

# A week unlike anything since 1997

The Mexico boys and girls basketball teams played state quarterfinal games on Saturday, making it the first dual quarterfinal season for Mexico basketball since 1997. The Lady Bulldogs lost to No. 4 MICDS, and the Bulldogs lost to No. 1 Vashon.



The Mexico boys basketball starters have a conference with head coach Darren Pappas during an official timeout on Saturday during a Class 4 quarterfinal game against Vashon in Mexico.

[Jeremy Jacob]

## Bulldog brotherhood strong after 64-54 loss to No. 1 Vashon

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

For the third time in four years, Mexico’s season ended in the quarterfinals to No. 1 Vashon. Unlike those previous two losses, the Bulldogs didn’t lose by more than 20 points and even trailed by only two points in the fourth quarter before losing 64-54 on Gary Filbert Court in front of a charged and packed home gym. This senior group wrapped up a four years that featured a 96-21 record, three district titles and three quarterfinal appearances. Head coach Darren Pappas said Mexico (23-7) was “right there” in the fourth quarter when the Bulldogs cut their deficit to 45-43. Kaden Benne knocked down a 3-pointer and Jaydon Eldridge earned free throws after

driving to the rim, but Vashon (25-2) put the margin up to 54-44 soon after. “I’m extremely proud of this group because they hung with the best team in the state,” Pappas said. “They put a lot of pressure on you defensively. They don’t allow you to be able to run your stuff efficiently and effectively because of so much pressure.” Pappas said Vashon’s defense forced Mexico’s “ballplayers” to make plays and make decisions” and can confidently say they “left everything out there.” Eldridge finished with 20 points and seven rebounds in his final game as a Bulldog, PJ Perkins had 12 points and nine rebounds in his final game and Charlie Fisher added 12 points. Terron Garrett was in the middle

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The Mexico girls basketball seniors hug their coaches and teammates after being taken out for the last time during Saturday’s Class 4 quarterfinal game at MICDS in St Louis.

[Jeremy Jacob]

## Lady Bulldogs first quarterfinal since 1997 ends in 76-46 loss

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

The growing confidence for the Mexico girls couldn’t match the gear shifted to by MICDS. The Lady Bulldogs’ first state quarterfinal game since 1997 ended in a 76-46 loss in state No. 4 MICDS’s home gym in St. Louis. Mexico stayed close to the Lady Rams until a MICDS timeout about halfway through the second quarter. Head coach Makenzie Mudd said MICDS displayed its great athleticism from that point onward, led by star freshman Jordyn Haywood. She finished with 37 points, 10 rebounds and eight steals and was bouncing around seemingly everywhere to make offense difficult for Mexico. “We knew they had a lot of athlet-

icism and a lot of speed, especially with (Haywood),” Mudd said. “We knew she was going to be a challenge. She played such a great game today and got us pretty good with her transition opportunities. We just struggled to get her stopped.” Having Haywood run wild upset the rest of Mexico’s game plan, Mudd said, as Kennedy Newman added to the defensive burden with 15 points and three 3-pointers. Mudd said Haywood is definitely one of the toughest the Lady Bulldogs have had to guard because of her versatility and length. Mexico was doing well early by spreading the ball around and scoring in transition off MICDS mistakes. Claire Hudson, who will play for Kirkwood Community College, finished

See **LADY BULLDOGS** on page B6

### 2025 Spring Sports Season Previews

# Mexico baseball to be led by huge senior class

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

Mexico baseball liked its team from a season ago and didn’t have to change much at all. After only having one senior a year ago, Mexico returns most of its lineup and its full pitching staff from last year’s 15-17 team. The Bulldogs expect to have 11 seniors this season, which is the largest senior group head coach Daniel McCarty has had. “I had one group that was nine (seniors),” McCarty said. “In my first year, I had a senior class of seven, and I thought that was a lot at the time. I’m hoping those seniors – only one is new to me this year – know their role once called upon.”

