

# LOCAL SPORTS Journal

JULY, 2017

FREE  
**SUBWAY**

A photograph of a baseball game in progress. In the foreground, a player in a white Muskegon Clippers uniform with the number 5 is sliding into a base. A player in a dark blue uniform is positioned behind him, ready to receive the ball. Another player in a white uniform is visible in the background. The scene is set on a grassy baseball field.

## Muskegon Clippers 2017 A NEW LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

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keep playoff  
streak alive



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girls go 21-1  
in soccer



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On the cover: Muskegon Clippers second baseman Nolan Bryant gets ready to make a tag. Photo/Marc Hoeksema

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# BETTER LEAGUE, TOUGH CHALLENGE

After three years of dominating their old league, the Muskegon Clippers are trying their luck this year in the elite Great Lakes League

By Steve Gunn  
LocalSportsJournal.com

The Muskegon Clippers have entered an exciting, and far more challenging, new world this summer, as members of the elite Great Lakes Summer Collegiate League.

The Clippers, Muskegon's popular baseball team, spent their first three seasons as members of the Michigan Summer Collegiate Baseball League, and were successful right out of the gate.

They came within a game of winning the league championship in their first season, then swept to league titles in 2015 and 2016.



Clippers owner Pete Gawkowski

The Clippers were also embraced by the public, consistently drawing crowds in the hundreds, which is impressive for a team of college baseball players who use summer leagues to stay sharp following the spring NCAA season.

But the Clippers had one big problem. Their league wasn't much of a league.

Team owner Pete Gawkowski found himself in the role of de facto league commissioner, even though he didn't want the job, just to keep other teams participating and the league afloat. He was successful, to a point.

But sometimes teams cancelled games because they didn't have enough players. On more than one occasion, opponents showed up at Marsh Field without enough players to field a team, and had to grab local high school players just to take the field.

One of the better teams, the River City Rapids, folded after playing only a few games last year, leaving a hole in the league schedule.

The league became less competitive in recent seasons, with the Clippers piling up huge victories last season over clearly overmatched opponents.

"There were so many times when I would email the other team and say 'You guys coming?'" Gawkowski said. "You just never knew. The River City team showed up with seven players one game last year, and we had to bring guys out of the stands to play.

"We had like 200 people here, and I said, 'We have to play this game - I'm not sending them home.'

"I think other teams just took a different approach. We take it very seriously, we want to put our best foot forward and do the best we can. That's why we moved up."

## Moving on

All of the problems prompted Gawkowski to push hard to accomplish his ultimate goal - getting the Clippers into the Great Lakes league, a respected 30-year-old circuit that serves as the summer home to a lot of legitimate prospects.

Last year 19 players from the Great Lakes league were selected in the Major League Baseball draft.

Gawkowski's goal was accomplished last October, when the Clippers were formally accepted into the league.

The move was a make-or-break matter for the Clippers, according to Gawkowski. There was no future in the old league, which ceased operations after last season, and nowhere else to go.

"We made the decision to go ahead



Bryce Kelley crosses home plate in a June 7 game against the Grand River Loggers.  
Photo/Marc Hoeksema

with last year, even though a few teams (in the old league) folded," Gawkowski said. "We had some momentum going and we didn't want to stop it."

Membership in the Great Lakes league brought a lot of changes for the Clippers.

They are a month into a 42-game regular-season schedule, which is far more challenging than the 29-game schedule they played last year.

They are competing at a higher skill level, with most of the players coming from bigger colleges and universities.

In the past the Clippers relied on many Division 2 players, including several from nearby Grand Valley State University. This year's roster has six holdovers from last year's team, along with new players from bigger schools like Michigan, Michigan State, Central Michigan, Western Michigan, Youngstown State, The Citadel, Oakland University and Western Kentucky.



The Great Lakes league is also much bigger than the old Michigan league. It has three divisions with a total of 15 teams, based in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Ontario.

The Clippers are part of the Northern Division, along with the Irish Hills Leprechauns (Adrian, Michigan), the St. Clair Green Giants (Windsor, Ontario), the Lake Erie Monarchs (Flat Rock, Michigan) and the Grand River Loggers.

The Loggers are a new team, under the same ownership as the Clippers. They are officially based in Grand Haven, but will split their home games between Grand Haven High School and Marsh Field this summer while Gawkowski and his staff work on finding a permanent home for the team in Grand Haven.

