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WEST BRANCH TIMES

Established in 1875 • West Branch is the birthplace of President Herbert Hoover, the Great Humanitarian & Home of the Bears

Volume 147, No. 22

Thursday, June 1, 2023

\$1.00



West Branch senior Marisa Herring tees off May 25 at the Class 1A girls' state golf championships hosted by Cedar Pointe Golf Course in Boone. The Bears would rise five spots from their previous mark of eighth to finish third as a team.

Matthew Dickinson/West Branch Times

Girls' golf 3rd at state Finish 5 spots higher than '22

By Matthew Dickinson
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The West Branch girls' golf team capped off a breakthrough season in style, surging five spots from last season's eighth-place Class 1A state tournament finish to third.

The Bears finished with 771 total strokes over 36 holes in the May 25-26 contest held at Cedar Pointe Golf Course in Boone.

"To say I'm proud of this team is an understatement," Bears Head Coach Jan O'Neil said. "They have been such a joy to work with and get to know over the past four years. They have set attainable goals all along their journey and to have them finish in the top three is phenomenal."

The Bears opened up

the two-day period with 393 over 18 holes courtesy of a 50-42 92 from junior Claire Jarrett, 50-46 96 from senior Tess Hammar, a 52-48 100 from Gabby Rushton, and a 52-53 105 from Alex Poppen. Marisa Herring shot a 52-58 110, while Karley Staker carded a 56-61 117.

West Branch saved its best for last, climbing up one spot after being one of only four teams in the 10-squad field to improve its Day Two score, shaving 15 strokes off its total to turn in a 378 in the final round.

The ever-steady Jarrett carded a 50-42 91, followed by a 44-48 92 effort from Poppen.

Rushton turned in a 50-46 96, while Hammar rounded out the scoring four with a 52-47 99. Staker contributed a 49-56

105, while Herring shot a 60-64 124.

O'Neil said that the Day Two setup, which had all golfers start off of the first hole with scheduled tee times instead of the Day One shotgun start at various holes throughout the course, helped the team close out the tournament strong.

The coach added that the Day Two format also helped the coaches plan the course better with an ability to pinpoint more difficult holes to help guide the golfers as needed.

While the state tournament featured the best competition the team had faced all season, the Bears did not let the pressure get to them. All six golfers stayed relaxed over the grueling 36-hole tournament, and worked to keep their team bond going

despite not being able to see their teammates on the course.

"This team has a special bond with one another," O'Neil said. "They've been their biggest cheerleaders from day one. They have worked so well balancing things out it helps take the pressure off someone who may not be playing her best. Every time I would go around to each player one of the first things she would ask is 'How are the other girls doing?' There were high fives with me when I could say, so and so just birdied, or guess who just had her PR? etc. I think knowing those things also helped each competitor stay focused because contributions were being made all around. They didn't let a bad shot or hole ruin the day but

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Pedro's punt

Boys' soccer earns first state playoff game ever

By Matthew Dickinson
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Believe.

The word has become the motto for the West Branch boys' soccer team, which punched its first-ever ticket to state in five years as a program with a dramatic 2-1 overtime win over Pella Christian.

A floater decided the May 24 game at Pella Christian in the Class 1A-6 substate final in Pella.

A somewhat unlikely hero in senior defender Pedro Cedillo Matom sent home the deciding goal towards the end of the first overtime period.

Following a tense end of regulation and a back-and-forth eight minutes of the extra period, Matom,

who the coaches shifted up to the center-midfielder position towards the end of regulation, gathered an inbounds pass from Cameron Gingerich near the 39-yard line of the Eagles' turf stadium.

After taking a touch to bring the ball to the middle of the field on the 34-yard line, Matom unleashed an arching shot that narrowly cleared the outstretched arms of a leaping Kaleb Pogany, the senior Pella Christian goalkeeper, who had been playing up in the box as no Bears were near the goal.

Matom's shot — from around 44 yards away — found the back of the net in the right-center part of the goal, sending West Branch to the Class 1A

state tournament while Eagles stood stunned on the pitch.

For the senior, who scored just his third goal of the season with the clincher, his belief helped him through hardships to take center stage at the biggest moment.

"I feel happy, and I thank God because He wanted us to win," Matom said through translator and Assistant Coach Jose Gongora.

