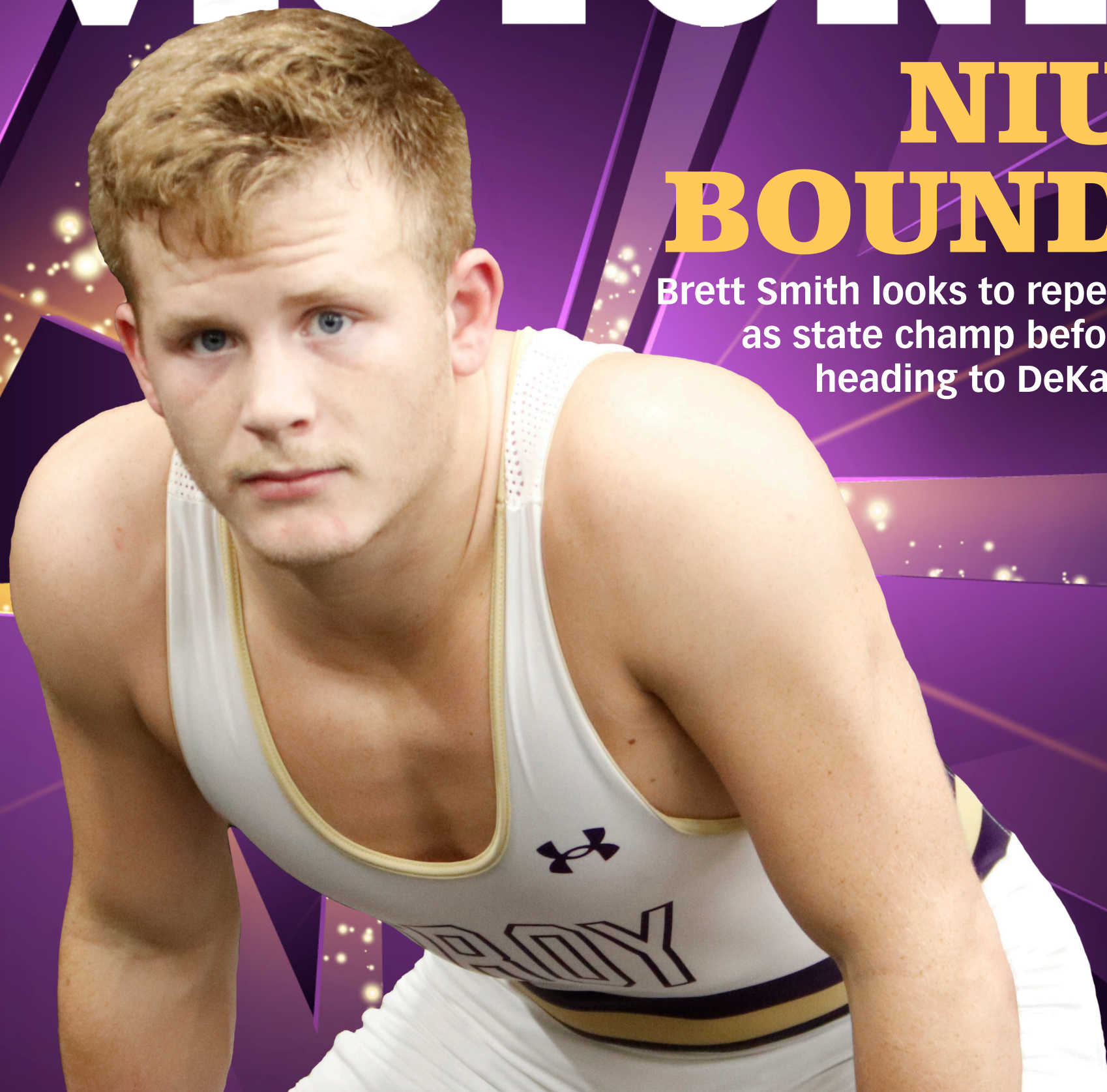


January/February 2023

VICTORY

NIU BOUND

Brett Smith looks to repeat
as state champ before
heading to DeKalb



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VICTORY

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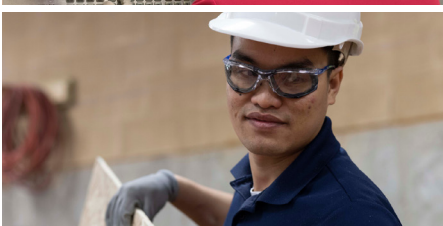
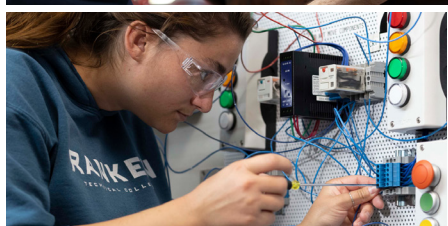
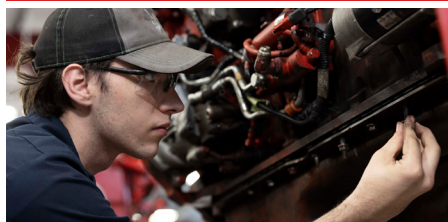
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Leading the way

Manny McCauley emerges as team leader for Warriors

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Warrenton sophomore Manny McCauley is proving to be a leader for the Warrenton wrestling squad this season, as they look to build on last season's success.

