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Friday preps spotlight: Pioneer, Palo Alto distance runners approaching longstanding record

O'Dowd coach has teachable moment at baseball game. Milpitas baseball team closes in on league crown. Monte Vista senior wins seven golds at nationals. Castilleja lacrosse standout averaging 7.4 goals per game.



Palo Alto's Grant Morgenfeld, shown here in a file photo, and Pioneer's Carson Hedlund share the top 1,600 time in the CCS this season, 4:07.36. The CCS record is 4:05.54. (Nhat V. Meyer/Bay Area News Group)



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Pioneer junior Carson Hedlund ran the 1,600 meters in 4:07.36 at Arcadia on April 6, the third-fastest time in CCS history.

Track and field is a progressive endeavor. Athletes tend to get faster, jump and throw further as their training and fitness progresses and competition intensifies as the season comes to a close.

So the natural question is how much faster can Hedlund run this season?

Can he approach the two top marks in CCS history for the mile/1,600, both run in 1977 by Willow Glen's Mark Stillman and Serra's Stan Ross?

Hedlund talked about it Saturday after winning the 800 at the CCS Top 8 meet:

"I always watch my races afterward on film, find what I did good, find where I made mistakes, how to not make those mistakes again," he said. "My mistake at Arcadia was being boxed in on the second lap."

You were boxed and still ran 4:07?

"Oh yeah, it was a crazy fast race," Hedlund said. "But that was my mistake and it cost me the race."

So, do you have a time goal for the rest of the season?

"Not necessarily," Hedlund said. "I want to win, I'm here to win. Racing isn't about time, it's about who crosses the line first. I know I'm physically fit and mentally prepared to win all my races the rest of the year. Just a matter of executing the day of."

Interestingly enough, also last Saturday Palo Alto's Grant Morgenfeld ran the same exact time as Hedlund for the 1,600, 4:07.36, at the Mt. Sac Invitational, and so is now tied for third on the all-time CCS list with Hedlund.

It will be interesting to see how much more those two runners can drop their times the remainder of the season.

The two top times in their sights? Stillman's 4:06.9 mile converts to 4:05.54 for 1,600 meters, Ross' 4:08.2 to 4:06.76.

- Glenn Reeves

BASEBALL: BISHOP O'DOWD'S TEACHABLE MOMENT

In a world where videos of players, coaches and parents critiquing and berating umpires over their calls get millions of views on social media and a referee shortage is only getting worse, Bishop O'Dowd baseball coach Brian Mouton went in a different direction.

Early in the Dragons' 9-5 victory this week at Piedmont, one of his key players argued a strike call with the home plate umpire.

The exchange went on until O'Dowd's first-year coach came over and told his player to stop. Mouton then pulled the player from the game.

After the game, the coach said he expects his players to respect the umpires.

"It was very much a teachable moment," Mouton said. "I need him to be focused and understand what is expected of him. I can't have them arguing. I had just told him the inning before to not argue with the umpire, and then he went out there and did it."

- Joseph Dycus

BASEBALL: MILPITAS ON VERGE OF LEAGUE TITLE

Zach Canez, in his second season as Milpitas' head coach, is not surprised his team is at the top of the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League El Camino Division standings.



"I'm not surprised at our success," Canez said. "Maybe other people are, but these kids have it. It was just trying to change that mental state and having them believe in themselves."

After starting this season 1-4, Milpitas has found its winning formula as the Trojans are 13-6 and undefeated through 11 games in league play.

Milpitas is 3 1/2 games ahead of second-place Santa Clara with four to go.

Led by pitcher and three-sport athlete Nathan Pagba, Milpitas is allowing just 3.6 runs per game. Pagba, a junior, has an ERA of 0.29 and leads the Trojans in on-base percentage at .465.

The league title will be the South Bay school's first in over 20 years.

"I've always been told Milpitas is a 'Little League team,'" Canez said. "I think we're finally getting some of that awareness in the community that we're doing something good here. We're trying to build on that every year from now on and hopefully, we're around a long time to stay."

- Nathan Canilao

ARTISTIC SWIMMING: STANDOUT WINS SEVEN GOLDS AT NATIONALS

Dalia Ovadia had herself a Michael Phelps moment at the USA Artistic Swimming Junior/Senior National Championships last weekend in Houston.

The Monte Vista senior won seven gold medals to lead Walnut Creek Aquanuts to their 19th national title.

Artistic swimming was formerly known as synchronized swimming.

"She's on the rise to be one of the greatest swimmers this country has ever seen," Aquanuts founder Gail Emery said. "Dalia has really grown up in our environment, matured and pursued her own excellence."

Ovadia's coach, Tammy McGregor, was named Junior National Coach of the Year.

- Nathan Canilao

GIRLS LACROSSE: CASTILLEJA ALL-AMERICAN TAKES BIG LEAP

Senior Riley Sterling is having yet another All-America season for Castilleja.

The midfielder averages 7.4 goals per game and has a whopping 126 shots on goal – 83 more than Julia Karsner, who is second on the team.

But after a junior season in which she struggled being the lone leader on a young team, Sterling is seeing her hard work pay off as the small all-girls school from Palo Alto has a chance to win its first league title in school history.

"What happened last year was that Riley was playing with all freshmen, so the pressure was all on her and that's not fair for any one player," Castilleja coach Stephen Rochlin said.

"But now we've been able to develop their skill sets so she can play a better brand of lacrosse," the coach added. "She can now also develop her skills because she has the players that she can pass to and the players that are around her that she can play our offense."

Sterling has been the best player in the West Bay Athletic League Alpine Division this spring. She is committed to play lacrosse at Colorado College next season.

- Nathan Canilao



The AAU team, owned by NBA star Damian Lillard and sponsored by Adidas, has a roster that includes Alvin Loving (Salesian), ArDarius Grayson (Oakland Tech), Elijah Perryman (Clayton Valley), Jalen Stokes (Dublin) and Jasir Rencher (Archbishop Riordan) — all of whom were all-Bay Area News Group selections this past season.

Team Lillard recently went 4-1 in the first weekend of the 3SSB Boys Circuit in Council Bluffs, Iowa, beating AAU teams such as Fresno's Jalen Green Elite and Atlanta's Team Honcho Basketball.

The Oakland-based team beat will play next week at the second circuit tournament in Hoover, Alabama.

– Nathan Canilao

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