

LOCAL SPORTS Journal

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FREE



The little QB who could

5 foot, 7 inch backup quarterback Brady Rose leads Mona Shores to its first state football title

SPECIAL STATE CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION



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team wins
Division 4 title



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LOCALSPORTS Journal

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Behind the amazing performance of junior backup quarterback Brady Rose, the Mona Shores football team took everyone by surprise and beat Detroit Martin Luther King to win its very first state championship.

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The Western Michigan Christian boys soccer team won its seventh state championship the hard way - by posting shutouts in six of its seven games in the Division 4 state tournament.

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The Hart girls cross country team won its third straight state title. The Fremont boys team won the Division 2 title after finishing a close second in 2018. Finally, Western Michigan Christian sophomore Abbey VanderKooi made it two individual state titles in two tries.

On the cover:

Mona Shores junior Brady Rose, who stepped in for injured starting quarterback Caden Broersma and led the Sailors to the Division 2 state championship at Ford Field in Detroit. Photo/Tim Reilly



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The Mona Shores football team had some struggles and stumbles along the way, but when the season was on the line, they overcame their challenges and won...

A STUNNING STATE CHAMPIONSHIP!

LocalSportsJournal.com

In the understatement of the year, junior Brady Rose sounded like a modest backup quarterback who had done just enough to help his team get by, in the absence of the injured starter.

“Coach has confidence in me as his back-up quarterback,” Rose said in the moments

after the Division 2 state football finals at Detroit’s Ford Field on Nov. 29. “He told me to just do it the same as Caden would have.”

Rose followed those directions to amazing perfection, and as a result his

Mona Shores football team is celebrating its first state title.

Rose, a 5-foot-7, 150-pound slot receiver and defensive back, stepped in for Mona Shores’ All-State quarterback Caden Broersma several times during the 2019 season. His first turn came in the first two games of the season, when he led the Sailors to victories. Then Broersma stepped back in, and Rose returned to his other important roles on offense and defense.

That lasted until the opening minutes of the state semifinals against favored Walled Lake Western at Okemos High School on Nov. 23, when Broersma took a hit, went down in pain, and didn’t return to the game.

That moment must have been hard for loyal Sailor fans to mentally process. They had to face what was at the time the biggest game of the year with their senior QB out. Probably lights out, season over, right?

Not by a long shot.

The semifinal game was wild, with the lead changing hands four times, and the two teams’ offenses matching each other touchdown for touchdown. Rose was more than up to the challenge, rushing for 205 yards and five touchdowns and throwing for 105 yards.

He also turned out to be the hero of the day, scoring the touchdown that brought the Sailors within a point in the waning moments of the game, then running in the winning two-point conversion to give the Sailors a wild 57-56 victory.

The victory put the Sailors in the Division 3 state championship game for the second straight season, with a chance to avenge



Brady Rose: Rushed for 3 TDs, passed for 1 in state title game



Tre Hatcher: 1 touchdown



Jaylen Hopson: 1 touchdown

their 2018 loss to Warren De La Salle. Despite Rose’s performance in the semifinal game, the obvious hope was that Broersma would return to the lineup and the Sailor attack would be intact with the Division 2 title on the line.

Then early in the next week it became known that Broersma had suffered a fracture in his back and would not be playing in the finals. That unfortunate news – plus the fact that the Sailors would be facing defending Division 3

state champion Detroit Martin Luther King – left a lot of fans with the impression that Mona Shores would have to settle for the state runner-up trophy again.

Once again everyone was guilty of underestimating Rose. The undersized quarterback had another huge game when it mattered the most. He rushed 21 times for 90 yards and scored three touchdowns. He completed 8 of 11 passes for 122 yards and another touchdown.

Rose also led the defense with 10 tackles, and made a key interception late in the third quarter, which led directly to a crucial Mona Shores touchdown.

And once again he led his team on a crucial offensive drive near the end of the game, and scored the winning touchdown in a 35-26 victory.

