

Arrowhead boys and girls both win state track and field titles

First time in state history a Division 1 school swept boys and girls championships



Dave Radcliffe/Freeman Staff

Arrowhead's Logan Hicks celebrates after setting a state record in the Division 1 boys 110-meter hurdles final during the WIAA State Track and Field Championships June 1 in La Crosse.



Dave Radcliffe/Freeman Staff

Arrowhead's Natalie Kussow, right, embraces teammate Avery Bott after the Warhawks won the Division 1 girls 4x200-meter relay final during the WIAA State Track and Field Championships June 1 in La Crosse.

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LAKE COUNTRY FIRE & RESCUE

Chenequa’s Bob Bellin retires after nearly 50 years of service

Was a firefighter, Fire Board member and trustee

By Bridget Dean
bdean@conley.net.com
262-513-2644

CHENEQUA — Lake Country Fire & Rescue is honoring the retirement of a long-time public servant.

For nearly 50 years, Bob Bellin has been dedicated to the safety of his community and the betterment of fire and rescue services across Lake Country. He played a major role in consolidating the seven partner communities and implementing the paramedic training center.

Bellin began his service with the Chenequa Fire Department in February of 1975. Shortly after finishing college and being drafted for a while, he and his wife settled down in Chenequa.

“After we had unpacked, we were sitting out on the front porch and enjoying a bottle of wine, and one of Chenequa’s finest stopped (by) and said, ‘Hey, how are you?’ and welcomed me to the village,” Bellin said. “And they said, ‘Oh, by the way, would you be interested in joining the fire department?’”

His relationship with fire services took off from there. In the early 1980s, he stopped active service as a fireman, but remained in contact with the department for major events and served on quite a few commissions and committees during that time.

He was witness to the 2000 formation of LCFR’s predecessor, the Lake Country Fire Department, comprised of the Chenequa and Nashotah fire departments. In 2010, the city of Delafield joined the department and it was renamed to LCFR; Bellin was asked to serve as the Chenequa representative for the new board. Oconomowoc Lake began contracting for service in 2020; a year later it became a partner, alongside Wales and the towns of Delafield and Genesee. Current Fire Chief Matt Fennig called the current structure of the department the LCFR7, for the seven partner communities.

Fennig gives much credit to Bellin for LCFR’s success.

“His persistence to do what is right for the area’s residents, strategic approach to challenges, and relentless pursuit of opportunity has brought our department to where it is today and at the same time, positioned LCFR to be a model for service delivery well into the future,” Fennig said.

Chenequa honored his time as a public servant with a resolution of appreciation. He served as a village trustee from April 2014 to



Courtesy of Lake Country Fire & Rescue

Bob Bellin (center, holding plaque), is honored by the Fire Board and Fire Chief Matt Fennig (holding axe). Left to right: Roger Yolo, Tom Touchette, Al Theis, Jerry Orlowski, Jim Morris, Martin Gallun, Bellin, Jeff Rumler, Steve Goetz, Fennig, Alan Enters, Mark Moore, Anthony Arbucias and Gene Mayernick.

April 2024; during that time he was on the Public Safety and Operations committees, the Plan Commission, the Highway 83 Task Force, and of course, the LCFR board.

As a member of the board, Bellin has been part of the joint long-term planning. There were always challenges to be tackled, but he found the work very rewarding. Shortly after the merger with Delafield, he was part of the push to raise the skill level of the personnel and cut down on annual re-certification costs by opening a training operation for EMTs and paramedics.

“(LCFR) could help set the pace, if you will, for bringing higher end medical, paramedic operations into the area,” he said. “It’s really been a real pleasure to be able to drive the higher end medical transport capability ... that’s been a major change obviously over the 50 years from what it used to be.”

He supported transitioning to full-time staff and the public’s education on why it was necessary that went along with approving budgetary changes.

“The way to see it is that the Fire Board is really in charge of setting the vision and the mission ... as well as setting the budget,” Fennig explained.

Another sector of leadership within the

department is the Fire Commission, which also is comprised of two appointed members from each community. The commission is responsible for hiring and discipline of sworn employees.

While there is no prerequisite of having worked in the fire services industry, Fennig says retired fire department personnel have an “upper hand” on a lot of things because they understand how fire departments operate.