Several of those seniors are returning pitchers. Sam Ryan, Austin Maxwell, Jaydon Eldridge and Landon Hilderman expect to be in the rotation along with junior Brady Fox. Mexico allowed an eight-year low of 3.3 runs per game and its defense only committed 18 errors, staying competitive in most of its games because of that. The season ended in a 1-0 pitcher’s duel in districts with Father Tolton. McCarty said Mexico wants to make sure its pitchers have the run support and have been focusing on that in the offseason. The Bulldogs have averaged less than five runs per game in each of the previous two years. “Our pitching is going to be our dominant strength along with our defense,” McCa-

rty said. “We focused on our hitting approach. We broke things back down, evaluated and corrected. We hope they stay with those corrections.” As far as reliable bats, McCarty said Ryan, or the team’s “ace,” is a threat at the plate who showcases a good glove at third base. Drew DeMint has been hitting gaps and provides a good top of the order bat and glove in the outfield, and Cooper Bledsoe is a senior leader at catcher. Hilderman has made big jumps with his swing, which has been enough to garner praise from McCarty. “I expect him to break the double record, if not the home run record,” McCarty said. “He gained some strength in

See **BASEBALL** on page B2



Mexico senior Wyatt Troesser catches a throw to first base during a preseason practice in March.

[Jeremy Jacob]



Mexico senior Emily Moppin stops a ball during a pre-season practice in March.

[Jeremy Jacob]

# Mexico girls soccer wants to flip close games for more wins this season

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

The Mexico girls soccer program is looking for progress this season. After doubling their win total from the previous year, the Lady Bulldogs want to improve on the six wins earned last season. Five of Mexico’s losses were decided by two goals, including the season-ending 3-1 loss in districts to Veritas Christian Academy. Head coach Sarah Olson said the program has had around five wins in the last 11 years and wants to mainly see that number increase this year. “We had a lot of close games last year,” Olson said. “We just let some things in defensively. Although, we were scoring more. It’s just cleaning things up a little bit.” Mexico has 35 total on the roster and usually carries about 18-20 players on varsity, though Olson hadn’t decided on a specific number. Olson said two key senior players, Claire Hudson and Kenley Jones, are making a state quarterfinal basketball run so they haven’t been brought into the fold yet. Heading into her fourth year as head coach, Olson said the roster is “split” with experienced and inexpe-

rienced soccer players. Olson said those experienced players are well-versed in the game and Mexico’s culture from recording minutes as freshmen due to lower roster numbers years back. Olson’s defensive line jumps out to her as an area of strength and has good senior leadership in Jones and Addison Paden. Emily Moppin brings senior presence to the midfield, and Hudson is a scoring threat at forward. Marali Herrera is an experienced junior in the midfield. “Those are some of the key people who were starters and are coming back to hold down the fort,” Olson said. Olson said she is looking forward to seeing how girls like Kaili Cox and Bailey Christianson develop with more time on the pitch this season. Zoey Norton is a newcomer with “quite a bit of a background in soccer” for Mexico this year after moving in from Utah. Mexico allowed less than four goals per game for the second straight year and posted a five-year scoring high at 1.5 goals per game. Olson said the Lady Bulldogs doubled their goals last season so she hopes they have even more this season.

See **SOCCER** on page B2



# Community R-6 baseball filled with excitement

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

Community R-6 athletes will be on the diamond for the love of the game. The Trojans have had winning seasons in recent years and have lost many kids from those winning teams. However, they haven't lost much excitement from their roster.

Head coach Joel Krato said, while kids will be elevated into bigger roles this season and will need some time to adjust, this year's Community baseball team isn't lacking when it comes to loving the game. The Trojans were out on a cool Saturday night practicing and not showing any discontent.

"We have a bunch of kids who love playing baseball," Krato said. "Every day of practice this year, we haven't gone less than two and half hours, and that's inside. First day outside was almost four hours. You never felt that any kid didn't want to be here."

Krato said Community will be returning one kid with more than one year of varsity experience and starting five kids who have never started a spring season. With only one freshman and six seniors who graduated from last year's team, Community has 14 or 15 the roster this season after having over 20 players the last three years, but Krato expects the roster to be at a normal level next season.

Fortunately, Krato said this team has some varsity-level experience from playing in the fall season. The Trojans have mostly juniors and sophomores and might have only two seniors in the lineup.