Having a sister team nearby will save a lot of travel costs for the Clippers, who will play all 12 of their games against the Loggers at Marsh field. Having two local teams will also benefit visiting teams, who will be able to squeeze in more games during their road trips to West Michigan.

"We probably could have gotten into the league by ourselves, but it's nice to have a neighbor," said Gawkowski, who added that the Clippers' budget will increase by \$20,000 to \$30,000 this year, due to increased travel costs. "Travel is expensive."

### *A dose of reality*

There was lot of excitement in the area as the Clippers prepared for Opening Day in their new league.

The team worked hard to build enthusiasm by increasing its advertising budget in recent months, highlighted by a series of quality cable TV ads.

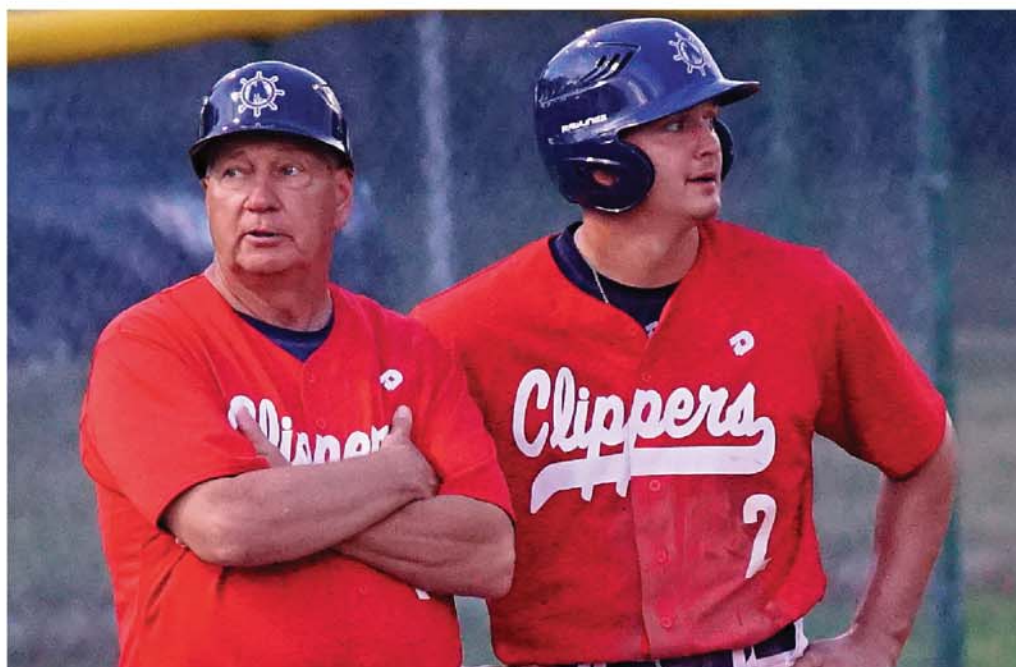
All the excitement culminated in a standing-room crowd, estimated at about 600 fans, for the opener on June 6 at Marsh Field. That's a lot of people for the old stadium, which has limited seating capacity.

"It was about a four-year project to get in this league, and we're really excited," Gawkowski said on the afternoon of the opener. "We've had a countdown calendar on the website – 230 days to Opening Day, then it was 40 and 30, and all of the sudden here we are."

"There's been a lot of buzz in the community, from what I've seen. More buzz than we've ever had before, which is a good thing."

While the opener marked the beginning of an exciting new era for the Clippers, it also delivered a dose of reality. They hosted the Loggers, their new sister team, and came out on the short end of an ugly 18-9 score.

They won their next two games,



Manager Walt Gawkowski and shortstop Tyler Trovinger, during a break in the action in a recent game. Photo/Leo Valdez



Pitcher Austin Batka



First baseman Ryan Blake-Jones

but lost five of their next six, and found themselves in last place in their division with a 3-6 record as of June 18.

They've done better since then, improving to 7-10 as of June 25, but the wins don't come as easily as they used to.

"The lesson is you have to bring it every single night," said the Clippers veteran manager, Walt Gawkowski, who is also the owner's brother. "Every team is good. There are no easy ones. The days of kind of breezing through a league are over. We have to have great energy and enthusiasm every night and play better baseball."

Pete Gawkowski is not surprised that the team has lost a few games, since it's the first season in a tough new league. He said the ultimate challenge for the orga-

nization this year will be gaining enough new community support to help cover the costs of the increased team budget. That means more corporate sponsorships – which the team has already secured – and even more ticket sales.

