



North Mason High School's Amber Johnson is hitting over .700 for the Bulldog softball team, which is 8-3 this year. Johnson, a senior, will play for Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, after graduating in June. *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*

Top Dog

North Mason senior hitting on all cylinders for 8-3 team

By Justin Johnson
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Amid the chaos, Amber Johnson has become a steady force for the Bulldogs.

A senior and four-year member of the North Mason High School softball team, Johnson's quiet humility and willingness to lift those around her have become her best assets.

"Amber is a very positive person," Bulldogs' coach Steve Valley wrote in an email. "She has always picked others up when they have made mistakes. She is way harder on herself than anything else. She holds herself to a higher standard (and) sometimes I have to remind her not to be so hard on herself — just have fun and play."

Johnson, the leadoff hitter in North Mason's powerful offensive lineup, is signed to play NCAA Division I softball next year at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. The Pirates compete in the nine-team Big East Conference, which includes Connecticut, Georgetown and Villanova.

Before she heads east, the Bulldog shortstop is intent on making the most of her final year in North Mason blue.

"I'm really excited we got to play at all because ... it was looking pretty iffy this year if we were going to get a season at all," Johnson said. "Last year, we were super excited to play and I think we were really hungry coming out this

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Mason renters can tap millions in aid

By Katie Hayes
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Millions of dollars are now available for residents struggling to pay rent and utilities. Mason County residents can access the funds, after the county approved more than \$2 million in assistance for Crossroads Housing and more than \$200,000 for Shelton Youth Connection.

"If you can show there is an issue or you missed rent, there is rental assistance out there to help you," Shelton Youth Connection Executive Director Susan Kirchoff said.

Shelton Youth Connection provides rent and utility money for people under 25 years old. Crossroads Housing distributes the money for people 25 and older.

"I think young people don't necessarily know they can tap into services if they need help," Kirchoff said. "If you are unemployed at this moment, you can actually apply for three months in advance of rent."

Residents can get assistance by calling Shelton Youth Connection or Crossroads Housing. Kirchoff said people are eligible to receive up to 15 months of payments, until the money runs out.

"We haven't done much advertising," Kirchoff said. "We put one little Facebook (post) out and we have already received six requests for help in less than 48 hours."

The money is meant for Mason County residents who are most likely to become homeless after the state's eviction moratorium expires.

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City triples size of Kneeland Park

By Gordon Weeks
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Students were dismissed from class and business owners closed their doors early during a half-day holiday to celebrate the grand opening of Shelton's Kneeland Park on May 16, 1920.

On Tuesday, the City of Shelton tripled the size of the popular park nestled alongside Goldsborough Creek.

The Shelton City Council gave final approval to buying 7.28 acres of undeveloped land on the west border of Kneeland Park. The city will pay \$80,000 for the land, which the city reports is appraised at \$95,000. The money will come from the Shelton Metropolitan Park District, and the money is in the city's 2021 budget.

The report to the city points out the acquisition had been identified in city planning documents from the 1989 Park Plan to the 2020 Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan. Members of the city's Parks & Recreation Citizens Advisory Committee unanimously recommended the council consider the purchase.

Kneeland Park currently measures 4.07 acres.



The swings were, and are, a popular feature at Kneeland Park, shown here in the late 1960s or early '70s. *Courtesy photo*

No one spoke during public comments on the deal. Council member Kathy McDowell said a resident asked her whether trees were going to be cut at the new site. Mark Ziegler, director of Community Development and Parks & Recreation, said trees

only will be removed now for safety concerns. The city will put together a master plan on developing the park, with forums and other outlets to take in public comments, he said.

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North Mason High School senior Amber Johnson is a three-sport athlete for the Bulldogs. Journal photos by Justin Johnson

Bulldog: Senior is a key leader during altered season

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season because we got that last season taken away. I'm just glad that we get to be out here and playing because I love it and it's so much fun."

For Johnson, the excitement surrounding her senior year is also personal because her younger sister, Audrey, is also part of North Mason's varsity squad.

"I love playing with my sister," Johnson said. "I've never gotten to play with her before, so it's pretty exciting."

Exciting is a pretty good descriptor of Johnson's season too.

North Mason defeated Kingston 16-4 on Monday afternoon in Kingston, improving to 8-3 overall.

