

# Times-Tribune

# Sports

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## FEAR FACTOR

*Middleton's athletic department has become the bullies during a bullying investigation*

Shhhhhh!  
Keep quiet, don't talk to anyone. If you do talk, be prepared to face the repercussions.

This is the unofficial mantra of Middleton's athletic department in 2023, where A.D. Jamie Sims, associate A.D. Brad Crandall and athletic assistant Amy McCall are playing the parts of Tony Soprano, Paulie Gualtieri and Christopher Moltisanti.

And just think folks — this type of leadership is **ONLY** costing the community \$263,000 a year — a price tag far higher than any other athletic department in the state. And that's before benefits are included.

In the wake of the bullying scandal inside Middleton's football program and the resignation of coach Jason Pertzborn, Sims and his crew haven't looked for solutions. They haven't attempted to solve problems.

Instead, they've become bullies themselves and tried



ROB REISCHEL

silencing anyone and everyone around Middleton High School.

According to multiple sources, Sims, Crandall and even McCall have warned folks not to say a word to about the scandal. Instead of getting to the bottom of the problem, they've tried using scare tactics to muzzle building employees.

And it isn't winning a lot of points.

"The cover up is always worse than the crime," said one district employee. "And they're a lot more worried about keeping everybody quiet than they are about fixing the problems — and there's a lot of problems."

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Times-Tribune photo by Mary Langenfeld

Middleton athletic director Jamie Sims and his staff have tried silencing several MHS coaches in the wake of a bullying scandal inside the Cardinals' football program.

# Bavery called to the Hall

*Middleton's boys basketball coach earns ultimate honor*

BY ROB REISCHEL

Times-Tribune

It was 10 a.m. Sunday, a time when much of society is at church, breakfast or simply lounging on their off day.

Not Kevin Bavery.

"I'm watching film of Baylor," said Bavery, Middleton's boys basketball coach since 2006. "I like some of the things they do offensively against certain zone defenses."

This, in a nutshell, Bavery.

Energetic. Passionate. And always trying to stay one step ahead of the competition.

It's why Bavery has lasted four-plus decades in a business that chews up and spits out most coaches. And it's why Bavery recently received the ultimate honor when he was voted into the Wisconsin Bas-

ketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

Bavery was one of 12 coaches voted into the Class of 2023, a group that will be honored during a banquet at the Glacier Canyon Lodge of the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells on Sept. 24.

"You look at some of the names of the guys that are in the Hall and it's pretty remarkable to think that you're going to be one of the guys, too," Bavery said. "It's a little overwhelming."

Bavery, who's leading Middleton to its best season in a quarter century, has a 439-272 career record, including a 223-141 mark with the Cardinals. He also held head coaching positions at Oregon and Cedarburg before coming to Middleton.

Bavery is the second boys basketball coach in Middleton history named to the Hall, joining 2007 recipient John Boyle.

Those that know Bavery best — like longtime assistant coaches Jerry Raffel and Tom Lesar — aren't the least bit surprised the Hall came calling. In fact, they're surprised it took this long.

"Kevin has always had vision," said Raffel, who's arguably Bavery's most trusted aide. "He's always looking for the newest ways. He always wants to be ahead of the trend, not behind the curve."

"He's just so innovative. The one thing about Kevin is he's always looking forward. He doesn't look back real often. He doesn't like to dwindle on

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Times-Tribune photo by Mary Langenfeld

Middleton boys basketball coach Kevin Bavery was recently voted into the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

# Gymnasts roll past Madison United

BY ROB REISCHEL

Times-Tribune

Exit on a high note.

That was Alexis Lindahl's message to her Middleton gymnastics team last Friday.

The Cardinals hosted Madison United in their final dual meet of the season and made it an enjoyable evening. Middleton toppled United, 129.125-125.475, and closed the regular season in style.

"This last competition was a fun one," Lindahl said. "It was our last dual of the season and I told my girls to go out there and have fun and that's exactly what they did."

Middleton's Eva Szczepanski was third in the all-around competition with a 32.10, while Ava Bollig was fourth (32.025).

Bollig led the Cardinals on the vault with an 8.475, while Aubrey Anderson had an 8.325, Jaelynn Kemp had an 8.10 and Szczepanski had an 8.050.

Szczepanski led Middleton on the uneven bars (8.10), while the Cardinals also counted scores from Abby Arnold (7.80), Kenavan Lindner

(7.75) and Bollig (7.25).

Lucy Hellenbrand led Middleton on the balance beam (8.30). The Cardinals also counted scores from Kemp (7.95), Szczepanski (7.85) and Buna Karanezi (7.70).

And on the floor, Bollig led Middleton with an 8.825, while the Cardinals also counted scores from Kemp (8.35), Arnold (8.20) and Szczepanski (8.10).

"The energy was high and the girls proved themselves, once again," Lindahl said. "It's incredible how much all of the girls have accomplished and improved this season and I am so proud of each and every one of them."

• **On deck:** Middleton is at the Big Eight Conference meet Saturday at Madison Memorial beginning at 10:15 a.m.

"I know the girls are determined to shine," Lindahl said. "The pressure is on, really. With sectionals only two weeks away, the girls know what's at stake. Nonetheless, we're going to continue taking it day-by-day, with that 'big goal' in mind."



Times-Tribune photo by Mary Langenfeld

Ava Bollig and Middleton's girls gymnastics team head to the Big Eight Conference meet on Saturday.

## SIMS

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"When they're so worried about keeping us quiet, it makes you wonder what they're hiding?" the source continued. "And are they just trying to protect their own [tails]?"

Those are extremely fair questions. And ones on the mind of many inside MHS.

Sims, who was hired in June, 2020, followed in the footsteps of two elite athletic directors — Luke Francois and Bob Joers.

Both ADs were big on communication, treated people fairly and with respect, and didn't use fear as a motivator. That appears to have changed with Sims & Co.

"The stuff going on now would have never happened with Bob and Luke," another source in the district said. "I can tell you, people aren't happy. We're going to lose a lot of good coaches if they keep Jamie around. Heck, we already have."

Both Francois and Joers operated one-person departments and each had a secretary.

Francois, who was also an Associate Principal, was a man ahead of his time, a gifted problem solver who brought groups of people together. He left in July, 2011 to become the Superintendent at Mineral Point and is the Superintendent at Waterford today.

His departure is still being felt more than a decade later.

Joers was Middleton's athletic director from 1995-2004, left to run his own business, then stepped back into the job when Francois moved on. Joers was a man of the people and was a staple at events — no matter how big or small.

