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Bluejackets send 3 individuals to state gymnastics

by John Wagner

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For the past few years, the Cambridge-Isanti gymnastics team has carried a burden into the Class 2A Section 7 meet.

The Bluejackets had claimed the team section title in each of the past 11 years. And C-I had advanced to the state tournament in 20 of the past 23 seasons, as well as 30 times since 1982 – more than any other Class 2A school.

As a result, the expectation of another state team berth may have felt like an added weight on the team's shoulders.

But this year Cambridge-Isanti's best team score was well behind those of both Anoka and Forest Lake. That is why coach Wendy Rooney and her gymnasts entered this year's meet, which



Cambridge-Isanti sophomore Laci Lorinser swings on the uneven parallel bars. Lorinser finished fourth at the Class 2A Section 7 meet in that event with a 8.975 score.

Photo by John Wagner

was hosted by Forest Lake on Friday, March 19, with a different attitude.

"Usually when we enter the section tournament, there's a lot of pressure on us to extend the streak," Rooney said. "We knew we weren't the top-ranked team coming into the meet, so not having the pressure of being No. 1 allowed us to relax and to have fun. Our goal was to have our best meet of the year."

In that sense it was mission accomplished for the Bluejackets, who posted a team score of 143.850, a mark that was a full point higher than the team's previous best. Unfortunately that score was not enough to advance the team to the state meet, as Forest Lake won with a 145.825 team

See **STATE GYMNASTICS** on page 13

Rush City, Pine City high school students unite in support of teacher, coach couple

by Sarv Mithaqiyani

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Four seniors from different high schools united in support of Zach Stoltz, an admired Pine City Elementary School teacher and coach.

The seniors' fundraising and support initiative began when they learned Stoltz recently had to undergo open-heart surgery and now is recovering.

The seniors involved include Jared Carpenter and Lydia Adams of Pine City High School, and Taylor Anderson and EllieMae White of Rush City High School. They produced red shirts with "Hearts for Stoltz" imprinted on the front, and "Two Teachers," "Two Schools," and "One

Community" written on the back.

"So I knew Stoltz from sixth grade as a teacher, and I also had him as a football coach when I was in seventh, eighth and ninth grade," Carpenter said. "So that's kind of along the lines, why I was kind of brought into this, because he's helped me through a lot through football, school and everything like that. So he's a huge part to me, too."

The reason for the two school communities coming together is because Stoltz is married to Rush City High School teacher and coach Erika Matzke Stoltz. About two years ago, Matzke-Stoltz was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent treatment.

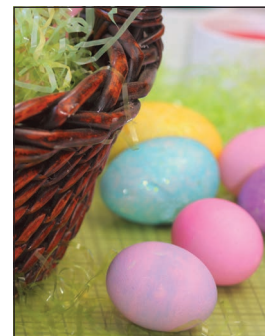
See **ACTS OF SERVICE** on page 13



After the students delivered the \$3,143 check to Rush City High School teacher and coach Erika Matzke-Stoltz on March 17, money raised for her husband's open-heart surgery, Pine City High School senior Jared Carpenter, as well as Rush City High School seniors Taylor Anderson and EllieMae White all give Matzke-Stoltz a hug together.

Photo by Sarv Mithaqiyani

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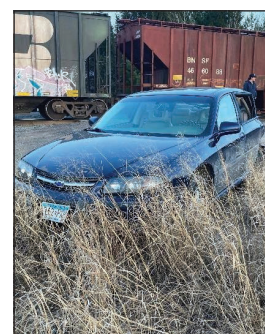


Easter services

See a list of Easter worship services being offered.

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INSIDE

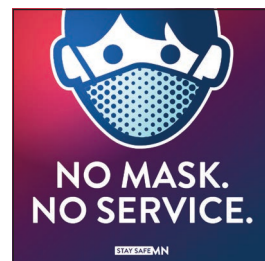


Car-train crash incident

A Chevy Impala was hit by a train, sending a minor to the hospital for injuries, according to authorities.

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COVID-19 TRACKER



As of March 23 Isanti County

Confirmed cases: 2,962
Deaths: 57

Chisago County
Confirmed cases: 4,778
Deaths: 48

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STATE GYMNASTICS

Continued from front

score while Anoka was second with a 144.875 mark.