In 46 plate appearances, Johnson is hitting a scorching .714 with 30 hits, 24 runs scored and 11 RBI in 11 games. Fifteen of those hits have been for extra bases with nine doubles, five triples and a home run, giving her 1.238 slugging percentage. Johnson's on-base percentage is .739, contributing to an OPS of 1.977. OPS is a combination of on-base and slugging

percentages, with a rating of 1.000 or higher considered elite-level hitting.

"Amber has been an absolute pleasure for the last four years," Valley wrote. "She has been one that can help teach other players. She is well-respected and other girls listen when she has something to say. She has a very good work ethic and knows what she wants to accomplish."

Johnson's ability to work with and teach other players has been vital for North Mason's success during the pandemic-altered season. The Bulldogs' first game, a 19-10 road win March 22 at Central Kitsap, came after just five days of practice.

"I think one thing we really focus on is we want to win every inning," Johnson said. "We want to get more runs on the other team every inning. We want to have those runs on the board because that really helps our pitcher out to feel more comfortable and to be able to do what she needs to do when we have a couple runs on them. We only had five days to practice before we started. That's not a lot of time to get started and get a lot of reps and swings in. I think we (have

done) a really great job of scoring consistently."

Johnson said that not having a state tournament at the end of the year is a little disappointing, but that the team is focused on getting the most out of its games.

"We want to have fun," Johnson said "We'll have little inside jokes and that makes the game fun. It bonds us as a team. Even though there's no exact end goal for this season, we go out and we play our hardest. We put in the work and then at the same time have fun, and just work to get the most out of this season as possible. It's a little bit different, but at least we get to play."

North Mason, as of Monday's win over Kingston, has won four straight and six of seven. The Bulldogs have scored 148 runs in 11 games. The team hasn't been quite as crisp defensively — something Valley admits has been a challenge due to the lack of practice time — having allowed 76 runs.

"Day one, I had Amber and (senior catcher) Kaylee (Huffman) take control of the team and start up just as we left off the year before," Valley wrote.

"I have always told Amber that I will not ever change a way she approaches the game or tweak anything about her. I have always said that was the job of her travel team. Her and I talked about my coaching style, and she said I was a game coach, not a fundamentals coach. I have taken that approach because you do not have a lot of time in the high school system to break everything down and start from scratch. I want to see all the girls succeed in everything they do. I will really miss Amber when she leaves, and I wish her all the luck in the world when she gets to Seton Hall. She is a great girl."

Johnson said that another reason she was excited for this season is that she expected the Bulldogs to have a good team.

"It's really important to have a lineup that can continuously hit, and so seeing that this year ... our stats are crazy," Johnson said. "It's amazing how many times we can find the gaps and we are aggressive base runners. We score a lot of runs and we make a lot of plays, and I think it's been a good season. I love to see that. It's so much fun when we play good."



Sports & Outdoors



Power hitter

Beaudoin leading undefeated Highclimbers

By Justin Johnson
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Audrey Beaudoin's path through high school volleyball hasn't been a straight line.

In fact, it has more resembled a go-kart course, filled with twists and turns and ups and downs.

Now a senior and the leading attacker for Shelton High School's undefeated volleyball team, Beaudoin's career has hit the straightaway.

"I feel as though our team is connecting really well together," Beaudoin said. "That's a big part of (our success). It's helping us to, like, flow kind of into winning our games and just communicating."

The 5-foot-11 outside hitter has reached double-figures kills in each of the Climbers' past three matches and is the player the team looks for at crunch time.

"She is our go-to hitter," Shelton coach Steve Beck said. "Broken play, need the ball down to side out, we want Audrey up front. When it is on, her serve is wickedly tough. Her consistency has greatly improved. Audrey works hard. No drama, no complaining. She is very coachable."

Shelton is 2-0 in Evergreen Conference action and 4-0 overall. All four victories have been in straight sets.

Shelton High School senior Audrey Beaudoin stands next to the net after a Sept. 23 volleyball match against Centralia. The Highclimbers entered this week undefeated. Journal photo by Justin Johnson

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Bulldogs top Kingston in long-delayed football opener

By Matt Baide
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After having its season delayed three weeks due to COVID-19, it was a successful debut for the North Mason High School football team in a 27-13 win against Kingston in an Olympic League game.

North Mason was led by the Simons brothers. Trevon Simons had 151 yards on 20 carries and two touchdowns. Aiden Simons had three catches for 75 yards and a touchdown run and Josh Simons also had three catches for 88 yards, including a 55-yard touchdown reception.

