



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Imbler's Erin Coston cleared 9 feet 9 to take second in 1A girls pole vault.

Coston places second

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Only one athlete from the Imbler Panthers track and field team qualified for the 1A state championship in Monmouth this weekend.

And though she didn't win her event, sophomore Erin Coston turned in one of the more impressive performances of the weekend, taking second in the 1A girls pole vault with a mark of 9 feet, 9 inches — a personal best by more than a foot.

And the move to second place almost didn't happen.

Twice on lower heights Coston was down to her final attempt — at 9 feet, and later at 9 feet, 6 inches. But both times she responded with a flurry. The sophomore was able to contort herself over the bar when facing elimination, and then had no issues at the next height, easily making it over 9 feet 3, and 9 feet 9, respectively, on her first attempts.

What ensued was a showdown between Coston and North Lake junior Briana Church, who entered as the two-time defending 1A champion. Coston, of course, was seeking to bring a pole vault state championship back to Imbler for a third year in a row after Aspen Birkmaier earned the 2A title in 2017 and 2018.

Coston's move over 9 feet 6 sent her into the final two against Church, and she briefly moved into the lead when she cleared the bar on her first try at 9 feet 9. Church missed on her first attempt at the height, but then made it over on a second go before surging back ahead, this time for good, when she cleared 10 feet on the first attempt — a mark that was also a personal record.

Coston missed on her three tries at 10 feet to settle for second, but she still came away with a 15-inch personal best on the day. Her previous top mark individually was 8 feet 6, and prior to this season, she had never cleared more than 7 feet 6.

Her eight points for second place earned the Panthers a tie for 22nd as a team.

FRESHMEN HELP BADGERSTO 10TH PLACE

A pair of freshmen played arguably the biggest role in getting the Powder Valley Badgers boys track and field team into a tie for 10th place at the 1A state championships Friday and Saturday in Monmouth.

Kaden Krieger and Reece Dixon both had strong weekends for the Badgers, who finished with 24 points as a team to tie with St. Stephen's Academy. Krieger turned in Powder's top individual performance by taking third in the 1A boys 300 hurdles in a time of 42.30 seconds. He was seventh in the high jump, clearing 5 feet 10 inches along with teammate Dominick Grende, who placed sixth in the event.

Krieger was also at the center of one of the closest finishes of the state meet. The freshman, Elgin's Tristan Simpson and Hosanna Christian's Christian Coleman flew neck-and-neck down the home stretch in the final leg of the 1A boys 4x400 relay, in which Powder Valley and Elgin were seeded first and

second, respectively, in the state. The trio of runners hit the finish line at a nearly identical time — with Krieger tumbling through the finish in an attempt to lunge ahead.

The race went to Hosanna Christian by seven one-thousandths of one second over Elgin, as the top two teams finished in 3:33.612 and 3:33.619. Powder Valley, which was barely edged out for third, finished in 3:33.68.

"It was pretty hard at the end," Krieger said of the race. "I couldn't feel my legs, and I was working so hard to try and get in front of Tristan. I was trying to get my head across (at the finish), but I reached my head too far and lost my balance and I just fell. I almost knocked (Simpson) over too."

Although the finish wasn't in Powder's favor, the effort caps a strong season for the Badgers and points to a promising future. Krieger said the team had a surge in athletes this year, which he credits to new head coach Nic Maszk.

"He's a good coach. He trains us well. A whole bunch of people went out this year for him," Krieger said.

Dixon placed fifth in the 1A boys triple jump at 40 feet 1, and the freshman also contributed to the Badgers' effort by coming in sixth in the 1A boys 400 in 52.85 seconds.

The Powder Valley girls, who placed 21st with nine points, sent athletes to the podium in all three events in which they qualified for state. The 4x100 relay team of Keanna and Megan Bingham and Sonora and Belle Blair came home sixth in 53.65 seconds, and Sonora Blair, Brooke Allen and the Bingham placed fifth in the 4x400 relay in 4:28.99.

Allen, the lone Badger to qualify individually, was seventh in the 1A girls javelin at 102 feet 1.

BOBCAT CONTINGENT TAKES 18TH, 25TH

The Union Bobcats girls track and field team had just three athletes at the 2A state championships, but two had third-place finishes to send the Bobcat girls home from Monmouth with 12 points and a tie for 18th place as a team.

Senior Abriel O'Reilly wrapped up her prep career by taking third place in the 2A girls 800 in a personal best time of 2:27.87, and Jaimee Baxter, who entered as one of the favorites in the 2A girls 400, finished with a time of 59.48 seconds — also a personal best — to also come away in third. The junior was one of only three athletes to finish the event in less than a minute.

The Union boys sent athletes to the podium in two events, with junior Jaxon Blackburn clearing 12 feet in the 2A boys pole vault to finish in fifth place and match the best effort of his career. Meanwhile, the Bobcats took seventh and eighth in the 2A boys 800, with Matthew Sheehy crossing the line in 2:06.12 and Monte Kirby hot on his heels in a pack of athletes finishing at 2:06.34.

