

Sports

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AWARDS

Faribault celebrates 2021 season with awards ceremony

By MICHAEL HUGHES
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The Faribault boys tennis team held their end of season awards ceremony Monday night at Faribault High School, where the Falcons celebrated the 2021 season and handed out their team awards.

Andrew Chou — the team's only senior — was awarded the Big 9 Scholar Athlete Award for maintaining a grade point average of at least 3.65 in addition to the Individual Academic Award for a GPA higher than 3.75.

The team's Most Valuable Player award was handed out to Carson Reuvers, while Thomas Drenth was recognized as the team's Most Improved Player.

As a team, Faribault won a Big 9 Conference match for the first time in four years thanks to victories against Albert Lea and Winona, and the Falcons hosted a first-round match in the Section 1AA tournament for the first time in more than 10 years. All that was achieved with only nine players, one less than is required to field a full varsity lineup.

At the individual Big 9 Conference tournament, Faribault advanced to the second round in three positions with Drenth and Carsen Kramer winning a first-round match at No. 2 doubles, Buay Lual and Long Duong claiming a win at No. 3 doubles, and Brandon Petricka winning at No. 3 singles.

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Carson Reuvers was named Faribault's Most Valuable Player at Monday's end of season awards ceremony at Faribault High School. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Anderson)

GOLF



Kenyon-Wanamingo's Tanner Angelstad surged to the Section 1A individual championship last week by six strokes, in addition to qualifying for the Class A state tournament. Angelstad's first trip to the state tournament starts Tuesday. (File Photo/southernminn.com)

'PLACE AS HIGH AS POSSIBLE'

After claiming Section 1A championship, Angelstad thinking big for 1st trip to state

By MICHAEL HUGHES
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In terms of work-life balance, Tanner Angelstad possesses less than most.

Angelstad, a senior on the Kenyon-Wanamingo golf team, qualified for the Class A state tournament by winning last week's Section 1A individual championship.

The next day he was right back at Kenyon Country Club, where he's spent just about every day since preparing for the state tournament June 15-16 at Pebble Creek Golf Course in Becker. And just plain working.

"It's almost every day I'm playing," Angelstad said. "I'm at the golf course right now talking to you. I'm out here every day playing and I work here, too, so it's wake up in the morning, go to work, get done with work and go play golf."

His coach, Jake Wieme, stresses that Angelstad

is not a golf-obsessive. You won't see him repeating the same chip onto the practice green until the sun sets or hitting ball after ball on the range until his hands develop callouses.

He's also not someone to show tons of emotion on the course.

"He's Steady Eddie," Wieme said. "He's not going to take any big numbers and he's going to be consistent."

And as for golf filling nearly all of Angelstad's days, that's just a fortuitous case of mixing business with pleasure.

"That makes it even better," Angelstad said. "I can just steal a cart whenever I need to and then go to town."

After working toward it since he narrowly missed the state qualifying cut as a sophomore in 2019, there was little drama last week surrounding Angelstad's chances at making state this season.

He ended the first day of the Section 1A

STATE DETAILS

The Class A boys state tournament is scheduled for June 15-16 at Pebble Creek Golf Course in Becker. Both days the girls are set to tee off starting at 7:30 a.m., while the first boys golfers are scheduled to start at noon.

There is no admission charge for spectators, who are free to walk the course alongside golfers they wish to follow. Live results are available through the iWanamaker app, with the state tournament package costing \$20.

tournament with a seven-shot lead over the rest of the field with a first-round score of 73. Even after a comparatively sluggish second round of 78, he still won the tournament by six strokes and was 29 shots clear of the state cut.

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TRACK AND FIELD

The Owatonna boys track and field team remembers the stories behind the 1981 state title

By LUCAS SEEHAFFER
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Saturday, June 6, 1981 started off like any other late spring day in Minnesota.

The sun shown bright and warm and the wind blew at a consistent, but not overpowering, rate, give or take a few large gusts. The atmospheric pressure pushing down on all of the athletes and spectators crammed into the bleachers in the southern Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington was unregistrable, but the pressure inside John Killen's chest as he approached the starting blocks for the half-mile run was very much so.

All of the other members of the Owatonna Huskies' boys track and field team that had competed up to that point had registered points during their various events and the Huskies found themselves near the top of the Class AA State Championship table with only two events remaining. Killen, who by then had established himself as one of the faster runners in all of southern Minnesota, felt the pressure to not let his team down.

