

Falling into fall sports

By Amanda Liu
STAFF WRITER

Cross Country

The cross country team ended a successful season, placing third at the DCC Championships.

Despite difficult course conditions at the county championships, the team saw several stellar performances. Senior captain Leoluca Cannuscio placed seventh at Counties, the first Blair boy in 27 years to finish top-ten. At Regionals, Cannuscio placed fourth and junior Leah Kannan placed fourteenth, while the girls' team qualified for States. At States, Cannuscio finished thirteenth.

Cannuscio attributes the team's success to their increased effort in practices.

"We were working really hard last year, but we're cranking that up a notch even this year," Cannuscio said. "We've been putting [in] a lot more energy than [in] past years, which just means we're working before and after practice."

However, the team also suffered some setbacks: The boys' team missed the cutoff for the state championships by only six points at Regionals. Nonetheless, Cannuscio remains optimistic about the team's future performance.

"We'll still have the opportunity to do really well during outdoor and indoor track and have the season that we know we're capable of," Cannuscio said. "We're going to have to refocus for next year and not only qualify for States but be one of the top three teams in the county."

Key players: seniors Leoluca Cannuscio, Rebecca Wessel, juniors Leah Kannan, Gabe Worthington, Melina Worthington



EMORY BROOKS

RIISING TO THE OCCASION Blair volleyball players scramble to score a point on Sherwood.

Girls' Volleyball

The girls' volleyball team battled through a tough season of injuries for a record of 11 wins, eight losses, and one tie. According to senior captain Katheryn Wang, many players suffered injuries throughout the season. As a result, the team lost a lot of time shifting players around and adapting to the resulting changes.

"A lot of our practices have been [spent] adjusting to fill the spaces... people have had to play a lot of positions that they aren't used to," Wang said.

The team also spent the earlier part of the season adjusting to their new coach, Chris Liang. Nonetheless, the players soon "picked up speed," according to Wang.

Another significant change for the team this season was the addition of taller players, which has affected their playing strategy.

"Historically we've been a really short team... we never really focused on blocking because we were not tall enough to block," Wang said. "But now we actually have blockers, so we've had to adjust, and the defense... now they [have] to account for the blocking that's actually happening."

Key players: seniors Megan Burke, Catherine Rodriguez, juniors Olivia Freer, Lucy Martin, freshman Samantha Rodriguez



AVERY BROOKS

ON THE DEFENSIVE Blair soccer players face off against their opponents in a match.

Boys' Soccer

The boys' soccer team ranked first in division 4A North with six wins, four losses, and three ties. In the playoffs, the team won against Paint Branch 1-0, but fell to Urbana 0-1 in their second game. Nonetheless, senior captain Gilberto Ramirez believes that the team saw significant improvement from last season. He attributes this success to an increased focus on team bonding, leading to a greater overall feeling of cohesiveness.

"I think this season we played more as a team," Ramirez said. "We played as a family this season, we were close to each other... so I think that's the most important thing."

During practices, the team primarily focused on basic skills such as shooting and passing.

Ramirez also noted that the team's strong sense of spirit contributed to overall positive gameday experiences. "We have people from different countries... for the games... people bring different food from their culture[s]," Ramirez said. "We [do] themes before every game."

Moving forward, Ramirez hopes to expand the diversity of team members. "I want to invite more Hispanic people to be on the team because we only have four players that are Hispanic," Ramirez said.

Key Players: seniors Henok Azene, James Madden, James McGhee, Gilberto Ramirez, Htoo-eh Redford-Maung Maung, juniors Silas Ritsma, Walter Sosa

Girls' Soccer

The girls' soccer team won the 4A North division title, ending their season with nine wins, six losses, and two ties. Junior Noa Dorah said that the team played less competitive schools at the beginning of the season, boosting their record, before playing more challenging teams later on. The team won their playoff game against Sherwood 2-1, but lost to Urbana 0-4 in the second round.

Dorah said that the team worked on specific skills in practice to improve game performance. "We do a lot of shooting... and corner drills," Dorah said.

Leading up to games, the team discussed the opposing team's strengths and weaknesses to work around accordingly.

Although the season went well, Dorah believes that the team still has room for improvement. "We've lost some games that we definitely should have won... but we're definitely better than last year," Dorah said. She believes improvement can come from increased focus and effort during both practices and games.

One challenge that the team will face next year is adjusting to the loss of players who currently hold leadership positions. "We need to figure out who's going to be the voice on the field," Dorah said.