“I will say that we have a number of retired fire department people on our board, which is amazing,” Fennig said. “They know the ins and outs of the fire department, and they know the vocabulary, if you will.”

Bellin said he really enjoyed his time working with young people interested in fire and medical services.

“We had students coming in early mornings before they want to school. They spent an hour training with us, and by the time they graduated out of high school, they had a pretty good idea (of) ‘Hey, I want to be a fire person, I want to be a paramedic,’” he explained. “It’s always rewarding to me, working with young people in those areas by bringing them around ... hopefully we made some impact on these people and their lives going forward.”

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MANAGEMENT

Bill Yorth - Publisher & Editor-in-Chief...513-2671
byorth@conley.net.com

Jim Baumgart - Freeman Group Ad Director 513-2621
jbaumgart@conley.net.com

Tim Haffemann - Circulation Director...513-2640
thaffemann@conley.net.com

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Courtesy of Jodie Kuenn Damon
A resident captured this image of a large snapping turtle laying her eggs in the mulch garden bed outside the Hartland Public Library.

Snapping turtle lays her eggs in Hartland library garden bed

By Bridget Dean
bdean@conleynet.com
262-513-2644

HARTLAND — During the last week of May into early June, it isn't uncommon to see snapping turtles out of the water, crawling to dry land to lay their eggs. At the Hartland Public Library, one has dug into one of the mulch flower beds for just that purpose.

One of the librarians, Emily Doty, said she has seen the turtle around the library at least three times since she began working there in 2011.

"Sometimes it's elusive," said Doty. "It has not been named; we're not entirely sure if it's the exact same one, either."

Andrew Badje, a conservation biologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, said snapping turtles do typically lay their eggs around the same area every year once they become of reproductive age.

They can be found across the entire state, even in urban areas, since snapping turtles will leave their habitat of lakes, rivers, marshes and other wetlands to lay eggs.

"You'll probably see them within a quarter-mile of less of the nearest water ... usually substantially less. A lot of times we'll just see them probably 10 to 100 feet away from water," said Badje. "For the most part, they're pretty aquatic animals. Even when they are in the water, they're usually kind of hanging out in the parts that have more vegetation in the water. Kind of in the more mucky areas."

He said snapping turtles "hang out," waiting for something to swim by so they can, as the name implies, snap it up. Outside this time of the year, most people don't see adult snapping turtles around.

Doty said staff at the Hartland library have put orange cones around the turtle's nest in previous years. She said they haven't attempted to move any nests or cover them too much, but Badje said there are a few ways, if necessary, that nests can be moved or covered.

"We usually tell people it's OK to dig up the nest, but just be careful, treat it like you're digging up dinosaur bones ... If you do pick up the eggs, just make sure you're not rotating them, because that could impair the turtle inside," he said. "(You) can relocate those nests in an area that has a lot of good sunlight and a lot of good drainage in the soil."

A simple trick he shared is to stake a

plastic milk crate upside down over the nest. This protects the nest from animals like raccoons or skunks from helping themselves to the 80 to 100 eggs inside a typical snapping turtle nest. Baby snappers hatch between 60 and 90 days after eggs are laid. Badje estimates people will start seeing small snapping turtles crawling back to the water in late August. Depending on the temperature, they can hatch as late as mid-October.

Adults can get heavy, too. Biologists aren't sure what the life expectancy of a snapping turtle is.

"It's hard for researchers and biologists to continue these long-term studies. I can't say for sure, but they do tend to live at least 40, if not 50, 60 or more years old, especially when you start seeing the bigger ones," Badje said.

If you need to move a turtle from, for example, a roadway, there are a few tricks to avoid being snapped while helping. Badje said the most important thing is to make sure that you are safe from traffic or other dangers in the area. The ideal situation would be the snapping turtle leaving when you shoo it off or nudge it with your foot, but some of these turtles can be aggressive or hunker down in place when confronted.

"You can get it to bite down on a stick. Again, that doesn't always happen, but if they bite down on a stick, you might be able to drag it that way," he explained. "What we've told people in the past, is if you have a car mat or something like that, you can lift up the shell a little bit and hold onto it, and slide a car mat underneath."

That's another way you can gently drag a snapping turtle to safety. When attempting this, you'll want to lift the shell right where the hind legs are. If the turtle isn't heavy and not very aggressive, you can pick the whole turtle up and move it or gently drag it.

