

INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



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IT'S STATE OR BUST FOR AREA ATHLETES



With lots of postseason action featuring athletes from all Carlton County schools, the Pine Knot News is filling seven pages inside with all the action. Photographer Dan Saletel captured the orange-out for Cloquet fans at the home section semifinal volleyball match Nov. 3, a sign of unity and an homage to Halloween past and deer hunting future. The Lumberjacks won against Hermantown but just missed state qualification over the weekend in a loss to Grand Rapids. Look for all the hits and misses inside, beginning on **Page 9**.

Say hello to "Bye Bye Birdie" on Esko stage

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After last year's Covid uncertainties, Esko musical theater directors didn't want to revive the fall musical with anything too dark.

"We had enough drama in 2020, so we wanted it to be something that was very uplifting," said Esko choir director Meghan Knudsen.

Enter "Bye Bye Birdie," a 1963 American musical comedy about a 1950s rock-n-roll star, Conrad Birdie, who travels to the small town of Sweet Apple to make his "farewell" television performance before he is inducted into the Army ... and kiss his biggest fan, Kim MacAfee. Things aren't as simple as they seem, however, because MacAfee has recently been "pinned" to local boy, Hugo, and Birdie's manager and his longtime secretary Rose have even more on their minds.

With 40 cast and crew members — plus two elementary students making cameo appearances —



Teens in the town of Sweet Apple spread the word — with old-school telephones — that Kim MacAfee and Hugo Peabody "got pinned" and are now boyfriend and girlfriend. Esko High School's production of "Bye Bye Birdie" kicked off Thursday night and will continue through next Sunday. *Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

"Bye Bye Birdie" is packed with humor, songs, dance, teenage drama and a small dose of real life issues, just

to remind folks what really matters.

Co-directed by Joyce Bergstedt and Emily Waldo,

Bergstedt said Waldo did the groundwork, doing character sketches and making sure they have the student

numbers and talent to make a particular show work.

Continued on back page

SPORTS

STATE CROSS COUNTRY MEET



Cromwell-Wright junior Noah Foster, center, ran to fourth place in the Class A state cross country meet Saturday in Northfield. It was the top finish for any Carlton County runner. MSHSL photo

A final, mighty run

C-W's Foster is top area finisher at state meet

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Carlton County sent more than 35 runners to the cross country state championships Saturday, and they came back with some impressive results.

Most impressive of all was Cromwell-Wright junior Noah Foster, who placed fourth in the boys Class A meet at St. Olaf College in Northfield. Foster ran the 5,000-meter race in 16:26.03. It was a big jump from his finish in 117th place as a freshman, although not quite the first-place spot he was gunning for.

Less than a second separated Foster and the second- and third-place winners, who finished in 16:25.02 and 16:25.93. Individual champion Jakob McCleary,

a senior from Perham, was the clear winner, roughly 16 seconds ahead of all of them. But he will graduate this year and Foster won't, which will give the Cardinals top runner another crack at his state goal.

Cromwell coach Pete Koenig thinks that's possible, because he knows what kind of work ethic it takes to be successful at cross country, and Foster has it.

"Cromwell has some great sports programs and coaches, but in cross country, it's the kids. It's not a team. It's all on them and they have to work hard," he said, pointing to the roughly 300 miles Foster put in over the summer. "When they work hard, good things happen."

The next-best Carlton County runner in the Class A meet was

Esko senior Nathaniel Rengo, who took 33rd place in 17:19.11.

The Esko boys qualified as a team for state, and finished in 14th place with 231 points, one point behind the 13th-place team and two points behind the 12th-place team. Other Esko finishers included junior Benjamin Meysembourg in 59th place, senior Michael Cornell in 78th, senior Jack McWilliams in 85th, freshman Alec Halvorson in 141st and senior Zach Erkkila in 155th place.

Esko coach Jerimy Hallsten was very happy. "Everyone ran a great race and put forth the tremendous effort that they have all year," he said.

Other local runners finished Saturday as follows:
For the Rebels, junior Shawn

Bailey took 67th place and senior Joseph Mikrot 111th.

Jack Riley of Carlton/Wrenshall took 99th place.

Panthers freshman Alex Burckhardt placed in 75th, ahead of half the field of 159 runners as a freshman, Panthers coach Jeremy Polson pointed out.

Class A girls

Polson was thrilled with his South Ridge girls team, which finished second to the Carlton/Wrenshall girls team at sections to qualify for state, then beat the Raptors at the Class A girls meet Saturday. South Ridge finished with 287 points for 12th place at state, while the Raptors finished in 14th with 302 points.

Continued on next page



Esko senior Jack McWilliams passes another runner during the Class A state meet Saturday. Contributed photo

STATE SOCCER TOURNAMENT

'Jacks hit a stadium wall

Girls get fourth at state tourney

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The Cloquet girls soccer team ended its state run last week with two losses and a fourth place in Class AA.

The Lumberjacks took to the big stage at U.S. Bank Stadium Thursday afternoon in a semifinal game against top-seeded Benilde-St. Margaret's. It was the Red Knights who defeated Cloquet-Carlton 3-0 and advanced into the state finals, while Cloquet faced Holy Angels in Friday's third-place contest, a 6-1 loss.

