photograph must be taken in a setting within Clay County.

For digital art, following the cover letter, submit a high-resolution image in a .pdf format. The editorial team is keeping the guidelines open. Digital paintings, digital sketches, and 2D or 3D graphics are all acceptable formats. The artwork must be original. The use of artificial intelligence is not allowed.

There is no prompt for each of the four categories. The only stipulation is that photography must feature a setting in Clay County. Students can send work for each category, but only one submission for each. Any evidence of using artificial intelligence for any step in the creative process will result in immediate disqualification. We welcome interpretations and commentary on mature themes and topics. However, explicit pornographic material will be rejected. Finalists throughout the year will be chosen each month on a rolling acceptance basis.

Send your submissions with your cover letter and work attached to jack@claytodayonline.com

Reach out with any questions. Let your voice be heard. Leave your mark on the world. Best of luck to our contestants!

Judging will begin in January 2024.



# COUNTY OF CHAMPIONS

By Randy Lefko  
School News

Both Middleburg and Fleming Island highs had astounding sports performances last weekend with the Lady Broncos winning the Class 5A volleyball title in Winter Haven with a dominating 3-0 win over Barron Collier High.

A day later, Fleming Island's boys golf team was winning its first team title and the first golf championship in Clay County history behind the front-running play of sophomore Tyler Mawhinney, who scorched the Mission Inn Resort Golf Course in Howie-in-the-Hills to win the individual state title as well.

Just an hour west, in Ocala, Fleming

Island senior swim freestyle sprinter Maryn McDade was winning her third straight 50 freestyle state title while finally capturing her first 100 freestyle state title.

Also for Fleming Island girls golf, the Lady Golden Eagles bettered last year's 12th place finish with a sixth place behind strong rounds from seniors Cambree Hodge and Kalia Polete.

If that wasn't enough, Fleming Island junior diver Ava Brinkman, the defending 3A champion, finished second in the state championships by a minuscule .95 points.

For the Broncos, first-year volleyball coach Forkum took the reins from iconic coach Carrie Prewitt and her four decades of leading the Lady Broncos – and six Final Fours, two finals, but no titles – to the gold medal ceremony with a strong upfront presence from senior Connor Rahn, a University of Tampa commit, who smashed for 25 scoring strikes in a battle with one of the best hitters in the state.



CORRESPONDENT PHOTO BY NOAH WYATT

Middleburg High setter Olivia Callipo and hitter Connor Rahn embrace in a championship hug after the Lady Broncos beat last year's Class 5A runnerup Barron Collier High, 3-0, to win the Class 5A volleyball championship Thursday in Winter Haven. The title was the first volleyball title for Middleburg.

## Rahn-led Broncos win 5A volleyball state title

By Randy Lefko  
Sports Editor

WINTER HAVEN - Everyone kind of figured that the Class 5A title game would feature three of the best hitters in Florida all patrolling above the net creating fireworks and drama, but it was Middleburg High's three-man frontal attack; Connor Rahn

(2nd in 5A, 425 Kills), Brooke Forkum (4th in 5A, 373 Kills) and Camden Rahn (three double-digit kill games in playoffs), that neutralized the threat and gave first-year head coach Meredith Forkum the Class 5A title over Barron Collier High out of Naples Thursday afternoon in Winter Haven.

Barron Collier, last year's runner-up to Jensen Beach, got the better of Jensen

Beach in their semifinal to advance while Middleburg handled a game Merrit Island team, 3-1, to advance.

