

**Basketball**

Check out the girls Division I tournament preview. Page C4



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**SECTIONAL GYMNASTICS**

## County stars to square off

Johnson, Yu, Thomas, Heppner ready to make runs

Brian Dulik  
The Gazette

The Greater Cleveland Conference and North East Gymnastics Conference gymnasts of the year will go head to head for the first time this winter.

Their competition includes the reigning state all-around, balance beam, floor exercise and uneven parallel bars champion, plus her teammates on the state runner-up squad.

Yes, the Summit County Fairgrounds Sectional is loaded with elite talent and the marquee meet takes place Monday.

Medina sophomore Colleen Johnson — the GCC all-around champion — and Wadsworth junior Jensen Heppner, who swept the titles at the NEGC Winter Classic, seek to continue their outstanding seasons against a field topped by five-time state



Yu



Heppner

champion Jordyn Thomas of Brunswick.

The top 12 finishers in each event, along with the top four teams, will advance to the Mentor District as they make their initial stop on the way to the state meet.

“Ultimately, that’s what it’s all about, but you can’t qualify for state if you don’t perform at a high level at sectionals and districts,” Bees coach Darcy Ranallo said. “The competition is so strong in our area of the

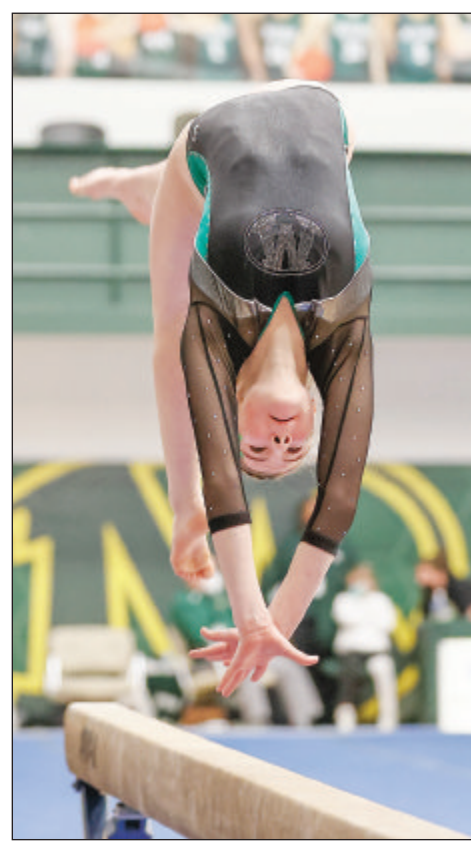
state, one mistake could cost a gymnast and their team everything.”

Johnson won four events at the GCC Meet, Medina sophomore Maddy Todorovich claimed one crown and Thomas was second in the all-around, floor and vault. Medina and Brunswick shared the overall league title after the latter claimed the GCC Meet by a mere 0.25 points.

The local powers both qualified for the state team meet in 2020, with the Blue Devils placing second and the Bees ninth at Hilliard Bradley.

Thomas’ health could be a major storyline this postseason as she continues to battle back pain, along with the sectional site shift from West Geauga to the much larger Summit County Fairgrounds Arena.

See **SECTIONALS**, C3



RON SCHWANE / GAZETTE

Medina’s Macy Maxworthy competes on the beam during the Greater Cleveland Conference Meet.

## WRESTLING: AURORA 38, HIGHLAND 33; MASSILLON PERRY 40, HIGHLAND 21



RON SCHWANE / GAZETTE

Highland’s Lukas Stiles turns Massillon Perry’s Gavin Turner on his way to a pin at 182 pounds.

# Timely conclusion

Hornets face stellar competition with sectionals on tap

Brad Bournival  
The Gazette

AURORA — The final scores say Highland lost to Aurora 38-33 and Massillon Perry 40-21 on Thursday, but those who follow wrestling know the sport is about what happens at the end.

While other programs are taking time off to get ready for sectionals in 15 days, the Hornets (25-7) were facing some of the best wrestlers in the state.

“That’s why we scheduled this,”



Hill



Maxworthy

Highland coach Tim Maxworthy said. “We did not look the best we could have tonight after coming off two pretty convincing wins (over Stow and Midview), but I

think it’s a whole heck of a lot better to build off a tough loss than it is a convincing win. This prepares us better for the postseason. We have good film we can watch. We have ways to adjust and move on.”

