

TRACK AND FIELD

'LET'S PUT ON A SHOW'

McCleary wins 1,600 title in dramatic fashion over future college teammate

By Jared Rubado
Perham Focus

St. Michael

Fans at the state Class A track and field meet were treated to an ending for the ages in the boys 1,600-meter championship.

Perham's Jakob McCleary won the state championship with a time of 4:21.12. It was 0.01 better than Nova Classical Academy's Finn McCormick.

"It's so awesome we got to do this against each other," McCormick said. "We talked before the race, after the race. We're just having fun out there. I told him before the race that we were going to put on a show. Let's have a good race and make it fast. We did it."

To the casual bystander, it was a race with an epic ending between two of the state's best runners. However, history will tell you it was the final showdown between two worthy rivals on the grandest stage of Minnesota high school running.

McCleary and McCormick have been side-by-side down the home stretch in two separate state tournaments during this athletic year.

In the fall, McCleary

beat McCormick by 35 seconds for the Class A cross country title. Despite leading the whole race, McCormick collapsed with the finish line in sight—opening the door for McCleary to run away with a lengthy win.

On Friday, McCormick made his move on the fourth and final lap of the 1,600-meter race at St. Michael-Albertville High School. It was clear the two University of Minnesota running commits were going to have one more battle in the high school ranks before becoming teammates.

"I was so close," McCormick said with a big smile. "The whole race, I just kept thinking, 'Stay in this.' Jakob took the third lap, and I was just going to sit behind him. I made the conscious decision to let him lead. I know he has a good kick, but I wanted to try to out-kick him. With 250 to go, my coach told me to go. I took off. I thought I had him. With 100 to go, I was still in the lead. I put another surge in, but he still got me in the last 20 meters."

Both runners lunged at the finish line, leaving McCormick on the ground once again. Because it was less frightening than his collapse at St. Olaf



Photos by Jared Rubado / Perham Focus

Perham's Jakob McCleary celebrates winning the 800-meter run for the second straight year on June 10 at St. Michael Albertville High School in the Class A state championships. McCleary ended his high school career with four state titles combined in cross country and track.

College in November, it made for an unforgettable conclusion to a race that left both runners' eyes glued to the STMA video board, awaiting a winner.

"I just didn't want my legs to give out on me," McCleary said on making a move to pass McCormick in the final seconds. "I thought to myself, 'OK, we're really doing this.' I'm throwing everything I have, and he's throwing everything he has. We gave our best effort. That's all you can really ask for when you have a competition."

Rivalry renewed

Both McCormick and McCleary acknowledge a rivalry between the two of them. However, it's rooted in immense respect. Their clash at the cross country championships grew their relationship off the track.

"I love racing Finn. He's a great competitor and a better guy," McCleary said. "I didn't talk to him much until I told him I was going to The U. It's just a rivalry that's set up in the perfect way. We had

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Perham's Jakob McCleary, left, and Nova Classical Academy's Finn McCormick run down the home stretch on June 10 at St. Michael Albertville High School in the Class A state championships.

Yellowjackets bring a bus full of hardware back from state

By Jared Rubado
Perham Focus

ST. MICHAEL – A half of a point can mean different things in different sports. At the Class A state track and field meet, it meant Nova Classical Academy Knights were boys state champions.

Perham finished with 47 team points after Thursday and Friday. It was less than a point away from Nova's state championship-winning total of 47.5. Despite a frustrating end, Friday's finals gave the Yellowjackets more than enough to celebrate.

The Perham girls finished in 12th place with a score of 23.5. Perham sent a bus full of athletes to compete in 17 events at state. Here's how it shook out.

Gracie Morris

Gracie Morris is busier than most eighth-graders.

As a prominent varsity athlete in cross country, gymnastics and track, Morris has to make time to practice in her running and field events. Between offseason camps and morning practices, she ensured her time was well spent with a second-place pole vault finish.

"I'm also a distance runner, so my whole season, I had to do all of my running practices in the morning," Morris said. "I did all of my pole vaults after school. It was a lot. I did camps for it in the winter too. It was just a cool day."

