

GRIT: The drive, stamina and fortitude to push through any challenge or obstacle until success is achieved. (written on the back of the warm-up shirts)



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Caitlin Shortridge (center, #10) sets the ball for Ella Weaver (second from right, #14) during last week's win against the Brentsville Tigers. Junior Brianna Adderley (#6) is on the right.

WINNING TAKES GRIT

WMHS volleyball team digs deep for successful season

BY TERRY BEIGIE AND
KATHLEEN BORRELLI
Record Staff

The last time the William Monroe High School varsity volleyball team stepped on the court was Nov. 7, 2019, for the region 3B semifinal game against Goochland High School. This was the first-ever showing for Monroe in the regional semifinals after defeating James Monroe for a first-ever regional quarterfinal win. Goochland defeated the Dragons in straight sets 16 months ago, but the ladies are ready to roar this sea-

son despite the pandemic. With little practice time before storming the court, the Dragons took on three opponents last week—dispatching them all in 10 full sets. They beat Warren County on the road in straight sets on Monday, March 1: 25-12; 25-19; and 25-23. The write ups for the home matches are below. “One word that we’re really focusing on this year is grit—in life and in school—especially in the situation that we’re being put in right now, we have to have a lot of grit,” said Monroe head coach Leah

Wimmer. “They have to be pretty gritty in school because some are being thrown into the hybrid or fully virtual learning situation instead of being in school and having that structure every day. And going into practice, they have to be flexible in where they’re being put and they have to be flexible having to wear the mask and understanding that yes, they may be uncomfortable but ultimately it’s going to protect each other.” Although not officially required, the team has decided to wear masks

each game and each practice to help keep others safe, Wimmer said. Volleyball normally begins in August, but due to the postponement of the season it began on March 1. Wimmer, who is in her fifth year coaching at William Monroe, said the team is excited to play. “We weren’t sure what our season was going to be like and if we would even get to play,” she said. “They girls are really excited and they are treating every practice as if it could be their last. We’ve already had to have voluntary practices because

of weather and every one of our varsity girls showed up. They want to learn and they want to improve. They want to be successful this year.” Watching the team in its small pre-season, Wimmer said she’s proud of how they’re handling the transitions. “Going into practice and seeing how excited the girls are and seeing how hungry they are is incredible,” said Wimmer, who also played volleyball while a student at William Monroe. “We have an amazing group of girls; they’re so mature

and they’re so responsible. They ask so many questions and they really are taking ownership of their game and their team and that’s really cool to see.” One big obstacle Wimmer said the team needed to get over was the separation of the team. The JV team doesn’t travel on the bus with varsity anymore or stay to watch their games. The team members cannot get together nor have team meals like they would normally do. The seats on the court are spread apart instead of

See **GRIT**, Page B4

Monroe football falls to Skyline, 26-29

BY TERRY BEIGIE
Record Editor

In its first home match in nearly 16 months, the Dragons football team faced injuries, inexperience and penalties for its first loss of the season against Skyline High School on Saturday, March 6. “Last year we had good experience and guys who could back them up,” said Dragons head coach Jon Rocha after the game. “This year, we have experience on our first level, but our second guys who go in, not so much, and they’ve got to step up. That’s what I told them—when the guy in front of you goes down, that’s your chance and we didn’t stop them.” William Monroe was first on the boards when the Hawks’ punt return didn’t go as planned, placing the ball for the Dragons on the Hawks’ second yard line within the first two minutes of the

game. Senior Alex Hoffman earned the touchdown and senior Will Auer’s extra point was good, bringing the score to 7-0, Dragons. Hawks senior Darion Santucci was tackled by Dragons’ senior Robbie Young for a gain of two yards. Dragons’ senior Gavin Hussar got the tackle on Hawks’ junior Logan Bailey, for a gain of only three yards for Skyline. Monroe earned two quick offside calls, giving the Hawks an additional 10 yards in three plays. The Hawks earned a false start penalty immediately after, giving them a five yard penalty and forcing them to punt the ball, which went out of bounds on William Monroe’s 47 yard line. Dragons quarterback Blaise Van Dyke handed the ball to Hoffman for a gain of six yards. On Hoffman’s second carry he earned 11 yards and the first down.

See **FOOTBALL**, Page B4



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Logan Barbour runs for a Monroe touchdown.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Dragon Football Club

March 6, 2021

William Monroe vs Skyline

Sr **ALEX HOFFMAN #22 RB/LB**

Provided Outstanding Senior Leadership and performance on both offense and defense.