The race began without any indications that it would go anything but well, but as it progressed, Killen found himself trapped. A runner each from Wayzata and Minneapolis Southwest High Schools had broken away from the fray and would proceed to claim first and second place,



The 1981 Owatonna High School boys track and field team brought home the program's first state title in over three decades. Team members in alphabetical order: Joe Cashman, John Killen, Greg Potter, Willie Randall, Dan Sampson, Rick Schroeder, Patrick Shultz and Tim Warner. (File/southernminn.com)

respectively, but Killen was stuck in the middle of a four-runner pack and was unable to free himself by the time the race ended. Killen finished in 1:58.91, good for sixth place overall and the one team point that came along with it.

He was disappointed and the Owatonna team now needed to earn at least five points during the 1,600-meter relay to leapfrog Minneapolis Central High School and claim the school's first track

and field state championship since the early-1950s.

The Huskies did not win, but they came ever-so close, falling to Wayzata by seven milliseconds despite the best efforts of Tim Warner, the relay team's final runner. However, their second place finish earned them their requisite five points.

The Owatonna High School boys track and field team and the eight athletes that represented them on that warm day

in early June of 1981 were state champions.

While the entire team, as well as legendary coach Ev Berg, were ecstatic, perhaps no one was more so than Killen.

"Thank God we all earned points. I earned one point and I always like to think that that one point gave us the point we needed to win."

The Great Ev Berg

Patrick Shultz was a sophomore when

he first laid roots in Owatonna.

"I was the 'outsider' of the team so to speak," Shultz wrote to the People's Press in an email.

Schultz's family had just moved to Owatonna from Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1979 and he started with the track and field team as a junior in 1980. Shultz had run the quarter-mile and sprinted for Lourdes Academy, a Catholic high school located just west of the Fox River in Oshkosh, and he wondered how he would fit in with the track team at his new school. A written correspondence from coach Berg saved him from any amount of lost sleep.

"My first contact with our coach, Ev Berg, happened when I was still a sophomore at Lourdes Academy in Oshkosh. It was a beautiful letter, which I still have, congratulating me on a very good track season that year and how excited he was that I was coming to Owatonna. I felt right at home right away. He told me about the other guys on the team, the times they ran and how they finished at various meets. He told me that as a quarter-miler and sprinter that I was going to fit right in... and I did. All the guys were super nice and welcoming to me and I had instant friends."

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SPORTS

GOLF

After 1-year hiatus, Stevens ready to show how much he's grown

By MICHAEL HUGHES
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There was no doubt surrounding whether or not Nate Stevens was going to qualify for his third state tournament. And there was hardly any doubt about him securing the Section 1AAA individual championship at The Jewel Golf Club in Lake City.

Still, after a bogey on the 15th hole on the second day of the two-day tournament and then a par on the 16th hole, which he eagled the day before, Stevens needed to take a breather before his tee shot on 17.

Quite literally, the Northfield junior took some deep breaths, and then proceeded to birdie the final two holes to wrap up the Section 1AAA individual championship with a blistering final round of 64, good enough for seven-under par and the section record.

"I was in a sports psychology class in the first semester, and a big thing there was controlling your breathing to keep her heart rate as low as possible," Stevens said. "I do some exercises when I'm out on the course to keep my heart rate low so I don't get tense."

That mental fortitude is the biggest change for Stevens from when he was last at state in 2019, when he placed ninth as a freshman.

Yes, he's grown a few inches, which has allowed him to add extra yardage



Northfield junior Nate Stevens qualified for his third state tournament in spectacular fashion by shooting seven-under par on the second day of the Section 1AAA tournament to break the section record. He enters the state tournament as one of the individual favorites. (File Photo/southernminn.com)

to his drives, but the ability to control that strength is due to the work he's put in mentally.

"It was kind of just getting older," Stevens said. "I took a couple stepping stones last summer when I was playing in bigger tournaments and

playing with really good players. It just seemed like they were so much stronger mentally than I was, so I wanted to become like those players who were mentally strong. There's still a long ways to go, but I'm moving in the right direction in that aspect."

In the time between state tournament appearances, Stevens has crossed off a lot of his personal golf goals. He committed to play Division I golf at Notre Dame. He won multiple America Junior Golf Association Tournaments, placed sixth in the Min-

nesota Amateur Championship and eighth in the Minnesota State Open.

