

The Thunder roll

WSU finally finding success on ice

There's a storm brewing on the horizon of the Macomb Area Conference White Division. Actually, make that thunder, as in the Warren-Sterling United Thunder boys ice hockey team.



Fred Costello

SLAP SHOTS

but a similar scenario seems to be taking shape for the Thunder, called WSU by those around the rink.

Until this season, the Thunder was comprised of players from Warren-Mott, Cousino and Sterling Heights high schools. The Marauders for the first time this season fielded their own team.

Historically, WSU hasn't made much noise in the MAC. The team was fifth in the division in 2005 and placed sixth in '06 and '07. Three straight times they have been bounced from the playoffs in the first round – two by way of shutout.

So what would make them think the 2008 season would turn out any differently? Enter senior goalie Willy Mistretta.

The Cousino student opted not to participate in travel hockey this season, instead joining the Thunder between the pipes as well as the Cousino football team.

His on-ice arrival was felt immediately.

It's not often that a turning point in a hockey season comes in a team's third or fourth game of the year. After two tough losses to open the season, WSU went out to Grand Rapids for a Thanksgiving tournament. The

Even with our successes they don't get too up or too down.

— Warren-Sterling United ice hockey coach Andy Peraino

Thunder dominated their opening game on the strength of a Mistretta shutout against Bay City, then topped Rochester 4-3 in the title match.

"Willy came up with a number of big saves in the championship game," WSU coach Andy Peraino said. "It kind of turned our season around. We came back and started playing against the guys in our own league and we put together a nine-game unbeaten streak."

What a difference strong goal-tending can make.

To hear Peraino tell it, the Thunder may be able to put together the finest season in school history based on Mistretta's ability to shut down opposing offenses.

"He keeps us in every game," Peraino said. "He doesn't give up many rebounds and he handles the puck well in our end. He does not give up any weak goals. He makes the saves he's supposed to make and some of the ones he's not supposed to. It's a tremendous lift having him back there."

WSU is enjoying its most fruitful season to date. The Thunder is 9-3-2 overall and an impressive 6-1-1 in the division. Their 13 points has them fourth in the MAC White, however, the teams above them have played as many as four more divisional games.

All that means is the last month of the season is make or break time for WSU.

And not all of their hopes lie on Mistretta's shoulder pads.

Peraino views his five seniors

Power Five

The county high school power rankings

1. Dakota – High-powered offense was on display against Romeo
2. Utica – Winning at Shores proved this team is for real
3. WSU – Thunder are 9-1-2 in their last 12 games
4. Stevenson – Got their revenge against L'Anse Creuse
5. Ford – Still managing to fend off L'Anse Creuse atop the MAC White

— FRED COSTELLO

as the core of the team. Forwards Tom Farrah, Mike Billotti and Adam Kramer make up the bulk of the team's offensive attack. Along the blueline, stalwart Drew Kwart teams up with sophomore Kyle Kozey to anchor the defense. Mistretta is the fifth senior in the group.

Statistically, Farrah leads with 26 points, followed closely by Billotti with 24 and Kramer, who has scored 20 points through 14 games. Sophomore forward Marty Case is also edging close to the 20-point mark.

Peraino also made it a point to highlight the strong play of sophomore forward David Pomaville.

Like any team that does not have a history of winning a ton of games, WSU is still finding an identity. Peraino said his group – half of which are freshmen and sophomores – has a tendency to play down to its competition at times. He's noted their ability to keep a level state of mind though.

"Even with our successes they don't get too up or too down," Peraino said. "We don't have any wild swings in emotion. The boys come to play every game. We're just looking for that same consistency the whole year. In the second half of the season we've got to take care of our responsibilities and capitalize."

What the coach most wants for



Photo courtesy of Warren-Sterling United hockey

Members of the Warren-Sterling United hockey team. From top left Mike Billotti, Adam Kramer and Tom Farrah. Bottom left Drew Kwart and goalie Willie Mistretta.

this group is to win that elusive playoff game. Making things extremely difficult has been first-round matchups against Stevenson, St. Clair Shores Unified and U-D Jesuit in the past three seasons. Yet as we've seen already, the Thunder is capable of pulling out an underdog win, as they did Jan. 3 in a 6-5 win over division-leading Ford.