Sadie Senich said the team had waited for this trip to state for a long time,

because last year's state competition was canceled because of the pandemic.

"For most of us, as soon as we left [the section championship game], we were already thinking of what we could do with the team this year," Senich said. "Then to be able to advance past the first round was a dream for us."

In the semifinals, the Red Knights played outstanding defense and worked the ball meticulously on offense. Although they controlled action early on, it wasn't until the 25-minute mark when Elizabeth Deitzen beat Cloquet goalkeeper Kaitlyn Olson off a corner kick to give the Red Knights a 1-0 lead.

The Red Knights made it 2-0 at 33-minutes, when Kiya Gilliland took advan-

tage of a pass from Ava Wagener and beat Olson over her right shoulder. The Lumberjacks had a tough time breaking past the defense, managing only two first-half shots on goal compared to four for the Red Knights.

"We knew that both teams we played were good, very good," coach Dustin Randall said. "They were fast, played good defense and moved so well with and without the ball."

Although the 'Jacks hoped to cut the lead in the second half, Benilde-St. Margaret's continued to control play and took a 3-0 lead at the 69-minute mark as Gilliland scored her second goal of the game to ensure the victory.

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Alexa Snesrud (12) gets to a rebound off teammate Katie Turner's shot to score a goal in Friday morning's Class AA third-place soccer match with Holy Angels in West St. Paul. The 'Jacks settled for fourth place. Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News

State run ...

Continued from previous page

Panthers Addison Burckhardt — a North Woods freshman who runs on the collaborative team and who finished first at sections — was the top local girls finisher, in 42nd place and a time of 20:28.73. Her teammate, sophomore Evelyn Brodeen, finished two spots behind her in 44th place at 20:29.05.

Polson said it was their best team finish ever.

“[It was a] great experience and team effort,” he said. “We return most of the team and have strong up and coming runners.”

The top Carlton/Wrenshall runner was seventh-grader Brielle Simula in 82nd, followed by Sara Cid in 90th, Abby Cid in 103rd, Ruth Sandstrom in 109th, Isabel Riley in 127th, Emma Cid in 130th and Morgan Laveau in 146th place.

Raptors coach Erik Holter said the combined team prepared for the postseason “knowing that their races were about bigger things than themselves.”

“They ran for the glory of God and also for people that are



Cloquet sophomore Elise Sertich races in the midst of a pack of runners from across the state at Saturday’s Class AA meet. Sertich took 84th place. *Photos by Dana Sanders*

special to them that have passed away or people close to them who were not healthy. Let alone their mental preparedness, their work ethic at practice shined,” he said after the section meet. “They showed up each day ready to work and do exactly what the coaches had prepared for them. They certainly have peaked at the right moment.”



Other individual Class A local girls runners included repeat state qualifiers Esko senior Grace Hrabik, who finished in 66th place in 20:56.28, and Cromwell-Wright’s Emaleigh Olesiak, who took 87th place, finishing in 21:27.45.

Hallsten expects a strong performance from his team next year too. “[They] set the bar for next year’s team,” he said, rattling off a list of returning runners.

Class AA

Following the Section 7AA meet in Cloquet on Oct. 28, the consensus from the second-place Cloquet boys team was that the temperature — a gray day with temperatures in the 40s — was ideal for running.

That wasn’t the case for the northern boys at the state meet in Northfield Saturday. By the time

the Class AA boys race started, the temperature was almost 70 degrees with direct sun.

“Overall they ran well. No PRs (personal records) with the warm temperatures, but they had a nice race,” said assistant Cloquet coach Ryan Zimny. “But the heat definitely was a factor.”

Only one girl qualified for state on the girls’ side, Elise Sertich, who finished in 21:02.14, good enough for 84th place as a sophomore.

As a team, the Cloquet boys took 11th place out of 16 teams with 281 points; the top five runners make up the score. Zimny said that’s the highest finish they’ve had in the past several years as a team at state.

The boys finished in the field of 160 runners as follows:

Jake Mertz: 38th place
Miles Fischer: 42nd

Cloquet senior Jake Mertz leads a pack of runners at the Class AA state meet Saturday. Mertz was the top Cloquet boys runner at the meet, placing 38th individually. The boys team took 11th overall.

Sam Buytaert: 67th
Calvin Snesrud: 130th
Cale Prosen: 147th
Alex Zegan: 149th
Ben Sanders: 157th

Mertz passed Fischer in the later stages of the race, crossing the finish line almost seven seconds ahead of his teammate and closest competitor, at 17:12.21 to Fischer’s time of 17:19.13. Senior Sam Buytaert also had a strong race, finishing in 17:42.68.

The state experience is a little less stressful, Zimny said.

“It’s always nice to finish off the season with a trip to the state meet,” he said. “It’s a celebration of the hard work they put in without the stress of sections where they are trying to qualify for state, so it is a bit of a more relaxed atmosphere for them, even though they are still trying to run their best.”

CONGRATULATIONS

Esko Football team on their Section 7AAA Championship!

Best of Luck at the State Tournament!

