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---Daily Herald--- 10/07/17

Geneva takes care of Elgin

BY JERRY FITZPATRICK

October 7, 2017 12:29 AM

The last thing Geneva's Reilly Waldoch expected heading into this season was to be the featured ball carrier for the Vikings come Week 7.

Normally a fullback, the 6-foot-3, 220-pound junior figured to be a blocking back clearing holes for others. Maybe he'd carry the ball 5 times per game. Ten on a good day. Perhaps he'd catch the occasional pass out of the backfield.

Then the season happened.

One tailback quit the team early on and three more were shelved by injury. Thus, Geneva turned to Waldoch out of pure need. And out of that desperation came inspiration in the form of Friday's 28-6 win over Elgin at Memorial Field.

Measuring each step on slippery grass, Waldoch carried 27 times for 171 yards and 2 touchdowns to lead keep Geneva's playoff hopes alive.

"It's an honor to be the Geneva running back," Waldoch said. "They've always had a good back in the past so it's good to keep the legacy going."

Missing cornerback/wideout Garret Sneed due to injury and safety Ian Hanson for personal reasons, short-handed Geneva (4-3, 3-2) outgained Elgin (2-5, 1-2) 366 total yards to 203 prevail in the Upstate Eight River.

Quarterback Bobby Murray completed 10 of 15 attempts for 204 yards and 2 touchdowns, both to wide receiver Jacob Temple, a 6-foot-4 senior who took advantage of a size mismatch to make 5 receptions for 134 yards.

"He just really did his job getting the ball out to me and I just had to go make a play on it," Temple said of his quarterback.

After missing the playoffs last fall for the first time in four seasons and only the second time since 2004, the Vikings can become playoff eligible next week with a win at league co-leader St. Charles North (6-1, 4-0). They finish the season at home against West Aurora (5-2).

The win over Elgin was a confidence boost on the heels of last week's 49-0 loss to Batavia.

"After having bad things happen to you last week against the rivals, it was a good week of practice," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "I was pleased with the way we responded. We are who we are. They just kept fighting. We're a little limited at spots but we also showed some nice character."

The Maroons were limited to 127 yards of total offense outside of a 76-yard, fourth-quarter touchdown run by Trevon Morris that allowed Elgin to avoid the shutout on homecoming.

Elgin coach Anthony Mason said his team had a bad practice week and it showed on game day.

"We're making the same mistakes from the first week and we're in the seventh week now," said Mason, who, like Wicinski, played college football at Northern Illinois. "We don't feel like we were 28-6 to this team. We thought we had a great chance. We saw the holes and we wanted to attack the holes."

We were literally throwing bubbles with (defenders) 15 yards off the ball and the ball was going into the dirt, the ball was going overhead. It's wet and rainy, but we were transferring balls in and we had fresh balls in buckets so that's not an excuse.

"It's a matter of execution. How do you execute better? You execute every single day. You make the mistakes earlier in the week so come Friday you're able to not make those mistakes. It's not happening. It's not happening.

"So, it's a matter of continuing to work at it and committing to get better every day. We don't have everybody on board with that. Everybody, from the staff to the players, has to work hard Saturday through Friday night to get this turned around and be successful."

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St. Charles East handles Larkin

BY CRAIG BRUESKE

October 6, 2017 11:34 PM

Larkin football coach Dragan Teonic accurately summed up his team's dismal beginning to Friday night's Upstate Eight Conference River Division clash against St. Charles East.

"Terrible -- awful start," said Teonic, whose team (3-4, 1-3) dropped a 35-0 decision to the host Saints (5-2, 2-2) at Norris Stadium. "From there, everything kind of rolled against us. They outclassed us in every way. They were a better football team than us tonight -- no question about it."

St. Charles East senior linebacker Abe Swanson recovered a fumble on the Royals' first play from scrimmage inside the red zone.

Six plays later, senior center Alex Pahadi scored the first touchdown of his varsity career as he recovered a fumble in the end zone for a 7-0 Saints lead with 8:39 left in the opening quarter.

"I thought our defense set the tone with that early turnover," said Saints coach Bryce Farquhar.

With sophomore quarterback B.J. Crossen making his second varsity start for the injured Clayton Isbell, the short-field touchdown was exactly what the Saints needed early.

