

# Norton area 'Sports Year in Review'

By DICK BOYD

Sports produced many positive headlines and stories, except for one death of a living sports legend, in the Norton area during the recently completed year of 2006.

**Highlights**

• For the first time in Norton's long history of wrestling excellence, Norton Community High School's wrestling team, under the expert guidance of head coach Bill Johnson, won the Class 3-2-1A state tournament for the third year in a row.

Norton's domination of a field of 224 of the best wrestlers from all over the state was so overwhelming that the Blue Jays had enough points at the end of one day of competition to earn the state tournament title.

Last year's Norton team compiled a 15-3 overall dual record, which included a perfect 8-0 dual record and championship of the Mid-Continent League. The Blue Jays won their third straight Hoxie Invitational championship, third J.R. Durham Invitational championship in a row, seventh MCL Tournament championship in a row, Panther Classic in Phillipsburg for the third straight year and the Regional Tournament for the second consecutive year.

Norton's biggest victory prior to the state championship was their second straight championship of the prestigious Newton Tournament of Champions. Until Norton first won the tournament, no team from a school smaller than Class 5A had won the championship in the long history of the tournament.

The Blue Jays who competed in the state tournament, their grade, weight, place and season record were: Clay Madden, senior, 119, champion, 39-1; Luke Pfannenstiel, senior, 152, champion, 33-6; Lance Roe, senior, 160, champion, 37-1; Nathan Broeckelman, junior, 125, champion, 40-2; Zach Bainter, freshman, 112, second, 24-3; Jeremy Harding, senior, 145, second, 27-5; Kent Mann, junior, 130, third, 29-8; Blake VanEaton, junior, 140, third, 35-9; Jon Harding, senior, 135, fifth, 32-14.

Madden is the first wrestler in Norton history to win four state tournament championships. His career record is a phenomenal 128-10.

• Bruce Graber, Norton Community High School football and track coach for 11 years, resigned to accept a head football coach and teaching position at El Dorado High School, a Class 4A school east of Wichita. During coach Graber's tenure in Norton, his football teams compiled a record of 88 wins and 23 losses for a 79 percent winning record. Graber-coached Blue Jay football teams were Mid-Continent League champions six times and qualified for state playoffs six times, reaching the sectional championship game twice.

Coach Graber's track teams won four league championships. In the state track meet, his athletes earned state championships in ten events and his track athletes earned 45 additional medals in the state track meet. As a team, Norton finished in the top five in the state track meet on two different occasions during coach Graber's tenure.

• With the departure of head coach Graber, assistant coach Lucas Melvin moved up to the head football coaching position and guided his Blue Jays to a 7-3 record, a tie for second place in the Mid-Continent League and runnerup in the District and Bi-District.

One of Norton's losses was 14-3 to three-time Class 2A state champion and Mid-Continent League foe Smith Center in the season opener. For the past two seasons, the Redmen had outscored opponents by more than 40 points per game.

Norton's only other losses were to state-ranked Phillipsburg, whom they tied for second in the league, and defending Class 3A state champion Southeast of Saline, coached by former Norton player Pat Haxton.

• Norton Community High School girls basketball coach Kevin Jilka and Blue Jay boys basketball coach Doug Reusink both reached their 400th coaching vic-



Norton senior tailback Blake VanEaton had a stellar offensive and defensive performance during the Blue Jays' 44-6 win over Plainville. Shown here breaking loose for one of his long gains, VanEaton rushed for 155 yards on 12 carries and was the leading tackler from his linebacker position. At the conclusion of Norton's 7-3 season, VanEaton was elected Most Inspirational Player for the second year in a row. Shown blocking for VanEaton is senior fullback Chris Davis.

- Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

tory during the season. They were honored during home games ceremonies for this outstanding coaching achievement.

• The Northern Valley Junior High girls basketball team compiled a perfect 14-0 record for the season. It was their second undefeated season in a row.

• The Norton Junior High wrestling team completed another outstanding season by scoring 256 points to steamroll to the Mid-Continent Elementary League Wrestling Tournament championship.

Phillipsburg was second with 166.5 points. Sixteen Norton wrestlers medaled.

• Norton's Carl Neff had an enjoyable time returning to Pittsburg State for a reunion of his Gorilla basketball team's 50th reunion.

The 1955-56 Pittsburg State quintet compiled an impressive 17-2 record en route to the third place finish in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics tournament.

Many fond memories of the best Pittsburg State basketball team in the history of the college surfaced for Neff during the reunion, which included ceremonies honoring the team.

• The Norton Community High School boys and girls basketball teams both completed another successful season.

The Norton boys, under head coach Doug Reusink, placed second in the annual Mid-Continent League Tournament, finished fourth in the league race and compiled a 12-8 season record.

