

FLAG FOOTBALL - STATE THIRD-PLACE GAME: WILLOWBROOK 30, PERSPECTIVES 0

Willowbrook bounces back from tough semi loss to take third

By BOB MARANG

Shaw Local News Network correspondent

After the conclusion of the state flag football third-place game Saturday afternoon, Willowbrook gathered for its final postgame meeting of the historic season.

At the 50-yard line, in the middle of the massive blue "W" with black trim, the Warriors intently were listening to their coaches talk about the positives of the season. Almost every coach also infused the returning players with a dose of motivation for next season.

A year after losing in the state quarterfinals, the Warriors took a step further by reaching the third-place game Saturday.

Getting an opportunity to play on their home field, the Warriors atoned for a tough loss in the semifinals to Young, bouncing back with an impressive 30-0 victory over Perspectives in the third-place game.

With the shutout win, the Warriors (22-1) closed out the best season in program history on a bright note.

Clutching the third-place trophy in her left hand, Willowbrook coach Rachel Karos said her players showed a lot of heart by rebounding with a stellar two-way effort to dominate the city-based school with the same nickname.

"It's bittersweet because I think we had higher expectations," Karos said. "I'm proud of finishing this hard. We had a heartbreaking loss, but we bounced back. I'm super proud that we finished strong and what we have done. It's hard to go into the playoffs undefeated. We finished strong in the second half."

"The work for next year starts tomorrow. We want to get back (here). We can't hang our heads about it, and hopefully, we will have another chance to get back to state. We have to get back to work."

Perspectives (18-4) had no answer for Willowbrook's big-play offense and stingy defense. The Warriors, who lost 12-6 to Young in the semifinals, took some time to get their high-octane offense in gear. Senior quarterback Marli Smrz completed 17-of-31 passes for 204 yards and three touchdowns, tossing TDs to Jazilah Gatlin, Eliza-beth Pettinger and Jada Langston.

Smrz said she was happy to end her career with a victory, noting the Warriors have significant returnees to



Willowbrook players celebrate with the state third-place trophy after a 30-0 victory over Chicago Perspectives at the state tournament Oct. 18.

make a push for another state experience next season. Smrz added a 13-yard TD run in the second quarter.

"I've grown up on this turf and have so many memories here," Smrz said. "I've met so many people and gotten so many amazing opportunities. I'm going to miss it a lot. It's weird that I'm not going to be here next year. We have a great team. I know my sophomore year that this was going to be a special team. I'm so proud of this team and can't wait to see what they will do next year."

Langston, a junior, is one of the players slated to take on a bigger role next season. Langston had a monster game, catching 10 passes for 89 yards and a 9-yard TD in the third.

"Our offense is probably one of the best in the state," Langston said. "It's great to have Marli throwing the ball. She throws a great ball and it always lands right in my hands. We worked so

hard in the offseason and in the season. It's amazing to be a part of such a great team. We got third in my freshman year, but I'm happy to get third again."

McKenzie Edison also had a game to remember, hauling in seven receptions for 50 yards to spark the offense.

"It's so exciting because not many teams can get this far," Edison said. "We didn't execute like we did in the semifinals. We should be in the finals. I'm happy we won this game. We all have to lock in during summer training and in the offseason and put in as much effort as we can to get back to state next year. I'm proud of every one."

The Warriors finished with three interceptions, one each from Pettinger, Kennedy Rieger and Janell Adams. Leigh Bernardo pulled a team-high seven flags and recorded two sacks to lead the defense.



Willowbrook's Leigh Bernardo celebrates against Chicago Perspectives.

Village board approves new liquor license fees

Board members adopt amended proposal; businesses without video gaming won't face any increases in 2026; businesses that offer video gaming will have their liquor license fees tripled

By Chris Fox
VILLAPARK REVIEW

Villa Park Village Board members voted during their Oct. 13 meeting to increase several of the village's liquor license fees as of Jan. 1, 2026. Businesses with liquor licenses and video gaming will face steep increases in their fees, while businesses that don't offer video gaming won't see increases in their liquor license fees.

Some owners of Villa Park businesses spoke early in the Oct. 13 meeting and criticized the proposed fee increases. Village board members stated later in the meeting that liquor license fees had not changed in recent years, despite a 2019 village ordinance that called for annual fee increases to be linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). According to the village, liquor license fees were supposed to rise annually at a rate consistent with the CPI in recent years, but the previous village administration did not implement those increases.

