

# LOCAL SPORTS Journal

JANUARY 22, 2020

FREE

## HEART OF THE LAKE HAWKS

*Ralph Monday escaped the rough streets of LA and found a new home, a permanent team, and a meaningful life in Muskegon*

**Plus...**



Mona Shores' Jaylen Hopson dedicating a special senior season to his father, who died unexpectedly in July.

**SUBWAY**

Because accidents happen.



Orthopaedic  
Associates  
of Muskegon



# Ortho Walk-In Urgent Care

At our Muskegon office: Mon–Thur: 8am – 8pm | Fri: 8am – 5pm. 231-733-1013

Our team is here for you,  
no matter what sport.

## Lakeshore Sports Medicine Specialists



**Same day appointments and walk-ins available,  
because you just can't plan for it.**

If you experience an injury to a bone, joint, ligament, tendon or muscle, you can expect to be seen quickly by one of our two sports medicine specialists and by an orthopaedic surgeon, when needed.

**Sports physicals available!**

Call now to make an appointment for your son or daughter to have the required sports physical to participate in their school sports programs.

OAM offices in Grand  
Haven and Muskegon.

GRAND HAVEN:  
1445 Sheldon Road, Suite G1

MUSKEGON:  
1400 Mercy Drive, Suite 100

231-733-1326  
[www.oamkg.com](http://www.oamkg.com)





We offer **4%** APY  
on checking accounts!  
Call for details.

231-726-4871

[www.muskegoncoop.com](http://www.muskegoncoop.com)

**2 Convenient Locations**

1051 Peck Street, Muskegon, MI 49440  
1920 Laketon Ave., Muskegon, MI 49442

**MUSKEGON**  
CO-OP FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

# LOCALSPORTS Journal

## 4 Mr. Lake Hawk

Ralph Monday came to Muskegon about seven years ago, hoping to escape a troubled past and build his basketball career. He's still here, leading the West Michigan Lake Hawks on the court and making a difference in his adopted community.

## 8 Dedicated to a Dad

Last summer, Mona Shores' Jaylen Hopson and his dad were excited about the start of the high school football season. Suddenly Paul Hopson passed, and his heartbroken son dedicated what turned out to be a state championship season to his memory.

## 12 A Stiff Upper Lip

Ravenna's Josh Cox, one of the best multi-sport athletes in the area, lost his entire senior season to a nasty injury in the first football game in the fall. But he's learned to accept his fate while he rehabs and works toward a future in college sports.

## 14 Pitlick Part 2

In 2015 the Muskegon Lumberjacks traded for Rem Pitlick, who became their all-time single season scoring leader. This year they traded for his little brother, Rhett Pitlick, who is exhibiting similar skills as the Jacks climb in the standings.



**“Good luck to all MCC  
sports teams in 2020!  
We are praying for  
your success!”**

*Ken and Sheryl Callow*



*Bleakley Law Office*

*318 Houston Avenue*

*Muskegon, Michigan 49441*

**231-722-3733**

# MR. LAKE HAWK

**Steve Gunn**  
**LocalSportsJournal.com**

When Ralph Monday first came to Muskegon in 2013 to play for the West Michigan Lake Hawks, he was a young man trying to escape a troubled past by pursuing a sport he excelled at.

Like many young players, he wanted to use the American Basketball Association to develop his talent, then perhaps move on to bigger opportunities in more lucrative leagues.



He did not view the Lake Hawks as a destination team, or Muskegon as a long-term home.

But then kids got in the way, in a very good way. So Monday is still in town, helping the Lake Hawks thrive on the court, and making a difference in the lives of young people in his adopted community.

The biggest factor was that Monday became a father over the past few years, and



number, and promised to call him soon, just to see how he was doing.

That turned out to be a very fortunate phone call for McPherson.

"About a week later I called him and asked how he was doing," said Monday, a big, friendly guy with an engaging personality. "I asked if he was hungry, and he said yes, so I told him to meet me at a store, and we got him something to eat."

The two started talking again, and before long Monday offered to let McPherson stay in his home and get his life back on track, if he agreed to certain conditions.

"I heard him talk, I heard a lot of anger, and I could tell he was meant for so much more," Monday said. "I told him that the way he was spending his energy was not right. I told him he didn't need to be out there on the streets. I gave him some rules and guidelines, which he still follows. I told him he had to get into school and choose a direction."

McPherson jumped at the opportunity, moved in with Monday and enrolled at Muskegon Community College. He's currently in his third semester, thinking about what he wants to do with the rest of his life, now that he has renewed hope for a positive future.

**Ralph Monday escaped a troubled life in Los Angeles, came to Muskegon to star for the West Michigan Lake Hawks, and discovered a passion for working with young people facing the type of challenges he did.**

now has three young daughters to care for. He remembers what life was like growing up without a dad in his home, and he's determined to be there for his children.

Monday also became involved in the lives of a lot of youngsters in the area, through various community outreach programs. And sometimes he reaches out to troubled kids in a more informal way, when he meets one who's having a rough time.

One of those youngsters was Dershaun McPherson, a 19-year-old who had numerous scrapes with the law while growing up in Muskegon. He had been placed by the court in a rehabilitation facility in Pennsylvania, where he finished high school, but found himself homeless and desperate when he returned to the area.

One night in 2018 he had a chance

meeting with Monday and his girlfriend, and his life changed for the better.

"I was walking with an old friend, it was late, and we just bumped into each other," McPherson said about Monday. "His girlfriend stopped me and asked a question, we engaged in a conversation, then we went our separate ways.

"I was homeless at the time. If I was lucky I would be able to spend a night here and there at a friend's crib. For the longest time I would just walk all night, from the Heights to downtown and back, just to stay awake. I had too much pride to sleep outside."

