

Jets close out season in state consolation final

By JASON OLSON

jason.olson@apgecm.com

After missing the last two adapted floor hockey state tournaments, teams from across Minnesota returned to Bloomington Jefferson High School to crown state champions on March 18-19.

The South Suburban Jets (5-6) call Jefferson home during the season with team members from Jefferson, Kennedy, Richfield, Edina, and Eden Prairie High Schools. The Jets qualified for state with a 10-6 win over Mounds View/Irondale/Roseville March 9. South Suburban received the No. 4 seed in the CI Division (Cognitive) bracket and opened state against the North's No. 1 seed Maple Grove.

The Crimson downed South Suburban 19-6 in the quarterfinals March 18.

The Jets regrouped the next morning to face Owatonna in the consolation semifinals winning a thriller 10-9.

South Suburban and Owatonna traded goals early, building a 4-4 score going into the second period. The Jets kept the pressure on to carry an 8-4 lead into the third period while sophomore goalie Rachel Fyler made some big saves all game. Defensemen Lily Gilbertson, a Jefferson junior, teamed with Jefferson senior Gener Guzman to also protect the Jets goal. Wings include Jefferson sophomore Helen Olson and Eden Prairie junior Max Miketa worked hard to keep the puck in the offensive zone.

Owatonna used a 5-1 rally to tie the game at 9-9 with 2:51 to go.

South Suburban senior center Gabe Imafidon scored eight goals in the game including the winner with 54.1 seconds left.

Imafidon, a Jefferson senior, was the first player to congratulate a teammate or opponent on a nice play, even giving a quick fist-bump to the Huskies goalie who made a remarkable save on his goal in the third period as the puck was



(SUN NEWSPAPERS STAFF PHOTO BY JASON OLSON)

South Suburban Jets senior center Gabe Imafidon, front, celebrates a 10-9 win over Owatonna in the consolation semifinal March 19. Imafidon is a senior at Jefferson High School.

deflected into the corner of the court.

After the win, Imafidon led the team in a J-E-T-S, Jets! Jets! Jets! chant, pumping his helmet in one hand while looking into the crowd.

The Jets are coached by head coaches Chris Tomberlin and Aaron Walton along with assistant coaches Bridget Michalek and Dan Slinden. Student managers are Max Marwarren, Riley Praska and Amelia Vogelsberg.

Dakota United went on to win the consolation championship against the Jets by a 12-2 score.

New Prague/TCU/LeSeuer-Henderson/Belle Plaine/Jordan defeated Burnsville/Farmington/Lakeville 12-3 in the CI Division championship on Saturday afternoon.

Dakota United defeated Brainerd 5-2 for the PI Division championship earlier Saturday afternoon.



(SUN NEWSPAPERS STAFF PHOTO BY JASON OLSON)

South Suburban's Gener Guzman, left, a Jefferson senior, takes a shot during the win over Owatonna. He scored a goal from mid-court against Owatonna.

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Richfield's Magicians set to move to Wisconsin

Junior hockey team leaves an impact in the community

By **JASON OLSON**

jason.olson@apgecm.com

After 12 seasons as part of the North American Hockey League, nine of which were based at the Richfield Ice Arena, the Minnesota Magicians will relocate to Eagle River, Wisconsin after the 2021-22 season.

The Magicians ownership group (Minnesota Junior Hockey Group, LLC) was approached by a group based in Eagle River, Wisconsin about the junior hockey club recently and the two agreed to the sale and relocation of the franchise, according to Ron Beran, a member of that group.

Beran was part of the ownership for the last five years, saying the sale was “Bittersweet. It was a good run in a great league and it’s tough to see the team go. It was a lot of fun to see the kids given the opportunity to reach the next level in hockey and that’s the most gratifying part of it for me — to help them achieve their dreams.”

More than just a hockey team

Richfield Ice Arena manager Kris Weiby said the Magicians brought a lot of excitement to the community and we’re very good partners over the years.

A post on the City of Richfield website conveyed more positive sentiments: “Residents have loved every minute of it! Thank you for all of the great hockey and community memories. The team was so great when it came to volunteering in the community. Rarely a week went by that they were not helping kids learn to skate, helping remove invasive species at the nature center, or stopping by a classroom. We encourage fans to come out and cheer on the team for the four remaining home games this season.”

Magicians ownership includes Beran, Scott Krueger and Joe



(SUN NEWSPAPERS STAFF PHOTO BY JASON OLSON)

Minnesota Magicians have been a tenant at Richfield Ice Arena since 2013.

