

# SPORTS

SEQUIM GAZETTE

## School closure ends spring prep seasons

### Careers wrap for seniors

BY MICHAEL DASHIELL  
*Sequim Gazette*

A school scoring record. A shot at defending not one but two state titles. A first-year coach replacing a local legend. A 42-match league winning streak. And more than 100 different meets, games and matches for varsity and junior varsity teams donning the purple and gold, all cancelled.

If 2019 was a banner season for Sequim High School sports, 2020 will likely be remembered as the "lost season."

By mid-May, prep softball teams should have been in their final warm-up games before the postseason, prep baseball and boys soccer teams would be in the thick of district playoffs, girls tennis and track athletes would be battling familiar foes at league meets for district seeds, and players from boys and girls golf squads who hadn't already locked up state berths would be aiming to extend their season at the West Central District tourney.

Instead, those athletes are finishing classes for the 2019-2020 school year remotely, and only left to wonder what could have been.

"We had a pretty disappointing loss (to end last season); we kind of knew we had the potential to go far in state," said SHS senior Mike McAleer Jr., a four-year varsity player and a captain of the 2020 boys soccer squad that saw practices this spring but never saw a game.

Expectations were high for an SHS soccer program that had earned back-to-back state tourney berths. Much of this year's roster included stars from Storm King's U19 boys team that excelled in Washington Youth Soccer's Regional Club League (RCL) — one of upper echelons of select soccer in Washington state.

Last year's team scorched the Olympic League to the tune of a 12-0 record and league title to earn a home playoff game, before the

Wolves were upended 3-2 by Woodland in the opening round of the state 2A tourney. Sequim wound up 15-2-2 overall.

Senior Ryan Tolberd was two goals shy of matching Liam Harris' school record for goals (45). He, McAleer and Adrian Funston were among All-Olympic League seniors who never saw a chance to suit up their senior seasons.

"We definitely knew we had the potential (to excel at the state tourney); we just hadn't had the chance to show it," McAleer said.

"We were excited to get Sequim on the map a little bit. We just feel we kind of got robbed."

McAleer, who is headed to Western Washington University in the fall, is one of 12 seniors on the SHS boys soccer varsity squad who saw his season come to an end before it really got started. While Sequim High had a relatively low spring sports turnout from its Class of 2020 — just 34 of the 219 students signed up to play were 12th-graders — the Wolves' soccer program was hit particularly hard, with 15 seniors between varsity and JV rosters, highest among all SHS spring sports.

(By comparison, Sequim's 52-member track and field team has nine seniors, and just three of the 26-member girls tennis team were seniors.)

"We had a returning core group of seniors who were very motivated and were together for a lot of years," first-year boys soccer coach Ken Garling said.

"I feel really bad for the seniors — such motivated, such a great group of boys. For them to not be able to fulfill that (dream) it's just a bummer. The underclassmen will get another crack at it."

Garling was looking forward to his first season at the Wolves' helm, after Dave Brasher ended a 24-season tenure as Sequim's head coach.

*"We were excited to get Sequim on the map a little bit. We just feel we kind of got robbed."*

Mike McAleer Jr.  
SHS Senior

"We were building on the success of the past several years (and I) felt we had the tools to win our league," Garling said. "Once we got to state, who knows what happens."

In early March the Wolves were building up to their 10th practice, the minimum for players to be eligible as they anticipated their first game, a non-league contest at 3A Central Kitsap scheduled for March 14. Players had eyed a training session the day prior, Garling said, when players and coaches heard of Gov. Jay Inslee's decision to temporarily close all state schools, thereby suspending all extra-curricular activities.

"The information early on was changing so rapidly; we were all just going, 'What (is) going on?' I think we were all in shock," Garling said. "(But) we could kind of seeing the writing on the wall."

"There's just nothing you can do about it; it is what it is."

Garling said he has stayed in communication with players to see how they are handling the shutdown.

"I remind them they're all in this together; this is everybody in the state, every sport," he said. (But) it's still hard."

McAleer said he'll miss a number of things about his high school playing days, in particular the bus rides with teammates on the return from away games.

"It showed how tight we were, how much we enjoyed being with each other, playing around, playing and winning big games," he said.

McAleer added, "I'm still pretty numb to it all. I'm sure I'll laugh about it someday."

#### State champs stymied

After back-to-back appearances in the state 2A tennis finals, doubles partners Jessica Dietzman and Kalli Wiker were looking for a rare third trip to the finals this spring.