Of the final play, Matom said through Gongora that he thought back to a go-ahead shot against Tipton early in the season that he made from a considerable distance as motivation to give the match-winning shot a try.

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West Branch senior Pedro Matom hugs Assistant Coach Jose Gongora after his game-winning goal to give the Bears a 2-1 overtime win over Pella Christian in the Class 1A-6 substate final. The win sent the program to its first-ever state tournament in its fifth year. Matthew Dickinson/West Branch Times

Council OK's 35% hike to water rates

Also, \$373K OK'd for wastewater treatment plant project

By Gregory R. Norfleet
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In August, water bills will likely begin a five-year, 35-percent climb after the West Branch City Council unanimously approved the first reading

of a new ordinance.

The move comes in preparation for high-cost water-related projects, starting with the east side water main work already under way.

The biggest jump — 25 percent — comes in the

first increase, just before pupils return to school. Water customers right now pay \$7.79 per 1,000 gallons with a minimum of 1,700 gallons charged per monthly bill. That will rise by \$1.95 to \$9.74, according to Ordinance

803.

For each year after that, on Aug. 1, the rates will increase automatically by another 2 percent, until topping out at \$10.54, at which time the council will review the rates.

"This helps residents

know what it's increasing to," City Clerk Leslie Brick told the council at its May 15 meeting.

City Administrator Adam Kofoed said that the automatic rate increases would help address inflation, too. He noted that the city recently saw a

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Believe

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"I had the ball in my foot," the senior said. "I saw that there was no one in front of me, it was clear. I remembered the Tipton shot that I took, and I decided to go ahead and take it."

"Believe" has been a part of the team throughout the season. A large yellow sign with the word scrawled across the middle as well as the signatures of the team's players has been toted around by the team all season to be held up at critical parts of matches.

The sign is a nod to the one featured in the popular streaming television show *Ted Lasso*, which follows the adventure of a fictional American college football coach who is hired to take over a struggling English Premier League soccer team. The titular character is set up to fail, but instead manages to turn a ragtag group into a winning team with a mixture of positivity and creative coaching.

The Bears' Ted — Head Coach Ted Miller — has accomplished a similar feat, guiding a program that rose quickly to one of the top teams in the area in half a decade.

The team posted double-digit wins this season and the past two years, with the exceptions being a 7-5 opening campaign in 2019 and the team not having a season in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

While Miller values wins as much as the next coach, he also emphasizes connectivity and building relationships with the team, a strategy that has helped the team gain chemistry this season. That developed a tight-knit group with 12 different players scoring goals this season while 26 players have seen game action this year.

"Honestly, I can't even come up with words," Miller said after taking some time to compose himself. "I'm just so proud and so happy for these kids, especially the juniors and seniors. Our program's only five years old, four with the Covid. They've basically been here the whole time. They work their tails off in season, they come in and do a lot of offseason stuff."

Much like *Matom* and the fictional *Lasso*, Miller followed the sign's lead and believed.

"Am I surprised we made it to state?" the coach asked aloud. "To be honest with you, on the calendar we handed out to the parents before the season, I circled May 30 and I said that we're getting there this year. I'm not surprised that we made it, but I'm happy. I don't know what else to say. These kids are very good players. Our bench — I can't remember ever having a bench in anything I've ever coached. Any level, any gender. We seriously have 11 kids on the bench and they can all play at any time."

The coach's belief extended to *Matom's* winning goal.

"I told [Assistant Coach] Tim Shields, with about 15 minutes left in regulation, I said 'Watch, I guarantee Pedro's going to win the game.' I called it. I could just see it. I could just see it in his eyes that it was going to happen. A lucky guess."

The team's depth played dividends in the match. While the Eagles mainly kept the same 11 players on the pitch at all times, the Bears generously switched out players throughout the contest, especially in the forward and midfield positions that carried much of the burden of movement in the match.

West Branch would routinely shuttle multiple players at a time in moves akin to a line change in hockey, including some sequenc-



West Branch Head Coach Ted Miller addresses the Bears' supporters after Pedro Mitom's game-winning goal to give the Bears a 2-1 overtime win over Pella Christian in the Class 1A-6 substate final. Behind him, senior Cameron Gingerich and sophomore Christian Scire hold the state-qualifying banner. "You guys are awesome!" the coach exclaimed, thanking fans for their support of the program. **Matthew Dickinson/West Branch Times**



West Branch senior Aiden Shields (4) gathers the ball during the Bears' 2-1 overtime win over Pella Christian in the Class 1A-6 substate final May 24 in Pella.