Cambridge-Isanti tied Forest Lake for the high team score on the uneven parallel bars with a 35.250 mark, and it placed second to Anoka on the balance beam with a 35.625 score.

In a pleasant surprise, sophomore Alison Barber led the Bluejackets with a fifth-place finish in the all-around with a 36.100 mark, while fellow sophomore Laci Lorinser was sixth at 36.025. Barber placed second the beam with a 9.375, the highest individual event finish for the Bluejackets in the meet.

"It was easily Alison's best meet of the year," Rooney said. "She competed with a new vault today, and she stuck both landings. It was the best beam routine she has had all season – she really stepped up."

Junior Laci Leverty was third on the bars (9.200) while Lorinser was fourth (8.975) and Barber tied for sixth (8.800) in that event. Leverty also finished fourth in vault (9.475) and floor exercise (9.500).

While the team finish at section may not have been what Cambridge-Isanti had hoped for, the team's high score, combined with a Mississippi 8 conference title, made for what Rooney judged to be another successful season.

"There were so many unknowns, it would have been easy for this team to be unfocused and not motivated," said Rooney, who was voted Section 7 coach of the year. "But these girls really pushed themselves, and we made a lot of im-



Bluejackets junior Laci Leverty twists in the air during her floor exercise routine. Leverty advanced to the Class 2A state meet by placing fourth with a 9.500 mark. *Photo by John Wagner*



North Branch eighth grader Dakota Esget competes in the floor exercise at the Class A Section 7 meet hosted by Big Lake on Saturday, March 20. Esget finished second in the all-around at that meet with a 36.525 score.

provements in a short amount of time."

The season is not over for the Blue-



Cambridge-Isanti sophomore Alison Barber completes her balance beam routine at the Class 2A Section 7 meet held at Forest Lake on Friday, March 19. Barber finished scored a 9.375 in that event to finish second. *Photo by John Wagner*



North Branch senior Paige Bauer flies through the air to complete her vault at the Class A Section 7 meet. Bauer won the event with a 9.425 mark.

Photos by Jorge Perales

jackets, as three individuals will compete in the state meet at Champlin Park High

School on Saturday, March 27, in the morning session that begins at 11:30 a.m.

Leverty will compete in the vault, bars and floor exercise, while Lorinser will compete on the bars and Barber will compete on the beam.

"We will spend the week making the routines we have as strong and as consistent as we can," Rooney said. "We're excited that we get to compete with those routines one last time, and we'll just try to have some fun."

Esget, Bauer and Isackson-Rod advance to state

North Branch's Paige Bauer and Dakota Esget will be joined by Livia Isackson-Rod of the Rush City Flamingos at the Class A state gymnastics meet, which will be hosted by Champlin Park on Friday, March 26.

Esget, an eighth grader, placed second in the all-around competition at the Class A Section 7 meet hosted by Big Lake. Esget's 36.525 score in the all-around included a first-place effort on the bars (9.025) and a third on balance beam (9.075).

Meanwhile Bauer, a senior, won the vault with a 9.425 score. Isackson-Rod, a senior, will compete on two events in the state competition: She placed fourth on the bars (8.6) and tied for third on the floor (9.3).

All three will perform in the morning session, which begins at 11:30 a.m.

The Vikings finished third in the team competition with 135.425 points, while the Rush City Flamingos placed seventh with 127.600 points. Defending state champ Big Lake won the team title with a 144.400 mark.

ACTS OF SERVICE

Continued from front

She's since recovered. Although the T-shirt fundraiser was dedicated to Zach Stoltz, it was also for showing appreciation and support for Matzke-Stoltz.

"She thinks very carefully about what she says, and that impacts us as players and us as students," White said.

"Yeah, just everything she says is very genuine and from the heart," Anderson added. "She just tries to make us feel as loved as she can and just welcome in her classroom and court."

Rush City High School Principal Janet Wagener commented on Matzke-Stoltz's involvement in many student activities.

"She's at everything, beyond what she's even involved in," Wagener said. "She'll go to graduation parties. She's tried to go to as many graduation parties as she can."

Anderson said that since it's their final high school year, they wanted to leave behind a special gift and memory.

"It's our last year with her, so I think it's kind of hitting us more," she said. "And just the time that we have with her is running out. So we just wanted to do something big for her."