"We were really emphasizing on hitting the mesh point early and trying to get them off their game a little bit," said Griffin, who had 5 tackles for loss and a sack. "It's good for our offense, too, getting B.J. (Crossen) in there with good field position and giving him some confidence. That first turnover was absolutely huge."

Crossen's (12 carries, 117 yards) game took off from there as he scored the Saints' next 3 touchdowns on runs covering 25, 17 and 26 yards, respectively, with the latter extending the lead to 28-0 after 3 quarters.

"I felt a lot more confidence out there," said Crossen. "The offensive line and the backs did a great job blocking for me. (Receiver) Josh Luedtke made two big blocks that set me free and they were walk-in touchdowns."

"It's just seeing the varsity speed and being able to read and react to it," Farquhar said of Crossen. "It's the confidence. That's the biggest thing -- him developing that confidence. I was proud of the job he did tonight."

Sammy Scialabba capped the night's scoring with a 3-yard touchdown run midway through the fourth quarter -- all part of the Saints' 351-yard rushing attack.

"We had a hard time getting anything going offensively," Teonic said of the Royals' 79 yards of total offense, "and we had a hard time stopping them."

Swanson (2), Yalon Rogers (2), Drew Conn, Nico Piaskowy, Patrick Gerkin and Ronan Macaluso also added tackles for loss for the Saints' stingy defense that limited Larkin's Kindrel Morris to 34 yards on 20 carries in the sloppy conditions.

"I think it's definitely advantage defense especially when you have a shifty offense like Larkin has," said Griffin. "These are the games you remember -- they're so fun playing in the mud."

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Batavia tops South Elgin in battle of unbeaten

BY JOHN LEMON

Something had to give when high-powered South Elgin traveled to stingy Batavia Friday night -- and not just because both teams entered with perfect 6-0 records.

The Storm can put points on the board with the best of them, averaging 40 a game. Batavia excels at stopping its opponents from scoring, allowing just 3 points per game with 4 shutouts in 6 games.

Defense won out on a wet night at Bulldog Stadium. Batavia held the Storm to 11 first downs and 152 yards of offense in a 10-7 Upstate Eight Conference crossover victory.

"I feel we have a championship-caliber defense, week in and week out," Batavia coach Dennis Piron said. "It's very hard to score on us."

Defensive lineman Ethan Towers had a sack and helped apply the constant pressure on star Storm quarterback Nate Gomez all night. Gomez finished with 38 yards rushing on 21 attempts and threw for 102 yards on 11 of 20 passing with 2 interceptions.

"He's a good quarterback, very shifty," Towers said. "We kept him contained in the box and every time he tried to set his feet he really couldn't. We wanted to take their No. 1 player out of the game."

"It was an all-together really good game for us. Our defense is playing phenomenal. Our defense flies around, hits kids, destroys kids, has a really good time doing it."

South Elgin's defense also was up to the task. They were on the field nearly the entire first quarter but held Batavia twice on fourth down inside their own 27-yard line to keep the game scoreless.

Batavia (7-0) got on the board late in the first half. Art Taylor capped an 11-play, 67-yard drive with a 1-yard touchdown run. Jack Carlson added the point after for a 7-0 lead with 3:28 left in the first half.

Batavia converted a pair of short third downs on the drive while South Elgin often found itself in third and longs much of the night.

"We really struggled to stay on schedule," Storm coach Pat Pistorio said. "We found ourselves in a variety of bizarre downs and distances."

Batavia nearly shot itself in the foot just before halftime. The Bulldogs tried a hook-and-ladder deep in their own territory but fumbled. South Elgin took over at Batavia's 26 with :16 left.

Gomez threw into the end zone twice; Tom Stuttle intercepted the second attempt on the final play of the first half.

Carlson gave Batavia a two-score lead with a 23-yard field goal with 9:55 left in the fourth quarter. That proved to be a big kick when Gomez threw a 6-yard pass to Pierre Toussaint with 2:58 remaining. Gomez set up the touchdown with a 36-yard pass to Jaron Wells on a controversial catch that Batavia thought it had intercepted.

The Storm followed with an onside kick but couldn't recover it. The Bulldogs picked up two first downs to run out the clock, the second one on another controversial call when the Storm felt they stuffed quarterback Riley Cooper on a fourth-and-1 sneak with 1:07 left.