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AND
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FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

Eskomos win title thriller over Gobblers

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Prior to Esko's Section 7AAA championship game against Aitkin, Eskomos head coach Scott Arntson told anyone who would listen to him that the game would be a dogfight. He based his thoughts on the fact that when the two teams met earlier in the season, Esko managed to sneak out a 2-point win.

Arntson was right. The Eskomos pulled out another close win Thursday when they booted a field goal, making the final 17-14 and sending Esko to the state tournament.

"It was a good game and that was exactly what we expected going into the game," said Arntson. "Nothing surprised me."

Playing at the University of Minnesota Duluth and Maloskey Stadium, the Eskomos wasted little time in taking a lead on a spectacular play by Koi Perich — who raced 69 yards for a touchdown, making it 7-0 after an extra-point kick by Wyatt Stankiewicz.

"Koi is simply a great player when you can isolate for him. If he gets in space he's pretty dynamic," said Arntson. "What a lot of people didn't realize is that Devonte Gregory made a big block on that play."

Another second-quarter score by the Eskomos gave the appearance the game was going to be a blowout. Nolan Witt slammed into the end zone from 6 yards out and Stankiewicz tacked on the extra-point kick, pushing the lead to 14-0.

Arntson was proven prophetic when the Gobblers scored on an 8-yard pass after a turnover by Esko, pulling the Gobblers to 14-6 after the Eskomos snuffed out a 2-point conversion run.

"We turned the ball over and they had a short field and they put it in," said Arntson. "I looked up at the scoreboard and thought to myself, 'Here we go, we're in a game now.'"

Late in the third quarter things got even more interesting after the Gobblers added a 38-yard touchdown run that tied the game after the 2-point conversion run.

"As I said before we knew that even though we were up early that Aitkin would be there at the end," said Arntson. "They are just a tough team to play."

Esko needed a big drive to find a way to slow the methodical push of the Gobblers and they got it midway through the fourth quarter on a couple of big pass completions to Carter Zezulka and Koi Perich.

"We kept shooting ourselves in the foot, but those two big catches got us out of trouble," Arntson said.

Eventually the Eskomos got down inside the 5-yard line with five minutes left and a fourth-down decision to make.

"Really the decision was about what would happen if we made a field goal and the kickoff after that," said Arntson. "We knew that Wyatt (Stankiewicz) would



The Esko team celebrates after a wild win in Duluth last week and a section championship. *Photos by Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News*



Esko's Wyatt Stankiewicz kicks what became a game-winning 20-yard field goal with quarterback Ty Christensen holding to put the Eskomos ahead 17-14 with 5:25 left in the fourth quarter.



probably make the kick and then he usually kicks the ball to the end zone on kickoffs, so we felt that they'd have to go 80 yards to score and we liked our chances, so that is what we did."

Stankiewicz knocked the field goal through, making it 17-14.

"After we kicked off, we got

a stop and we knew we could not turn the ball over to them again," Arntson said. "When we were talking on the sidelines as we went back out on offense, we were trying to figure out what are the safest plays we can run so we didn't give the ball back to them." In the end, the Eskomos had



Above: Esko's Carter Zezulka leaps to make a catch over Aitkin's Carson Kullhem Thursday. **Left:** Joey Antonutti rips the ball away from Aitkin's Zack Ehnstrom.

just enough to pick up the win and will now play in the state tournament against an upstart New London-Spicer squad.

"They were 3-5 entering the playoffs," Arntson said. "Now they are 6-5 so they are playing their best football of the year."

The quarterfinal game will

take place at 1 p.m. Saturday at Brainerd High School.

"The guys were ready against Aitkin and we were lucky enough to get just enough breaks to win," Arntson said.

This is Esko's second state appearance with Arntson as head coach.

FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

Bombers’ run ends

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After a 5-3 regular season, the Barnum football team got on a roll in the Section 7A playoffs. The Bombers steamrolled Mille Lacs in their quarterfinal game, and then did the same to North Woods in their semifinal matchup. Last Friday the story-book-style ending came up a bit short as Deer River ended the Bombers season in a 32-8 final at Proctor’s Terry Egerdahl Memorial Field.