Village business owners express their disapproval of proposed increases

The proprietors of Villa Park businesses with liquor licenses who spoke during the meeting included Debbie DeMito, owner of DeMito's Saloon (335 E. Kenilworth Ave.) and De Vine (339 E. Kenilworth Ave.), who asked why the proposed increases hadn't been brought to her attention. DeMito also referred to the food and beverage tax that her businesses already pay.

"Every month we pay a substantial amount to Villa Park for this food tax," said DeMito while speaking during the meeting's segment for public comments on agenda items. "Now, on top of that, to more than double our liquor license, you're really putting the squeeze on us."

DeMito and other speakers during the meeting mentioned that Elmhurst recently decreased its liquor licenses.

"I think you're not only going to scare away potentially new business, I think you may scare away existing business," DeMito added.

Maryann Delulio, the own-

er of Mortadeli (357 S. Ardmore Ave.) also addressed the board. Delulio stated that food costs are "through the roof" and that the village takes in revenue from the sales her business makes. Delulio said she was never informed of the proposals to raise liquor license fees.

"People are going to have to close their doors; this is insane," said Delulio while complaining about the proposed fee increases.

Brendan Fitzharris, the owner of Fitz's Irish Bulldog (314 W. St. Charles Road), addressed the board and noted some of the current challenges his business faces.

"Costs in the last five years have skyrocketed so much," Fitzharris said. "Utilities, insurance, food costs, liquor costs, everything." Fitzharris then referred to the village's food and beverage tax. According to the Village of Villa Park website, the rate of the village's Places For Eating or Restaurant Tax is 1.5 percent of the gross receipts received by the restaurant. This tax is in addition to other taxes on food and beverages.

"It's squeezing us out of business," said Fitzharris after he spoke about higher costs and the village's food and beverage tax.

Fitzharris mentioned that he also owns a business in Elmhurst. He referred to Elmhurst recently lowering its liquor license fees.

"It's very hard to own a small business nowadays," Fitzharris stated.

John Demirdjian, who owns The Captain's Room (212 S. Villa Ave.) with his wife, Kristen, addressed the board and stated his business is celebrating one year in operation.

"We've had a very good year," Demirdjian said. He added, however, that there were significant start-up costs for his business. Demirdjian stated that many businesses suffered a great deal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Shutdowns crushed people," said Demirdjian, who added that some businesses are still trying to dig out of the hole caused by pandemic-related shutdowns.

"A lot of that was nonsense and things could have opened up a lot earlier," said Demirdjian, who noted that he received no advance notice from the village about the proposed increases in liquor license fees. During his comments, Demirdjian stated he understood there were about 86 liquor licenses in the village. Village board members did not confirm that number during the meeting.

Previous village administration never enforced 2019 ordinance that called for annual increases in liquor license fees; those annual increases were linked to the Consumer Price Index

Villa Park Village President Kevin Patrick said during the Oct. 13 meeting that the village's liquor control commission has been discussing the issue of liquor license fees for two months. He said that commission's recent meetings can be viewed on YouTube. He also said that business owners can reach out to village board members and the liquor commission by email.

Village attorney Ryan Morton said there were a couple of revisions to the proposed ordinance as it appeared in board members' packets for the meeting. One error regarded the liquor control commission's recommendation for AAAA liquor licenses. The current fee is \$1,900. According to information in the packets, the proposed recommendation was to raise the fee to \$4,500. Morton said the recommendation was to raise that fee to \$3,000, not \$4,500.

The other change, said Morton, was related to the codifying the 2019 village ordinance that stated liquor license fees shall be increased every year in an amount related to the CPI. Morton said the village's records show that those increases were never implemented in the last six years.

Trustee Deepasriya Kumar mentioned the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many restaurants were forced to close. Kumar said there should be a different fee for businesses with video

gaming. She described the proposed increases as "enormous" and said they should be reconsidered.

"It's very complicated; our liquor code itself seems very complicated," said Kumar.

Trustee Tina Konstatos referred to Elmhurst's reduction in liquor license fees. She noted that Elmhurst is a home rule community, while Villa Park is not. She also stated that Elmhurst is considering an increase in its property taxes, and that Elmhurst does not allow video gaming at its bars and restaurants.

