



Patrick Shelby/Sunnyside Sun

**BIRTHDAY BASKET** — Senior Isaac Perez scores a second half bucket on his way to a team high 19 points against the Black Hills Wolves during the 2020 WIAA Class 2A Hardwood Classic on Saturday at the Yakima SunDome. The point guard celebrated his 18th birthday on the court and earned first team all-tournament honors.

## Toppenish elevates community with trophy

Wildcats earn best state finish since 1992

■ PATRICK SHELBY  
Managing Editor

YAKIMA — The magic of sports can sometimes transcend the final score and when it does, a team's purpose becomes bigger than the game itself — the Toppenish Wildcats experienced such a feeling as they celebrated their sixth place 2020 WIAA Class 2A Hardwood Classic trophy with an honored community of cheering fans Saturday morning.

"It went beyond basketball and I believe that," senior Isaac Perez proudly affirmed as he departed the visitor's locker room following their 63-58 game loss against the Black Hills Wolves March 7. "It was more than just a game — that was something for our community and why I haven't cried like this in a long time!"

Perez celebrated his 18th birthday with his extended Wildcat family while hugging teammates and soaking up the big stage moment at the northeast section at the SunDome. Tears of emotions were transformed into triumphant smiles when the celebratory party began to sing in unison, "happy birthday" to the class president.

"This bunch of young men I feel have done more than just basketball for our community," Toppenish coach John Mesplie confidently expressed, despite his exhausted voice after four straight tournament games. "This is one year I think they just really made our community a lot more tightknit and coming together.



Patrick Shelby/Sunnyside Sun

**EMOTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT** — Isaac Perez gives sophomore Jason Grant a heartfelt hug following their sixth place finish and their best state finish since 1992. Perez and Grant both acknowledge their love of playing basketball together while growing up on the hardwood.

They're a special group."

The Wildcats began their fourth game in as many days with a strong commitment of pushing the ball up the court after a made basket or securing a defensive rebound. Their up-tempo offense assisted in negating the Wolves' height advantage and at the end of the first quarter, they led 15-12.

By halftime, their aggressive play continued to pay dividends as Toppenish went to the free throw line 12 times, making seven foul shots for 58%. Black Hills hit four of four from the line as they took a 32-30 lead into the break.

Perez connected on 3 of 7 from the field, 4 of 6 free throws, 3 steals and 4 rebounds. His brother, freshman Joshua Perez tipped in 8 points on 3 of 6 shooting, including one of four from behind the 3-point arc, 1 of 2 free throws and 3

boards.

Senior Manuel Felan and junior Jason Grant added 4 points. Senior Matthew Ramirez and Sophomore Riley Mesplie each netted 2.

Coach said he was extremely proud of his upperclassmen Perez, Felan, Ramirez and Nick Garza, for helping to create the program's high achieving culture by their strong leadership and academic accomplishments. He credited them for being role models to the five sophomores and one freshman who rounded out the team.

Tied at 39 with 5:23 remaining in the third quarter, Perez and his younger brother knocked down consecutive 3-point field goals, sophomore Mario Larios scored a field goal and Grant added one free

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## Zillah girls season ends against Lynden Christian

Leopards make strong Hardwood Classic run

■ PATRICK SHELBY  
Managing Editor

YAKIMA — Peaking at the right time and splashing down the first bucket of the 2020 WIAA Class 1A girls Hardwood Classic quarterfinal game against No. 2 seeded Lynden Christian, No. 9 Zillah pounced on the opportunity to leave their mark at the SunDome.

"That's the best part about this team — they don't ever give up! They work hard on a daily basis and that's something I never have to ask them to do. They bring it and know what's expected. I couldn't ask anything more of them," ZHS coach Brandie Valadez conveyed.

During the opening quarter and with 4:35 remaining in the second, the Leopards (21-6) proved

their determined resolve to challenge the Lyncs (25-1) on every possession while executing their fearless brand of attacking basketball and were within 23-20.

"It felt good! We scouted them hard. We knew their personnel really well," Sophomore Brynn Widner stated. "They had really good defensive pressure on us and they're really big too!"

The sophomore said it was very hard to draw fouls against girls who are 5-foot-10 and 5-11 but that wasn't going to prevent them from slashing to the bucket against Lynden Christian as they went to the free throw line and shot 11 of 20 for 55% in the first half while the Lyncs were 0 for two.

Halfway through the pivotal quarter, the Lyncs went on a 13-2 run with most of their points coming in the paint to lead 36-22 at halftime. Widner scored 9 points, 2 of 4 from the field

and 5 of 5 from the line, while junior Hollie Ziegler added 5 on a 3-pointer and 2 of 2 free throws.