"I thought we had it at the end," Pistorio said of the stop. "I know earlier in the game there were some issues with the chains. We can't rely on everything to go our way, especially on the road. We'll learn from it and improve."

Cooper completed 11 of 16 passes for 97 yards; Jeremiah Evers led a balanced rushing attack with 58 yards on 14 carries.

"We have had to grind out first downs to win a game," Piron said. "That was the goal there. Get two first downs and we win. Really proud of the way we finished."

Batavia wraps up the regular season with a pair of road games: against Larkin in Week 8 and at St. Charles North in Week 9.

"They are so tall, they are rangy, they are long," Pistorio said of Batavia's defense. "They really create some major matchup problems for a lot of teams. They really gave us a hard time today."

South Elgin (6-1) has pair of home games remaining -- a nonconference matchup against Cary-Grove in Week 8, and an Upstate Eight Valley finale against East Aurora in Week 9.

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Welcome Makeover-Elgin High community gets first look at field house renovations with schoolwide gathering for homecoming

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

October 7, 2017 12:29 AM



Elgin High School students and staff at the school's homecoming assembly at the newly renovated Chesbrough Field House. Oct. 6, 2017. (Rafael Guerrero/Courier-News)

Friday was Elgin High School's first school-wide assembly of the school year — homecoming.

However, something was different. As Elgin athletic director Paul Pennington pointed out to the hundreds of students, the bleachers were new, the floor was new, much of the Chesbrough Field House was new.

"What do you think of your new space?" he asked the students, to which they answered with boisterous, resounding cheers.

After months of repairs and renovations, the construction at the Elgin High gymnasium was completed this week. Gone are the decades-old bleachers and flooring, victims of the expected wear-and-tear of a frequently-used high school athletic facility. In was a shiny new floor and maroon-colored seating.

School officials were notified in January the district was looking into repairing the field house, which had had few repairs since it opened in 1968. School board documents from earlier in the year show the project as tied in to similar repair work at Harriet Gifford Elementary School. The two projects'

combined bid cost \$1.3 million, although most of the cost is toward Elgin High School.

The project called for new wood flooring, a telescoping bleacher system, lighting, door and frame replacement, new drinking fountains, divider curtain replacement, roof venting replacement, and repainting the ceiling of Chesbrough. According to board documents, a separate \$202,000 bid was approved by the U46 school board for the removal of mercury-containing flooring prior to the commencement of general construction.

Pennington said the former rubberized, wooden floor had run its course, originally installed because it could survive having all forms of sports and activities played on it, but it "didn't give like a wooden floor."

The old bleachers, meanwhile, were also wooden and showing signs of wear, he said.

Work on the gym began in the spring, forcing the school to shut down all activities inside the gym. The school's athletic department showed updates and progress on the renovation project via its social media pages.

"It was bare in here for a while...this floor and bleachers hadn't been touched since the '80s," Pennington said.

Thursday and Friday marked the first days students and staff stepped on the new floor and bleachers. Next Thursday, the field house will see its first competition, as the Elgin girls volleyball team hosts its first home game, Pennington said.

The volleyball team has been the road team the entire season, with practices at the Top Flight Volleyball Club in Elgin.

"We used to do our own thing (before home games)," said senior-year player Karen Aguirre in a September interview with The Courier-News. "Now, we're all together. We've become a closer family ever since we've been on the road together."

The team was promised at least one home volleyball game. Pennington said they will get to practice on their home court for the first time likely Tuesday, a welcome relief to the seniors on the team.

"These seniors, they were very gracious throughout this season," Pennington said. "This space is theirs, and they will get a chance to play at least one match at home."

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Crossen pattern: Backup quarterback steps up for St. Charles East vs. Larkin

BY GENE CHAMBERLAIN

It's been a big year for backup quarterbacks in the Upstate Eight River.

Right now St. Charles East sophomore BJ Crossen is trending.

Crossen rushed for 118 yards and three touchdowns Friday in his second game up from the sophomore team to lead St. Charles East's 35-0 home victory over Larkin.

"It was easy for me," Crossen said. "The offensive line did a great job, the backs did a great job blocking for me.

"(Receiver) Joshua Luedtke had two big blocks that set me free. It was just walk-in touchdowns."

