

Mariners turn in strong effort at Red Division 'B' Meet

Villa Park swimmers race to 23 victories in six-team meet

Several members of the Villa Park Mariners completed the 2025 season by swimming at the DuPage Swim and Dive Conference Red Division 'B' Meet in Bloomingdale on July 12.

The Mariners competed against swimmers from five other teams—Butterfield, Wood Dale/Addison, Carol Stream, Glendale Heights and Hanover Park—in the meet.

Villa Park swimmers delivered first-place efforts in 23 of the competition's 58 individual events. There were no relay events in the meet.

Villa Park's Matthew Kelley-Tellez won four individual titles during the July 12 meet. Swimming in the 8-and-under boys level, he earned his first win of the day in the 25-yard freestyle, which he completed in 29.26 seconds. He added victories in the 50-yard freestyle (which he finished in 1 minute, 4.34 seconds), the 25-yard butterfly (44.52) and the 25-yard breaststroke (33.44).

Belle Knudtson of the Mariners also won four individual titles during the Red Division 'B' Meet. Competing in the 13-14 girls level, she secured her first win of the meet in the



50-yard freestyle (33.36). She went on to earn first-place finishes in the 100-yard freestyle (1:16.58), the 50-yard butterfly (41.70) and the 50-yard breaststroke (46.41).

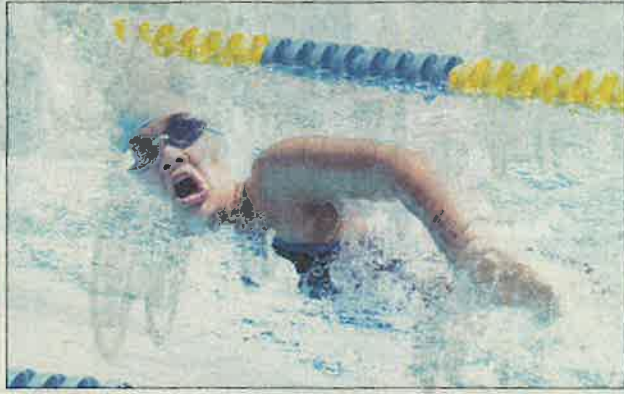
Villa Park's Penelope Kuhl won three titles in the 9-10 girls division of the July 12 meet. She posted her victories in the 100-yard individual medley (1:31.85), the 100-yard freestyle (1:16.39) and the 50-yard butterfly (40.51).

Claire Brennan of the Mariners won three races in the 15-18 girls level of the Red Division 'B' Meet. She earned first-place finishes in

the 100-yard individual medley (1:21.21), the 100-yard freestyle (1:11.08) and the 50-yard backstroke (38.54).

Ariana Knudtson of Villa Park was a two-time champion at the July 12 competition. Swimming in the 11-12 girls level, she won the 50-yard freestyle (35.27) and the 50-yard butterfly (49.96).

Thomas Tyler of the Mariners won two individual titles in the 15-18 boys division of the Red Division 'B' Meet. He swam to victories in the 100-yard freestyle (1:15.66) and the 50-yard breaststroke (51.00).



CHRIS FOX FILE PHOTOS: Rock Valley Publishing

Some members of the Villa Park Mariners finished the 2025 season by swimming at the DuPage Swim and Dive Conference's Red Division 'B' Meet in Bloomingdale on July 12. Villa Park's Belle Knudtson (pictured above earlier this season) won four individual events in the meet's 13-14 girls division, Matthew Kelley-Tellez of the Mariners, who is also pictured (top left) earlier this season, won four individual titles in the meet's 8-and-under boys level.

Villa Park's other individual champions in the July 12 meet in Bloomingdale were:

8-and-under girls: Madeline Dahm (50-yard freestyle: 54.74)

9-10 girls: Brooke Bor-

kowski (50-yard breaststroke: 1:18.59)

15-18 girls: Tabitha Smaczny (50-yard freestyle: 32.46), Megan Usry (50-yard butterfly: 36.49) and Olivia Day (50-yard breaststroke: 42.92)

While Villa Park swimmers won 23 individual titles in the meet, Butterfield earned the second-most titles of the competition with its 10 victories, Carol Stream swimmers won nine events.