If all goes well on the financial end, Gawkowski said the Clippers will begin the process of planning major improvements to Marsh field.

"Depending on how the season goes, we will sit down with the city of Muskegon (which owns Marsh Field) and talk about getting a grant to fix the ballpark up," Gawkowski said. "We already have plans drawn and we know what we would like to do – add more seats, add locker room facilities, expand the dugouts and add more restroom space."



# Grand Haven's Cinderella Run

**The Buccaneer baseball team had an 18-15 regular season, then stunned everyone by advancing all the way to the state semifinals**

What were the odds of the Grand Haven baseball team advancing all the way to the state semifinals?

The Bucs finished the regular season with an 18-15 record. They were second in the O-K Red Conference, but finished behind three teams that tied for first - Grandville, Holland West Ottawa and Hudsonville.



Going into the postseason, most fans probably figured that the best Grand Haven could hope for was a district championship, if everything went really well.

But the Bucs did much better than that.

They won their first six games of the state tournament, picking up district and regional championships along the way.

Then came an exciting state quarterfinal victory that sent the Bucs to Michigan State University for the Division 1 state semifinals.

The dream ended in the semifinals with a 9-1 loss to a talented Northville squad. But history will record that Grand Haven was a team that couldn't win its conference in the regular season, yet came within one victory of playing for a state championship.

It was truly an amazing Cinderella run.



**Hunter Brown (left), Owen Krizan**

"It's been fantastic," Grand Haven Coach Mike Hansen said after the semifinal loss. "I mean, 6-1 in the tournament, and if you go anywhere in the country and go 6-1 in a tournament, you're going to say, hey, that's a heck of a tournament."

"The takeaway is that it was tough today, but overall it was a heck of a

season."

Hansen said he wasn't surprised by the tournament run, because he knew all along that his team had a lot of talent and athleticism.

The Bucs started the season with a 9-12 record, but that was when they were using a lot of younger players, to develop them for the future. Around midseason they switched to a more veteran lineup, and posted a 15-3 mark the rest of the way, including the state tournament.

The postseason run started with a victory over Holland in pre-districts.

Then the Bucs upset the field in districts by defeating O-K Red co-champion West Ottawa 4-3 in the semifinals, and Mona Shores 6-4 in the championship game.

Next came regionals, when the Buccaneers left their opponents shaking their heads with two late come-from-behind victories.

The Buccaneers trailed Byron Center by a run headed into the seventh inning, which is the final inning in high school baseball. But they scored four in the top of the seventh to steal a 6-3 victory.

They trailed Grandville 1-0 after five innings of the regional championship game. Grand Haven's Max Schweikert recorded an RBI single to knot the game at 1-1 in the sixth, then Jake Hansen hit a single in the seventh to drive home Sean Casey and seal a 2-1 victory.

Schweikert picked up the win from the mound, going all seven innings, allowing only three hits, one run, two walks and striking out one batter.

"Winning those games in the last inning was exciting for everybody," Hansen said. "You couldn't write a book better than that. It was thrilling to see how excited the kids were to win it."

The Bucs' biggest win of the season came in the state quarterfinals on June 13 against state-ranked Saginaw Heritage at Central Michigan University.

Grand Haven's Jarrett Prins and Jake Hansen scored the only two runs of the game in the fifth inning.

The situation became tense in the bottom of the seventh when Heritage loaded the bases with one out, following with a pair of singles and an intentional walk.

That led to a ground ball to third baseman Joey Zelenka, who fielded it cleanly, stepped on third base for a quick force out, then threw to first to complete a double play and end seal the 2-0 victory.

Schweikert was brilliant on the mound for the second straight game, tossing a complete-game shutout while allowing only four hits against a talented Heritage lineup.

"That was a gut-wrenching game," said Hansen, who chose to intentionally walk a dangerous Heritage hitter and load the bases in the seventh, before the double play decided the issue.

"That team was extremely talented, and we knew they had some big-inning potential. You could have cut the tension with a knife. But then we made the play and it was over."

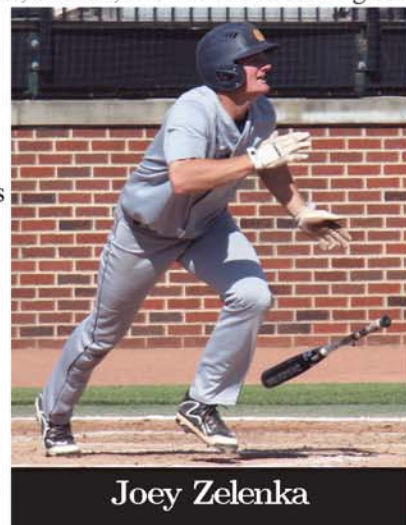
The tournament run halted with the painful loss to Northville on June 16 at MSU.