As a team, the Union boys scored seven points to take 25th. ■



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Elgin's Aaliyah Burton swept the championships in the 1A girls 100 hurdles and 300 hurdles.

Burton wins twice to lead Elgin

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

A sophomore sensation played a vital role in lifting the Elgin Huskies girls track and field team to its best finish in a decade.

Aaliyah Burton swept both the 1A girls 100 hurdles and 300 hurdles — two events in which she'd entered as a big favorite — and tied for fourth in the 100 to help the Huskies to a 10th-place finish at the 1A state championships in Monmouth this weekend.

"It means so much. Since I'm (only) a sophomore, it's awesome to come (to state). I want to give thanks to my coach. She's the reason I'm here doing hurdles," Burton said. "I love hurdles, so I put all my time and effort into those."

Elgin head coach Emily Sorensen said Burton got a taste of what state would require when she qualified a year ago, calling that experience from 2018 "huge."

"We talked throughout the season about what it's really going to take to be at the top of the podium," Sorensen said. "It's going to take heart and hard work every day at practice. She really had to grow as an athlete mentally, challenging herself through practice and being smart."

That challenge even included running with the EHS boys.

"There were a lot of times she chose to work out with our male athletes who are here at state in order to increase her own potential and her own speed," Sorensen said.

Burton blistered through the 100 hurdles to win by nearly a second in a time of 16.03 seconds. She followed later Saturday by adding the championship in the 300 hurdles, rallying in the final three hurdles to win in a time of 48.47.

"I said (to myself), 'This is my time,' so I pushed myself to get up there," she said of the 300 hurdles.

Burton also finished in a tie for fourth in the 1A girls 100 in a time of 12.97 seconds.

The other two Elgin athletes to

make it to state — also sophomores — were responsible for Elgin's remaining points, as Jocelyn Palmer placed fifth in the 1A girls 800 in 2:32.70, and Maddison Harvey came in seventh in the 100 hurdles in 17.20, only 0.07 seconds shy of third place. As a team, the Huskies finished with 30.5 points.

"It's impressive when you look at the age of the girls who are at state," Sorensen said. "These young ladies were able to place as high as they did as sophomores."

The placing was the first top-10 finish for the Elgin girls since 2009, when the team tied for eighth.

ELGIN BOYSTURN IN BEST FINISH SINCE 1992, TAKE FIFTH

None of the athletes on the Elgin Huskies boys track and field team were alive the last time the school fared this well at state.

Behind a trio of second-place finishes, including a thrilling photo-finish in the final race of the meet, the Huskies secured their top state placing since 1992 by taking fifth with 34 points at the 1A state championships Friday and Saturday in Monmouth.

"The boys came to compete, (and) we as a coaching staff are pleased," head coach Emily Sorensen said.

That spring in '92, the Huskies finished in a tie for third with Amity and trailed only state champion Salem Academy and runner-up Warrenton. That was also the year, Sorensen said, the Huskies last won a district title.

"We did go back and look at when the last time they won district, so we were aware of how long ago it was," she said.

Elgin has struggled to maintain success since 1992, landing just one top-10 finish in 26 years before this weekend. In fact, as recently as four years ago, the Huskies failed to have a state qualifier.

Sorensen said in rebuilding the program she has taken an approach of getting the athletes to focus on the small things.

"Sometimes we get so focused on the end result, but they are focused on what's the next step for them. We've really tried to ingrain that the end result will take care of itself," she said.

Over the weekend, that end result included a second-place finish in both relays and a second-place finish by Tristan Simpson in the 1A boys javelin. Simpson finished the javelin Friday with a throw of 165 feet 10 to get the Huskies on the board early, then anchored both relay teams to second place. The latter race, the 4x400 with himself, Wyatt Hallgarth, Geoy Greenlee and Clay Wilhelm, saw a photo finish between Simpson, Christian Coleman of Hosanna Christian and Kaden Krieger of Powder Valley. Hosanna edged Elgin by seven one-thousandths of one second to win in a time of 3:33.612 to Elgin's 3:33.619.

"Everything was going well, and at the end we all grouped together," Simpson said of the finish. "I was hoping one of us (Elgin or Powder Valley) would get first and second."

Simpson, who earlier in the day teamed with Hallgarth, Greenlee and Jordon Palmer to finish second in the 4x100 relay in 44.51 seconds, credited the coaching staff with the program's resurgence.

"They really push us to work together, to work hard and never give up," Simpson said.

The Huskies landed four more athletes on the podium along with the three runner-up efforts, as Wilhelm took fifth in the 400 in 52.61 seconds, Greenlee placed sixth in the 100 in 11.64, Brandon Caldwell came in seventh in the 110 hurdles in 17.30, and Chris Hanson was eighth in the shot put at 39 feet 4.

The future looks to be bright for Elgin, with sophomores and juniors accounting for all but three of the Huskies' points on the weekend.

"The really neat thing for these young men is they're all hungry for the next step," Sorensen said. ■



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Elgin's Wyatt Hallgarth, right, hands the baton to Geoy Greenlee during the 1A boys 4x100 relay Saturday at the 1A state track meet at Western Oregon University in Monmouth.