The fact the Horneets lost to the Greenmen (12-7) by five points despite giving up 12 points to forfeits and with Corey Haney and Joey Scally still out of the lineup says a lot.

Creed Hill (138 pounds), James Scavuzzo (145), William Scavuzzo

(160) and Lukas Stiles (182) were the only double winners, but that was immaterial as well.

The night was about facing Perry (15-6) and Aurora and getting better just before the postseason.

The Greenmen came in projected to finish third in Division II and had nine ranked wrestlers. Two of those are projected to make the state finals, with Dylan Fishback (195) slated as a state champion.

See **HORNETS**, C3

**COMMENTARY**



RICK NOLAND

## Today’s kids are awesome with the media

Way, wayyyyy back in the day, when I was a strapping 5-foot-11, 145-pound senior attempting to play point guard for the mighty 1978-79 Akron North Vikings, I can only imagine what would have transpired had I ever been interviewed.

It could have happened.

No, really, it could have.

I mean, in our season opener at Norton, my mouth seemingly stuffed full of cotton, I was so nervous, I took a beautiful pass from Tony Harvey and soared — the word “soared” is used very loosely here — in for a layup for the first points of the game.

The next time down the court, I hit one of my patented 18-foot jumpers — the 3-point line didn’t exist, so there was no sense shooting a 20-footer — to make it 4-0. Actually, it was more like a set shot, but you get the picture (which included very short shorts and socks pulled up to the knees).

At this point, the game was just two minutes old. Always pretty good at the kind of math that didn’t involve letters or parentheses, I quickly computed that at my present rate, I would have 16 points at the end of the first quarter. Sixteen points times four quarters and I would finish with 64!

Four minutes into the game I still had four points, but potential glory remained a distinct possibility, at least in my naive 17-year-old mind. I mean, a point a minute would give me 32 for the night, right?

At the end of the first period I had — you guessed it — four points, but, hey, 16 points for a kid who played almost entirely junior varsity ball as an 11th-grader would still be a solid varsity debut.

Halftime? Yep, still four points.

Long story short, I ended with eight as the Vikings fell to the Panthers 77-74.

Alas, that would be my career high. I never remotely approached a triple-double, like Medina’s Corey Tripp did with 35 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists Wednesday against Brunswick, but I became the master of the triple-halfe — five points, five assists, five turnovers.

Alas, I was never interviewed, though future Gazette co-worker Larry Pantages covered the Norton game that night for the Akron Beacon Journal.

See **NOLAND**, C4



Tripp



Barnett

**STATE WRESTLING**

## Darby, Marengo Highland, Marion Harding to host

Brad Bournival  
The Gazette

High school wrestling finally has a few homes.

That word came down Thursday in an email to athletic directors and wrestling coaches from Tyler Brooks, the Ohio High School Athletic Association officiating and sport management director.

Hilliard Darby High School will host Division I, Marengo Highland will handle D-II and Marion Harding will entertain D-III on March 13-14.



Gilmore



Tecco

“It’s nice to finally have dates for the tournament so we can get the small things out of the way, like our hotel and final preparations,” Medina coach Chad Gilmore said. “It’s going

to be strange being in the gym. It will take away some of the electric feel of the state tournament. I think kids really love being in that Schottenstein Center, but a year ago we were praying that we could have the state tournament one way or another.”

All tournaments will follow the same schedule, which is tentatively set to follow the district tournament format, where two championship and two consolation rounds are wrestled. That schedule will be announced at a later date.

“The most important thing we

are doing is giving our student-athletes a chance to compete,” OHSAA Executive Director Doug Ute said in an email. “Our member schools and other tournament sites are to be commended for doing everything they can to provide these opportunities during the (coronavirus) pandemic.”

It’s the 18th time in 83 years the state tournaments will be held in high schools and the first since 1958 (Lakewood High).

“I’m thankful for Marengo Highland to step up and give D-II a place

to wrestle our state tournament,” Buckeye coach Mike Tecco said. “It definitely helps knowing where we are wrestling so we can make arrangements. I feel bad for the seniors who will not get to experience the spectacle of state being in Columbus at the arena, but I’m happy they will get to wrestle the state tournament.”

