

Norby, Schaefer named conference MVPs

By Eric Morken

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The Ashby baseball team (24-3) rolled through the Pheasant Conference with a 12-0 season on the way to a championship this past spring, and the Arrows put five players on the all-conference team as a result of that.

Senior Jaden Norby was a powerful bat in the middle of a lineup that scored 8.8 runs per game and a powerful arm in a pitching rotation that allowed 2.1 runs. He was named the Pheasant Conference MVP for that versatility.

Norby had a team-best .452 batting average overall in 26 games played this season. That included 7 doubles, 3 triples and 6 home runs as he racked up a team-high 28 RBIs and 33 runs scored. Norby was maybe even more dominant on the mound where he struck out 99 batters in 60 1/3 innings on his way to an 11-1 record and a 1.04 ERA.

Hancock's Preston Rohloff was the Pitcher of the Year in the Pheasant Conference, and Nate Moberg of Border West earned the Offensive Player of the Year Award. Ashby's Jared Larson earned the Coach of the Year Award.

Ashby's Carter Spangler (.373 BA, 17 RBI, 22 runs, 2.15 ERA), Hunter Norby (.359 BA, 24 RBI, 22 runs, 0.52 ERA, 49 SO, 40 2/3 IP), Mattson Hoff (.297 BA, 19 RBI, 18 runs) and Torin Olson (.353 BA, 25 RBI, 38 runs) also earned all-conference honors for their seasons. Evan Paulson (.321 AVG, 17 RBI, 14 runs) and Brodie Ecker (.257 AVG, .379 OBP, 9 RBI, 21 runs) were honorable-mention selections.

Brandon-Evansville had four guys named All-Pheasant Conference in Kyle Schaffran, Tyler Bitzan, Brady Perleberg and Riley Perleberg, while Hunter Koep and Dezmund White were honorable-mention selections.

West Central Area rounded out the area teams as Jordan Lohse and Reubens Swanson were all conference, and Trent Koloski and Colton



Photo by Eric Morken / Echo Press

Ashby senior Jaden Norby lets out a scream after a slide into home plate that ripped his jersey during the Section 6A championship round against New York Mills on June 10, 2021. Norby won the Pheasant Conference MVP Award for his spring season after hitting .452 with 28 RBIs and 33 runs scored in 26 games played, and posting an 11-1 pitching record with 99 strikeouts and an ERA of 1.04 in 60 1/3 innings pitched.

Lindquist were honorable-mention selections.

Chargers line the softball all-conference list

The Brandon-Evansville softball team had a similar presence on the All-Pheasant Conference list as the Ashby baseball team did.

The Chargers, who went 13-1 in winning the program's seventh straight conference championship, put four players on the all-conference first team in Bailey Schaefer, Mikenna Patrinn, Sydney Schaefer and Taylin Kramer.

Bailey Schaefer earned the league's MVP honor, while Patrinn was named the pitcher of the year. Korrie Randt and Kylee Dingwall were honorable-mention selections, and Kasi Sieling was the Pheasant Conference Coach of the Year.

Schaefer dominated the competition in 18 games played this past spring, hitting .636 with a .706

on-base percentage. She homered seven times, hit five triples and five doubles on her way to 35 runs scored and 32 RBIs. Defensively, she did not commit an error as this team's catcher.

Patrinn posted a 2.39 ERA in 67 1/3 innings through 16 games. She struck out 74 and issued 20 walks on her way to building up a 10-2 record from the circle.

West Central Area had two first-team all-conference selections in Addison Staples and Emma Swenson. Madi Hansen was named to the second team, and Claire Stark and Alaina Sykora were named honorable-mention players after the Knights went 8-5 in league play.

Ashby rounded out the area teams in the league as the Arrows finished 4-10 in the conference. Anna Thormodson and Anissa Heinrich were second-team all-conference players, and Ryleigh Brendmoen earned honorable-mention status.