For a backup quarterback with limited experience at the position at the varsity level, Rose performed like a confident veteran.

“Our offense never changed when we had to insert Brady in the lineup,” said Mona Shores head coach Matt Koziak. “Brady has one of the best football IQs I have ever coached. He knows where to be, and he is so cool and calm. He is just a special kid who doesn’t get too high on his highs or low on his lows.”

Overcoming challenges

The season started with an air of concern for Mona Shores, after a broken bone in a pinky finger sidelined Broersma for the first two games.

Luckily Rose had plenty of time to practice under center in the weeks leading up to the season opener, and led the Sailors to impressive wins over East Kentwood (28-7) and Bay City Central (43-6).

Broersma returned in Week 3 and quarterbacked Shores to a 33-13 conference victory over crosstown rival Reeths-Puffer. But there were some troubled waters ahead.

The Sailors faced their first real test in Week 4 against state-ranked Rockford, and came up on the short end of a 34-21 final score on their home field. Suddenly the season had a blemish, and some of the Sailors’ weaknesses had been exposed.

Mona Shores responded to that loss with three straight victories over Kenowa Hills (42-20), Grand Rapids Union (56-0) and Jenison (35-6). At 6-1, the Sailors appeared ready for their annual showdown against neighboring



The Sailors mob the trophy after winning their first state championship. Photos/Tim Reilly

rival Muskegon, the state's top-ranked team in Division 3.

The Muskegon-Mona Shores game has been the biggest in Muskegon County in recent years and is always hyped up. The winner takes home the O-K Black Conference crown and local bragging rights, and emerges with a lot of momentum heading into the playoffs.

But this year it wasn't much of a showdown, because Muskegon handed Mona Shores a humiliating 53-0 defeat on its own field. Suddenly the Sailors seemed deflated, and state championship hopes seemed distant at best.

"That was probably the biggest shellacking we ever took," Koziak said. "In the past it always felt like a back-and-forth game. But we were never in that game this year, and they poured it on us."

That kind of loss in a major showdown game would have caused a lot of teams to lose confidence and fold up. But the Sailors responded by taking a good, long look at themselves and addressing their shortcomings.

"When you watch film and you see guys not blocking till the whistle or running routes short, you critique yourself," Koziak said. "We showed the kids the film and told them that those things are the game within the game. The kids embraced it, and we had to fix those things, because you can't just talk about it."



Kolbe Trovinger, after making a clutch catch.

Mona Shores still played a little groggy over the next few weeks. In Week 9 they only led sub-.500 Fruitport 14-7 at halftime before pulling away for a 42-20 win in the second half.

In the first round of the playoffs at Midland, the Sailors trailed 13-7 at halftime before rallying for a 20-13 win.

Against Midland Dow in the district finals, Mona Shores led 14-0 at halftime before grabbing a 35-12 victory.

The longer the Sailors survived, the more confidence they gained. And they would need every bit of that confidence over the next three weeks, when they faced and overcame very daunting challenges.

The first was in the regional finals at Portage Northern, a team

they destroyed in the same round of the playoffs in 2018.

Things did not start out well for Mona Shores. The host Huskies scored touchdowns on their first three possessions, built a 20-7 lead, and had a 23-14 advantage at halftime.

But the Sailor defense buckled down in the second half and kept Portage Northern off the scoreboard. That allowed the offense to score twice and steal a 28-23 victory, which was capped by a thrilling 64-yard touchdown run by senior Kolbe Trovinger in the third quarter.

"Wins are great, but the way these kids have won in the playoffs, it's just crazy," Koziak said after that game. "They find a way to win for each other."

The state semifinal against Walled Lake Western turned out to be one for the ages, and the Sailors had to dig very deep to keep pace and find a way to beat the heavily-favored Warriors.

The high-scoring, back-and-forth affair was tied four times before the outcome was decided.

Walled Lake Western scored a touchdown on the third play of the game and led 7-0. Mona Shores scored and tied it up 7-7. Walled Lake went up 14-7, then the Sailors tied it again.