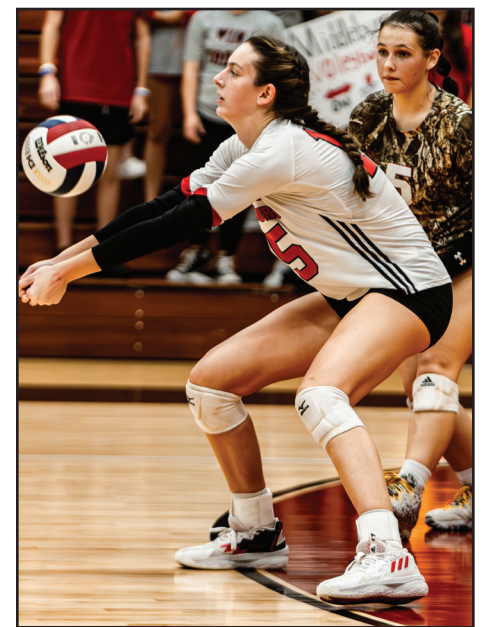
"We were well aware of their girl upfront; senior hitter Aisha Keric (3rd in 5A, 413 Kills), and that she would be formidable," said Bronco first-year head coach Meredith Forkum, who followed a 40-year career of mentor Carrie Prewitt on the Bronco sideline in getting that elusive title despite Prewitt's six trips to the Final Four with two championship runner-up finishes. "Our approach was to play our game, move the ball around quickly and try to defend her the best we could."

With her three-man wrecking crew up front delivering 25, 14 and 10 scoring bolts in the 3-0 win (25-23, 25-17, 25-23) Forkum's strategy proved fateful to Keric's game-leading 27 scoring kills. The difference was Barron Collier's second and third hitters only delivered four and three kills to supplement Keric's efforts.

"The key to our strategy was setter Olivia Callipo who was reading their defense and putting the ball in play to the best hitter in position," said Forkum, with assistants Kory Camp and Tony Valentin. "She had a great game at the net and Kate Lowery had a great game blocking or deterring much of Keric's attack."

Forkum's first season proved magnified by the aura of former coach Carrie Prewitt's contribution to the program's strong history.

"I got lucky with the right group of kids, a good schedule of matchups and a little luck," said Forkum. "Coach Prewitt set the standard but had some bad luck in some of her Final Fours (food poisoning in 2003 finals). I talked to Coach Prewitt and she was overjoyed. She told me she was at peace and happy for the whole team and



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS BY NOAH WYATT

Middleburg senior Connor Rahn will be a candidate for best player in Florida after her outstanding final season with a state title and a top five hitter in the state finish.

where the program is going."

Forkum gave kudos to the Middleburg softball team that had followed the volleyball team throughout the journey.

"They were like our biggest fans," said Forkum. "Ashley (Houston, softball coach, first team state title for Middleburg) knows the value of a team spirit and her girls were awesome."

Against Merritt Island, won 25-20, 25-17, 16-25 and 25-20, Forkum got some bench inspiration help from sophomore libero Morgan Padgett who noticed the team's face were a little mopey after the

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# McDade lands third title, elusive 100

Brinkman; second by 0.95

By Randy Lefko  
Sports Editor

Ocala - Fleming Island High senior swim freestyle specialist and twice the Class 3A 50 free champion Maryn McDade did what she does in her event with a dominating post-season culminating in an astounding third 50 free title, but, more interesting, was her journey to capture the swim double with the elusive 100 free title up for grabs just a few minutes later.

"I had about 15-20 minutes between the finals of the 50 and the 100, just the 100 butterfly between the two finals," said McDade, who recently signed her letter of intent to continue her swimming at Florida State University. "I hit a 22.99 in the prelims and swam almost a perfect race, but my finals were not good."

Not good, but good enough for the gold medal and a third title.

"I missed on my flip turn," said McDade. "I just did not panic and put my head down to get back in the game. There was a lot of pressure for the third title, but not as much direct competition."

McDade's main rival, Ponte Vedra's Penelope Zarczynski, had chosen to compete in the 200 free (Fourth).

"She swam well, but I wished she was next to me because she was my biggest competition," said McDade. "Now the 100, that was a different story."

In the 50 free final, McDade won with a 23.18-second split with Maya Golubovic of Seminole High and a Texas A&M commit, second at 23.31 and Ponte Vedra sophomore Sophie Fox third at 23.44.