Pankratz, along with Vice President of Operations Kevin Ingvalson, who is in his seventh season overseeing the day-to-day operations of the franchise on the business side.

Beran said not being able to give back to the community in the same way before the pandemic was tough.

“A big part of junior hockey is giving back to the local community and we did that through different initiatives, helping the city out or doing things like a teddy bear toss [organized donated stuffed animals to be given out to area children] and it was fun to see part of that back for the last three or four months,” Beran said.

According to Beran, the franchise was in a two-year battle to survive and pay outstanding bills. “We had more people coming back than last year but COVID hit everyone hard and not having fans for a year-and-a-half took a toll,” Beran said. “We

were never going to fold the team as owners, it was never an option for us. We all took on additional responsibilities during that time but at some point — you don’t make money because I did this for the kids.”

The team will be re-branded and renamed and still play in the Midwest Division, joining Anchorage Wolverines (Alaska), Chippewa Steel (Wisconsin), Fairbanks Ice Dogs (Alaska), Janesville Jets (Wisconsin), Kenai River Brown Bears (Alaska), Minnesota Wilderness (Cloquet) and Springfield Jr. Blues (Illinois).

NAHL Commissioner and President Mark Frankenfeld said in the release: “The Magicians have done a wonderful job in developing and advancing NAHL players for the past nine years, so we thank their ownership, organization, and community for their commitment to our league.

“We are excited to have

a new location in Eagle River, Wisconsin, which has a storied tradition in hockey and great community support who are passionate about the game of hockey.”

This season

The Magicians host the Springfield Jr. Blues on March 18-19 before closing out the regular season at the Blues March 25-26.

Minnesota currently sits in sixth place in the Midwest Division with 53 points (23-19-4-3). They are two points back of the Minnesota Wilderness and four points behind third-place Janesville.

Beran said the team is playing well and is in a fight for a playoff spot. The Magicians made their first run to the Robertson Cup final four last June and were back at pre-season camp in August for the start of the current season.

“It was a lot for everybody,” Beran said of the short off-season after the

playoff run. “It was a fabulous time to be part of that — exciting. First time beating Fairbanks in the playoffs in Alaska.”

The Magicians were established as the New Mexico Mustangs in 2010, playing out of Rio Rancho, New Mexico for two seasons before being sold to Minnesota Junior Hockey Group in December 2012 and began to play as the Magicians for the 2013-14 season. According to the Magicians’ website, more than 90 players have committed to play hockey in the NCAA including more than 60 at the Division I level with three alumni drafted into the National Hockey League.

Next for RIA

Weiby said the lease agreement with the Magicians runs until 2023. “So we have some time to evaluate everything,” he said. “One good thing about our location is that filling our ice time in the

prime winter season isn’t a problem. There isn’t a downtime for us since we host 14 tournaments each year, which brings in a lot of tourism from out-of-town.”

The Magicians have a big presence around the arena from signage above the main entrance and around the main hallway leading to Rink 1, where the logo sits in the ice and all of the major branding that has been in place for a long time.

“It’s a loss for us right now but other organizations are going to be putting in requests for proposals to fill that void,” Weiby said.

Those proposals will go through a process with the city council to make the final determination in what the next steps are for the ice arena. He said there is interest from outside groups from college, community and other professional teams to help replace the gap left by the Magicians.

Bloomington skiers compete at junior nationals

Clarke earns All-American honors on home course at Wirth

By **JASON OLSON**

jason.olson@apgecm.com

Three weeks after skiing in the state Nordic meet, Bloomington's Jon Clarke and AJ Westanmo competed in the weeklong junior nationals at Theodore Wirth Park, bringing the top young skiers in the country together to determine the 2022 national champions.

Clarke and Westanmo ski with the Loppet Nordic Racing club and represented the Midwest region at nationals.

Clarke competed in four events during the week, opening with a 15th place finish in the U18 Freestyle in 24 minutes, 1.1 seconds. Skiing with the No. 1 bib, he was the first out of the starting line.

"I could just put my head down and go because no one else was on the course," he said.

Clarke earned All-American status (top 10) after finishing seventh in the freestyle sprint, which included three rounds of racing on a 1.3km course against 30 other skiers. Clarke won the "B" final, finishing eighth overall.

"Each time I noticed something different," Clarke said, noting the right side track is faster. He was fourth on a late climb but quickly made up time to the top of the hill, accelerating around the corner to create separation to ski the final 1.3 km alone.

Clarke will follow another former Jefferson standout skier, Zak Ketterson, to compete at Northern Michigan next season. Ketterson recently completed his first season on the World Cup stage. He was part of the winning American mixed team event partnering with Jessie Diggins and two others.

