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CHRIS FOX PHOTO Villa Park Review

A season to remember

Earlier this year, the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) announced that girls flag football would become the 32nd sport to hold an IHSA state series. The IHSA selected Willowbrook High School as the host site for the inaugural IHSA state finals in the sport. The first IHSA state event in girls flag football took place at Willowbrook on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 18-19. Friday's action included four quarterfinal games featuring the state's eight sectional champions. Willowbrook's team earned a berth in the state quarterfinals when it won the title at the Streamwood Sectional on Oct. 16. The Warriors defeated West Aurora 16-0 in the sectional's championship game.

Willowbrook's team is pictured with its sectional plaque after last week's win over West Aurora. The Warriors' bid for an IHSA state title ended with Friday night's 13-8 loss to Whitney Young in a quarterfinal battle. Willowbrook finished its 2024 season with a record of 21-6. Palatine's Fremd High School won the IHSA state title on Saturday afternoon, defeating Rockford's Gullford High School 24-12 in the championship game in Villa Park. Whitney Young defeated Bradley-Bourbonnais 35-8 in the third-place contest. The IHSA state series in girls flag football will return to Willowbrook in 2025 and 2026.

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Ojeda wins the individual title at conference meet

Senior Amelie Ojeda of the Willowbrook girls cross-country team won the individual championship in Saturday's West Suburban Gold Conference Meet at O'Brien Park in Downers Grove. Ojeda blazed to her victory in the conference meet, finishing nearly two minutes ahead of the second-place runner.

Ojeda covered Saturday's 3-mile race in a first-place time of 17 minutes, 28.48 seconds. She finished within about one second of breaking the course record in a girls competition at O'Brien Park. The second-place finisher, Downers Grove South sophomore Gianna Lamb, completed the race in 19 minutes, 23.98 seconds.

Four other Downers Grove South runners were the next competitors to cross the finish line. The Mustangs won the meet's team championship with their 20-point total (2+3+4+5+6). Willowbrook finished second in the six-team meet's standings with its score of 62.

Senior Holly Harris (20:07.40) of

the Warriors ran to a 10th-place finish in Saturday's meet. Junior Mariangela Popoca (20:17.56) turned in a 12th-place finish for Willowbrook. Freshman Juliet Oddo (20:23.88) landed in 15th place for the Warriors, while junior Allyson Stefani (21:59.59) of Willowbrook placed 24th to complete the team's scoring lineup.

Sophomore Genevieve Kling (22:02.84; 26th) and senior Malin Meeker (22:57.06; 35th) also ran for the Warriors' varsity lineup at the conference meet.

Warriors' boys team finishes second at the WSGC meet

Willowbrook's boys team earned a second-place finish in the team standings of Saturday's West Suburban Gold Conference Meet in Downers Grove. Morton won the team title in the seven-team meet with its score of 30. The Warriors posted team score of 53. Downers Grove South placed third in the meet with its score of 58.

Senior Adriano Quintero led Willowbrook's boys team in Saturday's

conference meet with his fifth-place finish in the 3-mile race. Quintero completed the race in 15 minutes, 30.28 seconds. Junior Miteku Branch (15:46.36) earned a ninth-place finish for the Warriors, while senior Kasen Blain (16:06.96) of Willowbrook landed in 10th place.

Freshman Legend Alka (16:26.42; 14th) and senior Jake Skibbie (16:28.55; 15th) completed Willowbrook's scoring lineup at the conference meet.

The Warriors' girls and boys teams will compete in this Saturday's IHSAA Class 3A Lyons Township Regional in Western Springs.

Rams run at the Upstate Eight Conference Meet

Glenbard East's boys and girls cross-country teams competed in Saturday's Upstate Eight Conference Meet at Fenton High School in Bensenville. The Rams earned a fifth-place finish in the team standings of the 13-team boys race. Glenbard East's girls team landed in 12th place

in the 13-team standings.