If you are touching snapping turtles without any gloves on, Badje said to remember the risks of salmonella. Always wash your hands after handling a snapping turtle and avoid touching your face until you have done so.

Although they aren't the most well-liked turtles in Wisconsin due to their large size and sharp attitudes, Badje said they are incredibly beneficial to aquatic environments.

"They will eat a lot of different things that most other animals won't, so we like to say that they're our garbage disposal of the wetland," he explained. "They do help clean up these areas ... so in other words, they're worth keeping around."

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Dave Radcliffe/Freeman Staff

The Arrowhead boys and girls track and field teams pose with their first-place trophies after both programs claimed the Division 1 championship at the WIAA State Track and Field Championships on June 1 in La Crosse. It marks the first time a Division 1 school swept the boys and girls titles in state history.

WIAA STATE TRACK AND FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS

TWICE AS NICE

Hicks’ record-setting day lifts Arrowhead boys to fourth consecutive state title

By Dave Radcliffe
dradcliffe@conley.net
262-513-2655

LA CROSSE — The scene looked dire for Arrowhead and boys coach Chris Herriot following the Division 1 boys 100-meter dash final at the WIAA State Track and Field Championships on June 1 in La Crosse.

Sam Vargas, Arrowhead’s standout senior sprinter, was being helped to the side after aggravating a calf injury as he finished dead last. Not only did the injury prevent Vargas from placing in the race, but he would no longer be able to compete in the open 200 final nor the 4x100 relay later that day, potentially costing the Warhawks precious points.

So his teammates rallied around him, and without one of its most important cogs, Herriot’s chariot chugged onward.

“He’s a very motivational person,” Arrowhead senior Logan Hicks said. “To see him go out out of everyone, it’s not fair at all. But we’re going to win it for Sam now.”

Hicks and the Warhawks did just that. Arrowhead’s boys won their fourth consecutive Division 1 team title comfortably with 60 points despite the absence of Vargas, as Hicks broke each of the hurdle records and the Warhawks won both sprint relays, shattering a state mark of their own.

“To set a state record without your top sprinter or the state record-holder in the hurdles ... every kid had their role to play and every kid came in there believing that they could achieve the goals that we put forward, and they did,” Herriot said.

Herriot, who has led the Warhawks to six of their seven titles dating back to 2004, knew they would need a contingency plan in place in case the injury bug bit Vargas.

“We knew he was banged up going into it,” Herriot said. “We took Sam out of our projections, so OK, let’s say that something happens. It pops in that 100 and he laid everything out and we’re like, look, we can still absolutely win without our best sprinter, which is crazy to say.”

Crazy for most programs. But not Arrowhead.

With a plethora of sprinting depth, the Warhawks went on to win both the 4x200 and 4x100 — the latter of which Vargas was slated to run the anchor leg. Instead, the Warhawks plugged in sophomore Harper Hughes, who had earlier helped them break Muskego’s 2018 state record in the 4x200.

The result was another state championship. “I was incredibly nervous,” Hughes said. “But these guys had my back the whole way. They motivated me. And after that 4x2 we just kept it going.”

The quartet of sophomore Presley Bencz, who took sixth in the open 100 (11.12), sophomore Ryan Heiman, junior Jackson Schulz and Hughes ran a state-record time of 1 minute, 26.73 seconds.

“Losing Sam just gave us a little something extra to run for,” Schulz said. “He’s one of us and we would do anything for him.”

Exit Vargas, enter Hughes, and the same foursome got it done in the 4x100, clocking in at 41.71 seconds to edge runner-up West De Pere by three one-hundredths of a second.

“Honest to God, this fueled us more than anything,” Bencz said. “Sam’s one of our brothers. But Harper, we’ve ran relays with him. I knew I could trust him.”

So did Herriot. “We talked about the one race that we felt most confident that we could win, our fastest kid is gone,” Herriot said. “But at the same time, Harper could be in there regardless. We just had to pick somebody to sort of rotate through. So we didn’t really skip a beat having him in there.”

Injury concerns didn’t end with Vargas. There was also the aforementioned Hicks, who required plenty of dry-needling and physical

therapy throughout the offseason due to a stress fracture in his back. Then, attempting to come back too hard, too fast, Hicks promptly pulled his hamstring at the start of the spring.