Sophomore quarterback Micah McIntyre was 7-for-12 passing with 206 yards in his first varsity football start.

"He did a good job managing the game," North Mason head coach Thomas Mosby said. "We made some key mistakes, but he was able to use his leadership and keep us focused and keep us calm on offense and come up with some key passes for us. Our offensive line was just great in being able to allow us to get that



North Mason High School's Trevon Simons looks to evade a Kingston defender Saturday in Belfair. Simons scored two touchdowns in the Bulldogs' win. See more photos on page A-24. Journal photo by Justin Johnson

many yards on the ground."

On defense, Steven Neatherlin had six tackles and added 102 yards on the ground on 12 carries. Dakota Filer added an interception for the Bulldogs.

The Bulldogs ran for 253 yards on 32 carries.

"I'm just proud of my kids," Mosby said. "They've been

through a lot over the last several months, had to endure a lot of frustration and patience. I'm proud for the way they responded, got us that first dub and I hope for more success down the line."

Neither team scored in the first quarter but the Bulldogs got on the board with a Trevon

Simons touchdown run at the end of the second quarter for a 7-0 lead at halftime.

The Bulldogs scored two touchdowns in the third quarter and sealed the win with another touchdown in the fourth.

"I think we have a lot of things to clean up," Mosby said. "With our first game out, there was some first game rust to knock off. We have lots to improve. The penalties, we need to cut down on some of our mistakes. We had a lot of first half turnovers."

Mosby was happy his team finally got to take the field in front of their home fans in Belfair after the problems earlier in the season.

"I think it was a relief for the kids to be involved playing another team," Mosby said. "They were getting quite frustrated for a while. It was up and down week to week and sometimes day to day, it was a relief to get our fans back out and involved in a home football game. It was exciting."

North Mason (1-0, 1-0) was scheduled to travel to Port Angeles this Friday, but

the team has had player contact exposure and is back in quarantine, canceling their scheduled game against the Roughriders.

Mosby also said he is trying to teach his team that this is real life and how they handle this challenge can dictate how they will handle these problems as adults.

"It has been a roller coaster ride for our coaches and players for sure," Mosby said in an email statement to the *Journal*. "At this point we are resolved to control what we can and just try to keep our eyes on our long-term goals this year and hope that we will get the opportunity to make them come to fruition. It has been tough on our kids and we are doing all we can do to keep them focused under such uncertainty week to week. We are trying to remain positive. Yes, this has been probably the biggest challenge of my coaching career for sure."

The team is scheduled to play Olympic in Belfair on Thursday, Oct. 7, a game Mosby said he expects his team to be able to play.



Top, the Shelton High School volleyball team celebrates winning the first set against Centralia on Sept. 23 at Terry Gregg Court in Shelton. Below, senior outside hitter Audrey Beaudoin hits over the net. Journal photos by Justin Johnson

“We really want to just kind of like get to that stage that none of us have ever been. We want to really try to make this the best year possible and just have fun with it while we’re doing it.”

*Audrey Beaudoin
Shelton High School senior outside hitter*

Volleyball: Climbers’ goal to advance to postseason play

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The Highclimbers joined the Evergreen Conference in summer 2020, but due to COVID ended up playing its 2020 season — during the spring of 2021 — in the Olympic League, where Shelton faced several 3-A and 4-A schools with significant underlying club volleyball programs.

“Last year, with COVID, it kind of threw all of us off our groove,” Beaudoin said. “We were competing with teams that were way out of our league in the sense of how many of them were club players or year-round players. This year we’re competing with teams that are in our league and we’re being able to match up pretty well against them.”

A key component of Shelton’s early success has been resilience when matches have tightened. In two matches this year, against Olympic High School during its season opener and again against Centralia on Sept. 23, the Climbers found themselves trailing in a set late after leading for much of the way, but rebounded and closed out those sets with victories.

“I think that our team would get down on itself at some points, but we were able to kind of just boost our mood with ... (committing) ourselves to the game and just give it our all,” Beaudoin said.

While Beaudoin has become the Climbers’ top attacker, she was quick to



credit her teammates for putting her in that position.

