

Messalonskee, Waterville in ‘B’ North final

BY LARRY MAHONEY
BDN STAFF

The Messalonskee High School Eagles lost five regular season hockey games this season.

That's four more than they lost the previous two seasons combined as they went 41-1 and marched to back-to-back state Class B hockey championships.

HIGH SCHOOL HOCKEY

But coach Joe Hague's 13-5-2 Eagles, the third seed, are back in the regional final where they will take on top seed Waterville, 17-1-1, at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Alford Arena on the University of Maine's campus in Orono.

Coach Dennis Martin's Panthers, whose only loss came at the hands of Class A North finalist Lewiston, swept the Eagles in their two regular season games 6-5 and 7-2.

The victor will take on the winner of Wednesday night's Class B South title game between No. 2 Gardiner, 15-4-1, and top seed Yarmouth (15-4) in Saturday's 1 p.m. state final at The Coliseum in Lewiston. Yarmouth beat Gardiner 2-0 in a mutual season-opener on Dec. 5.

In the Class A matchups, archrivals Lewiston (15-2-2) and St. Dominic Academy of Auburn, 11-7-1, will square off at The Coliseum at

8 p.m. Tuesday in the North final. Lewiston is the top seed and St. Dom's is the No. 2 seed. That will follow the 6 p.m. Class A South final between defending state champ and top seed Scarborough (15-2-3) and No. 2 Falmouth (16-4).

The two winners will meet for the state crown at 6 p.m. Saturday at The Coliseum.

Lewiston swept the Saints 6-1 and 3-2, while Scarbor-

ough and Falmouth split their regular season meetings.

Waterville used goals by Nick Denis and Justin Wentworth and 16 saves from Justin Pinnette to eliminate Winslow in the semifinals. Michael Oliveira and defenseman Adam Roderigue had assists as Waterville unleashed a 50-shot barrage.

High-scoring linemates Brandon Nale and Jared

Cunningham led Messalonskee past Camden Hills 3-1 in their semifinal as Nale scored twice and Cunningham assisted on both and also scored a goal. Freshman Amber Kochevar made 32 stops.

Lewiston received a hat trick from Alex Rivet to beat Bangor 6-3 in their semifinal and Gavin Bates had a pair of goals to lead St. Dominic Academy past Edward Little 4-1.

Johnson showed off skills at Atlanta

BY JONATHAN INGRAM
THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The great drivers win races they have no business winning and they rarely give one away. In Atlanta, Jimmie Johnson literally took the victory from the other contenders by racing his final green flag stint longer on worn tires on a day when driving a loose, sliding car was the name of the game.

Or, on a day when a guy like Dale Earnhardt Sr., the late king of car control back in the days of bias ply tires, might have won.

NASCAR



NASCAR Sprint Cup Series driver Jimmie Johnson (left) and Kevin Harvick race during the Folds of Honor QuikTrip 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway on Sunday.

It's not as if Johnson never has contact with other drivers. But his style is far more surgical, said Dale Earnhardt Jr., who finished several car lengths back in second in Atlanta in the overtime finish. The first time Johnson caught Earnhardt Jr.'s eye was in the All-Star race at the Charlotte Motor Speedway.

"He went three wide in the middle of Turns 3 and 4 and he turned sideways and never lifted and just kind of banged," he said. "He drove the quarter panel on the guy outside and the fender (was) laid on the door of the guy on the inside and beat them both off the corner. I thought, 'Man, it's amazing the car control he has.'"

Hendrick, whose team won its first race in 1984, has been around the sport long enough to know what goes



Johnson

around comes around. His team initially had trouble beating Earnhardt Sr. to championships and the movie "Days of Thunder" mimicked the wars between "The Intimidator" and Hendrick's driver Geoff Bodine.

After coming up on "the short end of the stick" in the battles with Earnhardt Sr. in the mid-1980s, Hendrick signed Jeff Gordon, the driver who put an end to Earnhardt Sr.'s championship streak in 1995. Less than a decade later, he signed Johnson at the behest of Chevrolet's racing manager Herb Fishel, bringing the California driver from stadium truck racing to the Sprint Cup.