Konstatos, who mentioned three times that she is a small business owner, said she would like to protect established bars and restaurants in Villa Park by limiting the number of such new businesses that open in the village.

Kozar makes motion to proposed ordinance; his motion calls for no increases for AAAA and EEEE establishments, which don't include video gaming; Kozar calls for tripling of license fees for businesses with video gaming

Trustee Jack Kozar said he didn't have a problem with keeping the village's current annual fees for two classes of licenses—AAAA (tavern, full liquor on premises, plus package sales, with no video gaming) and EEEE (restaurant, unrestricted; on-premises only; seated/table service, li-

quor less than 50 percent revenue, with no video gaming) at their current rates. Those current fees are \$1,900 for AAAA licenses and \$2,000 for EEEE licenses.

Villa Park's other liquor license classes include AAA, AA, A, EEE, EE, E, L and Z.

The village's liquor commission recommended that the AAAA rate rise from \$1,900 to \$3,000, and that the EEEE rate rise from \$2,000 to \$3,000.

Speaking during the meeting, Kozar proposed an amendment to the proposed village ordinance. His proposal called to triple the liquor license fees for businesses that offered video gaming. He said that if businesses wanted to transfer their licenses to a class that didn't offer gaming, they could make that change.

"We have overwhelming sentiment in this village that is against gaming, against more gaming, against the way that we've implemented gaming, so for something so unpopular, I think it's fair that there's compensation to the village for the village's increased costs," claimed Kozar, who stated that he used to own a business that had a license that allowed for gaming, but he chose not to have gaming at his business.

Kozar stated that from January to August of this year, revenue for village businesses with gaming was more than

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CHRIS FOX PHOTO Rock Valley Publishing

Middle-schoolers join Willowbrook's marching band

Willowbrook High School's marching band recently held its annual Band Day. The marching band welcomed young musicians from Jackson, Jefferson and Albright middle schools on Friday, Oct. 10. The students in grades 6-8 joined Willowbrook's marching band on the field to perform before that evening's varsity football game. Before playing "The Star-Spangled Banner," the students from Willowbrook's feeder schools teamed with the high school's marching band to perform "Livin' la vida loca."

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Village board approves official Halloween trick-or-treating hours for this year

This year's holiday trick-or-treating hours are the same as last year's—3 to 8 p.m.

Villa Park Village Board members voted unanimously during their Oct. 13 meeting to approve an ordinance setting the official 2025 Halloween trick-or-treating hours in the village. Keeping the same hours as last year, the village approved the official trick-or-treat hours of 3 to 8 p.m. this Halloween—Friday, Oct. 31.

Warriors take home the third-place trophy

Late TD pass from Smrz to Edison lifts Willowbrook to an exciting quarterfinal win; after losing to Whitney Young in the semifinal round, the Warriors win the third-place contest and complete their season with a 23-1 record

Willowbrook's flag football team finished its 2025 season by winning the third-place trophy in the IHSA state tournament, which ended on Saturday on the Warriors' home field in Villa Park.

The Warriors earned their berth in the state quarterfinals in Villa Park by winning the title at the South Elgin Sectional on Oct. 14. Willowbrook then advanced to the semifinal round with their thrilling last-second victory in Friday night's quarterfinal game.

The Warriors suffered their only loss of the 2025 season in Saturday's semifinal contest against Whitney Young. Willowbrook returned to the field on Saturday to complete its season with a 30-0 win over the team from Chicago's Perspectives Charter Schools in the third-place contest.

The Warriors finished their season with a 23-1 record.

Maine South defeated Whitney Young 26-6 in Saturday's state-championship game, which took place shortly after the third-place matchup.

One year ago, the Warriors won a sectional title to advance to the quarterfinal round of the IHSA's inaugural state event in flag football. Willowbrook's 2024 season ended with a loss to Whitney Young in a quarterfinal battle in Villa Park.

The Warriors, who opened this year's post-season by posting two decisive victories to win a regional championship on their home field, began last week's hectic schedule with a 28-0 victory over Naperville Central in a semifinal game at the South Elgin Sectional on Oct. 13. One day later, Willowbrook earned its berth in the state quarterfinals with a dominant 44-0 win over West Aurora in the sectional final in South Elgin.

