

SPORTS

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Thursday, June 3, 2021 **B1**

Area athletes gearing up for state meet

Bryan hoping to carry momentum from regionals

By **MICHAEL BURWELL**
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Bryan's boys track and field team proved how a little momentum could turn into big results on Saturday.

The Golden Bears are hoping that wave rides right into Ohio's biggest stage.

Fresh off of four regional championships, six top-four finishes and a runner-up team trophy, Bryan will be looking for one last strong performance as it caps off the season at the OHSAA Division II state meet this weekend at Pickerington North High School.

"Winning runner-up as a region is crazy and getting that momentum going to state would be huge," said Bryan junior Quinn Brown, who led off both of the Golden Bears' regional-champion sprint relay teams. "We're feeling good and hopefully we can build off the first-place finishes."

Running events begin at 2 p.m. Friday with the 3,200-meter relay finals. Prelims in the running



Photo by Michael Burwell

Bryan's Decota Shaw (second from right) hands the baton to teammate Caleb Kepler (second from left) in the 800-meter relay during the final day of the Division II regional track and field meet on Saturday at Piqua High School.

events are scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m.

The top two finishers in each of the three heats, plus the next two best times,

advance to Saturday afternoon's finals.

Six Bryan athletes put up big performances in last weekend's Division II

regional meet at Piqua High School. With their showings, the Golden Bears will

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Taylor excited for second state meet during junior year

By **MICHAEL BURWELL**
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Bryan distance standout Joshua Taylor is back at a state meet, and this time, he is glad to be bringing some of his buddies along.

The Golden Bears' junior, who earned all-Ohio honors in cross country in the fall, will be one of six Bryan athletes competing in this weekend's OHSAA Division II state track and field meet at Pickerington North High School.

After posting a pair of top-four finishes at regionals in the 1,600- and 3,200-meter runs, Taylor will get a taste of another meet with the best distance runners in the state.

"I'm excited. It's going to be really fun and I enjoy that the team is coming too, so that's going to be a totally different feeling," Taylor said. "It's going to be fun not only to race, but also just to watch the other runners and watch them compete. I think it'll be fun."

"I feel like cross country

was just a smaller group and then you watch a race, you run a race and then track it seems like there's twice as many people. It's just a bigger crowd, so I think track is more exciting and I think the state meet will be more exciting because for state cross country, it was like I made it and it was just me and it was just me warming up and it was just me running. It was a good race, but I think it's going to be fun to have a lot more people there cheering me on."

Taylor will compete on Saturday, the final day of the state meet. He is scheduled to run in the 1,600 around 2:40 p.m. and the 3,200 around 3:50 p.m.

Taylor has racked up plenty of victories, high finishes and solid times throughout the year. He is the lone athlete from Bryan to earn a state tournament berth in two sports this year.

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Family tradition fuels Potvin

By **MICHAEL BURWELL**
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Owen Potvin had quite a family legacy to uphold. With a big senior season that includes three regional championships, it is safe to say the Bryan speedster has done his part.

Potvin's father, Corey, won multiple state championships in the sprints and hurdles for Escanaba High School in Escanaba, Michigan, in the late 1980s. Older brother Alex, a 2019 Bryan High School graduate, made regional appearances in the sprint relays as a sophomore and senior for the Golden Bears and earned a pair of Northwest Ohio Athletic League titles in the 400-meter relay as well.

Owen Potvin, with plenty of support from the two, has had a season to remember so far.



Photo by Michael Burwell

Bryan's Owen Potvin (middle) celebrates with friends, teammates and family after winning the 200-meter dash during the final day of the Division II regional track and field meet on Saturday at Piqua High School.

"One of my goals this year was actually to get some of my times faster than my dad's, and I finally did it in the 200. I'm faster

than him," Potvin said. "But I never even tried hurdles, so he'll always be better than me at that."

"But it's always nice

having my dad and my brother there supporting because even at regionals,

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Photo by Michael Burwell

Bryan's Joshua Taylor (right) runs to the finish line past Wauseon's Braden Vernot in the 3,200-meter run during the final day of the Division II regional track and field meet on Saturday at Piqua High School.



Photo by Michael Burwell

Edon's Trey Whitney (right) hands the baton to teammate Drew Gallehue in the 400-meter relay during an April 13 track and field meet at Edgerton High School.

Edon sprint relay set for D-III meet

By **MICHAEL BURWELL**
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EDON — A complete team effort from Trey Whitney, Drew Gallehue, Destin Hamrick and Gage Eicher resulted in quite a moment for Edon's boys track and field team.

For just the second time in school history, the Bombers will be sending a relay team to state as the quartet will compete in the 400-meter relay at the OHSAA Division III state meet this

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Blue grateful for 2nd chance

By **MICHAEL BURWELL**
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EDGERTON — Craig Blue's stumbling, diving and heartbreaking fifth-place finish at regionals in the 300-meter hurdles turned out to be good enough to get him to state.