Peraino also hopes for more fan support. Unfortunately for WSU, they play at Hazel Park's Viking Arena, which is obviously not an idea location for players who hail from schools in Warren and Sterling Heights. That said, he has noticed an ever-increasing amount of interest in the team, from both the student body and the administration at the respective schools.

Peraino is not lost on the fact that high school sports are a cyclical beast. Obviously, the team will not have Mistretta, Farrah, Billotti and company to shoulder the load next season. Under-

standably, his mind is on the here-and-now. The way the Thunder have come together, it's hard to blame him. They're in ripe position to make a run at their first division title and having fun doing it.

With apologies to the NHL on VERSUS marketing staff: Could this be the year of the perfect storm?

— Send comments or county player of the week nominations to macombdailyhockey@yahoo.com

Games of the Week

The county's best matchups this week

Warren-Sterling United vs. Romeo, Friday; 7 p.m. at Suburban Macomb

St. Clair Shores Unified vs. Chippewa Valley, Saturday; 4:25 p.m. at Fraser

Dakota vs. Eisenhower, Saturday; 7 p.m. at Suburban Macomb

L'Anse Creuse North vs. Ford; Saturday; 7:50 p.m. at Fraser

Lamphere vs. L'Anse Creuse; Saturday; 8:25 p.m. at Fraser

New coach hopes to uphold pool tradition

'For me to be a part of it is an honor and a pleasure,' coach says.

By Tom Willard
Macomb Daily Sports Writer

First-year head coach Brendan Pfaff thinks his swimmers and divers at L'Anse Creuse High School could be a sneaky bunch this season, taking other teams by surprise.

"The thing we have going for us is we're a little below the

county radar," said Pfaff, noting that the Lancers are under-represented on In the

Wake, a running list of the top reported times in Macomb County, published weekly in The Macomb Daily (see below).

"But realistically, we're holding a lot of cards in our hand that people don't know about," he said.

L'Anse Creuse had a stacked deck in 2007, winning the county meet and nearly beating perennial power Grosse Pointe South in the Macomb Area Conference Red Division meet behind an octet of talented seniors that included three-time all-county standout Pat Alfes and Alex Waghensals.

"The amount of talent we lost is hard to fathom," said Pfaff, a 1998 Warren Woods-Tower graduate and former Utica Shelby Swim Club coach who replaces Brent Nielubowicz at the helm for the Lancers. He inherits a



Macomb Daily staff photo by David Dalton

L'Anse Creuse swim coach Brendan Pfaff instructs his divers during a recent practice. Pfaff takes over a team that lost eight seniors from last year, when the Lancers won a county meet title.

squad with 14 rookies, which presents some considerable challenges.

"These are the guys who've never swum before, never competed in the sport of swimming and before November couldn't do a flip-turn to save their lives," said Pfaff, who is encouraged by his group nevertheless.

"The nucleus of guys we've kept (is) a talented bunch," he said. "We still have a few aces up our sleeve and our talent continues to emerge. The challenge will be if the freshmen this year can step up to the level the (older) swimmers are at now."

Kyle Harp, who has already qualified for the state meet in the 100 backstroke, and fellow co-captain Jon Rodgers lead a talented group of swimmers that also includes Eric Platte and Sean Stepaniak. Senior Matt Or-

tisi, meanwhile, is one of Macomb County's elite divers and shattered the school record by scoring 236 points against Grosse Pointe North in a narrow dual meet loss Jan. 15.

Pfaff said he hopes to uphold the winning history that his predecessors, including now-retired coach Jack Lucas, forged at L'Anse Creuse.

"I have to give a lot of credit to the guys ahead of me coaching because they've done some amazing things," said Pfaff. "My goal is to send a few guys to state and keep up the proud tradition. For me to be a part of it is an honor and a pleasure."