Grand Haven failed to take advantage of a first inning lead-off double by Ryan Mattson. Northville scored two runs in the home half of the first on a bases-loaded single by third baseman Jake Moody.

The Mustangs then scored one run in the second, one in the fourth, three in the fifth, and two in the sixth to sew up the victory.

The lone Grand Haven run was scored by Owen Krizan in the seventh inning on a Northville error.

"The first inning we got down two to nothing, and it just kept on slipping and slipping," Hansen said. "We just couldn't get a grasp on the game."



**Joey Zelenka**



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We're all familiar with the elite professional sports teams that make it to the playoffs, year after year.

The New England Patriots come to mind, along with the Detroit Red Wings, whose 25-year playoff run finally ended this spring.

In baseball, perhaps the best recent example is the St. Louis Cardinals, who have qualified for postseason play 12 times since 2000.

Teams with that kind of success are usually big-league clubs with huge budgets and the luxury of bringing back great players every year.

But how do you explain the success of a team like the West Michigan Whitecaps, the Detroit Tigers' Class A minor league affiliate based in Comstock Park?

The Whitecaps recently clinched the first-half championship in the Midwest League's Eastern Division, earning the club a playoff spot for the fourth straight season, and the 17th time in their 24-year history.

That record is pretty amazing, considering the Whitecaps start each season with almost an entirely new set of young players, assigned to them by the Tigers.

Different faces every year, but almost always great results. How does that happen?

Jim Jarecki, vice president of the Whitecaps, said the success starts with the Whitecaps' close relationship with the Tigers. He said the big-league club takes pride in

making sure that the Whitecaps get quality talent every season, so they can put a good product on the field.

"Over the years the Tigers have drafted very well," he said. "Look at the guys we've had here over the years, like (current Tigers) Nick Castellanos and Alex Avila. We've had more than 100 players move on to the Major Leagues."

"We've been associated with the Tigers since 1997, and have a great relationship with them. The Tigers understand how important West Michigan is to them from a marketing standpoint. They know how important it is to have a solid presence here."

Jarecki also said the Whitecaps take great pride in providing a positive, professional environment for the young players to thrive in, and they tend to respond.

"We provide the facility, the atmosphere, and meet their needs from clubhouse to playing field," he said. "We give them the environment and opportunity to develop their skills. When they come into a good environment, it helps them play well."

### *Slow start, big finish*

This year's group of Whitecaps, under the direction of first-year Manager Mike Rabelo, did not start out looking like a playoff team, despite winning the first three games of the season.



## New faces every year, SAME GREAT RESULTS

They had great pitching from the start. The most impressive performance came from starter Gregory Soto, who opened the season by tossing an amazing 28 innings without allowing an earned run.

But the hitting lagged behind, and the Whitecaps found themselves with a mediocre 6-8 record after 14 games.

Some fans obviously wondered if the team's proud playoff tradition would hit a bump in 2017.

But then the runs started to come in big bunches, and so did the victories. The Whitecaps ripped off 18 wins in 22 games and started pushing for first place in the Midwest League's Eastern Division.

They finally passed the Dayton Dragons, the early division leaders, on May 4, and never gave up first place.

The Whitecaps clinched the first-half Eastern Division title on June 15, when they were rained out, but Dayton lost a game. They celebrated the next day with a hitting fest, setting a new league record with 11 doubles in a 15-8 rout of the Lansing Lugnuts.

The Whitecaps finished the first half with a sparkling 45-22 record, 5 ½ games ahead of Dayton and 7 ahead of third-place South Bend. Through June 19, they had the highest winning percentage of any team this season in professional baseball.

The Midwest League splits its season in two halves, and the first-half championship clinched a postseason playoff spot for the Whitecaps, regardless of how they play in the second half.

They will face Dayton in their first-round playoff series in September.

The Whitecaps finished first in the league in pitching in the first half with an impressive 2.63 team earned-run average.

Four starting pitchers – Austin Soddors (1.40), Anthony Castro (2.29), Soto (2.68), and Eudis Idrogo (2.86) all finished with ERAs below 3.00. Soddors was third in the league in ERA while Castro was eighth.