Wrestling in the 106-pound weight class, McCauley won 14 of his first 16 contested matches this season. McCauley went 15-5 in the 106-pound weight class last season before losing his varsity spot to teammate Joshua Kassing. McCauley noted the challenges of wrestling last season as a freshman, when he only weighed about 90 pounds.

"I still managed. The year came to an end not even due to skill. Just lost my spot to my teammate," McCauley said. "But honestly, I probably wouldn't be where I am now if that didn't happen. That was definitely a learning experience."

Despite losing his varsity spot to Kassing late last season, Warrenton head wrestling coach Clayton Olsson thinks McCauley wrestled well last year as a freshman. Olsson said McCauley dedicated himself after losing the wrestle-off to Kassing. McCauley maintained a positive work ethic throughout the rest of the season and dedicated himself on the mat and in the weight room in the offseason.

"He doesn't make excuses," Olsson said. "He's here. He's dedicated. He's focused. And any obstacle that pops up, he just has that mindset of I got to adjust and I've got to overcome. I can't let this stop me. Which is exactly what you need to be successful in this sport."

McCauley feels more comfortable competing on the mat this season and believes in his wrestling abilities. He said he still feels nerves prior to and during a match but he described them as "comforting nerves." He is just worried about achieving a positive outcome in a match.

McCauley believes his wrestling abilities have improved from his freshman season to this season. He is better on top and on his feet.

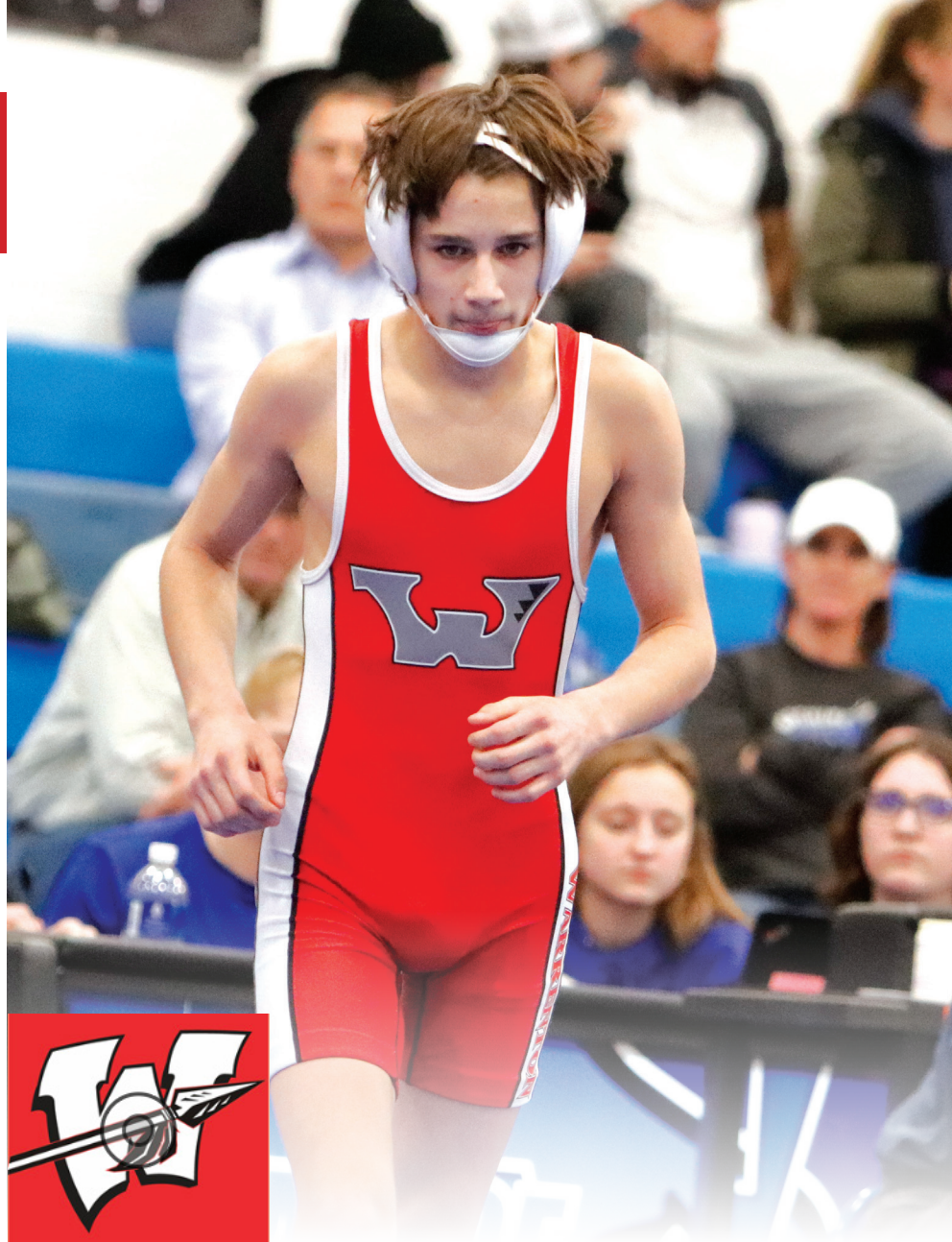
"He's a little more confident in his abilities," Olsson said. "A little bit better on top and really controlling the pace of the match. There's different tactics that you kind of learn like, when do I need to really push the pace? When can I kind of sit back a little bit in different positions where you have to scramble and wrestle differently? A lot of that stuff just comes with experience and mat time."

