

FOOTBALL

## Ponies claim sub-district title

Defense shuts down East Ridge to trigger 16-0 triumph and hand Stillwater its first league crown since 2012 season

BY STUART GROSKREUTZ  
THE GAZETTE

WOODBURY — A season that started late and with few guarantees has produced the Stillwater football team's first sub-district or conference championship since 2012.

The Ponies (4-1 EM, 4-2) finished out the six-game regular season with a resounding 16-0 East Metro sub-district victory at East Ridge on Wednesday, Nov. 11, denying the Raptors (2-1, 4-1) sole possession of the title. Roseville (2-1, 2-3) also claimed a share of the league title with an 18-14 victory over Mounds View.

Woodbury could have created a four-way tie atop the standings, but was upended by White Bear Lake 27-24 in overtime on Wednesday.

Because of countless schedule adjustments and/or disruptions due to COVID-19, not every East Metro sub-district team has played the same number of games — or league games — so the number of sub-district losses was used to determine the final



Senior running back Dominic Krenz breaks tries to evade an East Ridge tackler during Stillwater's 16-0 East Metro sub-district football victory on Wednesday, Nov. 11 at East Ridge High School. With the victory, the Ponies earned a share of its first sub-district or conference title since 2012. Below, junior defensive back Zachariah Hunter races towards the end zone on a 40-yard interception return during Stillwater's 63-28 win over Cretin-Derham Hall on Friday, Nov. 6 at the University of Northwestern in Roseville. (Gazette staff photos by Stuart Groskreutz)

See Title, Page 11



## Stillwater cruises past Cretin-Derham Hall

BY STUART GROSKREUTZ  
THE GAZETTE

ROSEVILLE — It was a frenzied start for both teams, but it was sustained production in all three phases of the game that carried Stillwater to a comfortable 63-28 East Metro sub-district football victory over Cretin-Derham Hall on Friday, Nov. 6 at the University of Northwestern.

The Ponies (3-1 EM, 3-2) rolled up a season-high 405 yards and scored touchdowns on offense, defense and special teams.

Playing on a beautiful fall night against the Raiders (0-3, 1-4), Stillwater did not waste any time.

Carter Bauer returned the opening kick-off 88 yards for a touchdown and a 7-0 lead

after Jacob Huenink booted the extra-point kick.

"A touchdown to start the game is always a blast," LaBore said.

The early fireworks continued as Cretin-Derham Hall quarterback Luke Floysand connected with Tre Holloman for a 25-yard touchdown to even the score less than two minutes into the game.

Stillwater sophomore receiver Max Shikenjanski then hauled in a 44-yard touchdown pass from Casey Venske with 8:12 remaining. The Raiders tied the game at 14-14 on their very first play of the ensuing drive as Marselio Mendez hauled in a 77-yard touchdown pass from Floysand as part of a thrilling first few minutes of play.

"Tied 14-14 with four min-

utes gone in the first quarter is not something you're going to commonly see. That said, we knew they had big-play potential," LaBore said. "Their wide receivers are fast and athletic — No. 5 (Holloman) is one of the best athletes in the country — we knew that if we weren't good over the top and gave them time to throw they were cable of big strikes. If we kept their receivers in front of our d-backs and approached it with some balance I was pretty confident things would slow down a bit and they did."

After seven scoreless minutes, Stillwater's Dominic Krenz powered in from 1 yard out in the final minute of the opening quarter for a 21-14 lead. The Ponies then poured

See Raiders, Page 10

SAHS

## Stillwater forges ahead with athletics during pandemic

BY STUART GROSKREUTZ  
THE GAZETTE

Despite moving to district learning for its secondary education students due to increasing COVID-19 case rates, Stillwater Area Public Schools will continue to allow athletics and activities following direction of the school board on Nov. 5.

Distance learning was used last spring in an effort to slow the spread and resulted in the cancellation of the entire spring sports season. The fall sports seasons were also impacted,

but several teams have already completed those campaigns and the volleyball and football seasons will wrap up in the next few weeks. Distance learning for Stillwater secondary students will resume on Monday, Nov. 16.

Some school districts have already shut down the remainder of their fall sports season and, in some cases, delayed the start of the winter season, but the decision to continue as planned in District 834 is supported by Stillwater Area High School Activities Director Ricky Michel.