"They have fun competing with each other," Krato said. "The key for us is we may not be the best team when the season starts, but when you have a bunch of kids who love playing baseball, we're going to get better."

Drake Welch stands out to Krato as one of the team's top pitchers and top bats. Welch has been working hard over the last few years and just needs to see results on the field.

"He potentially could be a conference MVP candidate depending on the success of our team," Krato said. "He is an upper 70 or lower 80 mph arm which, in Class 1, plays really well. He potentially could hit some out."

Cooper Rohan was the team's No. 1 pitcher during the fall season, and Kyler Swaim is a left-handed arm who threw well in spring and fall. Krato said Nik Crider is "young and raw" but should be an all-conference player in the future.

Community lost two big weapons at the plate and especially on the mound in each of the last two years. Gavin Allen graduated and then Mason Carroll graduated after last season. The all-state players are both pitching in college, but Krato said this team's pitching has its own advantages.

"This is the year where I've probably got my best depth at pitching," Krato said. "Gavin and Mason were great, and they are both collegiate arms. This year, we don't have the horse of an all-state pitcher, but we have five kids at 60-70+ mph and that have sat 70+ in bullpens."

Welch has reached 81 mph, Crider has reached 77 mph, Rohan has reached 74-75 mph, Swaim has reached 75 mph and



Community R-6 junior Cooper Rohan takes batting practice during a preseason practice in March.

[Jeremy Jacob]

Houston Hogan has reached 73 mph.

Among the position players, Krato thinks highly of several kids. Lane Carter reminds Krato of Eli Johnson because of his stature and strength, Rohan reminds Krato of all-state and college outfielder Ayden Meranda, and Welch reminds Krato of Carroll.

Since the Trojans have so much youth

this year, Krato said their success will depend on how much his kids develop. That includes how they deal with failure.

"I'm excited what we're going to be this year because I don't know," Krato said. "You have some kids where their ceiling could be high. The sky is the limit for us, but it's just how close are we to the sky right now?"

# Van-Far baseball wants to take next step after district title

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

Van-Far baseball is coming off its first district title since 2018.

The Indians lost in the next round at Schuyler County but have mostly everybody from that roster back this year. They just need to be at full strength.

Head coach Cameron Huff said his team could be a "dominant force" this season but acknowledged there will be some adjustment necessary because of injuries. Starting catcher and pitcher Gibson Condie is expected to miss a few games due to an ankle injury sustained during basketball season, and Malik Douglas is an all-state player who will be kept off the field until he is 100 percent following ACL/MCL surgery during football season. Douglas was the

team's leadoff hitter and an outfielder last year, so Huff said that does shift around people until Douglas hopefully returns around the end of April.

"We're going to have some growing pains early in the season, but once we get fully healthy, I think we'll be alright," Huff said. "With Malik and Condie both being out, it throws a curveball into what we're trying to do. That pulls Garrett Hopke out of the outfield and behind the plate, for instance. We might be missing some guys, but it's also going to give some other guys a spot to shine."

Huff said there will be 21 total boys this season. Only one freshman, Cayden Douglas, will make the varsity roster of about 13-15 that Huff hopes will be better prepared after having more playing time than usual early in the season. He added he is thankful to have a new Ju-

nior Hack Attack pitching machine provided by the Van-Far Athletic Booster Club to prepare his defense.

Even without those injured players, Huff said Van-Far still has No. 1 pitcher Reece Culwell, all-state player Carson Huff, Tyson Douglas, Gaven Gaston, Ronnie Stanich and Garrett Hopke as key returning players. Huff expects Slade Keller to find more playing time early with injuries, and Cayden Douglas provides speed and athleticism even without much baseball experience. Brady Puls and Easton Sharp didn't start last year but will be fighting for playing time at second base.

Huff said his projected full-strength lineup brings much speed and hitting ability that makes him optimistic for this season.

"Our first seven hitters are Malik, Ty-

son, Gaven Gaston, Carson Huff, Reece Culwell, Gibson Condie and you throw in Ronnie – who hit .275 as a freshman – in the seven hole," Huff said. "Eight and nine is probably Landon Flowers and Brady Puls or Easton Sharp. That's a tough lineup. Defensively, that's a lot of returners from the team before."