McCauley has focused this season on coming in with a set goal and practicing with a purpose. He credits his work outside of practice with helping him take his game to the next level.

McCauley won the GAC title in January in the 106-pound weight class. He went 3-0 in the tournament. He also placed first this season at the Ft. Zumwalt North Invite. He earned a pair of second-place finishes earlier this season at the Harrisonville Tournament and Liberty Tournament.

With districts slated for the middle of February, McCauley's goal is to place high at the district tournament in February.

"From here on out, I don't want to take any more losses," McCauley said in early January. "In districts, obviously the goal is to be a district champ or end up in the finals. There's still room



to improve until then but I feel like things should be up from here."

McCauley thinks the Warriors as a whole have improved over the course of the season. He said the Warrenton wrestlers have been taking it hard in the practice room with chips on their shoulders. They are trying to make a name for themselves and their abilities.

Despite McCauley only competing in his sophomore season, Olsson sees him as a team leader for the Warrenton wrestling squad. He noted McCauley was the only Warrior wrestler as of early January to not miss a single practice. McCauley is a role model through his actions and also vocally, Olsson said.

While serving as a team leader as a sophomore in most sports can be challenging, Olsson thinks wrestling is a unique sport that allows underclassmen to earn the respect of their teammates and be team leaders.

"I think in a lot of other sports, it can be difficult," Olsson said. "But in the wrestling room, it's such a unique sport. Everybody has the battles that you go through every day. When you see a young guy like that, even though he's smaller and younger, going through those battles and adversity and then coming out on top, you have immediate respect for that. So regardless of his age or size, the kids respect him and are listening to him."

The sophomore does not know whether he will wrestle at the collegiate level after his high school career. He does hope to continue wrestling after graduating from Warrenton.

"Right now, I'm focusing on the sophomore season," McCauley said. "And if the opportunity comes, I'm going to run with it. Obviously, the goal is to get to the next level. If it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be. But I'm going to work as hard as I can to make it happen."



One more run

Jack Fessenden, Trojan seniors ready to make one more state tourney push

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Jack Fessenden is one of several upperclassmen looking to lead the Troy Buchanan Trojans back to the state tournament.

A senior guard, Fessenden started playing basketball when he was in kindergarten. He specialized in basketball growing up and traveled around the country in grade school playing basketball. Fessenden and the other Trojan players grew up playing together as early as elementary school.

"It's the same guys even on the high school team," Fessenden said. "So it's just been fun to play with the same guys for so many years."

Fessenden leads the Trojans with over 17 points per game this season. He has averaged over 10 points each of the past three seasons. He averaged over 10 points per game in his sophomore season and over 13 points per game last season.

Fessenden's calling card is his shooting ability. Head coach Tim Gilmore, who has coached the Trojans since Fessenden's freshman season, stressed Fessenden's all-around game is also strong.

"Everybody labels him as a shooter but he's so much more than that," Gilmore said. "He's a great slasher and hands down our best on-ball defensive player. He's a player first

type of kid. Always willing to give credit to somebody else. And his teammates have done a fantastic job finding him this year. He's shot it super well."

Gilmore also has seen Fessenden grow as a leader for the Trojans this season. Fessenden's voice is heard much more this season. He is pushing all his teammates, even his senior teammates.

Gilmore sees Fessenden's increased leadership role partially due to his senior status and partially due to an emphasis heading into this season.

"I think it comes with time," Gilmore said. "I think it comes with experience. And just confidence to speak up and to talk and to do those things. We have been pushing these guys because they are a quiet, kind of a modest, old school group. Their voices are starting to get heard at practice."

The Trojans finished their non-conference slate with a 9-3 record as they look to win their second district title in three seasons. The Trojans advanced to the state tournament in Fessenden's sophomore season. They fell to Ft. Zumwalt North in the state quarterfinals. The Trojans came up one point short of repeating as district champions last season,

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falling to Ft. Zumwalt South 60-59 in the district championship game.

“We always look back at that and see what we can improve on and just never let that happen again,” Fessenden said. “That’s been our main focus this year is what can we do to prevent that.”

Gilmore thinks the Trojans learned from last year’s district championship game loss and are ready to make a push for the district title.

“We feel like we learned so much from our district championship game last year that you just can’t take any practice for granted, take any possession for granted,” Gilmore said. “Every possession matters and I think these guys really understand that now. It sticks in the back of your brains. I think it stuck with us all summer.”

Gilmore said the Trojans are a veteran team this season. The Trojans are led by their six seniors but also get contributions from their underclassmen. Sophomore Andrew Moore averages 14 points per game, which is second on the team.