"It's kind of a week-by-week thing," Michel said. "Dance started on Monday and they are the first winter sport. The next group starts on Nov. 23 and another group on Nov. 30 and then girls basketball on Dec. 7. I would say at this point we feel that the negatives of not having something offered for our younger people outweighs the positives (of shutting down). We see that as worse for our community than we do seeing it improve our community."

Numbers continue to rise in Washington County and within

the school district's boundaries, but Michel thinks the structure provided by school-sponsored activities is a better alternative than other options that participants will inevitably gravitate towards in the event of a shutdown.

"They're going to find alternatives," Michel said. "If we don't do it, somebody else is going to offer it. In our community many have the resources to use other options and I would argue they would not go into it as safe as schools have gone into it. While options are a good thing, it be-

comes a problem, and I think as schools we'd like to be more in control of our situation and by having sports when we can have guidelines and rules to live by during the winter season."

Michel said the school had 917 students participating in fall sports and debate. There were three documented cases of COVID-19 among that group and all three were traced to social situations outside of their participation with those sports/activities.

See SAHS, Page 10

### Lauren Riniker Volleyball

The Stillwater volleyball team has been on a roll since dropping the season opener and Lauren Riniker has been a steady performer throughout.



The senior outside hitter led the Ponies with 21 kills in a 3-1 victory over Forest Lake on Nov. 4. One of just four seniors on the roster, Riniker contributed to a strong effort in a 3-0 victory over Park. She drew plenty of

attention from Woodbury, but the Ponies had enough other options to secure a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Woodbury on Nov. 11, improving to 9-1 on the season.



## SAHS Athletes of the Week

### Zachariah Hunter Football

Needing victories in each of its last two regular season games, the Stillwater football team received big performances from its defense while knocking off Cretin-Derham Hall and East Ridge to claim its first league title since 2012.



Junior Zachariah Hunter finished with two interceptions, including one he returned 40 yards for a touchdown in a lopsided win over the Raiders. He also made six solo tackles in Stillwater's shutout victory over the Raptors — helping the Ponies (4-1 EM, 4-2) earn a No. 1 seed for the section playoffs.

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VOLLEYBALL

# Ponies extend winning streak to nine

BY STUART GROSKREUTZ  
THE GAZETTE

WOODBURY — It wasn't smooth sailing throughout, but Stillwater righted the ship in time to secure a 3-2 Suburban East Conference volleyball victory over Woodbury on Wednesday, Nov. 11 at Woodbury High School.

It was the ninth straight victory for the Ponies (8-1 SEC, 8-1) since falling to sixth-ranked East Ridge in the season opener, but the first time Stillwater has been pushed to five games in a match.

Stillwater rallied to defeat the Royals (6-5, 6-5) by scores of 22-25, 25-19, 16-25, 25-14 and 17-15.

"Yeah, it was very tooth-and-nail," Ponies coach Sara Biermaier said. "Woodbury played a great match."

The Ponies defeated Woodbury 3-1 earlier this season, but had their hands full after a sluggish start in the rematch.

"This is our second time playing them and they put up a really strong block in front of (Lauren) Riniker and played really well," Biermaier said. "I'm pleased with how we fought and it was a very good finish."

The momentum shifts throughout the match were dictated by serving, the coach suggested.

"We missed a lot of serves in the games we lost," Biermaier said.

"When we got our serves in we won."

After falling behind 2-1 in the match, Stillwater stormed back with a comfortable victory in Game 4 and held on for the victory in a tighter fifth game. The Ponies were unable to convert on two earlier match points, but Sydney Shaffer and Olivia Foss combined on a block to deliver the decisive point for Stillwater.

"Shaffer had some big kills and some big blocks and Tori Liljegen played well," Biermaier said. "Our middles really worked hard on blocking."

The coach also credited libero Lucy Zollar for picking up her play later in the match.

"Lucy started out a little rough, but picked it up from that point and that made a big difference going forward," Biermaier said. "We knew they run a quick offense so we really tried to work on setting up blocks. To be quite honest, we didn't execute that quite as well as we had practiced it, but managed to pull out the win."

Stillwater also tried to keep the ball away from Woodbury's sophomore libero Tanya Luniewski, but that was easier said than done.

