Girls athlete of the week // The Post-Gazette's top female performer from the past seven days



Olivia Cernuto Southmoreland soccer

The past week: Cernuto scored the winning goal in a 2-1 victory against Brownsville Oct. 1 and had five goals in a 10-2 victory against Uniontown Oct. 3.

Check this out: Cernuto, a 5foot-6 sophomore forward, is one of the leading scorers in the WPIAL, tallying 21 goals in the first eight games for Southmoreland. This comes after scoring 16 goals as a freshman. Cernuto helped Southmoreland to an 8-0 start after the team was 3-10 last year. Cernuto also is a talented

basketball player, averaging 11 points and making all-section last year as a freshman for a team that made it to the WPIAL Class 4A championship. She also runs track. Cernuto's brother, Zach, is the starting quarterback for Southmoreland's football team, and Cernuto's mother, Amber, will be Southmoreland's girls basketball coach this season. Seriously, after going 3-10 last season, did you really expect this? No, I didn't. I don't think anyone expected it, really.

What's the reason? I think our

Girls soccer notebook

By Ken Wunderley

Tri-State Sports & News Service

section match, but it had

special meaning for Roland

Laurita and his daughter

Belle Vernon played host

to Hempfield in a girls soc-

cer match Sept. 30 and the

Leopards pulled out a 2-1

nally scheduled for the

opening weekend of the sea-

son, but was postponed due

to the coronavirus," said

Roland Laurita, the first-

year head coach at Hemp-

field. "It would have been

my first official game as a

head coach. I was a little dis-

appointed, because I didn't

know whether it would be

match was rescheduled, be-

cause it gave him a front-

row seat to watch his

daughter Izzy, a senior at

Belle Vernon who is consid-

ered one of the top players

"I tried to treat it as if it

Laurita was glad the

rescheduled.'

in the WPIAL.

"The match was origi-

victory.

It may have been a non-

coach (Josh Pajak) is a big part of it. He's putting us in positions where we can excel. The team is a lot better this year and we really mesh well together.

You're only a sophomore, but what's the best moment of your high school career so far? Honestly, just this whole sea-

son. It's been crazy.

Where do you think your future is? I could see it in soccer and basketball, or even track. **OK**, what would you like your future to be in? Probably basketball

Any pressure to choose one **sport?** Sometimes, but I feel like, whatever sport is in season, that's what I'm dedicated the most to.

Where's the pressure come from to choose one sport, coaches? Yeah, probably. They all want me to work at that one to get better.

Your mother will be your bas**ketball coach this year. Have** you ever played for her before? She's been my coach almost every year since I was little. So, what will the rides home from practice and games be

like now? I mean, I don't think any different than when she is just in the stands. Did you ever play any touch football with your brother and his friends growing up? Yeah. My cousins and him always played football together and I always played with them. Just in this past year, me and my brother would sometimes go to the football field and I would run some routes for him. So, you're his practice re-

ceiver? Sometimes — if he

can't get anyone else. — By Mike White Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

SOCCER **SCORING LEADERS**

(Through games played Oct. 4)

BOYS Eben McIntvre. Charleroi Anthony DiFalco, Franklin Regional

Rowan Kriebel, Quaker Valley Keller Chamovitz, Quaker Valley Elijah Cincinnati, Trinity Dane Beller, Mars Blake Cooper, Franklin Regional Carlo Denis, Greensburg C.C. Joey Folino, Serra Catholic Chase Yopp, New Brighton Julian Hays, Bentworth Rutger Randall, Keystone Oaks Daniel Sassak, Belle Vernon Keegan Amos, West Allegheny Austin Arnold, Chartiers-Houston Ryan Gehring, O.L.S.H. Billy Lawrence. Springdale Landon Mohney, Butler Johnny Dragisich, West Allegheny Jake Guerrini, Burrell Andrew Rodriguez, Southmoreland Lucas Toohey, Mount Pleasant Anders Bordoy, Kiski Area Ryan Edwards, Quaker Valley Luke Giger, Thomas Jefferson Sam lacovangelo, Charleroi Cannon Kuchinick, Plum Riley Kutschbach, Chartiers Valley Devin Murray, Deer Lakes Jordan Taylor, Jeannette T.J. Braun, Trinity Christian Dom Dezort, North Catholic Dylan Greggs, North Catholic Michael Ngugi, Thomas Jefferson Michael Sullivan, Deer Lakes Zack LaValle, Seneca Valley Zach Lorenz, Franklin Regional Tyler Nymberg, Mars Nolan Agostoni, Latrobe Evan Burry, Riverside T.J. Cherry, Seton LaSalle Mason Fabean, Greensburg C.C. Micah Guevara, Beaver County Christian Alex Hauskrecht. Winchester Thurston Morgan Kost, Trinity Christian Julian Kroger, Beaver County Christian Nabil Lahlou, Mars Morgan Madison, Monesser Marcelo Majano, West Mifflin Joey Moeller, Baldwin Nick Nagy, Belle Vernon Joe Obeldobel, Yough Jack Sella. Thomas Jefferson Bobby Serafin, Sewickley Academy Nate Witkowsky, McGuffey Riley Zimmerman, Norwin Nick Almeter, Serra Catholic Brendan Ash, Norwin Vince Belice, Indiana John Bence, Aguinas Academy Billy Christafano, Franklin Regional Dan Gormley, South Fayette Jay Hessler, Freedom Robbie Hrabosky, Elizabeth Forward Zach Johns, West Mifflin Zachary Kautter, Central Catholic Seth Kingsland, McGuffey Garrett Paxton, Freedom Tyler Switalski, Waynesburg Tyler Wellman, Steel Valley Riley Wirth, Brentwood Joe Anania, Shady Side Academy