"With the 100 just minutes to start, I was dead after the 50," said McDade. "I had to really reach in to get through the 100."

In the 100, there is a little leeway as far as little mistakes along the way said McDade, but her strategy was to take the first 50 super fast and hold on.

"I have to take it out fast or I won't have a chance," said McDade. "I'm serious, that last 25, I could not feel my arms or legs."

In the 100, where McDade was second in district to Nease junior Olivia Moore, McDade had competition on both sides of her for the final 50 with Golubovic and Moore in her peripheral.

"I could see them on both sides and they were right there," said McDade. "My first 50 in the 100 was about a 23 and when I turned, I saw that they were both right there. I just said to myself, 'Put your head down and go.' I normally take a breath every stroke in the 100 which is not optimum, but I had to win that one."

In the 100, McDade won in 50.49 with a 23.98 opening 50 with Golubovic second in 50.64 with an opening 50 in 24.29 and Moore third at 50.93 with a 24.45 opening 50. In the diving competition, where Fleming Island junior Ava Brinkman was the defending 3A champion, the final tally came down to the tuck of a chin as Brinkman finished second by just 0.95 points;



Fleming Island Junior diver Ava Brinkman shows off some spins and moves en route to her silver metal finish at the class 3A swimming and diving championships in Ocala. Brinkman was the defending 3A champion and lost by 0.95 points to earn her silver medal.

483.60-482.65, in one of the tightest diving competitions in Florida history.

"I think it came down to the last dive and me not tucking my chin before my entry," said Brinkman. "By not doing that, it made my entry long and the judges caught it."

Brinkman finished second to Hadley Futch of Winter Springs, a long-time rival, with Sadie Dempz of Viera High third at a distant 442.75. Fleming Island also had freshman Carolina Croce in the diving competition with an 11th-place finish with 329.75 points. Ironically, as a freshman, Brinkman had a record-setting district championship effort and was thought to be a lock for a state title in her first foray, but a season-ending injury did not allow her to compete at that regionals. As a sophomore, she recovered from injury to win the gold medal. Also in the 3A championship meet, Fleming Island distance swimmer Elizabeth Loehse, a sophomore, finished 10th in the 500 free (5:09.89, winner at 4:54.27) and 11th in the 200 free (1:55.85, winner at 1:49.10) with freshman William Shoesmith finishing a strong seventh in the 500 free in 4:45.03 with the winner's time at 4:19.89 (Ethan Ekk, a junior at Chiles). Shoesmith was 12th in the 200 in 1:44.54 with the winner at 1:36.72.

Fleming Island's girl's relays got an eighth in the 200 free relay and

For Oakleaf, senior Peyton Loving was 20th in the 50 free in 25.62 and 14th in the 100 breaststroke in 1:08.43.

For Orange Park, Sebastian Lopez finished 16th in the 100 breast in 1:01.36 and 12th in the 100 free in a very fast 47.79 with the winner at 45.29.

"Class 3A is the fastest class in the state," said Orange Park coach Susan Johnson.



Fleming Island senior freestyle swimmer Maryn McDade shows off her two gold medals; one for the 50 free and one for the 100 free; after the FHSAA class 3A swimming and diving championships in Ocala on Saturday. McDade is now a three-time 50 free state champ and 100 freeway was her first gold medal in that event.

## Volleyball

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third game loss.

"Morgan, who has played lights out the second half of the season, noticed and said something that they were not smiling and having fun out there," said Forkum. "Sometimes the team tends to think too much about the game at hand and the fun of it all gets away from them. She made a pretty good statement about it and the team responded. I just let it happen because I could not have said it better."

After their third game loss, 25-16, Middleburg responded with a 25-20 final game to propel themselves into the final.

Rahn led the attack with 15 kills, but Forkum was equally formidable with 14 kills on her left hand. Camden Rahn added seven. "Merrit Island was the hardest serving team we have ever seen," said Forkum. "We had a little trouble getting the ball to the net, but we figured it out."