Her mark of 11-feet crushed her personal record set earlier this season.

"I got it by like six inch-



Photos by Jared Rubado / Perham Focus

Perham's Gracie Morris finishes second place in the pole vault with a personal record of 11-feet on June 10 at St. Michael Albertville High School in the Class A state championships.

es," Morris said laughing about setting her new personal record. "I kind of thought I was going to get fifth or something because my first two vaults, I was nervous and freaking out. I didn't believe (the coaches) when they said I had a chance to win."

In the week leading up to state, Morris felt more dialed in on the pole vault with a more pointed practice plan.

"I think what helped a lot was being able to focus more on the pole vault before state," Morris said. "I was still in the 4x400. I can handle doing both distance and the pole vault. When I have full energy, I think that helps a lot."

Morris was one of two girls and three Yellowjackets in total to pole vault at state. Natalie

Rooney finished in seventh place at 9-feet, 6-inches.

"When I get freaked out, (Rooney) helps me keep calm," Morris said. "She's older, so she has more experience. It's also just a lot better because when you don't have teammates, you don't know who to talk to before you go."

Levi Richter made it to state for the second year in a row in the pole vault. He cleared 12-feet for a 12th-place finish.

Morris has four more years of varsity competition left. "Uhh, yeah," Morris said when asked if she's motivated to return to state in her freshman season. "I want to get like 12-feet next year."

Lauryn Rustad

For the first time in her

career, Lauryn Rustad had to prepare for post-season track meets, which says a lot for a hurdler who broke the Perham school-record four times.

After losing all previous seasons to injuries and COVID-19, Rustad finally got a chance to compete with the big dogs. She finished in eighth place in the 100-meter hurdles with a time of 16.30.

"I've dealt with a lot of injuries," Rustad said. "Now that I'm here, I'm thankful God got me here. I was happy to be here for the experience and hopefully make it back for my senior year... I'm proud of the work that I've put in."

"I had stress fractures in cross country my junior year. In basketball, I struggled with some ankle injuries and



Perham's Lauryn Rustad, middle, runs the 100-meter hurdles to an eighth-place finish on June 10 at St. Michael Albertville High School in the Class A state championships.

the same stress fractures. I've been hurt for every single track season I've ever had. To be honest, the only real experience I had was a little bit at the beginning of last year before I got hurt. I had two or three meets before it was over."

Rustad broke her own school record on Friday with a time of 15.90.

"It took a lot of hard work and a lot of courage," Rustad said. "It takes perseverance. On a personal level, all my teammates and coaches have helped me with many things in my life, not just track. It's a very supportive team atmosphere. I'm so thankful for the coaches that I have."

The best of the rest

Senior Connor Kostynick wrapped up his high school throwing career with two medals.

He took third in the discus (158-01) and seventh in the shot put (49-feet, 2-inches). Kostynick's shot put mark was the best of his career. He competed in his first

state tournament after missing his sophomore and junior seasons with a torn ACL and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perham's 4x800 boys team of Bjorn Anderson, Micah Thompson, Caden Doll and Blake Swenson took fourth place with a time of 8:19.05. Anderson also ran in the 3,200-meter race in 9:47.01. The 4x400 team of Thompson, Aiden Kennedy, Blake Swenson and McCleary took fifth with a time of 3:29.00.

The team of Liz Birke-land, Caidyn Breid, Ella Hendrickson and Leelou Novotny took 10th place in the girls 4x800-meter relay. The 4x400 girls team of Lola Pulver, Morris, Novotny and Jaden Hackel finished in 12th place with a time of 4:11.04 in Friday's prelims.

Hackel snagged a third-place finish with another personal best in the triple jump. She recorded a mark of 36-feet, 7-inches.

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BASEBALL

Perham's record-setting season comes to an end

By Jared Rubado
Perham Focus



Jared Rubado / Perham Focus

From left to right: Rian Solberg, Ben Shumansky, Chas Melvin and Austin Aanenson stand on the first-base line in the first Section 8-2A championship game against Roseau on June 9. Perham fell in the second championship game 3-2.

which makes it all the more surprising they turned to small ball to keep their season alive.

