

# Willowbrook's Amelie Ojeda becomes school's first sectional champion

## Downers Grove North sweeps boys, girls titles

By BILL STONE

Shaw Local News Network correspondent

HINSDALE – Willowbrook senior Amelie Ojeda was building off her breakthrough 2023 girls cross country season with even more training and success on the track.

Practicing inside after the indoor conference meet, Ojeda was struck in her left eye by an errantly thrown baseball. She was sidelined the entire outdoor season recovering from the injury and a concussion.

"I was just in the wrong place, wrong time. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor," said Ojeda, whose eye has almost fully recovered. "I persevered. Even though it did take away my track season, that's why I put a lot of work into my cross (country) season (since June). I thought, 'Now I have to be extra serious because this is where it counts.'"

Ojeda counted a historic accomplishment Nov. 2 by becoming her school's first girls sectional champion at the Class 3A Hinsdale Central Sectional at Katherine Legge Memorial Park in Hinsdale.

Ojeda, who finished in 16 minutes, 35.58 seconds for 2.9 miles, broke 17 minutes for the first time after becoming the program's first girls regional champion Oct. 26.

At state Nov. 9 at Peoria's Detweiller Park, Ojeda (37th in the state in 2023) hopes to challenge the program's highest finish (fifth).

"I want to do top five. I might as well aim for the top," Ojeda said.

Both Downers Grove North teams have state trophy hopes after winning impressively.

The Downers Grove North boys, who are the defending Class 3A champion and ranked No. 1 all season, won the sectional title with 38 points. Junior Philip Cupial (14:07.37) and senior

## Suburban Life

### ATHLETE OF THE WEEK



#### AMELIE OJEDA

Willowbrook, senior, cross country

**Why she was selected:** Ojeda finished the 2.9-mile Legge Memorial Park course in 16:35.58 to win the Class 3A Hinsdale Central Sectional, becoming Willowbrook's first girls cross country sectional champion. She was voted the Athlete of the Week in an online vote. Read her Q&A with Joshua Welge online at [shawlocal.com/mly-suburban-life/high-school-sports](http://shawlocal.com/mly-suburban-life/high-school-sports).

Grant Schroder (14:10.76) finished 1-2 and junior Will Surratt (fifth, 14:26.70) and senior Brady Travers (ninth) also were in the top 10 to earn all-sectional honors.

Cupial (seventh) and Schroder (10th) are the Nos. 3 and 6 returning 2023 state finishers.

"We're just going to put ourselves up there (at state) and push the pace," Cupial said. "Without Grant I don't think I could push myself to my limits. It's a good feeling knowing there's someone that wants it as much as you."

The Downers Grove North girls won the sectional title with 28 points. They had five all-sectional performers – senior Alayna Todnem (second, 16:51.55), junior Lily Eddington (fourth, 17:09.07) and seniors Audrey Casten (sixth), Kenzie Willard (seventh) and Ava Gilley (ninth).

The Trojans were second at state in 2023 and this season are ranked No. 2 to Barrington, which was third at state last year. Defending state champion York is ranked No. 3.

"We definitely haven't always had perfect years of feeling great," said Casten, who ran injured at state last year. "At the point that we're at, we're feeling ready and excited with what that's going to bring for us."

The top seven sectional teams

advanced to state as well as the top 10 individuals not among those teams. Both sectional races featured seven top-30 ranked teams.

In the girls race, Naperville North (58), Naperville Central (123) and Wau-bonsie Valley (153) were second, third and fourth. Hinsdale Central (183) and Downers Grove South (184) were sixth and seventh. The Mustangs edged eighth-place Neuqua Valley by 10 points for their first state team berth since 2019.

"We knew that we had a shot if we ran really well. Nobody was expecting it," Downers Grove South coach Doug Plunkett said. "From where we are at the beginning of the season, they've come a long way."

Sophomores Nia Ortega (22nd), Gianna Lamb (25th) and Rose Jones (29th) led the way. The lineup has been boosted by senior all-stater Holly Johnson's return since the conference meet.