Junior Mason Hephner led the Rams in the 3-mile boys race with his sixth-place finish. Hephner completed the race in 16 minutes, 4.10 seconds. Glenbard East senior Leo Contreras (16:49.50) finished 25th, while seniors Miles DePhillips (17:09.80) and Gavin McDonald (17:10.40) placed 30th and 31st, respectively.

Glenbard East freshman Teigan O'Donnell completed the 3-mile girls race in a fifth-place time of 19 minutes, 1.10 seconds.

The Rams' boys and girls teams will join 10 other teams at this Saturday's IHSAA Class 3A Lyons Township Regional at the school's south campus in Western Springs.

Ferris and Gertsen secure second-place finishes for the Broncos

The Montini Catholic boys and girls cross-country teams ran at Saturday's Chicago Catholic League (CCL)/Girls Catholic Athletic Conference (GCAC) Championships at

Loyola Academy's Munz Campus in Glenview. Montini's boys team posted a second-place finish out of seven teams in the CCL White Division standings. The Broncos' girls team placed fifth in the seven-team GCAC Red Division standings.

Montini senior Nolan Ferris ran to a second-place finish in Saturday's White Division boys race. He completed the 3-mile race in 15 minutes, 42.20 seconds. Sophomore Nino Pesola (16:10.39) of the Broncos placed fifth, while Montini sophomore Adriel Garcia (16:37.28) earned a ninth-place finish.

Junior Sydney Gertsen of the Broncos raced to a second-place finish in the individual standings of the GCAC Red Division race. She completed the 3-mile event in 17 minutes, 24.74 seconds. Montini junior Ashlyn Lindt (18:34.39) landed in seventh place.

Montini's boys and girls teams will run in this Saturday's IHSAA Class 1A regional at Harvest Christian Academy in Elgin.

Warriors earn a spot in the IHSAA's inaugural flag football state event

Willowbrook wins a sectional title to advance to the state tournament on its home field;

Warriors' season ends with a 13-8 loss in the quarterfinal round

The Willowbrook High School girls flag football program won an IHSAA sectional title last week. The Warriors defeated West Aurora 16-0 in the Oct. 16 championship game of the Streamwood Sectional to earn a berth in the inaugural IHSAA state tournament, which took place on Friday and Saturday at Willowbrook's stadium in Villa Park.

The Warriors and seven other sectional champions advanced to the quarterfinals of the state tournament, which featured four games on Friday. Willowbrook's quest for a state title ended with Friday night's 13-8 loss to Whitney Young in a quarterfinal battle.

The Warriors finished their 2024 season with a record of 21-6. Willowbrook opened the post-season by beating Conant 24-0 in a semifinal contest at the Conant Regional in Hoffman Estates on Oct. 9. One day later, the Warriors defeated Elgin 42-6 to win the regional title and advance to the Streamwood Sectional.

Willowbrook earned a narrow 20-14 victory over Addison Trail in a semifinal clash at the Streamwood Sectional on Oct. 15. One day later, the Warriors secured their berth in the state quarterfinals by beating West Aurora in the sectional championship game in Streamwood.

Addison Trail nearly tied Willowbrook on the final play of last week's post-season showdown. On the last play of that game, junior Leigh Bernardo of the Warriors pulled the flag of a Blazer who was heading toward the end zone. Bernardo pulled the flag near Willowbrook's 2-yard line to end the game. If the Blazers had scored a touchdown on the last play of the game, they could have won the contest with a successful conversion attempt.

Willowbrook junior Marli Smrz excelled on both sides of the ball during the sectional championship game against West Aurora. Smrz delivered a special defensive per-

formance by intercepting four passes. She picked off two West Aurora passes in each half. On the offensive side of the ball, Smrz—who is the Warriors' quarterback—threw a pair of touchdown passes in the win. She also fired successful two-point conversion passes after both of those touchdowns.

West Aurora drove deep into Willowbrook territory on its opening drive of the game. Smrz ended that drive with her first interception of the night. The Warriors then drove down the field and scored on an 18-yard touchdown pass from Smrz to sophomore McKenzie Edison. On the two-point conversion play, sophomore Jada Langston made a spectacular one-handed catch in the back of the end zone to extend the Warriors' lead to 8-0 with about nine minutes to play in the first half.