It was during the basketball games where the words "Hearts for Zach" went around initially and inspired the idea of



From left, Jared Carpenter, Erika Matzke-Stoltz, EllieMae White and Taylor Anderson.

Photo by Sarv Mithaqiyar

the T-shirts the seniors decided to make, White explained.

"We had little hearts that people could sign their name or like a prayer pin or like anything to him," she said. "And they could also donate money. ... We wanted to try to also make him feel as loved in the community as she is. Because he was always right by her side through everything."

With the help of Prism Design & Embroidery in North Branch, the four students custom-designed the T-shirts they used to promote Stoltz's heart procedure in Pine City and Rush City communities. The purchase of the T-shirts and donations were made available on a website for a week around Feb. 9, the students

explained.

The link was also promoted on the Rush City and Pine City community Facebook pages, and the schools sent the same link to students, staff and others, Anderson said.

"So we had it on a bunch of different community pages," she said. "And we also made fliers that went up with just basic information on where to find the link."

Through all the promoting efforts of both communities and schools, the four students were able to sell approximately 218 shirts and raise about \$3,143 for Stoltz.

"We were watching the number go up and up," Anderson said. "And I re-

member I was looking at it, and I was like, 'Wow, we're almost gonna hit \$500. Imagine if we could hit \$1,000.'"

"Oh, it blew out of the water," Carpenter remarked. "We were all thinking, we're all watching, we're like, 'Wow, we just raised \$1,000 to \$2,000 to \$3,000.'"

Anderson said, "I'm really proud of both of our communities for stepping up."

On March 17, Anderson, White and Carpenter presented the \$3,143 check to Matzke-Stoltz during the lunch hour.

The moment the students delivered the check to Matzke-Stoltz was charged with emotion and tears of joy. Hands covering her face and in tears, Matzke-Stoltz said she loves the students and the community.

"It is very much appreciated," she said to the students. "We love our community. ... There's a lot of people that are going through a lot of tough things right now. But for you guys to just open your hearts for us ... and you've done it time and time again, it's just, you can't even put into words how much it means to us."

"Like this is beyond generous," Matzke-Stoltz continued, adding that during their illnesses she and her husband couldn't imagine not being able to teach anymore. "This is our calling, and for you guys to be so thoughtful to think of us in our time of need ... as young adults ... this is going to take you so far in life."

Sports

Braham, Rush City win openers before bowing out of section tournament

by John Wagner

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Braham boys basketball coach Jeff Eklund watched his team miss a couple of key shots in the waning moments of its Class A Section 5 first-round contest against Hinckley-Finlayson on Thursday, March 18.

But he was confident his team could get the basket it needed to force overtime against the Jaguars when he called timeout despite his team trailing by 2 points and just 19.3 seconds on the clock.

“We had missed some easy shots,” Eklund admitted. “We have some guys who can get to the rim, so we decided to spread the floor and attack the basket. Caleb [Schusted] likes the moment, and he was able to knock down the shot.”

Schusted, a senior, drained a short jumper in the lane with less than five seconds left to force overtime. Then the Bombers dominated the extra session, outscoring the Jaguars 16-6 to claim a 74-62 victory.

Schusted was just one of the stars for the Bombers, finishing with 14 points. Several of the team’s leaders were unlikely heroes: For example, junior Jonah Johnson scored 15 of his team-leading 18 points after halftime to key his team’s comeback.

“Jonah is a big, strong kids who’s a phenomenal athlete,” Eklund said. “In the second half he decided he was going to be more physical than anyone else on the floor, and you could see him impose his will on people.”

Another emerging hero was junior Mac Nelson, who was asked to play extended minutes as several teammates fought through foul trouble. Nelson contributed 11 points, including a 3 early in overtime that helped his team take command of the contest.

“There have been games where Mac Nelson hasn’t played a lot of minutes,” Eklund said. “Because of foul trouble, and because of the way he played late in the season, he played some huge minutes for us – and he made a huge 3-point shot in overtime. He earned everything he got.”

The first half of the contest was tightly contested, with a number of lead changes before Braham forged a small lead late in the period. But Hinckley-Finlayson sank a shot from beyond half court at the buzzer to tie the game at the break, then used that moment to lead for most of the second half.