“I have to really rely on my team,” Beaudoin said. “Once we get a good pass and a good set, it’s kind of up to you to build off that. Your whole team is working to try to set you up and get you that perfect position. I feel like if I can get that good swing in ... and it ends up being a killer hit or something, we’re able to all come together in the circle and just rejoice with each other and have a great time. We realize ... we all worked together and communicated and built off of everyone’s skill.”

Beck said one of the things

that makes Beaudoin successful is that she is usually quick to move past a mistake and stay focused.

“They say good athletes must have a short memory so that they can move past their errors quickly,” Beck said. “Usually all it takes is to tell Audrey to take a deep breath, relax and to just start fresh again. Pressure doesn’t seem to be a factor. She loves to hit the ball.”

Beaudoin said she started playing volleyball because her sister, Josie, played before her and the two would practice at home.

“She would always ask me to go out and play with her,”

Beaudoin said. “Just this net we had at my house. I’d start passing with her so that she could get more practice and because she was trying out for the teams, so I started sort of young just passing and being around a ball and fighting that out, watching how my sister did it.

“I just kind of found this love for it and this love of the energy and the rush you get from hitting that ball down or passing off a hit or even serving and getting a killer ace.”

As a freshman, Beaudoin was the setter on the junior varsity team despite being 5-foot-9, which she admitted

didn’t make sense given her height.

“I definitely feel as though I’ve progressed with each season,” Beaudoin said. “Even with the hit of COVID that kind of slowed that down a little bit, but overall it’s been an accomplishment to get to the place where I’m at and see how the girls that I’ve grown up playing volleyball with have progressed along side of me. We’re all just feeding off of each other.”

Beaudoin is one of four seniors on Shelton’s varsity roster, joining setter Kylie Walker, middle blocker Taylia Budge and outside hitter Marissa Deemer.

Beaudoin also is on the Climbers’ girls tennis team, president of Shelton’s DECA club and on the school’s Knowledge Bowl team.

As for this season’s goals, Beaudoin said the team hopes to make it to the postseason, whatever that may look like.

“We really want to just kind of like get to that stage that none of us have ever been,” Beaudoin said. “We want to really try to make this the best year possible and just have fun with it while we’re doing it. (Last year) there wasn’t that end of the rainbow at the end of season. There wasn’t really anything to strive for. (We want) to put all of our effort into it and make sure that everyone is kind of committing. We’re all trying to figure out how to work as a team and get to that point with the success, whatever it may be.”

Sports & Outdoors



Opening day

The North Mason High School softball team gathers around home plate to celebrate a first-inning home run by senior Tuesday Palmer, No. 8, against Mason County Cup rival Shelton on Saturday at Highclimber Field. The Bulldogs defeated the Climbers 7-1 *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*

Palmer's 5 RBI, 9 Ks lead Bulldogs to win

By Justin Johnson
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The calendar said it was Saturday, but at Highclimber Field, it was undoubtedly Tuesday.

Senior right-hander Tuesday Palmer had a first-inning home run and five RBI, and threw a complete game two-hitter while fanning nine to lead the North Mason High School softball team to a 7-1 road win against Mason County Cup rival Shelton in both teams' season opener.

"I was super-excited to start the season and play

Shelton for the first time," Palmer wrote in a text message. "I've been looking forward to this season since last season. Hitting that home run in the first inning I think surprised all of us a little bit considering we don't get many practices prior to the first game, but I proved to myself that with focus and determination I can make it happen.

"My pitching was shaky at the beginning, but near the end of the game I started to get more accurate and zoned in," wrote Palmer, who was the *Shelton-Mason County Journal's* All-County Pitcher of the Year last season after helping lead North Mason to a

12-4 record and the Olympic League South Division championship. "Now we know what to expect for the rest of the season, and I can't wait to get into it."

Sarah Pruitt led things off with a single for North Mason, and scored when Palmer — the third batter in the Bulldogs' lineup — smashed a two-run homer on the second pitch of her at-bat for a 2-0 first inning lead.

"I was very impressed with our pitching and catching," Bulldog coach Steve Valley wrote in a

see **SOFTBALL**, page A-20

Seahawks life without Russell Wilson will be fine

The Seattle Seahawks made a big move and traded quarterback Russell Wilson to the Denver Broncos for two first-round picks, two second-round picks, and quarterback Drew Lock, tight end Noah Fant and defensive lineman Shelby Harris.

I know a lot of fans are upset about this move, and rightfully so, but I'm here to tell fans that everything is going to be fine.