West Aurora turned in another strong drive on its first offensive series of the second half. Once again, Smrz ended the Blackhawks' drive with an interception deep in Willowbrook territory.

Edison made a pair of big receptions during the Warriors' scoring drive in the second half of the sectional's title game in Streamwood. Willowbrook completed the drive with a 5-yard touchdown pass from Smrz to sophomore Liz Pettinger. Smrz then connected with Edison on the two-point conversion pass.

Playing in Friday's state-quarterfinal game on their own field, the Warriors fell to an early 6-0 deficit against Whitney Young. The Dolphins scored on a short touchdown pass with about 15 minutes left in the first half. Whitney Young tried a two-point conversion pass, which failed, leaving its lead at 6-0.

The Warriors evened the score at 6-6 when Smrz tossed a 9-yard touchdown pass to Pettinger with about 10 minutes remaining in the first half. Moments later, Smrz completed a successful two-point con-



version pass to Pettinger to give the Warriors an 8-6 lead.

Willowbrook's scoring drive in Friday's quarterfinal contest covered 80 yards in nine plays.

Whitney Young regained the lead with a 57-yard drive that ended with a 4-yard touchdown pass with 2:34 remaining in the game. The Dolphins tacked on an additional point with a one-point conversion pass.

Whitney Young lost 6-0 to Rockford's Guilford High School in one of Saturday's semifinals. Fremont edged Bradley-Bourbonnais 16-14 in Saturday's other semifinal matchup. Whitney Young soundly beat Bradley-Bourbonnais 35-8 in the third-place contest. Fremont won the inaugural IHSAA state flag football tournament. The Vikings beat Guilford 24-12 in Saturday afternoon's state championship game.



CHRIS FOX PHOTOS/Rock Valley Publishing

Willowbrook's flag football team won an IHSAA sectional title last week to earn a berth in the quarterfinals of the inaugural IHSAA state series in the sport. The Warriors defeated West Aurora 16-0 in the championship game at the Streamwood Sectional on Oct. 16. Willowbrook junior quarterback Marli Smrz (No. 6 - top left) threw two touchdown passes in the victory. She connected with sophomore McKenzie Edison on an 18-yard touchdown pass in the first half. Smrz threw a 5-yard touchdown pass to sophomore Liz Pettinger in the second half. Edison (No. 3 - above) is pictured after one of the two key receptions she made on the Warriors' second-half touchdown drive. In addition to throwing two touchdown passes, Smrz excelled on defense by making four interceptions in the sectional's title game. Smrz made two interceptions during each half. Winning the sectional propelled the Warriors to the state series, which took place at their home stadium in Villa Park on Friday and Saturday. Willowbrook's season ended with Friday night's 13-8 loss to Whitney Young in a quarterfinal game. The Warriors completed their 2024 season with an overall record of 21-6.



CHRIS FOX PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Halftime performance

Members of Willowbrook High School's marching band are pictured during the band's halftime performance at last week's varsity football game between the Warriors and the Morton Mustangs. Willowbrook defeated Morton 43-6 in the Oct. 17 contest, which took place on a Thursday night to accommodate the IHSA state tournament in girls flag football. That tournament took place in Willowbrook's stadium on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 18-19. Last week's game against Morton was the Willowbrook football team's final home game of its regular season. The Warriors can clinch a berth in the 2024 IHSA playoffs if they win this week's regular-season finale at Leyden.

Stay well this winter: Vaccinate against COVID-19, flu, and RSV

To protect yourself and your family against COVID-19 and influenza (flu) this coming winter, the DuPage County Health Department (DCHD) strongly recommends everyone six months and older, especially people with chronic health conditions or who are pregnant, get their updated COVID-19 and flu vaccines this winter.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) also spreads in the winter months. Like COVID-19 and flu, RSV causes a respiratory infection that can lead to severe illness and death. Infants and older adults are more likely to develop severe RSV and need hospitalization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends RSV vaccines for all adults ages 75 and older and adults ages 60-74 who are at increased risk for severe RSV.