Barron Collier, 26-7, got up by as much as 17-13 in game one to put a slight pause in the Bronco enthusiasm, but a double-edged sword of attack from Padgett serves and two blocks from Callipo flipped the momentum to Middleburg and the game got tied at 20-20 before a huge block by Camden Rahn ignited a five-point winning swing to 25-23 with Forkum delivering the final blow.

"They were staying close to us in all three games and we just had to settle down after that game one to get into our game," said Forkum. "We got to a point where we were just tipping the ball and I told them we need to start swinging away."

In the second game, Barron Collier kept pushing Keric to the net, but it was laser-like serves from Kendyl Wahl that backed

up the Barron Collier defense and kept Keric a foot or two away from her spot at the net.

"Kendyl has been our momentum shift most of the season with her serves to control the pace of the game," said Forkum. "Because their girl was six foot tall, she would have had more strikes if she was closer to the net. Kendyl's serves forced them to set up a foot or two off her mark and we had the defense set up waiting for her."

With Middleburg holding a two-point edge most of the game; at least to a 14-14 tie, Connor Rahn took over the domination end of the Bronco attack with a seven scores in 10-point swing from above the net.

"Hey, she's the top hitter out there and she wanted to assert herself," said Forkum. "I think she took the signing for a scholarship the night before (to the University of Tampa) as a big proving point for her game."

Rahn's A-10-like scorching of Barron Collier's defense pushed the game to a 25-17 win.

In game three, Rahn opened with a massive swing to open up the contest then Middleburg shifted to Camden Rahn getting shots on the opposite end of the net to put the Broncos up 14-9 and cause Barron Collier to take a time-out and catch their breath.

"I had to settle them in to finish the game and not look ahead to the celebration," said Forkum. "I don't think they wanted to play a fourth game, but we still had to finish."

Barron Collier got as close as 23-22 and caused some heartburn for Forkum, but the match ended 25-23.

# Mawhinney rocks 3A state golf title

By Randy Lefko  
Sports Editor

HOWEY IN THE HILLS - Behind a sizzling first round at the Mission Inn Resort Golf Course, Fleming Island sophomore Tyler Mawhinney had a hole-in-one and an eagle enroute of a first-round 4-under-par 68. He fired an even-par 72 on Saturday to win the individual title by three shots and lead the Golden Eagles to its first team championship.

"I think we are the only Clay County team to ever win a state golf team championship with the Middleburg guy (Cody Carroll) the last individual champion a few years ago," said Fleming Island golf coach Bruce Cloud, noting Mawhinney was seventh last year as a sophomore in a one round championship (73) due to weather. "To say this was a challenging finish of the season is an understatement, but the boys got their heads right and played a great weekend of golf." Along with the Fleming Island boys, the Fleming Island girls golf team improved from 12th last year to sixth behind team champion Lake Mary, the defending 3A champions, with seniors Cambree Hodge and Kalia Polete scoring the top two finishes; Hodge 16th with a 152 total (75, 77), Polete 34th with a 158 total (80, 78). Fleming Island's finish is impressive as top golfer Alyzabeth Morgan (second state finisher last year tied with Hodge at 62nd behind Polete at 46th) missed the entire season with knee injury rehabilitation from an injury suffered at last year's state tournament.

"The girls told themselves that Alyzabeth was not going to be able to join the team this year and I think they took it upon

themselves to practice with a little more diligence to get back to state," said Fleming Island girls golf coach Brian Nedrich. "We



STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY LEFKO

Fleming Island sophomore golfer Tyler Mawhinney scored the top score in the Class 3A golf championship tournament in round one then held his lead to win the individual title as well as lead the Golden Eagles' boys team to a first school and Clay County title.

were two or three putts per girls away from a solid top three finish out there, but that course is very tough."