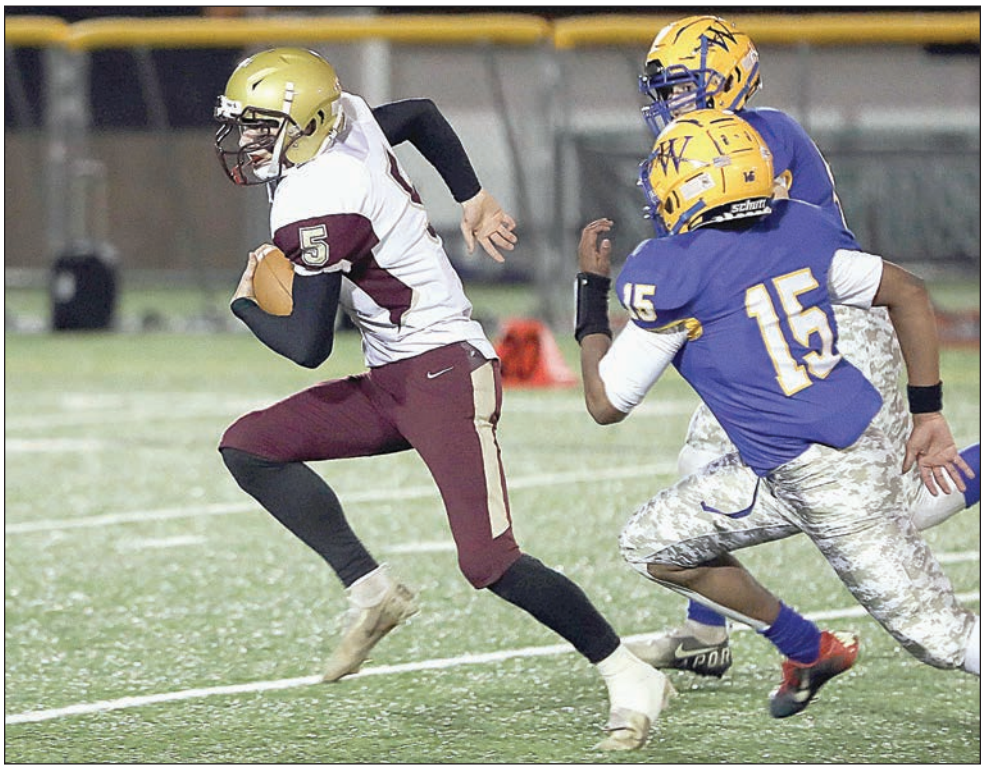
“I was so pleased and excited for the kids and couldn’t have asked for more,” said Barnum coach Rob Minkkinen. “Prior to the season, Deer River and North Woods were considered the favorites in the section. Our guys worked hard to find a way to get into that top tier of teams in our section.”

Barnum avenged an early-season defeat at the hands of North Woods, but were unable to do the same against a stout defensive team from Deer River

Friday night. “They are a talented, well-coached, physical team,” Minkkinen said of the Warriors. “They have good backs and we made just too many mistakes to win.” Both of the Warriors’ first scores came as a result of miscues by the Bombers offense. “On our first possession we bobbled a ball that was taken away by the defense and eventually resulted in a score,” said Minkkinen. “Then they blocked a punt, which allowed them another short field for a score, so that put us in a hole early.”

Trailing 26-0, the Bombers were able to score just before halftime when quarterback Hayden Charboneau hit Caden Sheff for a 60-yard touchdown pass. Following the 2-point conversion run by Sheff, the score stood 26-8 at halftime. “After halftime our guys dug in their heels and did a great job defensively and of avoiding mistakes,” said Minkkinen. “They didn’t score again until about 30

seconds left in the game. Our field position was better because we avoided the fumbles and interceptions. Our guys came out and played a very physical game, but we just had some unfortunate things go against us early in the game that we weren’t able to overcome.” Charboneau had an impressive game at quarterback as he went 15-for-30 in the passing department, good for 191 yards and a touchdown. Joe Peterson caught six catches for 54 yards and Sheff added a pair of catches for 73 yards and a score. On defense, Sheff had a big game with 18 tackles. Max Moors finished with 12 tackles and both Willie Richardson and Alec Sparks had 11 tackles. Richardson also forced a fumble in the game. “Our guys came to play and had a couple of things go wrong early, but I couldn’t be prouder of how far this group has come,” said Minkkinen. “I also couldn’t have asked much more from this group. Our



Above: Barnum’s Caden Sheff runs past the Deer River defense for a first-half touchdown during Friday’s Section 7A football championship in Proctor. **Right:** Willie Richardson makes a catch in front of Deer River’s Ethan Williams. *Photos by Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News*



kids did a nice job all season and should be proud of how well they did.”

Early Ogilvie attack drops South Ridge

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In early October, South Ridge lost 20-12 to Ogilvie. On Friday, the teams met again, but this time they were playing for the Section 5 nine-man championship. The Lions pounced on the Panthers this time, pulling away to a 42-0 win and securing the section title.

“They hit us with a big passing play early,” said South Ridge coach Brent Johnson. “We just haven’t reacted well all season when we get down early.”

The big play was a Bryce Nelson 50-yard touchdown pass to Ryan Schumacher that gave Ogilvie an 8-0 lead after a 2-point conversion by Noah Bitz, and that’s how the first quarter ended.

Things got even more difficult for the Panthers in the second quarter as they gave up two more touchdowns. The first Ogilvie score in the quarter was Bitz popping into the end zone from 10 yards out, followed by Nelson tacking on a 2-point conversion run for a score of 16-0.

The second score was another Nelson-to-Schumacher pass for 3 yards. It was 24-0 at halftime.

“Our whole season has been kind of up and down,” said Johnson, adding that they lost the first two games of the year and were 3-4 going into the playoffs.

Unfortunately, the Panthers suffered a pair of significant injuries to twins Jaxon and Aaron Bennet. Jaxon, the running back, had his season come to a close in a game against McGregor and was not available for the last game of the season or the playoffs. Aaron, the star quarterback, got hurt in the third quarter of Friday’s loss to Ogilvie. Those two injuries along with a season-long, nagging shoulder problem for lineman Joe Stokke took a toll on South Ridge as the season progressed.