Mona Shores then built a hopeful 28-14 lead in a wild second quarter, but Walled Lake kept fighting back, and the Sailors clung to a 35-28 lead at halftime.

The Warriors tied the score in the third quarter, Mona Shores went back up 42-35, then it was tied 42-42. Walled Lake went up 48-42 in the fourth quarter, Mona Shores pulled ahead 49-48, then the Warriors scored their final touchdown with 3:51 remaining to build a 56-49 lead.

The Sailors' final drive, starting at their own 35, will go down in school history.

Rose connected with Keondre Pierce for a 45-yard pass on the first play, then completed an 18-yard pass to Trovinger on fourth-and-nine from the Walled Lake 19, keeping the season alive and putting the ball at the one-yard line.

Rose dove into the end zone three players later, then carried in the gutsy two-point conversion with 17 seconds left, and Mona Shores emerged with the amazing one-point win and another trip to



Rose makes a game-changing interception.

the state finals.

"It's a special group," Koziak said about the magical playoff run. "We don't have any Division 1 athletes except Caden, who has an offer from Central Michigan. But these kids just play their butts off. It's one of those life lessons where you keep grinding and chugging like we have all year long."

The final hurdle

The Sailors were again considered definite underdogs in the finals against Detroit King.

It's not that they lacked talent. Running back Tre'shawn Hatcher came in to the finals with 1,257 yards and 12 touchdowns on 140 carries, despite missing two games in the regular season.

The Sailors also had a slew of dangerous receivers, including Jaylen Hopson (18 catches, 304 yards, five TDs), Pierce (13 catches, 228 yards, one TD) and Trovinger (13 catches, 209 yards).

The entire offense functioned effectively behind the work of a huge and talented line, which included center Bryce Sikkenga (5-10, 302 pounds), guards Derek Pennell (6-0, 298) and Cooper Wierengo (5-11, 205), and tackles Blake Bustard (6-6, 265) and Mason Klos (6-0, 256).

"This is the heaviest line we've ever had," Koziak said. "We average 260 with a right guard who only weighs 205. We got some big guys up front and our coaching staff does a great job with them. They don't get the credit they deserve for the holes they create."

But Detroit King, which beat the Muskegon Big Reds in the 2018 Division 3 state finals, seemed like a very tough challenge indeed, particularly with the Sailors missing their starting quarterback.

King opened the season with two losses against quality opponents, but then reeled off 11 straight wins, including a convincing 60-17 victory over Birmingham Seaholm in the semifinals.

King had outscored its opponents 531-161 on the season, and had plenty of playoff experience and success to fall back on. King was playing in its fourth state championship game in the last five years, and won titles in 2015, 2016 and 2018.

"They're used to winning," Koziak said. "It's not their first time here. They're extremely talented and well-coached."

When game time came at Ford Field, the Sailors stunned everyone by scoring touchdowns on their first two possessions jumping out to a 14-0 lead. Rose scored the first TD on a one-yard run and Hatcher scored the second on an 18-yard burst.

Detroit King scored a touchdown later in the second quarter, but the extra point kick failed. Mona Shores scored again on a one-yard run by Rose and led 21-6. The Crusaders added a score just 25 seconds before halftime, and Mona Shores went to the break with a 21-12 advantage.

Detroit King scored on the opening drive of the second half, the two-point conversion was good, and the Sailors' big lead had suddenly shrunk to 21-20. At that point a lot of people were wondering if King had withstood the worst that Shores could dish out, and



Mona Shores Coach Matt Koziak won a state title on his third visit to Ford Field.

would rally for the win.

They turned out to be wrong.

King stopped a Mona Shores drive on downs at its own 14-yard line, then moved the ball to the 50 in a drive that could have given them the lead. But Rose ended the threat by picking off a pass at the Sailor 45.

The Sailors then traveled 50 yards on seven plays, scoring on a 17-yard pass from Rose to Hopson on fourth down with 16 seconds left in the third quarter.