"We're kind of like the underdogs. A lot of people didn't really believe in us, but it kind of just pushed us harder," Ortega said. "We had to work really hard to get to where we are so we're all really proud."

Junior Lily Hodneland (15th) and sophomore Ella Satre (16th) led Hinsdale Central.

Individual qualifiers included Glen-

bard East freshman Teigan O'Donnell (24th) and Lyons Township junior Mya Coglianesse (32nd), who overcame an Achilles injury that kept her out of regionals.

In the boys race, Lyons Township (112) was a strong second while Morton (190) was seventh.

Lyons seniors Ben Wuggazer (third, 14:16.62) and John O'Halloran (seventh) were all-sectional. The Lions expect to be a state contender after taking fourth in 2023 but graduating both all-staters.

"I would say our goal definitely is top five. We're hunting for a trophy," Wuggazer said. "We'll see what happens but I think it's in sight, especially after today."

Morton earned its first team state berth since back-to-back trips in 1996 and 1997 under current coach Bill Bloom and only its fourth trip to state overall. Unranked Hinsdale Central (238) was eighth.

"We didn't know for sure we were going to make it in so when we got the news, we were really excited," said Morton sophomore Miguel Flores (sixth), who was all-sectional. "I feel like we've all been pushing each other to try to get to this level."

Bloom figured beforehand the Mustangs needed three top 20 finishers to advance. Juniors Orlando Sandoval and Alex Rodriguez were 14th and 20th. Initially, the Mustangs heard they were eighth with three individual qualifiers. Team scores then were refreshed with previously missing finishers.

"We went through all of the emotions. I was giving the old, 'Hey, guys, we didn't make it,' speech but then they came over and go, 'Hey, we got in by (48 points),' " Bloom said. "It was a day of ups and downs. How exciting for this school."

Individual qualifiers included Riverside-Brookfield senior Brady Norman (13th), Downers South sophomore Conrad Saner (19th), Glenbard East junior Mason Hepner (23rd) and Willowbrook senior Adriano Quintero (28th), the final qualifier by 3.25 seconds.

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5:44 remaining to move Willowbrook's lead to 37-21. Romano's fourth field goal of the game—a 27-yard kick—closed out the scoring with 2:51 to play.

She finished 37<sup>th</sup> in last year's state meet. This year's IHSA post-season featured four Class 3A sectionals, so as one of the state's four individual sectional champions, Ojeda should be a contender in this weekend's state meet.

# Warriors pound Hononegah 40-21 in first-round playoff battle

## Willowbrook avenges last year's 44-0 playoff loss to Indians

One year ago, the Willowbrook football team ended its season with a 44-0 loss to Rockton's Hononegah High School in an IHSA Class 7A second-round playoff game in Rockton.

On Friday night, the Warriors traveled to Rockton and returned the favor, beating the Indians 40-21 in a Class 7A first-round playoff game.

Willowbrook earned its sixth straight win with Friday's triumph and improved its overall season record to 7-3. The Warriors will continue their 2024 season with a home playoff game—this Friday's second-round contest against Saint Rita (8-2). The game will begin at 7 p.m. in Villa Park.

Willowbrook jumped all over Hononegah (8-2) in the first quarter of Friday's first-round meeting in

Rockton. The Warriors led the Indians 17-0 at the end of the first quarter. Willowbrook's lead grew to 27-7 by halftime.

Willowbrook's opening drive, which included a 26-yard pass from junior quarterback Jahonise Reed to senior Charlie Siegler, ended with a 1-yard touchdown run by senior Aidan Kuehl on a fourth-and-goal play. Senior Dean Romano added the extra-point kick to give the Warriors a 7-0 lead with about eight minutes left in the first quarter.

Hononegah fumbled the ball on its first offensive play. Willowbrook senior Josh Phknaits recovered the fumble at the Indians' 23-yard line. A short time later, Romano kicked a 32-yard field goal to push the Warriors' lead to 10-0 in the middle of the first quarter.