The Edgerton senior couldn't be happier for the second chance.

Blue missed out on automatically qualifying with a top-four regional finish for the OHSAA Division III state track and field meet. But, he received an at-large bid by having one of the two next best times across the state in Division III to advance to this weekend's state meet at Westerville North High School.

"It was definitely a large range of emotions, for sure," Blue said. "After I finished fifth, I thought this year they weren't doing wild cards because



Photo by Michael Burwell

Edgerton's Craig Blue jumps over the final hurdle in the 300-meter hurdles during the Lamberson Invitational on May 8 at Pete Dreher Track in Montpelier.

it wasn't at Jesse Owens Memorial (Stadium in Columbus). So I'm like, 'Well, I guess I'm done for this season.'

"Then when my parents woke me up at 9:30 (Saturday morning), said,

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Breier, Beltz look to make statement

By **MICHAEL BURWELL**
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Two of the best long jumpers in the Buckeye Border Conference will look to make their mark among the state's best.

Hilltop junior Wyatt Beltz and Stryker junior Brianna Breier, who won league titles in mid-May, will represent their communities at the OHSAA Division III state track and field meet this weekend at Westerville North High School.

"I am so blessed and beyond excited to be able to represent Stryker, a small town, going to state," Breier said. "It's just amazing."

Beltz and Breier will

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Carry

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have favorable lane assignments in their respective heats.

Bryan's 400- and 800-meter relay teams will both compete in the third heat in lane five. Brown, senior Caleb Kepler, senior Decota Shaw and senior Owen Potvin teamed up to win the 800 relay regional title in 1:31.20 and are seeded third out of six teams in their heat (tied for ninth out of 18 teams overall).

Brown, Kepler, sophomore Rylan Garza, and Potvin won the 400 relay in 44.28 and are seeded fourth in their heat (tied for 11th overall).

"We talked about just trying to replicate the same process that we did going into it, so staying focused on what we can control and from there, just kind of letting everything play out for us," Bryan boys track and field coach Ken Ciolek said. "We've got some favorable lane assignments and got some favorable heat selections, too, so it's the same thing we told them before."

"They hold their own destiny in their hands and all they've got to do is just continue to execute and stay within themselves and they'll be good to go."

Bryan's relay teams have been mixed around throughout the season for multiple reasons, but the athletes have shown camaraderie.

Brown balanced his first year of track and field with baseball and was a key member of the Golden Bears' squad on the diamond that finished second in the Northwest Ohio Athletic League. Garza was injured most of the season, but returned for the NWOAL Championships in mid-May.



Photo by Michael Burwell

Bryan's Quinn Brown gets out of the starting blocks in the 800-meter relay during the final day of the Division II regional track and field meet on Saturday at Piqua High School.

"I just don't want to get bored," said Brown, who also dual sports in the fall with soccer and football. "So I just kind of was like, 'I guess I'll just join track too.' I guess it kind of worked out."

Kepler and Shaw, key components of Bryan's football team in the fall, were both in their first year of track and field. Freshman Drew Hahn, who helped the sprint relay teams post top-three finishes at the district meet, was also among several athletes who helped build Bryan's relay teams throughout the year.

"This was my first year of track, but coming into this year, this was all I wanted was to be able to make it to state," Kepler said. "To be able to do it with these guys, it's going to be a fun experience especially since we

have a chance to compete and do extremely well there. So I'm hoping we just have a blast and go out and just run well."

Added Ciolek: "Being able to do that and kind of build those relationships, and the coaching staff's been pretty thorough about telling them we ran multiple different relays throughout the course of the year, telling them that we're going to be able to run essentially three different 'A' teams at any given time."

"To be able to build that, and as we got closer to leagues, just telling them, saying, 'Guys, it's going to be that next-person-up type of situation as we try to plan these out.' That's why we continue to roll with the basically eight kids that we have is because at some point, you were a key

component of us getting to where we're at now."

The biggest key for Bryan's sprint relay teams will be executing their handoffs. The Golden Bears have put in plenty of work to perfect them, but they know that every fraction of a second matters.

"We've been practicing every day, but at the same time, I feel like we're all just naturally good at doing handoffs," Garza said. "But even with naturally being good, you still have to practice every day doing them."

Added Kepler: "At times, it was a struggle throughout the year because coaches switched it up a lot. They tried figuring out different teams, like who would work where. But once we got a set lineup, we would just practice

every day all week and it just kind of came to us pretty fast once we could all start working together and we knew each other and what everyone was going to do. Once we worked on it for a week or two, we pretty much mastered it almost."

Shaw and Potvin will also be competing in individual events. Shaw won a regional title in the 400 (50.72) and will start in lane four in the third heat. He is seeded second in the heat and seventh overall.

Shaw's best time came in prelims at regionals when he ran a 49.80. He will be shooting for a school record at state; Tyler Manon ran a 49.18 during the 2019 Division II regional meet.