"I was just running my route and I just caught it," Hopson said about his TD catch. "This championship means a lot because I lost my dad, so I had a lot to play for and I wanted to give 100 percent."

Just three plays later, King's Penny Boone broke loose for a 66-yard touchdown run. The two-point conversion pass was incomplete, leaving Mona Shores clinging to a 28-26 lead with 10:45 left in the fourth.

At that point the Sailors needed a long drive to kill the clock and more points to seal the win, and they accomplished both.

The Sailors got the ball back at their own 27 and went to work, moving the chains and keeping the explosive Crusader offense off the field.

An eight-yard run by Hatcher on third-and-3 gave the Sailors an important first down at their own 35. A four-yard run by Rose on third-and-3 at the 50 moved the ball into Detroit King territory.

A pass interference call on Detroit King on the next play gave the Sailors the ball at the Crusader 31. Then they advanced to the 12, where they faced fourth-and-one with 3:42 remaining.

Hatcher got the first down with a three-yard run to the Detroit King 9. Then Rose ran seven yards to the 2, before plowing in for the game-clinching score on the next play. Keegan DeKuiper's fifth PAT kick of the day made the score 35-26.

Detroit King got the ball back as the clock ran down, but Trovinger intercepted a pass at the Sailor 37 with about 40 seconds left, ending all doubt.

Mona Shores outrushed King 208-197. The Crusaders had a 209-122 advantage in passing and a 406-330 edge in total yardage, but the numbers on the scoreboard were all that mattered, and they favored the Sailors.

Hatcher finished with 95 yards on eight carries with one touchdown. Hopson had a great game, catching five passes for 103 yards and a touchdown. Trovinger had seven tackles for the Sailors while Cam Sobish and Gary Humphrey added five apiece.

"I told them after the last game I would never bet against them in anything, including in life," Koziak said about his players. "We lose our All-State quarterback, who played in this game last year, and a backup quarterback comes in and leads us to our first state championship ever. These guys believed in what we were doing and they believed in each other."



Injured QB Caden Broersma hoists the state title trophy.

When game time came at Ford Field, the Sailors stunned everyone by scoring

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DENIED!

The Western Michigan Christian boys soccer team won its seventh state title by keeping opponents off the scoreboard

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Of course it takes nerves of steel for a high school goalkeeper to register a school-record 46 shutouts in a varsity soccer career.

But even a calm demeanor couldn't fully explain what Western Michigan Christian's Jameson Goorman accomplished in the Division 4 state championship game at Novi High School on Nov. 2.

Goorman looked as icy as the bitter wind blowing across the field as he stood in the mouth of the goal, with five shooters from Grosse Pointe Woods University Liggett getting ready to take him on from 12 short yards away.

Then he managed to do something his veteran Coach Dave Hulings had never seen in his long career – stop four of five shots in an overtime shootout.

The last save, against Liggett's Nolan Ondersma in the fifth and final round, was one for the history books. Goorman dove hard to his right and deflected the high, hard shot away, giving WMC a 1-0 victory and its first state soccer championship since 2010.

"I was just thinking that I was go-

ing to save every single one, that was my mindset," Goorman said after the game to a crowd of reporters. "I just kept thinking about the next one. I am just excited and happy that we can bring back a state championship to my school. I had a lot of confidence going in."

Hulings raved about his goalie after the game.

"Was Jamo big or what?" said the coach, who captured his third state title with the Warriors. "He is amazing. People wanted me to talk to him about being more intimidating in the box, but I said you don't tell Jamo anything, he just knows what he's doing. He's just got a sense about it. He knows how to read players. That's his parents and his DNA, it's nothing you can coach."

"For him to make four saves (in a shootout), no I have never seen that before."

Of course Goorman needed a little help in the shootout, because his teammates had to outscore Liggett to gain the victory. They didn't have much more luck than the Knights did, but two Warriors – seniors Brandan Fles and Isaac VanHoeven – managed to get the ball past Liggett goalkeeper Sam Sword, and that was one more than the Knights could muster.