Crossen had TD runs of 25, 15 and 26 yards, while fullback Justin Jett bulled for 116 yards to make St. Charles East (5-2, 2-2) eligible for playoff consideration.

Already in the conference, St. Charles North backup quarterback David Beach produced two key wins and Larkin (3-4, 1-3), Streamwood and Elgin extensively used backup quarterbacks. Crossen last week played after senior starter Clayton Isbell suffered an ankle injury, but didn't need to do much in a 42-7 win over Bartlett.

"It's a thrill for me," Crossen said. "I knew this previous offseason that if Clayton went down I was the next guy up. I was just kind of waiting for my chance and I'm glad I was able to step up and the team didn't have a real letdown."

Even the rain and mud couldn't derail Crossen, Jett and the triple-option attack.

"It's tough getting footing," Crossen said. "But these are the games you remember, like, 'Oh I remember when we played Larkin and it was all muddy and it was like a swamp.'

"It was fun."

Saints center Alex Pahadi also had fun with a rare lineman's dream TD, after recovering a fumble at the goal line.

Pahadi chuckled about "aiding" the officials' call while at the bottom of the pile to start the scoring.

"It was a little bit outside (the end zone)," he said. "I had to shift it a little bit to get it in there."

Sammy Scialabba closed the scoring with a 3-yard TD run in the fourth quarter.

St. Charles East's defense dominated, starting with a fumble recovery on the first play from scrimmage by Abe Swanson to set up Pahadi's TD. Pat Griffin and Nico Piaskowy spent the night roaring off the edge into Larkin's backfield.

"Our edge guys really set the tone tonight," St. Charles East coach Bryce Farquhar said. "Pat is not your prototypical defensive end, but is a really tough kid who can get to the quarterback and he's playing at an all-conference level again."

The Saints held Larkin running back Kindrel Morris to 34 yards. Jahari Stubbs had Larkin's lone highlight with an interception.

"Just awful, we had an awful start," Larkin coach Dragan Teonic said. "Everything kind of rolled against us. They outclassed us in every way. They were a better team than us tonight."

"We had a hard time stopping them, penalties were piling up and we had a couple turnovers. Everything went their way."

gchamberlain@tribpub.com

Twitter @genechamberlai2

Week 7 highlights

Bartlett 25, East Aurora 7: Joey Allen scored two touchdowns and Austin Gates took the opening kickoff back for an 88-yard TD in an Upstate Eight Valley win by Bartlett (2-5, 2-1).

Geneva 28, Elgin 6: Trevon Morris broke a late 76-yard TD run for Elgin (2-5, 1-2) in the Upstate Eight River.

Glenbard South 16, St. Edward 13: St. Edward (4-3, 1-2) had TD runs of 3 yards by Nick Wright and 11 yards from Angel Garcia in the Metro Suburban Blue.

Huntley 49, Crystal Lake Central 7: Eric Mooney threw for 305 yards and four TDs, and had a 4-yard TD run to lift Huntley (6-1, 5-1) in the Fox Valley.

Jacobs 35, Glenbard East 7: Jacobs (5-2) romped behind Caleb Walker's 76-yard TD run and 59-yard TD pass from Anthony Wilson to Brandon Van De Linde.

McHenry 38, Dundee-Crown 25: Ricky Ibarra rushed for 250 yards on 35 carries and had TDs of 36 and 20 yards for Dundee-Crown (1-6, 0-6) in the Fox Valley.

Prairie Ridge 55, Hampshire 14: Ben Courcelles had an 18-yard TD run and Drew Dalby threw for 310 yards for Hampshire (1-6, 1-5) in the Fox Valley.

St. Charles North 41, Streamwood 0: Alec Kritt's 81-yard kickoff return for a TD started St. Charles North (6-1, 4-0) to an Upstate Eight River win over Streamwood (0-7, 0-5).

Woodstock North 17, Burlington Central 7: Nick Termini tied it with a 30-yard TD run, but Burlington Central (3-4, 1-3) couldn't score in the second half of a Kishwaukee River loss.

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Michael Niemiec, Batavia defense stand tall in win over South Elgin; remain undefeated

BY PAUL JOHNSON

Batavia's defense has been one of the best in the state, but the Bulldogs faced one of their stiffest challenges Friday: South Elgin senior quarterback Nate Gomez.