“Coming back from that has been anything but good,” Hicks said. “But this is not what I expected today, and I’m very happy about it.”

As he should be. Hicks would run a state-record time of 13.97 seconds in the 110 hurdles, breaking the previous mark of 14.04 set by Daurice Fountain of Madison Memorial in 2014.

As recently as a few weeks ago, Hicks wasn’t even sure if he’d get a chance to run in the event.

“We were ‘this’ close to not even running him in 110s (at regionals),” Herriot said. “But at the same time as a coach it was good to listen to the athlete. He said, ‘No, coach, I think I can do it.’ And here’s a kid who’s got as much experience as anybody, and fortunately we took the gamble and it paid off.”

Hicks said it was all about how he came out of the blocks, which he considered “probably the best start I’ve had in my life.”

“The second the gun went off I couldn’t see anyone by my side,” Hicks said. “It’s raining but there’s no wind with it. It wasn’t lifting me up at all, so you could call it the perfect weather conditions plus the rain. But everything kind of went right in the moment.”

It was a moment of redemption for Hicks, as well, after finishing runner-up to Menomonee Falls’ Nathan Taylor last year at state. This time, Taylor, who had battled a hamstring injury of his own throughout his senior season, had to settle for silver (14.38).

“He’s really got it going now,” said Taylor of Hicks.

He continued to have it going in the 300 hurdles final.

This time, Hicks erased a state record that had stood since 1991 despite a stumble here and there with a winning time of 36.92 seconds, distancing himself from runner-up Blake Postler of D.C. Everest down the stretch.

“I try to hold myself a little bit at the start so I can finish it, but there’s just something about running at state that just gives you something extra,” Hicks said. “I just can’t explain it. It just hits you and you start moving faster than you thought you ever could.”

Hicks later ran the anchor leg for Arrowhead’s fourth-place 4x400 relay, as he joined seniors Dominic Burg, Remington Landmann and Tyler Heiman to finish in 3:19.05. He heads to the University of Wisconsin as a four-time state champion, having also won the 300 hurdles as a junior and the 4x200 as a sophomore.

“Very happy it got to this point, that’s for sure,” Hicks said.

Last year, Arrowhead had to share the D1 team title with Stevens Point. Such was not the case this time around, as it finished 16 points clear of second-place Onalaska.

The Warhawks also got points from Landmann in the 400 (4th, 49.05), junior John Kubisch in the high jump (6 feet, 6 inches) and Tyler Heiman in the 800 (7th, 1:55.66). The last program to win four consecutive D1 boys team titles was Milwaukee South, which won five in a row from 1985-89.

A five-peat is more than in reach for Herriot’s squad considering what’s coming back. And even if another possible disaster scenario like Vargas’ injury arises, Arrowhead will likely be well equipped to not only deal with it, but thrive in the process.

“It’s hard to describe it and it’s amazing,” Herriot said. “But at the same time, it almost feels like a job every day. You can’t ever come here and do anything except to win to be happy, which is where you want to be, but it weighs on you. And it’s just great when you have the ability to do it that they come through.”

“Who knows where we’ll be next year, the year after that, but we will go back to the lab and try to figure it out.”

Arrowhead girls claim first state crown in program history

By Dave Radcliffe
dradcliffe@conley.net
262-513-2655

LA CROSSE — Despite having already put together a weekend that would be good enough for a state title most years, the job wasn’t yet done for Arrowhead’s girls entering the final event of the WIAA State Track and Field Championships on June 1.

That’s because Homestead, lurking seven points behind, could conceivably still overtake the Warhawks for the Division 1 team crown in the 4x400-meter relay.

“Not only did they push us. ... I can’t imagine there’s ever been a runner-up that’s scored so many points,” Arrowhead coach Jason Eisenman said. “Most years, that wins it.”

More on that in a bit.

With three silver trophies to its name but never a gold, Arrowhead’s girls put an end to that drought with a second-place finish in the 4x400, anchored by their stud senior, Taylor Thimmesch, who threw down a final leg of 55.81 seconds to put a stamp on the Warhawks’ state championship.

“There isn’t a better kid out there,” Eisenman said of Thimmesch, who was also third in the open 400 (56.51). “She’s remarkable and UWM is definitely getting a good one.”