Joers, who oversaw all activities at MHS in addition to



Times-Tribune photo by Mary Langenfeld

Middleton athletic director Jamie Sims makes \$125,640 per year. The three person athletic department is paid more than \$263,000, not including benefits.

athletics, died on May 15, 2020 of pancreatic cancer. Things haven't been the same since.

Sims was hired in June of 2020, Ben White was named associate athletic director and Mindy Ripp was hired as the athletic assistant. It marked the first time Middleton had a three-person department — two athletic directors, as well as an athletic assistant.

White, Middleton's long-time boys volleyball coach and a trusted confidant of Joers,

knew the inner workings of MHS and seemed like a natural choice for the A.D. job. But after settling for second place, White eventually went looking for greener pastures and resigned after 18 months.

Ripp lasted one month less than White in a department that was beginning to trend downward. Sims replaced them with Crandall and McCall.

Several coaches said they didn't trust Crandall, and two called him the "Mr. Smithers"

of the department in reference to "The Simpsons" character. McCall is widely seen as intrusive, and someone who continually oversteps boundaries.

Sims himself was set to jump ship and accepted a principal position at Sun Prairie West in March, 2022. But the Middleton-Cross Plains School District gave Sims a substantial raise to stay in a job he had held for just 21 months.

The logic of that is currently questionable, at best.

Most athletic departments across Wisconsin have one single A.D. There is no associate. Roughly half of the state's athletic directors have an athletic assistant.

Middleton has a three-headed monster with the largest payroll of any athletic department in Wisconsin. Sims leads the way with a hefty contract of \$125,640, while Crandall earns \$89,291.30 and McCall makes \$48,318.40.

They receive various benefits

in addition to these salaries.

Despite having a bloated department, many agree that communication is dramatically worse today and more things have fallen through the cracks than ever before.

"There's just too many cooks in the kitchen," one source said.

For example, Middleton's boys basketball team did several hours of fundraising so they could afford a coach bus for a recent four-hour trip to northern Wisconsin to play in the prestigious 'Battle of the Border.' To the basketball Cardinals, this was their Super Bowl.

Instead, the paperwork was never submitted and Middleton's players and coaches spent more than eight hours round trip on a yellow school bus.

"It's sloppy," one source said of the department. "And things move slower than they used to because you have people getting in each other's way now."

What has many coaches more upset than anything, though, is an athletic department that's tried solving a bullying issue by becoming bullies themselves.

As Alanis Morissette once sang, "Isn't It Ironic?"

Just 10 months ago, Sims resigned his position as A.D., had one foot out the door, cashed in on a hefty pay raise and told the Times-Tribune: "What's been great is 100 percent of the coaches, 100 percent of the community members that I've heard from have told me they're happy I'm staying."

Today, those opinions have changed.

And many wish Sims would have kept walking when he had the chance.

# Times-Tribune

# Sports

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## One of a Kind

**Middleton should name its basketball court after the finest hoops coach in school history**

Everywhere I went this winter, I noticed it.

Bob Suter Court at Janesville Craig.

Craig Haase Court over at Hartland Arrowhead.

Even Ab Nicholas Court at the UW Kohl Center.

In many gyms across the state, the court is named after a great coach — or someone integral in getting that facility built.

Middleton High School's court isn't named after anybody. But it should be.

No individual meant more to the growth of basketball in Middleton — especially to girls basketball — as Jeff Kind did.

Kind, Middleton's girls coach from 1993-2022, was inducted into the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2018. He compiled a remarkable 578-256 career record and is the sixth-winningest girls coach in state history.



ROB REISCHEL

Kind retired after the 2021-2022 season and moved out of the area. But instead of letting his three decades of tremendous work fade to black, Middleton's athletic department should step up and name its floor Jeff Kind Court.

"He worked endlessly on building our program, day in and day out," former Middleton standout Alexis Thomas said. "Summer basketball camps, youth camps, tournaments, lifts, building personal relationships, and more. Not only did he love his players, he loved the game more than anyone I know."

And Kind brought more success to the Middleton than

any coach who ever walked the sideline.

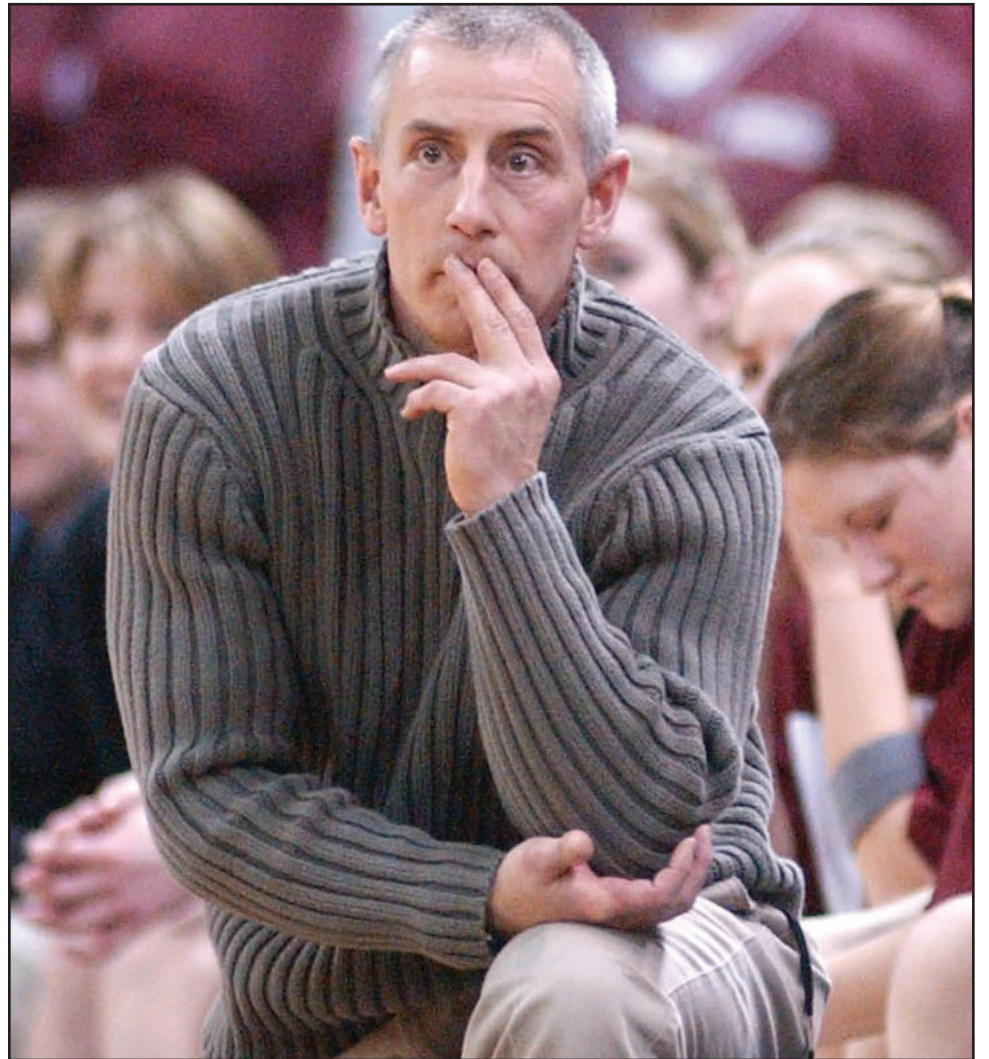
Kind spent 30 of his 44-year coaching career at Middleton where his achievements were unparalleled.