Something about McPherson clicked with Monday, who grew up on the rough streets of the Los Angeles area and had his own problems with the law as a youth. He made a point of getting McPherson's phone

He's grateful to Monday for the assistance he's provided.

"He gave me a place to stay and helped me get back on my feet," McPherson said.

## *Escaping a troubled past*

Monday, 33, known widely by his nickname of Kali, spent the first years of his life in the Watts area of LA, which is notorious for crime and violence. Later his mother moved the family – which included 17 natural or adopted children – to Pasadena.

He ran into his share of trouble as a kid, which is not unusual for youngsters in the neighborhoods where he grew up.

"It was real bad," Monday said. "I watched one of my best friends get shot in front of me. There were a lot of gangs around me, stuff like that. It was kind of



hard to avoid.”

Basketball ended up being Monday’s ticket out.

As a kid his sports were football and baseball. He didn’t participate in organized basketball until his sophomore year in high school, when the varsity coach noticed him playing a pickup game and invited him to come out for the team. He ended up playing three years of varsity at two different high schools.

“I wasn’t all that good at first,” Monday said. “I couldn’t even dribble. But I played with a lot of intensity, then worked hard every summer because I wanted to be good at it, and it just kind of blossomed from there.”

Monday played one season at Citrus Community College in the LA area, and helped the team win a state championship.

That helped him land a scholarship to Northeastern State University in Oklahoma, where he played for a season before transferring to Bellevue University in Nebraska. But Monday encountered problems with the law there, left school and went home.

He spent two years back in Los Angeles, where there was more trouble to be found.

“I was going down the wrong path, in and out of jail a few times, and my mom talked me into playing basketball again,” Monday said. “She said that was the best chance for me.”

Monday had the good sense to listen to his mother.



**Monday takes a shot at a recent Lake Hawks home game in Muskegon.**

He enrolled at Bethesda University, a small Christian college in Anaheim that was just starting a basketball program, and his career finally took off. He became a team and conference most valuable player and set single-game school records for points (41), rebounds (24) and blocks (7).

By the time he was done he was named a National Christian College Athletic As-



**Monday with Dershaun McPherson, 19, who was homeless and without direction before the Lake Hawks' star took him in and gave him a fresh start. Photos/Jason Goorman**

sociation All-American.

Monday decided he wanted to play pro basketball, so he showcased his talents at the Global Basketball Summer League in Las Vegas in 2013. That’s how he first made contact with the Lake Hawks and ended up in Muskegon.

Monday was a part of the very first Lake Hawks squad in 2013-14. He and several other young players spend that season living with team owner and coach Ron Jenkins, until they could secure housing on their own.

He has been a mainstay for the Lake Hawks for all or parts of six seasons since arriving, helping the local squad win three North Central Division championships and reach the ABA regional finals three times, in 2014-14, 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Monday is a two-time ABA All-Star who can do a little bit of everything on the court, from playing the point and distributing the ball, hitting shots from the outside, and scoring the tough points in the paint. Perhaps his biggest strengths are his defensive and rebounding abilities.

Over his career, Monday is averaging 15.75 points per game, 8.38 rebounds and 1.5 assists.

Monday may have lost a step or two since his younger days, but he remains a co-captain of the Lake Hawks and a strong veteran presence on the young team, which has a roster with an average age of about 22.

“He’s not the 20-some year old he was when he first came in, but he’s still playing very similar to that,” Jenkins said. “He’s still very tenacious defensively, and in his scoring and attacking ability. Sometimes he plays shooting guard, but he’s strong enough and big enough to play small forward and dominate inside, and his rebounding skills are second to none.

“He’s definitely one of the leaders of

the team. He knows the organization and understands its purpose. He helps with the younger players coming in, helping them understand the entire picture. A lot of times those younger players, especially the local guys, don’t look outside the four walls. Kali tells them they have to earn the right to be a starter, they have to earn the right to be a champion.”

This year’s version of the Lakes Hawks may be one of the best, and could have the potential to finally get past the ABA regional finals in the postseason tournament. The team had a 10-2 record in early January and was ranked seventh in the league, which includes roughly 100 teams playing in different conferences across the nation.

Monday said he’s been waiting for a chance to take the Lake Hawks to the top of the league, and he hopes this is the season that could happen.

He also said he loves working with the young players on the team, particularly the local guys who are trying to advance their careers, like former Muskegon High School standouts Will Roberson and Jacarri Scott, and former Muskegon Heights star Marquis Brewer.

“We’ve won division titles, but I’ve never got a ring, and I think this is one of the better chances that we’ve had,” Monday said. “I think this team plays with a little more heart, and we play a little more defense. In the past we tried to just outscore teams too often.”

“I love this group of players. I like being kind of a mentor. It’s so crazy that I’m getting to play with little Will (Roberson). I used to go up there and work out with his team when he was at Muskegon.”

Monday played parts of several seasons in pro leagues in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, which pay good money for

**Continues on next page**

Americans who are willing to go there. He said he's also been approached about joining other teams in the U.S., but passed up the opportunities, partly out of loyalty to Jenkins and the Lake Hawks.

"I'm going to keep playing here until my body gives out," Monday said. "I've been through so much here with this team. I wouldn't feel right playing in another uniform. I've turned down pay to stay here, offers from some pretty good teams. I don't want to go join them. I want to beat them."

### ***'I don't know what would have happened'***

Monday's career with the Lake Hawks began with complications, due to his past legal problems. He was serving a 10-year legal probationary period for several convictions.

He had to get permission from the court in California to move to Muskegon and play for the Lake Hawks. He also had to find a way to fulfill the community service requirements attached to his probation.

He did that by connecting with Corinthians Baptist Church in Muskegon, where Jenkins serves as a deacon.

Monday managed to do his community service, and pursue what was becoming a growing personal interest – helping kids who grew up in the same circumstances he did.