“We tried to respond to Ogilvie and at times we would get a little something going, but then we weren’t consistent,” Johnson said. “We decided to try and spread things out and would make a nice play or two and then we couldn’t connect on the



South Ridge quarterback Aaron Bennett keeps the ball on a run play as the Panthers face Ogilvie Friday night in Esko. *Dan Saletel / Pine Knot Sports*

passes.” The lone score of the third quarter was another Nelson-to-Schumacher pass. In the fourth quarter, Nelson added an 80-yard touchdown run to make it 36-0 and then Blitz added his second running touchdown on a 10-yard touchdown run.

Aaron Bennett led the Panthers with 85 yards passing in a nine-for-25 performance. He also tacked on 25 rushing yards to lead his squad in that department. Ogilvie put up 443 yards of total offense compared to 124 for the Panthers.

“It was nice to get to the section title game,” said Johnson. “I don’t think a lot of teams thought we’d get that far after having those two losses right at the start of the season, so the guys fought back and got rewarded for how hard they worked.”

IT'S STATE TOURNAMENT TIME!

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GOOD LUCK AT STATE!

FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

The Moose Lake/Willow River football team celebrated another entry into the state football tournament last week after a 63-0 drubbing of Mesabi East in the Section 7AA championship game in Esko. *Photos by Dan Saletel / Pine Knot News*

Rebels bull their way to state tournament

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The Moose Lake/Willow River football team isn't taking anything for granted, especially the Section 7AA championship last week. On Thursday, they defeated Mesabi East 63-0, after beating the Giants 64-0 in early October.

"It was good to see the team not looking past this team to bigger games down the road," said Rebels head coach Dave Louzek. "We will watch game film with the players and correct any mistakes and work as we enter the state tournament."

The Rebels advanced to a state quarterfinal game against West Central Area/Ashby Thursday in Brainerd, after this issue of the Pine Knot News went to press. (Look for an update at pineknotnews.com.)

The Rebels wasted little time in establishing their dominance over the Giants. On the second offensive play by Mesabi East, the Rebels caused and recovered a Giants fumble. With the Rebels now on offense, Logan Orvedahl raced in for a 16-yard touchdown scamper. After the Sam Knezevich extra point kick, Moose Lake/Willow River was up 7-0 just 1:43 into the game.

"Playing well right from the start shows how ready our kids were to play," Louzek said. "Causing the fumble and scoring quickly put no doubt into which team was going to control this game."

Orvedahl ran for four touchdowns and a total of 173 rushing yards on just 12 carries Thursday at Esko Stadium.

"Logan Orvedahl has been outstanding all season long," Louzek said. "He is a leader on the field, during practice, and in the locker room. This team works very hard for each other and the players are achieving great success together. They know they all must do their jobs in practice during the week and at games for great individual efforts to occur."

Just three plays later, the Rebels defense forced the Giants to punt. Four plays later, Orvedahl scored on a 60-yard touchdown gallop on fourth down. Knezev-



Henry Ribich gets some blocking help from quarterback Adam Neumann on a run play Thursday against Mesabi East.

ich added the extra point and it was 14-0 with just 5:12 gone.

On Mesabi East's third series, the Rebels' Kaden Robbins stepped in on a pass attempt to get the turnover. Jackson Thompson raced in for a 29-yard touchdown jaunt on the next play, making it 20-0 with 7:12 gone. The Rebels extra point kick was blocked, one of the very few highlights for the Giants.

Before the first quarter ended, the Rebels would add yet another score when Adam Neumann

tossed a 26-yard pass to Landin Kurhajetz for a touchdown and Knezevich's extra point boot pushed the lead to 27-0.

The Rebels offense continued making big plays making on offense in the second quarter, including a 54-yard touchdown scamper by Orvedahl, a 44-yard touchdown dash from Thompson and another Orvedahl touchdown run, this time from 29 yards out. The Rebels led 48-0 at halftime after three more extra-point kicks by Knezevich.

"This team, like all Rebel teams, was very focused for the section championship game," Louzek said. "Our regular season preparation is always geared towards playoff success and the players understand that. Having beaten Mesabi East earlier in the season did not present a problem for getting our kids to work hard and be ready for this game as they are working to become better every game with the hopes of competing for a state championship."

At halftime, the head coaches agreed that the game should go into running time. That usually occurs if a team has a 35-point lead in the fourth quarter, but it's up to the coaches.