It was a state title long in the making for a program that finished second under head coach Steve Kostka in 2007, 2010 and 2011. Ironically, in 2010, the Warhawks tallied 57 points — the same total for the Highlanders — when they finished behind Bradley Tech’s 70 points. Arrowhead’s 67-point output is the best performance since among Division 1 teams.

Before heaping praise on his team, Eisenman, in his first year as the girls head coach since taking the reigns from Chris Herriot, gave his flowers to the legendary track aficionado.

“This really is a tribute to the dynasty that that he’s created,” said Eisenman, as Herriot led both the boys and girls programs at Arrowhead the previous three years. “He got this program rolling and he’s been so helpful and supportive. Him and I worked really, really well together and so I can’t thank him enough. It’s been remarkable working with him and success breeds success.”

Nothing evidenced that more than June 1, when Arrowhead became the first Division 1 school to win both boys and girls team state track and field championships in the same year.

“It’s that much sweeter that the boys did it, too,” Eisenman said.

For as impressive as the boys were, the girls shined even brighter.

The sun wasn’t shining on June 1, however, as rain forced pole vault to move inside the fieldhouse. That didn’t deter Arrowhead senior Elise Schroeder from following through on her top seed, as she cleared 12 feet, 6 inches and then won a vault-off with Oak Creek junior Erica Miner.

“I was using a new pole, and it was a little bit bigger, so I think I was just kind of scared to go on it a little bit,” Schroeder said. “But I felt pretty good.”

Schroeder, who was runner-up in pole vault last season, said that previous experience helped going in this time. She and Miner went back down to 12 feet after both failed on their three attempts

to match the state record of 12-9, and it was Schroeder that prevailed.

“I just kind of tried to stay calm, because the more calm I stay the better I feel like I vault,” Schroeder said.

Arrowhead also claimed a state title in the 4x100 relay. Sophomores Payton Eichler, Natalie Kussow, Giselle Huggett and Avery Bott combined for a winning time of 1 minute, 40.71 seconds, with Bott closing a considerable amount of ground on her anchor leg and pulling away down the stretch.

“I felt very strong,” said Bott, who was also second in the open 200 (24.77). “Giselle and my handoff I feel like was pretty good, but probably needs some work, but overall I think it was really good. We really brought it all together.”

Kussow can put her gold medal next to the one she brought home from state basketball this past winter.

“Payton got a good lead for us,” Kussow said. “Our handoff was good. The second leg felt good. We got through some adversity before the race but we powered through it.”

That adversity? Almost showing up late for the start.

“We were just running to our spots and they said, ‘They could disqualify you,’” Huggett said.

Crisis averted.

“We had some issues before the start of the race but we really powered through those,” Eichler said.

Huggett, Kussow, Schroeder and Eichler later took second in the 4x100 relay (48.30), finishing only behind Mukwonago. A day earlier, Eichler was third in the long jump for six valuable points, as the contributions spread far and wide for the Warhawks.

Senior Rachel Kleinhans was fourth in the 100 hurdles (56.51) from Lane 9 and also gutted out a seventh-place showing in the 300 hurdles (46.16) for two more points.

“You take a tough lane draw and remarkably tough, strong hurdler, Rachel gets fourth place. Just unbelievable,” Eisenman said.

Arrowhead would medal in all four relays, beginning with the 4x800 on June 1 when senior Anne Straka, junior Addison Kowalewski, junior Elle Brunner and junior Joelle Duty teamed up to finish sixth (9:29.74). Roughly seven hours later, it was Schroeder, Bott, junior Emma Groff and Thimmesch slamming the door shut with a second-place time of 3:55.52.

“The 4x8 getting precious points and finding themselves on the podium. ... absolutely a team effort,” Eisenman said.

Every last point mattered for the Warhawks going back to a day earlier and senior Addy Moseler’s eighth-place showing in the shot put. Eisenman, who specializes in coaching sprints, acknowledged how excited he is to have two more years with his “super sophomores,” but praised his senior class for finally guiding Arrowhead to the promised land.

“Such a special group of girls with with great leadership at the top in Taylor Thimmesch,” Eisenman said. “We’ve got Addy, Anne, (Libby Ray) showing these girls how to do things. (Madison Hook is) just an incredibly selfless, wonderful teammate and these younger girls are super fortunate to have those types of young women to emulate.”

“And so finally, here we are, and it feels good.”