"By that point, I saw a problem with some of the youth here, the same problem I had when I was younger," Monday said. "I saw anger. That's how everything went wrong with me. I didn't have a father around, and there were gangs."

He became involved in various community outreach programs through the church and the Lake Hawks.

He has visited local schools and read and talked to students, helped with local food drives for less fortunate families, visited the Muskegon County Youth Transition Center and encouraged the kids to turn their lives around, and assisted local law enforcement with various anti-gun and anti-bullying initiatives.



**Former Muskegon Big Red Will Roberson is one of several home-grown Lake Hawks.**

He's also worked at youth basketball camps at the Muskegon YMCA, and helped out with some local high school teams.

"I enjoy being a positive figure for kids here," Monday told Local Sports Journal back in 2015, during his second year with the Lake Hawks. "Muskegon kind of reminds me of where I came from. I think having a positive male figure is important for boys, especially these days."

Monday's interest in working with youngsters eventually led to his current job with Preferred Employment and Living Supports in Muskegon, helping people who have experienced mental challenges learn to live on their own and find employment opportunities.

He said the work can be time-consuming and requires a lot of patience, but the rewards are great when he sees signs of

progress.

"One of my clients, we were helping to clean a church, and it took about two months to get him acclimated," Monday said. "But after about seven or eight weeks, he was able to open the door to the cleaning closet, grab stuff, and do things on his own, without being told. Just seeing that was great."

"I'm an extrovert. I want to be around people and lead people. Who wouldn't want a job like that? It's my job to help them. We are supposed to have patience with people. That's what I'm here for."

While his life in Muskegon has allowed Monday to make a clean break with his past, there have been painful reminders.

One came during his second season with the Lake Hawks, when he learned that a childhood friend back in Los Angeles had been shot and killed in some sort of gang-related incident.

"That was Paul, one of my best friends," Monday said. "He got killed outside of a liquor store. He was a little younger than me. We were neighborhood kids who grew up together. I used to see him every day. He was like a little brother."

Luckily Monday was in Muskegon when he got the news, surrounded by a strong support system of new friends who helped him deal with the loss.

He felt anger and remorse, but was able to channel it in a healthy way.

And luckily Monday was there for McPherson, the young man who has been staying in his home, when he experienced a similar tragedy not long ago.

A cousin McPherson was close to was recently shot and killed in Muskegon.

McPherson said he felt a sense of rage, which could have driven him to do something extreme if he had been on his own.

"Honestly, I probably would have killed somebody or been killed myself," McPherson said. "That turned me very angry. If that would have happened, and I wouldn't have had someone in my ear, I don't know what would have happened."

## American Youth Basketball Tour

Celebrating 25 years of basketball excellence

### Upcoming local summer events



**Muskegon - June 12-13**  
**Ludington July 10-11**

**NATIONALS**  
**Grand Rapids Nationals**  
**July 24-26**



## STOP IN TODAY FOR YOUR SCHOOL APPAREL!

*R Designs*

EMBROIDERY • SCREENPRINTING  
CORPORATE APPAREL • TEAM UNIFORMS  
PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

BRING IN  
THIS COUPON  
FOR

**20% OFF**

YOUR PURCHASE OF \$50.00 OR MORE

**MONDAY - FRIDAY**  
**9:00- 5:30**  
**SATURDAY**  
**9:00- NOON**

**6979 GRAND HAVEN RD.**  
**NORTON SHORES, MI**  
**616-935-7099**





**Shoreline  
MMP<sup>LLC</sup>**  
231.571.4453

**Why obtain a medical card  
when it's recreational?**

- Patient rights
- Access to more dispos
- Shorter lines
- Lower sales tax
- Cheaper pricing
- Higher dosing available

**Medical Marijuana Certifications**



*Diane's*  
**Compassionate Services**

40 years experience specializing in  
terminal illness and nutrition

**231-722-8103**

**135 OTTAWA ST., Muskegon**

**BOWEN LAW OFFICES**  
*Attorneys & Counselors*  
1042 TERRACE ST.  
MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN 49442

BUSINESS PLANNING \ COLLECTIONS \ CONTRACTS \ ESTATE PLANNING \ LAND LORD - TENANT  
LITIGATION \ ELDER LAW & MEDICAID \ PROBATE \ REAL ESTATE \ TAX

PHONE: (231) 726-4484

DAVID T. BOWEN  
[dbowen@bowen-law.com](mailto:dbowen@bowen-law.com)

JONATHAN R. HOOGSTRA  
[jhoogstra@bowen-law.com](mailto:jhoogstra@bowen-law.com)

*Of Counsel:* DAVID K. FATH, JR.


**Brett Thorsen**  
Owner

2591 McCracken Street  
Muskegon, MI 49441

E [lakeshorec1@yahoo.com](mailto:lakeshorec1@yahoo.com)  
T 231.755.6978 F 231.755.7330

[www.carpetone.com](http://www.carpetone.com)


**LAKESHORE  
CARPET ONE FLOOR & HOME\***



**BAD BOYS BAIL BONDS**  
**FUGITIVE RECOVERY AND INVESTIGATIONS**

**TOLL FREE 24 HOUR HOTLINE 866-728-6400**

*"If we can't get you out, you aint gettin' out".*



**WADDELL  
& REED**  
*Financial Advisors™*

380 West Western Ave  
Suite 120  
Muskegon, MI 49440  
(231) 727-8176  
[waddell.com](http://waddell.com)

**SHERRY BECKER**  
*Financial Advisor*

&

**ROGER GARRETSON**  
*Financial Advisor*



# dedicated to a dad who couldn't be there to see it

By Steve Gunn  
[LocalSportsJournal.com](http://LocalSportsJournal.com)

Jaylen Hopson and his father, Paul Hopson, always shared a special bond through sports.