Ryan Shantz, North Catholic Ethan Snyder, Norwin Jack Staley, Bishop Canevin Jerzy Timlin, Bentworth Gabe Viszlay, Hampton Donovan Woytsek. Elizabeth Forward Caleb Yuricha, Norwin

GIRLS

Kelsey Salopek, Steel Valley Olivia Cernuto, Southmoreland Renae Mohrbacher, Freedom Jillian Butchki, Belle Vernon Mary Kate Lape, Connellsville Reagan Schreiber, Bentworth Bella Carroto, Charleroi Tessa Dellarose. Brownsville Paige Kuisis, Seton LaSalle McKenzie Pritts, Yough Hannah Henn, Oakland Catholic Ashlyn Basinger, Waynesburg Natalie Merrick, Eden Christian Mallory Schreiber, Bentworth Mikaela Small. Seton LaSalle Ava Wert, Avonworth Madeline Boulos, Deer Lakes Alyssa Clutter, Trinity McKenzie DeUnger, Charleroi Gracie Dunaway, Mars Morgan Einodshofer, Belle Vernon Mackenzie Evers, West Allegheny Sara Felder, Greensburg C.C. Ashley Horvath, Char-Houston Isabella Laurita. Belle Vernon Mackenzie Leeder, Mount Pleasant Emily Cooper, Waynesburg Elsa Gordon, Sewickley Academy Krystal Phouthavong, Steel Valley Olivia Stetz, South Allegheny

Lucia Wells, North Alleghenv Emily Bonelli, Apollo-Ridge Jagime Dermotta, Serra Catholic Taylor Klingensmith, Southmoreland Farrah Reader, Belle Vernon Macrina Robb, Knoch Natalie Beinlich, Elizabeth Forward Ellie Coffield, Mars Tatum Gretz, Greensburg C.C. Kaitlyn Killinger, Plum Julie Mohrbacher, Freedom

Gina Proviano, Plum

Alexa Taylor, O.L.S.H

Jocelyn Gratchic, Connellsville

Tatum Hoffman, Ligonier Valley

Ashley McAdams, Deer Lakes

Tessa Charpentier, Bentworth

Nevaeh Hamborsky, Connellsville

Anna Resnik, Elizabeth Forward

Jayden Sharpless, North Catholic

Sydney Stahl, Keystone Oaks

Angelina Berkey, North Catholic

Grace Billmann, North Catholic

Maura Heberle, South Side Beaver

Maya Wolford, Penn Hills

Leah Brockett, Burrell

Kavlee Elwood. Kiski Area

Malia Kearns, Penn-Trafford

Ava Kovscek, Brownsville

Mia Lowry, Waynesburg

Melia Peer, Mt. Lebanon

Natalie Vilchek, Yough

Bella Schueltz, Ligonier Valley

Lauren Kirsch, Bishop Canevin

Sabrina Knox, Aguinas Academy

Natalie Lamenza, Thomas Jefferson

Mackenzie Taranto, West Allegheny

Caroline Wroblewski, Mars

Bella Meder, Serra Catholic

Jessica Molitoris, Montour

Ruby Rojas, West Mifflin

Saveria Ulizzi, Montour

Chloe Weiland, Butler

Hannah Biros, Yough

Maddie Delucio, Latrobe

Katelyn Ferrence, Ringgold

Soraya Gibbs, Steel Valley

Madison Hurst, Hampton

Samantha Miller, Butler

Jamie Seneca, Plum

Katelyn Kauffman, Norwin

was just another game, but deep down she is my daughter," Laurita said. "Our goal was to win the game, but we Sarah Schupansky, North Allegheny came up short. Alyssa Wright, Char-Houston

Izzy Laurita played a big part in the victory by assisting on both goals.

