

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK



JOE AZAR
SLUH water polo

A senior utility player and team captain, Azar helped the Junior Billikens to their record 25th Missouri Water Polo district championship with an 11-6 victory against Metro Catholic Conference rival Chaminade in the title game. Azar had four assists and scored the first of a four-goal barrage in the opening minute of the third quarter that helped SLUH surge to an 8-2 lead after it had built a 4-2 advantage at halftime. A solid player in both the offensive and defensive areas of the game, Azar led the Jr. Bills with 54 assists and also scored 33 goals to rank among area leaders with 120 points. A three-year varsity player, Azar also scored 14 goals and had 12 assists during his junior season.



COLE BEARD
Clayton tennis

The Greyhounds captured their fourth successive Class 1 team state title, and Beard helped continue that tradition in his first season with the program. A junior who transferred from O’Fallon High in Illinois, Beard played at No. 2 singles and No. 2 doubles in Clayton’s 5-1 win over Bolivar in the semifinals and 5-0 victory against Maryville in the title match at Cooper Tennis Complex in Springfield. Beard and fellow junior Samanyu Tumuluru won both of their doubles matches by 8-0 scores. In singles, Beard topped Bolivar’s Maccaffey Rich 6-2, 6-0 and Maryville’s Will Shell 6-3, 6-0. The week before in the individual state tournament, Beard and junior Ruben Haroutounian won the Class 1 doubles consolation title.



GABRIELLE CAMPBELL
Bayless track and field

A sophomore, Campbell became the first female state champion in school history when she rolled to the 400-meter title in the Class 3 state meet. Campbell blazed to a performance of 55.38 seconds, the third-fastest time in the event this season in Missouri regardless of class, for a victory of more than two seconds. That time was a personal best and school record, as were her runner-up clockings in the 200 and 400. Campbell ran 24.92 seconds in the 200 and 2:15.97 in the 800. As a sophomore, she was second in the 400 and fourth in the 800. Campbell is Bayless’ fourth individual champ in any sport, joining Ron Doza in boys track (1961), Brendon Isom in boys swimming (1962-63) and Don Schuchmann in boys swimming (1961-63).



OWEN GARRETT
Collegiate track and field

The Owls captured the Class 3 team championship for the school’s first team state title behind Garrett, a senior who became the school’s first boys individual state title winner. Garrett won the 800 meters in a personal-best time of 1 minute, 55.63 seconds. He also anchored the winning 3200 relay with teammates Clyde Jackson-Cameron, Evan Moll and Melik Pratt in a season-best clocking of 7:52.92 that ranks as one of the state’s top 10 regardless of classification. Garrett also was seventh in the 1600 to help the Owls score 49.5 points for team honors over Richmond (40), Lutheran North (38) and Centralia (38). Voted the “Sprit Owl” by his senior classmates, Garrett will continue his running career at the University of Tulsa.



JOHNNY MATHES
John Burroughs tennis

A freshman, Mathes helped the Bombers roll to the Class 3 team state championship, the program’s second in a row, fifth since 2018 and seventh overall. John Burroughs beat Liberty-KC 5-0 in the semifinals, then knocked off Rockhurst 5-1 in the final at Cooper Tennis Complex in Springfield.

Mathes and senior Jasper Schmidt, who won the Class 3 doubles championship a week earlier, won 8-1 at No. 1 doubles in both dual matches. Playing at No. 2 singles, Mathes did not finish his match against Liberty because the team result had been decided. But against Rockhurst, Mathes won 6-0, 6-0 against junior Hunter Stout to put a cap on his 14-0 singles record this season.



JACKSON SMITH
Festus baseball

A 6-foot-4 senior left-handed pitcher who has signed with the University of Michigan, Smith was at his best when the Tigers needed it during a 2-1 victory against De Soto in the Class 5 District 1 title game at Farmington. Smith threw a complete game no-hitter, striking out 12 while walking five. With the game tied 1-1 in the bottom of the seventh, he led off with a double (his 14th of the season) and scored the district-winning run from third on a passed ball. In a 5-4 win over Cape Central in the district semifinals, Smith pitched the final 1 1/3 innings in relief for the win and was 2 for 4 at the plate. For the season, he’s 7-1 on the mound with a 1.69 ERA and 71 strikeouts in 45 1/3 innings. At the plate he’s hitting for a .447 average with 36 RBI.



