

NORTH COAST SECTION TEAM CHAMPIONS – BVAL FALL SPORTS

Cross Country, Boys

1964 – Pittsburg

The 11th year of the NCS cross country championships would be the final one where the schools were split into eight groups, and included many schools at the time which are now part of the Central Coast Section. The Pirates were in Group 3, which was actually comprised of schools in the sixth-highest enrollment classification.

After finishing third in the same grouping a year earlier, this time the Pittsburg runners successfully navigated the two-mile course at San Mateo College, led by a strong performance from sophomore Howard Carter, who placed third out of the 61 runners in the field. He was followed closely by Sherman Carter, Jr. and Ed Pena, who placed fourth and fifth overall for the Pirates. Pittsburg placed five runners in the top 10 of the field, finishing with an astonishingly low team score of 31 points, 24 points better than second-place Newark.

1966 – Pittsburg

In the year after the Pirates won their 1964 NCS Group 3 title, the section underwent a massive change in structure for the cross country championships. Beginning in 1965, the NCS conducted two separate weekends of championships, first holding the Division Championships, and then the Meet of Champions, comprised of teams which qualified from their respective divisions. In the first year of the format, Pittsburg finished second in Division II and then fifth in the Meet of Champions race. In 1966, the Pirates went for it all.

First, Pittsburg won the Division II race at Acalanes, beating defending champion Pleasant Hill by 12 points. Howard Carter placed third in the field to lead a contingent of four Pirates who all finished in the top 11 runners. Ed Pena placed seventh, George Alfaro finished 10th and Mike Brisbane placed 11th to round out a strong quartet. Buck Black was the final Pittsburg placer, finishing in 22nd place.

The next weekend, the Pirates held off the Rams once again, but this time on Pleasant Hill's home course at the Meet of Champions. Carter was Pittsburg's top finisher, running 9:28 to place 11th on the two-mile course, but the Pirates' superior depth carried them to victory. Pena finished 12th in an identical time, Brisbane was just one second behind to place 16th, Alfaro came across the line just one second later to finish 18th and Black made it all five Pittsburg runners in the top 20 with his time of 9:31, for an amazing spread of just three seconds between the top five Pirate runners in the pack.

1998 – Antioch

The Panthers scored just 52 points in the NCS Division I championship race, beating second-place Mission San Jose by 14 points. Three Antioch runners placed in the top 10, including top-three finishes from Steve Nunez and Chris Hernandez. Craig Avis added an eighth-place finish, making it a trio of Panthers who all finished the difficult three-mile course at Newhall Park in under 17 minutes, while Jahnathan Larson placed 13th in the field.

Cross Country, Girls

1999 – Antioch

With two runners in the top four and all five scorers placing in the top 18, the Panthers cruised to the Division II title, beating second-place San Ramon Valley by 31 points on the Hayward High course.

Standouts Janie Nolan and Christine Perez finished in second and fourth, respectively, to pace the dominant effort. Meanwhile, the trio of Stephanie Nunez, Katie Wallace and Angela Flood all finished within 30 seconds of each other to round out the top five Panther harriers.

The success of this phenomenal group did not stop at the NCS Championships. The Panthers went on to place third at the CIF Division II Championships, as the top team from Northern California in the division. Nolan added a second-place finish on the Woodward Park course at the state meet, stymied in both her post-season races only by the outstanding runs turned in by Sara Bei of Montgomery-Santa Rosa.

2002 – Deer Valley

Led by a third-place finish from senior Jessica Daley, the Wolverines edged Monte Vista for the Division I title, beating the Mustangs by four points.

Daley led the way with her time of 18:51 on the three-mile course at Hayward High, while fellow senior Heather Scott added a top-ten finish, placing eighth overall for Deer Valley. But it was the depth of the Wolverines which carried them to the team title. Junior Tamara Torlakson placed 15th in the field, followed by a top-25 finish from senior Melissa Monte. Despite those four strong performances, Deer Valley and Monte Vista were in a dead heat for the title after 26 runners had crossed the finish line.

With the championship coming down to which number five runner would finish first, the Wolverines got the needed boost from junior Miranda Donaldson, who finished just three seconds behind Monte to place 28th overall, 10 seconds and four spots in front of the fifth Mustang runner to clinch the team title for Deer Valley.

Football

1980 – Pittsburg

Three years earlier, a Mission San Jose team led by linebacker Gary Plummer claimed the NCS 4A title by beating Antioch in the title game. This time, the Warriors fell short against the Panthers' rivals, as Pittsburg claimed its first section title with a 14-7 victory over MSJ.