“We were up by 9 with a few minutes left, but Hinckley is a good team and coach [Dan] Kreft does a good job of



Braham junior Jonah Johnson drives to the basket. Johnson scored 15 of his team-high 18 points after halftime to lead the Bombers to the overtime victory.

Photos by John Wagner



Braham senior Zach Yerke rises up to take a jump shot. Yerke finished with 11 points in the win.



Braham boys basketball coach Jeff Eklund gives instructions to his team at a time-out during the Bombers’ win over Hinckley-Finlayson in the Class A Section 5 tournament game on Thursday, March 18.



The parents of Hayden Lee brought a poster celebrating the Braham boys basketball senior’s 18th birthday, which happened to land on the same day as the Bombers’ overtime win over Hinckley-Finlayson.

coaching them,” Eklund said. “They kept battling, and we got a little careless with the basketball while they started making

plays. That gave them a lot of juice entering the second half.”

Braham managed to stay close, al-

lowing Schuster’s jumper to force overtime, then got early 3’s from Nelson and Hayden Lee to pull away.

“After those 3’s, we talked to our kids about remembering time and score,” Eklund said. “We talked about not settling for shots, and for getting a great shot – not a good shot, a great shot. And our guys believed.”

Two Bombers besides Johnson, Schuster and Nelson scored in double figures as Isaiah Lanrain had 13 points and Zach Yerke added 11.

Braham saw its season end two nights later when second-seed Upsala claimed a 62-57 home victory.

Rush City beats Kimball, loses to Melrose

The Rush City boys also opened tournament play with a home victory, knocking off Kimball 49-44 at home on Thursday, March 18.

“The game was very physical,” Rush City coach Tryg Thompson said. “Kimball has a good size across the line and a very good point guard. They play a much slower pace than we would like.

“We tried to pick up the tempo, but we had a difficult time doing that.”

But the Tigers picked up the win thanks to 12 points by senior Zeth Hahn along with 11 points apiece by junior Ty Stepp and sophomore Tony Daas.

Rush City, the No. 8 seed in the section, then saw its season end with a 84-44 loss at Melrose, the top seed in the section and the fifth-ranked Class 2A team in the state.

North Branch loses at Hibbing

The North Branch boys had a tough road, both literally and figuratively, in the Class 3A Section 7 tournament, dropping a 77-33 decision at Hibbing on Saturday, March 20.

Junior Trevor Johnson led the way with 19 points, but no other Viking had more than 4 in the loss to the team ranked sixth in the state in Class 3A.

“I just want to thank all of our players, coaches and managers for their efforts and perseverance this year,” North Branch coach Alex Kuhlman said. “And best wishes to our seniors, Nate Halseth and Adam Richards, and senior managers Luke Fisk and Tony Hartlieb.”

Cambridge-Isanti bows out

The Cambridge-Isanti boys team saw its season come to a close prematurely. The Bluejackets, who were seeded No. 6 in the Class 4A Section 7 tournament, were forced to forfeit their first-round contest at Forest Lake due to concerns surrounding COVID-19.

Sports

C-I avenges loss to Duluth East in sections

by John Wagner

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The Cambridge-Isanti girls basketball team opened section play with a familiar opponent.

And that was an unsettling feeling.

The Bluejackets, the No. 2 seed in the Class 4A Section 7 tournament, drew seventh-seeded Duluth East in their opening round game on Saturday, March 20. Four days earlier the Greyhounds had traveled to C-I and claimed a 57-51 victory.

“We’ve talked all year long about having a laser focus, and Tuesday night, even before tipoff, I didn’t like our focus,” Cambridge-Isanti coach Jody Ledahl said. “But the three days of practice after that, and in this game, that laser focus was there – especially defensively. Tuesday we may have taken them a little more lightly than we should have. In the rematch, we didn’t.”

The proof was in the Bluejackets’ 60-43 victory in Saturday’s section tournament contest.

Ledahl said his team did not change any strategy for the rematch. Instead his team focused on improving its defense after allowing Duluth East to shoot 55% from the field, including 57% on 3-pointers.

In the tournament game, Cambridge-Isanti jumped out to a 12-2 lead, and while the Greyhounds did cut the advantage to single digits late in the first period, the Bluejackets eventually enjoyed a 33-20 halftime lead.