HOUSTON TIEFENBRUNN
Borgia golf

A freshman, Tiefenbrunn became the Knights’ first individual state champion when he tied for Class 3 medalist honors with Springfield Catholic sophomore Harper Elliott at Sedalia Country Club. Both players shot 1-over-par 141 with matching rounds of 69 and 72. Tiefenbrunn’s effort also helped Borgia finish fourth in the team race for the program’s first state team trophy since 2017. Tiefenbrunn battled back after playing the first four holes of the second round 4 over, making birdie on the par-5 No. 5 hole. He also made birdies on Nos. 14, 15 and 17. Tiefenbrunn, who enjoyed a strong junior career heading into high school, also tied for the top spot in the Class 3 District 1 tournament in Farmington.



MATTHEW WALTMAN
Jefferson track and field

A senior who has signed to continue his career at Truman State University, Waltman repeated as state champion in the 200- and 400-meter races, ran the anchor leg on the winning 1600 relay and helped the Blue Jays capture the Class 2 team championship for the school’s first boys team state title in any sport. The Blue Jays scored 66 team points, winning by 28 over runner-up Brentwood. Waltman ran personal bests and school records while winning the 200 (21.54 seconds) and 400 (48.3 seconds), and his 400 time set a Class 2 state meet record. In the 1600 relay, which won in 3:27.51, Waltman was joined by Braeden Caldwell, Ethan McVey and Larry Lemons. Waltman was a state qualifier his final three years in the 100, 200 and 400.

The Post-Dispatch Athletes of the Week is compiled by Chris Gove based off stats reported to STLhighschoolsports.com. Please send nominations to cgove@stltoday.com by noon each Monday.

GIRLS SOCCER | MEHLVILLE 2, FESTUS 1

‘SOMETHING SPECIAL’

Panthers rally to claim first district title this century

WARREN MAYES
Special to the Post-Dispatch

IMPERIAL — There are nine freshmen on Mehlville High’s girls soccer roster. Still, when preseason workouts began and with six freshman working their way into the starting lineup, coach Kelli Merritt believed her young Panthers could become district champions. She was right. Freshman Addie Arnaiz and senior Irelynn Stover scored the goals and freshman Summer Santoya was solid in goal as Mehlville earned a 2-1 win over the Festus Tigers in the Class 3 District 1 championship game that was played on a sunny Monday afternoon at Windsor High School. A large crowd attended the Memorial Day contest.

It was the first district soccer title for Mehlville since the early 1990s, said Merritt, who has been the head coach since 2018. “This district championship means everything,” Merritt said. “I mean’s it’s been over 25 years since Mehlville has had a district championship. We’ve worked for this year all year. I’m really proud of the girls and their effort and what we have accomplished. “All the freshmen we have starting for us don’t play like freshmen. I knew we had something special this season.”

Up next
Mehlville (18-4) will play District 2 champion Summit (20-5-1) on Saturday in a quarterfinal contest. “We know it’s going



PAUL KOPSKY, SPECIAL TO THE POST-DISPATCH

Mehlville’s Zaeli White, 16, and Autumn Willis of Festus battle for a bouncing ball during the Class 3 District 1 girls soccer final on Monday, May 25, 2026 at Windsor High School in Imperial, Mo.

to be a challenge, but we’re looking forward to it,” Merritt said. “We’re going to go out there and do our best.”

Second half
Arnaiz gave Mehlville a 2-1 lead when she scored with 37 minutes and 26 seconds to play. It was her team-leading 21st goal this spring.

Arnaiz has been playing soccer for 13 years. The assist came from junior Lexi Timmerman. “On my goal, I thought I can’t screw this up again,” Arnaiz said. “I was like, ‘I’d better score.’ I shot the ball and it went in. I was like, ‘Oh my gosh. I just scored the game-winning goal.’ I thought, though, we would need another goal.” It was just a matter of time before Arnaiz scored, Merritt said. “She had some chances in the first half, but she just kept working,” Merritt said. “I told her to keep taking her chances. She does have a great strike.”

The Panthers had several good scoring chances in the second half, but Festus senior goalkeeper Josie Hensley, who will play at

the University of Pennsylvania this fall, denied Mehlville from adding to its total and gave the Tigers a fighting chance. “Yeah, she saved several goals for us there in the second half,” said Festus coach Aaron Portell. “She’s been like that all year. She’s a top-notch goalkeeper. She’s a heck of a kid.”

First half
Festus sophomore Kaylin Brewer scored on a free kick at 29:32. She had been pushed down and was awarded the kick. It sailed high, just out of the reach of Santoya for a 1-0 Festus lead. It was her team-leading 27th goal of the season.

