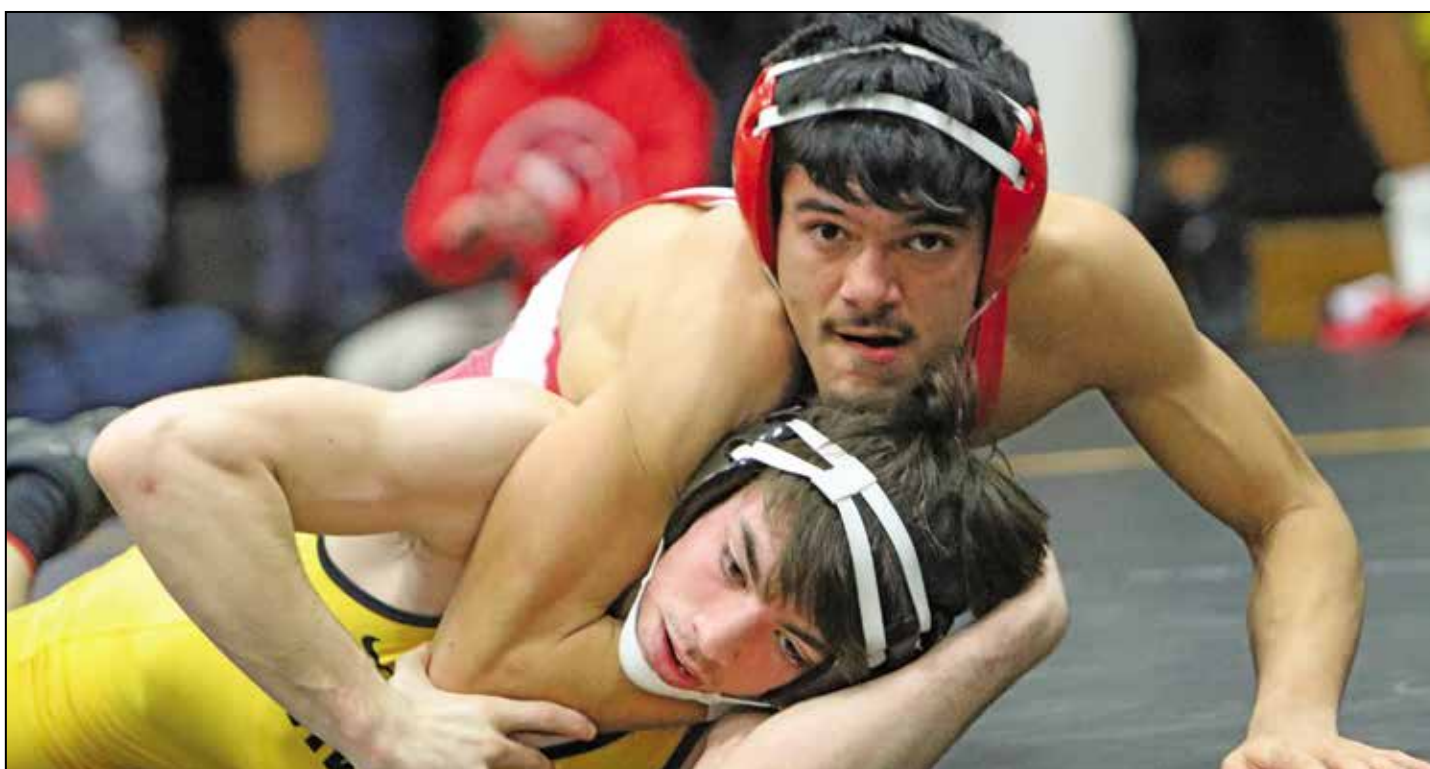


# The News SPORTS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2023



Highland's Carlos Valenzuela puts opponent in a headlock during his first place match at the district tournament in Sigourney.

## For Abbi Stransky, a shot of the season



Paul Bowker  
Columnist

A year full of pain had boiled down to this one tearful moment.

For the first time this season, and for the last time ever as a Highland Huskie, Abbi Stransky stood on the basketball court in her Huskie jersey and shorts. Ready to play. Finally.

She glanced over at senior teammate Katelyn Waters and saw tears growing in Waters' eyes.

Soon, Abbi sensed her own tears.

The moment had come to this. A torn anterior-cruciate ligament, followed by a severe meniscus tear in the same knee. A year of pain and rehabilitation. One injury. And then another. More rehab. A senior year that was disappearing all too quickly.

And now, at the start of a basketball game against Columbus on an early February night, Stransky, her knee still recovering, stood on the court before the game-opening jump ball with every ounce of attention in the entire Highland High School gym clearly focused on her. Huskies head coach Jody Fink had arranged with Columbus coach Kasey Keltner for a ceremonial layup by Stransky to begin the game.

The moment still brings tears to his eyes.

Of all the wins and the losses and a basketball season filled with practices and games and early-morning workouts, this is what he'll remember. This incredible moment.

"This was something that I wanted to do for her ...," Fink said. "Get back out on the court and do something. Just give her that."

And in that one moment on Senior Night, the emotions suddenly hit hard.

"I saw Katelyn had tears in her eyes before she even passed me the ball,"

## STATE CAPITAL BOUND

After districts in Sigourney three Highland wrestlers qualify for the state tournament in Des Moines

BY GIOVANNI CORONEL

The News

SIGOURNEY

Getting a chance to qualify for the state tournament is what these wrestlers have been waiting all season to do and the time has finally arrived to make it a reality. Taking place in Sigourney this past Saturday the district tournament kicked off with eleven area schools participating.