Second-year head coach Larry Rodriguez led the Pirates to a semifinal win over Kennedy-Richmond, 20-13, before they turned their attention to the Warriors, in a game played at the Oakland Coliseum. The end result was the second straight one-score post-season victory for Pittsburg, which roared back throughout the season after getting blown out by Wooster-Reno in its season opener. After blanking Tokay a week later, the Pirates lost by one point to Mitty, 7-6. It would be the team's final defeat of the season.

After a mid-season tie against Northgate, Pittsburg reeled off five straight wins to finish the regular season, including a 21-20 win over Antioch in the Big Little Game. The defense was then especially stifling in the playoffs, holding Kennedy to three rushing yards and 110 total yards of offense before then limiting Mission San Jose to 179 total yards of offense in the title game.

1985 – Pittsburg

At the start of the season, it did not appear that the Pirates would be headed to the section playoffs, much less play for a NCS 3A title. After missing out on the 1984 playoffs due to a coin flip, Pittsburg dropped its first two games of the season, falling to Tracy and El Cerrito. A win over Christian Brothers-Sacramento triggered a five-game win streak, but a 10-0 loss to Clayton Valley put the Pirates into must-win mode just to make the eight-team playoff bracket.

Pittsburg did just that with a 13-7 win over College Park and a 19-14 win over Antioch in the Big Little Game, turning up its rushing attack in both games as a precursor to the post-season. After being held to just over 100 yards rushing in the loss to Clayton Valley, the Pirates ran for over 200 yards in each of their final two regular season victories.

As the playoffs opened, Pittsburg turned repeatedly to that ground game, rushing for 218 yards in a 21-14 quarterfinal win over Kennedy-Richmond, while holding the Eagles to just 63 yards on the ground. Ron Polk added a 42-yard punt return for a score. In the semifinals against Washington-Fremont, the Pirates controlled the line of scrimmage once again, rushing for 215 yards and completing just one pass during a 17-7 victory, while the defense did not allow a yard during the second half and Robert Hosmer drilled a 45-yard field goal.

That led to a rematch with Clayton Valley in the 3A title game at the Oakland Coliseum. Running backs Donald Ray Hines and Lee Dongallo combined with quarterback Mike Crespo to provide a different performance on the ground this time, rushing for 208 yards, including a long touchdown run from Dongallo. With just over two minutes to play, Hosmer hit a 35-yard field goal that proved to be the difference in a 15-12 victory.

Amazingly, the 1985 championship run was also Pittsburg's first post-season appearance since winning the 1980 title, despite an 8-1-1 mark in the 1981 campaign.

2017 – Liberty

When the North Coast Section created an Open Division for the playoffs in the 2016 season, the Bay Valley Athletic League took immediate advantage. Freedom reached the Open Division in 2016, while Antioch reached the Division I title game before falling to Monte Vista. In 2017, Pittsburg was in the Open Division after winning the BVAL and Liberty grabbed its opportunity in Division I, storming to a title and laying the foundation for a state title run in the following season.

The Lions did fall to Pittsburg during league play in 2017, snapping what had been a seven-game win streak at the time. In the following game, its regular season finale, Liberty survived a thrilling shootout with Freedom, 37-35. The game knocked Freedom out of the conversation for the final berth in the Open Division and placed the two rivals as the top two seeds in the Division I bracket.

The top seed gave the Lions a first-round bye, and they then hosted rival Heritage in the quarterfinals, after the Patriots throttled defending champion Monte Vista in the first round. The regular-season game between the rival schools had been decided by three points, 17-14, when Liberty's defense stopped Heritage at the one-yard line in the final seconds of the game. The playoff rematch was not as dramatic, as sophomore quarterback Jay Butterfield threw for 231 yards and three touchdowns in a 35-15 victory.

The semifinals featured the second of three straight rematches for the Lions, this time hosting a San Leandro team they had beaten by seven points in the regular season and was coming off a quarterfinal win over Foothill. Once again, the rematch did not hold the same drama, as the Liberty defense held the Pirates scoreless in the second half and pulled away for the 34-12 victory, as junior Tyerell Sturges-Cofer topped the century mark and ran for a pair of scores.

The title game was the final rematch, and a much-anticipated one against Freedom, especially after the first game had been decided by a mere two points. But the rematch never lived up to billing, as Liberty pulled away rapidly in the second half, using a 255-yard performance on the ground from Sturges-Cofer and a stifling defensive effort to post a 37-0 win for the Division I title, in head coach Ryan Partridge's first season at the helm.