Matthew Dickinson/West Branch Times

es where around half of the starters would catch a breather on the sidelines.

The team's midfielders in particular showed their talent and depth. Cameron Gingerich, Trenton Schutte, and Elliot Hinkhouse controlled the action during their time on the pitch, keeping the Pella Christian defense honest with shot attempts from long range.

The Bears also employing creative passes to set up some scoring opportunities for forwards such as Joe Hamann, who struck for the team's first goal at the six-minute mark.

When the starters shuffled off, fresh legs from players such as Bradyn Sexton, Tate Frantz, and Cooper Burger helped the Bears maintain their relative stranglehold over possession.

This limited the Eagles' ability to get many scoring looks from their forwards, especially sophomore Theo Hugen, who scored Pella Christian's lone goal after 33 minutes.

"After the game, I took the (midfielders) aside and said that 'you guys are the leaders of this team. I expect a lot out of you, the team expects a lot out of you, and you guys pulled through each and every game,'" Miller said. "They do have a demanding job, and they played very well."

Miller added that he feels "super confident" that the team will not lose any momentum when subbing in his reserves, which allows the coach to give his hardworking starters some needed rest during

matches.

The Bears also received another outstanding effort in goal from first-year net-minder Shae Farmer, who logged six saves in crucial situations while allowing one to pass the line in the most important contest of his career.

The most critical stop happened during the overtime period on a free kick from just outside the goal-keeper's box.

After the first Eagle to line up for the kick made way for the second Pella Christian player to kick with a bit of trickery, Farmer stood steadfast in the goal before leaping to his left to snag the ball that was destined for the corner out of the air.

That gave West Branch possession and, more importantly, another chance to win the match.

"Compared to practice, that wasn't even really a hard save," Farmer said of the stop. "After I caught it, I thought it was just in the middle of the goal. I came over here [after the match] and everyone's telling me that it was right in the corner. I was excited that it was as good of a save as it was."

Farmer also credited first-year Assistant Coach TJ Cappel, who specializes in training the junior and fellow keeper Oliver Trepanier, for his progress after just one season in goal.

"Without TJ, I wouldn't be anything," the keeper said. "He's pushed me all the way here. Without him, I think I would be the same as any other keeper. I really

give all my props to him for how good I am."

For Miller, the substate victory in a season where the Bears also advanced past the second postseason round for the first time will be a special one.

"It means a lot to the program," the coach said. "The younger kids growing up, several in the stands. They're our future. Getting to that level — that state level — it means a lot to the program. It's going to build up the popularity of a sport that's already very popular in West Branch."

The dream season will continue May 30 at the Cornie Soccer Complex in Des Moines, as the fifth-seeded Bears (14-3) will take on fourth-seeded Des Moines Christian with a 10:10 a.m. kickoff.

The Lions, who hail from the West Central Conference, hold an 11-4 overall record and are rated third in 1A by the Bound website's power rankings, courtesy of the ELO system.

Des Moines Christian holds a 47th ranking among all schools with a schedule ranked 72nd. West Branch sits at 89th with a 160th schedule rank among all schools.

Highlights

The Eagles began the match as the aggressors on offense, firing off a shot just a minute into the contest before forcing Farmer into stopping a shot attempt two minutes later.

After five minutes, the Bears drew a free kick, which set up Christian

Scire for an open look at the goal.

While Scire's shot on goal did not turn into a score, West Branch converted a minute later as junior Joe Hamann, who ranks sixth in 1A with 26 goals, found the net to give the Bears a 1-0 edge while relieving some of the pressures of a playoff contest.

The Bears were not done, with Cameron Gingerich firing a shot attempt a minute later.

Pella Christian gained possession and forced Farmer into a pair of difficult stops at the 13- and 15-minute marks, with the latter stop coming courtesy of a lunging effort from the junior keeper.

West Branch then swapped in a number of players to keep fresh legs on the pitch. The swap eventually lead to a near-goal from Cameron Gingerich after 21 minutes on a second-effort attempt near the goal.

The Eagles cleared the ball but were not out of the woods yet, with JP Cortez firing a shot on goal two minutes later.