Paul played football, basketball and baseball during his years at Muskegon High School. Jaylen followed in his footsteps in the same three sports, through youth leagues and middle school, and finally at Mona Shores High School.

Jaylen always wore the number 23, the same number his dad wore in high school.



Jaylen skipped varsity football in his junior year to focus on basketball, but decided to return last fall for his senior season.

Both he and his dad were excited last summer when the Mona Shores varsity started preparing for the season. On July 10, Paul facetimed with Jaylen, saying he wanted to buy him a new pair of football cleats.

Of course Jaylen knew his father had been admitted to Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids, dealing with some ongoing health issues. But Paul seemed stable when they talked, and Jaylen saw no reason to be overly concerned.

The next day, July 11, Jaylen was with his teammates as they arrived at Grand Valley State University for a summer 7-on-7 tournament. Suddenly he started receiving text messages from various people, asking if he was all right.

Not knowing what was going on, Jaylen texted his dad, but received no response. A few minutes later he called the phone, and his grandmother answered in tears.

He learned that his father had died very suddenly that morning, after battling a rare form of blood cancer and heart disease. He was only 43.

"I heard my grandma crying on the phone, and I just knew," Jaylen said. "I knew he had been in and out of the hospital, seemed fine, then he went back in for a few days or a week or something, then he just passed. I don't know if he knew (he was dying), but he didn't tell me or my mom or anything."

It was a staggering loss for a kid whose father was his biggest fan. Suddenly the excitement of the pending football season was blurred.

"When it first happened, I was hurting real bad," he said. "It was my senior year, I was about to graduate, and he wouldn't be there to see it."

Jaylen's mother, Cynthia Hunter, said Paul's death took everyone by surprise.

"He had been having issues with his breathing and everything, and the doctors didn't really know what it was," Hunter said. "They gave him breathers and things. Then back in the beginning of last summer, they found out he had heart disease, then the blood cancer."

"It just went from there. One day during the summer he went to emergency, they found fluid around his lungs, then he went to the hospital in Grand Rapids. He got out a couple of times, but then days after went right back."

"He really didn't know he was that sick. It was kind of crazy. Last summer we were supposed to go on vacation to Texas, and a



few days before that I took the kids to Grand Rapids to see him. I could kind of tell something was wrong, but we were sitting in the hospital talking about Jaylen's graduation, pictures, what we were going to do and when we were going to do it.

"It was a shock."

Jaylen said he only missed one day of football practice after his father died, but getting back in the mindset to work hard and compete was extremely difficult.

"Some days I didn't want to go to practice, and some days I went but didn't do much of anything," he said. "Some nights I would lay in bed and not be able to sleep. I would just think about some of the things he used to say to me after games."

Jaylen said the support of his friends and teammates, and his determination to have a great season in his father's memory, helped him snap out of his immediate depression and accept the challenge of football.

"I was a wreck," Jaylen said about the visitation and funeral at Beulah Baptist Church. "But my football team came to the visitation. That's what made me want to get back to them. They supported me. They were there for me, and I wanted to be there for them."

"My dad wanted me to play football for one more year, but he only wanted me to play on one side of the ball, so I wouldn't get hurt for basketball. But after he died I wanted to give 100 percent, so I played both offense and defense."

### ***Storybook season, magical game***

Jaylen played very well, indeed, in what turned out to be a storybook season.

Mona Shores had a great passing attack all year, and Hopson was one of four outstanding receivers, along with Keondre Pierce, Kolbe Trovinger and Brady Rose.

He led that crew statistically through the first 13 games with 18 catches for 304 yards (an average of 16 yards per catch) and five touchdowns. But he saved his very best effort for the most important game of the season, the Division 2 state championship at Ford Field in Detroit.



**Jaylen in action at the state finals at Ford Field. Photo/Tim Reilly**

Mona Shores scored a touchdown on the first possession of the game on a one-yard run by Rose, who was filling in at quarterback for injured starter Caden Broersma. Hopson played a big role in the drive with two catches for 14 and 17 yards.

The Sailors scored again on their second possession on an 18-yard touchdown run by Tre Hatcher. Hopson also had a hand in that drive, catching a 27-yard pass from Rose.

Hopson finally found the end zone himself in the third quarter, catching a 17-yard TD pass from Rose on fourth down. The extra point gave the Sailors a 28-20 lead.

In the end Mona Shores upset Detroit Martin Luther King 35-26 to win the first football state championship in school history. Hopson finished with

five catches for 103 yards and one touchdown.

A lot of critics thought Mona Shores had little chance to go all the way. The Sailors were decided underdogs in the state semifinals against Walled Lake Western, but pulled off a wild 57-56 victory. They were huge underdogs against King, the defending Division 3 state champion, but again defied the odds to win the crown.

Hopson said the seniors on the team never doubted their poten-

tial for greatness.

"Our freshmen coach told us we were going to go to a state championship game and win it," he said. "So we believed it ever since we got to varsity."

When asked about his favorite memory of the championship game, Hopson said "probably the end of the game, how we were all just hugging and stuff."

When asked if he had any special thoughts about his dad after winning the title, Hopson nodded.

"After we won I took a knee, beat on my chest, and said 'This is for you,'" he said.

The significance of the moment was not lost on his mother, who knew how determined Jaylen was to honor the memory of his father.

"Oh my God, I was in tears," said Hunter, who was in the crowd at Ford Field, cheering with the throng of Mona Shores fans. "He just played his heart out, I got back home before him, and I was standing in the kitchen when he walked in. I just grabbed him and held him tight. I couldn't let him go. I told him how proud I was of him, and how proud his dad would have been. It was a special moment."