After the Trojans make a run at the district title and potentially a run in the state tournament, Fessenden is hoping to find a home to play basketball at the collegiate level. As of January, Fessenden was still looking around to see his best fit. He is talking to coaches and his family to see what will be most beneficial for him and his future.

“I definitely want to stay close but also want to compete,” Fessenden said. “Somewhere that’s welcoming and wants to win is my main focus.”

Gilmore said Fessenden has the ability to play basketball at the collegiate level. It is hard to find players that can shoot the basketball, he said.

“Wherever it’s at, what level it’s at, I don’t know,” Gilmore said. “But he can shoot it really well. He’s athletic enough. He’s long enough. The thing he has that a lot of kids don’t is he’s willing to grind on the defensive end. So many great players are just one-way players. He’s definitely a two-way player.”





Leader by example

Elsberry's Candice Dowell leads Lady Indians in senior season

By Jeff Stahlhut

Elsberry senior Candice Dowell started playing basketball at the age of six, playing on a co-ed team for the YMCA while she was in just first grade. By the time she was in third grade, she was playing competitively — and not with kids her own age.

"I had to handle the ball for a fourth-grade team that needed an extra player and a point guard," she said.

And so began her journey in basketball, one that has led her to Elsberry, where she has played for years for Coach Kari Koch-Dowell, who she said has helped her to succeed from the start of her high school career.

"As a freshman, Coach K. believed I could compete at the varsity level and pushed me every day to be where I am," Dowell said. "She gives up all her time to make sure our team has success."

Kari Koch-Dowell is just one of many who have helped to influence Candice over the years.

"My biggest influence has been my mom, who first started coaching me and she was the first to introduce me to the game. Then Coach Doug Smith (grades 3-6 select basketball coach), who coached my mom in high school, and then picked me up for a competitive travel team," she said. "Coach B. (Assistant Coach Brittany Koch-Dowell) has also been a big influence because she has been hard on me and

taught me to believe in myself. And I wouldn't be the player I am today if it wasn't for her."

On the court, Candice leads by example for the most part, excelling as a point guard and taking her fair share of shots.

"Candice has always been a point guard for my teams mostly because she can handle the ball and in high school sometimes that is hard to find," Kari Koch-Dowell said. "She is a shooter and this year, we have been able to take her off the ball more which allows her to shoot. I would say her natural position is a shooting guard as she can create for others if she doesn't have a shot."

Given the choice, Candice admits she loves to shoot, but is always willing to do what's best for her team.

"I enjoy being a shooter," she said. "But right now, my team needs me as the point guard so I will do whatever my coaches and team need me to do. Being the point guard, I control the tempo and help set my team up for opportunities to score. Being the shooter helps lead the team and it's less pressure at times."

Kari Koch-Dowell tries to keep her senior guard in the best spot to succeed, no matter where that may be in a given moment.

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“Her best two things are shooting and running the team,” she said. “She has developed her game as far as handling pressure and getting our team into an offense. As she has gotten stronger, she has expanded her range for shooting which spreads out the defense.”

Running the team and being consistent is just part of what keeps Candice motivated.

“My motivation on the court is my teammates, being a team leader, and loving the game,” she said. “My coaches help with consistency. They tell me what they expect of me day in and day out. I am expected to be the team leader even on my bad nights. I can pick my team up in other ways. When my outside shot isn’t falling, I’ll drive or set my team up for shots. It’s a team sport.”

Candice’s play on the court and leadership are two of the many traits that make her so valuable to her team.

“She has many values to this team. She is one of the players that can play through being tired if we need her too, she can get hot from the three (point line), and her defense has improved tremendously this year which has allowed her to get more steals,” Kari Koch-Dowell said. “We know when she is on the floor what we are going to get from her. She is one of our consistent players who does it night in and night out.”

Kari Koch-Dowell also touched on Candice as a leader.

“Candice is a shy individual when it comes to being in groups,” Kari Koch-Dowell said. “It has taken her till her senior year to start to talk and say things. She is a people pleaser and always tries to do the right thing. She leads by example. She by no means is a vocal leader but sets good examples for others.”

As for the future, Dowell’s plan is to continue to play basketball after her prep career is over.

“I do plan to play ball after high school. I have had several offers and still have coaches calling,” she said. “To be honest I’m not sure at this moment where I will end up. I hope to be close to home. I’ve set a deadline for myself on senior night.”

In any instance, it sounds like sports will be a part of her future.

“I haven’t decided if I want to major in exercise science or physical education,” Dowell said. “I want to stick with the sports side of life and enjoy it.”





Sibling wrestlers

Riggs siblings find success on wrestling mat for Wright City

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Wright City wrestlers David and Elizabeth Riggs both have their sights set on success at the state wrestling tournament.

The siblings are among the team leaders for their respective wrestling teams at Wright City. A senior, David Riggs started wrestling around middle school and began wrestling competitively his freshman year at Wright City.

"I started wrestling around middle school," David Riggs said. "Doing little league stuff and messing around wrestling and practice and stuff. And then eventually, I got competitive my freshman year. Started wrestling here. And each year, I've been wrestling here and getting better."

Elizabeth Riggs remembers watching David wrestle when she was in fifth grade and decided she also wanted to wrestle. She began wrestling her freshman year at Wright City, when they started separating boys and girls wrestlers into separate divisions.