There are two immunizations recommended to protect infants from severe RSV: a maternal RSV vaccine given during pregnancy, or an RSV antibody given to infants after birth.

"Everyone should make a plan to get the vaccines that offer the best protection for themselves and their families. For those at high risk of severe illness, including pregnant individuals, staying up to date with immunizations for COVID-19, flu, and RSV is one of the most effective steps to protect not just themselves, but also their newborns from potentially life-threatening complica-

tions," said Adam Forker, executive director, DuPage County Health Department.

Vaccinating against COVID-19, flu, and RSV during pregnancy is important because it helps protect newborns during their most vulnerable months, when they are too young to be vaccinated.

Babies have a higher risk of severe illness and hospitalization in the first few months of life, and by getting vaccinated during pregnancy, mothers can pass on protective antibodies to their babies. The CDC reported in a study that from October 2022 to September 2023, 18 percent of infants hospitalized with COVID-19 had mothers who were vaccinated during pregnancy. This dropped to less than 5 percent from October 2023 to April 2024, showing that maternal vaccination is a key way to reduce hospitalizations and protect newborns from severe illness.

DCHD offers the updated COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines to eligible children through the Vaccine for Children (VFC) program. Call DCHD for questions about the availability of specific childhood vaccines or clinic schedules at (630) 682-7400.

Updated COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines are available through retail pharmacies and most doctor's offices—visit www.vaccines.gov to find a location near you.

As we head into the colder months,

remember to take these steps to prevent respiratory illnesses this winter:

- stay up to date with immunizations: Stay up to date with the immunizations that are recommended for you.
- Practice good hygiene: Practice good hygiene by covering your coughs and sneezes, washing or sanitizing your hands often, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces.
- Take steps for cleaner air: This can mean bringing in fresh outside air, purifying indoor air, or gathering outdoors. Virus particles do not build up in the air outdoors as much as they do indoors.
- Take precautions if you're sick: Stay home and away from others (including people you live with who are not sick) if you have respiratory virus symptoms that aren't better explained by another cause. These symptoms can include fever, chills, fatigue, cough, runny nose, and headache, among others.
- Seek medical care promptly: Seek health care right away for testing and/or treatment if you believe you may have a respiratory virus (if you feel sick or tested positive for one) and you have risk factors for severe illness. If you have flu or COVID-19, treatment may be an option to make your symptoms less severe and shorten the time you are sick. Treatment needs to be started within a few days of when your symptoms begin.

Police Reports

The Villa Park Police Department recently reported the following arrests and citations. Readers are reminded that an arrest does not constitute a conviction, and that suspects are considered innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law. Persons charged with domestic battery are not named in order to protect the privacy of victims. Juveniles age 17 or younger are not named.

Oct. 15

A complainant at a store in the 1-100 block of E. St. Charles reported at 9:42 a.m. that an unknown suspect removed items from display shelves and left without paying.

Oct. 14

A complainant at a business in the 100 block of E. North reported at 9:15 p.m. that a suspect battered them.

Oct. 12

Alexander Soto, 20, of Addison, was charged with DUI and no insurance near N. Villa and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks at 3:25 a.m.

Two victims in the 200 block of W. Roosevelt reported they were battered by a suspect.

A complainant at a store in the 900 block of S. Route 83 reported at 5:35 p.m. they were having an argument with a subject in the parking lot. A second subject reportedly exited a vehicle and approached the complainant with a knife.

A complainant in the 1-100 block of E. St. Charles reported at 12:02 a.m. that they were battered by a suspect.

Oct. 11

A complainant near E. Madison and S. Ardmore reported they were battered by a suspect.

A complainant near N. Ardmore and W. Plymouth reported at 11:04 p.m. that an intoxicated suspect approached and threatened the complainant.

Oct. 10

Zaniah M. Brown, 19, of Chicago, was issued a citation for retail theft at a store in the 900 block of W. Route 83 at 7:56 p.m.