"With this better competition at state, I think that it'll give me enough adrenaline and push me to keep up with everybody else and hopefully try to win in Friday's heat and hopefully place top four on Saturday," Shaw said. "So I'm hoping that gets me to a school record on Saturday."

Potvin has the second-best regional time in the 200 among the 18 state qualifiers in the event. He will be seeded first in the second heat and run in lane four after earning a regional title in a blistering PR of 22.18 seconds.

Bryan junior distance standout Joshua Taylor, an all-Ohioan in cross country in the fall, will run in the 1,600 and 3,200 on Saturday. He is seeded 17th in both events (4:31.89 in the 1,600 and 9:51.84 in the 3,200) after running in cold and windy conditions, but has the potential for a big showing. He ran a 4:25.57 in the 1,600 at the NWOAL Championships and a 9:47.41 at districts.

Year

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His successful cross country season included a 19th-place finish in 16:14.80 in the Division II state meet in early November at Fortress Obetz, as well as a school-record 15:47.54 earlier in the season at the Liberty Center Extravaganza.

He hasn't skipped a beat on the track.

Taylor won titles in the 800 (2:01.90) and 1,600 (4:25.57) and was second in the 3,200 (9:54.84) at the Northwest Ohio Athletic League Championships in mid-May. He set a meet record in the 1,600 (4:27.66) and won the 3,200 (9:47.41) in the Division II district meet at Defiance the following week.

In cold and blustery conditions Saturday at the Division II regional meet at Piqua High School, Taylor placed third in the 3,200 (9:51.84) and fourth in the 1,600 (4:31.89).

"I know he put in a lot of time over the offseason, and that definitely pays off," said Bryan girls track coach Garret Gleckler, who is also an assistant cross country coach for the Golden Bears. "The summer and the winter both for cross country and track pay off and it definitely shows that he put in the time during the offseason."

"I know he's ramped his mileage up over the course of this season too, and now we're trying to taper into this tournament season and hopefully he'll have great races at state this weekend."

Taylor will be seeded 17th among the 18 state qualifiers in each event. But he is well within striking distance of the some of the leaders.

Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy junior Drennan Akins has the top time from regionals in the 1,600 with a 4:23.30. Woodridge senior Ryan Champa is the top seed in the 3,200 (9:27.46).

Taylor said his biggest focus will be sticking with the front of the pack throughout the races, like he did at regionals, and staying mentally strong.

"The times were all right there so anything can happen, especially at a big meet like that," Taylor said. "So it's really just having that mindset going in that I can win it and just try to win it and if not, hopefully get my PR and get a good placement and get podium."

Added Gleckler: "I think if he just commits early and puts himself in a good position early in the race like he has all season, he's got a golden opportunity. I have all the confidence in him this weekend."

Seniors Owen Potvin (200, 400 relay, 800 relay), Decota Shaw (400, 800 relay) and Caleb Kepler (400 relay, 800 relay); junior Quinn Brown (400 relay, 800 relay); and sophomore Rylan Garza (400 relay) will join Taylor in representing the Golden Bears, along with several state alternates in the sprint relays.

"I think it's going to be great for not only (Taylor), but for the rest of the guys that are at the state meet too. We're fortunate to have six events at state and I think they all have a really good chance at competing on Saturday in the finals," Gleckler said.

Fuels

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my brother, he had work but he got off work and was hauling it there as fast as he could. He called me and he's like, 'I'm on my way, win everything. Just win, just go out there, break school records and win.' And I'm like, 'OK.'

"He showed up and he was up there screaming in the stands, my dad was screaming so it's always fun to have them there."

Potvin's stellar stretch toward the end of his final high school season has been full of victories and record-breaking performances. In Saturday's Division II regional track and field meet at Piqua High School, he won the 200 in a personal record of 22.18 seconds and anchored the Golden Bears' winning sprint relay teams as well. Bryan won the 800 relay in a school-record 1:31.20 and finished first in the 400 relay in 44.28.

His winning ways represented a family trend.

Corey Potvin won several Michigan High School Athletic Association Upper Peninsula Class A-B state titles. In 1988, he won the 110 hurdles (14.6 seconds), 100 (11.1) and 200 (22.7).

He also won the 110 hurdles state championship in 1987 (15.1) and was a member of the 800 relay state championships squad, and in 1986 he was the 110 hurdles champion (15.7).

"He's usually just more about telling me what I'm



Photo by Michael Burwell

Bryan's Owen Potvin (left) sprints to the finish line in the 800-meter relay during the final day of the Division II regional track and field meet on Saturday at Piqua High School.

doing right," Owen Potvin said, "and then he's like, it's always the same things: my blocks and my starts because they're like I always come out weaker."

"So he's always like, 'If you can get that down, then you'll be looking at some crazy times,' so I've just always been working on that."

Alex Potvin, meanwhile, was part of the Golden Bears' 400 relay team that placed eighth and the 800 relay squad that was 10th at the 2019 Division II regional

meet. He was also on the seventh-place 400 relay regional team in 2017.