RONNING

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when I started hitting tennis balls," Ronning said. "My brothers ran a tennis camp in Parkers Prairie, so it all kind of started from there. I guess you could say I've been doing this for about 50 years."

In the early 1970s, Ronning's oldest brother helped start the tennis program at Parkers Prairie. The big family from a small town preached competition, which often led to family rivalries.

"It was never friendly," Ronning said, laughing. "We're very competitive— all four of us boys. My two oldest brothers set the stage. My second oldest brother ended up going pro for several years. He always ended up beating my oldest brother. They played college tennis together, which was pretty cool. But when we played each other, it was never friendly. We always wanted to win, and that atmosphere was fun in our eyes."

Ronning's edge carried over to coaching. Schmidt saw his drive to win even with the racket out of his hands.

"He'd be the first to tell you that growing up, his family didn't have a lot of money," Schmidt said. "He's just the hardest worker you'll ever see. He's as competitive as they come. The thing about him as a coach is, win or lose, he wanted his team to leave it all out on the court every time. It's kind of a cliché, but he wouldn't be happy if his teams didn't give it all. He wanted them to be sportsmanlike and to just go for it."

Ronning was a three-sport athlete in high school. In his senior year on the football field, a shoulder injury hindered his athletic career after graduating.

"I tore my shoulder up pretty bad, and I basically suffered through basketball and tennis my senior year," Ronning said. "After



Eric Morken / Echo Press

Alexandria tennis coach Dave Ronning talks with senior Jacob Partington between games during Partington's match with Minnewaska's Tate Reichmann on April 15, 2021.

that, I pretty much put my tennis racket away for 17 years. My shoulder was so bad that I eventually had to get surgery. Once I got the surgery, I got the fire back for tennis again."

By the time Ronning was ready to get back into the sport, he had kids of his own who were ready too.

"When I had my two boys coming up, I wanted to be able to play against them," Ronning said. "I wanted to give them the competition they needed. I started playing with them, and I played in tournaments too. That got me going. But it killed me to have tennis out of sight and out of mind. I played in the state tournament and then basically just quit. It was very hard. My brothers kept playing and coaching when I couldn't do anything."

Ronning's goal was to coach his two sons through high school, but the Alexandria boys coaching job wasn't open. However, when the girl's position became available, he saw it as an opportunity to get his foot in the door.

"I kind of got lucky when the boys job opened up after three years of coaching girls," Ronning said. "My plan was to be done when my boys graduated, but I loved it. There were too many things I loved about coaching to quit, so I decided to stay on for a while."

Ronning reached levels no other Alexandria tennis coach had ever been at when he took the 2019 boys team to the state tournament. But some of his fondest memories came with sharing moments on the court with his kids.

"That was priceless," Ronning said. "Just the experience of being able to be with them more was worth it. To be there on the courts with them when they made it to the state tournament is something I can't put a price on. I'll never forget that. I think they enjoyed it too."

The game has changed

Ronning showed an ability to change with a fluent game. Despite being away from tennis for 17 years, he adjusted to a new style that was sweeping the sport.

"When my brothers and I played, the game was all serve and volley," Ronning said. "You needed to get to the net on every point. Nowadays, you stay at the baseline. Rackets are made to stay at the baseline and support those players. The footwork has also changed tremendously. We focus on that more than anything else. It's all about footwork."

Ronning embraced the changes and saw them as a positive movement for the sport.

"It's a good way for the game to evolve in

my eyes," Ronning said. "Kids have gotten so much stronger, faster and quicker. It's been fun to evolve with it. I tell this story all the time about when I got back into tennis. I used to go down to the courts all by myself. I would go through the footwork that I saw on TV. I wouldn't even bring a racket sometimes. I would go through all of it just so I could learn what I needed to teach."

Ronning has seen tennis grow in his own community at the same pace it's grown worldwide.