"Our pitching staff, one through five, has been incredible," Jarecki said. "The pitching really held everything together."

The offense also finished near the top of the league, after the slow start.

The Whitecaps' .268 team batting average was tied for second in the league with Bowling Green.

Blaise Salter, a first baseman from Michigan State University, was second in the league batting race with a .330 average and led the league with 29 doubles and 53 RBIs.

Jacob Robson was third in the league with a .329 average while Danny Woodrow was 10th with a .303 average.

Cam Gibson was eighth in the league with 10 home runs.

"Coming into the season, hitting was something we saw as a possible struggle, and we were last in the league in hitting after the second or third week," Jarecki said. "Then when the weather started warming up, the hitting started to come around, and it was contagious."

Salter, Robson, Josh Lester, Soddors, Soto and relief pitcher Jason Foley represented the team in the Midwest League All-Star Game.



Jacob Robson



Gregory Soto



Danny Woodrow



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# THE NEW STATE HOME RUN CHAMPION!



Mona Shores junior slugger Taylor Dew launches her record-breaking homer on June 1. Photo/Eric Sturr

## LocalSportsJournal.com

Mona Shores' Taylor Dew is the state of Michigan's single-season softball home run champion!

Dew hit two homers against Whitehall June 1 in the Sailors' final regular season game, played on their home field. Her first homer was her 21st of the season, breaking the state's

single-season record of 20, set a year ago by Abby Krzywiecki of Farmington Hills Mercy.

The record-breaker came in the second inning, in Dew's second at-bat of the evening.

"I was definitely thinking about it before the at-bat, but not when I was at the plate, not at all," said Dew, a junior first baseman, whose team beat Whitehall 13-1. "The pitch was low and down the middle. I swung pretty hard at it. I like those pitches."

Dew said she didn't expect the ball to clear the fence – just like she didn't expect her record-tying home run to make it a few days earlier against Holton.

But she admits she watched the ball the whole time, just to see if

it might have the necessary distance.



Dew poses with the ball she hit to set the state record.

Photo/Eric Sturr

it might have the necessary distance.

"I honestly didn't think it was going to go over," she said. "I just got under it, and it went really high and barely went over."

"I was running and watching it the entire time. It was kind

of a relief, because now I don't have to worry about it anymore."

Dew was mobbed by her teammates when she reached home plate, in a moment she will never forget.

"I almost fell down a few times," she said. "They were jumping all over me. It was really cool."

She said both of her parents were in attendance to watch her historic moment.

"I know my mom took a video of it," Dew said. "I could hear her screaming. My dad is kind of a quiet guy, but I'm sure he was excited."

After the record-breaking homer, Whitehall Coach Dave Goodrich called time out, and both teams gathered near the mound for a special ceremony. The home run ball was retrieved and presented to Dew.

"Dave Goodrich talked to us before the game and said if it happened, he would bring his team out and make a moment of it," said Mona Shores softball coach Jason Crago.

## ONE MORE RECORD TO GO

State career home run record: 49  
Dew's current home run total: 38

"Dave and I have coached together for 17 or 18 years now, and he's a good buddy of mine. He told me before the game that they were not going to (intentionally) walk her. He knew this was something special, something you don't get to see, ever."

"She's a great kid and she works super hard," the coach added about Dew. "To have so many people show up was great. It was a big crowd for us, and they went nuts. There were probably a couple hundred there."

With a year of varsity remaining, Dew has a good chance of breaking the state's career home run record of 49, set by Erika Underwood of Addison High School, between 2012 and 2015. Dew currently has 38 career homers.



# CLAIRE BORCHERS : THE GIRL WHO NEVER RAN TRACK IN HIGH SCHOOL IS NOW A TRACK STAR AT U-M

By Nate Thompson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

What makes college athletics special are the stories of unheralded athletes doing better than anyone expected and eventually becoming All-Conference or All-American standouts.

The stories are more recognized in sports like football, but also happen in track and field, as 2014 Grand Haven High School graduate Claire Borchers has proven.

Borchers never competed in track and field during her four years at Grand Haven High School, before enrolling at the University of Michigan. And now, just three years later, the junior qualified for the NCAA Track and Field Championships and finished 17th in the 3,000-meter steeplechase on June 10, with a time of 10 minutes, 7.35 seconds.

