

Think Green This Sunday
Happy St. Patrick's Day!

THE WEEK IN SPORTS

Sports Section
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GOFF LED SCORING, PETGRAVE REBOUNDS, RUKA 3'S

Cougars Were Competitive; Finish 11-12 in Boys Basketball

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Three senior starters and a multitude of sophomores and juniors comprised this year's Cranford High School (CHS) boys basketball team that competed in the Union County Conference Sky Division that was comprised of New Providence (Pioneers), Governor Livingston (Highlanders), Roselle (Rams) and AL Johnson (Crusaders). Although the Pioneers, who finished with a 29-3 overall record, won the division with an 8-0 record and the Highlanders were 6-2, the Cougars finished in the middle of the pack with a 5-4 record but more than doubled their overall win record from last year to finish 11-12.

Aware of his team being under-sized as compared to the rest of the conference and county, first-year Head

Coach Sean Trotter, a 2011 CHS graduate and three-sport athlete, who had been the assistant coach the three previous years, had a philosophy of out-hustle, outwork and outsmart the opponents. The result was a season filled with very competitive games.

Within the conference, the Cougars defeated Roselle three times, 58-47, 64-49 and 59-25, and the Crusaders twice, 49-46 and 57-44. The Cougars had a 6-3 record against non-county opponents, the wins being over Voorhees, 68-56, Eagle Area, 64-62, Somerville, 51-43, South Plainfield, 58-53, Lyndhurst, 50-47, and Millburn, 63-52.

The Cougars did experience several stinging losses — Governor Livingston, 57-54, Hillside, 62-60, Metuchen, 55-53, and Hanover Park, 61-59. But the biggest burn came in a

77-74, overtime setback to the Pioneers in Cranford where the Cougars overcame a 13-point halftime deficit to send the game into overtime. The Cougars' season came to an end when they lost in the first round of the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 Tournament, 56-36, to the Colonia Patriots, who went on to win the title.

"This season was a successful year even though our record is not as great as we wanted. These players came to play everyday whether it was practice or a game and it showed, since we were in every game this year no matter who the opponent was. These kids have changed the culture and have the program moving in the direction that we want it to be going," Coach Trotter expressed.

Individually, senior Hunter Goff

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David B. Corbin (Late December 2018 files) for The Westfield Leader and The Times

QUITE AN ASSET TO THE TEAM...Freshman Lily Hughes made huge contributions to the Raiders' efforts this season whether it be in freestyle relays, backstroke or Individual Medley races.

SMALL, BONHOTE, HOWELL, RYAN WON UCT 200-FrR

Raiders Won 5th UCT in Row, Finished Swim Season 10-2-1

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Having graduated a number of very talented seniors from the 2018 team, this year's Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School girls swim team may have been considered to be in a somewhat rebuilding phase. And maybe they were. But the Lady Raiders were able to rebuild enough in time to win their fifth straight Union County Tournament (UCT) title, advance to the North Jersey, Section 2, Public B Championship meet and finish with a 10-2-1 record.

With a number of dominating victories over Union County schools

during the regular season, the Lady Raiders enjoyed the luxury of experimenting with various combinations, especially, in relay races plus testing the strengths of some of their younger swimmers in individual events. The fortunate thing, however, was that there was a wealth of talent, especially, with the freshman class.

Of the county schools, the Raiders easily defeated Kent Place, 105-65, Union, 100-44, Oak Knoll, 113-57, Elizabeth, 100-41, Cranford, 105-65, and New Providence, 112-58. The Raiders also topped the Summit Hilltoppers, 99.5-70.5, and the Governor Livingston Highlanders, 99-71.

But they did witness a 101-69 setback to Westfield early in the season on December 21.

In the section semifinals, the Lady Raiders tied North Hunterdon, 85-85, but advanced due to a superiority in power points. Their only other loss was to Chatham, 98-72, for the title.

However, possibly the Raiders' best team performance came on December 12 when they stunned Chatham, 86-84. After the Raiders got a great jump with a 1-2 finish in the opening 200-medley relay, the lead zigzagged back-and-forth until the Raiders swept the 100-breaststroke with sophomore

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CROWLEY ASSTS, ROONEY SCORING; McGUIRE RB, BLKS

Blue Devil Cagers Competed With Multi-Sport Athletes

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Competing in the Union County Conference Valley Division Westfield High School boys basketball first-year Head Coach Jim McKeon, aware of having a squad of multi-sport athletes comprised predominantly of underclassmen, worked a philosophy of rotating 10 or 11 of his athletes in and out of the lineup. The Blue Devils proved to be very competitive but were on the short side of several very close games and finished the season with a 10-15 record.

For the first time in several years, the Blue Devils had the opportunity to play rival Scotch Plains-Fanwood twice during the regular season and won both but the first one was a wild one, a 60-59, thriller over the Raiders. The second was a much easier, 66-48 triumph. The Blue Devils had one of their most effective performances in their season finale, 68-49, victory over the hosting Cranford Cougars. Outside the county, the Blue Devils recorded big wins over Hillsborough, Chatham, Fair Lawn, West Windsor-Plainsboro North and West.

The Blue Devils did absorb stinging losses to Plainfield twice, 41-39

and 80-77, New Providence, 74-70, Lincoln, 48-46, Rahway, 44-42, and Summit, 50-49. Although falling short in the NJSIAA North 2, Group 4 Tournament, the Blue Devils gave fourth-seeded Watchung Hills all it could handle in a 54-50 loss.