There will be no public ticket sales. Tickets will be distributed only to qualifying wrestlers through school athletic directors.

See **STATE**, C3

HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL

DIVISION I GIRLS TOURNAMENT PREVIEW



**BRUNSWICK OUTLOOK:** The Blue Devils have come close to reaching their potential in the second half of the season, having won 10-of-15 games since senior Haley Fink moved into the starting lineup. The offensive punch of Michigan State soccer recruit Jordyn Wickes and freshman Journey Hildebrand is as good as anyone in the district. Like the school's boys team, Brunswick is a sleeper because of a good offense (53.6 ppg), but it also can lose to anyone due to a below-average defense (63.1 ppg allowed in losses), making a first-round game with young Midview intriguing after the Middies lost to the Blue Devils 42-31 on Jan. 27. A sectional final at No. 5 Westlake is a tough matchup, as the Demons' man defense is stout and will force pace to a crawl. Look out if Brunswick wins that one, because the Blue Devils likely will get a rubber match with archrival Medina and then a potential revenge opportunity against Highland in the title game.

**HIGHLAND OUTLOOK:** The swan song for an incredibly experienced senior class begins Thursday, when the Hornets host the winner of No. 26 Euclid and No. 29 Lakewood in a sectional final. The Panthers are led by physical center Alexis Reese, while the Rangers have been relatively competitive and gave Bay and Elyria Catholic some trouble in the Great Lakes Conference. A comfortable win there puts Highland in the district semifinals against No. 6 St. Joseph Academy, which has played a brutal schedule and owns quality wins over Magnificat, Wadsworth, Strongsville and Massillon Perry, which plays Highland on Saturday. The Hornets will need to play well to advance and have a 50/50 game for the title, whether the opponent is Medina, Westlake or Brunswick. Highland does everything well except score consistently, so the Hornets will go as far as the shot-making abilities of Kendall McCormick and Maddie Miller take them. They are searching for their first district title since 1992 and first as a D-I school.

**MEDINA OUTLOOK:** While the Bees are hoping to back door their way into a second straight Greater Cleveland Conference championship — Strongsville needs to lose to Solon on Monday — it's important to point out they're playing pretty well at the right time. Medina was especially strong in the fourth quarters of back-to-back wins over Solon, and the re-emergence of trigger-happy Elizabeth Stuart has sparked the offense. Medina always has been a solid defensive team led by incredibly versatile All-Gazette pick Sarah McKee, and the Bees are all but guaranteed to reach the district semifinals with sectional games against 34th-seeded Twinsburg and No. 28 Firestone. Things then will get interesting, as defensive-minded Westlake or No. 11 Brunswick will come to town. The Demons will be a pesky out but don't have offensive threats like McKee, Stuart, Shannon Wojciak or Hailey Tripp, while the Blue Devils would be hard pressed to upset their rival for a second time. That will set up a district title game at Highland or at home against St. Joseph Academy. Medina defeated the Hornets 51-40 on Dec. 5, while the Jaguars' brutal schedule led to a misleading 12-9 regular-season record.

**WADSWORTH OUTLOOK:** The ninth-seeded Grizzlies showed incredible guts by rallying for a Suburban League National Conference championship share without third-leading scorer Brooke Baughman (ACL) and fourth-leading scorer Regan Simpson (illness). They also picked up a great draw. Wadsworth will open with a familiar foe, SL National Conference member North Royalton, Saturday at home. The Bears already have lost 44-23 and 41-25 to the Grizzlies and shouldn't pose much of a threat. A greater unknown, No. 23 Cleveland Heights, will be next up, but the Tigers lost to Stow by 30 in late January. The real challenges begin in the district semifinals at No. 8 Avon, which was drilled by top-seeded Olmsted Falls twice in Southwestern Conference play. The Eagles are led by Abby Liber offensively and have a defensive scoring average well under 40 when the two losses to Olmsted Falls are factored out. Olmsted Falls is a heavy favorite to reach the district final and owns a high-quality win over Laurel, which beat Wadsworth by 44 at The Classic in the Country.

