

Sports & Outdoors

Reclaiming the Cup



The Shelton High School football team celebrates after defeating intracounty rival North Mason on Friday night at Jack Stark Field at Highclimber Stadium in Shelton. The Climbers' 45-6 win over the Bulldogs ended a three-year losing streak in the series. *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*

Gould runs wild in Shelton victory

By Justin Johnson
justin@masoncounty.com

For the first time in four years, the Cup is staying in southern Mason County.

Senior Gavin Gould scored five touchdowns and the Shelton High

School football team ran past rival North Mason 45-6 in the ninth annual Mason County Cup – Battle for the Axe on Friday night at Jack Stark Field at Highclimber Stadium in Shelton.

“As a team, this game was very important to us,” Gould wrote in an email. “The Bulldogs have won every

year since I’ve been in high school, so taking that axe back meant a lot to our team.”

Shelton’s home field win snapped a three-game North Mason winning streak in the series dating back to 2017 and the Climbers now lead 5-4.

“The game means a lot to a lot of people and meant a lot to the community, to the district, to our football program, to alumni, and we were happy

that we could play a really good brand of football in an important game,” Shelton coach Mark Smith wrote in an email. “I thought all three aspects of the game — offensively, defensively and special teams — played well and had a role in the win. It’s good to have the axe back home and to win the Mason County Cup.”

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Climbers win Evergreen XC title

By Justin Johnson
justin@masoncounty.com

When Alauna Carstens burst through the tree line on the north side of Lake Isabella State Park, Aiden Gregg and Ali Clifton soon followed and the final one-third of a mile of the 5,000-meter course of the Evergreen Conference girls cross country championships became a coronation.

Led by Carstens’ season-best time of 21 minutes, 47.9 seconds, the Shelton High School girls cross country team won the Evergreen championship with a team score of 32 on Saturday afternoon.

It was the Highclimbers’ first girls league title since 2013.

“The conference meet was memorable. About 30 girls competed at leagues, so it was competitive,” Carstens wrote in an email. “Ali, Aiden and I focused on making power moves on the hills. The whole Shelton girls team was really engaged during this race. It felt good to come in first at the finish line and have my teammates right there with me.”

Gregg finished second with a season-best 21:53 and Clifton was a half-second behind at 21:53.5. The trio have finished 1-2-3 in

every race Shelton has competed in during the season.

“I’m not going to say we went into this meeting expecting that to happen, however I will say that throughout the season ... our top 3 have really just been able to motivate each other during our actual races,” Gregg wrote. “We are really strong and competitive together. Working together throughout the season to get that has really made us strong and we were super-motivated to prove that.”

And prove it they did. The course at Lake

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Shelton High School’s Alauna Carstens was the individual winner at the Evergreen Conference girls cross country race Saturday at Lake Isabella State Park near Shelton. The Climbers claimed the team title. *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*



Shelton High School's Alauna Carstens enters the finish chute to win the Evergreen Conference girls cross country title. Carstens was one of four High-climber runners to finish in the top 10 and earn All-Conference honors Saturday at Lake Isabella State Park in Shelton. *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*

XC: Girls title is Shelton's first since the fall 2013 season

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Isabella features grass, dirt and wood chip surfaces, plus several hills designed to challenge and push runners. Shelton coach John Johnson called the course an "honest cross country test" that rewards the fittest athletes.

"My relationship with Aiden and Alauna has excelled over this past year," Clifton wrote. "We all have great running qualities and have been able to use that with each other. Even when we lose each other during a race, we still end up finding each other. We pace each other well and encourage each other. The last race there was a point I began to speed up, Alauna and Aiden both let me know I should save that for the end. It's really become a true team sport this year, and I'm really proud of not just us three, but the whole team."

Senior Hannah Shrum finished as Shelton's No. 4 runner, turning in a season-best time of 23:23.6 to finish 10th and earn All-Conference honors. Shrum's time was more than a minute faster than her previous season-best, which came the week prior on the same course at Lake Isabella in a dual meet with Rochester.

"Hannah Shrum had a big day for us, and Faith Linthicum essentially delivered what we needed," Johnson wrote. "Those two women are critical to our team success and we are all grateful for what they have done this season. Our home course is tough. There is some difficult ground and always another hill in front of you. To stay engaged for 20-plus minutes when you're hurting the whole time says something about their desire to run well for their teammates."

Carstens said it was great to win the title at home, sending the Climbers' seniors out on a high note in their final high school race at



Shelton's Aiden Gregg, top, and Hannah Shrum react after crossing the finish line second and 10th, respectively, at the Evergreen Conference cross country championships Saturday at Lake Isabella State Park near Shelton. *Journal photos by Justin Johnson*

Lake Isabella.

"Everyone had so much energy and was overwhelmed with happiness because we showed up for each other and performed well," Carstens wrote. "Although we have

had a short cross country season, my team and I have been race ready for months. We weren't even sure we were going to be able to compete in any races this year, yet we trained almost every

day during the offseason. By staying in shape throughout the summer, we created a good team dynamic and it has made a big difference in this year's season. I'm glad coach Johnson motivated all of us to go out and run when other teams in our league weren't training at all."

Shelton's girls won every meet that competed in this year, including finishing with perfect 15 team scores in their first two competitions of the season.

"We are just so much stronger than our competition right now because of our training and our bond that kept us running," Gregg wrote. "Unlike a lot of these teams that really only started training in the past eight weeks, we have a year of buildup behind us and we are at our fittest right now."

Clifton wrote that she feels the team has become more supportive of each other during the pandemic, and that cross country is one of her main socializing bubbles.

"Even people I've been running with for the past two years I got to know more," Clifton wrote. "We all began to see each other's strengths, and just build off of each other while building each other up at the same time. We found that the more we supported each other during practice and even during races, the better we did as individuals and as a team."

Gregg, Shrum, Abigail Johnson and Hannah Johnson are the Climbers' four seniors, and competed for the final time at Lake Isabella.

"I think Hannah and I really just wanted to have a good race," Gregg wrote. "This is the last race we will ever run in high school on our own course. We also have a lot of drive for our team. This year was a year where we all could have possibly gone to state, and being that we don't have that, a first place league title is the next best thing."

Shelton competes at the District IV meet at 3:30 p.m. today at Hudson's Bay High School in Vancouver.

"The team and I are excited to compete on the district course because this is new territory for us," Carstens wrote. "We have the opportunity to push ourselves against other runners we haven't raced yet and I am confident Shelton cross country will put in the necessary effort to place well on Thursday."

Johnson wrote that watching the team compete this season has been inspiring.

"With the way our top three women have been racing of late, there is no doubt who the fittest girls in our conference are," Johnson wrote. "A group of athletes like we have up front creates an opportunity where each of them can elevate one another. Watching their commitment to the team and the way they prepared over the past year has been inspiring and motivating for me."

The Shelton boys finished sixth at the conference meet. Tumwater won the title with a team score of 32.

Jaydon Blackburn finished 17th overall with a time of 19:43.1. Blackburn, Carson Bursch, Nathan Gomez and Landon Bursh will compete individually today at the district meet. The boys race begins at 4:10 p.m.

North Mason

Bulldogs senior Noah Hasselblad finished third overall at the Olympic League championships on Saturday at Battle Point Park on Bainbridge Island.

Hasselblad was the top 2A boys finisher at the meet, finishing with a season-best time of 16:30.1 on the 5,000-meter course.

North Mason sophomore Kezlie Thygesen finished fifth overall in the girls race, running the course with a season-best time of 20:36.4.