"It was kind of weird playing against my dad," she said. "He's always coached me and rooted for me, but this time he was on the other side of the field I'm glad we got to take advantage of this opportunity, but I wish we could have done it together."

Laurita was not expecting to see his daughter play much this season, due to his coaching responsibilities and COVID-19 restrictions Fortunately, that hasn't been the case.

"I actually got to see her play four times last week." Laurita said. "Monday [Sept. 28] was senior night at Belle Vernon and we had a junior varsity game. My assistant agreed to coach the team so I could attend Vernon also had games on Tuesday and Saturday and I was able to attend after our practice.



Laurita family getting their kicks

Matt Freed/Post-Gazette

Belle Vernon's Izzy Laurita, left, works against Connellsville's Emma Tikey Monday at Belle Vernon.



Photo submitted It's a soccer family for Hempfield coach Roland Laurita and his daughter Izzy, who plays for Belle

I've also been able to see her other games on live stream so I'm not missing her senior year."

Izzy Laurita broke into Belle Vernon's starting lineup as a freshman and scored 12 goals. As a sophomore, she was one of the top scorers in the WPIAL with 33 goals and 20 assists. Last season, she stepped away from high school competition after three games and four goals to train with the Pittsburgh Riverhounds ECNL club team.

"My decision to not play

high school soccer last year wasn't easy, but I wanted to maximize my training during those months on the field and in the weight room," she said. "I was also concerned with the possibility of a serious injury."

Laurita committed to University of Memphis prior to last season, but changed her mind early this

"I visited Georgia State the day before the corona virus shut everything down, she said. "It was perfect timing. I met with the coaches and toured the campus all day and loved everything about my visit."

The corona virus shutdown convinced Laurita to come back for her senior year at Belle Vernon.

"I hadn't played since February and wouldn't be playing club ball until November," she said. wanted to play for my senior year and I'm glad I

Laurita has switched from forward to midfielder this season and has 12 goals. Belle Vernon entered Wednesday's match at Albert Gallatin with a 7-2 record in Class 3A Section 2 and 9-2 overall.

Shady Side Academy

Shady Side Academy started the season 12 days later than other schools, but it wasn't due to a COVID-19 shutdown.

"Our school decided to wait an additional two weeks to start the season to minimize our possible exposure to the virus," Shady Side Academy coach Mary Lynch said. "They wouldn't even let us hold a scrimmage, but we were allowed to practice."

Shady Side began its season Sept. 26 after four weeks of practice. That means the Indians will play 11 games in 24 days — 10 section matches and one non-section encounter with Fox Chapel.

"It's a condensed schedule, but the girls were excited to get the season started," Lynch said. "Having so many matches in such a short amount of time could have been a problem, but we have a large group of returning players, including seven seniors who have provided great leadership."

Shady Side has moved up to Class 2A after being the most dominant team in Class 1A since a third class was added in 2010. The Indians won four WPIAL titles and placed second once during that 10-year stretch.

"I started here as an assistant in 2010 and took over as head coach in 2013,' Lynch said. "We're in a new class and a new section, but the girls are up for the challenge. We just have to stay healthy with such a condensed schedule."

The Indians have continued their success in Class 2A by winning four consecutive matches, including Saturday's 3-0 win against Burrell, which was ranked No. 5 in the WPIAL.

The top returnees for Lynch are senior midfielder Melissa Riggins and junior forward Gabby Hill. Hill recorded five goals in the first three games, while Riggins had four. Riggins, a two-time PIAA track champion, has accepted a scholarship offer to play both sports at Georgetown.