That led into this spring, when he repeatedly set and re-set the school record for lowest round and enters the Class AAA state tournament as the No. 1 ranked individual in the state by the Minnesota Golf Association.

"He has the state tournament marked on his calendar to be playing at his best," Northfield coach Adam Danielson said. "He'll be working on his short game and we'll be playing a few holes and things like that, but he understands what he needs to do to prepare for big events. He's played in so many state tournaments and so many other junior PGA events and MGA events. He knows what he needs to do to get ready, so there's not a whole lot I can say."

Stevens is vying to first obtain that all-state finish that eluded him two years ago, but he also has his eyes on becoming the school's first individual state golf champion since Brad Cook won a pair of titles in 1973 and 1974.

"It's always been a goal since I started playing high school golf in seventh grade to be up at the top of the leaderboard at the state tournament," Stevens said. "It would be nice to check off that goal, because I've already achieved a bunch of different goals in the last few years and that was a goal I didn't even have the opportunity to achieve last year. I'm just excited for the opportunity."

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Petrica also finished the season with a 9-8 record, the first time in Faribault coach Jeff

Anderson's eight-year tenure a player finished with a winning record.

Anderson was also presented with a celebratory cake by volunteer assistant coach Bill Boyes for being named the Big 9 Conference Coach of the Year for the first time in his career.

Reuvers, Carter Sietsema and Harrison

Gibbs were named captains for next spring.

"All returning players were challenged to work in the offseason to continue their improvement from this season and also to recruit new players in hopes of growing our team to have both a Varsity and JV team next season," Anderson said.

CHAMPS

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The only relative drama on that final day was when a player in his group cut Angelstad's lead to two strokes, but a solid finish through the last handful of holes eliminated any doubt surrounding the championship.

"He was going to make the state cut either way, but his goal was to win the section," Wieme said. "Luckily or unluckily the kid was in his group, so (Tanner) saw it happening. I talked to him throughout and didn't want to say, 'Hey, he's on your tail,' but he was well aware of what was going on."

The margins won't be so wide next week in Becker. Through the iWanamaker app, which the Minnesota State High School League used to score every round of high school golf this season, Angelstad and Wieme can compare where he stacks up entering the state tournament.

While there's no exact conversion rate to stabilize scores across different levels of course, Wieme said Angelstad has a definite possibility of finishing high up the leaderboard.

"Right now on that app, I think he's ranked in the top 10 in Class A," Wieme said. "Tanner's ultimate goal is a state championship, and if all goes well he can definitely do that."

"Place as high as possible is always the goal," Angelstad said.



By virtue of the Faribault boys tennis team only rostering nine players and two managers this spring, every Falcon received a varsity letter at Monday's end of season awards ceremony at Faribault High School. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Anderson)

TRACK

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Shultz's first interaction with coach Berg was far from unusual; that's simply the kind of guy he was.

"Anytime that you were in his presence, you were in the presence of somebody who was a true leader, a champion human being and he cared for your best interests the whole time," said Warner, a co-captain of the 1981 team who participated in the hurdles, triple jump and relays.

None of the athletes could help themselves from speaking about the military veteran and their social studies teacher in the highest possible terms.

"Ev Berg was a fantastic coach, but, more importantly, an outstanding human being and a role model. I learned a lot not only about training from him, but about life in general," Schultz said.

"He was a humble guy. He had a great sense of humor. He was just very calming. He had a calming demeanor about him. Father-like figure. Just a good authority figure. Just the kind of guy you wanted to work for and impress," said Joe Cashman, another member of the 1981 squad. "It was an honor to know and learn from someone like coach Berg. I'll never forget the wisdom, humor and discipline he taught us."

Killen said Berg and his wife Pat were "significant influences" on his life and taught him about making a commitment, performing and having an expectation for excellence. Berg was about ethics, commitment and doing things in a quality way. Those lessons have played out in Killen's life and Killen said Berg was the most influential person in his life after his father and mother.

"Ev Berg was an institution. Just a tremendous leader. I was so fortunate to run



Nolan Randall, nephew of Willie Randall, is surrounded by athletes from the 1981 state championship team celebrate his birthday. Nolan along with his mother, Franny, tragically passed after being involved in a car accident five weeks after the state meet. (Submitted photo)

for him for all four years," Killen said.