### ***Dealing with grief***

The Sailors' long playoff run took Jaylen immediately into the varsity basketball season, which started just a few days after the state championship game. He's Mona Shores' starting point guard, and one of the Sailors' leading scorers.

He says he's learning to cope with his loss while he focuses on school and basketball, but there are still a lot of tough moments.

"I really just stay around my friends, and I talk about it sometimes, and they just sit and listen," he said. "Sometimes it still gets tough, like when I have a bad day in practice, and I know I can't go home and talk to him about it, which is something I used to do a lot."

Jaylen has a lot of happy memories of his father to cling to, many of them related to sports, of course.

"In little league he was my coach for just about every sport," he said. "He treated me like his son, but also like any other coach would treat me. After practices he would tell me what I did wrong and what I could do better. It helped me a lot."

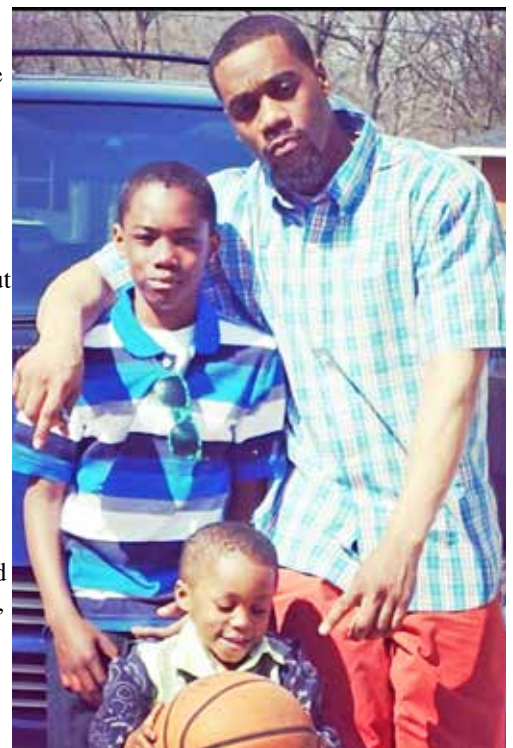
He remembers another championship game, in his youth football days, when his dad was an assistant coach.

"I had a long run in that game, and I looked over and saw him on the sideline, jumping up and down," Jaylen said.

During his high school years, he said he noticed his dad in the crowd a lot, showing his obvious pride.

"I remember a lot of times seeing him in the stands cheering hard and telling people I was his son," Hopson said. "That made me feel great."

He said there were times when his dad got tough, when he needed it the most.



**Jaylen and Paul Hopson with Jaylen's little brother Kohlby.**

***Continues on next page***

One of those times came during his junior year in high school, when Jaylen started spending school nights with his dad, because he lived so close to Mona Shores High School.

He said his grades had been poor during his first two years of high school, and his father was no longer willing to tolerate the situation.

"I wasn't a good student, to be honest," he said. "I wasn't trying at all. I was pretty immature. Then my dad basically told me that if I didn't improve, I wouldn't be playing sports anymore. Then I started getting really good grades."

Jaylen's brother and sister are also dealing with grief, and in some ways it's more challenging for them, because they are much younger.

His brother Kohlby is eight and his sister Jordyn is seven. They both attend Marquette Elementary in the Muskegon school district, where their father had been employed.



**Jaylen battles past a defender in a recent Mona Shores basketball game.**

"Jaylen's brother is taking it very hard," Hunter said. "This season he was in football, and that was really hard because his dad was always on the field with him. Sometimes he looked like he was just in a daze on the field, looking around, like he was waiting for his dad to come."

Hunter knows that Jaylen experiences some of those same emotions, even though he's older and more prepared to understand life's tragedies.

"All three of the kids were close to their dad, but with the boys, there was just something about their father," she said.

"At first Jaylen wouldn't open up about it. I was so worried. I kept talking to him to make sure he was okay. He was more worried about his brother and sister and how they felt than he was about himself.

"Before the state championship game, he seemed a little bit down, but he said he was going to play his heart out for his dad. And he played his heart out."

HERE'S TO ALL THE THINGS  
THAT MAKE A HOUSE A HOME!

**DH**  
DOUG HALE  
— HOMES —



WOODLAND SCHMIDT

Contact us today for  
help listing or finding  
your next dream home!

**DOUG HALE**  
REALTOR®  
231.578.1215  
Doug.Hale@CBGreatLakes.com



[www.DougHaleHomes.com](http://www.DougHaleHomes.com)

LOCALLY OWNED AND OPERATED FOR OVER 50 YEARS

**ARNOLD'S**  
AUTO GLASS INC.

**Mobile Service**

480 W. Sherman Blvd, Muskegon, MI 49444  
Phone 231.733.5544 Toll Free 800.754.1211 Fax 231.733.5574

MOBILE SERVICE 231.733.5544

**KraftMaid®**  
KITCHENS FOR THE REAL LIVING ROOM™



**Free**  
standard sink base  
cabinet with  
purchase of 5  
or more cabinets.  
Expiration 3/1/20



BUILDING CENTER  
1053 Jackson St. | Grand Haven  
616-842-5600

[www.Rycenga.com](http://www.Rycenga.com)

**Noordhoff**  
**PLUMBING**

Residential • Commercial  
Fast Reliable Service  
Licensed Master Plumber



**231-798-2777**



**Guaranteed  
Best Price  
AND FREE  
LIFETIME  
WARRANTY  
ON ALL NEW  
AND USED.**



\*SEE DEALER  
FOR DETAILS

**Deur Speet**  
FREMONT



**GUARANTEED**

**\$ CREDIT APPROVAL**

**Have you been turned down  
for an Auto Loan?**

**WE GUARANTEE YOUR APPROVAL**

**Call Kevin Hagg today! 231-924-3640**

**33 WEST DAYTON • DOWNTOWN FREMONT**

**SHORELINE  
MOTORS**

**SERVICE CENTER**

- Oil Change - Batteries - Tune ups - Radiators - A/C  
- Brakes - Suspension - Exhaust - Steering - Electrical