Batavia passed the test with flying colors in its 10-7 home win.

The Bulldogs held Gomez to 33 yards rushing on 21 carries. He went 11-of-21 for 97 passing yards with one touchdown and two interceptions.

"He puts their offense on his back," Batavia safety Michael Niemiec said. "He's their entire offense. We just tried to stay disciplined, stay in our gaps, stay in our run lanes. If it's a pass, we'll get into the passing lanes, but mostly we were just trying to stay back and see what he was going to do. We knew he could throw. And if he gets a running lane, he's gone."

Niemiec had one of the biggest plays when Batavia (7-0) was protecting a 10-0 lead in the fourth quarter. Gomez had the Storm (6-1) on the move, trying to get back into the game. Niemiec picked off a Gomez pass to end the threat, returning the ball 24 yards to the South Elgin 25.

The Bulldogs didn't score on the ensuing drive, but the play stalled the Storm's momentum.

"We picked up when they were going to pass," Niemiec said. "It helps when you know. That's a lot of film work. If they got the first down, they would have gone down the field."

South Elgin coach Pat Pistorio was impressed with Batavia's defense. Through seven games, the Bulldogs have allowed 25 points.

"They do an awesome job," Pistorio said. "They're so disruptive. They're tall and rangy, long. They really create some major matchup problems for a lot of teams, and us as well. Their ability to run sideline to sideline, it's something they coach and something they're really proud of."

Offensively, Batavia did just enough. Sophomore running back Art Taylor scored from a yard out with 3:28 left in the first half for the Bulldogs' lone touchdown. Jack Carlson's 23-yard field goal with 9:55 left proved to be the difference.

"We're just not able to get some of the explosive plays that we wanted to get," Batavia coach Dennis Piron said. "I'm just proud of how we competed to the very end."

Piron had high praise for South Elgin, which scored on Gomez's 7-yard pass to Pierre Toussaint with 2:58 left.

"They're doing a really nice job over there," Piron said. "They're very, very tough. I think they can do some damage in (Class) 8A."

Pistorio similarly was impressed with Batavia.

"I truly believe that they will be in contention for a state championship," Pistorio said. "We're very proud of our kids, but also want to make sure to give credit the credit they deserve. Awesome game."

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Why high school football programs are losing players

BY JAKE GRIFFIN, BOB SUSNJARA AND MITCH DUDEK

Since first grade, 14-year-old Henry Wagner has spent autumn afternoons practicing and playing football.

This year, the Naperville teen traded in his helmet and shoulder pads for running shoes and shorts.

"The day before school registration he told me he was switching to cross-country," said Wendy Wagner, Henry's mom and a pediatric physical therapist. "I danced like a schoolgirl. He's the one who made the decision, but he knew I felt very strongly about the potential risks and I probably had a big outside influence on that decision."

Henry is part of a wave of defections over the decade from a sport that is part of the American high school experience and that holds marching band and cheerleading and homecoming in its orbit.

The number of students participating in football across the suburbs has dropped 18.7 percent since 2008, with some programs plummeting 40 percent or more, a Daily Herald/Chicago Sun-Times analysis of teams at 87 suburban public high schools shows.

The decline is even more pronounced on freshman, sophomore and junior varsity teams, the analysis shows.

Coaches and parents give many reasons, including a broader array of fall sports and activities now offered and a push for athletes to specialize rather than go out for several sports.

But much of the decline, which has grown steeper over the past two seasons, arises from concerns about safety, according to coaches, athletic directors, doctors and parents.

"I'm not going to say concussions aren't an issue. It absolutely is," said **Bartlett High School Athletic Director Jeff Bral**, who considers the game safer than it's ever been.

But many parents aren't convinced.

"I've had more parents who weren't super excited about it in the first place, and then the kid suffers a concussion and the parents will say, 'Don't worry, Doc, he's not playing anymore,'" said Dr. Nathaniel Jones, an orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine expert at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood.

The 87 suburban high schools have 2,549 fewer football players than in 2008, according to the analysis of documents obtained through open-records requests.

The biggest drop came in 2016, eight months after the movie "Concussion" hit theaters. The suburban schools combined to lose 903 players from the previous season.

