



FEATURES

## A 'surreal' experience



Lynden's head football coach, Blake VanDalen, poses with his Seattle Seahawks High School Coach of the Year award. VanDalen raised the 12th Man flag ahead of Seattle's Dec. 26 home game versus the Chicago Bears. (Photo courtesy of Blake VanDalen)

From volunteer assistant to multiple 2021 coach of the year awards, VanDalen made his 25th year with the Lions a memorable one

By Connor J. Benintendi  
connor@lyndentribune.com

SEATTLE - Before raising the 12th man flag as the Seahawks' high school coach of the year, Blake VanDalen made sure to do his research on the previous honorees.

That only added to the shock when he realized he was going to have his own police escort up to the top deck.

"I'm sure Ken Griffey Jr. is used to this, and I'm sure Paul Allen was used to it; [Matt] Hasselbeck, Steve Largent," VanDalen said. "Trust me, I googled all the names of the people who have done this and I'm still trying to figure out how my

name fits in there."

The fifth-year head coach of the Lynden Lions has piled up a huge number of accolades this season, from state champion coach, All-Northwest Conference coach of the year, Seahawks high school coach of the week (and year), and now 12th man flag raiser.

"It truly is surreal, that's the only word that has stuck with me through this whole thing," VanDalen said. "It really doesn't feel real, even though it just happened, and I went through it."

He received an email from the Seahawks the Tuesday following Lynden's 2A state championship victory over Tumwater.

It asked him to join the other Washington state championship coaches at the flag on Sunday, Dec. 26, before Seattle's game versus the Chicago Bears. He, however, would be the one to raise it.

Since their state championship victory, he said he had already been waking up every day wondering if it was all a dream. This was even more difficult to fathom.

"I sat at my computer, I think I felt

my head spin around a couple of times, I got a little lightheaded," he said. "It just so happened to be my son [Weston VanDalen] and I were the only two in the weight room ... he had the same reaction. He read and it and you almost wonder if it's a prank, those kinds of things just don't happen to a guy that's never left Lynden."

After his 25th year with the Lynden program, VanDalen was getting the recognition he deserved, whether his servant's heart allowed him to think so or not.

Simultaneously, he understands the importance of his first 20 years with the Lions' program, picking the brain of his legendary predecessor, Curt Kramme.

In April 2017, Kramme, a hall of fame head coach who spent 26 seasons with Lynden's football program, died after a nearly year-long battle with bladder cancer.

The Lions won seven state championships under Kramme, including six in eight years from 2006-2013. Blake

See **VANDALEN** on B2

BRIEFLY



Ferndale's senior guard Mark Schlichting will look to build on an already-impressive season when the Golden Eagles resume play against Sedro-Woolley at home on Tuesday, Jan. 4. (Connor J. Benintendi/Lynden Tribune)

## Ferndale sports resume this week after winter break

FERNDALE -- Like many schools over the holiday break, the Golden Eagles were dormant.

In fact, the only teams that played any games over the week-long winter hiatus was the Meridian, Nooksack Valley and Lynden Christian girls basketball teams.

Other than that, it was a slow week. The Golden Eagles basketball teams don't have to wait much longer, as the boys will play Sedro-Woolley at home on Tuesday, Jan. 4. The girls had their game against Sedro-Woolley cancelled, and thus they will suit up on Friday, Jan. 7, at home against Mount Baker.

For the Ferndale wrestling teams, they have already been off for a much more extended period of time. The boys haven't hit the mat since Dec. 16, and the girls one day prior on Dec. 15.

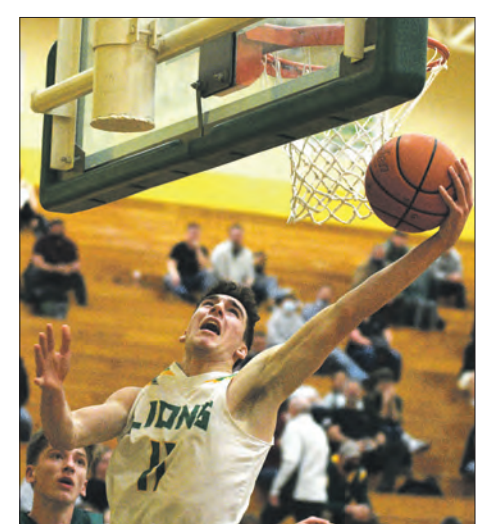
The boys are set to resume on Wednesday, Jan. 5 when they travel to Sedro-Woolley. The girls are scheduled for a dual versus Squilicum on Thursday, Jan. 6.