Wilson has been the quarterback in Seattle since he was drafted in the third round out of Wisconsin in 2012. He helped the Seahawks reach two Super Bowls, winning Super Bowl XLVII and was 1 yard away



MATT BAIDE
MATT'S MUSINGS

from back-to-back Super Bowls.

He is the greatest quarterback in Seahawks' history and he will be in the Ring of Honor one day and likely the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Seattle has won a lot of

games during his time in the Northwest.

He will always be appreciated for what he did for the team and the city. Not only did he excel on the field, he was a good person off the field. He visited Seattle Children's Hospital every week and won the Walter Payton's Man of the Year award for his charity work.

If you listen to my podcast, Washington East to West Sports on YouTube, and listen to my brother Sean or Kevin, or go on Twitter at all, you will most likely see Seahawks' fans talking like the sky is falling, all hope is lost and the Seahawks will now nosedive into the depths with the NFL's teams that

can't seem to get anything right like the Detroit Lions or Jacksonville Jaguars. Some fans are getting rid of their Wilson jerseys, denouncing their Seahawks fandom and swearing off Seattle until Pete and John are held responsible and fired.

I am happy with this trade for a few reasons. The first and main reason is because Wilson could have stopped this trade and stayed in Seattle if he wanted to. Wilson had a no-trade clause in his contract, which he waived for the trade to go through.

Last offseason, it was clear he wanted out with the list of teams he'd be willing to be traded to. If you went to your significant other and said,

"I love you, but if we were to break up, I would like to date Tina, Amber or Chloe." Do you think your significant other would just shrug it off and decide to stay together? No, and the Seahawks saw that. With two years left on his contract, the team decided to get something in return for a player who was going to leave regardless of what management wanted.

I wanted to keep Wilson as well, but when it is clear he wanted to leave, why keep him and keep this going for another two years before it ends anyway? If you love someone, you should let them go, if that is what they desire.

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Rivalry showdown opens 2022 season



Softball: Big 5th opens up game

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message. "We have a senior catching that did not catch hardly at all in high school. I was very impressed with Tuesday going the whole game. I did not plan on her throwing all seven."

Shelton scored in the bottom of the inning to cut the lead to 2-1, where things remained until the fifth inning.

With the bases loaded and one out, Palmer hit a three-RBI double to make it 5-1.

"We struggled at the plate. As a team we hit like .215-ish," Valley wrote. "We had 11 strikeouts looking. We have already started on fixing

our strikeouts. The girls have a goal for the season and are working very hard to improve every day."

Shelton coach Rich Squire felt like he saw plenty of positives, despite the loss.

"The team battled every inning," Squire wrote in a text message. "We were in the game through the fourth. We had one inning, which was the fifth, which we allowed them to set the table for a really good hitter. We have to do a better job pitching to the lower part of the lineup."

"I think we had a good game. The girls are working hard. I see a lot of potential for this team and where they can go."

Clockwise from above, North Mason High School's Tuesday Palmer hits a first-inning home run against Shelton on Saturday at Highclimber Field. Shelton catcher Danyka Squire catches the ball. Bulldog catcher Jill Maiuri catches a strike. Shelton's Christina Alvarez, left, and Carly Van Aagten celebrate after a deep fly ball was caught in center field. North Mason's Sarah Pruitt watches a fly ball. Palmer winds up for a pitch.

Journal photos by Justin Johnson





Sports & Outdoors

Olympic champions



Top: The North Mason High School softball team celebrates a home run by sophomore Audrey Johnson against Klahowya in the Olympic League South Division semifinals Saturday morning in Belfair. The Bulldogs defeated the Eagles 12-1, then beat Bremerton 5-4 in nine innings later in the day to win the division title. **Above:** Mandy Cole, who hit the game-winning home run against the Knights, prepares to bat against the Eagles. *Journal photos by Justin Johnson*

Cole's walk-off homer lifts Bulldogs to division title

By Justin Johnson
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Mandy Cole stepped to the plate hoping to get on base. She got more.

A lot more.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, Cole smashed an 0-1 pitch over the fence, rounded the bases and touched home plate to lift the North Mason High School softball team to a walk-off 5-4 victory over Bremerton in the Olympic League South Division championship game Saturday evening in Belfair.

"When I was up at the plate, all I was thinking about was just getting on base and trying not to overthink it," Cole said in a text message. "When I started rounding first, I saw it go over and I was ecstatic. I looked over to left field and saw my family jumping up and down and my dad running after the ball, and all I could think about was 'did that really just happen?'"