Kind led the Cardinals to the WIAA Division 1 state tournament a remarkable 12 times. Prior to Kind's arrival, Middleton never qualified for state.

On three occasions — 1993, 2003 and 2011 — Middleton reached the state championship game, but settled for a silver ball. Kind also finished with a 495-215 record at MHS (.697) and led the Cardinals to 11 Big Eight Conference championships.

Middleton's 2020 team was arguably the best team of the Kind-era, going 25-1, winning 20 straight games and earning a trip to the state tournament. But as that top-ranked Middleton team sat in

See KIND page 17



Times-Tribune photo by Mary Langenfeld

Jeff Kind, who was Middleton's girls basketball coach from 1993-2002, led the Cardinals to state 12 times and into the state championship game three times.

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## VISTA WEST

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KIND

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its Green Bay hotel room less than 24 hours before the state semifinals, the season was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We'll always say, 'What if?' " Kind said of that 2020 campaign. "There's not much you can do about it."

Kind inherited a program that struggled before his arrival. In his first year at MHS, though, he led the Cardinals to the state championship game where they lost to Janesville Parker.

That contest featured Middleton's Angie (Halbleib) Murphy — who finished her

MHS career as the state's all-time leading scorer — and Parker's Jennah Burkholder, who was named the state's player of the year in 1993. With those players as headliners, the teams competed before a sold out UW Field House in a game that changed how girls basketball was viewed throughout the state.

"I was lucky enough to have coach Kind as my coach my senior year in high school and it was my favorite year of basketball in my life," said Murphy, who coaches Verona now and has turned the Wildcats into a juggernaut.

"I loved playing for coach Kind."

Middleton went through some lean years as Kind embarked on building the program from the ground up. By the turn of the century, though, the Cardinals were once again a power and reached the state tournament in 2001.

Middleton remained a force, reaching the state championship game in 2003. Then the Cardinals reached the state tournament nine times between 2008-20.

"I think when I started, we had a really good first year with Angie ... but the pro-

gram was not very sustainable at that point," Kind said. "Then it was a big rebuild.

"But we got better and better and the next 20-some years we were usually one of the best teams in the state. Being able to sustain that for such a long amount of time is something I'm really proud of."

As terrific as Kind was on the bench, most that crossed paths with him declared that he was a better person than a coach.

And that's saying a lot.

"He was a tremendous coach," said Tim Simon, a basketball and football as-

sistant coach who worked for years in the Physics department with Kind. "Look at all of his conference championships and appearances at state. It's pretty unparalleled.

"But as good as of a coach as he is, he's an even better man. He's one of the most humble, unassuming, people I know. With him, it was always about the kids, the players, the program."

Hannah Flottmeyer, a 2019 Middleton graduate, echoed those sentiments.

"It was a privilege to be coached by coach Kind," Flottmeyer said. "He truly cared about you as a person before a player. He was always a man of integrity and kindness and I have a lot of respect for him. He expected excellence from us and that

made us achieve higher levels."

Kind represented everything Middleton should ideally aim to stand for.

Integrity. Class. Honor. And of course, winning.

Many of those seem to have been forgotten during a football bullying scandal and the firing of an assistant wrestling coach who hugged his granddaughter.

If ever there was a poster child for doing things the right way, it was Kind. That's why his three decades of service and success should be recognized by the school.

And the best way that could happen is for Middleton's basketball teams to be playing on 'Jeff Kind Court' in November.

TOWN OF CROSS PLAINS LOCATION AND HOURS OF POLLING PLACE

Notice is hereby given of a Spring Election for residents of the Town of Cross Plains. Said Election will be held on Tuesday, April 4, 2023 at the Community Center, 3734 County Road P, Cross Plains. The polls will be open at 7:00 a.m. and will close at 8:00 p.m. They are accessible to all. If you have questions concerning the polling place contact the Town Clerk, Nancy Meinholz at 798-0189 or tcpclerk@tds.net.

Nancy Meinholz, Clerk

Official Ballot Nonpartisan Office and Referendum April 4, 2023

30

Notice to voters: If you are voting on Election Day, your ballot must be initialed by 2 election inspectors. If you are voting absentee, your ballot must be initialed by the municipal clerk or deputy clerk. Your ballot may not be counted without initials. (See end of ballot for initials.)

Table with 3 columns: General Instructions, School District, and Referendum (cont.). Rows include Justice of the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals Judge, Municipal, and various School District and State referendums.

Posted: 3-23-2023 Publish: 3-30-2023 WNAXLP

Subscription renewal notice for Times-Tribune. Includes expiration date information and a 'Don't miss a week!' headline with contact details for PO Box 286, Black Earth, WI 53515.

Advertisement for 'The Ultimate Wood Heat' by Central Boiler. Features a \$2000 tax credit, efficiency certifications, and contact information for County Line Burners, LLC.

TOWN OF MIDDLETON NOTICE OF PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION AND CONTRACT. Details a public construction contract for pavement sealing maintenance with a cost of approximately \$24,977.00.

# Times-Tribune

# Sports

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## Middleton's 'Best of the best'

### MHS' girls shine during chaotic year



It was a tumultuous year inside Middleton's athletic department.

There was a bullying scandal in the football program. The legendary Dave Miller, an assistant wrestling coach, and tennis coach Henry Johnson were fired by athletic director Jamie Sims in a pair of head scratching moves.

Along the way, Sims, superintendent Dana Monogue and principal Peg Shoemaker drew the ire of many in the community for the multiple firings and their lack of transparency. The once-proud football program also had multiple candidates turn down the vacant coaching position after Jason Pertzborn resigned in January.