"I tried it my freshman year and it was definitely unlike any other sport I had ever done," Elizabeth Riggs said "I did track and soccer and basketball prior to it. But just with how demanding it was physically, mentally, everything, it was completely different than anything I had ever done. But I really enjoyed it. I liked how far it pushed you mentally and physically."

Elizabeth said she has competed at pretty much the same weight class since her freshman year. She has competed mostly in the 125-pound weight class this season. She started the sea-

son with an 18-3 record.

David made a jump in weight classes over his four years at Wright City. After wrestling in the lowest class his freshman year, Riggs has wrestled in the 144-pound weight class the majority of this season, winning 15 of his first 18 matches.

He noted the challenges he faces wrestling at a higher weight class, specifically the quality opponents in the middle weight classes.

"The competition's pretty steep the higher you go," he said. "Everyone's a lot stronger and a lot bigger. They're a lot older too because they're not as small. There's a lot of competition."

After coming up one match short of qualifying for the state tournament in her freshman season, Elizabeth qualified for the state tournament last season. She won one match at the 2022 state tournament. Riggs' focus last season was to qualify for the state tournament. She has her sights set on placing at the state tournament this season.

"I think it's definitely just getting to each level and then learning how to compete at that level," she said. "Last year, my mind was kind of just get to state and it wasn't really trying to place at state. Obviously, I wanted to but it was more trying to get there. This year, now that I've been

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there, I know what it looks like. I want to get there and then I want to place and do well there. I think each year as you get better, your goals get bigger.”

Coach Fred Ross thinks David Riggs was on a trajectory to qualify for state last season before suffering an injury. Riggs has his sights set not only on qualifying for the state tournament but also placing at the state tournament in his senior season.

“I want to qualify. I want to do that for sure,” David Riggs said. “But it’s my senior year. It’s my last year. So I also want to place.”

Ross said both David and Elizabeth have made strides as wrestlers this season. Ross reiterated the challenges David faced in jumping several weight classes over his high school career.

“He worked hard this summer and he’s definitely stronger than he was last year,” Ross said. “Which has helped him out in a lot of his matches.”

Ross said Elizabeth Riggs has moved weight, which has allowed her to get stronger and be more physical. Ross is also seeing major strides in her mental approach.

“Her mental approach is getting so much better than it was her freshman year,” Ross said.

Despite participating on separate teams, both David and Elizabeth Riggs like being able to wrestle for the same school. David said it allows the two siblings to provide feedback with each other. Elizabeth said it is cool to compete with a sibling and push each other to do their best and be at the same competitive level. She said there is also competition between the two siblings.

“It just pushes you more,” Elizabeth said. “I know I always want to beat him. If it’s a girls and boys tournament, I always want to place higher than him.”

Ross identified both David and Elizabeth as team leaders for the wrestling teams.

“They’ve both done an outstanding job leading this team,” Ross said. “Whatever’s asked of them to do, I can count on them. Give them a task and they can do it. And that’s their upbringing with a solid mom and dad figure that just really raised them right.”

David and Elizabeth also play in other sports at Wright City. David is a three-sport athlete, participating in soccer in the fall and track in the spring. Elizabeth also runs on the track team. She placed third in the 300-meter hurdle competition last season at the state tournament.

While neither athlete’s future plans after high school are set, both David and Elizabeth are both open to competing athletically at the college level.

“It just depends on where I’m going,” David said. “I’ve had a little bit of communication with college coaches about wrestling. I would hope to wrestle in the future. I’m not entirely sure if I will but the goal is to.”

He said if he does compete athletically at the college level, it will either be in wrestling or track.

Elizabeth said if she does decide to go to college after graduating next school year, she is open to wrestling or running at the college level.

“It really depends on how I do this year and next year with my sports,” she said. “But it’s definitely an option.”

DIVISION I WRESTLER



Brett Smith to wrestle at Northern Illinois after his quest for another state title

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Troy Buchanan senior Brett Smith is set to continue his wrestling career at Northern Illinois University, but only after he looks to win a second consecutive state championship.

A Missouri Class 4 state champion, Smith started wrestling at a young age. He estimates he started wrestling when he was four or five years old. He remembers watching his brother wrestle, which triggered his desire to wrestle.

"He came out of his mom's womb and he didn't have a choice. He was going to wrestle," Troy Buchanan head wrestling coach and Smith's cousin Josef Wolfrum said. "The energy that he had, you knew he was going to wrestle."

Smith, who has placed fifth or better all three years he has competed at the state tournament, won the Class 4 state title last season in the 170-pound weight class.

Smith placed fifth while attending Holt High School his freshman season. He transferred to Troy Buchanan after his freshman year and has competed for the Trojans the past three seasons. Smith's father, uncle and cousin have all served on the coaching staff in Smith's time on the wrestling team.

Smith placed second at the state tournament in his first season at Troy Buchanan during his sophomore season. Competing in the 160-pound weight class, Smith lost to David Brooks of Staley High School on a close 6-4 decision in the 2021 state championship.

Smith completed his quest for a state championship last season with a 2-0 win over Hayden Trezek of Francis Howell in the 170-pound championship match.