“Our defensive communication was good – even from the bench we could hear them talking,” Ledahl said. “They knew which kids we could help off and which kids we couldn’t, and which kids we would switch off and which kids we wouldn’t. We just didn’t give them any breathing room.”

C-I never let up in the second half, forcing Duluth East to shoot just 37% from the field and 20% on 3’s. Meanwhile the Bluejackets offense had three players score in double digits, led by junior Mikayla Aumer’s 22-point, eight-assist performance.

Sophomore Evelyn Wiltrout finished with 11 points and eight rebounds, while junior Aiyana Knight also scored 11 points.

Cambridge-Isanti faced sixth-seeded Coon Rapids in the semifinals on Tuesday, March 23, in a contest that was not completed at press time. If the Bluejackets won that contest, they will advance to section championship against either Forest Lake or Andover on Thursday, March 25.

Forest Lake will host if it wins its game Tuesday, while Cambridge-Isanti



Several snappily attired fans cheered on the Cambridge-Isanti girls basketball team during its section win over Duluth East on Saturday, March 20. Photo by John Wagner



Cambridge-Isanti junior guard Aiyana Knight looks to find an open teammate during a fast break. Knight finished with 11 points in the Bluejackets Class 4A Section 7 quarterfinal win over Duluth East on Saturday, March 20. Photo by John Wagner



North Branch senior Kate Carlson takes a shot through traffic in the lane during the Vikings’ Class 3A Section 7 loss at Chisago Lakes on Saturday, March 20. Photo by Jorge Perales

will host if its opponent is Andover.

“Coon Rapids is a big school and a good program, and the physicality of the games the rest of the way is going to skyrocket,” Ledahl said after Saturday’s victory. “We need to focus on defense, and we need to focus on our rebounding. It will be a challenge.”

The North Branch girls saw their season come to a close with a 67-37 loss at Chisago Lakes in a Class 3A Section 7 quarterfinal contest on Saturday, March 20.

Senior Kate Carlson led the Vikings with 16 points and 10 rebounds in her final high school contest.

The Rush City girls’ season ended with a 66-22 loss at Pierz on Tuesday, March 16, in the opening round of the Class 2A Section 6 tournament, closing the books on a 10-9 season.

The Braham girls opened Class A Section 5 action with a 67-43 home victory over Upsala on Wednesday, March 17.

But the Bombers, the No. 2 seed in the South Division of the bracket, were upset by third-seed Swanville by a 59-46 margin two nights later to finish the season with a 13-7 overall record.

SPORTS SCHEDULE

Thursday, March 25

Cambridge-Isanti wrestling at Class 3A individual state finals at St. Michael-Albertville, 2 p.m.

Cambridge-Isanti girls basketball at Class 4A Section 7 title game, 7 p.m. (if win March 23).

Friday, March 26

North Branch and Rush City gymnastics at Class A state meet at Champlin Park, 11:30 a.m.

Saturday, March 27

Cambridge-Isanti gymnastics at Class 2A state meet at Champlin Park, 11:30 a.m.

Schedules are subject to change



Sports

Area hockey teams see season end at sections

by John Wagner

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Last week was a tough week for area high school hockey teams.

The bad news started late in the day on Monday, March 15, when the North Branch boys team confirmed it would not be able to play in its Class A Section 5 first-round tournament game against Mora due to COVID-19 concerns.

“Our hearts hurt for our guys, especially for our seniors, who gave so much and deserved a better ending than this,” Vikings coach Jacob Mars said.

The following evening the Northern Tier Stars, the girls hockey co-op that includes players from both Cambridge-Isanti and North Branch as well as St. Francis, saw its season come to a close with a 5-1 loss at Forest Lake in the first round of the Class 2A Section 7 tournament.

The Stars, the No. 7 seed in the second, played the second-seeded Rangers tough.

“We were looking to keep their bigger players out of the middle of the ice, and for the most part we did that,” coach Cory Denney said. “But we did have a couple of breakdowns, and when that



Northern Tier Stars senior Gabby Giving, No. 21 on top, hugs senior teammate Ashton Parnell after Giving scored the lone goal in the Stars' 5-1 loss at Forest Lake in the Class 2A Section 7 quarterfinals on Tuesday, March 16. Photos by John Wagner

happened, they capitalized. They're a good hockey team.”

The Stars allowed just one goal in the first period, then rebounded after allowing a pair of goals in the second to get a goal by senior Gabby Giving at 16:36 of that period.