"I thought once they were able to get a couple of runs, we started to take a step back and let it get to us. Next time, we just need to have that confidence to limit their runs by taking charge and keep going," Widner expressed.

Lynden Christian outrebounded Zillah on the offensive glass by a decisive 9-4 margin and only 11-9 defensively as they used their athleticism to dominate the low block. Junior Emily Mellema led the team with 10 points while Lexi Hernandez contributed seven. They shot 16 for 32 field goals while the Leopards were only able to connect on 5 of 16 for 31.3%

"This is our first time making it this far in a really long time. So, I never want to settle to be loser out," Widner acknowledged while

describing how her tough-minded parents raised the shooting forward to never give up and keep going.

The Lyncs came out in the third quarter and picked up where they left off as senior 5-foot-10 guard Riley Dykstra added to the balanced scoring attack and increased her team's lead to 56-28 going into the final quarter.

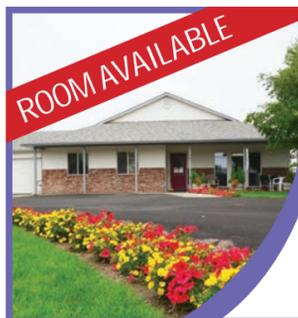
"Our girls have come so far. We were a completely different team at the beginning of the year. And, we've molded into the team that we are now," Valadez described as she left the stadium with her players and toddler son in tow following their 63-41 loss, Thursday night, March 5.

Zillah was led in scoring by Ziegler's 16, Widner 13, Tori Zapien six, Maddie Wallace and Emmalee Nishi each had two while Liana Ramos and Kayana Bass added one.



Patrick Shelby/Sunnyside Sun

**BATTLING FOR POSSESSION** — Zillah High School junior Tori Zapien wrestles for the offensive rebound with Lynden Christian junior Kiley Roetcisoender early in the third quarter. The Leopards held their own on the defensive glass with 20 while the Lyncs posted 22 and a 15-10 edge on the offensive backboard.



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# Grizzly track team gets leg up on season

130 athletes turn out to compete

■ **PATRICK SHELBY**  
Managing Editor

SUNNYSIDE — Around this time last year, winter temperatures were in the air and the ground remained frozen with snow — what a difference a season makes as more than 130 Grizzly athletes turned out for the track team on Monday, March 2.

“I am super excited about the numbers and our returning talent,” SHS track and field coach Dustin Crowe conveyed. “We’ve got a good group of young kids and a nice mix of returning veterans.”

Coach said he has been really pleased with their enthusiastic attitudes and work ethic, along with a willingness to try new sporting routines on the fourth day of spring practice.

Sophomore Alaina Morgan enjoys the difficulty of running hurdles, the 300-meter event to be specific. Track and field runs in her family and by the end of

last season, she had discovered her technical stride to match her athletic abilities which challenges the multisport athlete to excel.

“I like that it’s not just an open sprint and that I’m not just thinking about the fact that I have to be running,” Morgan acknowledged. She credits her older sister for inspiring her to run the 100-meter hurdles in middle school.

Now, she runs both the 100 and 300 hurdles with her favorite being the longer event. “It’s less impact. You have more time to think and the 100 scares me,” she stated.

Team members are trying to find their role or redefine their niche and what they can be successful at while having fun. “At the same time, we try to identify talents and steer them in a direction in which they will excel,” Crowe explained.

Senior Mike Rivera was Sunnyside’s only 4A state multi-event placer in the 100 and 200-meter and plans to improve upon his fourth and seventh place finishes this year.

“I want to do something for my community, even if it’s as small as winning a state title or getting as close as possible. Making my coaches and family proud, along with my school,” Rivera expressed, who has been lifting weights and running sprints since the end of football season.

This year, there will be two state berths awarded which coach believes will benefit his athletes in quite a few events. He confirmed the team’s focus right now is all about improving from March to May.

One of those athletes who has been working out and getting ready for the upcoming season is sophomore Myles Newhouse.

“I’ve been looking forward to this,” Newhouse, exclaimed. The dual sport athlete finished third at Districts in the 400-meters with plans for winning state.

“I like winning, plain and simple. In track, I can achieve that. It’s more individual than football and gets my confidence up,” the motivated runner affirmed.



Patrick Shelby/Sunnyside Sun

**HURDLE MOBILITY** — Sunnyside High School sophomore Alaina Morgan joins her teammates in working out to be more explosive while increasing their range of motion and preventing injury during Thursday afternoon’s two-hour practice.