"She had a heckuva night," Biermaier said. "She seemed to get everything."

The victory against the Royals was also special for Biermaier, a 2013 Woodbury High School gradu-

ate, and there were more than a few familiar faces in the gym.

"I felt like a student again and was pretty nervous, but it's fun," Biermaier said. "It's great community support and always great to be at Woodbury's gym."

## Stillwater 3, Park 0

At Cottage Grove, the Ponies cruised to a 3-0 conference victory over Park on Thursday, Nov. 5, winning by scores of 25-12, 25-11 and 25-23.

Stillwater coach Sara Biermaier was pleased with her team's play on the court and the positive vibes coming from the bench, especially during a tighter third game.

"It was really fun," the coach said. "Every person played, which is really awesome. I love to see the support these girls have."

Senior Lizzie Dorschner was among those players seeing more court time and the coach said she made the most of it.

"She had a really good game that night," Biermaier said. "She really capitalized."

The coach remained confident, even with the Ponies trailing 20-18 in the third set. Stillwater won 7 of the next 10 points to close out the sweep.

"I was going to keep them in regardless and let them figure it out," Biermaier said.

## LOCAL SCHEDULE

Friday, November 13

Nothing scheduled

Saturday, November 14

Nothing scheduled

Sunday, November 15

Nothing scheduled

Monday, November 16

Nothing scheduled

Tuesday, November 17

Nothing scheduled

Wednesday, November 18

Volleyball — At Roseville, 7 p.m.

Thursday, November 19

Volleyball — At East Ridge, 7 p.m.

Friday, November 20

Nothing scheduled

Saturday, November 21

Football — Class 6A section semis: Cent/LN at SAHS, 7 p.m.  
Volleyball — Cretin-Derham Hall at SAHS, noon

Sunday, November 22

Nothing scheduled

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# RAIDERS

(Continued from page 9)

it on while outscoring the Raiders 28-7 in the second quarter to build a 49-21 lead into halftime.

"I'm happy that for the most part our defense settled down," LaBore said. "To give up 14 points in two drives and to settle down and limit them to seven points for the next two-and-a-half quarters is pretty good. The defense kept going out there and trying to get stops and get the ball back for us."

Edward O'Keefe scored back-to-back rushing touchdowns in the second quarter as Stillwater extended its lead. Junior Zachariah Hunter also snared an interception and returned it 40 yards for a touchdown to give the Ponies a 42-14 lead with 5:16 remaining before halftime.

"Scoring in all three phases in any game is going to give you a huge advantage and we had a lot of big plays," LaBore said.

The Raiders answered with an 80-yard drive that ended with Floysand finding Mendez for a 24-yard touchdown with 46 seconds remaining in the half.

But the Ponies weren't finished.

Following a kick-off return from Krenz out to the Stillwater 45-yard line, Venske completed back-to-back passes to Shikenjanski that covered 30 yards and then connected with Logan Carlson for a 25-yard touchdown with just nine seconds left before halftime.

Venske completed 12 of 15 passes for 197 yards and three touchdowns in the game.

"Casey's performance was



Junior running back back Edward O'Keefe breaks through the Cretin-Derham Hall line for a gain during Stillwater's 63-28 East Metro sub-district victory on Friday, Nov. 6 at the University of Northwestern in Roseville. (Gazette staff photo by Stuart Groskreutz)

very good," LaBore said. "We found a few things to nitpick on Saturday morning, but that is a pretty good night for a quarter-back no matter what. That was

impressive. Our wide receivers, overall, did a nice job and we had a number of guys who had a catch."

Shikenjanski totaled six catch-

es for 116 yards.

"He was open all night long and delivered," LaBore said.

The game was a far cry from last year's defensive battle that

ended with a hard-fought 7-5 victory for the Ponies.

The performance was also a

See Raiders, Page 15

# 10 years ago this week ...

**Boys cross country** — Junior Tom Linner places 28th and sophomore Eric Colvin finishes 31st overall to help lead the Stillwater boys cross country team to a seventh-place showing in the Class AA state meet at St. Olaf College. Sophomores Wayde Hall and Sean Bjork place 73rd and 97th for the Ponies, a team with just one senior in its state lineup.