Amazingly, all this drama did nothing to slow the Cardinal Train. Instead, Middleton did what it typically does — win and win big.

The Cardinals enjoyed success from August to June, capturing conference titles, sectional crowns and state championships along the way.

Each year, the Times-Tribune picks the best of the best. Last week, we honored the boys. This week, we'll award the girls.

#### Team of the Year: Golf

Ellen Close teared up — repeatedly.

Amanda Beckman let the



Times-Tribune photos by Mary Langenfeld

Vivian Cressman (left), Ellen Close (right) and Middleton's girls golfers were the Times-Tribune's Team of the Year in 2022-2023.

tears of joy flow.

Vivian Cressman beamed with pride.

And Becky Halverson had a perma-grin that might have stuck with her for weeks.

Middleton's girls golf team — a group packed with potential, but struggling with consistency — put it all together at the WIAA Division 1 state

tournament held Oct. 10-11 at University Ridge. The Cardinals compiled a two-day score of 645 and finished second behind defending state champion Westosha Central (626).

Union Grove (660), Brookfield East (662) and Waunakee (665) rounded out the top five.

"God, I'm so proud of all these girls," said Close, a ju-

nior who made massive strides in 2022. "We all came in here just to play our best, we wanted to play our best and we did. We played amazing and there's just no words for how proud I am. I'm really happy."

This was the Cardinals' 22nd trip to a state tournament held at University Ridge and was their second-best score.

Middleton's 645 team score would have also won 21 of the 27 previous Division 1 state tournaments held at University Ridge.

The Cardinals just happened to run into a buzzsaw from Westosha Central, which posted the second-lowest score in state history, just two shots

off the record of 624 set by Hartland Arrowhead in 2016.

Afterwards, Middleton was ecstatic — and emotional — after rising to the occasion with back-to-back sensational rounds.

"Nobody would have be-

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**BEST**

*continued from page 9*

lieved you if you told them we'd be second," said Beckman, a senior making her fourth trip to state. "I would have hoped we could do it, but we really pulled through these past few days. It's incredible to see the whole team put in their best effort and have a good time. That was our main goal here."

This was one of the deepest and most talented fields the state tournament has seen in years. And Middleton entered in a bit of a funk.

The Cardinals were second at the Reedsburg Regional and won the Middleton Sectional leading into state. In both events, though, the Cardinals shot approximately 15 shots higher than their season average.

So when the tournament began, Middleton was an afterthought to many. Instead, the Cardinals got their groove back and posted the second-best round on both days of the tournament.

"This field was incredible," said Cressman, Middleton's No. 1 golfer. "Everybody is so good, that even being in the top four or five teams would have been great. But to be able to take second, we take that as a really big win."

Halverson has enjoyed unparalleled success during her 10 years as Middleton's head coach.

In that time, she's led the Cardinals to three state titles, three second place finishes and three third place showings. Middleton has also reached the state meet all 10 years under Halverson.

But the Cardinals' coach called this runner-up finish "one of our better trophies" after her team lost two standouts from the 2021 squad and struggled late in the season.

"This was a great group of kids that I don't think most people thought would be second at state," Halverson said. "Top-five? Sure. But not top two."

"But the girls worked really hard the last week. We had a lot of fun competitions and kept it light. And then they came out and played terrific golf."

They sure did. Middleton fired an opening round 315 — its second-best score of the year — and sat comfortably in second place. Westosha Central led with a 307, but the Cardinals held a solid lead over third place Brookfield East (320) and fourth place Union Grove (325).

Cressman had a brilliant first round with a 2-over-par 74 that left her in sixth place individually. Cressman made four birdies and shot an even-par 36 on the front nine.

Close, who took her game up several notches this season, made three birdies and shot a 79. But the key to Middleton's success came from the bottom half of the lineup.

Beckman, a staple in the program since her freshman year, had been up and down of late. But she fired an opening round 80 in which she had just 30 putts.

"My putter was insane," Beckman said.

And sophomore Maddy Wilcox carded a personal-best 82 from the No. 5 spot in the lineup.

"I think we got four scores that were good and that was just huge," Cressman said. "We had like three good ones most of the year, and then we would have to count one that we really didn't want to count."

The second day brought much of the same.

Heavy winds and intermittent rains made it tough for the golfers. And the final grouping of Middleton, Westosha Central, Brookfield East and Union Grove saw their scores jump by an average of 14.8 strokes.

The Cardinals' score rose to 330, making it impossible for them to catch Westosha Central. But they were never in danger of falling out of second place either.

Cressman capped an all-state season with a second-day 77 in which she played the final eight holes at 1-under-par. Cressman finished with a two-day total of 151 that left her in a tie for fifth place individually.

"I kind of embraced the struggle of golf a little bit more this year and it's worked out really well," said Cressman, who will be one of the favorites to win state in 2023. "I'm happy when I go golf now and that was the biggest thing. How do we make golf fun again?"

Beckman finished her career in style with a second straight 80 that left her in 18th place individually. Beckman didn't have a birdie, but also had just one hole all day where she scored worse than a bogey.

Close shot a second-day 83 that was highlighted by a birdie at the par-4, 15th hole. That capped a season in which Close improved more than anyone in the program and finished the state meet in a tie for 22nd place.

And Wilcox shot a second-day 90 that was higher than her opening round, but still allowed her to finish in a tie for 39th place individually.

Afterwards, the Cardinals received a fire truck ride through town. They celebrated during a festive team dinner.

And they basked in an accomplishment they knew was possible — but at times, didn't always look probable.

"Not many people thought we could do this the way we were playing," Halverson said. "But it's an incredible group of girls. I'm just really happy for them."

**Honorable mention:** Volleyball, tennis, swimming

**Coach of the Year: Maddie Vogel, volleyball**

When Vogel was hired to lead the Middleton program back in 2020, she had two main goals.

"As a coach, my two biggest priorities are to build mental



Times-Tribune photos by Mary Langenfeld

Becky Halverson (top) helped lead Middleton's girls golfers to a second place finish at the WIAA Division 1 state tournament. Above, Maddie Vogel guided Middleton's girls volleyball team to state and was named the Times-Tribune's Coach of the Year.

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## BEST

resiliency and a strong work ethic," said Vogel, who also coaches at Capital Volleyball Academy. "Fostering failure is crucial. It is important to me that my players are comfortable making mistakes and using those mistakes to grow rather than being scared to mess up.

"By building a strong mindset going into the season I hope to increase overall confidence and give my team the belief that we are on equal footing with any other team in the Big Eight. I also hope to construct a strong work ethic across the entire program.