Perham lived to fight at least one more day with a 5-3 win over Roseau in 11 innings on Thursday. On a day when the bats stayed cold, the ability to "do the little things" better than the North's second seed forced a second Section 8-2A title game.

"Today, it came down to small ball and being able to throw strikes out of the bullpen," Perham head coach James Mulcahy said. "It's no secret that we've been a power-hitting team all year long. When push came to shove, we played small ball... It says a lot when you have a big and strong team and ask them to play small ball to win. They haven't had to do a lot of this all year."

Schmidt drew a lead-off walk to start the top of the 11th inning in a 3-3 tie. Kovash, the designated hitter out of the eight-hole, dropped a perfect bunt down the third-base line. He forced an errant throw at first base, allowing Schmidt to score the

eventual game-winning run.

"We just had to get the job done," Kovash said. "We had to find ways to get runs. We didn't want to play another inning because 11 innings is a lot of baseball. (Schmidt) got on base, and Gage (Germolus) and I had really good bunts. I just want to do whatever it takes to win. I don't want to be selfish. I just want to do anything I can to get a win."

Germolus followed with another bunt one pitch later to set up Austin Aanenson, who doubled the lead on a ground ball to the shortstop.

"It comes down to who's more determined," Germolus said. "Obviously, we can hit the ball over the fence. It's doing the little things right like bunts and playing small ball that matter in games like this."

Bye hasn't seen much time on the mound this spring. However, he was asked to get some of Perham's biggest outs of the season.

After Rian Solberg gave the Yellowjackets a 3-2 lead in the top of the 10th, Roseau tied the

game in the next half inning on Gunderson's two-out, run-scoring single. Bye came in relief for Detloff, who was pulled to stay under 30 pitches, keeping his availability for game two on Friday.

Bye got the final four outs of the game to earn the win.

"We know he's got enough experience and how much he knows baseball," Mulcahy said of Bye. "He understood the situation. If we had to play 13, 14, 15 or 16 innings, we would ride him the rest of the way. We told him that. He's only come out of the bullpen a couple of times. He's one of our dudes that have to come out and perform, and he did that."

After the Rams took Tuesday's 8-2A semifinal game, Perham came into Thursday needing to earn a rubber match.

The Yellowjackets defeated Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton (18-8) 1-0 in the final game of the elimination.

The game's lone run came in the fifth inning. Kovash laced a double to right field before stealing third. He later scored on a fielder's choice.

There aren't many designated hitters sitting in the eighth spot every game. After an injury to senior Jack Mensing, Kovash was asked to step up and learn how to contribute at the varsity level earlier than expected.

"It speaks to him and his mentality," Mulcahy said of Kovash. "When Jack Mensing went down, we didn't know who our DH was. We didn't know what Evan's role was coming into this year... He sacrificed JV at-bats to get ready for varsity. Down the stretch, he's gotten his backside chewed a little

bit. He's had to figure out his role. He stepped up, which is a positive for a junior who didn't know what he was on this team."

One run was all Germolus needed on the mound. He threw six shutout innings, allowing just two hits and three walks. Schmidt came in to earn the save after Germolus reached the pitch-count limit of 115.

"When I was warming up in the bullpen, I thought to myself, 'This could be my last game,'" Germolus said. "I went out there and gave it my best. (DGF) did everything right today. They're a solid team, and they're a problem for us in our conference and section. They're always ready to play."

Needing to win three games to get to state and having every pitcher except Pulju available for Thursday, Mulcahy had a decision to make as to who would start game one. He turned to a senior and gave him a chance to have his signature playoff moment this spring.

"He has been that guy all year," Mulcahy said of Germolus. "He hasn't always had the toughest opponents. I told the guys yesterday that my decision was to throw Gage against DGF. I have confidence in Gage. You take a chance in saving your No. 1 (pitcher). If you save him and lose and you didn't use him, it's frustrating. I told him to do what he does best, and that's pound the strike zone, and the bats will come around. They didn't, but to get that performance out of him and run it all the way to 115 pitches is exactly what we needed."