Culwell and Condie will be the top two pitching options again, and filling in the rest of the spots should be Carson Huff, Tyson Douglas and Gaston after each has shown promise in bullpens. Huff said there are 10 pitchers on the roster, with five to six who that will probably see varsity innings.

"That's a huge thing for me this year is not just relying on Reece and Condie," Huff said.

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## Baseball

from page B1

the lower half and improved his swing."

McCarty said the usual varsity number out of the 35 total players is 21 but could go up to 23 or 24 due to some early pitching injuries.

"My key thing is I want to get the younger guys some reps for the future," McCarty said. "Those younger guys are working hard for a spot or a spot on varsity. It's fun to watch them play and compete."

Mexico was "streaky" a year ago, McCarty said, as it followed an eight-game winning streak with an eight-game losing streak. He said having a good dug-out culture can help the Bulldogs better control momentum, especially against North Central Missouri Conference teams like Moberly, Fulton and Kirksville.

"This team can either win it all or give it away," McCarty said. "We definitely have the talent this year, and we also have the competition this year."

## Soccer

from page B1

"We're building year after year and have been building things up," Olson said. "We just have more experience, so that does help. There's a lot of quickness. There are some fast girls, but the experience builds in a little bit more knowledge into the game, and therefore, decision-making."

# North Callaway looking for less to achieve more

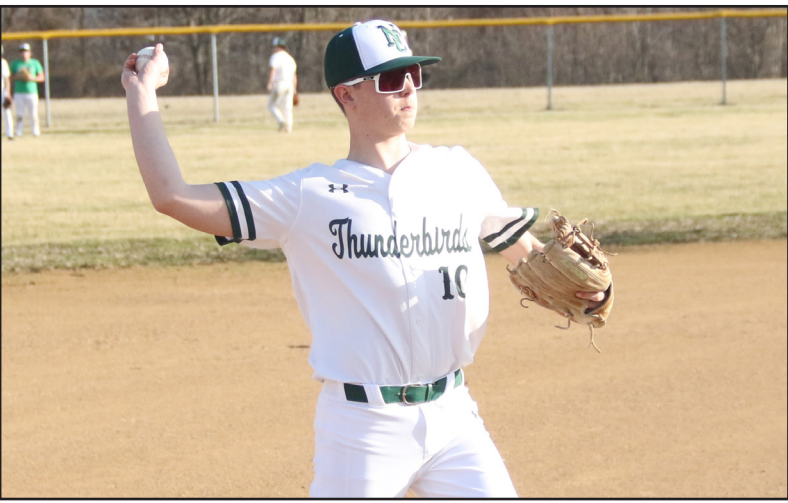
BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

North Callaway baseball wants more of the success it had from last season.

The Thunderbirds won their first district title since 1999 and advanced to the Class 3 state quarterfinals before losing to eventual state champion Duchesne. With most of last season's roster back, North Callaway has high hopes for this season.

Head coach Kirt Kleindienst was the Eastern Missouri Conference coach of the year as North Callaway averaged a five-year high in runs scored and an 11-year low in runs allowed. Kleindienst said some statistics should change from last year if the Thunderbirds are to make a deeper run.

"On the offensive side, we want to cut our team strikeout



North Callaway junior Tucker Sheets makes a throw home from third base during a preseason practice in March.

[Jeremy Jacob]

total in half," Kleindienst said. "That was our biggest 'Achilles' heel' in our key losses. All of our close losses, we had double-digit strikeouts."

Kleindienst said North Callaway can't "watch the ball" go by like it did against Duchesne, and the ball can't go by as much on the defensive side either.

"Defensively, we want to cut the errors in half because I am a defensive-minded coach," Kleindienst said. "I expect better this year after having these guys for a year under my wing."

Out of the 34 players total, Kleindienst said he plans to carry 15-16 and some of them will be his returning all-conference players Keaton Bell, Carter Moore, Tucker Sheets and Coltyn O'Neal. Bell and Moore will be seniors, providing North Callaway its main battery and two of its pitchers from a season ago. Sheets has grown an inch and a half and gained about 10 pounds after being the team's RBI leader a year ago, and O'Neal led the team in batting average.