Boys soccer notebook

Seth Basinger, Connellsville

Matt Bucha, Chartiers-Houston

Luke Del Rosso. Central Catholic

Sam Farner, Shady Side Academy

Alex Hyrcza, Aquinas Academy

Michael Osekowski, Avonworth

Heran Pradhan, Brentwood

Thomas Ruffcorn, Brownsville

Connor Schmidt, Seneca Valley

Ben Betz, Brentwood

Chris Brancato, Moon

Liam Dale, Springdale

Bishal Damai, Avonworth

Zach Dirling, Brentwood

Aaron McKelvy, Indiana

Liam Nichols, Hampton

Brady Eisel, Ambridge

D.D. Flowers, Plum

A.J. Coma, Plum

South Park riding its stingy defense toward postseason

By Keith Barnes Tri-State Sports & News Service

South Park has been a perennial championship contender for more than a decade and this year is no exception. Every year, it seems the

Eagles find a different way to beat teams. This season, it's all about back-third dominance.

"We're playing really well defensively and everything we do comes from the back," South Park coach Jon Cantwell said. "We're led by two

senior center-backs that have been starters since they were freshmen and they have a ton of experience in the back for

Those two defensive specialists, Jason Luffey and Peyton Pauline, have been such impressive stoppers it's been almost impossible to generate an attack against the South Park goal. So far his season, the Eagles have only allowed three goals,

have not allowed more than one in a game and have six shutouts.

Luffey and Pauline are certainly two huge reasons why South Park (9-0-0) is among the early favorites as the regular season winds down and teams begin preparing for the WPIAL Class 2A playoffs.

"They see the game well," Cantwell said. "And, really, everything kind of starts with them.

As good as the defensive players are, any team that has this kind of success has to have a solid person in the net behind them. In the case of South Park, the team has two as senior Logan Thomas, the starter last year, has split time with junior Preston Cecotti.

And by split time, it's divvied up about as evenly as it can be. Each goalkeeper gets a half each game.

"We're fortunate to have two starting goalkeepers, which most people would love to have," Cantwell said.

"We're blessed there and they're both very different in their styles of play and, as we look ahead to the postseason and what we need in a specific game, we can choose which goalkeeper to use depending on the opposition. We're fortunate to be able to do that."

Having two goalkeepers has been a necessity considering how compressed the campaign has been. Because of the COVID-19 delays, the season opened Sept. 14 and will end Oct. 15. To cram that many games into a 31-day span and remain undefeated not only is a testament to the team's skill, but also its

Still, even though South Park has clinched a spot in the playoffs, the team cannot afford to take its foot off the pedal. The Eagles have a challenging week coming up with three Section 1 games — Keystone Oaks, Elizabeth Forward and Avonworth—all of which came into this week as

potential playoff squads.

"We have a tough week ahead. We play third, second and fourth place in our sec-[respectively] and, honestly, I'll put our section up against any in Double-A," Cantwell said. "I think, one through four, all four of those teams are capable of winning a playoff game and to me, we're going to play three potential WPIAL quarterfinalists next week and there's really no better way to prepare yourself."

Norwin Prior to the season, Norwin was, at best, an afterthought when it came to the best teams in the WPIAL.

Now, with a week remaining in the regular season, the Knights have the appearance of a Class 4A contender.

"The way we're approaching it is that we're trying to be three goals better than everyone else," Norwin coach Scott Schuchert said. "We're just trying to dominate, which

takes all the factors out of it. Norwin has allowed only four goals in its seven games and all came in, at least, a four-goal victory. The Knights also have four shutouts, including its first blemish Monday when it concluded a 0-0 tie with Allderd-

ice in a Section 2 matchup. "We had a lot of opportunities, but we just couldn't find that goal," Schuchert said. "We tried a lot of different directions, too. I think this is one of those games, as a coach you try to learn things."

Norwin has a strong presence in the middle with a four-year starter in midfielder Ian Brown, junior center-back Caleb Yuricha, who has a surprising six goals, and junior goalkeeper Andrew Yanez.

Norwin, like so many teams, had its entire schedule crammed into about a month and is trying to find a way to keep its players fresh down the stretch. Playing 13 games in 36 days does not

give the body much time to recharge, which brings training and endurance into question for every squad that has hopes of a WPIAL and, potentially, a PIAA playoff run.

"I think the length of play is critical and we shortened the length of practices," Schuchert said. "Shorter practices mean we have to maximize the time when kids are there and, I think earlier in the season, we had those two-and-a-half-hour practices but now we just want to give them proper rest."

Norwin is also preparing for the postseason with a finale against a Mars squad that is a favorite to win Class

"It's an unfamiliar opponent and I think that's some of the things that we might down the road,' Schuchert said. "We need to see teams we're not familiar with and we're looking toward a great challenge.