"Losing that sophomore year, I just worked a little bit harder," Smith said. "Last year, I kicked it off hard. I was going as hard as I could. I wanted to win it."

Wolfrum characterized Smith as "the image of Trojan wrestling."

"He is always relentless," Wolfrum said. "Always pushing his limits. Always pushing his teammates' limits to the next level. And that's what really separates him from everyone else. He has no quit in him. There's always a fight in this dog."

Wolfrum thinks Smith is ready to defend his Class 4 state title. He believes Smith's setups are cleaner than they were a couple years ago. He also believes Smith has the right mindset to push himself for another state title.

"If you want to remain on top, you're going to have to do everything in your power to get there again," Wolfrum said. "And he's continuing to push limits. Even things that are outside of his comfort level. Just the non-stop grind and the mentality he has is really pushing him to that next level. And it's really going to show at the state tournament in February."

Smith thinks his experience his freshman year at the state tournament helped prepare him to compete at the state tournament his junior year. There were not as many spectators at the state tournament his sophomore year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"It was for sure a big wake up call," Smith said. "It was probably one of the most nerve-racking tournaments I've ever been to. People say it's the big show and they're not lying. My freshman year, I was out there scared wrestling. This junior year, I was still a little nervous but I could tell I've finally grown up. I can feel a little better about myself."

Smith has stepped up multiple weight classes in his high school career. After wrestling at 145 pounds his freshman year, he is up to the 175-pound weight class this season. He wrestled at 170 pounds last year in his state championship campaign.

After he completes his senior season and his quest for back-to-back state championships, Smith will compete at Northern Illinois University, an NCAA Division I school. Smith announced his commitment to the Huskies in January.

"I was deciding if I wanted to stay close to home or go far," Smith said. "I had a couple schools that were giving me some pretty good offers. This California school, I liked it a lot. They were giving me everything. Just the distance. I'm more of a family guy I'd say."

Smith knew early on he wanted to wrestle at the collegiate level. Once he determined his athletic future at the collegiate level did not include football, Smith knew he wanted to wrestle at the next level. Smith was an all-state linebacker and three-time all-conference and

all-district player in football.

"Last year or maybe sophomore year, I was planning to play football in college," Smith said. "But then last year, I was like alright, I need to focus. The height's not going to work out and I need to lock in on some wrestling."

Smith anticipates starting his offseason work shortly after competing for a state title this season. He generally takes about two weeks off after the season before resuming work in the offseason.

"From now on, I'll probably be wrestling for five years straight," Smith said. "There's no break in between."



“ I was deciding if I wanted to stay close to home or go far. ”



Three-peat quest

Alli Meyer looks to lead Liberty Christian to another title

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Liberty Christian senior Alli Meyer is looking to lead the Lady Eagles to their third consecutive Missouri Christian Schools Athletic Association title.

A four-year starter for Liberty Christian, Meyer was a key member of Liberty Christian's last two MCSAA Division I championship teams. Meyer also was a key member of the Liberty Christian volleyball team the past four seasons.

Meyer noted the comfort level she had on the hardwood with her teammates last season, having played with most of the key contributors to the back-to-back state championship teams for multiple seasons.

"I had played with those girls since freshman year," Meyer said. "And so I was really confident in my passing. I knew who could catch what and who could do what."

This year, the Lady Eagles have introduced multiple new players to the mix. Meyer is joined by Kylee Ball, Anna Meyer and Lauren Moss as contributors from last year's team.

As the starting point guard the last four years, Meyer has been a leader on the court due to her position. However, she has taken on an increased leadership role after the Lady Eagles lost multiple starters from last year's team.

"Being the point guard, you kind of lead the court," Meyer said. "So I've always kind of had the leadership. But now, it's more of the encourager too because we don't have the older girls. I have to encourage the younger ones. Keep pushing. It's definitely different than the past years."

Meyer said her focus as the point guard is to pass the ball and set up teammates for points. She will score when necessary but this is not her primary focus.

The Lady Eagles lost substantial height from last season's team but have more quickness than in season's past. With the lack of height in the lineup, Meyer has needed to help more with rebounding for Liberty Christian.

"Last year, we asked her to pass and score," Liberty Christian head coach Butch Clark said. "We didn't really count on her to rebound because we had three, four kids that could do that. This year, she's got to do it. She and Kylee are the only two we've had that have consistently been on the boards. So she's adjusted her game. She hasn't complained about that a bit. I think she relishes it."

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With Alli Meyer, Anna Meyer and Ball set to graduate after this school year, Alli Meyer thinks the drive is strong for the seniors to make a run at one more MCSAA title.

Meyer is unsure of her future plans after making another title run and finishing her education at Liberty Christian. She is open to going to college and playing basketball at the collegiate level. Meyer said the health of her knees may impact her decision of whether to play at the next level. If she does play at the next level, she is looking for a team that would allow her to play with experienced players.

"I would be looking at who I would be playing with," Meyer said. "I throw the ball very hard. It's just how I play. I just wouldn't want to play with a team that is not experienced as much. Because that'd be totally different."

Meyer would like to find a school close to home if she elects to play basketball in college. If she does decide to attend college, she anticipates pursuing an education degree with the goal of becoming a physical education teacher.