In her first time competing in the "Big Dance" of track and field, which was held on the campus of the University of Oregon in Eugene, Ore., Borchers failed to advance to the finals in the event, but stamped an otherwise tremendous season with honorable mention All-American recognition.



Claire Borchers

Borchers set herself up to compete against the best of the best with a captivating performance two weeks earlier. In the moments after she turned in a come-from-behind victory to win her heat at the NCAA East Preliminaries on May 26 in Lexington, Kentucky, and clinching an automatic berth to the NCAA Championships in the process, Borchers realized she had really made it in the sport.

"I knew all the training, and all my great teammates that have helped me and motivated me over the years, had paid off," she said.

This was far from Borchers'

first athletic success story.

She was an All-Conference performer for the Grand Haven girls soccer team in high school, and finished in the top 30 at the Division 1 state cross country finals four times. She led the Bucs to the 2010 girls cross country state championship in her freshman season, when she placed 10th individually in the state title race.

Borchers' achievements in cross country caught the eye of University of Michigan women's track and field associate head coach Mike McGuire, who had previously recruited Grand Haven sisters Becca and Laura Addison to U-M.

"We kind of had that connection since he was also coaching the Addison girls," Borchers said. "He told me that he knew my cross country times were strong, but he was interested in me transitioning over to track, and it would be a situation where I'd have to earn my keep."

An event McGuire thought Borchers might flourish in was the 3,000 steeplechase, which requires a more technical game plan, instead of pure speed.



Grand Haven's Claire Borchers competes at the NCAA East Preliminaries in Lexington, KY, on May 26. Photo/Zach Sanderson

The steeplechase event features five unmovable barriers per lap, one of which is a water barrier, which is on an angle and about three-feet deep.

Once Borchers tried the event as a freshman at Michigan, she fell in love.

"What makes it so exciting is that it's often unpredictable," she said. "The last 100 meters of the race, if you're really tired, you could easily clip a barrier and face-plant."

"Hurdling is probably my stronger suit, so that helps me hang on between each barrier."

Borchers was a freshman during Laura Addison's senior season at Michigan, and the two had been friends while competing together at Grand Haven. Borchers said Addison was instrumental in helping her flourish under McGuire's coaching, and helping her adjust to the constant demands of being a collegiate runner.

For Borchers, there is no offseason. With her outdoor track season now complete, she'll jump into summer training, which involves fewer workouts, but requires consistent, regular-pace runs of 50 miles per week.

"I can train from home, so I'll get a chance to come back to Grand Haven this summer for a few weeks, which I love," she said.

In the fall, she'll begin her senior season with U-M's cross country team, before the winter track season.

Borchers' track experience came full circle with her family in attendance - including her parents Dan and Mary Borchers - at the NCAA Championships in Oregon.

Although she wasn't able to top her personal best time of 9:56.57, what she's been able to accomplish at U-M should be put into perspective. Her personal best is the third-fastest steeplechase time in U-M history. Her second-best time of 9:58.45 helped her finish second in the event at the Big Ten Conference Outdoor Championships on May 14.

"I definitely did not anticipate all of this," Borchers said. "I hoped and dreamed that this was a possibility long-term, but now that I've reached that goal, it's just really exciting."



# BEST OF THE BEST

## Seven area high school athletes claim state track and field titles

By Jacob Arvidson  
LocalSportsJournal.com

The only time Spring Lake's Bella LeRoux failed to win a pole vaulting state title was during her freshman year, when she took second in the state – behind her older sister.

Since then she has won three straight state championships, with the latest coming June 3 when she cleared the bar at 12-feet, 6 inches, setting a new Division 2 girls state pole vault record.

The three-peat state title and the state record are of equal importance in LeRoux's mind.



"In my senior year, to break the record is amazing, but also to get my third title is amazing," she said. "They equal each other out in that aspect."

LeRoux was one of seven area athletes (four of them on a relay team) to become state high school track and field champions in June.

Fruitport's Cameron Oleen claimed first in the Division 2 400-meter dash, Ludington's Lauren Biggs took the title in the Division 2 800-meter dash, and the Muskegon Catholic Central 4x200 relay team (Tommy

Watts, Ben Treutler, Dawson Steigman, and Cameron Martinez) won their second straight state championship.

Wrapping up her high school career on the highest note possible was an emotional moment for LeRoux, but it didn't hit her until she took the podium to be recognized during the state finals awards ceremony.