Head coach Kevin Jilka's Norton girls quintet had eight returning letter winners, four of whom were starters. They were undefeated until losing to Ellis in the Mid-Continent League Tournament championship game. They lost only one other game, in the substate tournament, and ended the season with an outstanding 18-2 record. The Lady Jays went unbeaten to win the regular season MCL championship.

• New Kansas State University head football coach Ron Prince was the featured speaker for the annual banquet of the Norton Area Chamber of Commerce on March 6 in the Norton American Legion Hall.

After an enthusiastic speech, during which he said he was glad to be back in Kansas after coaching back East and encouraged Kansans to be proud of their state, coach Prince answered questions about the Wildcat football program. He acknowledged that Terry Petrie of Norton is a member of the team.

• The Norton Community High School girls track team won the championship of the Mid-Continent League track meet and the Blue Jay boys were the league

runnerup team this season.

The Norton girls track team placed second and the Blue Jay boys track team finished ninth in the Class 3A Regional Track Meet in Ellsworth.

Norton qualified 11 athletes in 12 events for the state meet in Wichita.

The Northern Valley and Logan High School track athletes competed in the Class 1A Regional Track Meet in Hays.

Seven athletes from Logan and three from Northern Valley qualified for the state meet.

Marcus McKenna of Jennings, who runs for Hoxie, also competed in the regional meet and qualified for the state meet.

Placing in the state meet for Norton were Laura Lee Baird, second, 400 meter dash; sixth, 800 meter run; Hayli Bozarth, third, discus; seventh, shot put; Chelle Donovan, fourth, pole vault; Lance Roe, sixth, pole vault; Blake VanEaton, third, 400 meter dash.

Logan's Tim McElroy won the discus and placed fifth in the shot put at the state meet. The Lady Trojans' Bethany Clements placed seventh in the 800 meter run.

• Norton Community High School senior Dane Krizek won the individual championship of the Class 3A Regional Golf Tournament in Phillipsburg and his Blue Jay team placed third. Krizek continued on to compete in the state tournament in Hesston. It was Krizek's third trip to the state tournament.

• Norcatour's Chance Harman won the saddle bronc riding championship in the Great Plains College Regional on May 6 to qualify for the National College Rodeo Championship in Casper, Wyo. on June 10-17.

Harman, who is a scholarship rider for Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, Curtis, Neb., has two state high school championships to his credit, as well.

• Competing in the annual U.S. Jaycees/Daisy International BB Gun Match Championships for the 38th out of 41 years, the Norton

County Rotary BB Gun Team lived up to previous Norton teams' winning tradition by placing eighth overall out of 39 teams competing in July on the campus of Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Ky.

The Norton team of young marksmen, between 8 and 15 years of age, placed fifth in the written test of gun safety knowledge and 13th in shooting. Dustyna Sprigg was Norton's top shooter with a 380 x 400 and ranked No. 7 among all shooters. With her test score of 98 x 100, she placed 11th overall.

• The Norton Lady Storm won their first three games and lost their final two to place third in the three-day Girl's 18 and Under Fast Pitch Class C State Softball Championship Tournament in Topeka in mid-July.

Norton's final season record was 16-10.

Kirk Foley was the head coach and Darin Campbell was the team manager. Assistant coaches were Erin Hill and Maggie Foley.