Germolus opened the door for Perham's ace

in game two. Senior Chas Melvin threw seven strong innings. He allowed only one earned run, four hits, four walks and struck out five batters. Melvin tallied 117 pitches on the day.

"He started the entire year in football on both sides of the ball," Mulcahy said. He played almost every minute in basketball. You expect and you need your three-sport athlete, who has played every inning, every down and every minute to step up in those big situations."

Record setting year

Perham finished the season 24-3 and set multiple team records. Its 16-game winning streak is tied for the best in team history. Perham also did it in 1977 and 2019. The Yellowjackets recorded a program-best in hits (268), at-bats (772) and pitching wins (24) in 2022.

Chas Melvin set the program record for career hits with 95 and doubles with 24. Solberg is now the program leader in RBIs with 71. Gage Germolus tied the program record for best winning percentage with a 6-0 record. He also has the lowest single-season ERA at 0.23. Solberg tallied 43 RBIs this season, which is another program best. Aanenson recorded a 5-for-5 performance to break the team record for hits in a single game.

ROSEAU 000 003 0 - 3
PERHAM 000 200 0 - 2
PERHAM PITCHING- Blaiz Schmidt (LP) 5IP, 5H, 3R, 3ER, 4K, 2BB; Ashton Detloff 2IP, 1H, 0R, 0ER, 0K, 0BB
PERHAM HITTING- Austen Aanenson 1-3, BB; Chas Melvin 0-3, K; Ben Shumansky 2-3; Rian Solberg 1-3, R, 2B, K; Logan Pulju 2-3, R, 2RBI, 2B, HR; Evan Kovash 0-3; Gabe Bye 1-2, BB, K; Blaiz Schmidt 0-3, 2K; Gager Germolus 1-3, 2K
ROSEAU PITCHING- Aaron Wensloff (WP) 7IP, 8H, 2R, 2ER, 7K, 2BB
ROSEAU HITTING- Isaac Wensloff 0-3, BB; Alex Wensloff 2-4, 2B, K; Aaron Wensloff 0-2, R, BB, K; Cooper Flaig 1-4, R, 2B, RBI; Gavin Helgeland 1-3, R; Noah Urness 2-3, RBI; Gavin Gunderson 0-2, RBI; Gavin Jensen 0-3, K; Brady DeMars 0-3

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Jackets stay alive in 11 inning thriller

The Yellowjackets pride themselves on being a team of power,

SHOW

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some battles, and now it's going to be there in practice in a different way. We are going to push each other with that competitive spirit. I'll make sure I let him know about when I edged him out at state, as a joke, of course."

There were plenty of jokes to go around in the front of the pack on Friday. Both McCleary and McCormick tailed Nova's Henry Karelitz in the middle of the race. When McCleary made a move to take the lead, he let both of his opponents know it was go-time.

"Henry was leading the second lap. He led a great lap," McCormick said. "On the home stretch going into the third lap, I was right behind Jakob. He jumped ahead of Henry, leaned over and said, 'let's race.' I wanted to be in it with them, so I jumped up with Jakob and took second place. We rode it out for the last two laps."

"When Henry waved me through, I wanted to let them know it was time to race," McCleary said. "I wanted to fire it up and get us all going. I like when it gets a little chirpy in there. I think the sport needs that a little more. It was all in good fun."

McCormick was the first guy to hug McCleary after the results were revealed. It marked the end of a chapter in their careers as opponents. Now they will wear the same maroon and gold jersey in the fall.



Jared Rubado / Perham Focus

Perham's Jakob McCleary, left, and Nova Classical Academy's Finn McCormick celebrate finishing first and second in the 800-meter run on June 10 at St. Michael Albertville High School in the Class A state championships.

"It's going to be so fun," McCormick said. "I can already imagine all of the workouts next to each other-battling it out. It doesn't have to be such a competitive rivalry anymore. It can be a friendly one now. We'll have a great time."