He returned to action on Friday to pick up his second All-American honor of the week with a fifth-place finish in the 10km classic mass start. Clarke was seeded 26th, starting between the fourth or fifth

row from the front.

Knowing he needed to make a move early, Clarke surged to the first corner where he was among the top 10 by the opening kilometer. "I found my own track to ski and focused on staying with a front group," he said. "I thought it was really cool to be seeded 26th and finish fifth for my best race."

The week concluded with a fourth-place finish in the 4x3km freestyle mixed relay.

"Four events in six days are hard but I was prepared for it," Clarke said. "But we had coaches talking about how to use our bodies efficiently."

Wirth previously hosted the premier event in 2011 when a young Jessie Diggins emerged as a top-notch skier not only in Minnesota but across the country.

Skiing on a home course like Wirth gave Clarke a chance to know when and where to push the pace or set up in a particular spot to pass an opponent. "I've skied that course so many times before I really knew the ins-and-outs of the course," he said. "It was fun to see how skiers from other regions handled the course but I had the advantage of knowing where to attack the course."

Missing out on the typical stress of traveling was another nice perk of skiing in his own backyard.

The course was similar to the previous races this winter, but an extra layer of ice under a fresh coating of snow made for a very fast course with technical turns to navigate. "It helped me because I knew how to take them," Clarke said.

He was part of the Midwest team that competed at Junior Nationals in California in 2020 and Wirth was supposed to host the event last year but due to the pandemic, it was pushed back to this year.

Westanmo competed in the U16 division finishing 26th in the Freestyle Individual Start; fourth in his classic sprint quarterfinal heat; 11th in the 5k classic mass start and was 19th in the mixed team relay with Tommy Simmonds, Hanna Koch and Emily Percival.

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(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

Jefferson senior Jon Clarke skied as part of the Midwest team at the U18 division at the U.S. Junior National Cross Country Ski Championships at Wirth Park March 7-12. Clarke earned two All-American honors, including fifth place in the 10km classic mass start and seventh place in the freestyle sprint.



(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

Bloomington skier AJ Westanmo was part of the U16 division at junior nationals, finishing 11th in the 5km classic mass start.

BSM girls cap basketball season at state tournament

By **JASON OLSON**

jason.olson@apgecm.com

Despite 12 more shots from the floor and leading in many other stats, it was No. 4 seed Benilde-St. Margaret's (23-8) that came up short against No. 5 Mankato East 61-52 in the Class AAA state quarterfinal played at Maturi Pavilion on the University of Minnesota campus March 16.

The Cougars (25-4) used 17 points each from guard Peyton Stevemer and forward Mackenzie Schweim while shooting nearly 50 percent from the field (21-43, 48.8 percent).

BSM managed to convert on just 30.9 percent (17-55) field goals for the game, including 8-for-30 in the second half. Free throws were another story, as the Red Knights made 10-of-13 shots from the line in the second half and 14-19 for the game.

Rebounding was another area for concern as Mankato East held a 23-18 edge on the Red Knight's offensive end of the floor.

In addition to rebounding, coach Michael Swann noted missed defensive matchups proved costly.

"[Mankato East] moved the ball around very well," McGee said as communication breakdowns in the first half hampered the defensive play. "They knew where to go with the ball and we talked about it at halftime and did a better job in the second half."

RedKnights sophomore



(SUN NEWSPAPERS STAFF PHOTO BY JASON OLSON)

BSM's Olivia Olson, middle, fights through the Mankato East for two of her 21 points March 16.

Olivia Olson had a game-high 21 points on 5-15 shooting from the field plus making 9-of-10 free throws. Olson also had six rebounds, four steals, two assists, two blocks and was fouled seven times.

She did her best to will the Red Knights to a win, pushing the pace if she came down with the ball in the defensive end of the floor to catch Mankato East in transition on defense.

Freshman Kendall McGee added 11 points and junior Sierre Lumpkin added nine points and grabbed 11 rebounds. Junior McKenzie Wells

finished with six points and six assists.

BSM cut the lead to four points twice in the second half including after Olson made both free throws after being fouled on a fastbreak shot with 14:32 left to make it 35-31. She began the play with a steal on the opposite end of the floor.

Katie Kapsner made two more free throws to bring the lead down to 37-33 with 12:49 but that was as close as the Red Knights would get.

"We made a run with our [defensive] pressure but again it was our rebounding and a couple of

turnovers towards the end that hurt us," Swann said.