VanHoeven's shot, the fourth of the shootout for WMC, proved to be the winner. He sent a low shot directly at the goalkeeper, and somehow it managed to trickle

through his legs, giving the Warriors a 2-1 lead in the shootout,

Goorman made his final save a few seconds later, and the Warriors were the champions.

"It's hard to come up with words to describe this moment," VanHoeven said. "We put everything on the line today. I'm ecstatic. Being the last to touch the ball, putting it through the goalie's legs, you couldn't write it."

The other dramatic win

The shutout victory was the sixth in seven games in the state tournament for Goorman and the Warriors. They beat Eau Claire 8-0, Hudsonville Libertas 6-0 and Holland Black River 6-0 in districts, North Muskegon 3-0 in the first round of regionals, and Dansville 2-0 in the state semifinals.

The one win that was not a shutout was extremely challenging, because it came in the regional finals against Grandville Calvin Christian, the top-ranked team in the state.

The Warriors' four-game tournament shutout streak came to an end about 13 minutes into the first half, when Calvin Christian's Matt Muller put a high shot into the net from close range. WMC answered 16 minutes into the second half when Brevin Byrne got a low dribbling shot past the Calvin goalie and into the net, tying the game 1-1.





From left, Coach Dave Hulings instructs a player at the state finals; Michael Masumpa moves the ball upfield; Goalie Jameson Goorman embraces Brandon Fles after the victory.

The two 10-minute overtime periods were scoreless, but Calvin Christian came very close to breaking the tie twice with about four minutes left in the second OT. Goorman came up big on both shots, diving hard to his left on the first one to make a sprawling save, then leaping eight seconds later to stop a high shot that was headed for the net.

All four Warriors who got the chance to shoot in the overtime shootout found the mark – Fles, Byrne, Charlie Alfree and VanHoeven.

Calvin's first, third and fourth shooters scored, but Goorman stopped the second shooter, and WMC went into the fifth round with a 4-3 edge.

If Calvin's Andrew Gruppen scored, the shootout would have continued. If Goorman could stop him, the game was over.

The shot was high and on target, but Goorman calmly leaped and tipped it over the net, and hundreds of WMC students swarmed the field to celebrate the dramatic victory with the team.

"He was looking like he was going right, then he swung his hips over so I just dove that way and tipped it over the bar," Goorman said moments after his team accepted the regional championship trophy.

"(Goorman) would have been our fifth shooter," Hulings said after the win. "I think he made the save because he didn't want to shoot!"

Wrapping up a state title

The win over Calvin Christian was dramatic enough, but it paled in comparison to the drama of the state championship game, because neither team managed to put the ball in the net though 80 minutes of regulation and two 10-minute overtime periods.

Sword, the Liggett goalie, made a series of amazing saves in the last 15 minutes of the first half, when WMC was playing with a strong wind at its back and applied heavy



At top, Isaac VanHoeven kicks the winning shot in the shootout. Above, the Warriors claim their trophy. Photos/Randy Riksen

offensive pressure. The Warriors outshot the Knights 8-2 before halftime, but the game was scoreless at the break.

Liggett had the wind and the offensive momentum in the second half, outshooting WMC 5-1. But Goorman came up big on several occasions to keep the game scoreless. His two most impressive saves

of the half came with about three minutes left, when he dove to his left to stop a shot with his hands, then stopped another on the rebound while lying on the ground.

"The wind was bad," Hulings said. "You saw what happened when they had the wind, we had to go with one forward and pack it in on defense and try to make it to overtime. They just kept coming at us. To see (the defense) shut that down was a testament to those guys.."

The two overtimes also proved indecisive, and the score remained 0-0, leading to the dramatic overtime shootout, with five snipers from each team taking turns going one-on-one with the opposing goalie.

Liggett's first shot, by Matthew Summers, got past Goorman, and suddenly the WMC keeper seemed mortal after all.

Fles shot next for WMC and found the mark, tying the shootout at 1-1. Then Goorman took over and put on a show, diving to stop four shots in a row with the confidence of an athlete who knew he was going to get the job done.