Yes, it did happen.

It was the second home run of the season for Cole, who plays first base for the Bulldogs.

"I'm so proud of how much work we put into this season and finally seeing it pay off," Cole said. "Ending the game like that made the win so much sweeter."

North Mason was the tournament's top seed after a 10-4 regular season. The Bulldogs defeated Klahowya 12-1 in five innings earlier Saturday to advance to the championship and finished the year 12-4 overall.

"After we lost to Olympic (a 5-4 home setback April 26), we had a very long talk about many aspects of the game — mental and physical," Bulldog coach Steve Valley wrote in an email. "The girls took it to heart and brought it to the field against North Kitsap, where we battled all game and come out with the win. They brought it again Saturday."

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Three Highclimbers win titles at 60th Shelton Invite

By Justin Johnson
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The 60th running of the Shelton Invitational track and field meet looked a little different than usual, but that didn't stop a trio of Highclimbers from nabbing top honors Saturday.

The meet, traditionally a showcase for some of the state's best track and field athletes, was re-envisioned this season as an unofficial culminating event for the Evergreen Conference season.

Highclimber coach Doug Sells credited Invite director Mike Fox for helping put together the meet on short notice, allowing the

meet to retain its title as the longest-running invitational meet in Washington.

Shelton junior Alauna Carstens picked up two medals at the top of the podium after winning the 800 and 1,600 meters.

The finish of the 800 meters was one of the most dramatic of the meet as Carstens edged out W.F. West junior Elaina Koenig in the final steps of the race to finish with a time of 2 minutes, 28.39 seconds — a fractional 0.08 seconds ahead of Koenig. The time was a personal-best for Carstens.

In the 1,600 meters, it wasn't nearly as close for the reigning

Evergreen Conference cross country champion, as Carstens led the race for seven laps and finished in 5:31.86, winning by almost 9 seconds.

Senior hurdler Victoria Silverman rebounded from a fall in the 100-meter hurdles to decisively win the 300-meter hurdles in 49.12 in her final high school race at Highclimber Stadium. Silverman was leading the 100-meter race when she lost her footing with three hurdles remaining. She recovered quickly and, despite obvious pain, finished the race in under 20 seconds, good enough for a fifth-place finish.

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Shelton High School senior Kyle McGregor won the boys discus Saturday at Highclimber Stadium. *Journal photo by Justin Johnson*

Softball: North Mason finished year with 12-4 record

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That North Mason was in position for Cole's extra-inning heroics is in itself a testament to the Bulldogs' fight.

After an Amber Johnson home run in the first inning to lead things off, North Mason trailed Bremerton 4-1 heading into the bottom of the seventh.

Audrey Johnson's one-out two RBI double scored Sarah Pruitt and Tuesday Palmer — who hit back-to-back singles earlier in the inning — and close the gap to 4-3.

With two outs, pinch runner Stefanie Arbogast scored the tying run from third base on a wild pitch, sending the game to extra innings.

"It was a pitchers' duel until

Bremerton took the lead," Valley wrote. "In the seventh inning, I said 'Remember our talk. Leave it all on the field' and the girls did. They fought with everything they had and tied the game."

Palmer went the nine-inning distance in the circle for North Mason, scattering six hits and striking out seven batters.

"My focus in the circle against Bremerton was mainly to pitch as hard as I could," Palmer said in a text message. "For the few girls on that team that are great hitters, I would pitch just outside the plate where they would have a harder time hitting. Near the end of the game, I pitched farther outside the plate because

walking the better hitters seemed like a safer option than throwing pitches they could possibly hit over the fence."

Amber Johnson and Pruitt each had two hits and a run scored against the Knights.

"The season overall was definitely my favorite year of softball yet," Palmer said. "I have the most amazing teammates. No matter what the scoreboard looks like, we never gave up."

In North Mason's win over Klahowya, Pruitt was 2-for-3 with two runs and an RBI, Jill Maiuri was 2-3 with three runs scored and RBI and Audrey Johnson hit a three-run homer against the Eagles. Chloe Lewis earned the win in the circle and had three RBI.

"We were very up and down. We lost a couple of games we should not have, but we learned from every loss and it paid off at the end of the season," Valley wrote. "North Mason fast-pitch is learning to win again. We had a lot of firsts this year. When the pressure got tough, we worked through it and succeeded. Hopefully we will carry this to the next season."