"I actually was crying when I stepped up on the podium," she said. "I wasn't bawling my eyes out crying, but I was sitting in the seat they have us sit in before we go up on the podium, and my eyes just got so watery. I looked down the line of girl competitors, and that's when it sunk in a little bit more. It was just an amazing feeling."

Ironically, LeRoux wasn't interested in pole vaulting when she was younger.



Spring Lake's Bella LeRoux won her third state pole vaulting title in June. Photo/Grand Haven Tribune

"I didn't want to be like my sister," LeRoux said. "I didn't want to be doing the same things as her."

But her older brother Kevin McCauley, who she refers to as "my No. 1 fan and my idol," was also a pole vaulter, and wanted his younger sisters to follow in his footsteps. So he searched and found Land-on Athletics, a pole-vaulting team based in Nashville, Michigan, and encouraged his sisters to join.

After tagging along to watch the team practice, and after some prodding from her family, LeRoux gave it a try.

The success didn't come right away.

"I tried it and I was really, really bad and didn't want to stick with it," she said. "But my dad, my mom and my sister just told me to keep trying, and I couldn't just try something once and throw it out the window. I kept trying and trying and driving an hour and a half, three days per week, and that's how it started."

After her first full-fledged summer of dedicated training, prior to her freshman year of high school, things started to click for LeRoux.

"I went from seven feet my seventh-grade year, to eight feet my eighth-grade year, to 11 feet, six inches my ninth-grade year," she said. "I did that just from bearing down and saying, 'I do want to do this for the rest of my life, so let's get down to business.'"

She and her senior sister, Allie LeRoux, dominated the competition that year, giving Spring Lake a name in the pole vaulting community. The two eventually took first and second at the state meet, with Allie earning the top spot.

## AREA STATE TRACK & FIELD CHAMPS

**Bella LeRoux, Spring Lake - pole vault**  
**Cameron Oleen, Fruitport - 400 meter dash**  
**Lauren Biggs, Ludington - 800 meter dash**  
**Dawson Steigman, MCC - 4x200 relay**  
**Cameron Martinez, MCC - 4x200 relay**  
**Ben Treutler, MCC - 4x200 relay**  
**Tommy Watts, MCC - 4x200 relay**

"I didn't win, but that whole year it was my sister and I against each other, but we were also trying to root for each other and coach each other," LeRoux said.

"That was the year that tested me the most. That was her senior year, so she deserved all of it, but at the same time I wanted to win so bad. I would never just let her win."

The secret to LeRoux's success isn't size, strength or speed, she said.

"I think every coach and every athlete would say gymnastics," LeRoux said. "I was in gymnastics for 12 years. It's



just body awareness and strengths that we have from being gymnasts. A lot of great pole vaulters used to be gymnasts. Anybody can be a great vaulter, but the gymnastics helped me get into it a little bit faster."

LeRoux will take her talents to Michigan State University next year, and will continue her pole vaulting career for the Spartans.

## MCC relay team repeats its championship



Cam Martinez, Dawson Steigman, Ben Treutler, Tommy Watts. Photo/Radium Photo

The Muskegon Catholic 4x200 relay team repeated its 2016 state championship in Division 4.

But the team might have fallen short if it weren't for Dawson Steigman. The Crusaders were in fourth place in the race when he took the baton for the third leg. They were in first by the time he handed it off to teammate Cameron Martinez for the final leg.

"I got the baton and I don't know what happened," Steigman said. "I just took off and caught up to the rest of the guys, then I gave it to Cam and he pulled it out the rest of the way."

"All of us were super-hyped to prove to everyone we were back and ready to win this thing. There was a lot of excitement behind it, and once I got that baton I just let it all out."

"It was probably the best feeling I ever had. It was probably the most unforgettable moment I could ever think of."

The team of Tommy Watts, Ben Treutler, Steigman and Martinez finished with a time of 1:32.25, almost a full second slower than their 2016 championship time, but still good enough for another state title.

## Oleen keeps the 400-meter state title in Fruitport

"If the eyes are moving forward, the legs will follow."

Those were the thoughts of Fruitport's Cameron Oleen as he powered down the home stretch on his way to a Division 2 state title in the 400-meter dash, posting a time of 49.21 seconds.

"I came around that 300 turn and I saw the guy in the eighth lane out of the corner of my eye," he said. "I told myself I'd trained all season for this, I'm already in pain, so I might as well give it all I've got. The last 100 meters I couldn't feel my legs. I was honestly just running."

Oleen followed in the footsteps of 2016 Fruitport graduate Noah Hendricks, who won the state title in the same event a year ago.