CHRIS FOX PHOTOS: Rock Valley Publishing

Summer dance camp

Willowbrook High School's dance team held its annual summer dance camp for kids (ages 5-13) at the school last week. The five-day camp concluded with the 45 campers performing for their families during Friday morning's showcase in the school's main gymnasium. Members of the Willowbrook team (left) also performed during Friday's showcase. The dance team will hold a three-day camp for kids from Oct. 6-8. Campers will then perform during halftime of the Warriors' junior varsity football game on Friday, Oct. 10. The Willowbrook dance team will also hold three one-day mini camps during the 2025-26 school year. Those one-day camps include a Halloween-themed camp on Oct. 16, a winter-themed camp on Dec. 20, and a Valentine's Day-themed camp on Feb. 7. Each of the mini-camps will take place from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. in the Willowbrook dance room. For more information about the upcoming camps, contact the dance team's coaches at ccreighton@dupage88.net or mschulte@dupage88.net, or visit the team's Instagram feed—[@wbvarsitydanceeam](https://www.instagram.com/wbvarsitydanceeam).



SPORTS

TODAY IN SPORTS HISTORY

1936: Twenty-two nations line-up as the first basketball competition in the Olympic Games starts in Berlin; Estonia beats France 34-29 in the first game.
1992: The Orlando Magic signs NBA No. 1 draft pick Shaquille O'Neal.



Shaw Local News: McHenry (left) and Olivia (right) try to chase down a camper during the Chicago Bears Mini Monsters Flag Football Camp on Wednesday, July 16, at McCracken Field in McHenry.

Girls flag football surges in Illinois as hundreds more take the field in Year 2

More than 200 high schools expected to have teams this fall

By **ALEX KANTECKI**
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Olivia Filipp turned in for football about once a year with her family for the Super Bowl in February, but other than that, she had limited interest in America's most-watched sport.

When girls flag football became an official IHSA sport for the 2024-25 school year, Filipp's brother Connor, a football-loving 12-year-old, who's a quarter-back, encouraged his big sis to try out.

Olivia, a dedicated softball player, obliged. The two went to toss a football back and forth in the family's front yard. Not long after that, Olivia was signing passes, pulling flags and learning rules with her new high school team.



Bradley-Boundnois senior Nia Lawrence (left) looks for a way around teammate Callie Andrews during the school's flag football camp in July.

return to the field this fall but with more knowledge and love for the game.

"I honestly just wanted something different," said Olivia, who watches her brother play as much as she can. "I felt my whole life revolved around softball. I just thought it would be a fun opportunity and maybe make my arm stronger."

"Going into it, I just wanted to have as much fun as [Connor] does."

Last fall, hundreds of first-year players from 156 schools competed in the inaugural season of girls flag football in Illinois — up from the 22 in 2021, when Crystal Lake's Gustavo Silva, the Chicago Bears director of football development, kicked off a pilot program in Chicago.

More than 200 schools are expected to have teams this fall. IHSA assistant executive director Tracey Henry said, Silva's big goal for the 2026-27 school year is 300.

He believes the sky is the limit.

"I think we can hit [boys tackle] football numbers," Silva said. "Ultimately, my guess is it will land somewhere around four classes. There are about 800 schools in the state of Illinois. If you have 10 girls in your school, you can

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have a flag team. That's my approach, at least."

Nick Hildreth, Willowbrook's boys tackle football coach and assistant coach for flag, along with head coach Rachel Karos has seen firsthand how far the sport can take girls.

Willowbrook captured the first Chicago Bears Girls Flag State Championship in 2022. The Warriors then competed at the NFL Flag Football Championships in Nevada after winning a qualifier in Canton, Ohio.

Last month, Hildreth and Karos accepted invitations to coach some of the top girls in the nation at the USA Football National Development Program Select Bowl in Los Angeles.

"Football is kind of our pastime in the United States," Hildreth said. "It's something girls are seeing as an opportunity and getting excited about. At our school, outside of a few exceptions, our best athletes are playing. For myself, having a daughter in the community that will go to Willowbrook, now there are girls she looks up to. Someone like my daughter will never know any different."