A complainant in the 500 block of N. Ardmore reported at 12:52 p.m. that their apartment was burglarized.

Identity theft, fraud

According to information provided by the Villa Park Police Department, police reported three incidents of identity theft or fraud in the village between Oct. 8 and Oct. 15.

DuPage County Stormwater Management

accepting applications for water quality grant

The DuPage County Stormwater Management Planning Committee is accepting grant proposals for projects aimed at improving the quality of the County's waterways.

In its 26th year, the Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP) grant provides funding to projects exhibiting a regional water quality benefit, including restoration and green infrastructure projects.

"We are proud to be able to work with partners in DuPage County to continue to share costs for great projects that improve water quality," said Jim Zay, chairman of the DuPage County Stormwater Management Committee.

"Many of these projects have offset the impacts of flooding, helping to make the county more resilient."

Under the program, organizations and individuals may apply for reimbursement of up to 25 percent of costs for projects that improve water quality.

Since the grant program began in 2000, DuPage County has awarded approximately \$6.6 million to 112 projects, such as permeable paver parking lots, green roofs, and native vegetation, with \$300,000 awarded annually.

Applicants may apply virtually through a WQIP Grant Application portal.

The application deadline is Jan. 3, 2025.

To access the portal and download the WQIP Grant Application Packet, visit: https://www.dupagecounty.gov/government/departments/stormwater_management/grants/water_quality_improvement_program.php.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

From Villa Park to Ohio

The Villa Park Fire Department held its annual open house at Station 81 (1440 S. Ardmore Ave.) on Saturday, Oct. 12. The family oriented event included balloons for children. The open house did not feature a balloon release; one of the children who attended the event likely lost their balloon. A few days after the open house in Villa Park, a woman in Fremont, Ohio, found the pictured balloon in her backyard. The balloon traveled over 200 miles to Fremont, which is located southeast of Toledo.

Warriors roll to a dominant 43-6 win over Morton

Reed throws four TD passes to help Willowbrook to a 43-0 halftime lead; Warriors can clinch a playoff berth with a win over Leyden

The Willowbrook football team pounded Morton 43-6 in last week's West Suburban Gold Conference game in Villa Park.

The Warriors, who ran their winning streak to four games with the victory, improved to 5-3 overall and 4-1 in conference action. Morton fell to 2-6 overall and 1-4 in the conference.

The Warriors will finish their regular season with this Friday's conference game at Leyden (4-4 overall and 2-3 in West Suburban Gold play). Willowbrook will secure a berth in the 2024 IHSA playoffs with a win over the Eagles.

The Warriors quickly took control of their Oct. 17 contest against Morton, which was played on a Thursday night to accommodate Willowbrook's hosting the inaugural IHSA girls flag football state tournament on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 18-19. The Warriors owned a 22-0 lead over the Mustangs by the end of the first quarter. Willowbrook piled on three more touchdowns in the first three minutes of the second quarter to extend its lead to 43-0 by halftime. The halftime advantage of at least 40 points triggered a running clock throughout the second half.

Morton scored its only touchdown of the night on a short run with about eight minutes left in the fourth quarter. The Mustangs failed to convert a two-point run after the touchdown.

The Warriors drove 58 yards for a touchdown on their first possession of last week's contest, which was played in crisp and clear conditions. Willowbrook junior Anthony Leo closed out the six-play drive with a 5-yard touchdown run. Senior Dean Romano made the extra-point kick

to give the Warriors a 7-0 lead with 10:29 to play in the first quarter.

Morton prepared to punt at the end of its first offensive drive of the game. The snap sailed over the punter's head, and Willowbrook took possession at the Mustangs' 21-yard line. The Warriors' subsequent drive ended with Romano's 33-yard field goal, which raised the lead to 9-0 with 6:50 left in the opening quarter.

Junior quarterback Jahonise Reed fired a 28-yard touchdown pass to senior KJ Rhodes on Willowbrook's next offensive series. The touchdown pass ended a two-play, 46-yard scoring drive, which began with an 18-yard run by Leo. Romano's extra-point kick pushed the Warriors' lead to 16-0 with 6:50 remaining in the first quarter.