Of North Mason's four losses, two were by one run and the Bulldogs had the lead at some point in all four contests.

"I do believe we should have won every game we played, but I am very pleased with the outcome of this season," Palmer said. "I cannot wait for next year's season."

Bulldogs win baseball title

By Justin Johnson
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The Bulldogs peaked at just the right time.

Trailing 1-0 in the fifth inning, the North Mason High School baseball team rallied to defeat Klahowya 4-1 in extra innings in the championship game of the Olympic League South Division tournament.

It was a remarkable turnaround for North Mason, which won three straight and five of its final six games to end the year after starting the year 1-8.

"This year was unique to say the least," North Mason coach Rob Thomas wrote in email. "We played some great baseball over the last six games. Our team has battled all season and never hung their heads, even in the games we lost. We took every loss as an opportunity to get better as a team, and by the end of the season, we clearly started to gel as one unit."

The Bulldogs blitzed Sequim 19-4 in their final regular season game April 29, entering the division tournament as the No. 3 seed.

North Mason topped Bremerton 4-3 after senior Mason Shumaker's two RBI double in the

top of the seventh inning put the Bulldogs ahead 4-2.

Senior Caden North earned the win on the mound, fanning 10 in six innings of work and Preston Macomber tacked on two more strikeouts in seventh-inning relief for the Dogs.

In the title game against Klahowya, which swept the regular season series from North Mason, the Bulldogs trailed by a run until Bentley Fisk came across the plate in the fifth to knot things at 1-1.

With two outs in the eighth, Aiden Powell smacked an RBI double to score Cole McCormick for what would become the winning run. Fisk scored Ethan Smith with a hard-hit grounder to make it 3-1 and Powell crossed on a fielding error by the Eagles.

Macomber, who went the distance, shut out Klahowya in the bottom of the inning.

"To say that I am extremely proud of our team is an understatement," Thomas wrote. "I will leave you with one quote, and this is for my players, 'Can I get a Big Mac?' It is sad that the season is over, however I am glad that our seniors went out the way they did."

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Sports & Outdoors

Shelton-Mason County Journal

Girls Athlete of the Year

Johnson led 'Dogs 'positive' season

By Justin Johnson
justin@masoncounty.com

The pandemic took Amber Johnson's junior season of softball at North Mason High School, and nearly took her senior season as well.

When given the chance to compete, she wasn't going to let it go to waste.

"I knew with this being my last year, I wanted to make the most of it and just compete at my best level each game, but still enjoy every moment," Johnson wrote in a text message. "This year was so fun and the group of girls was great. I think that we played loose and that really helped us win games."

And win games the Bulldogs did.

Led by the shortstop's sizzling .590 hitting percentage, North Mason went 10-4 and won the Olympic League's Southern Division championship.

Johnson, an NCAA

Division I softball signee at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, is the *Shelton-Mason County Journal's* Girls Athlete of the Year.

"First off, I wanted to thank you, it means a lot to me to be Athlete of the Year," Johnson said. "Our season obviously wasn't exactly what anyone had planned or hoped for with a shorter season and less time to prepare. I think we did a really great job of getting ready to play games with only a week of practices. I think having our season cut off last year made a lot of us come out hungry to play."

A two-sport team captain and the Bulldogs' leadoff hitter, Johnson had 36 hits and 13 RBI, while scoring 25 runs. Half of her hits went for extra bases as she finished with 11 doubles, five triples and two home runs.

"Amber was a huge role

see *ATHLETE*, page A-24



Amber Johnson
North Mason HS

Girls Coach of the Year

Bulldogs coach earns top honor

By Justin Johnson
justin@masoncounty.com

With barely a week to prepare for the season, the North Mason High School softball team had an excuse baked in.

They never needed to cash it in.

The Bulldogs scored 42 runs in their first two games and ultimately rolled to a 10-win season, capturing the Olympic League's Southern Division tournament on May 1 with a ninth-inning walkoff against Bremerton in Belfair.

"(The girls) did all the hard work to get us to where we finished," North Mason coach Steve Valley wrote in an email. "The

see *COACH*, page A-24



Steve Valley
North Mason HS

Athlete: 'She was always willing to work with everyone'

continued from page A-23

model for the team," junior Tuesday Palmer said in a text message. "She is always willing to work with everyone and show the correct mechanics, and pushed everyone to do their best and have as much fun as possible. We are going to miss her a ton."