"Players that do the little things right, especially when points aren't on the line, will be far more successful in the long run. Maintaining high expectations across the board, whether it be in games or at summer conditioning, will help push the program back to the top."

Vogel did just that.

And after a 13-year drought last season, Middleton returned to the WIAA Division 1 state tournament.

The Cardinals went 27-3 overall and won their second straight Big Eight Conference title. And Middleton was led by a group of seven seniors that led a revival of MHS volleyball in recent seasons.

"This was an incredible group of girls," Vogel said.

Vogel turned out to be a pretty incredible coach for MHS, as well.

Vogel, who took over the program in May, 2020, helped the Cardinals through a COVID year. Middleton then won the Big Eight Conference in 2021 and reached the WIAA Division 1 sectional finals where it lost a five-set thriller to Holmen.

The Cardinals came back in 2022 stronger than ever, first winning a second straight Big Eight crown. After rolling through regionals, Middleton garnered some revenge with a 26-24, 25-21, 25-22 win over Holmen in the sectional semifinals.

"Revenge? Oh yeah," senior outside hitter Jordan LaScala said. "I think that kind of motivated us, like this is the team that we're familiar with and the team that ended our season last year. So yeah, there was that bit of competitiveness there."

Middleton senior middle blocker Sierra Pertzborn agreed.

"Obviously we wanted to win and go to state last year," Pertzborn said. "We were so close last year. But the fact that it was Holmen again, it just gave us that extra, that 'we want it more' feeling, which I think definitely helped us."

The Cardinals followed that with an impressive win over Waunakee in the sectional finals, before falling to eventual state champion DSHA in the state title match.

Vogel stepped down after the season. But her three years at MHS — especially the 2022 campaign — were certainly memorable.

"They're truly a group that loves each other and loves

playing," Vogel said of her 2022 team. "And I think that's what stands out and it's a reason we win some of those close games that other teams might not."

Honorable mention: Becky Halverson (golf), R.J. Leiferman (swimming)

### Game/Event of the Year: VB sectional finals

The match had been over for roughly 15 minutes.

Middleton's girls volleyball team had defeated Waunakee in a WIAA Division 1 sectional final on Oct. 29, 2022. And the Cardinals had earned a trip to state for the first time since 2009.

As the mayhem around Jordan LaScala unfolded, Middleton's gifted and verbose senior outside hitter reflected for a moment. Then she summed things up perfectly.

"Looking back on everything we've been through together, all the ups and downs, today was the moment," LaScala said. "We reached the summit."

They sure did.

Second-seeded Middleton played with poise and precision, overcame some second set foibles and knocked off the top-seeded Warriors, 25-20, 22-25, 25-19, 25-18, in a match played at Monona Grove High School.

"It's just amazing," said Middleton senior setter Evin Jordee, whose team fell in the sectional finals in 2021 to Holmen. "Honestly, it doesn't even seem real. We talked about it all season. It's been our goal all season to get one game farther than we did last year. And doing it with the people I love, the people from last year, means so much."

Senior libero Eliana Ross agreed with Jordee.

"It's amazing to have this feeling," Ross said. "Losing to Holmen in five sets (in 2021) was such a big motivator for us. After all we worked for and to be on top finally ... it's very emotional right now for us."

Middleton, a veteran team with seven seniors — including five that start — had been aiming for this moment for years.

LaScala, Jordee and senior middle blocker Sierra Pertzborn were all four-year varsity players. The rest of the senior class which includes Ross, middle blocker Amelia Frautschi, outside hitter Bryn Larson and rightside Addy Gmur all reached varsity in either 2020 or 2021.

A gifted group of juniors joined the team this year. And from the first practice of 2022, reaching the state tournament was the goal.

"We thought it was our year," said LaScala, who had a match-high 18 kills and a remarkable 24 digs. "That's what our coach always tells us and we believed it."

So when that dream became a reality, Middleton third-year coach Maddie Vogel was almost at a loss for words.

"It's kind of hard to put into words," said Vogel, who

coached several Cardinals during the club season before they got to high school. "It means a lot. It just feels like a really full circle moment. We watched a lot of these girls grow up. It's been a really cool experience to grow along side of them."

Middleton completed its journey by rolling past a Waunakee team that had gone unbeaten in the Badger East Conference, received the No. 1 seed over Middleton, and cruised to this point in the tournament.

"It's great motivation to be the underdogs," said Jordee, who had 38 assists and 14 digs. "We were the (No.) 2 seed and we wanted to prove we should have gotten that (No.) 1 seed. So being the underdogs is something that really motivates us."

That was evident early, as the Cardinals dominated the opening set.

Middleton raced to leads of 7-2 and 14-5 behind tremendous serving from Pertzborn, LaScala and junior Abby Tubbs. LaScala also had five early kills as the Cardinals grabbed control.

"We knew it could be our last match," LaScala said. "So we made sure not to take any point for granted."

That was evident later in the set, after Waunakee crept within 17-12. The Warriors appeared to have hit a winner that would have pulled them within four points, but Ross came out of nowhere and delivered one of the biggest shots of the match.

Ross dove to the floor to keep the ball alive. She did more than that, though, lofting a shot to the back left corner that landed on the line for a winner that gave Middleton an 18-12 lead.

The Cardinals kept control from there and captured the first set, 25-20.

"I love to play scrappy," said Ross, who had 22 digs and a team-high three aces. "I've been working a lot on reading the hitters, so seeing their hands, knowing when they're going to tip."

"I just think you should never give up on a point because every single point is important. As you could see in the match, Waunakee did keep up with us really, really well. So nothing should be hitting the floor."

Vogel was incredibly impressed with Ross. Of course, that's nothing new.