The Warriors advanced to the semifinal round of the state tournament with Friday night's dramatic 20-14 win over Chicago's Kenwood Academy High School. The Broncos of Kenwood led Willowbrook 14-12 in the game's closing seconds. The Warriors took the lead when senior Marli Smrz completed a 29-yard touchdown pass to junior McKenzie Edison with just 10.7 seconds to play. Smrz then connected with junior Liz Pettinger on a successful two-point conversion pass.

Pettinger scored the Warriors' first touchdown of Friday's quarterfinal game on a 3-yard reception from Smrz in the first quarter. Kenwood

scored two touchdowns during the second quarter to take a 14-6 lead. Junior Janell Adams of Willowbrook delivered a 6-yard touchdown run late in the second quarter to reduce Kenwood's lead to 14-12 by halftime.

The second half remained scoreless until Edison's last-second touchdown catch, which electrified the Warriors' supporters in attendance. Video clips of Edison's go-ahead touchdown were captured from multiple angles and posted online. Smrz launched a high pass over the middle of the field; Edison caught the pass on the run near the 10-yard line and sprinted into the end zone to give Willowbrook the lead and complete a five-play, 80-yard scoring drive.

"To make such a big, game-changing play, in front of our student section, in front of our families, on our home turf—I've never felt anything like it," said Smrz of Friday's winning touchdown pass. "To do it with her [Edison] meant the most to me. She's like my sister."

"The only thought in my head was—catch the ball," said Edison of her game-winning reception against the Broncos of Kenwood. "It was really exciting. Their defense was really good. It was definitely tough, but I had confidence that we were going to win."

Smrz completed 33 of 52 passes for 305 yards in Friday's win. Junior Jada Langston of the Warriors made eight receptions for 104 yards. Edison provided eight catches for 89 yards.

The Warriors took a 6-0 lead in Saturday's semifinal contest when Adams ran 38 yards for a touchdown with 4:38 left in the first quarter. Whitney Young evened the score at 6-6 on a 48-yard pass with 8:49 left in the second quarter. Whitney Young's defense scored the only points of the second half on an interception and 30-yard return for a touchdown with 7:12 remaining in the third quarter.

Less than an hour after losing in the semifinal round, the Warriors returned to the field to conclude their season by playing the third-place game against Perspectives. Smrz threw a 6-yard touchdown pass to Langston to give the Warriors a 6-0 lead in the first quarter. Smrz then ran 13 yards for a touchdown to boost the lead to 12-0 in the second quarter. Smrz fired a 28-yard touchdown pass to Pettinger in the middle of the third quarter to increase

Willowbrook's lead to 18-0. Langston's second touchdown of the contest—a 9-yard reception from Smrz late in the third quarter—pushed the lead to 24-0. Junior Lilli Macias scored the Warriors' final touchdown of the game on a 16-yard pass from junior Kaitlyn Santos.

"It's hard to have a heart-breaking loss, and then bounce back and still handle business," said Willowbrook coach Rachel Karos after the Warriors' victory in the third-place game. "I am super proud of the fact that we finished strong and got to end the season with a win."

Shortly after the Warriors accepted their individual medals and their third-place trophy, Maine South and Whitney Young took the field in Villa Park for the state-championship game. Maine South beat Whitney Young 26-6 to claim this year's state title.

Willowbrook formed its flag football program about three years ago, before the IHSA sanctioned the sport and held the inaugural state tournament in 2024. The Chicago Public League and the Chicago Bears joined together to host state championship events at the Bears' Halas Hall facility in 2022 and 2023. The Warriors won the 2022 state title, beating Chicago's Taft High School 20-0 in the championship game in October 2022 to complete their inaugural season with a perfect 9-0 record. Smrz was a member of that 2022 championship team as a freshman, playing as a wide receiver and a cornerback. Willowbrook's 2023 team won the third-place trophy at the state tournament at Halas Hall.