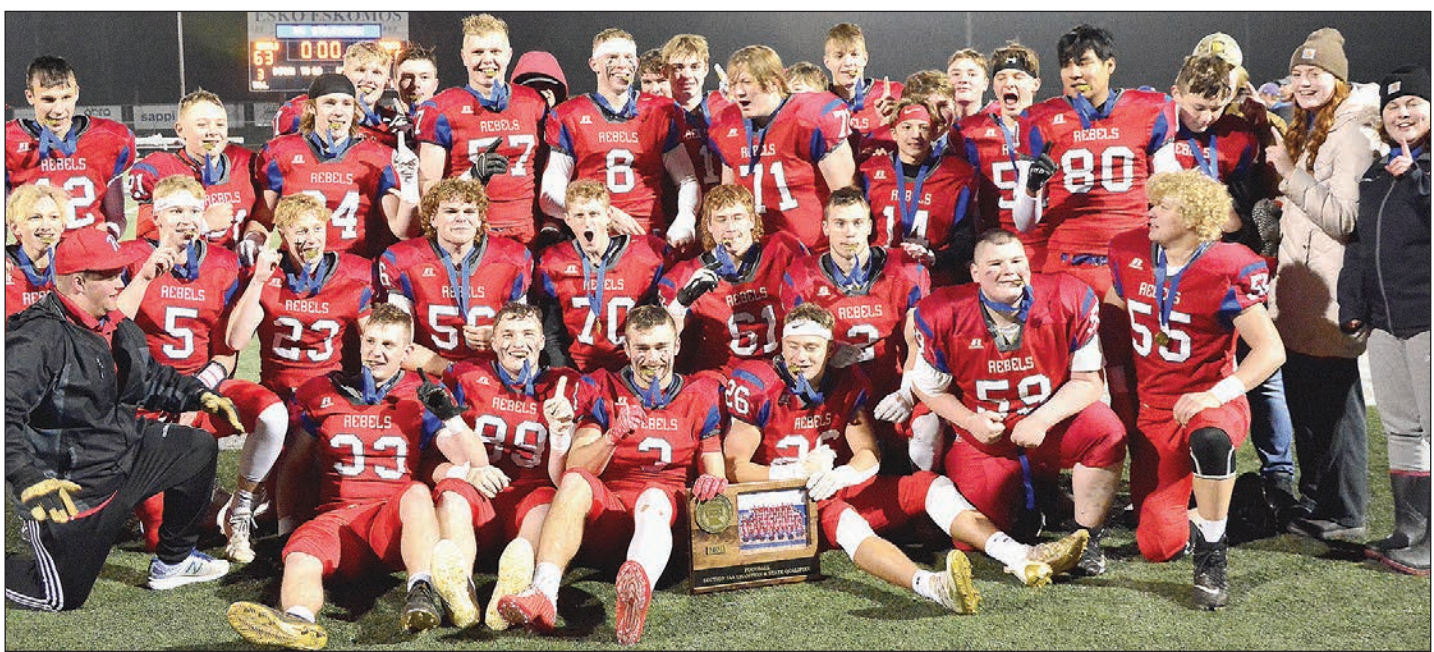
Even with the game in running time, the Rebels managed a safety and a Duane Broughton 36-yard touchdown run in the third quarter, pushing their lead to 57-0 with the extra-point kick by Knezevich.

Perhaps overlooked by many opponents is the strength of the Rebels defense. The Rebels gave up just 77 total yards to the Giants and held them to negative three rushing yards on offense.

"Our defense has been outstanding all season long," Louzek said. "During the regular season, they held opponents scoreless for 19 consecutive quarters. As a unit, they are physical and very fast to the football which makes it difficult for offenses to consistently have sustained drives against us."

The lone Rebel score in the fourth quarter came on a fantastic 95-yard touchdown dash by Jaxyn Schmidt.

A huge key to the juggernaut Rebels has been the impressive line play they bring. "The offensive and defensive lines are the anchor of our team," Louzek said. "Our success starts with them. They are fast, physical, and very-well conditioned to wear down opponents over four quarters."



The Rebels celebrate with the section title trophy.

VOLLEYBALL PLAYOFFS

Grand Rapids blocks Cloquet's state bid

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Cloquet volleyball had a busy week in pursuit of its first ever trip to the state tournament. The final week began with a semifinal victory over Hermantown last Wednesday, Nov. 3. The Lumberjacks beat Hermantown 3-1 to advance to the section finals. Senior Breea Rasmussen led the way with a career-high 15 kills and 14 digs. Sophomore sensation Ava Carlson continued her successful season with 16 kills and 18 digs. Senior middle hitter Geneveve Fonoti had nine kills and four blocks, junior Aili Buytaert had 11 kills, and sophomore Carly Johnson was running the show with 43 set assists. Sophomore Quinn Danielson was the defensive stopper with 24 digs. Coach Heidi Anderson was pleased with how her 'Jacks were able to dispose of the Hawks. "We had a nice balanced attack. We start four sophomores and people forget that we had no playoffs last year," she said. "So many of these girls are experiencing their first ever playoff run. And with Hermantown being in the Lake Superior Conference with us and a rival, the girls were looking forward to playing them." The young 'Jacks headed to the Section 7AAA finals Saturday, Nov. 8.