While Oleen had run as a member of the 4x400-meter relay team in prior years, this was the first year he had attacked the open 400. He will carry his momentum into his senior season as he looks to defend his state title.



## Ludington's Biggs gets a title in her final try

After finishing second in the 800-meter dash as a junior, Ludington's Lauren Biggs didn't want let the final meet of her career end without a championship.

The senior didn't disappoint, clocking in at 2:12.13 to claim her first individual state title.

"It was going to be the last individual race of my high school career," she said. "It was one of my goals at the beginning of the year to win the 800 at state. I had been looking forward to this the entire season, particularly since I got second last year. The atmosphere was really intense, but I knew what I wanted and I just went after it."

Biggs will become a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point in the fall, where she will continue to pursue her career on the track.



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## Mona Shores Girls Soccer 2017

# A dream season... to be continued

### LocalSportsJournal.com

Mona Shores girls' soccer coach Dylan Darga had two great honeymoons this spring.

The first came during the soccer season, which was his first with the Sailors.

He had a feeling his new team might be pretty good, but he never dreamed how good.

But Darga found out over the next few months, as the Sailors posted the finest season in program history. They had a perfect 18-0 regular season and won conference and district titles before finishing with a 21-1 record.



**Dylan Darga**

Shortly after the season ended with a loss in regionals to eventual state champion Forest Hills Central, Darga was married and off to Florida for a romantic honeymoon.

All in all, it was a head-spinning spring for the young coach, in a really great way.

"I really didn't have time for everything to settle in," said Darga, 31. "We lost to Forest Hills, then had the last week of school, then we were making final plans for the wedding, then we left on our honeymoon. It's been a busy spring."

Even when he finally had time to slow down and relax on his honeymoon, Darga admitted that the exciting season was a topic of conversation with his new wife, Amanda.

"It came up a few times," said Darga, who teaches third grade at Marquette



### Goalkeeper Megan Swanker

Elementary. "My wife has really grown to appreciate the sport. She's our biggest fan. I need her to be supportive, and she's been incredible about everything."

Mona Shores' record-breaking season started with a 5-0 victory over Zeeland East, and the wins just kept coming.

There was a 3-2 come-from-behind victory over Grand Haven. There was a 4-1 win over a previously unbeaten Fruitport team. There were two wins against conference arch-rival Reeths-Puffer and its standout goalkeeper Elysia Mattos.

The Sailors clinched the O-K Black championship with win No. 17, an 8-0 shutout over Grand Rapids Union.

They wrapped up a perfect 18-0 regular season with an 8-0 victory over Kenowa Hills on May 25. The team became only the third in Mona Shores history to post an undefeated regular season in any sport, according to Darga.

"Once we got outside (during preseason practices) and out of the gym, and I started seeing some of their skill on a bigger field, I could see there was something special about this group," Darga said.

The winning streak continued during the Division 1 district tournament. The Sailors opened the postseason with a 5-3 victory over West Ottawa and a 3-0 semifinal win

over Grandville. Then they captured their program's first district title since 2007 with a 3-1 win over Grand Haven in the finals.

That made the Sailors 21-0, a mark that far surpassed the previous team record of 18 wins.

"A lot of things made this run great," Darga said. "These girls hate losing in anything they do. You think about 21 wins in a row. We didn't have a single tie. Their mindset was they could be down at any time and still come back and win."

"The games got harder and harder, but they stayed calm and collected, and you almost knew what was going to happen. There weren't many bumps in the road and they kept pretty even-keeled. When it came to the post-season the girls were ready and in their prime."

The Sailors' season came a sudden halt with a 4-1 loss to another undefeated team, Forest Hills Central, in the regional semifinals. Mona Shores led 1-0 before the game slipped away.

But the sting of the loss couldn't ruin a great season, and some great individual accomplishments.

Sarah Mikesell broke the school's single-season scoring record with 40 goals. Raegan Cox set a new school season assist record with 30 while scoring 29 goals. Goalkeeper Megan Swanker set a new school record with 15 shutouts, and only allowed 13 goals all season.

The best part is that those three players, and most of the rest of the team, will return next season for an encore.

"We have almost everyone coming back," said Darga, who only lost three seniors to graduation. "Our JV team was very successful this year. Our sophomore class is 17 deep. Hopefully we didn't set the bar too high this season, but next year is looking like it will be fun."



**Raegan Cox**



**Sarah Mikesell**





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