The Lancers (2-1 overall) are currently 0-1 in the MAC Red but could surprise in the division, with most eyes on Romeo and Eisenhower as the Macomb County contenders, according to Pfaff.

In the Wake

200 Medley Relay			500 Free		
Romeo (Tyler Laurain, Derek Raska, Devon Compeau, Mike Glinski) 1:44.24 \$	Chippewa Valley (Andrew Scheibe, Patrick Blanz, Kevin Schieders, Michael Arena) 1:48.85 #	Eisenhower (Kevin Galemeau, Phil Hohnstadt, Alex Blanz, Kyle Kosciotek) 1:50.49 #	Devon Compeau 5:05.36 %	Romeo 5:05.76 %	Ford 5:11.29 %
L'Anse Creuse North (Joe Promaville, Askley Iregbu, Kevin Engelman, Rob Timmerman) 1:51.17 #	De La Salle (Mack Biggett, Kieran Scott, Mike Markham, Matt Witkos) 1:51.31 #	Anchor Bay (Aaron Shields, Andrew Leopardi, Nick Victor, Ben McVay) 1:51.96 %	Phil Hohnstadt 5:13.06 %	Chippewa Valley 5:15.12 %	Cousino 5:17.02 %
Derek Raska 1:48.05 @	Devon Compeau 1:50.18 \$	Alex Blanz 1:51.44 #	Chippewa Valley (Michael Arena, Kevin Schieders, Jeff Chew, Andrew Scheibe) 3:38.55 %	Eisenhower (Kevin Galemeau, Phil Hohnstadt, Nick Maloney, Alex Blanz) 3:39.44 %	L'Anse Creuse (Sean Stepaniak, Eric Platt, John Rodgers, Kyle Harp) 3:42.06 %
Bill Woods 1:52.49 \$	Greg Pelc 1:52.78 #	Kevin Galemeau 1:54.44 \$	Anchor Bay 3:42.76 %	Key: @ (D1 state cut), # (D2 state cut), \$ (D3 state cut), % (MISCA)	Attention: Coaches, swimmers and parents, if you want your swimmers/divers included in this report, make sure your coach has sent an MM backup file to Mike Owensby and John Pearson. Submitting MM results will assure this list is properly updated and your team is eligible for the Macomb County Championship Meet.
Derek Raska 2:01.04 @	Kevin Galemeau 2:05.64 \$	Jeremy Podgorski 2:10.18 #	Derek Raska 1:02.22 @	Patrick Blanz 1:05.25 %	Nick Victor 1:07.17 %
Zlatan Czizmic 2:11.59 #	Nick Victor 2:13.32 #	Kevin Schieders 2:13.78 %	Chippewa Valley 1:07.52 %	Anchor Bay 1:07.52 %	Jeremy Podgorski 1:08.94 %
Greg Pelc 22.01 @	Aaron Shields 22.35 #	Tyler Laurain 22.72 #	Devon Compeau 23.36 #	Derek Raska 23.37 %	Derek Raska 23.37 %
Mike Elliott 239.95 %	Matt Ortisi 207.75 %	Dayne Taylor 178.65 %	Devin Meyer 175.85 %	Winston Bradley 167.00 %	Ben Hunter 166.50 %
Derek Raska 54.84 @	Aaron Shields 55.58 #	Kevin Galemeau 55.81 #	Devon Compeau 55.83 #	Zlatan Czizmic 57.58 %	Derek Raska 49.14 @
Aaron Shields 50.15 \$	Eisenhower 50.51 \$	Greg Pelc 50.61 \$	Mack Biggett 50.81 \$	Phil Shevda 52.35 %	Aaron Shields 50.15 \$
Jeremy Podgorski 50.51 \$	Greg Pelc 50.61 \$	Mack Biggett 50.81 \$	Phil Shevda 52.35 %		
400 Free Relay	Romeo (Devon Compeau, Tyler Laurain, Christopher Fazzalari, Derek Raska) 3:29.04 #	Dakota (Taylor Burns, Alex Francisco, Aaron Flatt, Greg Pelc) 3:36.63 %	Chippewa Valley (Michael Arena, Kevin Schieders, Jeff Chew, Andrew Scheibe) 3:38.55 %	Eisenhower (Kevin Galemeau, Phil Hohnstadt, Nick Maloney, Alex Blanz) 3:39.44 %	L'Anse Creuse (Sean Stepaniak, Eric Platt, John Rodgers, Kyle Harp) 3:42.06 %
100 Fly	Romeo 54.84 @	L'Anse Creuse North 55.58 #	Anchor Bay 55.75 #	Kevin Galemeau 55.81 #	Devon Compeau 55.83 #
100 Free	Romeo 49.14 @	Anchor Bay 50.15 \$	Eisenhower 50.51 \$	Dakota 50.61 \$	De La Salle 50.81 \$
Warren-Mott 52.35 %					