Barrington High School Athletic Director Mike Obsuszt saw the effect of the movie, which starred Will Smith as the pathologist who discovered chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, the brain damage caused by blows to the head that has been linked to football.

"You have all that information, and parents start making decisions about not letting their kids play football," he said. Last month, prestigious Chicago magnet high school Whitney Young canceled the rest of its varsity football season because it couldn't field enough players.

Even traditional powerhouses have seen precipitous drops. Wheaton Warrenville South High School, which calls Red Grange Field its home, has gone from 257 players in 2008 to 149 this year -- a 42 percent slide. Fremd High School in Palatine had 194 players in 2008, but only 133 this year, a 31 percent drop. At Lakes Community High School in Lake Villa, gridiron participants have gone from 145 in 2008 to 101 this year, down 30 percent.

Lake Zurich sophomore quarterback Don Volante has had four concussions since he started playing in first grade, three caused by football, according to his mother, Cathi. He sat out a year after having two concussions during one season several years ago, and is currently sidelined and only participating in noncontact drills.

While she didn't stop his return to football, she also hasn't stopped worrying about his safety.

"I'm a parent before I'm a football mom," she said. "No sport is worth your health. Every doctor he has seen ... says that if your brain heals, then there is no long-term damage. Now I'm just trying to learn everything I can. I'd be happy if he were the kicker and no one hit him."

In a few days, she's taking her son to see another specialist.

Among the 87 suburban high schools, only nine reported more football players this year than in 2008. Most, such as Huntley and Hampshire, saw big enrollment spurts during that time.

The suburban decline mirrors state and national trends. Football participation in Illinois schools declined nearly 17 percent from 2007 to 2016, the National Federation of State High School Associations reported. Meanwhile, the National Sporting Goods Association says participation dropped 14.8 percent nationwide during those years.

Football has company in the decline, according to the Aspen Institute's [Project Play 2020](#), which seeks to boost athletic participation. Interest in most youth sports fell from 2008 to 2016, with gymnastics, lacrosse and hockey being exceptions.

Despite safety concerns, football is not short of advocates.

"I love what football develops in a person beyond the sport, starting with how a group of individuals with one goal can achieve amazing things with sacrifice, focus and discipline," said Neuqua Valley High School offensive coordinator and former NFL fullback J.R. Niklos. "The good football brings most certainly outweighs the bad."

Neuqua Valley is one of three high schools in Indian Prairie Unit District 204 in Naperville and Aurora. In 2008, there were two high schools with 501 football players. Even after the addition of a third high school in 2010 brought more opportunity to play, the number of football players in the district is down 22 percent to 391.

Proponents say the game is safer today than ever before because of increased emphasis on proper tackling techniques and less contact during practices. Athletic trainers are more adept at identifying and assessing concussion signs.

Dr. Erik Beltran, a neurologist from Northshore University HealthSystem, travels to suburban high schools to give concussion seminars typically

attended by parents. He said some fears about football are a result of "sensational" media coverage of CTE.

Former NFL players Dave Duerson and Junior Seau, who killed themselves in 2011 and 2012 respectively, are among former stars of the sport who were diagnosed with CTE after their deaths. Duerson, who played safety for the Super Bowl XX-champion Bears, left a note asking that his brain be studied for research.

Most recently, former New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez, who killed himself in prison at age 27 after being convicted of murder, was determined to be suffering from what CTE researchers described as "the most severe case they had ever seen in someone of Aaron's age," according to his former lawyer.

Beltran said the CTE research is "limited in its scope on what kind of conclusions you can draw from it clinically." He said there is nothing wrong with teenagers playing football or other contact sports if precautions are taken. Concussions represent 5.5 percent to 8.9 percent of all high school athletic injuries, according to research Beltran presented for a recent seminar at Fremd.

Medical experts said the research is so new that there are no guidelines for neurologists to follow when determining if a player should give up contact sports.

"I never tell patients you can't play anymore," said Jones, the Loyola physician. "We do discuss the risk, but there's more. There are the social benefits, the team benefits; I present info and try to be fair about it. Removing something a child or teenager loves can be problematic as well."

- Daily Herald staff writers Aaron Gabriel, David Oberhelman and John Radtke contributed to this report.

Part Two: Young teams, from junior varsity down to youth leagues, are feeling the biggest pinch after a decade of declining participation in suburban football programs. Coaches and fans worry that portends an even cloudier future for the sport.