Kathleen High junior Darby Hancock (7th last year) won with a 141 total ahead of Buchholz' Braydn Smith, last year's runner-up, who finished at 144. Lake Mary totaled 600 to Doral Academy at 653 (5th last year) and Niceville at 655 (2nd last year). Fleming Island, 12th last year,



Fleming Islands boys golf team shows off their Class 3A championship trophy with individual gold medalist Tyler Mawhinney holding trophy.

finished at 666.

"Everyone knew Lake Mary was lights out the best team out there and we were all shooting for second place," said Nedrich.

In the boys tournament run up, Cloud's reference to a challenging finish was that his team nearly did not qualify to even arrive in Howey in the Hills as they finished a disturbing third in their region tournament.

"We finished as undefeated in stroke play for the regular season, a strong district championship tournament, then a disastrous region finish," said Cloud. "We got the at-large bid to come here probably because of our regular season finish and record finish at districts, but talk about stress."

Adding to Cloud's stress level before the tournament event started was a flu attack on golfer Dylan Frein.

"He was just not feeling right and we figured a flu, we pulled him and he was very gracious about it, not being at full strength, and sophomore Carson Moore stepped in and did a nice job," said Cloud. "Dylan did what was best for the team and it may have put the other guys on notice to up their game a bit."

For Mawhinney, who has been the top striker for Cloud for most of the season, round one was about as good a round as a state championship round could get.

"The first nine holes of the Campeon course are very difficult and he opened with four pars and a double bogie," said Cloud. "He stayed calm like he does, made some adjustments then hit three more pars and a birdie to finish just one over (36, par 72 course). From there, he was on fire."

Mawhinney regrouped with his eagle three on a par five 10th hole; 562 yards, a bogie and par, then two birdies; 335 and 524 yard holes, before spinning in a hole in one on a par three 139 yarder.

"I knew what I had to do and my dad; assistant coach Joey Mawhinney, kept telling me to stay calm and play my game," said Mawhinney. "The second nine of the course was a little easier than the first nine. My driver is the key to my end game."

Mawhinney finished with three pars to close at 68 and lead the field with a first nine of 36 and a second nine at 32.

Mawhinney's two main challengers, junior Anthony Monteleone of Winter Haven

(45th last year) and junior Parker Severs of Lakewood Ranch (seventh last year), both second at 143 to Mawhinney's winning 140 total (68, 72), could not keep pace with Mawhinney's total game with Severs rolling through a 33 first nine holes, but going par for a 70 off the final nine holes to finish at 70 (2-under par).

Severs momentarily took the tournament lead over Mawhinney in round two, but went 36 (three bogies) and 37 (two bogies) for a 73 (1-over) final round.

"I was in one of the last groups to go out and all the golfers in front of me were making their moves to catch up," said Mawhinney. "I just wanted to play my game, make pars and let them chase me. I knew the second half was going to be where I could get back in the lead. I had some trouble on four (bogie), but kept playing par and got three birdies to finish."

Monteleone opened with a 34, 36 combo in round one with four bogies and seven birdies to stay within two strokes of Mawhinney, but round two saw Monteleone crumble in the first nine with three bogies and a disastrous double bogie to a 39. Monteleone recovered with three birdies and pars to finish, but Mawhinney stayed focus with two birdies, six pars and one bogie.

"We had a substantial lead in the team scores and I told the team to stay with pars for the win," said Cloud. "We didn't need to risk shots for birdies and we wanted the team title. Tyler was going to do Tyler and finish strong which he did."

Behind Mawhinney, also having astounding rounds of golf to supplement Mawhinney's front running pace were senior Jaylen Abbas at fourth in a tie with a 145 (75, 70) total and junior Emmet Kuhlenkamp in sixth at 146 (74, 72). "All of these guys were talking before the season that they were going to win the state title and do what it takes to get there," said Cloud. "For the whole season, they kind of watched out for each other and got on to each other when the intensity went down. If one of them missed a practice, he got the talk about letting the team down. I was pretty lucky to have a strong team; mentally tough and focused."

The rest of the scoring came from Ryan Houck, a sophomore, with a 152 total and Moore at 160.

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