Kleindienst wants to see other seniors Caleb Sheets and Chance Green have their best seasons.

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BOYS GOLF SEASON PREVIEWS



Mexico senior Jacob Stephens (left) chips a shot during a previous season at Arthur Hills Golf Course in Mexico. Van-Far sophomore Kaleb Baskett (right) putts during a district tournament at Heritage Hills Golf Course in Moberly last season.



[Jeremy Jacob]

Mexico boys golf seeing potential in young team

Mexico boys golf is displaying some skills early.

Head coach Becca Bates said there are only two seniors on the roster of 18 this season. Jacob Stephens and Eric Heaton will be the seniors on a young team that Bates has been seeing positive things from.

“An extreme positive of this year is everyone can hit the ball,” Bates said. “We have so much potential as a team especially with them being so young I am excited to see what the future holds for these guys.”

Bates said Stephens and Heaton have each been working hard to make it to state in their final years in the program.

**Van-Far golf looking for return to state**

Van-Far golf wants to return to state and has the means to do it.

A year ago, the Indians qualified a team for the Class 1 state tournament and will be bringing back three boys from that team. Jay Orr returns as the head coach after taking a couple years off after previously coaching Van-Far to third- and fifth-place finishes at state.

Orr said Pacey Reading, Kasen Christian and Kaleb Baskett all have state experience from a season ago and hope to build off that.

“It’s still early in the season and just getting back into swinging clubs, but I like the confidence they’re showing, in their games and with each other,” Orr said.

Kaden Whiteaker, Bryce Reading and Blake Riffle fill out the rest of Van-Far’s team. Whiteaker and Reading each played junior varsity for the school a year ago.

“Our goals this year are simple: to be competitive in conference play and to make another run at state as a team,” Orr said. “To do this, we are going to focus on our fundamentals and course awareness. Even though we are a relatively young team, I’m very happy with the team’s buy-in and looking forward to a competitive year from the Indians.”

North Callaway boys golf returning full varsity team

Last year’s North Callaway boys golf team is looking for more this year.

Every single member of the varsity squad is back looking to defend its conference title and small-school division Elsberry Tournament title. Anthony Russell, Vincent Houchins, Clayton Moore and Ajay Roberts all return for varsity, with Moore being the only senior in the group.

“We have experience this year from my returning players,” head coach Jason Smith said. “They have all made a commitment to getting better in the offseason, and I look forward to seeing how that pays off for them this season.”

Smith said there are 14 players overall and two seniors. He said he would like to take a team to the state tournament this season.

Community R-6 teeing off boys golf program

Not long into the Community R-6 boys golf program, there has been quite a bit of interest.

Athletic director and girls basketball head coach Bob Curtis will be the head coach for the boys golf program that plays its first season this spring. There will be 14 golfers with no seniors on the team and plenty of room for growth and learning.

“Most of our team is just picking the sport up but excited to see improvement with a month or so of practice in by April,” Curtis said. “We have a lot of interest and will get better as the practices go by.”

Curtis said it is too early to tell who the varsity players will be because Community is in the “learning phase” but mentioned Cooper Rohan and Kyler Swaim have looked good early.

No matter the weather, Community plans to practice at Arthur Hills in Mexico or with the school’s indoor golf simulator on bad weather days, Curtis said. He said this will help as the program primarily focuses on generating excitement for golf in the school.



Missouri Military Academy senior Cooper Johnston takes a shot during a meet last season at Tanglewood Golf Course in Fulton.

[Jeremy Jacob]

“This is going to be a learning year and an opportunity to teach our players the game, course etiquette and how to get better for the end of the season and next spring,” Curtis said.

**Missouri Military Academy golf senior core wants to improve every round**

Missouri Military Academy has a core of experience in its golf program this year.

Out of the 15 MMA golfers, five will be on varsity and four of those players are seniors. Cooper Johnston, Patricio Sanchez, Logan Lockhart and Trey Rudolph have worked hard to improve their games, and head coach Anthony Yannielli said they each hope to qualify for state.

“We are really focusing on our mental part of the game this season,” Yannielli said. “Each boy has spent several hours working on their swings and course management so the focus is now on mental. If you have a bad hole, move on to the next, do not dwell on that hole since there is nothing you

can do to fix it.”