Girls bowling keeps things going with a Wednesday, Jan. 5, matchup at home against Anacortes.

- Connor J. Benintendi

BOYS BASKETBALL

## Lions disrupt Mariners



Lions senior guard/forward Jordan Medcalf led Lynden with a game-high 16 points in their 62-44 victory over Sehome on Monday, Jan. 3. (Connor J. Benintendi/Lynden Tribune)

By Connor J. Benintendi  
Connor@lyndentribune.com

LYNDEN — The Lions came out on top in a battle between two of the top 2A Northwest Conference teams, defeating Sehome 62-44 at home.

Lynden (6-1, 4-1 NWC) utilized hustle and physicality in the rebounding department as well as quick hands in the passing

See **LIONS** on B3

GIRLS BASKETBALL

## Pioneers cruise to victory over 4A Mount Si

Devin Coppinger, Lainey Kimball's double-doubles propel Nooksack Valley to 63-48 win in Lynden Christmas Classic

By Connor J. Benintendi  
connor@lyndentribune.com

LYNDEN - The Pioneers bounced right back after their loss to top-ranked Tumwater.

After being thrust into competition at the Lynden Christmas Classic a day prior, the Pioneers made good on their short voyage. Nooksack Valley took the tournament spot of late-dropout Tahoma.

The Pioneers didn't miss a beat against Mount Si, crashing the offensive boards to get second chance opportunities and converting at a much higher clip from the foul line.

See **PIONEERS** on B3



Pioneers sophomore guard/forward Lainey Kimball (No. 10) tallied 12 points, 12 rebounds and 2 assists in Nooksack Valley's 63-48 win over Mount Si on Wednesday, Dec. 29. (Connor J. Benintendi/Lynden Tribune)



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# VanDalen: 'Humbling' to be honored by his peers

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VanDalen was there for all six during that stretch. "In 20 years, I was able to watch, observe, and see how our program not only was built, but how he [Kramme] was able to build his legacy, or his dynasty, or whatever word you want to put on his 26-year footprint on our program," VanDalen said.

With Lynden's head coaching position now vacant, and the program mourning the loss of a beloved man and mentor, the rest of the Lions' coaching staff contemplated taking a break.

Lynden's athletic director, Mike McKee, met with all the assistant coaches. When it was VanDalen's turn, McKee told him each of them was ready to be done, but they would all stay if he took on the head coaching role.

"That was as important as me taking over the program," VanDalen said. "The fact that every assistant stayed on, even if some of them believed - they might have thought it was a great time to transition out. I think a lot of that had to do with respect for coach Kramme, we didn't want to see it all just, poof, disappear."

Beginning as a volunteer assistant in the fall of 1997, VanDalen simply wanted to be around the program as a servant. He was happy in that role, knowing how integral committed volunteer coaches are to the success of a high school football program.

From there, Kramme promoted VanDalen to wide receivers coach, which was a paid position, and then later to defensive coordinator. He held that position for the next nine years.

"Then you get to that pivotal season when he was sick," VanDalen said. "For me it helped put everything in perspective: the 'why' of him wanting to coach and have an impact on kids' lives. Yes, he won a lot of championships, but he would tell you it was about the impact he had on kids and the time he got to spend with them."

VanDalen adopted that same calling. The kids needed someone they knew and could rely on, and he wanted to ensure they were aware they weren't being left behind. Humility, he said, was the number one thing he learned

from Kramme about how to be a head coach.

It didn't matter if he was winning titles or not, the important thing was whether he could look at his team's strengths and build around those. There was always room for growth, and it started with the coaching staff.

The Lions didn't spend much time away from their perennial dominance. In 2017, the team finished 5-5 (3-3 NWC) before losing to Tumwater in the first round of the state tournament.

The very next season they reached the 2A state championship against Hockinson after a perfect 12-0 season. Lynden led 31-28 with 10 minutes remaining in the game but surrendered back-to-back touchdowns, then trailing by 11. The Lions were unable to recover, losing 42-37.