**Football** — Stillwater and Mounds View shared the Suburban East Conference football championship with Cretin-Derham Hall, but the top-seeded Mustangs gained the upper hand after dispatching Stillwater 32-6 in the Section 2AAAAA finals. The Ponies, who receive 142 rushing yards on 25 carries from Corey Petersen, finish the season with an 9-2 record.



Linner

**Colleges** — Several Stillwater Area High School athletes sign a National Letter of Intent during the early signing period, a list that includes baseball player Pad Getchell (North Dakota), swimmer Hannah Bowen (Notre Dame), softball player Madie Eckstrom (Minnesota), volleyball player Mary Mikutowski (UM-Crookston), volleyball player Adrianna Nora (Baylor), lacrosse player Hannah Dickman (Detroit-Mercy), swimmer Torie Buberl (South Dakota), lacrosse player Carson Cannon (Denver), hockey player Caitlin Hewes (Connecticut) and soccer player Maureen Stormont (UM-Duluth).

This is a look back at some of the people and teams making news in the St. Croix Valley 10 years ago, as reported in the Stillwater Gazette.

# SAHS

(Continued from page 9)

Three of Stillwater's programs were shut down for two weeks this fall due COVID-19 exposure, but because of the safeguards and protocols established those quarantine's did not impact the entire program.

"Because there's a risk for cross contamination, it's inevitable that pods will get shut down," Michel said. "Three pods were shut down this fall, but the positive is that we haven't had three programs shut down. We were able to stay away from that."

He also understands that no matter how cautious people are and safeguards are in place, cases are inevitable.

"We are seeing the numbers go up, and up in schools," Michel said. "We have had more athletes test positive this week than we've had the previous six weeks. There are some things you can't control. Kids, if you offer them sports, at least you know

what they're doing from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. every day.

"It's always evolving and always changing. Just because it's Wednesday, Nov. 11 doesn't mean it's going to be the same on Friday, Nov. 13. Just like when we started fall sports and there is always something new that pops up. You're just waiting for the next fire to pop up."

He's also hoping the desire to continue with sports and activities will encourage kids, parents and the community to be even more diligent with doing what they can to limit the spread.

"Our main goal is to get kids playing and we realize there's going to have to be sacrifices made," Michel said. "Families will have to sacrifice, kids will sacrifice and coaches will sacrifice."

"I wish people would, No. 1, think beyond their own houses and realize this is a community problem and we are responsible for answering to our elderly, our parents, our children and grandchildren and all of those people. We tend to look at just

how does this impact our household and we have to think beyond that. People 40-and-under are not being impacted, but how many of those people will come into contact with somebody who is older and they may be impacted critically if they have COVID?"

Michel said compliance has generally been good with regard to spectators at events that allowed them this fall, but already anticipates some grumbling over one of the steps the Suburban East Conference has taken with regard to winter sports events.

The conference has decided to not allow fans for any of its indoor contests through the month of December, including hockey games that are held off high school property.

"We want to incorporate some changes and bring the numbers down," Michel said. "It's going to be tough to do. We're going to make sure winter goes, but be as safe as we can be."

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# TITLE

(Continued from page 9)

standings. The only requirement was that a team played at least three East Metro sub-district games.

“It was really nice to say you put yourself in a situation where the only team that matters is you and get to determine whether your a champion,” Ponies coach Beau LaBore said. “It was great to see our guys come out and play.”

White Bear Lake is the only East Metro sub-district team that has not won a league title since Stillwater’s most championship eight years ago.

“The message to the team doesn’t veer off too far,” LaBore said. “You encourage your players to believe. We don’t spend a lot of time talking about wins or sub-district championships, we talk about executing and limiting our mistakes and playing with our shoulder pads and winning on the line of scrimmage and having a lot of enthusiasm and winning the right way. A lot of our teams have done that game in and game out, but we maybe haven’t been the better team and that’s the unfortunate reality. Eight years is too long of a drought and we expect to compete. This was a clear cut opportunity to go out and get a title and we did.”

A home playoff game was a more realistic goal for the Ponies after getting humbled by Shakopee 49-0 in Week 4, but back-to-back victories not only vaulted the Ponies to a sub-district title but also led to receiving the No. 1 seed in Section 4AAAAA and a bye into the second round. Stillwater will face either fourth-seeded Centennial or fifth-seeded Lakeville North for a section championship on Saturday, Nov. 21.