"I would like to be a P.E. teacher if I do go," Meyer said. "I've always loved kids and sports and I'm really good at coming up with different games. That's really the only thing that comes out at me if I were to go for education."

Clark said the colleges he has spoken to think Meyer has the ability to play at the next level. He noted while there are things in her game she will need to work on to play at the next level, athletes often get pushed by the competition level at college.

"She'll have to work on her game," Clark said. "But I've had other kids that have gone to college. It amazes me some of the things that I didn't think they did real well in high school. When the colleges get them and they practice four hours a day, it's amazing how those things get ironed out of their game."





Warrenton High School alum Kaylee Anderson followed up a successful high school softball career at Warrenton with a half-decade collegiate career at Southeast Missouri State University.

Anderson helped the Warrenton softball team win two state titles. Since graduating from Warrenton, she played five years at SEMO and is currently finishing her masters program.

Anderson led the Redhawks in hitting last season in her final season of eligibility. She hit .353 in the 2021-2022 season. She led the Redhawks with 11 home runs and 37 runs scored. The Redhawks won 30 games in her final season.

Anderson is set to finish her masters degree at SEMO and graduate in May. She plans to look for a Speech Language Pathologist position somewhere closer to Warrenton.

What is your softball background and how did you get started into the sport?

I have been playing since I was five years old, when I started with T-ball. My parents got me interested in it when

they signed me up and I never looked back. My mom played softball her whole life and my dad played baseball, so I was bound to play at some point.

When did you start playing softball competitively and taking it seriously?

I started playing competitively when I was nine years old. This is when Jenny (Jansen) and I joined a travel ball team together. I always took it seriously but when we were that young, it was more fun than anything. It wasn't until I was a freshman in high school that playing at the college level was a real opportunity. I was going to more camps and talking to more coaches that made it seem more realistic.

What position(s) did you play at Warrenton?

At Warrenton, I pitched, played first, second, shortstop, third (most of freshman year), and two games in right field my freshman year. Ironically, that is the position I ended my college career playing.

Which position(s) did you play at SEMO?

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At SEMO, I mostly played second base, pitched and my last two years in right field. Being an infielder my whole life, surprisingly right field was my favorite position.

Where do you think you grew the most as a player at Warrenton and what are you most proud of from your time as a Warrior?

I think I grew the most between my sophomore and junior years at Warrenton. This was when recruiting was heavy and I went to a lot of camps. This was also when I switched travel ball teams and went to a team based out of St. Louis. I think this change was good for me. It helped me out of my comfort zone. I really did see a huge improvement in the way I played and thought about the game.

What was the recruiting process like? Did it span a short time or multiple years?

Recruiting was stressful to say the least. It was about two years of camps, emails, more camps and visits to schools. Being 13 and 14 years old trying to impress college coaches was a little difficult. The other difficult part was you are making a big decision about where you want to go, while

trying to figure out what degree you want to pursue at a young age. It was a lot, but it also gave me opportunities to travel with my parents and teammates. This was the fun part. Being able to go to new places and lots of road trips with my family.

Why did you decide to commit to SEMO?

I chose SEMO because of Coach (Mark) Redburn. From my one visit and talking to him in his office, I knew I wanted to play there. He was very honest, caring and had a vision for the program. We always joked that he was almost like having another dad at school. One of the other main reasons was that it was the perfect distance from home. Only 2.5 hours away. It also had the degree that I am still currently pursuing, speech-language pathology.

Are you happy with your decision to attend SEMO?

I am very happy that I attended SEMO. Cape is now my second home as I have been here for my entire adult life so far. Taking my fifth to play was one of the easiest decisions getting to play another year for Redburn and with my friends. Thankfully, I was accepted into my masters program so I could officially stay and play.

Do you have any plans to stay involved with softball?

As of now, I plan to find a slow pitch league and stay around the sport somehow. Coaching may be in the future but for now, I will enjoy being on the other side getting to watch for a change.



Senior scorer

Wright City's Jasmin Simpson among top scorers in state

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Wright City senior Jasmin Simpson is looking to finish her senior basketball season strong, with the end goal of continuing her athletic career in college.

A two-sport varsity athlete, Simpson stars on the Wright City basketball and volleyball teams. She started playing both sports in middle school.

Simpson has played on the varsity basketball team since her freshman year. She said she would not be the basketball player she is today without the help of her father. He would take her to the gym and they would practice together when she started playing basketball.

"I guess you could say I've always been in that environment," Simpson said. "My whole family has always been basketball fans. And then as I got older, I was like I might as well try it out. So I did. And then I grew a love for it."

Simpson is leading the Lady Wildcats on the court this season under first-year coach Dustin Elledge. Simpson is one of four players in Missouri to average over 20 points per game. She is averaging over 21 points and seven rebounds per game this season. She also averaged over 20 points per game last season.

Simpson cites her confidence shooting the basketball as a

big change this season from previous seasons.

"I would never shoot the ball. I was too scared to," Simpson said. "This year, I finally grew some confidence to start shooting."

With Simpson's height and ball handling ability, she plays both in the post and on the outside of the offense and defense, depending on the team's needs. Simpson has traditionally played in the post and is starting to play on the outside more this season.