WILLIAM MONROE HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL

The Comeback Kids
Dragons’ 7th-inning rally surprises Mason

BY KATHLEEN BORRELLI
Staff Writer

The energy on the field was tense as the William Monroe High School varsity baseball team faced Northwestern District rival George Mason High School on Thursday, May 27. After a tied game through four innings, the Mustangs pulled ahead by six runs in the fifth and sixth, but a powerful rally by the Dragons in the bottom of the seventh led them to pull ahead by a single run on a hit by senior Chase Mallory, to take the win and end the game at 11-10.

“We played OK at the start; that’s the worst defense we’ve played all year—we had like five or six errors, and we’re usually a lot better,” Dragons head coach Mike Maynard said after the game. “And then they just didn’t give up, and that’s just so fun to watch.”

The Mustangs, who are 6-3 so far in their regular season, beat the Dragons two weeks earlier at George Mason, 5-3. Powerful left-handed pitcher senior Peter Villa kept the Dragons at bay with fast balls and curve balls, and Maynard knew they would be facing a tough matchup going into Thursday’s home game against the same pitcher.

“In high school, you’ve got a certain amount of pitches you can throw,” Maynard said. “We knew if we could get him to that amount, we would have a chance, but we were behind six runs when he got it so that made it tougher.”

Dragon sophomore Waylon Cheek pitched a no-hitter on Tuesday, May



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Dragon senior Chase Mallory tags a George Mason High School Mustang player out at the plate.

25, against the Skyline Hawks, ending the game 11-0 in five innings due to the mercy rule; Cheek threw 39 pitches and the Dragons scored all 11 of their runs in

the first three innings of that matchup. Coming into Thursday’s game, Maynard felt it best to put a few different pitchers on the mound, since the Mustangs may

have strategized against Cheek’s pitching style since the last meetup. Dragon senior Hunter Powell took

See **BASEBALL**, Page B5

Dragons take hit on the pitch against Mustangs

BY TERRY BEIGIE
Record Editor

The William Monroe High School boys soccer team ran out of gas in last Thursday’s matchup against George Mason High School, bringing the first Northwestern District loss for Monroe. The Dragons fell 0-3, with two of those goals being made in the final five minutes of the game.

The Dragons pressured the Mustangs for most of the first half with goalie Jack Anderson making numerous saves—until the 36th minute, when a George Mason midfielder’s header got past him.

Mustang Matthew Hellert found the back of the net back-to-back at the 75th and 77th minutes of the game.

“I think the first half we defended pretty good. I think the whole game we defended pretty good,” said junior Kevin Valladares. “Our touches were off. We were holding it too long. I feel like right at the end, we gave up for the last 10 minutes. We kind of gave up after that second goal.”

Junior teammate Tyler Strickland agreed.

“I think we definitely were a little bit tired,” Strickland said. “We have had five days now without a practice, so coming off no practice and tired legs definitely played into it, I think. I think, offensively, I would have liked to be a little bit more a part of it.”

The Dragons defeated



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Andres Gonzalez Collazos kicks the ball out of Dragon territory.

Manassas Park, 1-0, on the road in a tough matchup just two days before the Mason game.

Assistant coach Jaciel Castillo said he was proud of the guys for hanging in in the hot and humid day.

“We were pressuring good in the first 20 to 30 minutes,” Castillo said. “I think what really hurt us, though, was our touches and holding the ball a little bit too long. We did pretty great. I couldn’t ask for more because they did an awesome job, but we need to clean up a little bit and get around that team

because they are beatable. If we see them in the finals, we’ll be ready.”

Valladares said the Dragons will definitely be ready the next time they see the Mustangs.

“We’ve got to switch more and we’ve got to play more direct; you can’t just play along the line all the time.”

The Dragons were scheduled to play their final regular season game at Skyline High School on Tuesday, after press time. Monroe is 6-1 in the Northwestern District.

Lady Dragons decimate Manassas Park Cougars

BY KATHLEEN BORRELLI
Staff Writer

The William Monroe High School varsity girls soccer team shutout Manassas Park, 9-0, on Tuesday, May 25. Under Virginia High School League rules, the game can be called 20 minutes into the second half if the winning team is up by 8 goals, so freshman midfielder Sydney Orange’s final goal came with just 3 seconds left on the clock, securing the Dragons their seventh win of the season to remain undefeated in the Northwestern District.