Yannielli said he wants each of his golfers, not just his varsity and senior golfers, to focus on getting “better during each round played.” He would like MMA to send a team to state after sending individuals in the past and knows the Colonels have a good challenge with the teams normally in their district.

Fernando Puebla, Beckett Sears and Merrick Devereux are all underclassmen Yannielli said should “challenge the varsity team” and at least give MMA a good foundation for next year if they return. Overall, MMA has seven returners on the roster.

“We are fortunate enough to have simulators at the school so every second we can work on our games regardless of weather,” Yannielli said. “We also incorporated different things into our practice this year and they have already paid dividends with improving their swings and flexibility to achieve their best possible swing.”

Track

from page B3

Faith Cash, Bailey Hill, Amelia Rohrbach and Abigail Schmidt will all be throwers along with junior Kymorie Myers.

“This year, we have a team that is somewhat inexperienced,” head coach Reid Randolph said. “However, there are some seasoned players on it. Our field event groupings are currently becoming a rather good group. It appears that there will be a number of talented girls who will be evenly distributed throughout the events. The success of our veterans and the growth of others will determine our prospects for the season.”

Some key track returners for the girls include Madyson Gordon and Cora Tripp as sprinters and Grace Rasmussen as a middle distance runner. For the boys, some returning track athletes will be Emerson Reinhard as a distance runner and Collin Moore as a sprinter.

Randolph said he wants the team to finish in the top three at meets.

**Missouri Military Academy returns to track to further prove itself**

Missouri Military



Van-Far junior Gaven Gaston sprints during a race at the state meet in Jefferson City last season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

Academy has a group of promising runners in its track and field program this year.

Head coach Traevonne Smith said it is a roster of mostly younger cadets but likes the potential seasons of some of his runners. Kyran Carter, Alex McBride and Ryan Miles all return to various distances on the track.


Carter is coming back as a top 100-meter-dash

runner, McBride is a returning 200-meter-dash runner and even set a new school record time of 22.93 at sectionals at the end of last season, and Miles is a long-distance run-

ner that has competed in the 400-, 800- and 1600-meter events for the Colonels.

These three cadets stand out because they are returners who have proved themselves in the past,” Smith said. “Some of my team’s strengths this year will definitely be the 100-meter-dash, the 200-meter-dash and the 400-meter-dash.”

Smith said many other areas are still up in the air, but he at least hopes that McBride will make it to the state meet.



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BOYS TENNIS SEASON PREVIEWS



Mexico senior Boston Davolt returns a ball during a home dual at Fairgrounds Park Netplex in Mexico last season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

Mexico boys tennis has many new faces to game

The Mexico boys tennis program is growing. Out of the 13 boys on the roster, there are six returning players. Three of the returners – Brixton Goerne and seniors Boston Davolt and Carter Blackburn – have “valuable varsity experience” while Skylar Shaw, Jonathan St. Martin and Jonothan Hernandez bring “some varsity experience” from playing time last year. “We have a lot of brand new players which is what we were wanting to keep our program growing,” head coach Tony Senor said. “We have a lot of young athletic players who are hungry to learn and grow.” Mexico had a state medalist that graduated and finished second as a team at districts. Senor said the Bulldogs will be going for conference and district titles

and have another state qualifier. **Missouri Military Academy tennis breaking in new roster** After achieving postseason success in the past few years, Missouri Military Academy tennis will have a new roster this season. MMA lost eight of its top 10 players from a season ago and will be returning one varsity player Henry Scribner, who finished 20-5 last year. Head coach Brad Smith said juniors Reuben Reyes and Fernando Puebla are new to the program and are good players, but many of the 17 players will be new. “This year is a rebuilding year for us, but our strengths will be our competitiveness to win matches,” Smith said. “Our new varsity players are hungry to prove themselves and keep up the reputation MMA has built for tennis the last four years.”