“Shakopee was obviously a very unpleasant experience, but we looked at the last two games and recognized that everything we wanted was still on the table,” LaBore said. “We had to find a way against Cretin and if we do that and East Ridge finds a way against Woodbury then we have a chance and that’s exactly how it unfolded. Going over to East Ridge and finding a way to slow them down and move the ball against their defense and come out of there with so much on the line is night and day from Shakopee two weeks ago.

“We kept it one game at a time in everything that we did over the last two weeks, but we promoted very strongly that if we get a win against Cretin-Derham Hall that they would have the opportunity to get rid of that nasty taste in their mouth from what could have been their last home game as seniors by earning a playoff game at home.”

After combining for 91 points with Cretin-Derham Hall less than a week ago, the Ponies were locked in a defensive struggle against East Ridge — limiting the Raptors to just 171 total yards.

“We zeroed in on trying to take away what they wanted to do the most which is run power,” LaBore said. “We tried to keep it on a short week as simple as



Stillwater linebacker Grant Miller pounces on a fumble with five minutes in the fourth quarter to stop an East Ridge drive and preserve the shutout in a 16-0 victory to secure the East Metro sub-district championship on Wednesday, Nov. 11 at East Ridge High School. Below, senior receiver Erik Roettger hauls in a reception for the Ponies during the first quarter. (Gazette staff photos by Stuart Groskreutz)

	East Metro		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
Stillwater	4	1	4	2
East Ridge	2	1	4	1
Roseville	2	1	2	3
Woodbury	3	2	3	3
White Bear Lake	2	2	2	3
C-D Hall	0	3	1	5
Mounds View	1	4	1	5

**Week 5 results**  
 Stillwater 63, Cretin-Derham Hall 28  
 East Ridge 18, Mounds View 16  
 Woodbury 10, Roseville 9  
 Lakeville North 49, WB Lake 14

**Week 6 results**  
 Stillwater 16, East Ridge 0  
 Roseville 18, Mounds View 14  
 WB Lake 27, Woodbury 24 (OT)  
 Totino-Grace 42, C-D Hall 27

**Class 6A section playoffs**  
**Tuesday, Nov. 17**  
 #8 Eastview at #1 STMA  
 #5 Minnetonka at #4 Woodbury  
 #6 Anoka at #3 Rosemount  
 #2 East Ridge, bye due to COVID  
 #8 C-D Hall at #1 Lakeville South  
 #5 Osseo at #4 Edina  
 #6 Champlin Park at #4 WB Lake  
 #Eagan at #2 Shakopee

#1 Eden Prairie, bye due to COVID  
 #5 Roseville at #4 Prior Lake  
 #6 Hopkins at #3 Totino-Grace  
 #2 Farmington, bye due to COVID  
 #1 Stillwater, bye  
 #5 Lakeville North at #4 Centennial  
 #6 Burnsville at #3 Wayzata  
 #7 Mounds View at #2 Blaine

we could to make sure we played fast and physical. We tackled very well and didn’t give up any big plays.”

The defense provided the first big play for the Ponies as sophomore defensive lineman Charlie Gleason sacked East Ridge quarterback Jackson Turner in the end zone for a safety less than a minute into the second quarter.

“Any time the defense scores it’s a big deal,” LaBore said. “It doesn’t matter if its two points or six points. It also set us up with really nice field position.”

A few minutes later, Gleason also forced a Turner fumble that was recovered by Ian Tandy at the East Ridge 12-yard line. Five plays later, senior Dominic Krenz scored a 1-yard touchdown and Jacob Huenink booted the extra-point kick to provide a 9-0 lead for the Ponies.

That fumble was one of three recovered by Stillwater.

“We won the turnover battle, the field position battle and played well in all three phases,” LaBore said. “We’re not good enough to not play well in one of those and hope the others will bail us out.”

East Ridge was driving late in the first half, but came up empty after failing to secure two long, but catchable, passes in the end zone.

Stillwater made it look easy while rolling up 400-plus yards against Cretin-Derham Hall, but nothing came easy against the Raptors. The Ponies remained patient and extended the lead after Krenz powered from 5 yards to with 5:38 remaining in the third for a 16-0 lead.