VanHoeven took his turn in the fourth round of the shootout with the score still tied 1-1. His simple, straight shot somehow got past Sword, and proved to be all WMC needed to gain the final edge in the dead-even contest.

Amazingly, WMC has ended each of the past four seasons with overtime shoot-out games. They lost the previous three and were eliminated from the tournament in sudden and painful fashion.

The dramatic state title win more than made up for those losses.

"We've only allowed one goal in four years in the tournament, so we couldn't go home without getting something from this," Hulings said. "This is just amazing."

WMC, which finished the season with a 19-2-3 record, has now won seven boys soccer state championships, in 1988, 1995, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2010 and this year.

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Maintaining Excellence

The Hart girls and Fremont boys cross country teams have been great for years, so nobody was stunned when they won state titles this fall. Meanwhile, WMC's Abbey VanderKooi is halfway to a four-peat as an individual state champion runner.

**By Andrew Johnson
LocalSportsJournal.com**

Great sports programs produce outstanding teams and win championship trophies, year after year.

That describes the Hart girls and Fremont boys cross country teams.

And super-talented, dedicated athletes will always shine, with a team or on their own. That describes Western Michigan Christian's Abby VanderKooi.

They all added another chapter to their outstanding legacies on Nov. 2 by winning state championships at the Michigan High School Athletic Association cross country finals at Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn.

It was the third straight Division 3 championship for the Hart girls, who have reached the point where they can claim dynasty status. It was the second straight Division 4 individual title for VanderKooi, who is only a sophomore and has the talent to end up being a four-time state champion.

Fremont won its first Division 2 state title since 2015, but the Packers have been among the elite teams in Michigan for years.

Their accomplishments were a testament to sustained excellence, brought on by hard work, dedication and an adherence to high standards.

Hart girls complete a three-peat

During his team's celebration, Hart girls cross country coach Terry Tatrow was asked if winning ever gets old.

He had a simple response.

"It feels awesome," said Tatrow, whose team had a score of 77 points, a whopping 56 points ahead of second-place Shepherd. "How could it possibly get old?"

The Hart program has had its share of success over the years,



Savannah Ackley finished fourth overall in the state finals, leading the Hart girls to their third straight team title. Photos/Randy Riksen

but three straight state titles has brought the Pirates to an entirely new level.

"It's been a long time coming," said Tatrow, who just completed his 21st season as coach. "We've had some really good teams. Our program has always been pretty successful, but not to this point. In the last five years or so, it seems like we've been getting the right kids with the right attitude and work ethic."

Three of the kids who helped Hart reach this pinnacle - Savannah Ackley, Audrianna Enns and Lynae Ackley - just happen to be cousins. Savannah finished fourth overall in the state title race, Audrianna was fifth and Lynae took 14th.

"They're great," said Tatrow about the cousins. "They're really hard-working kids. Our program starts in the summer, and Savannah really kind of sets the standard. But you never really know who is going to come in first, they all switch back and forth. It's really interesting having those three because it's really just a roll of the dice."

Rounding out the Hart scorers in the finals were MacKenzie Stitt, who finished 38th, and Brenna Aerts, who finished 49th.

Having won the state title in 2017 and 2018, the team did feel some extra pressure this fall, according to Tatrow.

"I could tell this year that we had a lot of expectations in our community and the cross country community," the coach said. "I think the expectations put a lot of pressure on the girls. They were a little more nervous this year than the last two."

"They were a lot quieter and more nervous knowing that everyone figured they were going to win it. Anything can happen at state. You just have to do the work all season long, and these girls sure did."

The lone senior on the Hart team was Aerts. That means four out of five runners will be returning next fall, making the Pirates instant

candidates for a four-peat.

"We'll lose Brenna and we'll miss her, but we've got some really good middle-schoolers coming up," Tatro said. "It's quite possible that we could even have a stronger team next year."

Fremont boys regain state glory

The Fremont boys cross country team had high expectations coming into 2019, due to its very promising performance last fall.