BASKETBALL STATE RANKINGS

BOYS
The top 10 teams in the Michigan Associated Press high school boys basketball poll, with records in parentheses. Totals are based on 15 points for a first-place vote, 14 for second, etc.:

- CLASS A**
1. Saginaw Arthur Hill (12-1)
 2. Saginaw (11-1)
 3. Ann Arbor Pioneer (11-0)
 4. Romulus (9-2)
 5. Detroit Pershing (8-1)
 6. Orchard Lake St. Mary (8-2)
 7. Lansing Sexton (9-1)
 8. Detroit Finney (10-2)
 9. Detroit Cody (11-2)
 10. Detroit Henry Ford (10-2)

Also receiving votes: West Bloomfield (10-2), 17, Clarkston (8-2), Jackson (9-1), 12, Grand Rapids Christian (12-1), 11, Holt (9-1), 10, Westland John Glenn (10-1), 9, Battle Creek Central (9-2), 7, Flint Caman-Ainsworth (9-2), 6, East Lansing (8-2), 3, Kalamazoo Central (9-2), 3, Brother Rice (9-2), 3, Detroit North-western (9-4), 1.

- CLASS B**
1. Detroit Renaissance (10-1)
 2. Detroit Country Day (8-2)
 3. Stevensville-Lakeshore (9-0)
 4. Frankemuth (12-0)
 5. Wayland Union (10-0)
 6. Zeeland East (10-1)
 7. Marshall (10-1)
 8. Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern (9-2)
 9. Grand Rapids Central (8-1)
 10. DeWitt (9-1)

Also receiving votes: Madison (11-0), 26, Hudsonville Unity Christian (9-2), 20, Richland-Gull Lake (9-2), 12, Divine Child (8-2), 10, Zeeland West (8-3), 6, Hemlock (10-1), 5, St. Joseph (8-2), 5, Flint Powers (6-5), 5, Goodrich (9-1), 4, Wyoming Park (8-2), 2, Alendale (9-1), 1, Livonia Clarenceville (9-1), 1.

- CLASS C**
1. Kalamazoo Christian (12-0)
 2. Bath (9-0)
 3. Negaunee (12-0)
 4. Reese (12-0)
 5. Charlevoix (10-1)
 6. Ottawa Lake Whiteford (10-2)
 7. Carson City Crystal (7-2)
 8. Bangor (9-1)
 9. Flint Hamady (10-1)
 10. Detroit Consortium (8-2)

Also receiving votes: Napoleon (9-1), 18, Albion (8-3), 16, Detroit Loyola (10-2), 16, Hillsdale (9-2), 14, North Muskegon (10-1), 12, Pewamo-Westphalia (9-1), 10, McBain (11-1), 8, Academy of Oak Park (11-1), 6, Hanover-Horton (9-1), 3, New Buffalo (9-2), 1, Saginaw Nouvel (7-4), 1.

- CLASS D**
1. Cedarville (11-0), 75
 2. Wyoming Tri-Unity (10-1), 70
 3. Detroit City (11-1), 65
 4. Climax Scotts (11-0), 53
 5. Ewen Trout Creek (10-0), 52
 6. Western Michigan Christian (9-2), 49
 7. Crystal Falls-Forest Park (11-0), 47
 8. Lawrence (10-0), 37
 9. Bellaire (9-1), 37
 10. Webberville (9-1), 36

Also receiving votes: Bear Lake (8-2), 18, New Lothrop (9-1), 14, St. Joseph Michigan Lutheran (11-1), 12, Lansing Christian (8-2), 12, Painesdale Jeffers (10-1), 11, Ellsworth (9-1), 7, Mackinaw City (8-2), 4, Cooks Big Bay de Noc (8-2), 1.