"I would say the challenge is mostly playing up top because I'm not really used to it," Simpson said. "I've always been in the post. I feel like it's not really difficult. It's just like either shoot, drive, post up."

Simpson noted the challenges in playing for three different head coaches in her four years at Wright City. She played for Dan Friedel her first two years at Wright City. Friedel was one of Simpson's favorite coaches. The Lady Wildcats were coached last season by Abby Modaff before Elledge took the helm of the program this season.

"With Coach Elledge, he's putting out a new Wright City basketball," Simpson said. "It's different. It's working so far."

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Elledge stressed the benefits of having a player like Simpson who is multidimensional and able to contribute in many ways. Simpson's versatility allows the Wright City defense to do multiple things and move the ball in different places for different looks.

Elledge said Simpson has been a big part of Wright City's success this season. Elledge noted he saw Simpson's progression over her high school career from afar for the past three years. Elledge was on the Van-Far coaching staff before taking the Wright City job this season.

"Coaching against her the last three years, kind of seeing the same thing," Elledge said. "Seeing how she's progressed each year, getting better. She's always been doing the same thing."

Simpson and fellow senior Katie Schanuel have provided senior leadership to the Wright City basketball team this season.

"It definitely helps having them to show players other drills and skills," Elledge said. "That's almost like having a second or third coach out with you kind of helping get things going in the right direction."

Wright City started the season on a four-game winning streak and earned six wins in their first 10 games. The Lady Wildcats are showing more offensive balance this season. Danika Graham and Kaedyn Johnson both average about five points per game this season. Simpson was the only Wright City player last season to average more than four points per game.

"I just hope to see my team grow individually and grow more confident with themselves," Simpson said. "They are definitely all good ball players. They just need to grow their confidence to show they can do it."

Simpson also starred for the Wright City volleyball team this past season. Simpson led Wright City with 146 kills and 36 aces this past season. Wright City won nine matches this past season, their most since 2019.

Although her future plans are unclear, Simpson is looking to go to college and compete in basketball or volleyball at the collegiate level. She is open to participating in both sports in college.

"I don't know what my future holds yet," Simpson said. "I'm far behind on that one. So I don't know. But I do want to continue my athletic career. I just don't know what it would be for, basketball or volleyball."





Versatile Warrior

Brady Creech takes on point guard role for Winfield

By Jeff Stahlhut

For Brady Creech, basketball is just one of two athletic passions in his life.

Having played basketball since he was just six years old, Creech is also an accomplished baseball player — a sport he hopes to play at the college level. Still just a junior at Winfield High School, though, time will tell if that hope comes to fruition. For now, he continues to make his mark on the hardwood.

Now in his second year coaching the junior guard, Winfield coach John Varner has watched Creech as a player that seems to do just about everything right.

“Brady is the type of kid that takes pride in doing the little things. He goes the extra mile with preparation, extra work, and leadership, all while excelling in the classroom with a 3.8 GPA,” said Varner. “What separates Brady from the rest? He is more concerned about the team and making his teammates better than any stats or accolades he receives.”

That attitude and ability to get things done the right way no doubt comes from the right influences and motivation.

“My biggest influences in my basketball life have been my dad and brothers,” said Creech. “What motivates me on the court is knowing I’m playing for something better than myself. That’s my teammates. Also to represent my school in a positive way.”

As the floor general, Creech gets things done while not necessarily being in his natural position.

“Brady has taken over the point guard responsibilities this season,” said Varner. “I would not call him a true point guard, but more of a playmaker. He creates so much for his teammates that his impact on the floor isn’t necessarily noticeable in the scorebook.”

Creech’s ability and willingness to compete makes him truly stand out from the rest.

“Brady competes. Brady is the best competitor I’ve had the privilege to coach in my 13 years of high school basketball,” said Varner. “Brady has a workman-like attitude. He scores, leads, takes charges, rebounds, creates, all while guarding the opposing team’s best player.”



And while he may not be in his natural position, Creech does his best to excel and keep everyone on the floor involved from the point guard position.

“My favorite thing to do on the court is just looking to get my teammates involved early,” he said. “I try my best to play the role of a true point guard, feed my teammates, hit the shots I should, rebound, and just be strong with the ball.”

Those traits have made Creech invaluable to his team this season.

“He is our engine. He creates great energy and excitement for this team by his effort and attitude every day he walks into the gym,” said Varner. “He makes the job easier on the coaching staff, because he’s an extension of us on the court. He is the coach on the court.”

In the future, his prowess on the basketball court may take a backseat to the ballfield.

“I know Brady’s true love is the game of baseball and will play college baseball somewhere,” said Varner. “He will definitely have a chance to play both in college. I believe that’s a huge testament to his athletic ability and work ethic.”

Creech would welcome that opportunity.

“I do plan on playing baseball in college and hopefully at a high level,” he said. “I don’t know where I want to go yet, but anyone who gives me the option to play for them, I’ll be truly grateful.”

No matter where he goes, Creech knows the direction he’d like to go in school when it comes to his major.

“Something that has construction in it, due to my dad being a carpenter,” he said. “I know about all that stuff and could follow in his footsteps.”

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