Owen Potvin's season down the stretch also included victories in the 100 and 200 at the NWOAL Championships in mid-May, and a win in the 200 and two top-three finishes in the sprint relays at the Division II district meet in Defiance the following week.

"I came into (this season) and I wasn't really expecting a whole lot honestly, but then we just started go-

ing and everyone was just outperforming what anyone expected," Potvin said. "We just kept carrying it on and on and we've just been dropping times consistently. I'm just hoping we can keep doing that because it's looking pretty amazing."

Bryan boys track and field coach Ken Ciolek said this season has been critical, especially in the relays. The two talked midway through the season about what races Potvin would run at the end

of the year to not only put himself in the best position to succeed, but the team as well.

"He had a lot of input to it, 'Do you feel like you can maintain this workload for these upcoming weeks?' and he was pretty excited about the opportunity," Ciolek said. "We talked to him about districts and regionals (being where) we're going to anchor you because we want to be able to get you the stick in your hand and then just kind of let you run your race."

Potvin is seeded first out of six athletes in his heat and second overall of the 18 state qualifiers in the 200. Bryan's 800 relay team of Quinn Brown, Caleb Kepler, Decota Shaw and Potvin is seeded third in its heat and tied for ninth overall, while the 400 relay team of Brown, Kepler, Rylan Garza and Potvin is seeded fourth in their heat and tied for 11th overall.

"I'm hoping that we can just carry that over to state and just like in regionals when we won that first event, we were all just on an absolute high of adrenaline and everything, so we carried that into our next events," Potvin said. "I feel like that really helped us, so if we can just even place top eight in our first event, I feel like we're just going to absolutely tear it up at state."

Apaches looking to make noise at state tournament

Fairview set to battle Wheelersburg in Division III semifinal

By JONATHAN LEBLANC
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SHERWOOD — If you told Fairview softball coach Staci Renollet before regionals her team would score 20 runs and only allow one, she “would’ve taken that in a heartbeat.”

The Apaches did just that. They beat Otsego 9-0 in a Division III regional semifinal and Cardington-Lincoln 11-1 in five innings for a regional title to punch their ticket to the state semifinals for the first time in program history.

Fairview (26-1), which is batting .461 as a team and averaging 12.3 runs per game, looks to continue its strong performance against Wheelersburg (26-1) in a state semifinal at 12:30 p.m. Friday at Akron Firestone Stadium. The winner faces the victor of Johnstown/Canfield South Range for the state championship at 4 p.m. Saturday.

It’s not only the stats her team is putting up that impresses Renollet.

It’s also their mentality. “I think the mental approach of our entire team is clearly what’s different,” said Renollet, who is in her 22nd season leading the Apaches. “And I guess any team getting to the state level, it’s got to be a little bit on the mental side.

“Every team is talented at this point, but I really just think their mental side of having confidence in themselves and each other, but not arrogance to the point where we’re not still working hard, hungry to (get) to that next level, not satisfied with the great season we’ve had (is important).”

Up and down the order, Fairview’s offense is potent.

With their batting average and runs scored, the Apaches also have 34



Photo by Michael Burwell

Fairview’s Allison Rhodes (middle) rounds third base after hitting a home run while Apaches coach Staci Renollet (right) cheers during a Division III regional softball semifinal against Otsego on May 26 at Elida Middle School.

home runs, are averaging 10.3 RBIs per game and 13.6 hits per game.

Leadoff hitter and shortstop Anna Ankney has team highs in batting average (.660), home runs (15), RBIs (57), runs (61) and stolen bases (14), but isn’t the only one chipping in offensively — 12 Fairview batters are hitting at least .321.

“The balance of (our offense) is what I’m most excited about,” Renollet said. “It’s definitely our staple type of hitters if you will, but it’s (also) different people, different games. The regional final, Anna obviously (had) outbursts of home runs, RBIs, Olivia (Ricica) is 4 for 4, and then in the regional semi it’s Kiersten (Cline’s) 4 for 4 and Allison (Rhodes) and Alyssa (Merritt) are hitting home runs.

“So all those different spots I guess of our lineup of people reaching base — whether it’s by a walk to get an inning started, moving runners around, scoring RBIs — I feel like what we’re trying to be. Put pressure on the opposing team, because

there’s not an inning that we don’t feel confident that we can get something going.”

In the circle, sophomore Paige Ricica has been dominant. The righthander has a 19-1 record, 1.47 ERA, 0.91 WHIP, 129 strikeouts in 114 innings and got both wins in regional games.

She’ll be tasked with limiting Wheelersburg’s offense, which is scoring 12.3 runs per game and has a .413 team average. The Pirates beat Zoarville Tuscarawas Valley 13-6 in a regional semifinal and Ironton 9-1 for a regional title.

Wheelersburg’s bats are fronted by Macee Eaton, who has team highs in batting average (.527), home runs (14), RBIs (65), runs (47), hits (48) and doubles (18).