“I’m proud of myself that I was aggressive and got the ball in the goal,” said Orange, who has been playing since she was 5 years old.

Freshman midfielder Livi Sharff made a shot on goal 30 seconds into the game but wasn’t able to find the net. Less than a minute later, after a corner kick by freshman Seanna Sutton, senior forward Mackenzie Sprouse’s ball found the center of the net for the first goal of the night for the Dragons. Another 30 seconds after that, senior forward Sydney Dombrovskis’ kick was

blocked by Cougars goalie senior Sarah McKenzie.

The ball stayed near the Cougars’ goal for the first half-hour of play, where Dragon junior midfielder Sydney Devory’s first shot was also blocked by McKenzie at the 10-minute mark. Devory made two more attempts to score, with the ball not quite finding net, and Livi Sharff’s attempted goal hit the Cougars’ goalie.

At the 20-minute mark, Orange scored her first goal of the season with an assist by freshman Elli Pursel, bringing the score to 2-0, Dragons. Senior midfielder Arianna Mosqueda got control of the ball and made two attempts on the goal, both blocked by McKenzie. At the 25-minute mark, team captain Sarah Earle’s long kick brought the action back to the goal zone, but Pursel’s shot sailed just over the goal to go out of bounds.

Twenty-eight minutes into the game, Pursel passed to Dombrovskis, who passed to Sprouse. Sprouse set up Devory, whose shot tapped McKenzie’s arm on its way into the net, earning

See **GSOC**, Page B5



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Above, junior Emma Dean manages the ball through the Cougar defense on Tuesday, May 25.

Dragons’ rising star keeps his cool on the pitcher’s mound

BY KATHLEEN BORRELLI
Staff Writer

William Monroe High School sophomore Waylon Cheek may be only 16, but that hasn’t stopped him from making a name for himself as a pitcher for the varsity baseball team this season. The Dragons, who begin regional playoffs on Monday, are undefeated on their home turf and have only given up two victories during the regular season for a 10-2 record.

Cheek started with T-ball at 4 years old and played some travel ball before joining little league—but he has always had a passion for pitching. He played on the WMHS JV team in eighth grade and was scheduled to earn playing time with both JV and varsity in 2020 until COVID-19 cut the spring season short and schools shuttered after just a single scrimmage. This spring will be his first full season on the team.

“I’ve pitched ever since little league started,” Cheek said. “My first coach, Tom Eddins, we were in All-Stars and I’d never pitched before and he put me in ... he pitched me that game and I did really good and then from there it just kept going and going.”

“He made varsity last year as a ninth-grader,” said WMHS head baseball coach Mike Maynard. “We had plans for him to pitch a little bit of varsity but also get some experience hitting-wise (by) doing some at-bats with JV ... but he pitched really well in the scrimmage so we were planning on maybe just keeping him.”

Although this is only his first season on the team, this pitcher is not one to get jittery in the spotlight.

He said he loves “the adrenaline, the rush—and knowing I have a team behind me.” With his Dragon teammates to back him up, Cheek is able to simply focus on the batter and trust the team will deal with what happens next.

Cheek certainly kept his cool on May 25, when the Dragons played the Skyline Hawks at home. Cheek threw a no-hitter—the second of his career, the first being in travel ball—striking out three with no walks and only 39 pitches. One Hawk batter was hit by a pitch, for Skyline’s only base runner of the game. The Dragons scored 11 runs in the first three innings and the game was called in the fifth due to the mercy rule, ending at 11-0.

“I had a lot of defense behind me, to be honest,” Cheek said of the game. “I only had three strikeouts, but it was a lot of infield and outfield plays—in the first inning, Hayden Gibson made a really good diving play ... Hunter Powell—he made a lot of plays at third base. The outfield got a little action; there were a lot of routine ground balls.”

“In the game where he threw a no-hitter, it seemed like he didn’t break a sweat,” Maynard said. “He’s just so comfortable, and he has a lot of older kids playing defense.”

Since all the other pitchers on the team are also in-fielders, Maynard said it’s important not to wear out their arms during a game. Luckily, Cheek mostly plays outfield, meaning he’s not doing a lot of throwing except when he is on the mound.

“We wanted to give him an opportunity because he impressed us in preseason,” Maynard said. “He worked really, really hard and he earned the opportunity to pitch as a 10th-grader on varsity and he just ran with that. We’re really proud of him. I’d say his best attribute is when he’s on the mound, nothing fazes him. He’s in his comfort zone.”

