

COMMENTARY

End private schools' sports advantage

As I survey the all-conference listings for both the Heart O' North Conference and the Indianhead Conference,

I am struck by the quality of talent and play I watched this



PAUL BARNES

winter among both boys and girls teams. Which brings me to good players, good teams, good coaches — and fair play.

This season I watched the best high school basketball players in the area compete, girls and boys. South Shore's Lily Truchon, Emily Montgomery, Koy Nelson and Carter Lulich were superb, as was Drummond's boys and girls teams, both of whom demonstrated terrific team play. Individual athletes who stood out include Jordan Bjork, Jordyn Delegan, Brynn Erickson, Grace Moravchik, Chase Miller, Tommy Zakovec, a whole cast of Hurley players, and so on. Besides being good players, these athletes have one other thing in common: They were developed, for the most part, by the coaches and programs in the small communities they call home.

Frankly, this is a tougher task than that faced by many of the private schools that often can be seen hoisting conference and state championship trophies. Particularly in smaller school divisions in which D5 Mellen, Butternut, South Shore, Bayfield, Drummond, D4 Washburn, and even D3 Ashland compete.

Why is that? Because private schools, with rare exceptions existing in areas with much greater populations, have the ability to pick and choose whom they'll wave in. I get it. I support it. But let's be honest: Oh boy, does this include athletes. It's called recruiting. And among small schools it's an incredibly unfair advantage all coaches recognize but few will discuss loudly. So, I will.

Hey, WIAA — wake up! In the very small school divisions, have the private schools play it off against each other with their own regional champions, before entering sectional play. And bump all the private schools up one level, so the D5 public schools get a fair shake. Hey private school coaches — step up! The playing field isn't even, and you know it. Be more about fairness and less about trophies. I have heard it said that winners make things happen, and losers make excuses. Hogwash. Winning can be observed and explained, and so can losing. No need for excuses. It's simple economics, really: if an entity — or person for that matter — possesses much greater resources and far more access? Advantage, resources and access. Predicting an outcome in such instances isn't tough. Nor is predicting the winner — they're the ones with the guts to compete for real. Scores and trophies be damned.

Paul Barnes is a freelance writer who covers sports for the Ashland Daily Press.

Future bright for AHS girls

BY PAUL BARNES
For the Ashland Daily Press



The Ashland Oredockers girls basketball players junior guard/forward Brynn Erickson and junior forward Grace Moravchik have been named to the Heart O' North all-conference team. Erickson was a second team choice, and Moravchik earned honorable mention. Both players made tremendous contributions to the team this year, according to coach Beth Erickson.

"Brynn added a lot to our team this season with her offensive skills and basketball knowledge," the coach said. "She stepped up to handle the ball for us and get our offense started and led the team in assists. She is a player that can score from anywhere. She was our top scorer and can hit the three-point shot, midrange along with driving and scoring at the rim. She created a lot of offensive looks for teammates as well on kick outs or hitting a post in the paint. Brynn was our second-leading rebounder; she could hunt the ball and fight for rebounds against much taller players. She was also one of our top defenders whether we were playing zone or man."

Moravchik brought a level of athleticism that was difference-making for the team, which finished 11-14 on the year.

"Grace is a player that will do anything we ask her to do," she said. "She led our team in steals because of her length and ability to anticipate. She often drew a taller player to guard when we were in man due to her athletic ability. She was our second-leading scorer. Most of her points came from steals that turned into layups. She also grew a lot, playing more in the post offensively, scoring in the paint. She also did an amazing job sprinting up the court in transition."

Despite losing senior Haillee Wilson, a speedy all-state soccer player who was a three-year starting point guard, with a core of returning talent, next season is a promising one for the 'Dockers, the coach believes.

"We are very excited to have Brynn and Grace back next season with two other starters, Olivia Zepczyk and Avery O'Connor," she said. "Along with Hannah Boehler who saw just about as much time as our starters. We will also have Sonja Root back who stepped up from JV and led our team in blocks. I have high expectations to strongly compete with the top teams in the conference next season."



The Ashland Oredockers will have two all-conference players, Brynn Erickson (number 23, with ball) and Grace Moravchik, returning to what looks to be a team that will be highly competitive in the Heart O' North Conference next season. (Contributed photos by Kevin Scott)

Truchon, Bjork and Delegan head up Indianhead all-conference team

BY PAUL BARNES
For the Ashland Daily Press



Bay-Area girls basketball standouts junior Lily Truchon (South Shore Cardinals), senior Jordan Bjork (Drummond Lumberjills), and senior Jordyn Delegan (Mellen Granite Diggers) powered their teams throughout the 2021-2022 season, and each was honored with repeat first team selections on the Indianhead Conference all-conference team. According to their coaches, the selections are well-deserved.

"Jordan Bjork was the person the girls looked to," Lumberjills coach Breeann



Delegan

Hanson said. "A great on-the-ball defender, Jordan held top-scoring girls below their average, and led our team in points, rebounds and three-point shooting percentage."

Bjork was accompanied on the all-conference team by three of her teammates: Kaitlyn Miller, Madison Miller, and Nora Skoraczewski. Each contributed significantly to the Lumberjills strong third-place finish in the Indianhead, just behind the conference champion Hurley Northstars, and South Shore, according to Hanson.

"Kaitlyn Miller was always willing to sacrifice

her body," the coach remarked. "Even not at 100% after tearing ACL last year, she still was the first one on the floor for a loose ball. Extremely coachable, always willing to do what it takes for the betterment of the team, never cares about her individual stats, dedicated, hard worker, likes to see her teammates do well — I can't say enough about her. She led the team in free throw percentage and assists, second in rebounds, second-leading scorer. Madison was our ball-handler ... and Nora was a great presence under the basket. She got a ton of offensive rebounds and understands help defense."

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South Shore Cardinals junior Lily Truchon is a repeat first team Indianhead all-conference selection who was the conference's leading scorer and rebounder while also ranking among the state's leaders in both. (Contributed photo)