**2221 Henry St.  
231-755-2116**

**SSB | Shelby State Bank**

*Where Banking is Still a People Business!*

**THE COMMUNITY BANK  
FOR SPORTS LOVERS.**



**GREAT CATCH!**

[www.shelbybank.com](http://www.shelbybank.com)

Member FDIC

**231-755-8600**

**Lakeside Cafe**

**Muskegon's finest American cuisine**

**1/2 OFF**  
Lakeside Cafe  
**BREAKFAST, LUNCH OR DINNER**  
With coupon. Buy 1, get the 2nd  
1/2 off. (of equal or lesser value)  
Dine-In only. May not be  
combined with any other offers or  
coupons. Valid thru 2/28/20  
LS20716



Home of the Stuffed Hashbrown



Breakfast served ALL DAY!

**1384 Laketon • Muskegon**  
(just west of Catholic Central)

Check out our delicious menu at  
**lakesidetogo.com**



**Ravenna's Josh Cox, one of the best three-sport athletes around, was ready for a great senior year before it was wiped out by yet another injury. Despite the disappointment, he's keeping a**

# STIFF UPPER LIP

**By Nate Thompson  
LocalSportsJournal.com**

Sports teach life lessons, and one of the most important is perseverance.

We've all heard the old saying - when things get rough, you get back up, dust yourself off and keep pushing forward.

Ravenna's Josh Cox has learned that lesson over and over again, through a series of disappointing injuries that have continually interrupted his development as an athlete.

Just a few years ago, Cox burst on the scene as one of the most promising multi-sport high school athletes in the lakeshore area. He became an All-State receiver in football, a talented scorer and All-Conference performer for the basketball team, and a standout runner in track.



All of that happened before his senior season, and the sky seemed like the limit for the kid who was really good at everything he played.

But just as he soon as he started building momentum in those sports, bad luck would rear its ugly head in the form of some new injury.

During his sophomore basketball season he fractured his fibula in practice, costing him a big chunk of the season. During his junior season he sprained his ankle in basketball and missed three games.

Both of those injuries paled in comparison to the mishap he had last August, when he tore his ACL in Ravenna's first football game of the season. He quickly learned that the best parts of his senior year - the football and basketball seasons - were lost for him.

Cox kept a stiff upper lip, learning to live like most students. He focused on his school work during the week and his friends on the weekends, and worked hard at his rehabilitation efforts, with an eye on playing some sport at some college in the fall.

But bad luck just won't leave Cox alone.

In January he was snowmobiling with friends in the Manistee National Forest in the Cadillac area when an accident occurred. Luckily nobody was seriously hurt, but Cox came away with another frustrating injury.

He broke his ankle, which put his rehabilitation program, and his



**Cox has been forced to watch from the bench as his Ravenna teammates jumped out to a 8-0 start this season. Photo/Leo Valdez**

hopes of playing a college sport in the fall, in a state of suspension.

"It kind of slowed the timetable down for me a little bit," Cox said. "It put everything on pause. Now I have to wait for my ankle to heal before I can get back out there."

## *Season over in Week 1*

In August, Cox was looking forward to having twice as much fun and success than he ever had on the football field. He was coming off a great junior season, when he totaled 888 yards and 14 touchdowns and earned All-State honors as a wide receiver.

He was pumped about playing again in Ravenna's explosive spread offense, catching passes from quarterback Connor Kilbourne.

He also volunteered to become a two-way player, playing defensive back as well as receiver, to help Ravenna shore up a defense that gave up two many points in 2018.

Sadly, his plan never came to pass, because his season ended on Aug. 30 during Ravenna's first game against Hopkins.

"I was returning a punt, and I just remember making a spin move and putting my foot down on a spot," Cox recalled. "I was going to cut back and my knee just froze in that spot, while the rest of my body kept moving the other way. As soon as it happened, I heard a pop. After it happened, my first thought was how long I might be out."

Even with their go-to receiver lost for the season, the Bulldogs flourished on the gridiron, reaching eight wins, advancing to the Division 6 playoffs, and narrowly missing out on a West Michigan Conference championship.

But his teammates' success didn't prevent Cox from wondering what might have been, especially in a pair of heartbreaking overtime losses.

In what was essentially the West Michigan Conference title game



on Oct. 18, Ravenna coughed up an early lead over Oakridge and suffered a 27-20 overtime loss. The Bulldogs had a similar fate on Nov. 8 against Montague, when they dropped a 20-13 OT decision in frigid temperatures in a Division 6 district championship game.

"We had some close games, and you can't help but think that if I could have been in there, I could have made a difference," he said. "But you just have to move on. We had other guys step up. Calvin Schullo stepped up and did a great job of filling my shoes (at receiver). He had a great season.

"I was on the sidelines (for the playoff game) and it hurt. Just seeing the season end and the pain in the eyes of all of our seniors, it was tough. It was hard to see it come to an end."

## ***No hope for hoops***

Cox had surgery in early November. The average time to fully recover from an ACL tear is nine months, so the double whammy for Cox was realizing he'd miss the entire season of his favorite sport -- basketball.

It was obvious from the start of his high school career that Cox was a special talent in basketball, and could have a huge impact on the Ravenna program.

Former Ravenna varsity coach Justin Johnson, who moved on to the same position at Mona Shores this season, remembers Cox competing at the middle school level, and instantly believing the sharp-shooting youngster had a chance to be a program-changing type of player.

"He moved up to varsity as a freshman, and he just stood out as one of those kids who's a very good competitor. As soon as he stepped on the court, he flipped that switch."