“Anytime we get a set piece and she’s close enough to shoot it, she’s been pretty deadly,” Portell said. “She’s good at knocking those in. When she was fouled that close, I told my coaches that she was knocking it in.” Merritt wasn’t worried about being behind. “We have a never-give-up attitude,” Merritt said. “We stayed together and came back.” Mehlville senior Irelynn Stover scored off a corner kick at 28:23 to

tie the game 1-1. It was her seventh goal of the season. Senior Macy Moeckel threw the ball in. “That was important,” Stover said. “I wanted to pick up my teammates. We practiced corners in every practice. I had so many corners come to me and I hadn’t scored. “I just keep putting my head down and keep playing. I thought, ‘No way, I scored.’ It was fun.”

Tigers season
Festus finished 16-6-1. “I’m proud of our effort,” Portell said. “We were missing two starters (senior Addi Cupp and junior Lillian Kennedy) and we had some girls playing through injuries. We showed a lot of fight. I knew it would be tough for us to score. We were more defensive minded today because of the situation we had to do deal with. “We battled. I thought we played well. I’m proud of what the girls were able to do.” It was the most wins in a season by the Tigers, who were in their second consecutive district final. “Now, we’re turning heads,” Portell said. “It’s going in the right direction.”

BASEBALL | VERITAS CHRISTIAN 4, CHAFFEE 0

Eagles soar into Class 2 quarterfinals

BY STEVE OVERBEY
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

O’FALLON, Mo. — Casen Trifiletti won’t take the mound without it. The Veritas Christian rightlander has to have his favorite treat right before heading to the bump. “I have an orange sour gummy worm before each inning,” Trifiletti said. “It gets me going.” That sugar-high worked wonders Monday afternoon.

Trifiletti tossed a four-hit shutout to guide the Eagles to a 4-0 win over Chaffee in a Class 2 sectional contest at T.R. Hughes Ballpark. Veritas (18-6), which has won eight of its last nine, will travel to Portageville (27-8) for a quarterfinal contest Wednesday.

The O’Fallon-based private school is one win away from its second final four berth and first since finishing second in Class 3 in 2014. And it has sour worms to thank for reaching the elite eight. At least according to Trifiletti, who swears by the superstition. There is actually a little bit of logic behind the move. “I’ve done research and sugar takes away some anxiety because it allows your mind to focus on the sour taste instead of the pressure around you,” Trifiletti said. It works, although his teammates are not sold on



PAUL HALFACRE, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Veritas Christian senior Casen Trifiletti (24) celebrates during a Class 2 baseball sectional victory against Chaffee on Monday, May 25, 2026, at CarShield Field in O’Fallon, Mo.

the idea. “I think he’s a crazy,” says junior catcher C.J. Heath. “But if he believes in it, that’s fine with us.” Explained junior infielder Uriah Reardon, who had three hits in the win, “Sometimes you’ve got to let him have those superstitions no matter how weird they seem.” Trifiletti, who transferred from St. Dominic during his sophomore season, has been known to panic without his treats. He forgot to load up prior to one start earlier in the year and messaged his father to bring some worms to the game. But Curt showed up with the wrong brand and forced mom, Tiffany, to take over the chore. Mom came to the rescue just in the nick of time. “It was close,” Triffany said of the race against the

clock. Chasen Trifiletti was all business Monday with a worm tucked under his lip. He gave up two hits in the first inning but wriggled out of an early first-and-third, one-out jam with a strikeout and a groundout. It was essentially smooth sailing the rest of the way. “He just puts his heart out there and fights,” Heath said. “Today, everything was working for him. That’s the way he pitches when he’s on his game.” Trifiletti walked three and hit a batter. He only set the side down in order in one inning. Yet he relied on his air-tight defense, which turned in a trio of web gems along with a nifty double play. “After that third inning, I really felt like I was in a groove,” said Trifiletti,

who improved to 6-1 and lowered his ERA 1.05. The Eagles scored single runs in the first, fourth, fifth and seventh innings to provide the necessary support. Reardon led the way with the 3-for-4 effort, but every starter reached base. “We just played a really clean game,” said Veritas coach Jarrett Reardon, Uriah’s father. “They grinded it out and were able to scratch across a few runs.” The Eagles relied on strong fundamental station-to-station baseball to get the job done. Trifiletti drove in a pair of runs on infield grounders. Jesse Bockhorst scrambled home in the fourth on a missed squeeze bunt that resulted in Chaffee catcher Nolan Fowler throwing the ball wildly into left field. Chaffee (26-3) struggled to handle the basics and committed four errors and made three wild pitches along with a couple other costly baserunning mistakes. The miscues helped Veritas fashion just enough offense to make Trifiletti feel comfortable. “Sometimes we just go out there and do what the game dictates,” Jarrett Reardon said. “We saw some opportunities to make some things happen and it worked out.”

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