Senior guard Matt Crowley, "Mr. Deception", had opponents second-guessing his moves whether they be on offense or defense. Crowley, who had 42 rebounds and blocked three shots, led the Blue Devils in thefts with 39 steals. Offensively, Crowley would lull opponents into a false sense of relaxation before he would either step forward and nail a 2-pointer or step back and sink one of his 21 3-pointers. Crowley led the team by far in assists with 82 and was second on the team in scoring with 277 points and free throws with 50. He scored 22 points in the win over Cranford and dished out an amazing 10 assists in the 80-77 loss to Plainfield.

"Matt, was fantastic for us this year. He was a guy that the other team always had to game plan for. He knew that going into games and stepped up. What I was most impressed by was his unselfishness with the ball. His assists went up dramatically from the

year before. We all know he can score the ball at anytime, but this year he created for others and you can see that in the number of assists. I believe he averaged four a game," Coach McKeon gushed.

Junior guard Griffin Rooney, who was one of Crowley's primary targets for assists, led the team, not only in scoring with 306 points, including 22 3-pointers; but also, he was deadly from the charity line, sinking a team-leading 75 free throws. Rooney, who had 18 assists, was second in steals with 21 and added 49 rebounds and three blocked shots. In the first game against the Raiders, Rooney sank six key free throws. In the game against New Providence, he scored 18 points, including trip threes.

"Griff can flat out score. He has the ability to get to the room at will. His midrange game was phenomenal. He also had a very high percentage from three. He is a guy you are going to game plan for. He will have to create for others as well as score. He is up to the challenge and we expect an even better year next year," Coach McKeon predicted.

Junior guard Jake Walsh proved to

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David B. Corbin (February 2019 files) for The Westfield Leader and The Times

TOUGH ACROSS THE BOARD...Senior Jeremy Ruka, No. 34 left, and junior Arjun Petgrave, No. 12, were vicious competitors this season for the Cougars whether it be on defense or offense.

BAKER, BRENNAN, YOUSSEF, PRIETO 8TH MOC 200-MR

Blue Devil Swim Boys Placed Second in UCT, Finished 9-4

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

New faces were needed to fill the slots of a talented and decorated senior class that has moved on to the college level, so the work was cut out for this year's Westfield High School boys swim team. The good news was that Head Coach Jeff Knight had a wealth of talented newcomers and he used them very well.

"After graduating a highly decorated senior class last year we knew there were a large number of spots to fill and we had a large amount of question marks. Many of the underclassmen were untested in pressure situations. However, I could not have been more pleased with their growth and the times they put up from start to

finish were extremely impressive," Coach Knight expressed.

The Blue Devils finished a very close second in the Union County Tournament (UCT), being nudged out, 405-400, by the Summit Hilltopper squad, advanced to the finals of the North Jersey, Section 2, Public A Tournament and finished with a 9-4 record.

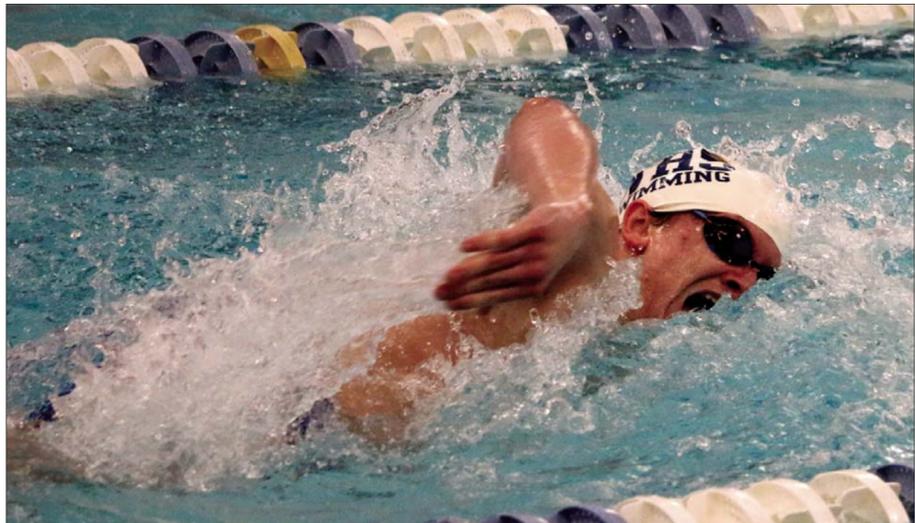
The Blue Devils recorded lopsided regular-season victories over Oratory Prep, 123-46, Cranford, 109-61, Union, 135-34, Plainfield, 140-24, New Providence, 120-50, Elizabeth, 127-43 and Governor Livingston, 110-60. In a rivalry clash, the Blue Devils sank the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raiders, 94-75, in Westfield and their final victory was a 114-56 rout of Ridge in the section semifinal.

Regular-season losses came at the hands of the No. 2 Bridgewater-Raritan Panthers, 112-58, in mid-December, and scorchers to Bergen Catholic, 89.5-80.5, and Summit, 87-83. Their final loss was to Bridgewater-Raritan, 107-63, in the Public A, Section 2 finals.

"Despite dropping some close meets such as counties, which really came down to a .03 time difference, we fought hard in every meet and in every race. That's all I can ask for. They represented themselves and their town well and have a lot to be proud of," Coach Knight said.

Although they captured only one first place in the UCT, the Blue Devil boys turned in a number of fine per-

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David B. Corbin (Late December 2018 files) for The Westfield Leader and The Times

IN THE SPOTLIGHT FROM THE START...Freshman Roan Baker proved that he had star qualities for the Blue Devil boys swim team right from the start. Later in the season at the Meet of Champions, Baker, Tom Brennan, Zach Youssef and Cooper Prieto placed eighth in the 200-medley relay.

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