"I don't know how each coach handles getting second, it's probably one of the hardest things in football," VanDalen said. "Getting third is a lot easier than getting second, believe it or not."

He told each freshman to hug a senior and tell them they were going to finish what they started. Those freshmen were this past season's seniors. It was the completion of a five-year journey that began when Kramme passed and VanDalen stepped in.

The Lynden program kept its unity and sense of family when the entire coaching staff stuck around, and it made bringing the gold ball home that much sweeter.

VanDalen's first thought as the clock hit zeroes in the state championship game? The names and faces of everyone who contributed, not just this season, but in the years leading up to it — all the way down to trainers and other team personnel.

"There's just this massive release of emotions," VanDalen said. "That hard work paid off, the selflessness of the kids paid off. It's really cool when you believe something whole-heartedly and then you're able to go out and execute it, and then, obviously, get the ultimate prize, too."

All of this came before raising the 12th man flag, an honor he never thought his name fit the criteria for.

The experience included getting a police escort to the

top deck, his youngest son Max getting to ride in the biggest elevator he's ever seen and being surrounded by his entire extended family before pumping up Lumen Field's thousands of fans.

Now, he is firmly into the basketball season as the program's junior varsity coach.

The football season moves further into the rear-view mirror, but VanDalen and the coaching staff have already begun plans for next year.



Lynden football head coach Blake VanDalen poses on the top deck of Lumen Field with his immediate family before raising the 12th Man flag on Dec. 26 (TOP). VanDalen raises the 12th Man flag ahead of Seattle's Dec. 26 home game versus the Chicago Bears (BOTTOM). (Photos courtesy of Blake VanDalen)

## ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Nooksack Valley's sophomore guard **Devin Coppinger** led the Pioneers to a 63-48 victory over 4A opponent Mount Si to close out their two-game series in the Lynden Christmas Classic tournament. Coppinger recorded a double-double of 26 points and 12 rebounds while adding 4 assists and 2 steals.



**DEVIN COPPINGER**  
NOOKSACK VALLEY - BASKETBALL

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## Mt. Baker Rotary Students of the Month January 2022 • Lynden High School

### Sage Anderson Student of the Month 2022



With a GPA of 3.9, LHS senior Sage Anderson has kept busy both in the classroom and out of it. She has been involved in ASB for three years (currently serving as class president) and FFA for four years (where she served as vice president in her sophomore year).

Sage has been on both the JV and Varsity LHS tennis teams all four years, and also did JV and Varsity LHS soccer her freshman and sophomore years. Additionally, she has served as the LHS Varsity Boys Basketball manager for the past three years.

When she's not in class or on the field, she enjoys pottery, traveling, hanging out with friends, spending time with family, strengthening her faith and volunteering in various capacities.

She is in the process of applying to schools and plans to pursue an undergraduate, then graduate degree to become a Speech Language Pathologist.

### Case Zweegman Student of the Month 2022



Case Zweegman has had quite the senior year. In addition to being the LHS Football Team Captain during a championship year, he was also awarded the NWC Sportsmanship Award for 2021 and serves as the senior ASB president. He maintains a GPA of 3.9 and also plays baseball for LHS.

He is actively involved in community service, notably helping out at the Lynden Community Center and, with his fellow football players, building Bender Park's latest installments.

Seasonally, Case does farm & field work at a local dairy farm. He is interested in a career in medicine.

Depending on the university he chooses, he plans to obtain an undergraduate degree in either biology or chemistry.

### Haley Biemold Vocational Student of the Month 2022



Haley is a senior at LHS with a 3.76 grade point average and greatly enjoys her welding classes and biotech classes. Off-campus, she loves going on adventures with friends and traveling anywhere that's warm.

She has been actively involved in her role as an ASB senior class officer as well as in Lynden FFA. Haley has been a FFA officer for the last three years and has shown sheep, pigs, goats, and a dairy heifer in that time.

Her work history includes feeding calves at Eglemill Dairy for the past two years and, in 2021, helping to get the grounds ready for the Northwest Washington Fair. Haley has also done several volunteer activities in the community throughout high school.

She will be attending Washington State University in the fall and is planning on studying something in agriculture.

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