Key Players: seniors Sneha Ojha, Rachel Shereikis, juniors Zoe Abramson, Nieve Barry, Rachel Dey, freshman Marlee Ginyard

Football

The football team ended the season with six wins and four losses. Though this is the same record they ended with last year, they managed it with key members of their team

out with injuries. Senior captain Brandon Ntankeu attributes the team's rough start to the season in part to these injuries.

"In comparison to last season and previous seasons, it could have been way better," Ntankeu said. "We didn't really have a running back... until the Einstein game."

Nevertheless, the team did its best to battle through difficult games, improving as the season progressed. Ntankeu said that the team worked hard in practice to improve upon its performance.

"Since last year all we really did was learn our plays better, understand everything better, and work out more, get stronger," Ntankeu said. When their season resumed this year, the team placed increased emphasis on individual player performance in practice, as well as figuring out how to time their plays correctly, according to Ntankeu.

In terms of future performance, Ntankeu believes there is still room for improvement.

"Moving forward for next season, our team could probably improve by getting stronger, faster, and overall just knowing what to do on the field," he said.

Key Players: seniors Caleb Francois, Maada Kposorwa, Xavier Moses, Olyfride Okombi, Pablo Perez, Kyle Smith, junior Samuel Johnson IV

Field Hockey

The field hockey team finished the season second in their conference with a record of seven wins, four losses, and one tie. Senior captain Adelaine McDonough said that the team worked on both mentality and conditioning to improve their performance, defying negativity and low expectations from other teams.

"I think people like to think that we're not as strong [of a program] as some of the upper county schools, to which I would say we are and we've proven that multiple times," McDonough said. "Our record this year has shown that we're really competitive... [so we're] just working on maintaining that [mindset], that we can beat anybody in the county."

As for physical endurance, McDonough said, "We've done a lot of conditioning, [we're] running every day." They have also spent time on simple mechanics. "We're working on stick work every day," she said.

McDonough believes that the team's success is partly due to their well-rounded roster and ability to play cohesively. "Overall, I think we work really well as a team," McDonough said. "We like to say the team is only as good as the weakest player, and I think we don't have any weakest players."

Key Players: seniors Adelaine McDonough, Zoe Roberts, junior Merete Oakes, sophomore Emma Smith, freshmen Amelia Lettre, Margaret Spire



YEKATERINA VAKHROMEVA

DOWN THE FIELD Freshman Margaret Spire pulls around a rival player in a field hockey game.



YEKATERINA VAKHROMEVA

HITTING 'EM HARD Blair handball players maneuver to gain possession of the ball.

Handball

The handball team achieved a second place ranking in Division II, with a season record of four wins and two losses. The team won their first playoff game against Magruder, and senior captain Martin Nuvaga attributed this win to the team's strong defense. Though the players put up a good fight against Whitman in the county championships, they ultimately lost by one point.

Nuvaga said that the team saw lots of improvement from last season. "Last season we didn't make playoffs, so... to even make the championship game is a really massive [improvement]," Nuvaga said.

The team started off the season with two consecutive losses but built up momentum leading into playoffs. Nuvaga believes the team's later success was due to increased team spirit and cohesiveness.

"Early on in the season we didn't really know each other... we didn't really trust each other," Nuvaga said. "After that, we started bonding... before games, even after practice."

Nuvaga also credits the team's success to its new players and increased effort in practices.

"We had more turnouts for tryouts this year, and I believe... the chemistry of the team was much better. We definitely worked more on our defense," Nuvaga said.

Key Players: seniors Alya Hall, Martin Nuvaga, Ary Strauss, junior Zane Shafer, sophomore Adam Noyes

Golf

The golf team ended the season with a record of 11 wins and four losses to place second in Division II, an improvement from last year's third place. Senior captain Ryan Cho said that though this season was more challenging than last year, the team still managed to have a successful record.

Cho said that in practice, the team worked on both technique and strategy. "There's range practice, where we just go to a driving range and we practice our swing," Cho said. "But for the most part... we just play nine-holes and... try to improve our score."

Cho said that consistency is especially important to a sport like golf and believes that the team could still improve in that area. "If you make a single mistake, it's really easy to just snowball into a really bad score," Cho said. "Most of the reason why we got second to [Richard Montgomery] would be consistency and just not playing as smart as them."

Nonetheless, Cho said that the team has been improving consistently for the past four years. He believes this improvement is largely due to the fact that "the players themselves have stuck with the team and [have] been practicing every single year."

Key Players: seniors Ryan Cho, Max Edminster, Pattara Kijlerkittikul, junior Jack Woodward

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with QO
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A look at Blair
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SPORTS



SEOYOUNG JOO