JOE PEARSON PHOTOS Rock Valley Publis

After a Hononegah punt, Willowbrook began its next offensive drive at the Indians' 45-yard line. Reed completed passes to Siegler and senior Jordan Pate on that drive before connecting with senior KJ Rhodes on a 21-yard touchdown pass. Romano's extra-point kick raised Willowbrook's lead to 17-0 with 2:57 remaining in the first quarter.

Hononegah's offense drove the ball inside the Warriors' 20-yard line late in the first quarter. That drive ended with the Indians missing a 40-yard field-goal attempt early in the second quarter.

Willowbrook extended its lead when junior Otis Powell intercepted a Hononegah pass and raced 25 yards for a touchdown with about eight minutes left in the second quarter. Romano's extra-point play moved the Warriors' lead to 24-0.

Romano's second field goal of the game—a 37-yard kick—moved Willowbrook's lead to 27-0 with about five minutes left in the second quarter. Hononegah scored its first points of the night on a 64-yard touchdown pass with about 40 seconds left in the first half. The extra-point kick trimmed Willowbrook's lead to 27-7 just before halftime.

Hononegah's 8-yard touchdown run cut the Warriors' lead to 27-13 with 9:35 to play in the third quarter. The Indians missed the ensuing extra-point kick.

Willowbrook's offense responded with a 60-yard touchdown drive that ended with Reed's 7-yard touchdown pass to Rhodes. Romano's extra-point kick gave the Warriors a 34-13 lead with 7:32 left in the third quarter.

The Indians scored a touchdown on a short run with 8:21 to play in the game. Hononegah added a two-point conversion pass to trim Willowbrook's lead to 34-21.

Romano helped the Warriors seal their victory by making a pair of field-goal kicks in the closing minutes. He made a 43-yard kick with 5:44 remaining to move Willowbrook's lead to 37-21. Romano's fourth field goal of the game—a 27-yard kick—closed out the scoring with 2:51 to play.

Willowbrook's football team opened the IHSA Class 7A post-season with Friday night's 40-21 victory over Rockton's Hononegah High School in Rockton. The same two programs squared off in second-round contest in last year's Class 7A playoffs. Hononegah beat the Warriors 44-0 in that contest, which took place in Rockton on a Saturday afternoon. Willowbrook owned a 17-0 lead after a quarter of Friday night's game. The Warriors' lead grew to 27-7 by halftime. One photo from Friday's action shows Willowbrook junior quarterback Jahonise Reed (top left), who threw two touchdown passes to senior KJ Rhodes in the game. Another photo shows senior Dean Romano (No. 97 - above), who made four field-goal kicks for the Warriors during their victory in Rockton. Senior Troy Wisn is the holder on Romano's field-goal and extra-point kicks. Willowbrook earned its sixth straight win and improved its 2024 season record to 7-3 with Friday's victory. The Warriors will battle Saint Rita (8-2) in this week's Class 7A second-round game in Villa Park. The game will begin this Friday at 7 p.m.



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## Sectional champion

Senior Amelle Ojeda (No. 2351) of the Willowbrook girls cross-country team raises her arms in victory as she crosses the finish line at Saturday's IHSA Class 3A sectional at Katherine Legge Memorial Park in Hinsdale. Ojeda won the individual title at the sectional. She completed the 2.9-mile sectional race in a first-place time of 16 minutes, 35.58 seconds. One week earlier, on Oct. 26, Ojeda won the individual title at the Class 3A Lyons Township Regional. With Saturday's victory in Hinsdale, Ojeda became the first Willowbrook girls cross-country runner to win an individual sectional title. Ojeda will compete in this weekend's IHSA Class 3A girls state meet at Peoria's Detweiler Park. She finished 37<sup>th</sup> in last year's state meet. This year's IHSA post-season featured four Class 3A sectionals, so as one of the state's four individual sectional champions, Ojeda should be a contender in this weekend's state meet.



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