In the history of Cloquet volleyball, the team has played in the section finals only three times, the last time in 2013. Cloquet earned the second seed and was facing top-seeded Grand Rapids. The two teams last met Oct. 14, with Rapids winning convincingly. But coach Anderson pointed out that one day before that match, starting setter and senior Emerson Rock suffered a back injury and wasn't available. The 'Jacks were struggling with a new setter and lineup. Fast forward three weeks, and Cloquet has established a new setter with Carly Johnson running the show and Rock coming off the bench to provide some senior leadership. Rock said it was tough not being able to play the last games of the season, but she learned she could still make an impact. "I was able to mentor the younger players even more during this time, giving them advice and tips

on how to succeed," Rock said. Before the game, Anderson listed three requirements to beat Rapids. "They surprised us last time by serving short. So we have been practicing all week for that. And we need to do a better job on first contact. And we need to transition better from defense to offense." Anderson, head coach for 18 seasons now, gave a scouting report of the Thunderhawks before the game. "They have a few more hitters than what we faced in the semis. They run some quick middle attacks and they have a tall, left-handed setter that likes to hit the ball over on two." The advice that Anderson gave her team was, "Do your best, compete and enjoy the experience of being in the finals. They are hard to make, and it has been eight years since we were in the last one." Minutes before the match, Grand Rapids coach Bekah Sutherland shared what her team needed to do to advance to St. Paul. "We need to serve successfully. By that, I mean we need to serve our zones and serve the players we have targeted." Sutherland continued, "We blocked well against them the first time we saw them and served well to keep them out of system. We need to be mentally ready." Rapids also has a young squad with only one senior starter. The table was set. Now it was time for the big game. Cloquet was attempting to earn its first ever trip to State. Nerves seemed to be in play as the 22-6 'Jacks couldn't stop the booming hits from an array of Grand Rapids attackers. Carlson and Fonoti tried to keep Cloquet on pace, but Cloquet lost the first game 25-12. Kyra Giffen, Kamryn Klinefelter and Katelyn Jamtgaard combined for 11 kills. Game 2 started out with Cloquet having a few good plays followed by unforced errors of serving long or hitting out of bounds. Every time the 'Jacks tried to make a run, Rapids seemed to come up with the ace kill or block. Especially effective was the Rapids setter Braya LaPlant with her array of shoot sets to the outside, quick middle attacks or setting her back row hitters, mainly senior outside hitter Klinefelter. Grand Rapids



Cloquet's Aili Buytaert stretches to get to a ball during Saturday's Section 7AAA championship volleyball match with Grand Rapids. Photos by Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News

took game two, 25-15. Cloquet seemed to settle down in the third set as Rasmussen, Buytaert, Fonoti and Carlson all had big kills. The two teams traded points down the stretch but a few missed timing plays between setter and hitter came at the wrong time, and Rapids finished the sweep with a 25-21 score. The Lumberjacks were led by Carlson with nine kills while Rasmussen, Fonoti and Buytaert all chipped in with six each. Johnson had 22 set assists. "They are tough," said Anderson after the match. "Several kids can score for them. They have a lot of weapons. I am pleased with my team's effort. They put everything they had on the court. They had a good season." Rapids was led by Klinefelter, who had a team-high 13 kills, with Jamtgaard and Giffen both finishing with nine kills apiece. After the match, LaPlant, a 5'11" setter for Rapids who also contributed six kills, said it was "amazing" to be headed to state.

"A lot of us have been playing together since third grade," she said. "We played so hard today because we didn't want to waste it." Grand Rapids is now 21-9 and ranked seventh out of 61 in AAA. They are seeded fifth at the Class AAA state tournament. Making first-team All Conference is LaPlant and junior libero Lindsey Racine. Kyra Giffen made the second team. LaPlant later learned she made the All State team, which consists of the top 18 players in the state at each division. Cloquet fell to 22-7 and ranked 14th out of 61, one of their highest finishes ever. Ava Carlson was also selected to the All State team. Rock earned first-team Lake Superior Conference honors with Carlson and Buytaert earning second-team honors. "As captain, I am so proud of the success our team had this season," Rock told the Pine Knot this week. "We did a good job of

taking it one game at a time and not getting ahead of ourselves. We focused on how we needed to play as a team to take down each opponent as we faced them." As for the season totals, Carlson led Cloquet with 330 kills. Buytaert was second with 195 and Rasmussen had 149. Johnson had 59 ace serves with Carlson next at 55. Danielson led the team with 250 digs followed by Carlson at 193, Johnson with 191 and Rasmussen 179. Rock finished her season with 561 set assists and just under 1,616 for her career. She finishes her career with 144 ace serves, 222 kills and 572 digs. "It is hard to think about my high school volleyball career wrapping up, as this sport and my coach, Heidi Anderson, have been such a big part of my life and have made such a positive impact," Rock said. Cloquet also will lose Geneveve Fonoti, Breea Rasmussen and Laura Hecht.



A historic year for Cloquet volleyball ended last week with a second-place in the section. In the history of Cloquet volleyball, the team has played in the section final only three times, the last time in 2013. A Cloquet team has never made it to the state tournament. Grand Rapids is making its sixth appearance at state.

VOLLEYBALL PLAYOFFS

South Ridge earns first trip to state tournament

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South Ridge earned its first ever state volleyball appearance Saturday by defeating Northeast Range 3-1 in front of a large crowd at the Lincoln Elementary School in Hibbing. After coming from behind Wednesday against Ely, the Panthers used that momentum to advance to the state girls state volleyball tournament this week at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

The Panthers came out a little slow Saturday, falling behind 9-2 to the Nighthawks in the very first set, but a timeout by head coach Brad Olesiak got the team refocused. The Panthers went on a 22-13 run to defeat Northeast Range 25-22 in the first set.