It was still a two-score game and the Raptors drove inside the Stillwater 5-yard line with five minutes remaining, but Grant Miller pounced on another East Ridge fumble to provide another



defensive stand for the Ponies. Stillwater was able to run out the clock with nine straight running plays — including rushes of 26 and 18 yards by fullback Nicholas Schlender — to set up their victory formation at the East Ridge 9-yard line.

“Our four-minute offense went right at them and blocked them and took care of the football,” LaBore said. “That’s incredibly satisfying.”

Schlender finished with a team-high 70 rushing yards on just nine attempts. In addition to his determined work as a lead blocker, he also caught two passes for 33 yards.

“We’re sending one of the smallest guys on the field, at least height-wise, but certainly not attitude and heart-wise,” LaBore said. “We can’t find enough ways to use him, whether it’s blocking, receiving or running. He delivered.”

Stillwater wasn’t flashy on offense, completing just 8 of 20 passes for 83 yards, but committed to a ground game that totaled 182 yards on 43 rushes. As a result, the Ponies had the ball for 10 more minutes than East Ridge (28:42 to 18:50) and also ran 15 more plays (63 to 48).

“We knew we were going to have to string drives together bit by bit,” LaBore said. “It doesn’t really change your preparation, we just had to do a lot more grinding to make it happen. When you look at the caliber of the opponent and recognize that we beat them in all three phases of the game, it was an all-around quality performance.”

Stillwater blanked a team that ranked second in the East Metro sub-district while averaging 321 yards per game.

“This team knows it’s not the biggest, fastest or most talented team, but they’ve shown they care about each other and are

willing to be physical,” LaBore said. “(Wednesday) was a clear indication that they can play championship football. Now we get to see if they can prove it in the playoffs.”

Zachariah Hunter set the pace defensively with six solo tackles, including two for a loss, and a knocked down pass for 19 defensive points. Michael Cowley also totaled six solo tackles and finished with 16 defensive points while Grant Miller contributed 15 defensive points.

Stillwater	0	9	7	0	—	16
East Ridge	0	0	0	0	—	0

St — Charlie Gleason sacks Jackson Turner for safety, 11:37.  
 St — Dominic Krenz 1 run (Jacob Huenink kick) 5:20.  
 St — Krenz 5 run (Huenink kick) 5:38.

	Team stats	
	St	ER
First downs.....	19	11
Rushes-yards.....	43-182	32-85
Passing yards.....	83	86
Total yards.....	265	171
Comp-Att-Int.....	8-20-1	7-16-1
Fumbles/lost.....	1/0	3/3
Penalties/yards.....	3/20	4/35
Punts/avg.....	2/33.0	2/22.5

**Individual statistics**  
**Rushing** — St: Nicholas Schlender 9-70, Dominic Krenz 20-69, Edward O’Keefe 13-43, Casey Venske 1-0 and team 3-0; ER: Owen Brettoi 20-62, Toby Anene 4-37 and Jackson Turner 8-(-14).  
**Passing (com-att-yds-td-int)** — St: Casey Venske 8-19-83-0-1 and Erik Roettger 0-1-0-0-0; ER: Jackson Turner 7-16-86-0-1.  
**Receiving** — St: Nicholas Schlender 2-33, Dominic Krenz 2-23, Erik Roettger 2-13, Max Shikenjanski 1-10 and Gavin Zurn 1-4; ER: Aidan Clarke 2-59, Caden Ni-enow 2-16 and Owen Brettoi 3-11.  
**Kickoff returns** — St: Edward O’Keefe 1-6; ER: Owen Brettoi 3-66.  
**Punt returns** — St: none; ER: none.  
**Interceptions** — St: Mason Buck 1-0; ER: Ethan Double 1-0.  
**Fumble recoveries** — St: Ian Tandy 1-0, Andrew Rantila 1-0 and Grant Miller 1-0; ER: none.

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Stillwater defensive lineman Charlie Gleason drags down East Ridge quarterback Jackson Turner for a safety to provide a 2-0 lead for the Ponies in the second quarter of their East Metro sub-district victory the Raptors on Wednesday, Nov. 11 at East Ridge High School. (Gazette staff photo by Stuart Groskreutz)