AndiJo Howard, a left-handed freshman, is the Pirates’ ace. She enters Friday’s matchup with a 24-1 record, 2.39 ERA, 146 strikeouts and seven shutouts in 152 innings.

Ankney and Renollet said the Apaches are ready and going to stick to the

routine they’ve had since the beginning of the season.

“Every day we just go into it like it’s the same game, just a different team,” said Ankney, a senior. “We don’t think of a different team as better than the other. We just want to go in and play our game, because we know that if we do we’re going to go out there and win and just do as great as we normally do.”

Renollet added: “This season has been so magical and special. I know a lot of people are like, ‘Oh, making it state,’ and kind of (have) that sigh of relief. Well for these girls, making it to state has been amazing, but we obviously want to go there and play well and see what we can do there.

“I keep telling the girls, ‘I really do think they were made for these moments.’ We’ve played well the whole season, but it seems like the bigger the game, the bigger the situation, the more driven they become. So, (I’m) pretty excited to see what they bring on Friday.”

Ricica sisters form dynamic duo for Fairview

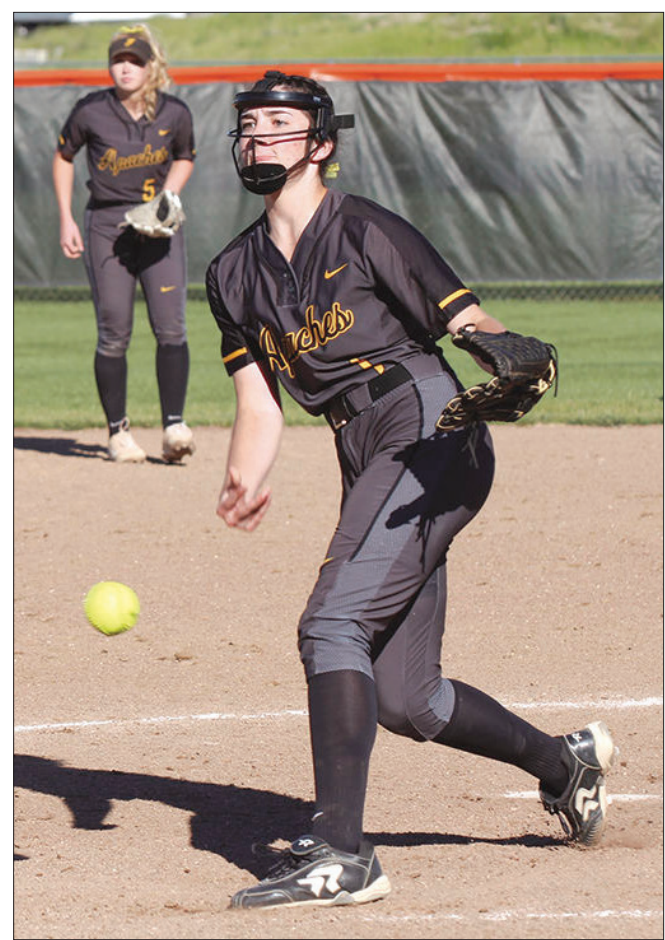


Photo by Michael Burwell

Fairview’s Paige Ricica delivers a pitch during the Apaches’ Division III regional softball final against Cardington-Lincoln on Saturday at Elida Middle School.

By JONATHAN LEBLANC
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SHERWOOD — Olivia Ricica never wanted to catch for her sister.

When Paige Ricica went to pitching lessons, Olivia was invited again and again to catch for her.

Every time it was pretty much the same answer: no.

“Usually, I would always make my parents go and I was always like, ‘No, I’m not going to catch Paige. Like, even when she gets into high school, I’m not going to do it,’” said Olivia Ricica, a senior for Fairview.

But eventually, she gave in — and they became one of the most dominant pitching-catching softball duos in northwest Ohio and in the state this season. Paige, a sophomore, has a 19-1 record, 1.47 ERA, 0.91 WHIP and 129 strikeouts in 114 innings.

The duo are also effective at the plate, with Paige batting .557 (third highest on the team) with 26 RBIs, 31 runs, two home runs and 49 hits (35 singles, 12 doubles). Olivia is hitting .461 with 40 RBIs, 29 runs, two homers and 41 hits (21 singles, 13 doubles, five triples).

Their combination is also a big reason why the Apaches’ softball team is 26-1 and playing in a Division III state semifinal against Wheelersburg (26-1) at

12:30 p.m. Friday at Akron Firestone Stadium.

“It starts with Paige in the circle and Olivia behind the plate,” Fairview coach Staci Renollet said. “That sister bond, they just work so well together and read hitters.

“(Olivia is) one of the best natural catchers we’ve ever had. You can’t say enough about Paige’s obvious talents as a pitcher, but her mental approach and as I’ve said before, she’s an athlete across the board, so these pressure, big moments don’t seem to phase her because she’s done that in travel ball, in basketball, in volleyball. And just the way she’s able to approach those tough offensive teams has been really impressive.”