But that was the only goal the Stars would score, while Forest Lake added a pair of third-period goals. Junior Meghan Gibb finished with 38 saves, and Stars coach Cory Denney praised his team's performance, especially the nine seniors on the roster.



Northern Tier Stars forward Ashton Parnell brings the puck up ice against Forest Lake.

“Overall, I think we had a great season,” he said. “Being in our first year of this co-op, I think nobody thought we would do what we did. Even though our seniors may come from different schools, they knew one another because they played together or against one another. I couldn't have asked for a better group of seniors.”

Then on Thursday, March 18, the Cambridge-Isanti boys suffered a painful 4-2 home loss to Pine City in the Class A Section 5 quarterfinals.

That contest was tied 1-1 after the first period thanks to a goal by the Bluejackets Nathaniel Bauer at 2:47 of the period

– just 37 seconds after the Dragons had scored. But Pine City scored twice in the second period, and the Bluejackets managed only a power-play goal by junior Treyten Green at the 8:38 mark.

And C-I, the No. 3 seed, was unable to get the equalizer in the third, while the sixth-seeded Dragons added an empty-net goal with just four seconds left.

Senior Bobby Hendricks made 40 saves for Cambridge-Isanti, which finished the season with an 11-7-1 overall record while finishing third in the Mississippi 8 with an 8-6 mark good for 16 points.

“The season came to an abrupt end, but the memories will last forever,” coach Jarad Ziebarth said. “I wish to thank the players for their time and dedication to improving over the offseason. I especially would like to thank the seniors for a very special year.

“Because of a lack of numbers in the grades above them, many of these seniors were thrown into varsity roles prematurely and have taken their share of bumps and bruises throughout the years. This group paved the way for the players behind them to enjoy a JV and varsity team for many years to come. They are a great bunch of kids that will be missed.”

Edblad earns state wrestling berth for C-I

by John Wagner

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To be clear, Cambridge-Isanti wrestling coach Neil Jennissen is no fan of COVID-19.

“COVID-19 is a really tough disease that has caused a lot of grief and a lot of misery for a lot of people,” Jennissen said.

It also delayed the start of the high school wrestling season, and it caused the MSHSL to create a condensed regular season as well as a new format to advance to the state tournament.

That format change involved advancing each section's top four wrestlers in every weight class into a “State Prelim,” which brought two sections together to determine an “Elite Eight” for next week's state tournament.

Because the Class 3A meet, which was held at Coon Rapids on Saturday, March 20, was called the State Prelims, it meant that technically the Bluejackets advanced 10 wrestlers to the state meet.

“I guess it's kind of a COVID gift to say 10 of our kids are going to wrestle in the State Prelims,” Jennissen said. “We were not seeded to get 10, so I would say in several cases we ‘wrestled above our seed,’ which is the goal. That means the kids peaked at the right time and wrestled well.”

The Bluejackets will be represented



Cambridge-Isanti freshman Leo Edblad controls Forest Lake's Parker Lyden during their 106-pound championship bout at the Class 3A State Prelims hosted by Coon Rapids on Saturday, March 20. Edblad won the bout 7-0 to improve to 35-1 this season and advance to this week's state championship. Submitted photo

by one wrestler at the state meet, freshman Leo Edblad at 106 pounds. While he was not the top seed at his weight, Edblad posted a 3-0 record in the State Prelims, including a 7-0 victory over Forest Lake's Parker Lyden in the championship match.

“Leo wrestled a really strong tournament,” Jennissen said. “He beat Parker Lyden for the third time this year, and it's hard to beat a good wrestlers like Lyden

three times in a row. But Leo brought the offense, and he never really allowed Parker to do what he wanted to do.”

Sophomore Treytin Byers came very close to joining Edblad at state. Byers lost his first-round match at 160 by a narrow 7-6 score, then won three straight matches to earn third place. Since he had not wrestled Elijah Madimba, who lost in the championship, Byers faced Madimba in a “true second” match and suf-

fered a narrow 3-2 loss.

“I thought Treytin put together some really strong matches,” Jennissen said. “In the true second match I thought he had a takedown, but he didn't get it – and lost 3-2. If he gets those points, perhaps his opponent tries to force things and maybe makes a mistake.

