

SPORTS

WIAA 3A STATE BOWLING CHAMPIONSHIP



Shelton High School senior bowlers Abby Sloane, left, and Morgan Holling, being embraced by Alyssia Paz, share a moment following the 3A state bowling championship Saturday at Narrows Plaza Bowl in University Place. *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*

CRAFTING A LEGACY

Seniors lead Shelton High School to third straight top-six finish at 3A state bowling championship

By Justin Johnson
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"This is my last roll ever."

The words flowed from senior Dreann Merriman's lips, her face a torrent of barely concealed emotion, toward her teammates gathered tightly together near the ball return of lane seven late Saturday morning at Narrows Plaza Bowl in University Place.

Merriman quickly gathered herself, turning her attention to this one final task of the 14th Baker game, the last moment of two days of grueling determination that composes the WIAA 3A state bowling championship.

She strode forward and let the ball go.

It knocked down two of three remaining pins, resulting in a score of 177 for the game and a sixth-place finish for the Highclimbers.

It was over and the emotion soon followed.

Shelton's four seniors embraced, tears flowed quickly, as did the laughs — a storm of mixed emotions at the end of a long journey.

"Going to state three years in a row was an amazing experience for me," Merriman said. "I didn't place my senior year, but I enjoyed my team so much. My team has made the experience so much better. I'm not satisfied with this

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FAR POST

Being thankful for the chance to witness Senior Night

There aren't many things in high school sports that surpass the emotional wallop that Senior Night brings.

Tears and smiles are everywhere. And that's before the action on the field or court even begins.

As the winter sports seasons are reaching their respective conclusions, I've tried my best to get out and see as many of those senior days or nights as I can.

Last week, I was at Shelton High School's Mini-Dome for both of its basketball senior nights, the boys on Feb. 4 and the girls on Feb. 6.

The week before, I saw Senior Night

for Mary M. Knight's boys and girls basketball teams, Shelton's boys and girls wrestling teams and North Mason's girls basketball team.

Every one of them was unique and touching — the emotions and energy intense.

Senior nights are truly one of my favorite sporting moments to witness.

During the Shelton girls basketball team's senior night — which honored seven players and the Climbers' team manager, first-year head coach Liz Canright told stories of the group and thanked her



By JUSTIN JOHNSON

players.

At the Bulldog girls basketball team's senior night, it was younger teammates sharing stories and why they looked up to the seniors.

The sporting world can be cutthroat and competitive. Winning triumphs so many things.

On these nights of honor, however, it doesn't really matter if one is the star player or a rarely-used substitute. Those who put in the work and effort to earn the privilege of wearing their school's uniform earn that moment in the spot-

light.

As winter sports conclude during the next couple of weeks, I'd just like to give thanks to the senior athletes here in Mason County.

Thank you for your hard work.

Whether you compete on a mat, court, field or pool, thank you for putting in that effort to be the best at what you choose to do.

And from me to you, thank you for letting me tell your stories.

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WIAA 3A STATE BOWLING CHAMPIONSHIP

"I hope that the future teams can stay positive and just love bowling as much as our team always has. I hope they can always improve like we did. It's been so amazing to make such great friends in bowling, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way."

Dreann Merriman, Shelton High School senior bowler



Bowl: Two league titles, three state tournament berths

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performance, but I just had an off day. I couldn't change anything but my attitude, and that's OK."

Shelton finished the two-day tournament, which spanned a six-game series Friday and a 14-game Baker series Saturday, with a team score of 6,631.

Merriman finished Friday with a score of 1030 to place 19th among individuals.

"The tournament pushes you to the limits and makes you work and be determined," Shelton senior Alyssia Paz said. "It hasn't been easy, but it's been a fun and wild ride over the years."

This was Shelton's third consecutive appearance at the 3A tournament, and its seniors have been the driving force behind that success. They shared the South Sound Conference's regular season title with Capital as sophomores before winning the conference's post-season tournament and finishing fifth at the state championships.

A year later, as juniors, they won the league title outright and eventually finished sixth at the 3A championships.

"Going to state means the absolute

world to me," senior Abby Slone said. "I have worked so hard and have dedicated most of my life to this sport. Nothing really matters at the end of the day besides knowing that I gave it my all for the sport I love."

Shelton's seniors — Merriman, Paz, Slone and Morgan Holling — have crafted a legacy of excellence during their careers, one that the quartet hopes inspires future Highclimber bowlers to continue to build upon.

"I hope that the future teams can stay positive and just love bowling as much as our team always has," Merriman said. "I hope they can always improve like we did. It's been so amazing to make such great friends in bowling, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way."

The state competition format is a labor of love for participants.

A set of three games followed by a short, late afternoon lunch break and a second set of three games means most bowlers have to roll more than 100 times in just a few short hours during the first day of action.

As individuals, Shelton's bowlers felt they could have each performed better, but were grateful for the op-

portunity to compete side-by-side with their teammates.

"This year at state wasn't my best, but I did what I could," Paz said. "Struggling sometimes just happens and as bowlers we learn from our mistakes. I'm glad I made it with my team and we all did our very best."

Shelton coach Dann Gagnon said he was pleased with the team's finish against the competition, which included two-time defending champion Wilson High School and this year's winner — Evergreen High School of Seattle.

"The last six years have been rewarding for me after seeing (the girls) improving each year," Gagnon said. "I reminded the girls to remember the journey as they finish their senior year. I will miss my seniors who have always been competitive and supportive with their teammates. Parents have also been supportive and encouraging, and that has been greatly appreciated. Without parent support, it would be difficult to have a successful bowling season."

Shelton finished this year with a 14-4 overall record (11-3 South Sound Conference), to take second in the SSC and third at the 3A West Central Dis-

trict championships.

Paz led the SSC with a bowling average of 190.6, an improvement of nearly 40 pins over her junior season. She had nine games of more than 200 and three series of more than 400, including a league-high 440.

Merriman bowled a league-high game of 248 and had seven games of more than 200. Both Paz and Merriman were named First Team All-League, while Slone earned Second Team honors.

The Climbers' roster also includes three other seniors: Bethany Comstock, who was an alternate bowler at the state championship, Annaliese Tholl and Realee Wiles.

Holling said this season was the best experience of her career, crediting both her teammates and Coach Gagnon for her improvement and growth. Holling said she has improved from an average of 115 to 131, a gain of 16 pins per game.

"This year, after every good or bad ball, my team was there with cheers, laughs, hugs and words of wisdom for me," Holling said. "That feeling is something that can't be replaced and I'll miss it for years to come."