"I knew the girls were excited and ready to go Saturday," Olesiak said. "So when we fell behind early, I just told the girls to slow down and focus and we will be fine." Following the timeout, the Panthers controlled the tempo and

the win gave them the confidence that they could do it.

The second set again saw the Panthers continue to play fast, pass the ball well and press the Nighthawks into several unforced errors which resulted in a 25-14 victory in the second set.

"We knew what our game plan was, where we wanted to serve the ball and to keep their best player on the defensive rather than offensive," Olesiak said.

Keeping Hannah Reichensperger from dictating the action for the Nighthawks worked so well that the Division I commit to Illinois State finished with only 17 kills on the night, far below her average of 31 per contest.

In the third set, South Ridge jumped out to an early 8-2 lead. In a reverse of the first game, following a tim out by Northeast Range, the Nighthawks battled back to pick up a win in the third set 25-21.

"I knew what their coach told them," Olesiak said, "I'm sure she reminded her



Row 1 (L-R): Kaija Snickers, Isabella Schneider, Adella Olesiak, Rylee Young, Elise Preston, Willow Newman. Row 2: Head Coach Brad Olesiak, Phylesha Preston, Olivia Spikeberg, Lauren Olson, Mercedes Lawrence, Kaitaia Klemetsen, Svea Snickers, Kelly Bergum.

The South Ridge volleyball team as seen in the Minnesota State High School League's state volleyball tournament program.

team what we did coming from behind two sets to none to Ely and that they can do the same thing, especially after they beat us earlier in the regular season. They knew us very well, but our team responded in the fourth set. Even

though it was a close battle [with] 11 lead changes, I just felt we were going to win, and we did."

Kelly Bergum and Svea Snickers led the Panthers with 12 and 11 kills while Bella Schneider had 30 set assists and Adella Olesiak

finished with 30 digs for South Ridge.

The win moved the Panthers to 21-6 on the season. They were set to face Class A top-ranked team Mayer Lutheran Thursday afternoon in St. Paul.

"I saw film on this team,"

coach Olesiak said. "They look like a college team, and they have two Division I commits for next year.

"We will just go down, play our style and try to use our speed and quickness and we see what can happen."

State soccer ...

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The Red Knights outshot Cloquet-Carlton 6-5. Olson had three saves and the Red Knights Olivia Paulson had four.

"They have seven Division I players on their team; they are very well-coached and deserved to win," Randall said.

With the 3-0 loss to the Red Knights, the Lumberjacks then faced the Academy of Holy Angels Friday morning at the West St. Paul Athletic Center in Mendota Heights. The Stars had fallen to Mahtomedi 2-1 in their own semifinal match Thursday.

When action began Friday morning, it was the Stars who came out with extra energy. They quickly scored twice to take a 2-0 lead over Cloquet-Carlton, and rolled to an eventual 6-1 final and third place in the Class AA tournament.

Stars sophomore Audrey Garton scored the match's first two goals, the first one coming just over eight minutes into the first half and her second coming 20 minutes later.

With almost 7:45 remaining in the first half, Lumberjacks junior Alexa Snesrud took a pass from Katie Turner and beat the Stars' Chloe Sandness for Cloquet's only goal, cutting the Stars' lead to 2-1.

Garton — the Stars' leading scorer and one of the top scorers in the state — shined in the first half, but teammate Kathryn Van Sloun took the spotlight in the second, scoring three times and adding one assist in the victory.

"This team was much like Benilde," Randall said. "They move the ball well, are very quick and



The Lumberjacks girls soccer team posed with the fourth-place trophy after making a run at the state soccer tournament last week.

Photos by Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News

handle the ball extremely well."

The Stars outshot the Lumberjacks 11-3 in the match, not allowing a shot on goal for Cloquet-Carlton in the second half. The game ended at 6-1.

Mahtomedi, the No. 3 seed, bolted to a three-goal advantage in the first half and protected that en route to a 3-1 victory over Benilde-St. Margaret's in the Class AA championship game on Saturday.

The Lumberjacks finished with an overall record 17-4. Turner and goalie Olson were named to the all-state team.

Like fellow senior Katie Turner, Senich said teamwork was the key to the Lumberjacks tremendous success this year.

"We knew relying solely on individual talent we wouldn't be able to go far, but together we could," Senich said. "We never blamed each other, we always just

picked each other up and started from square one. Out of all the years I played for the high school team, this year's group was the one who best understood what it meant to play on a team."

She also credited head coach Dustin Randall.

"He always knew what we needed to work on, when we should be resting, and when it was time to mess around and have fun," she said. "He made this year so enjoyable for all of us."

Her advice to younger players? Cherish the moments.

"Every goal celebration, pre-game story and bus ride will be something you'll miss."

The Cloquet girls soccer team will graduate seniors Caley Kruse, Olivia Macaulay, Kate Conway, Olivia Jameson, Maddie Young, Katie Turner, Ilei Benson, Jillian McCullough and Sadie Senich.



Jillian McCullough sends the ball across the penalty area in front of Benilde-St. Margaret's goalkeeper Olivia Olson during Thursday's Class AA state tournament semifinal at U.S. Bank Stadium.