Peuster becomes latest to run from Mexico to Benedictine

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

You probably heard this one before. A Peuster is signing to run for Benedictine College. Mexico senior Andrew Peuster signed on Thursday, March 13 to run cross country and track and field for the NAIA school in Atchison, Kansas. Peuster will join his brother Thomas Peuster, who ran for the Bulldogs a couple years ago. “I’m definitely excited about it,” Andrew Peuster said. “It definitely has been something I’ve been working on for several years, running over and over again. At the same time, I’m nervous, too, since it’s a new chapter in life.” Peuster has been distance running for Mexico for six years and is coming off an all-conference cross country season in the Bulldogs’ second straight North Central Missouri Conference championship. He has qualified for the state cross country meet once in his career and has one more track and field season left.

Looking ahead, Peuster is looking forward to making new friends at Benedictine while he majors in engineering physics but is glad to have someone he knows there. It is someone he obviously knows very well in his older brother. “It will be nice to have someone that I already know,” Peuster said. “It will help me adjust to it and all that.” Head coach Lucas Breneman said it is nice to see the program send more runners to college, starting with runners like Malik Holman, Jami Brandow, Alex Dukes and Thomas Peuster years ago and then Tyler Grimes and Landon Higgins signing to William Woods the week before. They all are similar in the sense that they are all “workhorses.” Andrew Peuster is also a workhorse, Breneman said, who has shown great commitment to running in the past and that is the case for the future as well with his signing. “Of all of the runners, he’s the most prepared for the next level,” Breneman said. “He’s put in the summer mileage and the work from not just high school but all the way back to seventh grade. I know that he has his best races ahead of him.” Peuster said family is a big reason why he started his running career. He played sports like baseball and soccer but ultimately found out running was a good fit for him. “Originally, it was parents who encouraged me and pushed me into doing it just to do a sport of some kind,” Peuster said. “In running, I was finally able to see a sport where I fit in and was able to directly see how my work paid off with performance.” Breneman said Peuster should be even more



Mexico senior Andrew Peuster was surrounded by family (left) including his brother and current Benedictine College runner Thomas Peuster (right) on Thursday at the Mexico Sports Complex during his signing ceremony to run cross country and track for Benedictine.

[Jeremy Jacob]

comfortable running with his older brother but pointed out the Mexico connection doesn’t end there. William Woods is joining Benedictine’s conference – the Heart of America Athletic Conference – and William Woods is where team-

mates Grimes and Higgins are going. They will go from friendly competition within a team to traditional competition between opposing teams. In the next few years, Breneman is looking forward to seeing that but mainly how they each im-

prove. He said it’s special when a kid has the talent and drive to run past high school. “Even the people that are naturally good at it, you can’t just show up

not putting any of the work in and have a bunch of success,” Breneman said. “You’re not going to compete at the high end. You prepare yourself for that in high school like he

has done in the offseason. A lot of college running is done without the coach, so when you can trust that athletes are going to put in the work, that’s huge.”



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# Bulldogs

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of Vashon’s late run to seal the game, finishing with 18 points and 13 rebounds and scoring nine points in the fourth quarter. Trey Williams Jr. also had 18 points and hit three 3-pointers, and Dorea McCaskill had 10 points and six rebounds. Pappas said Dehrio McCaskill is Vashon’s “go guy” and finished with six points, but the Wolverines were able to do what they did best to win their 13th straight game.

“We took some quick shots, we couldn’t get any pressure on them and they got out in transition,” Pappas said. “That’s what they’re at their best. That ball gets one end from the floor really quick.”

Mexico missed some short-range shots early to fall behind 24-13 after the first quarter but amped up the crowd with a late run in the second quarter to make the halftime score 31-22. Perkins scored the final two field goals, including a putback dunk after soaring between some Wolverines, and Mexico outscored Vashon 9-7 in the quarter.

The sound was deafening, the noise was constant and the pride in the hometown Bulldogs was unwavering.

Vashon did put itself in position for a sixth-straight state championship but couldn’t beat its eighth straight team by at least 20 points. The Wolverines have defeated most Missouri teams this season by at least 20 points this season and only faced more

of a challenge against out-of-state competition like their most recent loss on Jan. 19 against Illinois’ DePaul College Prep, who won a state title on Saturday night.

Pappas said Mexico’s recent history is also impressive as they are undoubtedly “one of the winningest classes” to wear a Bulldog uniform. A season with 20 wins and a quarterfinal appearance is special, and he said this senior group has had three of them.