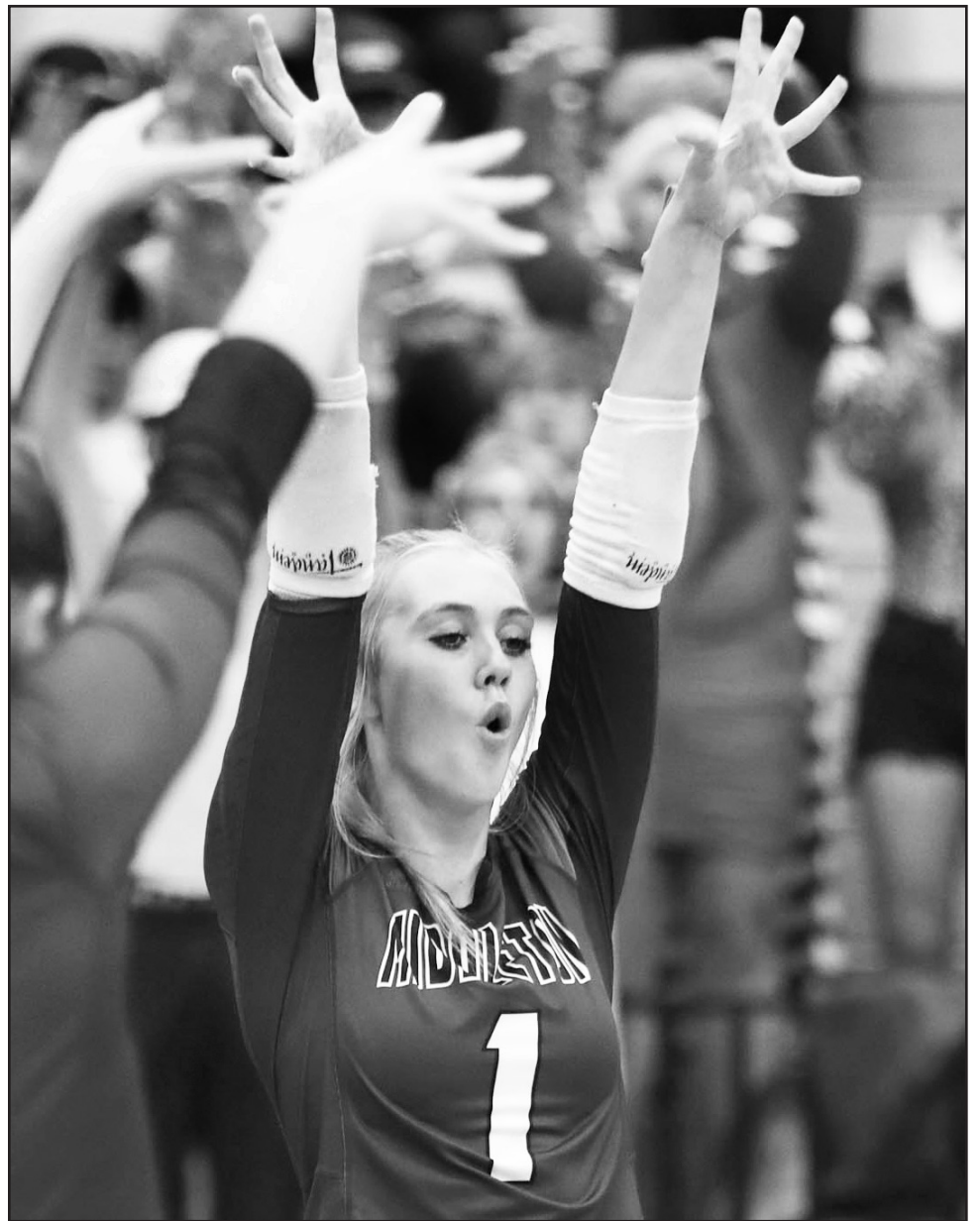
"She's got incredible grit," Vogel said. "She's always flying around the court. I always say she's a frustrating libero to play against. She picks up a lot of stuff."

There were six early ties and three lead changes in the second set as Waunakee jumped to a 12-9 lead. But the Cardinals went on a 6-0 run to take a 15-12 lead, and seemed to be in good shape.

Waunakee refused to go away, though. Trailing, 17-13, the Warriors finished the set on a 12-4 blitz and evened the match at one set each.

"Waunakee went on a cou-

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Times-Tribune photos by Mary Langenfeld

Evin Jordee (top) and Jordan LaScala helped Middleton's girls volleyball team win a thrilling regional title over Waunakee.

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**BEST**

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ple of really tough serving runs," Vogel said. "That was a big difference. In the other sets, we weren't letting them go on any big runs."

Middleton made sure that didn't happen in the critical third set.

The Cardinals went on an early 12-2 run and turned a 5-4 lead into an insurmountable 17-6 advantage. Tubbs had four service points in that stretch and Ross had three. Frautschi was also terrific up front with a pair of kills.

Wauaukee crept back within five points at 23-18. But the Warriors had a service error and a hitting error and the Cardinals captured the set, 25-19.

"In set two, I think maybe we were a little bit overconfident from the first set," LaScala said. "But they are a very strong team. So I think we were like, we can't take any point for granted. We have to focus on every point."

Jordee agreed.

"I think we really started playing together and our serve receive was amazing, the best it's been all season," Jordee said. "And that helped us a lot. We were able to set anyone, run fast tempo and kept pounding it on them."

"Playing together like that is something we talk about. When we play together, we can do anything."

The Cardinals proved that once again in the fourth and final set.

The Warriors sprinted to a 5-3 lead, but Middleton embarked on a 10-3 run, took a 13-8 lead and put Wauaukee behind the 8-ball. Tubbs once again had a solid service run with three points, while Frautschi came up big with two kills.

Wauaukee pulled within three, but a block kill from Pertzborn and a pair of service points from Amber Wahlgren gave Middleton a 17-11 lead. The closest Wauaukee came from there was four points.

On match point, Jordee gave Pertzborn a perfect set, and the 6-foot-2 middle blocker hammered it home.

Middleton's crowd rushed the court. The Cardinals hugged anyone and everyone they could find. And after a 13-year hiatus, Middleton was headed back to state.

"That's crazy to think about," LaScala said when informed the Cardinals hadn't been to state since she was in pre-school. "For me, being on varsity for four years, we've all come so far. It's crazy. And we feel very proud of ourselves as seniors. It's pretty amazing."

Vogel agreed.

"I think we came in here even more level headed, more relaxed than we did against Holmen (in the sectional finals)," she said. "We had our game plan, we drilled it hard at practice and we were ready for it coming in."

"And the girls did the rest. They played two of their better sets to finish off the match. They were ready."

And they proved it against Wauaukee.

**Senior Athlete of the Year:****Zaira Malloy-Salgado**

Zaira Malloy-Salgado capped one of the most brilliant careers inside Middleton's cross country and track and field programs with a huge senior season.

Malloy-Salgado, a University of Wisconsin recruit, finished in fifth place at the WIAA Division 1 state cross country meet on Oct. 29, 2022. Malloy-Salgado then won the 3,200-meter run and finished fourth in the 1,600-meter run at the state track and field meet on June 2-3.

"My overall strategy for the weekend was to run strategic races, but also take risks, and finish each race with zero regrets," Malloy-Salgado said of the state track meet.