CHRIS FOX PHOTOS/Rock Valley Publishing

Willowbrook's flag football team completed its 2025 season by winning the third-place trophy in the IHSA state tournament, which concluded on Saturday on the Warriors' home field in Villa Park. Willowbrook earned a berth in the state quarterfinals with its 44-0 victory over West Aurora in the championship game of the South Elgin Sectional on Oct. 14. One photo shows the Warriors celebrating with their sectional plaque after that victory. Willowbrook faced Kenwood in one of Friday's four quarterfinal games in Villa Park. The Warriors scored a last-second touchdown to earn a 20-14 victory and advance to Saturday's semifinal round. Whitney Young edged Willowbrook 12-6 in one of Saturday's semifinal contests to hand the Warriors their first loss of the season. Willowbrook concluded its season with a 30-0 victory over the team from Chicago's Perspective Charter Schools in Saturday's third-place contest. The Warriors finished their season with a 23-1 record. Maine South defeated Whitney Young 26-6 in Saturday's state-championship game.

Warriors move to 5-3 after crushing Proviso East 49-14

Willowbrook wraps up its regular season with this Friday's District 88 tussle at Addison Trail

The Willowbrook football team improved to 5-3 overall and 4-1 in the West Suburban Gold Conference following Friday's decisive 49-14 victory at Proviso East in Maywood.

The Warriors, who have won four straight games, scored seven first-half touchdowns to build a 49-0 halftime lead over Proviso East, which dropped to 1-7 overall and 0-6 in conference play. Willowbrook scored four touchdowns in the first quarter and added three more touchdowns in the second quarter. The two teams played the entire second half with a running clock.

Willowbrook senior quarterback Jahonise Reed threw five touchdown

passes in the first half of Friday's victory. Reed fired a 61-yard touchdown pass to senior Otis Powell to provide the Warriors' first points of the game. Powell hauled in another touchdown reception from Reed later in the first half.

Willowbrook junior Josiah Marlowe caught a pair of touchdown tosses from Reed on Friday. Senior Jaylen Griffin added one touchdown reception for the Warriors. Senior Rashad Morrison scored a defensive touchdown in the second quarter, when he scooped up a Proviso East fumble and ran six yards for a touchdown. Senior Anthony Leo contributed a 4-yard touchdown run later in the

second quarter.

Willowbrook will close out its 2025 regular season with this Friday's conference game at District 88 rival Addison Trail. The Blazers will enter the game with an overall record of 7-1 and an unblemished conference mark of 5-0. If Addison Trail wins Friday's battle, it will claim sole possession of the conference title. If the Warriors beat the Blazers, there will likely be a three-way tie for the conference championship, with Downers Grove South joining Willowbrook and Addison Trail with conference records of 5-1. Downers Grove South will likely beat Morton in this Friday's conference matchup.

Montini moves to 8-0 after stomping Saint Ignatius 49-7

The Broncos can complete an undefeated regular season with a win at Saint Laurence this Friday

The Montini Catholic football team ran its 2025 season record to 8-0 with Friday's 49-7 win at Saint Ignatius in Chicago. The Broncos owned a 28-0 half-time lead over the Wolfpack, which fell to 2-6 with the loss. Montini scored a pair of touchdowns in the third quarter to take a 42-0 lead and trigger a running clock

for the rest of the game. Each team scored one touchdown in the game's final 12 minutes. The Broncos scored their first touchdown of Friday's contest when junior quarterback Israel Abrams connected with junior Luca Florio on a 38-yard touchdown pass with a little more than one minute left in the first quar-

ter. Junior Johnny Louise added the extra-point kick to give Montini a 7-0 lead. The Broncos scored three touchdowns in the second quarter to push their lead to 28-0 by halftime. Senior Isaac Alexander scored the first touchdown of the quarter on a 9-yard run. Abrams then threw two touchdown passes—a 58-yard toss to Alexander and a 28-yard hookup with Florio. Alexander delivered the 58-yard scoring reception by catching a pass at the Wolfpack's 45-yard line and racing down the sideline and across the goal line. Abrams dodged a couple of defenders and stepped up in the pocket before unloading his 28-yard touchdown pass to Florio,

who caught the ball near the goal line before tumbling into the end zone. Abrams provided a 10-yard touchdown run in the third quarter. Later in that quarter, he threw his fourth touchdown pass of the game by connecting with senior Charles Flowers on a short screen pass. Flowers raced down the sideline and into the end zone for a 50-yard touchdown reception. Junior quarterback Joey Neustadt scored Montini's seventh touchdown of the game on a 9-yard run in the middle of the fourth quarter. Abrams completed 20 of 24 pass attempts for 441 yards and four touchdowns during Friday's victory. Junior Damacio Orregon sup-

