

## Cottage Grove martial artists score medals at regionals

Six martial art students from Lauraine's ATA Martial Arts in Cottage Grove, Oregon brought home an array of medals from last week's inaugural American Taekwondo Association Northwest District Championships held in Des Moines, Washington.

This event was only open to the top competitors from Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana and all of Canada.

"It was exciting me and my students to receive invitations to compete for the title," says fourth degree black belt and owner Erin Lauraine. "However, it was daunting to see how many states were also included, especially all of Canada. We decided to give it our best, and it paid off."

The group took in a total of eight District titles as well as four silver and two bronze medal finishes.

Leading the way was Lauraine who was a gold medalist in traditional forms, sparring and traditional weapons while taking home a silver medal in combative weapons sparring. Second degree black belt Erin Foreman was a gold medalist in traditional weapons and a silver medalist in forms while. Also a second degree black belt, Audrey Millard was a bronze medalist in sparring and combative weapon sparring.

First degree black belt Lee Lauraine was a gold medalist in sparring and combative weapon sparring. First degree black belt D.J. Jensen was a gold medalist in both sparring and traditional weapons. Green belt Meilani Pang finished seventh in sparring.

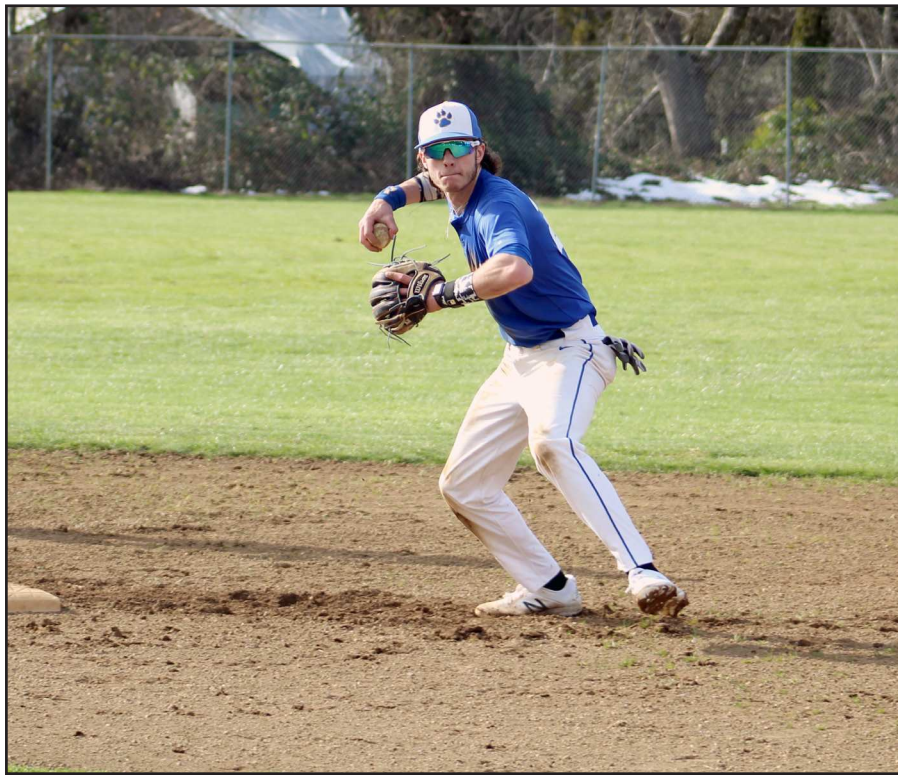
As an added benefit, black belt competitors who took the gold get an invitation to compete for the World Champion title in Little Rock, Arkansas next month.

"This is huge for us," says Lauraine's ATA manager Megan Millard. "The eight titles we won are eight chances at a World title. Just to get this opportunity usually takes going to dozens of tournaments and spending thousands of dollars, which many of our families can't afford. With this new opportunity, our students can have that chance."

The school has been fundraising for the past year to travel to the American Taekwondo Association World Championships in Little Rock, and is happy to report that all of their students will be there to compete for their shot at a World title.

"We're the biggest small school around," says competitor and gold medalist Lee Lauraine. "We're your classic underdog. People don't expect much from a small town school, but that's our greatest strength. We train hard, support one another and never give up."