Since then, Johnson's tail-happy, dirt trackin' style is the closest thing on the superspeedways to Earnhardt Sr., whose combination of car control and his willingness to dare drivers to race him the same way proved a formidable combination.

In Atlanta, Johnson's one-

and-only crew chief in the Sprint Cup, Chad Knaus, once again gave the No. 48 Chevy team a tough-to-beat combination. The longest running driver-crew chief relationship since Dale Inman and Richard Petty, Johnson and Knaus stole a march on the high banks. By calling Johnson into the pits with 49 laps to go, Knaus gambled that his driver's smoothness would enable him to go to the finish on a day when pit stops generally occurred every 40 laps due to tires getting literally ragged around the edges.

Knaus made a split-second decision from the Hendrick war wagon. "I looked down at the monitors, saw where they were at, saw the lap counts, saw that we had 49 laps to go," said Knaus. "I knew that everybody was pitting at 40 laps and I was like, 'Well, we're going to see how crazy these (other teams) are and if they're comfortable making this type of call.' And they weren't, so it worked out."

College

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Coach Richard Barron's Black Bears (24-7, 15-1 AE) wrapped up a share of the America East regular-season title for the second straight year. UMaine is the No. 2 seed after losing the tiebreaker to four-time defending champion Albany (24-4, 15-1 AE).

Albany is ranked 53rd in the NCAA Rating Percentage Index (RPI) used to select and seed teams for the NCAA championships. UMaine is ranked No. 69.

That puts the Black Bears up against No. 7 New Hampshire (12-17, 6-10 AE) in the tournament opener at noon Saturday at the Events Center.

The Husson University men's team advanced to the NCAA tournament by virtue of Saturday's 94-77 victory over Colby-Sawyer. It is the fourth berth in the last six seasons and the fifth overall for coach Warren Caruso's Eagles.

Husson (21-6) begins preparing for a Friday first-round contest against Amherst College of the New England Small College Athletic Conference. The Lord Jeffs (22-5) finished as the league runners-up, dropping an 81-79 decision to Middlebury in Sunday's title game.

Amherst, the 2013 national champion, is making its sixth straight NCAA appearance.

The Husson women's team has claimed the program's fourth NCAA post-season berth, the last coming in 2011. The Eagles (21-6) ended Castleton University's two-year reign of the North Atlantic Conference with a 58-49 win on Saturday.

Coach Kissy Walker's Eagles (25-2) are headed to Montclair, New Jersey, where they'll battle Albright College (21-6) of Reading, Pennsylvania, the Middle Atlantic Conference Com-

monwealth champion.

Two other Maine schools will host first- and second-round Division III tournament games.

Bowdoin College of Brunswick (20-6), a NESCAC semifinalist, is paired against Massachusetts State College Athletic Conference winner Westfield State (20-7). Commonwealth Coast Conference titlist University of New England in Biddeford (25-3) earns a home-court bid and will face Moravian (19-7).

Saint Joseph's College of Standish (23-5), the Great Northeast Athletic Conference winner, also will be at UNE, where it takes on Christopher Newport (22-4), an at-large pick from the Capital Athletic Conference.

UMaine's Vann gains AE honor

Issac Vann of the University of Maine was the only player honored when the America East men's basketball season awards were announced on Monday.

Vann, a freshman from Bridgeport, Connecticut, was named to the America East All-Rookie squad. The 6-foot-6 forward averaged a team-leading 15.8 points and was second in rebounding with 5.8 per game.

Vann, who missed 13 games because of an ankle injury, shot 45 percent from the field and paced the Black Bears with 41 percent (20-for-49) from the 3-point line. He also made 77 percent of his free throws.

He also averaged 1.7 assists and 1.6 steals while playing 27.9 minutes per game.

Jameel Warney of Stony Brook was chosen the Kevin Roberson Player of the Year for the third consecutive season and claimed his second straight Defensive Player of the Year honor.

Joe Cremo of Albany took home two honors, claiming Rookie of the Year and the Sixth Man award. Stony Brook's Steve Pikiell is the Coach of the Year.