While Olivia, Paige and Renollet discuss before the game how to face hitters, Olivia and Paige are the ones calling the pitches.

“We talk before the game kind of overall what we know about certain hitters and places where we want to try and pitch and that type of thing,” Renollet said. “But, the call-to-call pitch is definitely Olivia’s thing.

“Paige is out there shaking yes and no as well, so she’s a part of it, but it for sure starts with Olivia.”

When there’s a disagreement on what pitch to throw,

See **DUO** on Page B4

Apaches’ softball run capping off huge year for Fairview athletics

By JONATHAN LEBLANC
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SHERWOOD — Fairview’s softball team has had a historic season.

The Apaches (26-1) have won 26 straight games, picked up their second straight Green Meadows Conference title (7-0) and earned their first regional championship in program history. Fairview will be playing in its first Division III state tournament when it takes on Wheelersburg (26-1) in a semifinal at 12:30 p.m. Friday at Akron Firestone Stadium.

But, the softball team isn’t the only Fairview athletics team with success this year.

Fairview’s girls basketball team (21-4, 7-0 GMC) won its first GMC championship since 2005 and was Division III district runner-up; football (10-1, 6-0) was Division VI, Region 22 runner-up for the second time in the last three years and won its second straight GMC title; volleyball (22-2,



Photo courtesy of Staci Renollet

Fairview’s softball team celebrates after winning a Division III regional final against Cardington-Lincoln on Saturday at Elida Middle School.

7-0) won its first GMC title since 2001; and baseball (16-11, 5-2) won nine of its last 10 games before losing in a Division III district semifinal.

The Apaches also had several individual state qualifiers this school year. Seniors Cassie Mavis and Treyvon Hastings, along with junior Samantha Rohrs, earned state cross country appearances. Senior Kaden Blair became the school’s

first state wrestling placer since 2001.

Fairview also had multiple individual district and regional qualifiers across every sport.

“I teach sixth grade here, so I’ve talked about that since sixth grade with girls and boys across the board in terms of athleticism and competitiveness,” Fairview softball coach Staci Renollet said. “I’ve said several times as a Fairview coach and

watching our teams, the best thing these senior girls and boys bring is they expect to win every game no matter what sport it is.

“And I like to have that back in Fairview culture.”

This year’s success has also been spearheaded by the now-graduated seniors.

“Coming into this season, so many people told us, ‘It’s your senior year. You were

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Photo by Michael Burwell

Fairview’s Olivia Ricica gets ready to catch a pitch from teammate and younger sister Paige Ricica during the Apaches’ Division III regional softball semifinal against Otsego on May 26 at Elida Middle School.



Photo by Michael Burwell

Hilltop's Wyatt Beltz flies through the air in the long jump event during the Lamberson Invitational on May 8 at Pete Dreher Track in Montpelier.

Look

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join Edon's boys 400-meter relay team as competitors from BBC schools at the state meet. Beltz will compete at 10 a.m. Friday, while Breier will start at 10 a.m. Saturday.

The two athletes, who have been solid all year, saved their best for the biggest stage of their careers so far at last week's Division III regional meet at Tiffin's Frost-Kalnow Stadium. Beltz, who has consistently jumped around 18-19 feet, leaped to a personal record of 20-10 to finish third.

"I felt like I had more speed during the jump, and with the adrenaline running through my blood, I just was able to get the drive I needed at the final moment and get the landing in," Beltz said. "(I was) very excited because I knew that was going to be one of the top jumps and I was more than likely going to make it to state with it."

His top mark came in the first attempt of finals. He also had a 20-4 in his final attempt.

Meanwhile, Breier came through with a personal best 16-4 in her final leap to finish fifth at regionals. Although she didn't get an automatic qualifying mark with a top-four finish, Breier earned one of two at-large bids in the event to advance.

"It was so surreal. It still doesn't even feel like I'm going, but I know I belong," Breier said. "My coaches prepared me and I believe I'm going to accomplish big things."

Beltz became Hilltop's first state track and field qualifier since 2012 when Zach Smith finished 12th in the 1,600. Beltz is the first field event qualifier from Hilltop and ninth athlete overall from the school to earn a trip to state in the last 20 years.

Beltz is seeded sixth out of nine competitors in his

Duo

(Continued from Page B3)

Olivia will usually call a different pitch if Paige shakes her off, she said.

But sometimes — especially if she really believes in a pitch — Olivia will call for it several times in a row. That either results in the pitch being thrown or a trip to the circle.

"We just usually talk it out on the mound," Olivia said. "And we have Kiersten (Cline) and Anna (Ankney), and they're like, 'Oh, it's OK guys. Just relax.' So that helps too so we don't tear each other's throats out and yell at each other."

"It doesn't normally take us long to work through something like that," Paige said.

Both of them said they didn't expect this partnership to go as well as it has.