Fremont finished second at the 2018 state finals, only 13 points behind first-place Chelsea. The entire team was comprised of sophomores, plus one freshman, so it's fair to say that the Packers were poised for great things this season.

"It's fantastic to be able to seize the moment," said Fremont Coach Clifton Somers. "We were close last year with pretty much the same group. To capitalize on the opportunity that was in front of us is special. It's kind of a hard thing to understand what it means to win a state title. You have to be in the right shape and have a good day, on the right day."

If anyone knows about being a state champion, it's Somers, who has now won titles as a runner for Fremont, as a coach for Fremont, and now as the father of a Fremont runner.



Fremont junior Nathan Walker paced his team by finishing fourth overall.

"It was special," said Somers about having his son Conor Somers on the team, and watching him finish eighth overall on Saturday. "To share that moment with my son was really special. He's been very coachable, which he wasn't in middle school when I coached him in other sports. He struggled a little bit with dad as coach, but he's really matured out of that, and he's been really receptive."

The coach said a lot of credit for his son's development goes to junior Nathan Walker, who led the Packers in the state finals by finishing fourth overall.

"He's played a big role," Somers said about Walker, who finished with a time of 15:23.9 at the finals. "He's encouraged Conor and invited him to run with him, which really helped Conor

get better. Nathan does a great job overall. He's really a force behind us being competitive and not fearing anybody else. He's a sincere, encouraging guy to everyone on the team, and the kids really respect that."

Rounding out the Fremont scorers were Adam Ward who finished 18th, Ben Paige who finished 20th, and Mikko Vesma, the lone senior, who finished 36th.

"That's not something that happens very often," said Somers about his team finishing with five runners in the top 36. "That is pretty special to have that. Our goal was to have five in the top 30 and we just missed out on that."

"But they all worked hard during the season, and Adam Ward and Ben Paige really came on strong during the second half of the season."

With most of the team returning next season, people in the Fremont community may be looking ahead to a possible repeat, but the coach isn't ready to think about that just yet.

"I told the guys that they have to take some time to enjoy this,

and not worry about what's going to happen next year, because it's a long ways off," he said. "Yes, championships are won in the offseason, but you also need to stop and enjoy this. You can get burned out if you don't."



WMC sophomore Abbey VanderKooi won her second individual state championship and could be headed for four titles.

WMC runner stays on track for four titles

When it comes to domination at the individual level, VanderKooi takes the prize. She won her second straight individual state title as a sophomore this year and remains on pace to win four titles in four years.

She made her latest state title look easy.

VanderKooi finished with a time of 18:11.0, a full 1:11.7 ahead of the second-place runner, Riley Ford of Marlette.

But VanderKooi is an athlete who pushes herself hard, and she wasn't completely satisfied with the way she ran the state championship race. In last year's run, on the same course, she finished with a time of 17:47.3.

"This year I wasn't very happy with it," she said. "I mean, I was still happy to win, but the time wasn't nearly what I had hoped for."

VanderKooi said her state title run was an extension of the way she ran near the end of the season - and she was not happy with that.

"Recently I've been running slower," she said. "It's kind of scary and annoying."

"It's frustrating and I'm wondering if I'm losing motivation a little bit, because I never have anyone to race against and nothing to strive for."

She may have a point. While most runners strive to beat their nearest competition, VanderKooi typically runs against the clock, because nobody at the high school Division 4 level can keep pace with her.

"It's just how I've kind of always had to do it," she said. "I just wish I had someone to chase. I even wish sometimes that I was in a higher division."

Despite the slower time this year, VanderKooi admits that winning another state title is a great feeling.

"It's always exciting," she said. "It's fun to win state because it's a big deal. I've been really blessed by God to be able to win. To even be healthy enough to run is a blessing."

After winning two titles in her first two years, VanderKooi has already set her sights on going four-for-four in her cross country career.

"I really want to do it," she said. "It's definitely my goal. I'm already trying to get over this win and get back into training for it."

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