The end of a storied high school career

Athletes like McCleary don't come around often, even at Perham. The senior left his final mark on the program with two more state championships to a historic running resume.

McCleary won the 800-meter race in 2021 with a time of 1:56.92. On Friday, he beat his junior-year title time by almost two seconds at 1:55.03 for his second consecutive 800-meter state championship.

After the Perham cross country team hosted its home meet at Arvig Park in October, McCleary said he had

four goals for his senior year. He wanted to win the Class A state cross country title, repeat in the 800-meter in track, win the 1,600-meter and commit to run for a major collegiate program. Eight months later, he checked off the last two boxes.

"Having goals and achieving them is the best feeling," McCleary said. "You're not going to reach every single goal you make. I have a goal for my next meet at Nike Nationals next weekend. I have a goal, but if I don't reach it, that's OK. But when you do reach that goal, it's a great feeling."

McCleary brought four state championships back to Perham High School in two seasons. It's an elite mark that he hopes another Yellowjacket will top sooner rather than later.

"I finished off my high school career with two state titles. That's not just good for me,

but my community," McCleary said. "It's good for these younger kids behind me. I want them to look at what I did and do better. I want them to tell themselves that they can beat Jakob McCleary if they work for it."

"Ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to be one of those guys that kids looked up to as a legend. I wanted to do the things I did, but it doesn't come without a supportive community and a school all being there for me."

McCleary is the only senior that ran for the Perham boys cross country and track teams at state meets in the 2021-22 season. Junior Micah Thompson knows he has some big shoes to fill next year, but he cherished his time on the track with a close friend.

"Jakob is all you could ever ask for as a leader," Thompson said. "As a teammate and a mentor, he's so smart. He's obviously a great runner, but he's a better friend. Running with him these past two years in cross and track, he's just been an inspiration to all of us. He genuinely wants us to beat him."

McCleary has earned some time to cool down.

"I'm going to go surfing with some friends," McCleary said of his plans after he gets back from nationals. "I'm ready to enjoy the water, and I'm definitely ready to eat some ice cream. I think about it now and how I'll say it'll be nice to chill out, but I know I'll be sitting there waiting for the next time I can go on a run."

GOLF

Belka siblings to compete at state after winning section titles

By Jared Rubado
Perham Focus

BEMIDJI – Perham is sending two golfers to the state meet at Ridges at Sand Creek in Jordan, and they come from the same household.

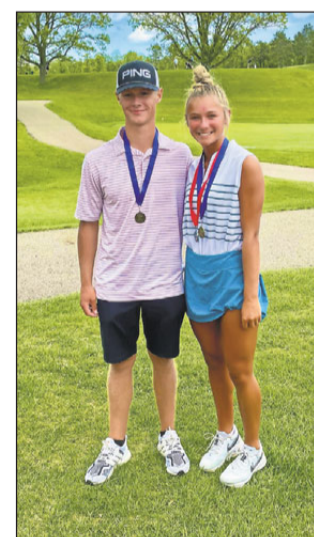
Marcus and Mallory Belka won the individual Section 8-2A tournaments last week to punch their tickets to state.

Marcus finished with a two-day score of 152, which was two strokes better than Fergus Falls' Riley McGovern in second place.

Marcus made four birdies on day one to finish five-over-par. He made eight straight pars on day two before adding another birdie to finish one-under-par on the front nine. He rounded out his day at three-over-par and eight-over for the tournament.

Mallory beat out Park Rapids' Anna Eckmann by six strokes for the Section 8-2A title. She also made four birdies on the first day before adding four more on the second day.

Mallory is the defending state champion and will defend her title



Contributed / Twitter / @YellowjacketAD

Perham's Marcus, left, and Mallory Belka win the Section 8-2A individual golf championships in Bemidji on June 8. Both will compete at state for the second straight spring.

starting on June 14 in Jordan. Marcus is also headed back to state for the second year in a row. He finished in third place at the 2021 section meet before falling out of the top ten on day two of the state meet.

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