But Cox never managed to put in a full season of varsity basketball.

Just days after scoring 35 points in an upset of defending conference champion Whitehall in his sophomore season, Cox landed on the foot of a teammate in practice, twisted his leg awkwardly and fractured his fibula.

Cox said he was initially told by a doctor that he'd miss the remainder of the season, but a second opinion allowed him the opportunity to return on time for districts. Ravenna ran into an outstanding team from North Muskegon and lost in the district semifinals, despite Cox scoring 27 points. Ravenna finished the season at 11-10, and Cox averaged 14.1 points per game.

He sprained his ankle in the third game of his junior season and missed three games, but came back and developed into the top playmaker on the team, distributing the ball to teammates and helping the Bulldogs increase their victory total to 15.

Hopes were high for Cox to have a very big senior season in basketball, as well, but the football injury ended it long before it began.

Cox's spirits were lifted a bit when Courtney Kemp, who replaced Johnson as the head basketball coach this year, invited him to remain on the roster and be part of the team.

He sits on the bench during games and roots for his teammates, attends practice the day before every game, and has enjoyed watching his teammates start the season with eight straight victories.

"That really helps me a lot with staying positive, by just being a part of the team," Cox said in December.

## ***Another setback***

Losing his senior season in his two main sports, and watching both teams thrive without him, might have been emotionally devastating for another kid.

But Cox adjusted his attitude, accepted his fate, and decided to enjoy his final year of high school, anyway.

"I've just been living it up with my friends and hanging out all the time on the weekends," he said. "It's not bad. I get a lot more free time, so it kind of works out. I keep up in school better. There's more time for homework."

Part of his optimism stemmed from the progress he was making in physical therapy twice a week at I'Move in Spring Lake.

"It's hard because I can't run yet. I can't push myself," he said in December. "But I can squat, and I've been lifting weights. I'm focusing on the strength part first."

There's was a chance that Cox could have been ready for the spring track and field season, and he could have looked forward to a great one. Last spring he placed sixth in the 400-yard dash at the Division 3 state finals.

But he wasn't sure he would have gone that route, even if he was ready. He said he was thinking about skipping spring sports, building up his strength and working toward a future in college sports.

He said he had reached out to NAIA school Concordia University in Ann Arbor, and also received interest from Division 3 schools Alma, Hope and Albion.

Surprisingly he was thinking more about college football than basketball.

"I didn't even like football until my junior year," he said. "I wasn't a football type of guy. But when we switched to a spread offense, I started to love playing wide receiver. Basketball is still my favorite sport to play, but I'm better at football."

Then came the snowmobile accident in January, that left him hobbled once again with a broken ankle, and unsure about his immediate future in sports.

"We were on a snowmobile, my buddy in front of us threw up some snow, and when it cleared we were going into a tree," he said. "I don't know how I broke my ankle, but I could feel it right away and I knew something wasn't right."

"You just have to accept it. Life happens. It's not going to stop you. You just have to look at life from a different aspect."

What about his plan to get back in shape and pursue a college sport?

"It's probably still a goal, but I'm putting it all on hold and just re-evaluating things until I'm over this injury," he said.

When his current problem has passed Cox knows he will continue his rehab efforts and work toward his goals, because it all comes back to one of the basic lessons of sport -- get knocked down, get back up.

"It's kind of a mind game," he said. "Injuries have a big impact, but you realize you have to stay positive and just work for the future."



# Pitlick Part 2



**The Lumberjacks needed another big scorer so they traded for Rhett Pitlick, the brother of the team's all-time, single-season scoring leader. So far he seems to have the same type of skills.**

**By Steve Gunn**  
**LocalSportsJournal.com**

It's funny how history can repeat itself, sometimes in really good ways.

In June 2015, the Muskegon Lumberjacks acquired forward Rem Pitlick from the Waterloo Black Hawks in a trade that drew little notice at the time.



But it didn't take long for Lumberjacks fans to notice Pitlick, who started scoring at a remarkable rate in the 2015-16 season, and didn't stop until he posted an amazing 43 goals and 46 assists. He won the league goal-scoring and point championship that season, and set an all-time, single season team record for points.

Pitlick went on to play three years at the University of Minnesota before turning pro. He currently plays for the

Milwaukee Admirals of the American Hockey League, the top farm club of the National Hockey League's Nashville Predators, and the big league is clearly in his future.

Forward to November 2019, when the Lumberjacks, interested in adding speed and goal production, completed a trade with the Omaha Lancers. The main acquisition in the deal was forward Rhett Pitlick, the younger brother of Rem Pitlick.

Muskegon fans will be thrilled if the younger Pitlick can put up numbers resembling those of his brother. His stats prior to coming to the Lumberjacks did not suggest any pending offensive fireworks. In 17 games with Omaha this season, he had four goals and seven assists.

But Pitlick is barely out of high school hockey and still very new to the United States Hockey League. Last season he joined

Omaha late and only played in seven games, and this season barely had a chance to get settled in before the trade occurred that also brought forward Cam Berg and defenseman Dylan Davies to Muskegon.

Pitlick's career is really just beginning, and there's no telling how good he might be.

His genetic makeup is certainly very promising. His father, Lance Pitlick, played in the National Hockey League with the Ottawa Senators and Florida Panthers. His cousin, Tyler Pitlick, currently plays for the Philadelphia Flyers.

He's a left-handed shooter, just like his talented brother, and has already accepted a scholarship to play college hockey at the University of Minnesota, just like his father and brother.

Rhett has also been drafted by an NHL team (by the Montreal Canadiens in the fifth round last summer), just like his father, cousin and brother.

Pitlick takes pride in his family's hockey legacy, and says his big brother always had a big influence on his development.

"We're real tight," Pitlick said about Rem. "I would say he's like my best friend, to be honest. We always did everything together. He has helped me out a lot."