plied four receptions for 107 yards, while Florio made three catches for 83 yards and two touchdowns. Montini's defense held Saint Ignatius to less than 200 yards of total offense during the game. Junior Orlando Greco of the Broncos intercepted a pass to end one of the Wolfpack's offensive drives. "Going into the game I was very concerned because of Saint Ignatius' size, and how well they run their option offense," stated Montini coach Mike Bukovsky. "Our defense really set the tone early and controlled the line of scrimmage, forcing them to go to more of a perimeter attack. We had a challenging week in practice with some

injury situations, and several of our guys really stepped up for us and played well." Montini can complete an undefeated regular season with a Chicago Catholic League (CCL) White Division win at Saint Laurence this Friday in Burbank. The Vikings will enter the game with an overall record of 5-3 and a division mark of 0-2. The Broncos are 2-0 in the four-team division. Carmel and Fenwick both have division records of 1-1. The Friars of Fenwick will square off against the Corsairs of Carmel in this Friday's division game at Carmel in Mundelein. The Friars and Corsairs will both enter the game with overall season records of 6-2.



CHRIS FOX PHOTOS Rock Valley Publishing

Rams close their division season with a win over Fenton

Glenbard East's girls volleyball team defeated Fenton 25-16, 25-19 in last week's Upstate Eight Conference East division match in Lombard. Junior Belle McDermott (No. 10) supplied 12 kills for the Rams in their Oct. 15 victory over the Bison. Senior Natalie Slusher provided 24 assists, four digs and three kills. Senior Haley Greenfield contributed four kills and four digs. Glenbard East senior Nora Opila (No. 4), who served the final point of the match, is pictured after the Rams completed their victory. Glenbard East improved to 5-1 in the Upstate Eight Conference East Division standings with its win over the Bison. The Rams posted a second-place finish in the division standings. Glenbard East won one of five matches at its own Autumnfest event, which took place on Friday and Saturday. The Rams' overall season record stood at 12-22 at the end of the 24-team competition.



CHRIS FOX PHOTOS Rock Valley Publishing

Willowbrook duo delivers in the clutch

Junior McKenzie Edison (left) and senior Marli Smrz (right) of Willowbrook's flag football team are pictured at the end of the Warriors' 44-0 victory over West Aurora in the Oct. 14 championship game of the South Elgin Sectional. With that victory, the Warriors advanced to the IHSA state quarterfinals. For the second straight year, Willowbrook hosted the state quarterfinals, semifinals, third-place game and state-championship contest. The Warriors faced Kenwood Academy in one of Friday's quarterfinal matchups in Villa Park. Willowbrook trailed Kenwood 14-12 in the closing seconds, but Smrz completed a 29-yard touchdown pass to Edison with 10.7 seconds to play to give the Warriors an 18-14 lead. Smrz then completed a two-point conversion pass to junior Liz Pettinger to boost the Warriors' lead to 20-14. Willowbrook, which lost in the quarterfinal round of the inaugural state event one year ago, hung on to beat Kenwood 20-14 and advance into Saturday's semifinal round. "I always look for Kenzie; I know I can count on her," said Smrz while speaking about Friday's game-winning touchdown pass. Smrz, who is also pictured during her touchdown run during Saturday's third-place game, noted that in addition to playing together on Willowbrook's flag football team, she and Edison were teammates on a Hands Team Academy club team. The Warriors suffered their first loss of the season on Saturday, dropping a 12-6 decision to Whitney Young in a semifinal contest. Willowbrook concluded its season with Saturday's 30-0 victory over Chicago's Perspectives Charter Schools team in the third-place game. "It's very exciting," said Edison after the Warriors accepted their third-place trophy. "I'm really proud of everybody and how far we've come, but I still wish we would have been able to get to first place."

Warriors' girls team wins the program's first WSGC Meet title in 27 years

All seven Willowbrook runners in the meet earn All-Conference honors

Willowbrook High School's girls cross-country team won its first West Suburban Gold Conference Meet championship since 1998 when it claimed the title at Saturday's conference meet at Centerpoint Preserve in Northlake.