Photo by Michael Burwell

Stryker's Brianna Breier soars through the air in the long jump event during the Division III district track and field meet on May 21 at Ayersville High School.

heat (10th overall out of 18 athletes). Salineville Southern's Brad Sloan is the top seed after notching a 22-3 at regionals.

"I'm really happy to be able to represent our school by making it to state," Beltz said. "I know my family's proud and other schools are also proud for representing the area."

"I know that some of the long jumpers (in the BBC) were saying they hope they can beat me next year, and I'm ready for the competition. I love everyone that does this event with me because I always try to make friends with them."

Breier is Stryker's first state qualifier since Paige Speelman in the 100-meter dash in 2017 and the first field event qualifier for the Panthers since Christine Huston finished tied for fifth in the high jump in 2013.

Breier will be seeded eighth in her heat and 14th overall. A big leap could lead to a podium finish; Only five athletes have a regional mark of at least 17 feet.

"I'm going to use my adrenaline for sure and hopefully I beat that (school) record," Breier said. "That's my goal to get on the podium there, too."

Paige credits the little bit of work they did last summer and before this season to help the transition go smoother for Olivia, who caught for 2019 grad Logan Smith the last two seasons.

"She definitely did not like catching for me at the beginning at all. She was always against it," Paige said. "But once we were kind of forced into it, I don't know, I like it now as it's developed. She's learned to call pitches the way I like them to be called."

The sisters look to continue the team's success on Friday.

"We're just going to try to keep doing what we're doing," Paige said. "We're going to have better competition, the game will be more intense and they'll probably get more hits."

Year

(Continued from Page B3)

the class that was supposed to do something for us," said senior Kiersten Cline, who played volleyball, basketball and softball, earning GMC player of the year in the first two. "And we obviously changed our culture here, but it's finally showing not just to our community, but to everyone else that we are going to state and how (we're) going out with a bang."

For the girls, a part of that success has been because of summer workouts, which volleyball coach Allison Ciolek started when she arrived five years ago. The workouts include conditioning and weightlifting three days a week at 7 a.m.

Renollet, Cline and Mavis all said the summer workouts gave the girls across all sports the opportunity to come together.

"I think we all bonded

because we did not enjoy it and we hated getting up, and we bonded through complaining," said Mavis, who ran cross country for the first time this year and played basketball and softball. "But then, it's like the third year doing it now and now it's just something like, 'Oh yeah, you get up and do that work.'"

Cline added: "The complaining turned into competing against each other, making one another better — which is awesome. Like, we had to run a mile every day and we were like, 'Well, I'm going to beat your time,' and, 'No, I'm going to beat your time,' to get better, but also to have fun with something."

"And then you would see girls — like I don't see who (compete in) cross country or golf — that'd come, and then I'd be able to bond with them

while still working out and things."

The girls were also motivated by the football team's success, and wanted to make sure the boys showed up to their games as well.

"Going from football season watching the boys being able to have all those sendoffs and seeing them succeed, it makes us be like, 'OK, now we've got to work harder so that way they can come to our sports,'" Cline said.

Mavis admitted she didn't think about what she wanted her impact on Fairview to be before this year.

But with Friday's game one of their last in a Fairview uniform, Mavis and Cline are glad this year's athletic teams have had this much success in their final year and have changed the culture for future generations.

"I think making it to

state is great, but bringing our community together is even better and I'd say that's an impact we're all happy to have," Mavis said.

"It's always one of those things, when you're a freshman, you always see the seniors and their impact on you. But once you move up and (realize if) they had any mistakes, you fix them to your best abilities," Cline said. "It's just crazy, because you see all the little kids look up to you and then you see the freshman who says they want to be like you and the whole culture change and everything."

"When we came to Fairview, it was rough. We had school meetings where literally (athletic director Paul) Yunker was like, 'We need to change the culture,' so we're like, 'OK, let's change this culture.'"

"So the fact that we did it and were successful, it's pretty sweet."

Edon

(Continued from Page B1)

weekend at Westerville North High School.

"As a team, we've just gotten better. We've grown better as human beings and as racers, so it's been a great time," said Hamrick, who along with Whitney and Eicher are seniors on the relay team. "I love these guys, love them like brothers and we're going to go do this together."

The Bombers are scheduled to run in Friday's prelims at 4 p.m. The top two finishers in each of the three heats, along with the next two fastest times, advance to Saturday's finals at 2:55 p.m.

Edon has had individual success, especially over the last decade. Logan Bloir won a state championship in the 100 in 2018 and Mike Peebles took home the high jump title in 2012.

But sending an entire relay team from the small community has been rare.

In 2003, Edon's Kyle Douglass, Matthew Smith, Adam Wagner and Dustin Morr advanced to state in the 400 relay and finished 14th in 44.65 seconds.

Eighteen years later, the Bombers are back in the sprint relay.