BSM's largest lead came early after Olson made a pair of free throws to take a 9-5 lead with 11 minutes remaining in the opening half.

Despite only having five upperclassmen on the state tournament roster, Swann said at this point of the season, inexperience and youth aren't a factor. The Red Knights proved during the regular season and section tournament that they were more than capable of handling what other varsity programs would throw at them en route to a 21-win regular

season and a second-place finish in the Metro West Conference with a 15-3 record. The Red Knight's 15 wins matched that by defending Class AAAA state champion Chaska which went 15-1 to led the conference.

"We're a young team and there is stuff we can do to get better," Swann said after the quarterfinal.

Consolation semifinal

BSM saw the season come to an end during Thursday's 62-44 loss to Austin in the consolation bracket semifinal played at Gangelhoff Center on the Concordia University

St. Paul campus.

The Packers used a 35-17 run in the second half to pull away from the Red Knights as the teams entered halftime tied 27-27.

Olson had a game-high 24 points while McGee and Bishop were next with six and five points, respectively. Austin used at least 12 points from four players. Emma Dudycha had 19 points and Hope Dudycha had 12 points.

Austin lost to top-seeded Becker 53-48 in the first quarterfinal March 16.

Future is bright

Despite the results at state, the future of the Red Knights program remains strong with Olson set to only be a junior in 2022-23, while Wells and Lumpkin will be seniors.

"We played a really good season, didn't start out very good but worked hard and got better as a team and you will see us the next couple years," Olson said. "We're not done yet."

McGee already has surpassed the 1,000 career point milestone and will only be a sophomore.

"We worked hard to come all this way to get to state in the first place but since we are so young, we have a lot of time left with me and the other freshmen we have time to keep working and hopefully make it further next year," McGee said.

Follow Jason Olson on Twitter @JasonOlson or @SunSportsJason.

Championship season in full swing for area graduates

By **JASON OLSON**

jason.olson@apgecm.com

Winter sports are wrapping up with championships taking place across the region, nation and beyond with ties to Richfield and Bloomington. Below are a few of the highlights:

Zak Ketterson

The Bloomington native and Jefferson grad was part of the winning United States mixed team relay at the final World Cup cross-country event in Falun, Sweden. The gold medal was the first in the event for the U.S., with teammates including

Olympians Rosie Brennan, Scott Patterson and Jessie Diggins. Diggins anchored the relay, pulling ahead with 2.5k left to finish in 42 minutes, 1.8 seconds, 3.8 seconds ahead of Finland and another half-second ahead of third-place Norway.

Lamar Grayson

The Richfield native completed his freshman basketball season at Bay College in Escanaba, Michigan where he averaged 12.6 points in just under 24 minutes per game for the 16-12 Norse. Grayson finished the season with a team-high

18 points, 17 coming in the second half of a 90-68 loss at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota in the NJCAA Region XIII Championship semifinal on Feb. 26.

Rachel Kawiecki

The Gustavus freshman from Richfield made the successful jump from basketball to softball where she's off to a hot start behind the plate. In three games she is hitting .556 (5-for-9) with one double, two RBIs, one walk, one run and one stolen base. She has 13 putouts and one assist as a catcher.

Manny Montgomery

The Dakota County Technical College sophomore and Jefferson alum recently wrapped up the basketball season at the NJCAA Division II National Championship in Danville, Illinois March 15-19.

Montgomery led the Rosemount-based Blue Knights averaging 17.1 points, 6.8 rebounds and 3.4 assists per game in 28 games for the 20-10 NJCAA Region XIII Champions. Montgomery had 18 points in a 71-67 win over Central Community College-Columbus in the regional final on March 5.

DCTC opened nationals with a 75-71 loss to Sullivan County Community College before a pair of wins (74-71 against Southern Arkansas University Tech and 82-73 against Niagara County Community College) to face Parkland College for seventh place on March 19. Parkland won 85-67 on Saturday. Montgomery led DCTC with 22 points against Sullivan then only played two minutes against Southern and missed the final two games.

Senior All-Star Classic
Jefferson senior

captains Grace Schuck and Emily Wozniak along with head coach Mark Johnson and assistant coach Sierra Vadner were part of Section 2 at the annual Senior All-Star Classic, played at the National Sports Center's Super Rink in Blaine March 4-6.

Schuck and classmate Abbie Longhenry shared the scoring lead for the Jaguars with 37 points, respectively. Schuck scored a team-high 24 goals while Longhenry finished with 15 assists. Wozniak finished with 13 points on five goals for the 12-14 Jaguars.