But for as great of a person as he was, as difficult as it may be to believe, Berg was perhaps an even better track coach.

"I remember coming down to the locker room each Monday to see our workouts posted for the week," said Willie Randall, the team's other co-captain. "They were meticulously written and thought out. Every workout was building us towards our championship form. He knew exactly how far he could push us as we prepared for the state meet. We owe our accomplishment to his meticulous preparation and leadership."

Come the 1981 season, Berg had been at the helm of the Owatonna track and field team for quite some time and, yet, he had limited accolades to show for it. The competition in the Big 9 Conference, a trend that persists to this day, was ruthless. Section 1AA, rife with schools such as Burnsville, the Lakevilles and Apple Valley, was even

more so. Trips to the state tournament, no matter the sport, were rare, even with Owatonna's proclivity for producing talented athletes.

"We had been gradually getting to the point where we knew we had something senior year. We knew we had something special just with our practice times and the evolution of us from our junior into our senior year, becoming more mature, faster and stronger," Warner recalled. "We had been winning track meets throughout the season and just devastating anybody we ran against. Dual meets, triangulars, the Pony Relays we won, the Robbinsdale Robin Relays we won, the Faribault Invitational we won, we won the Owatonna Invitational, we won the Mankato Invitational. So, we'd been pretty dominant that whole season and we were expecting to go home with the gold. [But], not only did we want to win it for ourselves, we wanted to win it for Ev Berg.

More than anything, we wanted to win it for Coach Berg."

"Our team didn't like to lose and our team was always gunning for a win," Killen said. "We all knew after we qualified that we had the talent and ability to win. Now it was, can we perform?"

The State Meet and Tragedy

Randall will never forget the first moment he stepped on the track that Saturday afternoon.

"The Saturday of the meet was incredibly hot, so we huddled in the field house to stay out of the sun. The meet was going to last all day and Coach reminded us to stay inside to preserve our energy. At one point in the morning, a couple teammates came in from outside and enthusiastically insisted that we all go run around the track, so we did. It was about 30 minutes before the start of the first race and the stadium was completely full. As we jogged in front of the bleachers nearly half of the stadium erupted in cheers. They were cheering for us! Nearly half of the stadium was filled with Owatonna fans. The support we received by the town was unlike anything I would have ever expected at a track meet. There was no stopping us at that point."

While the Huskies ultimately only claimed one first place finish, Rick Schroeder took home gold in the 110-meter high hurdles with a time of 13.85 seconds, all eight of the athletes that participated scored points. Schultz came in fourth during the 400-meter dash; Warner claimed third in the 300-meter high hurdle event; Killen, as previously mentioned, earned a sixth place finish in the 800-meter run; the 1,600-meter medley relay team finished fourth; and the 1,600-meter relay team cemented the state championship with their second place result.

In all, the team scored 33 points to finish one ahead of Minneapolis Central and three clear of Bloomington Kennedy. It was Berg's

first state title and the first Owatonna boys track and field title in over three decades. No iteration of the Huskies have brought home a state championship since. And along for the entire ride was Nolan Randall.

Nolan was the young nephew of Willie and the son of Mary Fran, or "Franny" as she was widely known, Randall's sister.

Franny was a single mother, so Willie took young Nolan under his wing, attempting to fill both a brother- and father-figure role for the child that was desperately missing.

"Nolan was my shadow and he became a part of our team," Randall said. "For his birthday in April of my senior year, I asked the guys to bring over whoever could for a surprise birthday party. We bought him his own track uniform for him to wear to the meets. When we returned home from the state meet by charter bus, he was with us. And as Todd Hale interviewed each of us coming off the bus, Nolan was interviewed."

Willie and the rest of the team loved Nolan and Nolan loved them back.

It was five weeks after the conclusion of that state track meet when Willie's life was turned upside down.

Franny and Nolan had been involved in a car accident, Willie was notified. Neither survived.

"It was devastating," Randall said. "The team served as his pallbearers at his funeral, and each of them wearing their state medal, I placed one of mine with Nolan in the casket before he was buried. To help his memory and spirit for track to live on, the team created the Nolan Randall Memorial Track Award, voted on by the team to recognize the one athlete who was the heart of the team."

While Franny and Nolan may be gone, their memory will forever live on in the hearts and minds of Willie and the rest of the 1981 state champion track and field team.