In 2019, led by Dietzman (then a junior) and Kalli Wiker (a sophomore), Sequim High's girls tennis team amassed a 16-0 record, a West Central District crown and share of the



Above, Sequim's Logan Laxson, right, hands off to teammate Darren Salazar in the 4x100 relay preliminaries at the state 2A track and field championships in Tacoma in 2019. Sequim placed sixth in the finals and helped the Wolves win its first boys state championship in school history. Below, Sequim High freshman shortstop Hannah Bates looks to make a play at a preseason practice in early March. Bates and the Wolves saw their 2020 spring season suspended before playing their first game in mid-March. Sequim Gazette file photos by Michael Dashiell

#### Spring sports previews online

In a sneak peek of what might have been, read up on previews of Sequim High's six varsity sports teams that were set to take to the fields, courts, courses and track ovals for their spring 2020 prep seasons at [www.sequimgazette.com/sports](http://www.sequimgazette.com/sports). Concerns of the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus moved Gov. Jay Inslee to shut down all Washington schools and their extracurricular activities in early April.



state 2A title.

The team lost seven players to graduation but still had high hopes of a strong 2020 campaign, with returners McKenna Hastings and Melissa Porter backing the returning state champs.

Sequim coach Mark Textor said he expected a steep learning curve for the Wolves, who behind a few returners had plenty of inexperience.

"We've got some challenges ahead of us," he said in early March. "We have more youth than we've had in a long time."

Another strong turnout saw 26 girls ready to hit the tennis courts for Sequim High, and none more experienced than Dietzman and Wiker. The duo finished the 2019 season with an unblem-

ished 22-0 mark and were 40-1 as doubles partners in the past two seasons.

The spring season cancellation ends Dietzman's prep tennis career, however.

Brad Moore, about to enter his 26th season as head coach of Sequim High's track and field squad, was looking forward to the Wolves' first spring campaign as defending state champs.

Last season's senior-laden SHS boys team swept up league and district titles before peppering the medal stand at the class 2A state track meet at Tacoma's Mount Tahoma High School last May for the first boys' team title in Sequim High history.

And though the Wolves' roster was depleted from

graduation, Moore said he had expectations the Wolves would be quite competitive.

"We've got some really good kids, especially among the sprinters," Moore said at a preseason practice in early March, a few days before the school shutdown. "We may have one of our fastest sprinting crews."

Among them was senior Darren Salazar, a two-time state medalist in 2019 (100, 200), along with state relay runner junior Logan Laxson, a district qualifier in the 200- and 400-meter races, and sophomore Theo McMurray, part of the Wolves' 4x100 relay that placed eighth at state.

Moore also said he ex-

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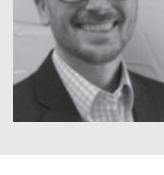
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## Closure

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league last spring. Returning were two state competitors — sophomore Riley Pyeatt placed fifth in the 400 and 12th in the 200, while junior Abby Schroeder leapt to 14th place in the high jump at last year's state meet — along with a trio of district meet-qualifying seniors: Hope Glasser (discus, javelin), Lesea Pfeffer (100 hurdles) and Gabby Happe (high jump).

### Links losses

Garrett Smithson, a familiar face in the Sequim High golf program after leading the SHS girls' program for several seasons, was set to take over an SHS boys program this spring that had amassed four consecutive unbeaten league campaigns, a 42-match league winning streak and back-to-back state tourney runner-up finishes under coach Bill Shea.

Instead, any non-senior Wolves will have to aim for next spring.

"We were really good; (we had) guys that put the time in the offseason," Smithson said. "They had a chance to do something special."

The Wolves' boys squad had the past three league MVPs, and though they lost both league co-MVPs from 2019 (Blake Wiker to graduation, Paul Jacobsen to an out-of-district move) they had plenty of firepower in their club bags. Former state tourney competitor Andrew Vanderberg, a senior, was set to be back in the fold after not playing in 2019, along with young stars Dominic Riccobene, Ben Sweet and Garrett Hoesel. Sweet was an all-league first team player who finished in the top 20 at state last spring while Hoesel and Riccobene were all-league second team players.

Vanderberg didn't play in

2019, and Smithson said he was excited to get the senior back into the mix this spring.

"It's pretty heartbreaking for me and him and all the other boys," Smithson said. "That's kind of a bummer for the guys who had a chance to make some noise at state."

Sequim's roster boasted another strong turnout among ninth- and 10th-graders, with eight underclassmen (three sophomores, five freshmen) on the boys' roster and another eight (five sophomores, three freshmen) on the girls' side.