The dominating performance in the section title game proved to be some foreshadowing of what was to come for Liberty, which would end up going undefeated in the regular season in 2018, and then after falling to De La Salle in the NCS Open Division title game, would end up beating Valley Christian-San Jose and Sierra Canyon-Chatsworth to claim the CIF 1-A title.

Volleyball, Girls

2003 – Liberty

Prior to the 2003 volleyball season, no school in the North Coast Section had ever won three straight section titles in the highest enrollment classification. Over the next three seasons, that would change, thanks to a dominant run by Liberty High.

Before the playoffs started in 2003, however, few would have predicted that the Lions would start their run to greatness. They finished behind Carondelet and Deer Valley in the BVAL standings, and received the four seed in the Division I playoff bracket, with Deer Valley holding the top seed; Carondelet was the top seed in the Division II title game, where it would lose in the championship match. But the seedings would matter very little in the post-season, as the Lions found their stride under head coach Linda Ghilarducci and began a tremendous run of playoff success.

In 2003, the run started with a dominating three-set victory over five seed Newark Memorial in the quarterfinals, including a 25-9 first-set win over the MVAL runner-up. That led to a rematch with Deer Valley in the quarterfinals, after the Wolverines trounced Monte Vista in the quarterfinals. This time, however, it was all Liberty on the court, as the Lions not only upset Deer Valley, but did so in three straight sets, winning 25-20, 25-23, 25-16 to reach the title game.

In the championship match, the Lions faced three-seed Castro Valley, which had knocked off MVAL champion and two-seed James Logan in a five-set thriller in the semifinals. Liberty wouldn't be able to sweep the Trojans as they had done to Newark Memorial and Deer Valley, but a four-set victory in the title game was handled in pretty dominant fashion, as the Lions held Castro Valley to 18 points or fewer in each of their three winning sets, prevailing 25-16, 16-25, 25-17, 25-18 to capture the program's first NCS title.

Liberty followed up its first NCS championship by then turning back Live Oak-Morgan Hill in a five-set thriller in the CIF NorCal Division I quarterfinals before falling to regional power Nevada Union-Grass Valley in the regional semifinals.

2004 – Liberty

After winning the program's first NCS title the previous season, the Lions continued improving in 2004, winning eight more games during the regular season despite finishing as the runner-up to Carondelet in the BVAL standings. But the post-season would end up exhibiting the phenomenal strength of the league, as Carondelet wound up winning the NCS Division II title without dropping a single set and the Lions once again rode the four-seed in the Division I bracket all the way to a section title.

Liberty's quarterfinal match in the playoffs featured a familiar opponent, hosting five-seed Deer Valley. After a tough first set against the Wolverines, the Lions pulled away to the four-set victory, winning 24-26, 25-13, 25-20, 25-22. That led to a rematch of the 2003 title match, heading to top seed Castro Valley, which had captured the HAAL regular-season title and beaten California-San Ramon in the quarterfinals. Once again, the Lions had the edge over the Trojans, this time eliminating the top seed in straight sets, winning 25-22, 25-13, 25-20 to set up a title match showdown against EBAL champion Amador Valley.

In the championship match, Liberty's quest for back-to-back section crowns was nearly derailed as the Lions dropped the first two sets to the host Dons, including a heart-breaking 28-26 setback in the first set. But Liberty put on a comeback for the ages, turning a two-set deficit into a five-set victory. The comeback started with a dominant 25-12 win in the third set, and that momentum led to a 25-21 victory in the fourth set, setting up a winner-take-all tiebreak fifth set for the section title. The Lions then became the first repeat Division I champions since Anly in 1997-98 with a 15-11 victory over the Dons.

Like the previous season, Liberty received the four seed in the CIF NorCal Division I playoff bracket. This time, the Lions swept their way past San Benito in the quarterfinals before once again bowing out to eventual NorCal champion Nevada Union-Grass Valley.

2005 – Liberty

By the time the 2005 girls volleyball season rolled around, there was no sneaking up on anyone for the Liberty Lions. The two-time defending NCS Division I champions already had a bulls-eye on themselves, one which grew in size as they captured the BVAL title and snagged the top seed in the Division I playoff bracket.

Liberty opened its post-season run with a dominant three-set quarterfinal win over MVAL champion James Logan, which had swept Berkeley in the first round. The Lions then were faced with a post-season rematch against Amador Valley, which would have loved nothing more than to exact revenge for the previous year's title match loss by ending Liberty's three-peat hopes. The veteran Lions, however, jumped out to a 2-0 advantage and then shook off a loss in the third set to put away the Dons, winning 25-22, 25-18, 23-25, 25-22.