The Bears dodged a bullet on the other end of the field at the 28-minute mark, when an unclaimed pass deep in West Branch territory near the team's own goal almost translated into a Pella Christian score.

Following the scare, Reese Gingerich answered with a shot on goal a minute later. The Eagles eventually broke through for their first and ultimately only score after 33 minutes from Hugen, knotting the contest at 1-1 with seven minutes to play in the first half.

With the minutes ticking down on the half, West Branch began showing more urgency on offense after giving up the equalizer.

Hinkhouse uncorked a long shot on goal with three minutes remaining in the half, and the team had a near chance after a corner kick at the end of the half.

Time expired before a good look could be found, however, sending the entertaining match into halftime with a 1-1 tie.

After the break, the Bears had a pair of tantalizing chances with a 44-minute long-range shot from Cameron Gingerich that just sailed over the goalpost followed by a near-strike from Hamann after a beautiful setup from Scire at the 46-minute mark.

A minute later, Scire took a free kick, which sailed to the right of the Pella Christian goal. A pair of great scoring chances for Hamann were stymied over the next few minutes, setting up what would be a dramatic end to the regulation period.

With another line change after 60 minutes, the Bears loaded up for one last push to win the

match before time expired on regulation.

After a Pella Christian shot off of a corner kick soared harmlessly over the West Branch goal, *Matom* foreshadowed his heroic effort with a 64-minute shot on goal.

Four minutes later, Cortez found another scoring chance with a shot on goal, followed by a shot on goal from Scire.

After 73 minutes, forward Cale Seydel found himself in a one-on-one situation with Pogany near the net, but the Pella Christian keeper was able to save the ball before a goal could be scored.

Following another mass substitution by West Branch after 74 minutes, a truly bizarre sequence that somehow resulted in no goals for the Bears ensued.

Hamann had a golden chance to score the go-ahead goal, but the shot plunked off of the goalpost and out of harm's way.

Less than a minute later, multiple West Branch players had fantastic shots on goal in a frenzy near the net, but Pella Christian was somehow able to clear the ball and reset for the final five minutes of regulation after an Eagles player stayed down after getting injured.

Scire began hoisting the yellow "Believe" sign that has become a mainstay of the program this season in an effort to inspire the team and get a buzzing West Branch crowd into the match.

Neither team could strike to end the 80 minutes of regulation, setting up an overtime period to decide which team would advance and which one would fall just one match short of qualifying for state.

The Eagles took control of the overtime period to start, drawing a corner kick before gaining a free kick just outside of the goal-keeper's box.

The shot was on target to the left side of the goal, but Farmer made an incredible stop to keep hope alive for West Branch.

Following the scoring scare, West Branch settled into its offense, surviving a pair of shots from Pella Christian while getting a shot on goal from Joe Hamann with about two minutes left.

With a few ticks under two minutes to play, *Matom* then took the pass from Cameron Gingerich before unfurling the shot heard 'round Pella to send the Bears to their first-ever state tournament appearance.

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West Branch offense: Cameron Gingerich 1 assist, 1 point, 3 shots; Aiden Shields 1 shot; Pedro Mitom 1 goal, 2 points, 2 shots, 2 shots on goal; JP Cortez 1 shot, 1 shot on goal; Joe Hamann 1 goal, 2 points, 8 shots, 4 shots on goal; Reese Gingerich 4 shots, 2 shots on goal; Lincoln Edwards 1 assist, 1 point; Trenton Schutte 2 shots, 1 shot on goal; Christian Scire 6 shots, 2 shots on goal; Sam Liu 1 shot, 1 shot on goal. Team totals: 2 assists, 2 goals, 6 points, 28 shots, 13 shots on goal.

West Branch goalkeeping: Shae Farmer 1 goal allowed, 6 saves, 85.7 pct. Team totals: 1 goal allowed, 6 saves, 85.7 pct.

Pella Christian offense: Theo Hugen 1 goal, 2 points, 1 shot, 1 shot on goal; Ethan Van Arendonk 4 shots, 1 shot on goal; Camden Parker 2 shots, 1 shot on goal; Aiden Stoltz 2 shots; Trae Van Maanen 1 shot. Team totals: 1 goal, 2 points, 10 shots, 3 shots on goal.

Pella Christian goalkeeping: Kaleb Pogany 2 goals allowed, 11 saves, 84.6 pct. Team totals: 2 goals allowed, 11 saves, 84.6 pct.