"That's how we mold the program into state contenders," Smithson said.

In late March, Sweet said he thought the postponement of school would actually help him a bit as he recovered from an offseason injury.

The thought of cancelling his sophomore season, he said then, would be tough.

"I was really excited going into this season," Sweet said, returning from playing a few holes at Sequim's home course, The Cedars at Dungeness. "I'm disappointed not to go to state."

Tim Lusk, who spent the past three springs leading Sequim High's fastpitch squad (including two state appearances), made the switch to lead Sequim's girls golf program.

Lusk said that though SHS's girls lost a trio of veteran players to graduation — including Madison Uranga, state alternate Yana Hoesel and state qualifier Brittany Gale — a slew of strong returning players figured to make Sequim more than a little competitive. Returners included sophomores Eliza Brown and Juliana Tamblyn, juniors JoNell Hill and Jessica German, and senior Abbee Jagger, with newcomers Jelissa Julmest and Hannah Wagner set to bolster an already strong lineup.

The Wolves found out they'd not get a chance to



**Sequim's Eli Gish, right, and Mike McAleer, background, pictured here playing for the Storm King U19 team, were two key players set to return to help the Sequim High Wolves defend an Olympic League title and return to state in 2020.** Sequim Gazette file photo by Michael Dashiel

tee it up one day before their first match, a March 13 home league match against Olympic.

"We're hoping to recover some of the season," Lusk said in late March, a few days after Inslee's first school closure, "but I'm looking forward to the next three, four years."

### Diamond dreams subdued

Dave Ditlefson, who is both athletic director and head varsity baseball coach at Sequim High, said he and other ADs were making contingency plans in early March as they prepared for truncated spring sports seasons.

The announcement about the school closure came on March 13, so SHS baseball coaches gathered players for a preseason practice, pictures and a conversation.

"Fortunately we were able to meet with our kids that day," Ditlefson said. "We were able to kind of prepare for it and say our goodbyes until at least April 27."

SHS's baseball squad had an impressive season in

2019, finishing with a 14-9 overall record that included a 7-5 Olympic League mark good for third in the league.

The Wolves came just one win short of making the state championship playoffs last year with a 2-2 mark at districts.

Despite losing star pitcher Johnnie Young to graduation, Ditlefson said he expected the Wolves to do well. A strong junior class led by Michael Young, Michael Grubb, Austin Newton and Hayden Eaton looked to back rotation headliner Silas Thomas, one of just two seniors on the team and its lone returning 12th-grader.

"(Cancelling spring seasons) was always in the back of our minds," Ditlefson said. "When he (Inslee) went to a May 4 (stay at home order) that was the kind of the writing on the wall. You could tell that was going to tough to start the season."

Ditlefson said he has stayed in contact with players.

"We're all sad about this lost season," he said. While the underclassmen have a chance to come back to play in 2021, "They still miss out

on a lot of memories they could have made; (it's) not much of a consolation prize."

After a three-year absence, Mike McFarlen was headed back to the dugout as head coach of Sequim High's fastpitch squad.

McFarlen led Sequim to five consecutive state 2A tournament appearances in all five of his seasons from 2012-2016 before stepping away to coach a select team as well as a Little League junior squad that qualified for regionals.

"I wanted to go back to (youth league), bring some of these kids up," McFarlen said.

McFarlen was understand-

ably optimistic about this year's Wolves fastpitch squad, with standout pitcher Leeann Raney looking to improve upon an impressive freshman season and slugger Jayla Julmest anchoring a potent lineup.

"We don't really have any weak spots," McFarlen said at an early March preseasn practice. "I think we'll be real competitive."

Kyllynn Stringer, one of

two seniors on the fastpitch roster in 2020 (Vicky Lelle was the other), was looking to complete a prep career in a sport she started at ages 5 (tee-ball) and 9 (softball).

"We had a really strong team this year, and I really saw us going far in state," said Stringer, a first baseman and pitcher.

"Last year, we didn't make it to the second day of state, but I was feeling a lot better about our chances this year. We had a lot of strong bonding and knew each other's strengths and weaknesses."

Despite the season's cancellation, Stringer said she isn't giving up on playing this summer.

"I might be able to play with TNT Fastpitch (team) this summer, so it's not over yet," she said.

The 18-year-old said she can find a silver lining in it all.

"At first I was definitely upset," Stringer said, "but my job (working at Olympic Medical Center) came out of it."

**Sequim Gazette reporter Matthew Nash contributed to this report.**

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