Needing to finish in the first or second spot in one's bracket to punch a ticket to state, Highland ended up with three wrestlers who did just that: Carlos Valenzuela at 132 lbs took first, Luke Guseman at 120 lbs finished in second, and Jack Peiffer at 138 lbs also had a runner up finish.

"I was very happy with how we competed as a whole at the district tournament. For the 3 that qualified, I thought we had a good day and it went about how I expected things would go. I knew there were going to be some weights where we would have to have some things go our way for us to get to Des Moines, but I was pleased with our effort to go out and score points," Highland coach Nick

Cole said.

"Our focus in practice leading up to districts was to not worry about winning and losing and the pressures that go with that, and to just go out and score points. I feel like we did a good job of that and we took a lot of positives away from that day. It's always very bitter-sweet this time of year because you are extremely happy for the kids that get to move on and you are equally crushed that there were teammates that didn't get that opportunity."

Valenzuela, a senior who is the fourth ranked wrestler at 132 lbs, continued his stellar season by winning all three of his matches at the district tournament.

Winning by fall in 0:57 over Springville's Ryan Foley in his first match, Valenzuela would win his next match by major decision, 8-0, over Cardinal Community's Bradly Snook.

In the first place match Valenzuela would put an impressive cap on his last regular season high school match with a victory by fall in 1:14 over Sigourney-Keota's Dan McLaughlin. Finishing at the top of the podium Valenzuela earned a 1A District 9 title and will head to the

state tournament with a 47-1 record.

"Carlos Valenzuela was in typical form on Saturday. Not sure that he gave up a point all day. In his semi final round, I would have liked to have seen him work some different attacks and score from different positions but at the same time, at this point in the season, you have to stick with what works and he dominated the match. In the finals, he went out and got off the mat quickly, which is what we preach at this point in the season," Cole said.

"I am looking forward to Carlos finishing his career in Des Moines and I believe he has certainly worked hard enough and has been committed enough to this sport to earn a medal. I am really excited for him."

Peiffer would start the tournament with a victory by fall in 1:37 over Regina, Iowa City's Spencer Winders. The semifinal round would last longer but the result would be the same for Peiffer. He would win by fall again, this time in 3:30 over Van Buren County's Tyler Stoltz.

In the first place match Peiffer lost

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## Hawks topple Comets in the postseason

BY GIOVANNI CORONEL

The News

MID-PRAIRIE

It was tournament time for the Golden Hawks and they opened up post-season play by hosting West Liberty, a team they defeated twice in the regular season.

Securing three consecutive victories over the same opponent is a tall task but it was one Mid-Prairie could handle as they emerged victorious against the Comets, 75-67, in the first round of the Class 2A District tournament on February 13.

During warm-ups a Golden Hawk player touched the rim which resulted in an automatic technical foul. So this postseason game began with a West Liberty player going one for two on free throws instead of the usual tip-off.

It was a back-and-forth game in the beginning with both teams finding an offensive rhythm early and this led to both teams scoring 20 plus points in the first quarter.

Both teams cooled off on offense in the second quarter but neither could take a sizable lead. It was a highly competitive contest that one would hope for in a playoff game. With each team scoring 12 points in the quarter the Golden Hawks would hold a single point lead at halftime.

Coming out of halftime it appeared

Mid-Prairie would be the team to finally pull away from its opponent when they went on an 8-3 run, all scored by sophomore Brady Weber, but the Comets would respond with a 13-2 run.

Entering the fourth quarter West Liberty would find themselves leading by three points, but it was an impressive 24 point quarter, kick-started with back-to-back three pointers from senior Camron Pickard and Weber, by the Golden Hawks that would prove to be too much for the Comets to handle.

"We did a great job of getting stops in the fourth quarter and followed the stop with a score," Mid-Prairie coach Daren Lambert said. "We did a great job of taking care of the basketball and sharing the ball to create open looks that we hit in different moments."

After Mid-Prairie took a seven point lead with not much time left West Liberty had to commit fouls to stop the clock and all the Golden Hawks had to do was make its free throws to ice the game and they did just that.

Four Golden Hawks scored 10 plus points and it was Pickard who was able to finish with a double double with 16 points and 10 assists.

"We had multiple guys hit shots at different times throughout the game. We put four guys in double figures and had 21 team assists," Lambert said about the well-rounded effort his team put forth against West Liberty. "We have a lot of



GIOVANNI CORONEL/THE NEWS

Mid-Prairie senior Camron Pickard elevates for a layup in the fourth quarter of a playoff win against West Liberty on February 13th.

guys playing with confidence which is exactly what we are looking for in the postseason."

This win advances Mid-Prairie (12-10) to the Class 2A District semifinals against River Valley South Division champion Wilton (17-4) on February 16. It will be a road game for the Golden

Hawks and they hope for a different outcome this time, losing the first two matchups against Wilton in the regular season.

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## ATHLETE of the WEEK

### GRANT BENDER

HILLCREST SENIOR

Bender put on a spectacular performance on offense, scoring 34 points, in a postseason victory over Regina Catholic, 60-55, on February 13. Shooting an impressive 14 of 21 from the field, Bender also nearly notched a double double by securing nine rebounds in the playoff game. This is the second straight game Bender has scored 30 plus points, he scored 33 in a victory against Columbus on February 7.



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