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Elgin Spanish teacher says love for language inspires him

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Juan Perez shows first-graders how to properly shake hands and look someone in the eye Thursday at Otter Creek Elementary School in Elgin. He helped establish the school's dual language program in 2011.

Using hand and facial gestures, body movement and singing, Juan Perez communicates words in an animated manner, helping students connect the dots and pick up language more easily.

Love for Spanish is what motivates Perez to come to work every day teaching 28 first-graders in a dual language classroom at Otter Creek Elementary School in Elgin.

"That's music to my ears," said Perez, 40, of Pingree Grove, who comes from the small town of Nerja in southern Spain. "I think Spanish is the most beautiful language of all."

Perez studied to become a physical education teacher, but couldn't find a job in that field when he moved to the suburbs. He is one of the pioneers of Elgin Area School District U-46's Dual Language Program, which started in 2011 with five teachers at a few schools.

"Otter Creek was one of the first schools to start the Dual Language Program," said Perez, who has taught in U-46 schools for 17 years, the past seven at Otter Creek.

Today, U-46's 80:20 Dual Language Program serves Spanish-speaking English learners from prekindergarten through eighth grades at 33 elementary schools, including two early learning centers, and five middle schools.

The program was implemented in eighth grade this school year, and is expected to be rolled out at the high schools in coming years.

It offers a bilingual educational environment in which students are taught literacy and academic content in English and Spanish starting in kindergarten, where 80 percent of classroom instruction is in Spanish and 20 percent in English.

As students move up in grades, English instruction increases by 10 percent per grade until both languages reach parity by third grade. Its goal is to foster bilingualism and bi-literacy, which officials say has proved to help students improve academically, while incorporating awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity.

"You have a new generation that's more prepared for the future," Perez said.

Perez said he himself didn't begin learning English until he was in fifth grade in Spain, which put him at a disadvantage for competing in a global economy.

"It was a little late," Perez said. "I didn't have the resources I needed. Learning (English), for me, was difficult. It took me quite an effort to learn what I needed to make the jump from there to here. I want them to have the opportunities that I never had when I was a child."

Learning multiple languages at a younger age enriches and adds value to students' educational portfolio, while opening doors to more careers, he added.

Perez's two-way dual language class is split between native English speakers, or English-dominant students, and native Spanish speakers. He teaches in Spanish 70 percent of the time for most subjects, including mathematics, while social studies and science are taught in English. Ninety percent of his students already are bilingual, he said.

Teaching native Spanish speakers who predominantly come from different South American countries can be tough, as Perez must adjust to variations between regional dialects.

Similarly, bridging the language barrier with English-speaking students who don't understand Spanish also is challenging at first, as it's easier for them to disconnect and get distracted, Perez said.

Within a couple of months they start gaining familiarity with Spanish words and understand how they relate to and connect with the English language, he said.

"As time goes by you see them learning and becoming proficient in Spanish ... that's amazing to me," he said. "It's my inspiration."

To reinforce what they learn in class, Perez records sounds, words, and texts -- from simple sentences and passages to entire books in Spanish -- with students in their own

voice after school. Students can play back the audio recordings -- accessible on a CD or through a cellphone app -- and practice reading. They also can listen to recordings of other students' reading.

"We have recorded more than 200 books," Perez said. "It's been really successful and I have a waiting list."

Perez has also recorded books with other second-, third- and fourth-graders at the school. "I'm seeing that it helps them continually build their language proficiency," he said.

Perez also get parents involved in the education process by sending video recordings of students and pictures of charts they create in the classroom so they can stay informed about what their children are learning. He coaches parents on learning strategies they can use at home.

"That really makes a difference and keeps them engaged," he said. "When you teach students you also have to teach their parents, because they also want to help their kids but don't know how."

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Bartlett High athletic complex work to begin later this fall

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Construction on the roughly \$1.5 million first phase of the Bartlett High School Activities Complex is expected to begin later this fall.

Construction on a roughly \$1.5 million project involving the first phase of the Bartlett High School Activities Complex is expected to start soon and be completed by August, officials said.