GIRLS
The top 10 teams in the Associated Press high school girls basketball poll, with records in parentheses. Totals are based on 15 points for a first-place vote, 14 for second, etc.

- CLASS A**
1. Rochester (12-0)
 2. Grand Haven (12-0)
 3. Grosse Pointe North (11-1)
 4. Ladywood (11-2)
 5. Detroit Pershing (9-0)
 6. East Lansing (11-1)
 7. Saginaw Arthur Hill (10-3)
 8. North Farmington (10-1)
 9. Detroit King (6-2)
 10. Lake Orion (12-0)

Also receiving votes: Benton Harbor (11-2), 25, Ford (10-2), 18, Walled Lake Western (12-1), 15, Temperance Bedford (10-2), 11, Hudsonville (9-2), 7, Lansing Sexton (11-1), 6, Mattawan (10-2), 5, Kalamazoo Lynn North (11-2), 4, Okemos (8-4), 2.

- CLASS B**
1. Detroit Country Day (9-1)
 2. Detroit Community (13-0)
 3. Grand Rapids South Christian (12-1)
 4. Portland (12-0)
 5. Midland Bullock Creek (10-0)
 6. Ludington (11-1)
 7. Comstock Park (11-0)
 8. Flint Powers (11-2)
 9. Detroit Renaissance (10-2)
 10. Wyoming Park (10-2)

Also receiving votes: Grand Rapids West Catholic (11-2), 18, Richland Gull Lake (11-1), 15, Petoskey (12-1), 14, DeWitt (10-2), 13, Lansing Waverly (10-2), 12, Lakeview (12-1), 7, Warren Woods-Tower (10-2), 5, Tawas (11-1), 2, Holland Christian (11-2), 2, Ionia (9-3), 1.

- CLASS C**
1. Saginaw Nouvel (11-1)
 2. Ishpeming-Westwood (13-0)
 3. Flint Hamady (10-1)
 4. Kingsley (11-0)
 5. Bangor (11-0)
 6. Waterliet (12-0)
 7. Clare (11-0)
 8. Houghton (11-2)
 9. Saginaw Valley Lutheran (10-1)
 10. Allen Park Cabrini (14-2)

Also receiving votes: L'Anse (11-1), 23, Morley Stanwood (11-2), 15, Charlevoix (10-2), 8, Hanover-Horton (10-1), 8, Sandusky (12-2), 6, Grandville Calvin Christian (9-4), 2, Kalkaska (10-2), 2, Uby (9-2), 2, East Jordan (9-3), 1.

- CLASS D**
1. Mount Pleasant Sacred Heart (12-0), 75
 2. Portland St. Patrick (10-0), 70
 3. West Michigan Christian (11-0), 63
 4. Chassell (10-1), 55
 5. Central Lake (12-0), 49
 6. New Lothrop (11-1), 42
 7. Cedarville (10-1), 40
 8. Bloomfield Hills Roeper (11-2), 32
 9. Jackson Christian (10-1), 32
 10. S.J. Lake Michigan Catholic (12-2), 26

Also receiving votes: Iron Mountain North Dickinson (10-2), 24, Ontonagon (9-2), 21, Big Rapids Crossroads Charter Academy (11-1), 20, Brimley (9-2), 18, Johannesburg-Lewisville (10-2), 10, Carney-Nadeau (10-2), 7, Kingston (9-2), 6, Dryden (8-3), 3, Port Hope (9-3), 2, Manistee Catholic Central (9-2), 2, Auburn Hills Oakland Christian (9-3), 2, Crystal Falls Forest Park (9-3), 1.

Coaches please call your results to (586) 469-4771 or fax to (586) 469-2892