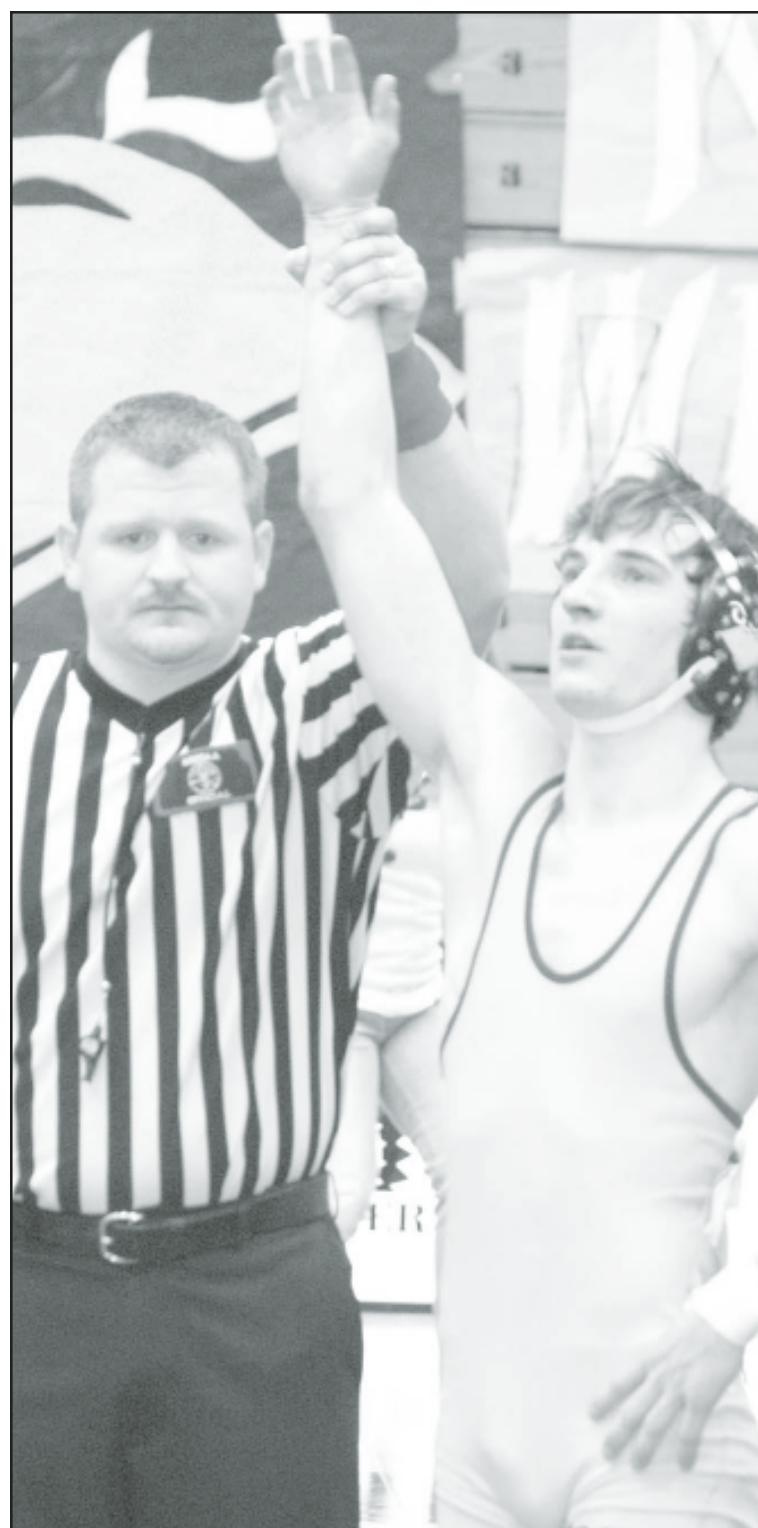
• The Norton K-18 baseball team compiled a 4-2 record in three days of games to place fourth in the Sub-Regional Tournament held July 14, 15, 16 in Plainville. The finish qualified Norton for the Regional Tournament held the next weekend in Russell. The Blue Jays lost to No. 2 seeded Colby in the first game and completed an outstanding 17-10 season.

Colby won the tournament and advanced to the state tournament in Lucas.

Ward Foley was the head coach. His assistant coaches were Lamont Shirk, Dave Bainter and Mike Terrell.

• Norton's Laura Lee Baird was a member of the 4 x 800 meter relay team which placed fourth in the 15-16-year-old division in the USA Track and Field National Junior Olympics held July 16 at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Md.

Earlier, the quartet won gold medals in the Missouri Valley Championship in Emporia and the Region Nine Championship in Lawrence.



Wrestling official Travis Steele held Norton Community High School senior Clay Madden's hand high moments after he won the 119 pound state championship in Gross Memorial Coliseum in Hays. Clay made Norton history by becoming the only wrestler in the Blue Jays' long and storied program to win four state championships! He was 39-1 his senior year and his career record was a sterling 128-10.

- Courtesy photo by David Steinfeld

• The Northwestern area team of young women athletes placed second in the Class C Women's Adult Fast Pitch Softball Tournament held July 22 in Topeka.

Members of the team from Norton were Maggie Foley, Erin Hill and Allison Foley.

\* Norcatour's Eldon Auker, possibly the best all-around athlete ever to come out of the state of Kansas, died on August 4. He won a remarkable nine varsity letters in three sports at Kansas State College. He was All Big 6 in all three sports — baseball, football and basketball — and chosen as a second-team All American at quarterback by the legendary sportswriter Grantland Rice.

After graduation, he pitched for more than a decade in the major leagues. Until his death, he was the last man alive to have struck out the legendary Babe Ruth.

Auker last visited his native Norcatour in May 2000, when he spoke at the dedication of a new downtown park named in his honor.

Auker is a member of the Kansas State Sports Hall of Fame and the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame.

• In the battle of undefeated junior high footballers, the Norton Blue Jays shutout visiting Smith Center 20-0 on Oct. 5 in Norton. Head coach George Rossi had one word to describe the victory, "Awesome!"

• Coach Deyton Hager's Norton boys cross country runners won third place and the two Lady Jays ran well, too, in the Class 3A State Cross Country Meet on October 28 in Wamego.

Blue Jay sophomore Zach Bainter placed ninth individually and sophomore Laura Lee Baird placed tenth.

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