

FOOTBALL

Fitting finish paves path to state

22 points in less than three minutes adds another chapter to Cards' storybook season

By Eric Morken
Alexandria Echo Press

Alexandria football coach Mike Empting was asked midway through the season after another close loss to a good opponent if he felt that his team was better than its record indicated.

Empting tends to hold the belief that you are what your record says you are. With this team, he certainly hesitated and had to think.

Players and coaches for Alexandria felt they were better than their 3-5 regular season record, but they had to show that by turning close losses into wins. With new life in the playoffs, fourth-seeded Alexandria (6-5) proved it all the way to a Section 8-5A championship after a 43-35 win at Bemidji (6-4) where the Cardinals rallied from a 14-point fourth-quarter deficit.

"I think honestly when we're down 14 with that much time left, it's always in your head," senior defensive back Teagan Pfeffer said when asked if doubt ever crept in for this group. "But this team that we have and the resilience we've shown



Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer

The Alexandria captains celebrate with the Section 8-5A championship trophy after defeating Bemidji 43-35 on Friday at Chet Anderson Stadium in Bemidji.

last week (in a 42-39 win at Moorhead) and this whole season, you can never count us out. I did (have some doubts), but I knew deep down that we were going to pull through. It's amazing. The amount of work that this

senior class with our junior class put in, we all bought into the process that Mike tried to instill in us."

The 3rd-seeded Lumberjacks trailed 21-20 at the half but led 35-21 late into the final quarter after

touchdown runs of 62 and 2 yards from senior running back Gemini Ellis in the second half. The final Ellis touchdown came after a play that could have been the backbreaker for Alexandria. On 4th and long, Bemidji

punter Barrick Nelson turned a low snap that did not allow him to get the punt off into a 73-yard run up the left sideline. It led to an easy score one play later.

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VOLLEYBALL



Eric Morken / Alexandria Echo Press

Alexandria senior Maggie Anderson goes up for a kill against Sauk Rapids-Rice in the Section 8-3A championship match on Saturday in Melrose.

Storm step up in a big moment

Sauk Rapids ends Alexandria's season a win shy of state

By Eric Morken
Alexandria Echo Press

The Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team saved what was likely its best performance of the season for the right time on Saturday night in Melrose.

The Storm came into the Section 8-3A cham-

pionship with a 12-16 overall record. They are ranked 30th out of 61 Class AAA teams through the QRF on Minnesota-scores.net, but Sauk Rapids-Rice did not look like a team under .500 in a rematch against top-seeded Alexandria.

The Cardinals (21-2) beat the Storm (13-16) in four sets on Oct. 14.

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CROSS COUNTRY

Alexandria girls get a podium finish at state

By Eric Morken
Alexandria Echo Press

The Alexandria girls cross country team had a goal of surpassing Willmar at the Class AA state meet at St. Olaf on Saturday afternoon after Willmar had barely beaten Alexandria for the Section 8AA title on Oct. 28.

Alexandria closed the gap on Willmar at St. Olaf, and both teams proved that they come from one of the toughest sections in the class as Willmar took second with 78 points. That was one in front of Alexandria's 79 as the Cardinals finished third. St. Paul Highland Park won the Class AA state championship with 61 points.

"They were excited to be on the podium," Alexandria head coach Travis Hochhalter said of his girls. "Since I have been here for 21 years, I have not seen an Alexandria team on the podium. It was something special...I'm pretty proud of these girls. There



Joe Brown / West Central Tribune

Alexandria senior Emma Ecker runs to a 13th-place finish in the 5K at the Class AA state meet at St. Olaf on Saturday. Ecker was the Cardinals' fastest finisher as she helped her team to a third-place overall finish with a time of 19:15.18.

weren't perfect races, but a lot of heart that was left out there. It was pretty phenomenal."

Isabelle Schmitz of Hutchinson won the state title in the Class AA race as she finished the 5K in 17:59.44 as the only runner under 18 minutes.

Senior Emma Ecker paced Alexandria in 13th place overall with a time

of 19:15.18. Sophomore Jaelyn Miller was next in 22nd place in 19:36.17, and Aleah Miller, who has led this program over the last couple seasons with many big races, finished 26th in 19:42.38.

Junior Brynn Kosters finished 42nd in 20:12.83, and Giselle Jahner was 61st among the 159 total

finishers in 20:38.18 as Alexandria's final scorer in the team standings. Sophomore Brynn Cross (100th, 21:28.52), and junior Amanda Bergerson (107th, 21:42.31) finished off the Cardinals' lineup. Bergerson's time was a near 30 second personal record.

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