Finalists

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He was a second-team all-state selection as a sophomore. He now leads the team in scoring with 10 goals and eight assists while averaging 27 minutes per game. He also is involved in the community serving as a mentor at the local elementary school and volunteering at multiple youth hockey clinics and activities. He has experienced success in the classroom posting a 3.5 GPA. He plans to play Junior Hockey

next season as he continues toward his goal of playing college hockey.

The Maine Class A Coaches Association will announce the Roy winner at its annual awards banquet March 13 at the Ramada Inn in Lewiston.

The award is named for Travis Roy, a former Yarmouth resident and North Yarmouth Academy standout who was paralyzed on his first shift in his first game at Boston University when he crashed into the boards. He lives and works in Boston and is a motivational speaker who works with a charity named after him.

Cimbollek

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Maine Public Broadcasting Network administrators said in November 2015 the network couldn't carry the regional semifinals and finals because the addition of a fifth class, Class AA, left them shy of resources to handle the extra coverage.

A problem occurred, also, in the imbalance of several classes: Class B North boys and girls with 17 teams each, Class C North boys and girls with 18, Class C South boys with 18 and C South girls with 21. The other classes, A through D, averaged just 12 to 14 teams.

However, there were some positives resulting in the new format.

More teams, 24, qualified for the tourney, and more officials were able to work games.

The new class names of North and South, instead of

East and West, are more accurate designations, and it also was refreshing to see Portland-area teams actually have to travel for some tourney games to Augusta after their opponents had hit the road in many past tourney years.

It's unlikely that change will occur from the new five-class format for the next season, but based on my past experience serving on the Maine Principals' Association's Classification Committee and my years as an athletic director, I would recommend the Maine Principals' Association move back to four classes and divide them up evenly.

There are 71 boys and 71 girls teams in the North and 65 boys teams and 67 girls teams in the South. The breakdown should be four classes of 18-18-18-17 in the North and then 16-16-16-17 for South boys and 16-17-17-17 for South girls.

I realize this won't solve the so-called problem of a

team on the low end of enrollment in a class facing a team on the higher end of enrollment.

However, basketball uses only five players at a time, compared to football-soccer and field hockey's 11, and baseball's nine. Team depth for basketball is not as big an issue, and an enrollment difference is not as difficult to successfully compete in basketball.

Remember the Hampden Academy boys dropped down a class this season after dominating what is now Class AA for the past four seasons.

For other schools, the Fort Fairfield boys and girls teams moved from Class D to C and were at the bottom of Class C enrollment figures, but the girls finished first in the Heal points and the boys were second.

The Houlton girls also moved up a class, from C to B and captured their second straight state title, and the Orono boys moved from C to

B and advanced to the regional final.

Other teams not bothered by moving up were the Oceanside and Medomak Valley boys teams, which both moved from Class B to A where Oceanside beat Medomak in the regional final.

Whatever format is in place, it's likely that all schools will never be totally pleased with it, especially those at the bottom of the enrollment ranges in each class.

Bob Cimbollek is a retired high school basketball coach and athletic director.

Coverage

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night before it was fixed, and the Class A girls game between Lawrence of Fairfield and York lost the video for much of the second half.

Morrissey explained that during the York-Lawrence game, the problem was that its streaming service adopted a new policy that allowed for "just one stream per account."

"We didn't know about it, and it wasn't an issue until the second half of the game," he said. "We called tech support and they told us we could

only have one stream at a time. So the MPBN team quickly opened a second MPBN account and it was smooth sailing from that point on.

"Other than that, the broadcasts were flawless," said Morrissey. "Our slow motion and instant replay worked well. We were getting 3,000 to 4,000 viewers watching each of our live-streamed games."

MPBN will receive the TV numbers in March.

Morrissey said a collaboration with the Time Warner Cable Network and the New England School of Communications was very helpful in their ability to cover the 10 state championship games at

the Cross Insurance Arena in Portland, the Augusta Civic Center and the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor.

MPBN representatives let the MPA know last November that they couldn't carry the regional semifinals and finals this season because the addition of a fifth class, Class AA, left them shy of resources to take care of the extra coverage.

But they did eventually reach an agreement with the MPA to carry the state championship games and Morrissey said they were able to use their own personnel and hire freelancers to provide complete coverage of the 10 games.

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