Junior Mandy Cole added, "Amber was a key component this season, from dancing at the start of games to get the team going or helping on the field by making plays on offense and defense."

As the shortstop, Johnson had a .957 fielding percentage in one of the most demanding positions in the infield. In addition to softball, Johnson also played for the Bulldogs' girls soccer team for four seasons.

"Amber was a leader from day one she stepped on to the field as a freshman. Everybody looked up to her and respected her from day one," North Mason softball coach Steve Valley wrote in an email. "She was always helping girls with whatever they needed help with. She saw something that a girl was doing wrong and she would help correct it. I honestly believe the best moment of the whole four years was when we beat Bremerton in the championship game this year. She was extremely excited because we never had the opportunity to play in districts or state. She was so proud of all the girls for not giving up and fighting for the victory."

North Mason girls soccer coach Nicole Bonnell called Johnson a great all-around player and person.

"She was a steadfast co-captain for the NMHS girls' soccer team during a year of pandemic uncertainty," Bonnell wrote in an email. "She positively supported her teammates and celebrated each opportunity to play. My favorite part about coaching Amber was her willingness to give 110% for the team wherever it was needed."

Johnson said her goal as a senior and leader was to create a positive environment.

"I know with the younger ones looking up to me and the other seniors it can be kind of intimidating sometimes, so I really wanted to make everyone feel welcomed," Johnson said. "One huge thing I tried to preach this season was good communication. I tried to talk in a way that

"I think one of the things I love most about softball is the people I meet. I have met some of my best friends through this sport and have gotten to learn from some of the greatest people. Later in life, I may not remember all the home runs or diving catches, but I will remember moments spent with my teammates and all the little inside jokes we shared."



was encouraging and others picked up on that so we ended up having positive communication on and off the field which ultimately led to a more relaxed environment that helped us to play better.

"I think a lot of times we can get so wrapped up in winning that we forget why we love the sport. I think this year was awesome because we played with passion and still took care of business and that's what softball is all about."

Johnson said softball is "more than just a sport to me" and credited it for giving her opportunities that she

wouldn't have otherwise had. She added that it helped her learn life lessons about bouncing back from adversity and making goals and working to achieve them.

"I think one of the things I love most about softball is the people I meet," Johnson said. "I have met some of my best friends through this sport and have gotten to learn from some of the greatest people. Later in life, I may not remember all the home runs or diving catches, but I will remember moments spent with my teammates and all the little inside jokes we shared."



Coach: 'He pushed us to do our best every game'

continued from page A-23

girls believed in themselves."

Valley, whose deft coaching mixed veterans and newcomers alike on the way to a 10-4 overall record, is the *Shelton-Mason County Journal's* 2021 Girls Coach of the Year.

"I am very thankful and honored, but I have to give all the credit to the girls," Valley wrote. "I didn't have to say much when we played bad. They knew what they did wrong. That bunch of girls were awesome."

North Mason opened its season March 22 with a 19-10 road win at Central Kitsap, and then beat Klahowya 22-3 at home for a 2-0 start. The Bulldogs dropped their next two outings to Port Angeles and Bremerton. That was the only time during the season that North Mason dropped consecutive games.



"(Coach Valley) helped by motivating us all to get to a new level and never settling for what we were," junior Mandy Cole, who played at first base and hit the walkoff home run in the division

championship game, said in a text message.

After splitting their fifth and sixth games to sit at 3-3 overall, North Mason won seven of its final eight games — including two

one-run wins against rival Bremerton.

"Coach Valley was a huge help to me and the team," junior Tuesday Palmer, the *Journal's* All-Mason County Pitcher of the Year, said in

a text message. "He pushed us to do our best every game and is always there to talk to us when we need it off the field as well."

Valley's Bulldogs saw three seniors graduate — including *Journal* Girls Athlete of the Year Amber Johnson, who wrote in a text message, "My favorite part about playing for Coach Steve was that he allowed us to joke around and have fun while still challenging us to play our best. He helped us keep our energy in check and make sure that we stayed engaged each game."

North Mason is set to return six of its nine starters and all of its key reserve players in 2022.

"We had great support for all the girls that did not get to see the field much and their families," Valley wrote. "We had zero drama, which made a great season."