



Howard sweeps individual events, 18 qualify for state as Lions shine at districts

The boys won the league title for the first time in five years; girls took second with Albrecht and Wright making statements

BY SAM WRIGHT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel



Photo by Sam Wright

Connor Howard gains the edge in the 100-meter final, the senior broke records while qualifying for state.

Rain came pouring down on the Wally Ciochetti track this past Saturday, as the Sky-Em district meet was wrapping up its final day. Usually, the rain can be a huge hindrance on performances, but that was not the case for Cottage Grove.

The Lions dominated a wide variety of events. The boys' squad took first place over an extremely competitive Junction City team that rivaled the Lions throughout the entire meet. The girls' team placed second and just under Sisters, the defending champs, and finished 59.5 points ahead of Junction City in third place.

It was the first time in five years that the boys have won the league title, and Head Coach Ricky Knutson said it was one of the best district championships Cottage Grove has ever seen.

Despite the disagreeable weather, the Lions saw personal records set and a total of 18 athletes (11 boys, seven girls) qualify for the state meet.

Perhaps the story of the season came from senior sprinter Connor Howard, who won the most valuable track athlete for the district championship.

Howard took first place in the 100, 200 and 400-meter sprints and took second place in the 4x100-meter relay. His original personal best in the 100-meter was 11.22 seconds, a time that was the third-fastest in Cottage Grove history. On Saturday, Howard finished the final race in 11.15 seconds, 0.03 seconds slower than his preliminary time.

In the 200-meter preliminary, Howard actually placed third behind two of Junction City's best, Zach Rogers and James Palodichuk. But in the finals, Howard gained the slightest edge on Rogers and managed to steal first place in 22.95 seconds.

The 400-meter run had a similar pattern. Howard lost to Trey Reed of Sweet Home in the preliminary races, yet he still managed to take first in the finals. Both Howard and Reed improved their times from the preliminary run; however, Howard improved a whole lot more.

In Howard's fourth and final event, the 4x100-meter relay, his team took second place, but their time of 43.72 seconds still broke a Cottage Grove record that had been standing for 12 years.

"Howard should be named athlete of the year for what he did on Saturday," Knutson said. "Not only how he placed, but the fact that he did it in a league that has a crop of some of the best sprinters in the state," he added.

And Knutson is right. Four sprinters from the Sky-Em League are ranked in the top 10 for 100-meter sprints. Howard stole the spotlight, but that is not to say that other Cottage Grove athletes didn't shine.

Michael Tharpe took first place in the high hurdles, breaking his personal best and the 15-second mark for a time of 14.98 seconds. He also placed fourth in the 100-meter sprints, qualifying for state with a time of 11.30 seconds (the automatic qualifying time is 11.37 seconds).

On the girls' side, Hannah Albrecht took home four silver medals by placing second in the 100, 200 and 400-meter races as well as the 4x400-meter relay. Although she didn't take any gold medals, the junior Lion was well decorated with her wide range of medals.

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Athlete of the Week

Connor Howard:
Most Valuable Track Athlete



Howard had consistently placed high in previous meets throughout the season, but at the district meet, he put on one of the best performances of any athlete. Howard won three gold medals in the 100, 200 and 400-meter sprints and then contributed to take second place in the 4x100-meter relay, breaking a Cottage Grove record with a time of 43.72 seconds.

Boys' Golf takes third at districts, state results to come

Junction City is this year's Sky-Em boys' golf champion, Sutherlin is the runner up and Cottage Grove reached its goal of taking third place in the district tournament. The Lions, headed by coach Kent Russo, have placed well enough to qualify for the 4A state tournament. The state tournament was held this Monday and Tuesday, but results have yet to be released.

In the district tournament, Nick Russo finished third overall in individual scoring and was the only medalist for the Lions. A few uncharacteristic holes put him in a tough spot, but Coach Russo said that his "mental toughness kept his round from exploding because he struggled on the front and started the back double bogey and triple bogey." Russo ended up scoring 86 and 89 to take his third place.

Another strong performance came from Jeramy Hall, who shot a 95 on day two of districts. Russo explained that the greens at Tokatee golf course are extremely fast, making things like putts and chips more difficult.

Trey Husko then shot 99, breaking 100 for the first time. On the front nine, Husko shot 42, however he struggled on the back nine and hit 57.

"He has some rough stretches and those will lessen with time," Russo said.

Overall, the team was very satisfied with their third place finish. As mentioned earlier, the state tournament finished up early Tuesday afternoon, and the results will be in next week's issue.

Pitch, Hit and Run winners head to Portland Sat.

BY SAM WRIGHT
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On May 7, the MLB's Pitch Hit and Run program came to Cottage Grove for area youth to test their fundamental baseball skills and earn a trip to Portland for the sectional competition.

For the girls, only one age group competed, and it was Addie Ruckwardt that came away as the all-around champion with a score of 444. Ruckwardt scored 150 in the pitch event, 134 in the hit event and 160 in the run event.

The boys' side saw a little more competition but still only had nine participants in total. In the age 9-10 group, Christian Spear was the all-around champion across the board, scoring 225 in pitching, 214 in hitting and 310 in running for a total score of 749.

In the 11 and 12 age group, Luke Hornick came away as the all-around champion but was only the hitting champion for his age group. Hornick hit off of a tee for a score of 224. Logan Ruckwardt (Addie's brother) was the pitching champion with a score of 225, and Walker Williams was the running champion who ran the bases for a score of 303.

Matthew Zumwalt put on an impressive performance in the 13 and 14 age group, as he won the age group and swept the board. His combined score as all-around champion added up for 817, the highest score of the day.

Spear, Hornick, Zumwalt and Ruckwardt will make their way to Portland on Saturday to compete in the sectional competition. The sectional competition will take place at Sunset High School and will determine who will head to Seattle to compete at the Mariners' stadium. Winners from that regional tournament will be invited to compete in the competition at the All-Star game in San Diego.

Cottage Grove secures Sky-Em League title after Elmira rout



Photo by Sam Wright

TJ Bellamy gets the forced out at third and tries for the double play at first against Elmira on Friday.

Lions see season-high batting average as they demolish Elmira on the road

BY SAM WRIGHT
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Throughout the season, Elmira seemed to be the only Sky-Em opponent that could topple Cottage Grove. The Falcons were ranked higher in the state rankings and statistically outmatched the Lions in most areas of the game (even bases stolen). But the Lions did not shudder. They had already beaten Elmira in April, and there was nothing to say that they couldn't repeat that once more.

And Cottage Grove didn't even need to beat them twice. One win would have secured the Sky-Em, but that won't stop the competitive instincts of these athletes.

Tuesday's matchup made it clear who the real dominant program of the Sky-Em was. The Lions marched in to Falcon territory and blew them away, 17-5, with a season-high score and a season-high batting average of .514. The team scored in every inning except for one, and three players had an average of .750 (Lukas Ward, Brett Ollivant

and Ryan East), six out of the 10 batters hit for an average of .500 or better. The team totaled 19 hits.

This is the type of hitting performance Head Coach Dan Geiszler has been looking for throughout the season. The Lions rely heavily on their ability to steal once on base, but their batting averages have sometimes been on the slightly lower side of average.

Brett Ollivant showed that he can

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