"Back in the 80s it was a booming sport, but then it died down for a while," Ronning said. "Now, it's growing a ton again just in the last 5-10 years. I definitely think our programs are in a good spot. If you get good numbers as we have, you can find quality kids. You can teach them. I'm thrilled with where the programs are at right now."

Both Ronning and Schmidt attribute success to their student leaders, especially in recent years.

"During the matches, we watch all of our players cheering each other on," Schmidt said. "There's some good bonding between our boys and girls teams too. We have great alumni too. Those players have been immensely important for us, and all of these things get people to want to play tennis."

Ronning doesn't have an exact timetable for when he will decide on coaching the boys team, but he doesn't plan on hanging up the racket for good.

"I need to take a few months to let my body and my mind heal," Ronning said. "I already did a camp this summer, and I've been asked to do it again in the coming years. I can't see myself stepping away completely because I love it too much. I want to respect whoever takes over the helm. I'd love to make myself available if they need any help, but that's up to them. I love this game so much to let it go completely."

FEST

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tournament, live entertainment, a general raffle and a silent auction. Live music by the band Coyote Wild will play from 7-10 p.m.

Kleine said the committee discussed in depth how they would run the event with shooting sports involved and alcohol also being served at the park.

"We're following the guidance of (Alexandria Shooting Park owner) Tom (Townsend)," Kleine said. "He said, 'We've had alcohol served here before during those types of events, and there's a zero tolerance policy.' If you're consuming alcohol, you're not partaking in the (shooting) events. Part of that was with the scheduling. The trap tournament starts at 11 a.m. The food vendors, the bar, they don't open up until noon. That was the thought behind getting that going in the morning so people aren't sitting around until 3, 4 o'clock in the afternoon."

Hosting an event like this as a primary fundraiser for the year required a lot of work and taking a bit of a risk with the amount of money the group has invested into the day. Kleine said Alomere Health and Bell Bank both came to the Viking

Sportsmen wanting to co-sponsor the event.

Board members for the Viking Sportsmen are hopeful that Outdoor Fest will be well attended and something that the group can continue to offer for the community into the future. Kleine said they have not yet seen a huge number of ticket sales, but he's hopeful that will change over the final weeks as the group markets Outdoor Fest through more avenues.

"We have committed significant resources to make sure we put together a good product," Kleine said. "Our committee members have been running ragged, reaching out to vendors, making sure we have entertainment, a stage, organizing trap and bean bag tournaments, sourcing trash and bathroom receptacles."

"All this is going on while we are also preparing for Youth Outdoor Activity Day less than a month later, which draws approximately 4,000 people to the same venue. We would be very pleased to continue this event and hope it proves to be a success and continues to grow year over year. We have had a ton of positive feedback from people who are experiencing burnout from the traditional fundraising mechanisms. Now it's time to see what kind of response we get."

WRESTLING

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includes four straight championship seasons from 2011-2014 and again from 2016-2019. Penn State finished second as a team this past season and with four individual champions.

Getting two All-American wrestlers from a program like the Nittany Lions to Alexandria is an opportunity that Struchen feels benefited the campers in multiple ways.

"I think they see that even the most basic techniques work and are used at the highest levels," Struchen said. "Getting to hear from elite wrestlers on the importance of setting goals, focusing on small

details, giving back to the sport and community, are super important. It was cool seeing our wrestlers getting to roll around on the mats and interact with the heroes they see on ESPN and the Big Ten Network (on TV)."

Kerkvliet and Starocci spent a lot of time going over their favorite wrestling moves with the student-athletes. They also spent time signing autographs and talking about the importance of doing things right off the mat and how wrestling prepares them for life down the road.

"Alexandria and the surrounding communities were fortunate to have these young men in Alex impacting the lives of local youth and high-school aged wrestlers," Struchen said.

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thank you
to our family and to all who attended the 65th wedding anniversary party for Bill and Irene Iverson on June 20th at the Event Cener in Parkers Prairie, MN