The Warriors delivered five of the meet's top eight finishes and posted team score of 27 (2+4+6+7+8) in Saturday's meet. Downers Grove South landed in second place with its team score of 33 (1+3+5+9+15). Morton (113) claimed third, just ahead of Leyden (114) and Hinsdale South (118). Addison Trail (143) placed sixth.

Willowbrook freshman Rachel Simek finished second in the conference meet's individual standings. Simek completed Saturday's 3-mile race in 19 minutes, 20.3 seconds. Senior Mariangela Popoca of the Warriors contributed a fourth-place effort with her finishing time of 19 minutes, 26.1 seconds. Willowbrook's trio of freshman Kate Borho (20:00.4), sophomore Juliet Oddo (20:01.9) and junior Bethany Yurich (20:03.3) finished sixth, seventh and eighth, respectively, to complete the Warriors' scoring lineup.

Freshman Paige Simek (20:15.50; 10th) and junior Genevieve Kling (21:12.4; 14th) also delivered strong finishes for the Warriors in Saturday's conference meet. All seven Willowbrook runners who competed in the meet earned All-Conference status by placing among the top 15 finishers in the meet.

The Warriors will open the IHSA post-season by competing in this Saturday's Class 3A Waubonsie Valley Regional in Aurora.

Warriors' boys team takes third at the conference meet; Alka and Branch finish sixth and seventh, respectively

Willowbrook's boys team finished third in Saturday's West Suburban Gold Conference Meet contest, which also took place at Centerpoint Preserve in Northlake. Morton won the team title with its 39-point output. Downers Grove South (50) finished second. Willowbrook landed in third with its 80-point total. Hinsdale South (94), Leyden (103) and Addison Trail (155) finished fourth, fifth and sixth, respectively.

Sophomore Legend Alka

ran to a sixth-place finish for the Warriors. He completed the 3-mile race at the conference meet in 15 minutes, 55.1 seconds. Senior Miteku Branch of Willowbrook finished seventh, just behind Alka. Branch ran the race in 15 minutes, 57 seconds. Alka and Branch both earned All-Conference recognition by placing among the meet's top 15 finishers.

Juniors Ryan Quinney (17:15.9; 20th), Thomas Thimo (17:42.5; 23rd) and Jacob Alexander (17:50.5; 24th) completed the Warriors' scoring lineup. Senior Angel Perez (17:51.6; 25th) and junior Kole Johanson (18:06.9; 29th) rounded out Willowbrook's varsity lineup at the conference meet.

The Warriors' boys team will join the girls squad in competing in this Saturday's IHSA Class 3A Waubonsie Valley Regional.

Rams run at the Upstate Eight Conference Meet; Hephner leads Glenbard East's boys team with his fourth-place finish

Glenbard East's boys and girls cross-country teams competed in Saturday's Upstate Eight Conference Meet in Elmwood Park. The Rams

placed fifth out of 12 teams in the boys competition. Glenbard ran to an eighth-place finish in the 13-team girls event.

Senior Mason Hephner led Glenbard East's boys team with his fourth-place finish in the individual standings of Saturday's meet. Hephner completed the 3-mile race in 15 minutes, 37.8 seconds. Junior Alexander Hernandez of the Rams earned ninth-place honors with his finishing time of 16 minutes, 21.6 seconds.

Freshman Ryker Tiltges (17:18.5; 32nd), senior Christopher Beales (17:27.6; 38th) and sophomore David Botero (18:16.8; 56th) completed Glenbard East's scoring lineup.

Sophomore Teigan O'Donnell provided the Glenbard East girls team's best finish at Saturday's conference meet. O'Donnell completed the 3-mile girls race in an eighth-place time of 18 minutes, 59.6 seconds.

The Rams' boys and girls teams will compete in this Saturday's IHSA Class 3A Waubonsie Valley Regional.



CHRIS FOX FILE PHOTO: Rock Valley Publishing

Willowbrook High School's girls cross-country squad won the team title at Saturday's West Suburban Gold Conference Meet in Northlake. The victory marked the Willowbrook girls program's first conference meet title since 1998. Freshman Rachel Simek led the Warriors to their victory in the conference meet by finishing second in the individual competition. Simek, who is pictured in during the Warriors' recent home meet at Lombard Common, completed Saturday's 3-mile race in a second-place time of 19 minutes, 20.3 seconds.

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