The Division I championship match at Liberty featured not only the best team over the past three years, but also a glimpse of the best team in 2006, as Foothill-Pleasanton would win its first 38 matches the next year to capture a section title and reach the state championship. But in 2005, the two-seed and EBAL champion Falcons were still coming into their own, and facing a Lions' squad which featured senior standouts such as Allison Cecchini, Kelley Quinn, Nicole Anderson and Tanya Alvino, to go with junior blocker Leanna Richey.

The Division I championship match between the top two seeds lived up to billing, in front of a packed and raucous crowd in Brentwood. The crowd turned up the noise as Cecchini dominated the attack in the first set, won easily by the Lions, 25-13. But Foothill showed it would not go away easily in the second set, as junior middles Betsy Sedlak and Felicia Willoughby established their presence during a 25-16 victory. Liberty grabbed control again during the third set, winning 25-15, but Foothill refused to break in the fourth set, prevailing 25-21 to set up a deciding tiebreak set. Alvino provided a steady hand for the Lions with her passing at the net, and the senior attacking trio of Cecchini, Quinn and Anderson put the match away with a 15-11 victory to claim the program's third straight NCS Division I title, the first Division I school to ever win three straight.

After the section playoffs, Liberty earned the two seed in the CIF NorCal Division I playoffs. The Lions easily dispatched Yuba City in the quarterfinals, winning 25-14, 25-9, 25-19, and then ousted San Benito for the second straight year, this time in the semifinals, winning 25-18, 25-15, 15-25, 25-19. That led to a showdown for the third straight year with top seed Nevada Union-Grass Valley. Unlike the previous two matches, which occurred in the semifinals, this time it would be for the title, though once again taking place on the Miners' home court. The Lions, however, displayed their grit on the road.

After dropping the first set, Liberty won a set against Nevada Union for the first time in three years with a 25-21 victory in game two. The third set went to extra points, with the host Miners pulling out a thrilling 27-25 victory. But the Lions roared back in game four, prevailing 25-23, and then dominated the tiebreak set, winning 15-9 to reach the first CIF final in school history. Liberty would end up falling in three sets to SoCal power Los Alamitos in the state final, but nearly beat the Griffins in the first set. Cecchini and Quinn were both named to the CIF all-tournament team.

Two years later, the accomplishments of this Liberty team, and its three-year run of excellence, would get recognized once more when head coach Linda Ghilarducci would be recognized as the CIF Model Coach in the sport of volleyball.

Water Polo, Girls

2018 – Heritage

After winning its third straight BVAL title, the Patriots had an opportunity much like Liberty's football team in 2017, after water polo adopted an Open Division for its top overall teams. The first year of the Open Division resulted in Heritage earning the number two seed in the Division I bracket.

After a first-round bye, the Patriots bolted to an early lead against Clayton Valley in the quarterfinals, played at Northgate High. Heritage scored four times in the second quarter to build a four-goal lead at the half, on its way to the 8-5 victory over the Eagles. Sophomore Kayla Longoria led the attack with three goals, while sophomore Ella Simone added two goals and two assists and junior Emma Lapum had three assists. The win over Clayton Valley then meant that the Patriots would get to host their semifinal game, facing three-seed and rival Liberty, who they had defeated in a pair of close matches during the regular season.

Beating a good team three times in one year is a difficult task, and the game appeared that it would be close once again. After Heritage built a two-goal lead in the first quarter, both teams executed offensively in the second quarter and the Patriots still held a two-goal at the half, 7-5. But the third quarter was all Heritage, led by the lethal scoring ability of Simone. The Patriots outscored the Lions 6-0

in the quarter, and Simone would finish the night with eight goals and two assists, as Heritage cruised to the 17-10 victory and a trip to the NCS Division I title match. Longoria and senior Maddie Bursch added three goals each in the win over Liberty.

The finals were originally scheduled for just two days later, but poor air quality due to fires up north resulted in numerous delays, until it was determined that the title game could take place at Berkeley High's indoor facility. The Patriots squared off against top seed College Park for the championship, having lost to the Falcons during the regular season.

The first half was close, with College Park by a goal after two quarters, 4-3. The Falcons extended their lead to three goals during the third quarter, but unlike the last time the two teams met, the final seven minutes would belong completely to Heritage. The Patriots cut the deficit to two goals before the start of the fourth, trailing 6-4 headed into the final quarter. Heritage would then outscore College Park 5-0 in the final period of play, emerging with the 9-6 victory and the Division I title.

Having won the Division I title, the Patriots were slated to advance to the CIF NorCal tournament, but poor air quality across the region resulted in the cancellation of the regional championships.