Hildreth's Warriors received national attention in 2022 when wide receiver Sarah Ball was featured on NFL Network's "Good Morning Football." The apply named Ball leaped high in the air to make a catch over her defender before turning upfield for a touchdown — with former NFL offensive linemen Brian Balmer analyzing the play during a segment of "Baldy's Breakdowns."

"That first year was really cool," Hildreth said. "It was kind of a blur."

A blur is a good way to describe the rising popularity of flag football.

Bridley, Hawthorn's went to the inaugural IHSA state tournament last season and finished fourth. When the season started, head coach Tremaine Turner, who had no previous coaching experience, and his staff had few expectations outside of teaching the basics of passing, catching, flag-pulling and kicking.

"We had no idea of what it was going to look like or what kind of athletes we'd get because it's during the season where there's multiple stuff going on," Turner said.

To his delight, Turner had enough players for two teams: 22 on varsity and 22 on JV. Despite having solid numbers, the first varsity game got off to an inauspicious start.

"The first game was a lot of laughs," Turner said. "We had these flags we thought we were going to use the whole year. They were just falling everywhere, and in the game of flag, if both flags are on the ground, by IHSA rules, it's supposed to be a dead ball."

"Being so hot, they were getting worse."

The refs were like, 'Hey, if we keep calling dead balls, this game is never going to end. So, it ended up being two-hand touch instead of flag football.'"

The Boilermakers got new flags from another school, and later, Silva and the Bears stepped in to make sure they had the proper equipment.

Bridley, Hawthorn's senior, Eva McIntyre, who plays safety, went out for flag football because she wanted to try something new, and a few of her friends from softball also were playing. McIntyre said there were a good number of track and field athletes and volleyball players who chose to play flag instead of volleyball.

"I think a lot of girls that went out for flag, they saw the boys' football games and really enjoyed it, the atmosphere of it," McIntyre said. "We had powderpuff, but it was only during homecoming week. I think that drew a lot of interest for girls to try it out."

"Providing opportunities for girls is something Turner is passionate about.

"It provides an even playing field for girls and boys. Girls deserve to be glorified, too," Turner said.

Jimmy Roberts, who has coached Jacobs' boys' basketball team for 12 seasons and will return as the flag football coach this fall, has two daughters (seventh and first grade) who have been drawn to the sport.

Seeing older girls play football is an eye-opener for them.

"They come around a lot in the summer for camp, and it's great," Roberts said. "Our boys' basketball players are good to them and have a real good time ... but it's just different being with the girls. They're girls, so they really embrace them."

McHenry senior Holly Waters and other Warriors flag football players recently helped teach youth girls and boys during a Chicago Bears Mini Monsters Flag Football Camp held at McCracken Field in McHenry.

About 75 kids showed up to run around and learn the ins and outs of the game.

"This is super cool," Waters said after running drills. "Especially as a girl, football is viewed as a male sport. Seeing all of these little girls come out is exciting to see. Probably some of them have older brothers who play football or maybe they have sisters who play now, too."

Silva wants to start expanding to reach middle schools so younger girls have an opportunity to play. It's also reaching the collegiate level, with Benedictine University and Rockford University having teams last year. In 2026, Silva said, eight colleges will have teams in Illinois.

"I don't want girls to say, 'I played four years in high school and that was great, but now what?'" Silva said. "I want them to say, 'Hey, I can go play collegiately or I can represent my country in the Olympics.'"

"There's no shortage of opportunities."

TOP: Jacobs' Olivia Philipp throws the ball in September 2024 at Dundee-Crown High School in Carpentersville.

ABOVE: Yorkville's Hayden Hooges (right) spikes after scoring on an interception against Joliet Central during a flag football game in September 2024 at Yorkville High School.

RIGHT: McHenry's Holly Waters (left) and Chloe Casey toss a football to campers during the Chicago Bears Mini Monsters Flag Football Camp on Wednesday, July 16, at McCracken Field in McHenry.

Shawn Icard News Network for photos