Reed's 15-yard touchdown pass to senior Troy Wisner increased Willowbrook's lead to 22-0 with 1:19 left in the first quarter. The Warriors missed the extra-point kick after Wisner's touchdown.

Reed threw his third touchdown pass of the night—a 22-yard connection with senior Charlie Siegler—in the opening minute of the second quarter. Romano's extra-point kick raised Willowbrook's lead to 29-0 with 11:03 to play in the first half.

Moments later, Morton fumbled the ball. Junior Mason Knudtson of the Warriors picked up the loose ball and ran 33 yards for a touchdown. The extra-point kick from Romano hiked the lead to 36-0 with 9:50 left in the second quarter.

Morton's next offensive drive ended with another fumble, which Willowbrook senior Jordan Pate recovered.

The Warriors' offense needed two

plays to produce another touchdown. On the first play of the drive, Reed threw a 20-yard pass to Siegler. Reed

threw his fourth touchdown pass of the game on the next play, lofting a 27-yard scoring strike to Siegler. Ro-

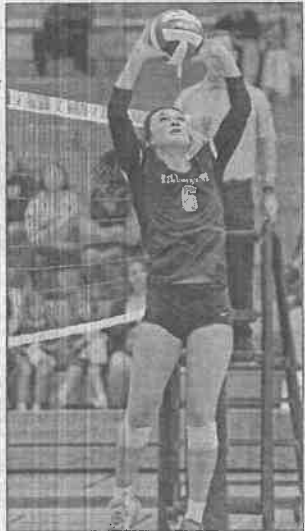
mano tacked on the extra-point kick to give the Warriors a 43-0 lead with 9:12 remaining in the first half.



Willowbrook's football team sailed to its fourth consecutive win when it defeated Morton 43-6 in last week's West Suburban Gold Conference game in Villa Park. The Warriors improved to 5-3 overall and 4-1 in conference play with their Oct. 17 win over the Mustangs. Willowbrook led Morton 43-0 at halftime. One photo from the game shows junior Mason Knudtson (above - center, holding the football) heading toward the end zone for a touchdown after he recovered a Morton fumble in the second quarter. Another photo shows senior Charlie Siegler (No. 3 - below), who caught two touchdown passes from junior quarterback Jahonise Reed during the second quarter. Reed threw four touchdown passes in the game. Willowbrook can clinch a berth in the 2024 playoffs if it wins its regular-season finale—this Friday's conference battle at Leyden.

Warriors beat the Hornets

Willowbrook's girls volleyball team moved to 23-6 overall and 4-1 in the West Suburban Gold Conference following last week's 18-25, 25-12, 25-14 win over Hinsdale South in Villa Park. Senior Hannah Kenty (No. 6) supplied 10 kills, 13 assists, six digs and five aces for the Warriors in their Oct. 15 victory over the Hornets. Junior Kendall Norton handed out 13 assists for Willowbrook. Senior Anna Marinier contributed six kills and for digs for the Warriors. Junior Julia Amin provided seven kills for Willowbrook, while senior Wendy Pollak hit three kills. Senior Lily Javier added 10 digs, four aces and two kills for the Warriors. Sophomore Melanie Marinier made seven digs for Willowbrook, while sophomore Maggie Hurley delivered two kills. The Warriors finished the week by winning four of five matches and placing second at Lincoln-Way Central High School's Autumn Knights Tournament. Willowbrook won its first four matches of the event before losing to Lockport in the championship match. Kenny, who was named to the all-tournament team, bashed the 1,000th kill of her Willowbrook career during the action at Lincoln-Way Central's event. The Warriors' overall season record stood at 27-7 at the end of the week. The Warriors completed their regular season earlier this week. Willowbrook will open the IHSA Class 4A post-season with an Oct. 29 semifinal match against Whitney Young at the Whitney Young Regional in Chicago.



CHRIS FOX PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