## VALLEY LANES BOWLING REPORT

### WEEK OF MARCH 3, 2020

#### SUNNY VALLEY MIXED WINTER 2020

**Team Leader:** Valley Girls, 4-0.  
**High Series Men:** Ricky Flett, 584 (224); Juan Pacheco, 475 (210); Tim Shipley, 445.  
**High Series Women:** Ellen Curtiss, 523 (221); Sheri Coder, 430; Cierah Rollinger, 379.  
**High Average Men:** Ricky Flett, 176.  
**High Average Women:** Ellen Curtiss, 165.

#### SUPER BOWL

**Team Leader:** Papa Dave’s Wood-working 58-17.  
**High Series Men:** Rob Rice, 633 (221) (243); Chuck Curtiss, 613 (233); Jon Peton, 613 (209) (210).  
**High Series Women:** Stephanie Luke, 553; Ellen Curtiss, 531 (214); Vicky Charvet, 509.  
**High Average Men:** Rob Rice, 214.  
**High Average Women:** Stephanie Luke, 182.

#### COFFEE TRIO

**Team Leader:** Hail Mary, 27-5.  
**High Series Women:** Maria Proffitt, 509; Violet Torres, 485; Sue Rice, 467.  
**High Average Women:** Susan Brown, 163.

### COMMERCIAL WINTER 2020

**Team Leader:** La Grenuda, 39-11.  
**High Series Men:** Charles Jacobs, 671 (277) (235); Brady Carl, 664 (204) (239) (221); Brad Morrow, 634 (256).  
**High Series Women:** Brad Morrow, 216.

### VALLEY LANES JR.’S WINTER 2020

**Team Leader:** 4 Boys, 4-0.  
**High Series Boys:** Pedro Canales, 438; Devlon Kitzke, 340; Joey Stanton, 316.

**High Series Girls:** Sydnee Colley, 424; Bailey Hazzard, 405; Lexi Kitzke, 255.

**High Average Boys:** Pedro Canales, 167.  
**High Average Girls:** Sydnee Colley, 156.

### LOWER VALLEY SCRATCH

**Team Leader:** Morrow Show Pigs, 76-5-48-5.  
**High Series Men:** Brett Kunert, 971 (244) (224) (258) (245); Brad Morrow, 892 (226) (206) (225) (235); Matt Gomez, 891 (215) (235) (246).  
**High Series Women:** Stephanie Luke, 707; Stacey Isaac, 633; Cheyenne Bird, 633.  
**High Average Men:** Rob Rice, 214.  
**High Average Women:** Stephanie Luke 191.

## TOPPENISH

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throw as the Wildcats went on a 9-2 surge and led 48-41.

Black Hills senior Avery Armin closed out the last 1:03 of the quarter with seven unanswered points of his own to even the score at 48.

Halfway through the fourth quarter and with the pace tightening up, Toppenish clung to a 52-51 lead. The Wolves’ six-foot-six junior Justin Hicks scored seven straight points to reclaim control of the game and led 58-55.

On the subsequent trip down the floor, the Wildcats would regain their poise as five-foot-nine Felan crashed the offensive glass, secured the rebound and powered his way back up to the basket for a field goal and foul. His three-point play tied the game at 58 with 2:04 left.

36-seconds later, six-foot-three senior Weston Ainsworth put Black Hills up for good with a basket. Toppenish had a chance to tie the game on their next trip down the floor but were unable to get a friendly bounce as the ball rimmed out from point blank range.

The Wolves grabbed the rebound and immediately called timeout. Toppenish fouled on the inbounds play. After sinking one of two free throws, the Wildcats were down 61-58, still a one possession game and signaled a timeout with 28.4 remaining.

Perez received the ball at the top of the circle and proceeded to drive around the left side of the paint where he was able

to get past the initial defender at the free throw line and cut toward the rim. As the point guard began to elevate with both hands on the ball above his head, Hicks slid over to meet Perez, who initiated contact into the chest of the shot blocker.

The Wolves’ post player went up in a vertical manner with his outstretched wingspan contesting Perez’s field goal attempt. The officials allowed the players to decide the outcome of the game and no foul was called as the ball was unable to find the bottom of the net on multiple attempts.

“It’s a great day to be a Wildcat! This was just an amazing season from beginning to end,” Athletic Director Brett Stauffer exclaimed. “It’s one of the best groups of talented boys that we’ve had in the school’s 100 year plus history.”

Sophomore Jason Grant wasn’t trying to hold back his outpouring feelings for his teammates as he walked off the floor, rather he was trying to find the right words of what they meant to him.

“I’m going to really miss these guys. It’s different with these guys. I don’t know why. They’re special! I’ve known these guys my whole life. I’m speechless. I can’t put it into words,” Grant poetically expressed as tears reaffirmed his candor.

■ **Patrick Shelby** can be contacted at 509-837-4500, ext. 110 or email PShelby@sunnysidesun.com

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