Malloy-Salgado's big senior year began with a string showing at the state cross country meet.

Ridges Golf Course is typically the most demanding course that runners will compete at all season. The first mile isn't overly difficult, but the final two are extremely hilly and can punish the state's most skilled runners.

Malloy-Salgado was in sixth place after the first mile (5:50), 13 seconds behind front-runner Kate Schmoll of West De Pere. Malloy-Salgado moved to fifth place at the two-mile mark, but had fallen 31 seconds behind eventual champion Sara Mlodik of D.C. Everest, who surged to the lead.

Malloy-Salgado pushed and pushed to make up ground on the leaders over the final mile. And while that didn't happen, she held firm in fifth place and earned another podium finish.

"My main strategy was to go out with a pack more or less in the front and see how I felt from there," Malloy-Salgado said. "It wasn't the best execution because I let the very front pack get too far ahead, but I still ran my own race and did the best I could."

Malloy-Salgado's strong performance helped the Cardinals finish sixth as a team. That, combined with a fifth place finish in 2021 and a third place showing in the 2020 alternate season gave Malloy-Salgado a trio of podium finishes — and an enormous amount of pride.

"I'm proud of where I have been able to get to the past four years," Malloy-Salgado said. "And to be able to have done that the past three years is really satisfying."

At the state track and field meet, Malloy-Salgado Malloy-Salgado won her second straight title in the 3,200 in 10:33.20. She chased down Muskego's Noelle Junig, who finished in 10:42.75, to become the second Cardinal distance runner to capture consecutive 3,200 titles.

Middleton great Liz Reusser won four straight titles from 1996-99.

"I was trying not to think much about last year's race," Malloy-Salgado said. "I wanted to focus on the present

and not compare my current self to my past self, but I'm obviously ecstatic to have defended the state title."

Malloy-Salgado ran between fourth and sixth place for the first four laps of the second heat, completing the first mile in 5:21.92, which she said "felt good, not too fast, not too slow."

At that point, Malloy-Salgado said she had enough energy to pick up the pace and move into second place. She eventually made her move to pass Junig heading into the final lap and overtook her for good with just over 300 meters left.

"I just kept speeding up each lap, keeping my eyes on first place to try to reel her in," Malloy-Salgado said of Junig. "Once I had moved into first I knew that I wasn't going to give it up."

Malloy-Salgado also ran a strong 1,600, finishing fourth in a personal-best time of 4 minutes, 52.73 seconds to improve on last year's fifth-place finish.

Malloy-Salgado, who was seeded fifth, marveled at the competition in the 1,600.

"The top ten girls ran under five minutes, which is astounding," she said. "I honestly thought I would place lower than fourth, because I knew how stacked the field was and how fast I would have to run to podium."

"But I took a risk and deviated from my usual strategy of being patient and trying to reel people in. Instead I put myself in a position to place well from the start and held on. And it worked out because I PR'd by 6 seconds."

Honorable mention: Jordan LaScala (volleyball), Natalie Charles (swimming).

**Performance of the Year: Tennis reaches state finals**

Middleton's girls tennis team won state titles in 2013 and during the 2021 alternate season.

And the Cardinals nearly came up with their third championship in a decade last October.

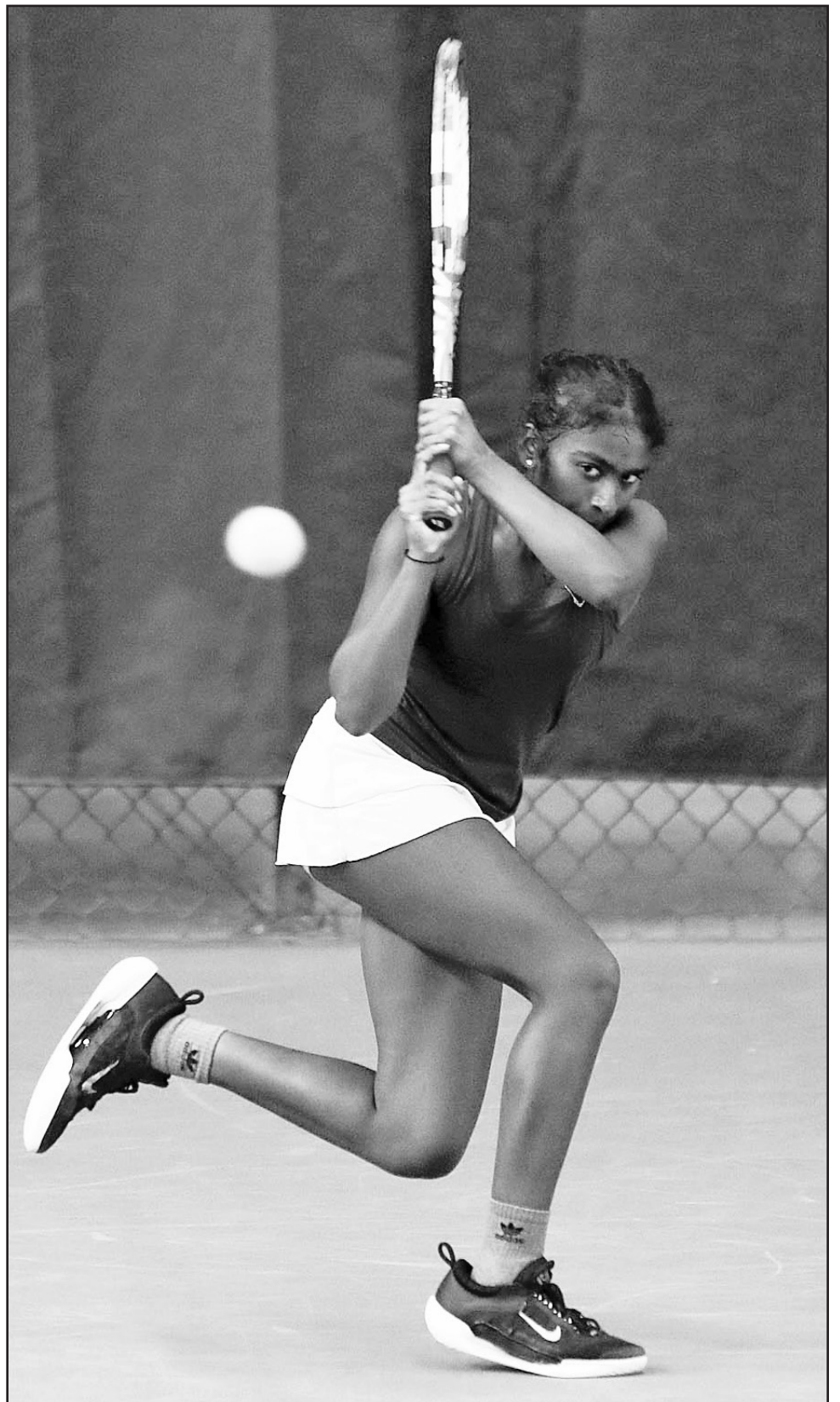
Middleton reached the WIAA Division 1 state championship match, where it fell to Hartland Arrowhead, 5-2.