“We owe a lot to them,” Pappas said. “That’s what we talked about in the huddle after the game. Even though their time is done wearing the red and gray, the brotherhood lasts forever.”

Mexico had seven seniors and Pappas appreciates the contributions of every one of them, including Sam Ryan, Austin Maxwell, Davontae Frame and Hunter Bickell, who gave them “everything they could” off the bench. Holden Aulbur became a “force down low” after much improvement and work with strength coach Devon Scott. Eldridge and Perkins were the two captains, and Pappas expects “big things” from each of them at the next level.

Pappas said the graduating group each worked hard to be individually strong but ultimately were at their strongest together. This led to strong seasons and a strong ending.

“The team chemistry can take you a long way,” Pappas said. “When they believe in one another and play for one another, this is the kind of result you get. They put up a dogfight against the best team in the state.”



Above, Mexico senior PJ Perkins soars upward for a rebound against Vashon on Saturday in a Class 4 quarterfinal game on Gary Filbert Court in Mexico. Perkins was one of seven seniors who played their final game as a Bulldog in a competitive 64-54 loss to the reigning state champion.



Left, Mexico junior Charlie Fisher blows by Vashon's Dehrio McCaskill for a layup on Saturday during a Class 4 quarterfinal game on Gary Filbert Court in Mexico.

[Jeremy Jacob]



Gary Filbert gym was packed on Saturday night when the Bulldogs hosted a Class 4 boys basketball quarterfinal game against state No. 1 Vashon.



[Jeremy Jacob]

# Lady Bulldogs

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with a solid final game of 17 points, five rebounds and four assists. Alyssa Miller posted a double-double of 10 points and 10 rebounds along with three 3-pointers that all fell in the second half, and Scottie Smith added seven points.

The Mexico girls hadn’t won a district championship since 2006 and were able to accomplish that this year on home court. They weren’t satisfied as they won 68-53 at Westminster Christian Academy four days prior from the quarterfinal game.

“The district tournament week and

hosting it and knowing we were able to beat all the teams that we played, the confidence boost that week really was the big spark to help us in this post-season run,” Mudd said. “On Tuesday, we came out a little slow at Westminster, but they came together and realized again that we can do this.”

Mudd said the Lady Bulldogs have “nothing to hang our heads about this season” when she spoke to them in the locker room after the game. Mexico was one of eight Class 4 girls teams still playing basketball this past weekend, and that itself is a great accomplishment.

Mexico’s run is even more amazing considering it had to deal with various injuries, illness and other adversity this season, Mudd said. Losing Grace

Hudson to a season-ending knee injury was already a big blow because the Lady Bulldogs had to shift around their roster to fill in for their starting point guard. Several other girls on the roster were injured at some point including senior Haley Perkins, who returned to the court Saturday after sustaining a concussion in the district semifinals.

“We worked hard to get here,” Mudd said. “I’m not mad at all with the effort I’ve seen all season from this team.”

Mudd can’t wait to see how her star freshmen from this season, Miller and Smith, will develop in the next three years. She expects Hannah Loyd to be a good senior leader next season, and thinks Landri Teel will fill in the post

role of Kenzie Taylor and Bentley McCarty to be the “scrappy” player that Kenley Jones has been.

However, that means saying goodbye to starters Hudson and Jones, Taylor and Perkins. Mudd said she appreciates all they have done for the program and said Taylor was “that inside presence” and Perkins was “a spitfire” even though they each have dealt with injuries over the last few years.

“Claire has been a leader for us for four years and did a really great job having to hold two different positions for us,” Mudd said. “Kenley Jones did a great job defensively for us all season long. She’s been one that nobody wants her defending them because she’ll get all up in your face.”



Left, Mexico senior Claire Hudson is fouled while driving to the rim against MICDS in a Class 4 quarterfinal game Saturday in St. Louis. The Lady Bulldogs first quarterfinal season since 1997 ended in a loss. Right, Mexico freshman Scottie Smith dribbles around a MICDS defender on Saturday during a Class 4 quarterfinal game in St. Louis.

[Jeremy Jacob]