“But I thought Treytin really wrestled well in that upper weight class after wrestling at 138 last year. He was an eyelash away from making the final eight, and he put together a good tournament.”

Senior Andrew Stickney ended up fourth at 195 after rebounding from a first-round loss by posting two straight wins before losing in the consolation final by a narrow 3-2 margin.

“Andrew is only in his third year of wrestling, so it was nice to see him prove he belonged up there with the big boys,” Jennissen said. “He's come a long way in a short amount of time.”

Jennissen also praised senior Wyatt Wothe, who won one of his three matches at 152 and proved to be a team leader on and off the mat.

“His weight class was pretty stacked, and I thought he wrestled well,” Jennissen said of Wothe.

And senior Logan Lindquist wrestled eventual champ Spencer Johnson of Sartell-St. Stephen in a tough match at 120,

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WRESTLING

Continued from page 31

a result that was Johnson's closest decision in the tournament.

"Through the second period, he was only down a point or two, and things kind of starting rolling against him in the third period," Jennissen said of Lindquist. "But he wrestled Johnson as tough as anyone did."

Seniors Brandon Austin at 138 and Devan Jones at 220 will join Lindquist, Wothe and Stickney as having finished their careers at the state meet, while Edblad, freshmen Braylon Davis at 113 and Maverick Henderson at 126, Byers at 160 and junior Scott Simpson at 285 can use the experience to improve heading into next season.

"We told the kids there would not be any easy matches – they would have to be ready to wrestle," Jennissen said. "Section 7 has always been very tough to get through, and when you throw in Section 8, that makes it even tougher."

"They needed the experience to learn

what wrestling at this level feels like – and to learn the work that it takes to wrestle well."

North Branch dreams realized, then dashed

North Branch advanced an impressive six wrestlers to the Class 2A State Prelims hosted by Cannon Falls on Saturday, March 20.

"That total of six wrestlers matches the most wrestlers the school has ever qualified in a single season, and they would have qualified [for state] under the previous format as well," North Branch assistant coach Kyle Kahl said. "That's a great accomplishment for these young men, especially in such a difficult season."

But the Vikings were unable to advance any wrestlers to this week's state tournament, despite coming close at several weight classes.

The most heartbreaking result was for junior Brandt Bombard at 160. He collected a pin in his first match before suffering a 5-2 decision to Cole Glazier of Kasson-Mantourville. Undeterred, he responded with two pins in the consola-

tion bracket to claim third place, as well as a true second match for the chance to advance to state.

But in that match he was paired with Cael Berg of Simley, the top-ranked wrestler in the state at his weight class, and Bombard saw his season end with a 5-1 loss.

"Brandt had a tough bracket for sure, but any real competitor wants to face the best and have a chance to beat the best," Kahl said. "While he came up short, he is already ready to train harder this off-season to prepare for next year."

Senior Josh Logan won his first match at 145 before losing in the second round, then won his first consolation match before losing his third-place match to place fourth.

"We are proud of Josh and his senior season," Kahl said. "He has been a great leader and mentor for our wrestling program."

The other four North Branch wrestlers – eighth grader Evan Pommier at 106, junior Ashton LaBelle at 152, senior Caleb Norwig at 220, and junior Jackson Marcussen at 285 – each won one of the

three matches they wrestled at the State Prelim.

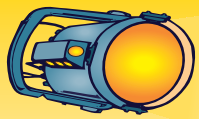
Positive finish for Rush City-Braham

The Rush City-Braham wrestling team sent four wrestlers to the Class A State Prelim hosted by Cass Lake-Bena High School on Saturday, March 20.

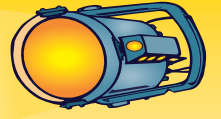
The best finish was posted by junior Austin Sterling at 285 pounds. Sterling claimed a pin in his first-round match, then lost to drop into the consolation bracket. He rebounded to methodically grind out a pin in 5:02 of his first consolation match before losing his third-place bout to place fourth.

Sophomore Landon Umbreit lost his opening match at 126, but bounced back to record a pin in his next match before losing his consolation semifinal.

Freshman Gavon Schroeder faced a harsh road at 132 pounds, taking on the top seed from Section 8 in his first match and exiting with two losses, while senior Carson Shockman saw his high school career come to a close with two tough losses at 138.'



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