"Last year we lost in the semis, so we didn't even make it this far," Middleton senior Sonya Agapov said. "It was fun, good teams, good results. Nothing to be upset about."

The No. 2-seeded Cardinals rolled past No. 7-seeded Hudson, 6-1, in the quarterfinals on Friday and toppled No. 3 seeded DSHA, 5-2, in the semifinals earlier Saturday, but couldn't overcome top-seeded Arrowhead in the final.

The Cardinals split the singles matches against Arrowhead and were swept in doubles, but came close to capturing all four singles matches.

Junior Netra Somasundaram, Middleton's No. 1 singles



Times-Tribune photo by Mary Langenfeld

Zaira Malloy-Salgado (top) was the Times-Tribune's Senior Athlete of the Year, while Netra Somasundaram and the Cardinals' tennis team had the Performance of the Year.



## BEST

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player, blanked Lexi Karge 6-0, 6-0 and Middleton sophomore Lydia Sabat defeated Emily Muresan 6-2, 6-3 at No. 3 singles. Agapov and Cardinals freshman Sophie Shi both dropped third-set tiebreaks at No. 2 and 4 singles, respectively.

Agapov rallied from a break down twice to capture the second set, but dropped a close 4-6, 6-4 (10-5) decision to Sarah Neubert.

"Being a senior it's really sad to see her go like that, but really awesome to see her compete and have a really good last match," Middleton coach Matt Given said. "You can't really have a better ending than that other than winning it all."

Shi dropped a 1-6, 6-2 (10-7) decision to Mekenna Verhagen at No. 4 singles.

In doubles, junior Ashley Andler and senior Amy Li lost to Hannah Cady and Jane Berglin 6-4, 6-2 at No. 1. Junior Keena Cheng and freshman Sarah Li lost to Myla Brunner and Lily Liu, 6-1, 6-2 at No. 2. And junior Caroline Sax and sophomore Hannah Lister lost to Lily Schulz and Jacque Cox, 6-4, 6-1, at No. 3.

While the singles lineup has led the way for the Cardinals for much of the season, the doubles teams came through when it mattered most. A pair of tight third-set tiebreak victories helped Middleton topple DSHA in the semifinals.

Cheng and Li edged Kelly Coury and Joan Barry, 7-6, 2-6 (13-11), at No. 2 doubles and Sax and Lister rallied to beat KK Buettner and Ellie Clemence, 3-6, 6-2 (11-9) at No. 3.

"I'm super proud of them," Given said. "I think from the start of the year until now, if you would have told me we would have swept two of three doubles against DSHA I probably would have said you're kidding. That's a huge improvement for those girls."

Middleton cruised against Hudson as it dropped just 12 total games in four singles matches.

Somasundaram defeated Lily Holmberg 6-1, 6-0 at No. 1 singles, while Agapov downed Grace Diedrich 6-4, 6-3 at No. 2. Sabat blanked Anna Runck 6-0, 6-0 at No. 3, and Sophie Shi defeated Cally Burgraff 6-3, 6-1 at No. 4.

In doubles, Andler and Lee defeated Grace Lewis and Grace Hanson, 6-4, 6-2, at No. 1, while Cheng and Li toppled Jenna Simmons and Nicole Hockin, 6-1, 7-5, at No. 2. And at No. 3, Sax and Lister lost to Helen Vandenberg and Maya Youseff, 6-2, 4-6 (10-7), at No. 3.

Sabat did not drop a set en route to a 3-0 record over the two-day tournament.

"I didn't expect it, but I did work really hard this year to get to where I am now," Sabat said.

Given said he has especially enjoyed coaching this group of players.

"This is my fourth year here and this is by far my most fun group I've been around," Given said. "Two seniors will be greatly missed, but really

young and a group of girls that really honestly gets along and is a blast to be around. Winning obviously makes that awesome too, but it's a great group of girls and I think they had a really good year."

The future looks bright for the Cardinals who lose only two seniors in Agapov and Li.

"I think we can get back to team state and compete and fight for the No. 1 spot," Somasundaram said. "It's going to be hard to have our seniors go because I've been around them since my freshman year, so I know it'll be a little hard to see them go."

### Breakout Performers of the Year: Olivia Chellevoid (cross country, track and field) and Hailey Stroede, softball

Middleton has been home to many of the state's top runners for decades now. And Chellevoid seems poised to become the Cardinals' next great performer.

At the state cross country meet, Chellevoid had a terrific day, finishing ninth overall in 19:04.4. Chellevoid was ninth after the first mile, moved up to seventh after the second mile and capped her stellar first season at MHS with a top-10 finish.

Chellevoid then finished sixth in the 3,200 at the state track and field meet.

"It's always awesome to have a teammate on the podium with you," Zaira Malloy-Salgado said of Chellevoid. "She was amazing."

Stroede batted .416 with a .454 on-base percentage. She had a team-high 42 hits, including 16 extra base hits.

She also had 29 RBI, scored 21 runs and walked six times.

"It's impossible to overstate the impact Hailey Stroede made this year — and as only a freshman," Middleton manager Brittany Carl said. "She was a spark for us and an athletic, dependable presence behind the dish. Hailey plays the game with so much confidence and energy. It's a joy to watch and a pleasure to coach. It's absolutely contagious."

"Even in the biggest games, in the most charged situations, she kept our team grounded, loose, and in the moment. She absorbs whatever tips and tricks you give her and puts them to work in her own way. It's been a lot of fun to see her grow and truly excel this year."

Stroede batted leadoff for the Cardinals and reached base in 19 of 20 conference games. She had an 11-game hitting streak and was a rock behind the plate.

"She's not only an incredibly talented catcher, but she's one of the toughest outs in our conference," Carl said. "She was the epitome of everything a leadoff should be. An unfazeable, speedy, and consistent contact hitter — and a very, very tough out."



Times-Tribune photos by Mary Langenfeld

Olivia Chellevoid (top) and Hailey Stroede (above) were the Times-Tribune's co-Breakout Performers of the Year.

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