**DISTRICT 4 SEEDS:** 3. Highland, 4. Medina, 5. Westlake, 6. St. Joseph Academy, 11. Brunswick, 17. Midview, 22. Amherst, 26. Euclid, 28. Firestone, 29. Lakewood, 30. Bedford, 34. Twinsburg.

**DISTRICT 5 SEEDS:** 1. Olmsted Falls, 8. Avon, 9. Wadsworth, 14. Avon Lake, 16. Hathaway Brown, 19. Valley Forge, 21. Shaker Heights, 23. Cleveland Heights, 24. Lorain, 31. North Royalton, 32. Maple Heights.

**DISTRICT 4 SCHEDULE:** Saturday (1 p.m.) — Bedford at Amherst, Lakewood at Euclid, Midview at Brunswick, Twinsburg at Medina. Thursday — Steele/Bedford winner at St. Joseph Academy, Lakewood/Euclid winner at Highland, Brunswick/Midview winner at Westlake, Twinsburg/Medina winner vs. Firestone. Feb. 23 — District semifinals. Feb. 26 — District championship.

**DISTRICT 5 SCHEDULE:** Saturday (1 p.m.) — Maple Heights at North Olmsted, Shaker Heights at Hathaway Brown, North Royalton at Wadsworth, Lorain at Valley Forge. Thursday — North Olmsted/Maple Heights winner at Olmsted Falls, Hathaway Brown/Shaker Heights winner at Avon Lake, Wadsworth/North Royalton winner vs. Cleveland Heights, Lorain/Valley Forge winner at Avon. Feb. 23 — District semifinals. Feb. 26 — District championship.

**UPSET SPECIALS:** Hathaway Brown over Avon Lake and Brunswick over Westlake.

**SLEEPERS:** Wadsworth and St. Joseph Academy.  
**THE PICKS:** St. Joseph Academy over Medina and Olmsted Falls over Wadsworth. The latter is a much more likely, as Highland, Brunswick or Westlake could reach the Northeast 4 championship game.

— Albert Grindle



NOLAND

From C1

Had he sought my incredible teenage insight, this is how the interview probably would have unfolded:

Pantages: You looked pretty comfortable out there. How did you feel?  
Me: OK.

Pantages: You guys dropped a tough one, but you were right there at the end. Does that give you confidence for the rest of the season?  
Me: Yeah.

Pantages: How's it feel playing point guard at the varsity level?  
Me: Good.

Pantages (desperately trying to ask a question that required more than a one-word answer): What are your goals for the rest of the season?  
Me: Win.

Pantages (having given up): Thank you!

Today, having spent 37-plus years at The Gazette, I still run into extremely quiet high school athletes on occasion, but not very often.

I unscientifically attribute this to two factors: Kids today live in a much bigger world than I did back then, and they are interviewed much more frequently.

Back in the 1970s, leaving the portion of Akron we called North Hill, even to play at nearby Ellet, Firestone or Garfield, was an adventure. Traveling to Norton, for us, was like going to another state, maybe even another country.

We almost never hopped on a school bus for away games (and we still wore odd-numbered uniforms on the road and even-numbered jerseys at home). Instead, a handful of players rode with varsity coach Dick Rudgers, another handful went with JV coach Vince Tassiello and five more piled in with the team's very average point guard, who drove his dad's gigantic Chrysler Newport, which got about four miles to the gallon. (The important players, of course, rode with Rudgers and Tassiello, just in case I lost contact with them en route and never found the opposing school.)

My entire senior year, I think we had a reporter at four of our games. Of those four — it could have been three or five, but you get the point — I don't



RON SCHWANE / GAZETTE

Medina's Jajuan Jackson pushes the ball against Brunswick's Randy Zimmerman.

ever recall that reporter interviewing a player. In those days, unless there was a monster performance — like my potential 64-point night — most postgame interviews involved only the head coach. That's just the way it was, at least in the Akron area.

Heck, a number of schools in the Akron City Series didn't even have gyms big enough to host varsity games. For league games, we didn't play junior varsity-varsity doubleheaders. Instead, four City Series varsity teams played a Friday doubleheader at Firestone, while four others played at North. The JV games were the following Monday.

(As an aside, since only a handful of

City Series schools had football fields with anything resembling bleachers and even fewer had lights, Friday night doubleheaders were held at the approximate 35,000-seat Rubber Bowl, which made even a good crowd seem like virtually no one was there. The remaining schools usually played on Saturday afternoon.)