"It's exciting. I've been hearing a lot of people come out and congratulate (me), good job, and it's like

Blue

(Continued from Page B1)

"Hey, coach (Jason Zumbaugh) wants to talk to you, I'm like what is this about because I had no idea. So he comes to my house and tells me, 'Do you want to run at state?' I'm like, 'Yeah, who doesn't want to run at state?' So he told me I made it and I guess I have another week of practice."

Blue, who has been solid all season in the hurdles and in the Bulldogs' relay teams, was one of two area athletes to earn an at-large bid. Stryker junior Brianna Breier advanced in the long jump after placing fifth at the Division III regional meet at Tiffin's Frost-Kalnow Stadium.

Blue's finish may have been tough, but his time was still solid.

He ran well throughout the race until the last hurdle before the finish line. He clipped the hurdle, fell,

yeah thanks but it wasn't just me," Eicher said. "It was the whole team."

"... It's good to have the whole community kind of coming together and really rooting for us to get there."

Whitney, Gallehue, Hamrick and Eicher have been improving their times throughout the year and were among an impressive contingent of boys sprint relay teams from Williams County that included Montpelier and Edgerton.

After finishing first in the Buckeye Border Conference meet in the 400 relay in mid-May and second to Montpelier in the Division III district meet at Ayersville High School the following week, Edon earned a trip to state by finishing fourth at regionals in 44.75.

"It was fantastic," said Eicher, the anchor on the team. "I remember getting the baton, looking up and I'm staring down and seeing that I was in fifth. And I'm like, 'Well crap.'"

"So I'm running and I'm like I've got to catch this guy, I've got to catch him. I started to gain on him and I'm like I've got a shot at this. Then the last 30-40 meters I got him."

Whitney, whose father (Tim) was a state qualifier in the 200 and whose uncle (Terry) is the Bombers' coach, starts the relay off in

the blocks for the Bombers before handing the baton to Gallehue.

"The first handoff is really important because we've got to get off to a good start, try to get us a little bit of a lead or just make it really competitive for the rest of the legs," Trey Whitney said. "Handoffs are really what cuts down the time at this point of the season."

Gallehue, a first-team all-Ohio quarterback for Edon's football team in the fall and an all-Ohioan in basketball during his stellar junior year, is the second leg of the relay before handing the baton to Hamrick.

"At the beginning of the year, I wasn't even actually in the 4 by 100 and one of our teammates got hurt, so they threw me into it," said Gallehue, who advanced to regionals in the shot put during his first year of track and field. "Our times were definitely slower at the beginning of the year, but as the year went on, we just kept practicing and getting faster and faster."

Hamrick, who qualified for regionals in both hurdles races, said the team has been improving steadily throughout the year.

"We've been working on handoffs all year, especially early in the year at Wayne Trace. Drew and Trey, they had the worst handoff of the year and since then, it's

been flawless," Hamrick said. "Me and Drew have always had great handoffs and then me and Gage are just continuously getting faster and faster as time goes. We get him to go, school record, we'll shatter it easily."

Edon is seeded fourth in the second of three heats and 10th overall out of 18 teams. Youngstown Valley Christian has the top seed (43.13).

The Bombers will be looking to set the school record of 44.56 set by the 2003 relay team.

The camaraderie between the four athletes — and executing the handoffs — will be the biggest key to Edon's goal of making a name for itself at state.

"We've just got to keep practicing handoffs, getting them smooth because those can cut down tenths, hundredths of seconds which can help break that record," Gallehue said.

Added Eicher: "There's a lot of camaraderie. Three of us are all in the same class and we've been around for quite a while, so we've grown pretty close, good friends. Drew, he's been right there with us so just kind of growing a strong bond of friendship over the past few years."

"This year just really cemented our friendship."

the finals, with Columbus Grove's Jon Banal winning in 40.25.

Going up against the best hurdlers in the region fueled his strong start in the race.

"Obviously, the competition helps out a lot, getting really amped up for the most important race of the year so far," he said. "I was just excited to run that race and all the emotion, all the hype really helps out."

Blue won the 300 hurdles the previous two weeks at the Green Meadows Conference meet and Division III district meet at Ayersville High School. He also was part of numerous top four finishes in the 110 hurdles, 800 relay and 1,600 relay the last several weeks.

Blue is scheduled to run in the prelims at 5 p.m. Friday. With the state meet being moved this year from the nine-lane track on the

Ohio State University campus to three separate high schools, three heats will be conducted in the running event prelims.

He is seeded fourth in the second of three heats and 12th overall out of 18 athletes.

The top two finishers in each heat, plus the next two fastest times, advance to Saturday's finals at 3:20 p.m.

As Blue gets ready for his first state tournament appearance, his biggest focus will be on sticking to his race and what he can control.

"I guess the biggest focus is to keep my composure. Obviously it's going to be a very exciting, very hyped-up race," he said. "But I've got to do me and just run my fastest time. If I run my fastest and I don't make it, so be it, but I'm going to run my race and hopefully the best happens."