

Story ideas?

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Section B

CHS CROSS COUNTRY

Going the distance

Morse, Raffey are the Lake City Reporter's Columbia Cross Country Runners of the Year.



FILE

Columbia's Bridget Morse returned to the state finals despite a broken elbow for a second straight season.

Bridget Morse placed 25th at the state finals meet.

By **ERIC JACKSON**
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Even a freak car accident couldn't hold her back. The wreck, which happened earlier this year, left Bridget Morse with a broken elbow. Her injuries though didn't stop the standout runner from a stand-out season. Morse rose to the challenge, overcoming the setback, reaching the state finals for a second consecutive season. The junior's resiliency and toughness was enough to capture the Lake City Reporter's Columbia girls Runner of the Year. "She's definitely matured as a runner," Columbia coach Shelli Shoup said. "Not only is she running, but she's also lifting. She's had tremendous improvement not only as a runner but as an athlete." Morse's elbow injury sidelined her for a few weeks, but she couldn't wait to get back on the course – competing through the pain at some events. Morse placed sixth at the Bobcat Invitational and took first at the Arrowhead Classic. She took third at the

Alligator Park Invitational as well as at districts. Morse placed sixth at regionals to record another trip to the state finals. "With her injury, she was not permitted to run on the road but still made sure she hit her times on the treadmill. Even if couldn't do [usual] training, she would improvise." Maintaining her dominance on the course despite injury is no surprise to those who know her personally. Morse demonstrated her mental toughness as well as physical this past cross country season. "The amazing thing is even just a few weeks from surgery, running out there with a broken arm, she still placed in the same position she did last year at Alligator [5K]." Morse, for the most part, competed against herself this season – testing her own strength and perseverance – never changing her initial season goals. She credits her big sister, Nicole, for always being an encouraging voice especially during rough times like earlier this year following the accident.

MORSE continued on 6B

Yassin Raffey placed 7th at the district meet.

By **ERIC JACKSON**
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Now an upperclassman, more races under his belt, Yassin Raffey took to the course determined to build on his breakout sophomore season this year. And Raffey wasted no time – outpacing the competition at the Ridgeview Bob Hans Invitational – winning the first meet of the season. He was far from through, too. Raffey notched personal bests and anchored Columbia's boys cross country team this year. The Sudanese speedster continues to impress his teammates and coaches. "I think he's really starting to realize that he has an opportunity to do something with running," Columbia coach Bradley Hough said of potential scholarship. "He's already got a letter from a Division III program, and I think more are coming." For his growth and vast improvement, Raffey has been chosen as the Lake City Reporter's Columbia boys Runner of the Year. "I worked so hard and I have a great coach," he said. "It helps with my friends there to believe in me and push me." Raffey has exceeded expectations

since he decided to try the sport just last year. This season has been no different as he has represented the purple and gold well placing tops in numerous events, including seventh at Columbia's district meet. Raffey also placed in the top-25 at the Alligator Park Invitational. He admits facing stiff competition and navigating courses was made easier this season after last year's learning curve. Experience, Raffey says, was key to his junior year leap, more seasoned than ever. "Everything is clearer now," he says. "I know more about what I am doing. It's easier now." After nearly qualifying for state at this season's regional meet, Raffey has his eyes set on accomplishing his ultimate goal next year. "I was so close," he said. "I really think I can." Before his next cross country campaign comes back around, Raffey will polish his skills on the asphalt, planning to compete for Columbia's track team this spring. "That might be where he's really going to excel," Hough said of track season. "He can do anything."



FILE

Columbia's Yassin Raffey led the boys cross country team this season after picking up the sport just last year.



KAYLA LOKEINSKY/Lake City Reporter

No days off

Fort White's Kacey Carter works on her deadlift while at weightlifting practice on Tuesday. In Fort White's last weightlifting meet, Carter placed first in the unlimited weight class and first overall. The Lady Indians are continuing to workout in the weight room over winter break in order to prepare for their next meet on Jan. 13. See more photos on page 6B.



BRENT KUYKENDALL/Special to the Reporter

Trojans edge Tigers

Columbia's Ja'Karis Hawkins skies for a layup during Tuesday's nonconference match against Lake Worth. The Tigers lost 69-66 at home to snap win streak.



BRENT KUYKENDALL/Special to the Reporter

Tigers drop nail-biter

Columbia's Teon Dollard (above) drives during Tuesday's loss to Lake Worth. Columbia's Bobby Fulton makes a move against a defender (below). The Tigers look ahead to the Hitchcock Challenge holiday tournament next week.

MORSE

Continued From 1B

"She's been there," Morse said of her graduated sister, who won last

year's Runner of the Year award. "Like emotionally, she's there....we've had similar experiences."

These days Morse feels like she's back to her normal self, preparing for track. She hopes this coming

track season will prepare her to reach new heights when the next cross country season rolls back around.

"I'm hoping for better results next year," Morse said.

FWHS WEIGHTLIFTING

Lifting all the way

Lady Indians spend their holiday break working out.



Photos by KAYLA LOKEINSKY/Lake City Reporter

Fort White's Gabby Marinko (above) works on her deadlift while at weightlifting practice on Tuesday. The Fort White girls weightlifting team (below) practices front squats. The Lady Indians are utilizing their winter break to continue their training as they prepare for their district meet on Jan. 13.



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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2016



Terry Cole Band

Merry Christmas!



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DINNER
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WED
LUNCH
DINNER

THUR
LUNCH
DINNER
KARAOKE
7 PM

FRI
LUNCH
DINNER
BEN CARTER BAND
8 PM

SAT
Merry Christmas

3076 95th Drive Live Oak, FL 32060