A no-hitter is a rare accomplishment for any pitcher. Only 311 have been recorded in major-league baseball history since George Bradley’s July 15, 1876 game—the Brown Stockings vs. the Dark Blues—an average of about two per year, according to MLB.com .

“Over the course of the season, he is developing great as a pitcher,” said senior teammate Chase Mallory. “That’s not his only game where he’s been dominant; every game he’s pitched this year, he’s just been dominant ... he knows what he can do and he stays calm—I’ve never seen him fully getting nervous.”

Mallory, who plays catcher and had eyes on the

ball during Cheek’s no-hitter, said Cheek didn’t even realize he was throwing a no-hitter until the final inning.

“He really doesn’t think about that; he just gets



PHOTO BY TERRY BEIGIE/GREENE COUNTY RECORD

on the mound and takes it an inning at a time,” Mallory said. “That’s one of the best things about him—he just doesn’t think about anything in the future or what’s going to happen. That’s what makes him one of the better pitchers on our team.”

Cheek has three regular pitches—a fastball, a curveball and what he calls a “two-seam,” named for the grip with the index and middle fingers along the ball’s seams where they are closest together.

“It’s a type of fastball but it runs,” he explained. “On a right-handed batter it runs into the hands. For me, when I throw it, it runs away from a lefty and into a righty.”

“He’s got a weird like three-quarter arm slot, so his fastball runs in on right-handers,” Maynard said. “He never really hits the barrel, so they roll over a lot of weak ground balls to (the left) side of the field. So he’s got one pitch that kind of goes this way and one pitch that kind of goes that way out of the same exact slot, so that’s really helped him.”

According to Maynard, the ability to throw two different pitches from the same position makes it extremely hard for batters to

predict where the ball will go. In the coming year, he hopes to help Cheek speed up his fastball—currently averaging around 80 mph.

“He’s got a blessing from God,” he said. “For him to take the next jump, he’s got to continue to work on his legs so his fastball will get faster ... Hopefully he’ll commit to the weight room and we’ll take that 78-82 to like 82-86 if we can.”

Two-time Bull Run District Player of the Year Jordan Gentry, who in 2012 helped the Dragons win the state championship,

was Cheek’s pitching coach in middle school and taught him the two-seam fastball. Gentry and Cheek will not be giving away any secrets before playoffs, but the basics of the two-seam grip can be found at www.efastball.com/baseball/pitching/grips/two-seam-fastball-grip.

“Gentry, who was maybe one of the best players who has ever played here... he threw two no-hitters that year,” Maynard recalled. “Cody Spencer in 2016 threw a perfect game. Waylon was one away—if Waylon didn’t hit a batter it would have been a perfect game. Waylon doesn’t walk anybody ... I think he’s only walked four people the whole year.”

Maynard says he only recalls four or five no-hitters in his time at William Monroe, and until Cheek they were all from seniors.

Cheek’s Earned Run Average (ERA) is 0.94 so far with the Dragons, so he only gives up approximately one run per game.

“As a tenth-grader, that’s incredible,” Maynard said. “He has four think he’s only walks and I hit three batters, so only seven batters have gotten on (base) free.”

In addition to pitching, Cheek is a strong hitter and has made some great catches in left field. In the May 27 game against the George Mason Mustangs, Cheek caught two great hits in the third and fourth innings and also stole a couple bases in the second. The Dragons made a fantastic rally in the final inning of that game to make up six runs and score a seventh, winning the game 11-10 with moments to spare.

“We play the regular season to get the best possible record we can, so we’re playing our best baseball when it really matters,” Maynard said. “We always tell them that at William Monroe, you play to win championships—they’ve seen Keegan (Woolford) do it and they’ve seen Jordan (Gentry) do it and all the kids come back, so it’s just kind of like a family.”

“It was amazing to play with a team like this,” Mallory said. “This is probably one of my favorite teams I’ve played on in the past five years, because we’re all together—we all hang out, we all grew up together ... after last year, I think we’re just not taking it for granted.”

With post-season coming up next week, Cheek is confident that his team is ready for action. When he’s not busy playing or practicing, he also enjoys riding dirt bikes with his younger cousin Bradley Burkholder on his uncle’s property in Dyke.

Check northwesterndistrictva.org for the most up-to-date news concerning playoff schedules.

CUTOUT PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