The people who make their living by judging hockey talent seem to think Pitlick will be very, very good. One website labeled him "Rhett Pitlick: The Montreal Canadiens' Stick of Dynamite."

"Pitlick is a dynamic skater with absolutely blistering speed," the website said. "Despite his draft position, Pitlick is one of the most exciting Habs prospects in their entire system, and one of the most intense players in the 2019 NHL Entry Draft period."

Steve Lowe, the Lumberjacks' new president of hockey operations, echoed that theme just after trading for Pitlick.

"Pitlick is one of the most dynamic players in the United States Hockey League," Lowe said. "Having Rhett on the same line with Danil Gushchin forms one of the best lines in this league,"

Considering all of that, it's curious that Omaha decided to let



him go in a trade. Pitlick admits he was surprised by the move, but also excited.

For one thing, he says the Lumberjacks have a more wide open style of play, which suits him just fine.

"Omaha is an amazing place, but the system they play did not fit me," Pitlick said. "I'm more of a creative player, and they play more of a system there, with lots of structure, instead of just letting you go out there and be you. I would say they give you a bit more freedom here."

"I kind of had mixed emotions (about the trade). It was a little sad to leave all my friends in Omaha, but it opens up all sorts of possibilities here, maybe for the better. My brother loved it here, so I'm excited to be here, too. My parents were really excited. They couldn't believe it. It's kind of funny how it ended up."

While Pitlick came to the Lumberjacks two months ago, he's just now settling in. That's because he barely had time to say hello and play three games with the team before hitting the road for three weeks to compete with the select USA squad in the World Junior A Challenge international tournament in Dawson Creek, British Columbia.

Gushchin also left the Jacks to play with the Russian team in the tournament. The Russians won the championship while the Americans took third.

By the time the tournament was over, the Jacks were in the midst of a two-week Christmas break.

With Pitlick and Gushchin gone, the Lumberjacks struggled badly, posting an 0-4 record. So they were really excited to have two of their most potent offensive weapons available when their season resumed on Dec. 27.

Their return clearly made a difference. The Lumberjacks, who



**Rem Pitlick: Tallied an amazing 43 goals and 46 assists for the 2015-16 Jacks.**

entered the holiday break with a 9-13-2 record, were 5-2-1 in their next eight games, and moved up two spots in the USHL Eastern Conference standings.

Pitlick scored less than a minute into his first game back with the team, and has totaled four goals and two assists since returning. Lumberjacks Coach Mike Hamilton is impressed, and wants to convince Pitlick to use his talents even more.

"He's got unbelievable skill," Hamilton said. "We've been trying to get him to shoot the puck more. He's got a great shot. We want him to shoot first and pass second."

Other Lumberjack forwards have also picked up the pace. Berg and AJ Hodges had four goals apiece during the post-holiday hot streak, while Gushchin, Alex Gaffney and Christophe Fillion had three apiece.

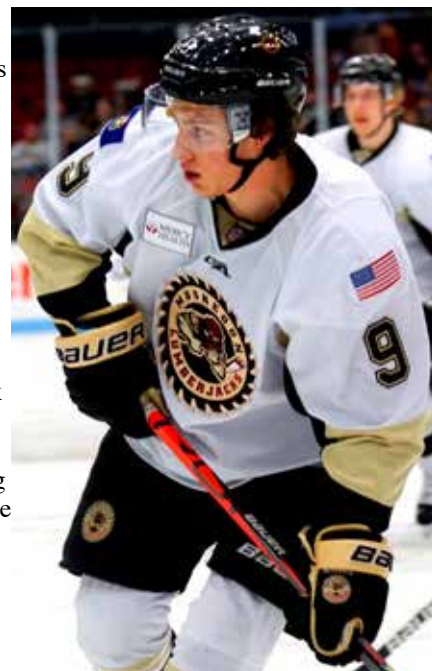
Suddenly Hamilton had three forward lines clicking. He said the talent was always there up front, but the Jacks spent the first part of the season struggling to get the puck to their forwards.

But the defense has improved, creating more scoring opportunities, according to the coach.

"People always want to talk about who's putting the points up, but really it's the growth of the defensemen," Hamilton said. "They are making good passes and getting the puck out. We're not getting stuck in our own zone for three minutes at a time."

Pitlick is happy his team has seemingly turned the corner, and he's excited about contributing. He said he tries not to feel any extra pressure to produce, despite the expectations that some obviously have for him, due to his brother's past accomplishments.

"If I think about it, I can get into that perspective, but at the same time, I just want to be here and be me," he said. "I just want to focus on this group and this year, not on the future or the past."



**Little brother Rhett Pitlick had 5 goals and 9 assists in his first 13 games for Muskegon. Photos/Leo Valdez**

**McDonald's**  
CANDIES  
handcrafted since 1941

**Buy 1 pound of candy,  
get 1/4 pound free**  
**expires 2/13/20**

**1064 S. Getty St. - Muskegon**  
**231-773-0319**

**VANDYK MORTGAGE CORPORATION**  
Est. 1987

**MARIO FLORES** 231.332.6505  
5906 COMMERCE CENTRE | MUSKEGON, MI 49444 231.638.0200

Vandyk Mortgage | 800-402-4399 | 2040 Camelot Court SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508  
CRML 000174302 | mario@marioflores.org

# Sports Medicine



Be game ready.



## Exceptional Care for Athletes of All Ages

Our team of sports medicine experts work to keep athletes safe. Our licensed athletic trainers specialize in injury prevention, rehabilitation, concussion programming and return to play. They collaborate with coaches, physicians, parents and the athlete to get them back in the game.

For more information, visit [MercyHealth.com/sports-medicine](https://www.MercyHealth.com/sports-medicine)

BeRemarkable.®