The Elgin Area School District U-46 school board last week reviewed bids for the project, which largely will be funded through more than \$900,000 in donations and up to \$700,000 from the district through tax revenues and loans. The low bid was submitted by Aurora-based L.J. Morse Construction Co. for \$1,577,700.

The first phase of construction includes installing bleachers seating 1,500 people, a press box and stadium lighting, said U-46 Chief Operations Officer Jeff King.

"This has been in the works for a while with an extreme amount of help from the booster club and the administrators at the school raising the money they have to put toward this project," King said. "The district also (paid) for the design piece of it, and we will be contributing an additional \$600,000 or \$700,000."

The district's contribution will be split between operations and maintenance fund revenues and debt certificates to be issued later, he added.

"It's really to get the first phase of the project off the ground so we can get started before winter," King said.

Bartlett High School Booster Club past president and project chairman George Kantzavelos said the group will present the district with a check for \$925,000 in the coming weeks.

Money was raised largely through donations, including \$500,000 from food products distributor Greco and Sons Inc., and Cheese Merchants of America, both owned by Bartlett business owner Eddie Greco. A donation of \$100,000 came from the Bednarke family, owners of Brooke Graphics in Elk Grove Village. Their children attend Bartlett High. Other businesses donated more than \$180,000, and the remainder came from fundraising, Kantzavelos said.

The booster club has raised funds for more than five years to build the complex at the 20-year-old school so its students would no longer have to share facilities with Streamwood High School. Bartlett students have competed at Millennium Field since 1997.

Initial cost estimates exceeded \$5 million, but plans were scaled back. A \$50,000 scoreboard was installed last fall, partly funded through a \$25,000 donation from the Bartlett Rotary Club.

The second phase of the project involves building the complex entrance, concession stands and visitors' stands. A third phase could involve installing new turf for the field.

"We don't intend to stop here," Kantzavelos said. "Our fundraising efforts will continue until all phases of the project are complete."

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U46 Schools raise over \$10K for hurricane, quake relief

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

In response to hurricanes and earthquakes devastating the [U.S.](#) and Latin America this summer and fall, School District U46 has raised more than \$10,000 in disaster relief.

On Thursday, the district announced it had surpassed the five-figure dollar mark, with schools continuing to raise resources for victims of Hurricane Maria and the September earthquakes in Mexico.

"We've seen overwhelming generosity from U46 students, their families and our staff in responding to the needs of those in Texas and Florida," said U46 CEO Tony Sanders in a written statement. "Now we are seeing the same spirit of giving aimed at those struggling in Mexico and Puerto Rico, where many in our district have family and friends."

In a news release, U46 officials detailed some of the ongoing fundraising efforts for the two communities.

Oakhill Elementary School in Streamwood has raised more than \$1,200 through a "Penny Wars" fundraiser. Century Oaks Elementary in Elgin will be collecting new and unopened battery packs, flashlights and money through the end of this week.

Also happening this week is students at the DREAM Academy in Elgin have been wearing jeans to class — and temporarily skipping the school's dress code — if they donate \$1 per day. Employees at the district's central office building next door did something similar last week. Otter Creek Elementary in Elgin is also hosting a coin challenge this week, with each day of the week corresponding to pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, or donors' choice.

Staff at the main U46 office building hosted a bake sale this week, and the staff are also collecting batteries and flashlights for victims in Puerto Rico, according to the release.

The money collected from these latest fundraisers and collections will be sent to either "The Puerto Rican Agenda" to help Puerto Rico, or "Chicago con Mexico," which is aiding reconstruction in Mexico following the magnitude-7.1 earthquake last month.

More than \$9,000 was collected for victims of Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Louisiana and Hurricane Irma in Florida, district officials said. The schools that participated include Bartlett, Hawk Hollow, Hillcrest, Hilltop, Spring Trail, Ronald D. O'Neal, Clinton, Oakhill and Liberty elementary schools; Kenyon Woods and Larsen middle schools; and Larkin and Streamwood high schools.

In the Streamwood High School Miracle Minute fundraiser, more than \$2,800 was collected, said Jaimee Shearn, a Streamwood teacher and event organizer, in an email last month.

Funds raised are being donated to organizations such as the [American Red Cross](#), C.E. King High School in Houston, the Autism Society of Texas' Hurricane Harvey Disaster Fund, Salvation Army and Feed My Starving Children, according to the release.