Back then, only the really, really good players had any type of relationship with athletes from other schools. This was neither good nor bad, it's just the way it was. The Internet didn't exist, only doctors had pagers — what was a cell phone? — and anything resembling AAU basketball was reserved for the best of the best.

Sorry for that rather long digression — assuming I had a point to begin with — but that happens more and more as my 60th birthday rapidly approaches.

Anyway, fast-forwarding 42 years to Wednesday night, most of the Medina players knew most of the Brunswick players, and a handful of them, wearing masks in this COVID-19 era, of course, talked freely an hour before tipoff. On a few occasions, they even spoke — in a friendly way, not in a trash-talking manner — during the game.

From a media standpoint, since sports writers at The Gazette make it a priority to talk to a number of kids over the course of a season, and since we have reporters at the vast majority of Medina and Brunswick boys basketball games, most of these athletes are very comfortable with — and very good at handling — the whole interview process.

Off the top of my head, I've interviewed Brunswick's Marquis Barnett, Tre Massey and Zach Eysen and Medina's Tripp, Jajuan Jackson, Christian Howard, Brandon Geschke, Bryce Beech and Matt Spatny this season alone. Over the last two, three and even four seasons, I've talked to a few of them dozens of times.

With some, the comfort factor has gotten to the point where postgame interviews aren't even interviews anymore. They're more like conversations. On occasion, the athletes not only answer questions, they ask them, like Tripp inquiring about past triple-doubles in Medina County after he nearly got one against Brunswick. (I spared him stories about my legendary triple-halves at ol' North High.)

My hope — and the point of writing all this, I guess — is that the athletes in this county appreciate how good they have it when it comes to the facilities they play in, the coaching they receive and the media coverage they get.

I have to remind my sometimes cantankerous — sometimes? — old self on occasion, but I'm certainly grateful for how good I've had it since coming to The Gazette fresh out of college in 1983.

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ROUNDUP  
Buckeye takes fifth at GLCT

YORK TWR — Four-year player Sydney Bell poured in a season-high 21 points Thursday, leading Buckeye's girls basketball team to a 57-41 win over Valley Forge in the fifth-place game of the Great Lakes Conference Tournament.



Bell

Center Autumn Meyer added 16 points Reagan McCourt six for the Bucks (7-12), who have won three straight.

In another game:

Medina 57, Euclid 33

EUCLID — Elizabeth Stuart (13 points) passed coach Karen Kase for seventh place on the school's career scoring list with 698 points as the Bees (15-6, 9-2) crushed the Panthers (2-5, 2-5) in Greater Cleveland Conference play for their sixth straight win. Shannon Wojciak (8 points), Hailey Tripp (8), Kate Bobey (8), Sarah McKee (7) and Leora Owings (7) also contributed.

Results

| Greater Cleveland Conference                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Medina 57, Euclid 33                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                 |
| MEDINA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 16 14 20 7 — 57 |
| EUCLID                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 7 9 11 6 — 33   |
| Medina — Elizabeth Stuart 5-0-13, Shannon Wojciak 3-0-8, Sarah McKee 2-3-7, Hailey Tripp 2-2-8, Aly Dwyer 1-0-2, Nikki Johnson 0-0-0, Leora Owings 3-1-7, Regan Todia 1-0-2, Kate Bobey 2-3-8, Maddi Rath 0-0-0, Ella Silvis 0-0-0, Audrey Kotick 1-0-2, Mylie Roberts 0-0-0, Kayla Joyner 0-0-0. TOTALS: 20-9-57. |                 |
| Euclid — Erin Miller 2-3-9, Yahaira Reid 5-3-15, Joy Byous 0-0-0, Deasia Huggins 0-0-0, Alexis Reese 2-1-5, Dajanay Bailey 0-0-0, Natalia Wilson 2-0-4. TOTALS: 11-7-33.                                                                                                                                           |                 |
| 3-point goals — Stuart 3, Wojciak 2, Tripp 2, Bobey, Reid 2, Miller 2. Records — Medina (15-6, 9-2), Euclid (2-5, 2-5). Junior varsity — Medina 35, Euclid 15.                                                                                                                                                     |                 |