## Warm welcome for first week of games



With the sun in the air, the Cottage Grove baseball team got a chance to be on their field for the first time this season on Monday. On Tuesday the team had their first game of the season (after *The Sentinel's* print deadline). Top photo: The team huddles around head coach Dan Geiszler on the first sunny day of the season. Left: Senior Wyatt Sayles works on turning two. Right: Koltin Britton dives for a fly ball.

## Elkton's principal continues success at Days Creek



PHOTO C/O JAMES ELLIS

Days Creek head coach James Ellis and his son, Blake, share a moment after the Wolves took third place at the 1A state basketball tournament.

*Serving as Days Creek's basketball coach in addition to Elkton's principal and athletic director, James Ellis successfully navigated through the winter sports season*

By Zach Silva  
 zsilva@cgsentinel.com

Eighty-three miles in the morning. Eighty-three miles in the afternoon.

For James Ellis, 52, the drive from Days

Creek to Elkton and back has become part of his daily commute. A time to listen to a variety of music, maybe throw on a podcast and probably do some thinking.

"Sometimes I don't listen to anything. Just unwind and think or prepare my mind for what I've got to do," said Ellis while sitting in his office in Elkton last week. In his first year on the job at Elkton, he works at the high school as both principal and athletic director — not exactly an uncommon pairing of jobs at the 1A level. But what is uncommon is that Ellis is also the head boys' basketball coach at Days Creek — a school in the same league as Elkton — in a position he has held for the last 27 years.

Entering the season, Ellis had plenty of questions and concerns about what could go wrong as he tried to juggle these responsibilities. But through plenty of hours logged on the road, community support from both schools and a tenacious basketball team, Ellis turned his busy year into one of the most successful seasons in school history.

Current Days Creek athletic director Ron Dunn first learned of James Ellis in the fall of 1982. Dunn had just started his first year at the school where he was the boys' basketball coach. School was just about to start for the year and a student told him some bad news about a junior on the basketball team who was hurt playing football.

"Somebody told me, 'Mr. Dunn, you're going to be sick...one of your best players broke his leg,'" remembers Dunn nearly 40 years later. "Sometime in that first week of school here comes that little blonde-haired kid with crutches and a big ol' cast on his leg." The pair began a lifelong friendship in that first year which was aided by Ellis who regularly bought Dunn ice cream from the student store.

After graduation the two remained close as Dunn encouraged Ellis to get into education and then eventually helped him get a job at Days Creek. Ellis entered the

coaching world of Days Creek as an assistant football and track and field coach at the high school in addition to coaching middle school basketball. In 1992 he took the position of head boys basketball coach.

Ellis got comfortable in the position and before long had coached the team to one of its best finishes in school history as the team placed second in state in both 2000 and 2001. Since Ellis has been at Days Creek, the Wolves have made it to the quarterfinals of the state tournament 11 times (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019). While the team maintained a high level of success on the court, off the court Ellis began working on getting his administrative license.

In the winter of 2018, Ellis was approached by Elkton about the possibility of taking the role of principal. Flattered by being considered, Ellis initially brushed it aside saying the timing wasn't right and that maybe in the future he would consider. After nearly three decades as head basketball coach at Days Creek, Ellis was not going to leave during his son's — Skyline player of the year Blake Ellis — senior season. Those at Elkton were insistent that he was the one for the job and after going through the interview process and discussing logistics, an agreement was met: Ellis would be principal and athletic director at Elkton while still coaching at Days Creek.

"I had my concerns at the beginning, but I will tell you... the staff members at both schools allowed this to work pretty seamlessly," said Ellis. "I kept saying, there are going to be problems that arise that I can't even imagine. But those were minimal."

In Elkton, there was an understanding that Ellis would leave school an hour or two early while making up hours on Fridays throughout the year. In Days Creek, he had assistant coaches in place that were ready in the off-chance he had to stay late. The closest thing to a problem came when discussing upcoming schedules.

**ELLIS** see B2

## Athletes of the Week



*This week's athletes of the week are Erin Lauraine, Lee Lauraine, Audrey Millard, Erin Foreman, D.J. Jensen and Meilani Pang of Lauraine's ATA Martial Arts. The Cottage Grove based athletes competed at the American Taekwondo Association Northwest District Championships and brought back a host of awards. To learn more, see left column.*



**Erin Lauraine**  
 4th Degree Black Belt  
 Gold Medalist in Traditional Forms, Sparring and Traditional Weapons, Silver Medalist in Combative Weapon Sparring

PHOTO C/O LAURAINES ATA MARTIAL ARTS