

St. Francis soph goes public with private school concerns

You have to say one thing for 15-year-old Matt Unger: he's not shy. Unger is a sophomore at Wheaton St. Francis High School. St. Francis is one of the schools that will be elevated to Class AA status in the fall, as long as the Illinois High School Association's new multiplier format for determining enrollments withstands the challenges and actually does take effect.

In case you've been visiting someone off the planet the last few weeks, a quick refresher. At its March 19 meeting, the IHSA board of directors voted to apply a 1.65 multiplier to enrollments of private and non-boundaried schools. This means roughly 24 schools (17 private and 7 non-boundaried) will move from Class A to Class AA in the fall.



John Radtke

In soccer, that number will be even greater — probably around 60 — because the IHSA board also voted to do away with the current system of figuring soccer enrollments based on the number of schools participating in the sport. Soccer now becomes the same as every other sport.

Matt Unger plays soccer at St. Francis. He joins many people associated with private schools who are opposed to the new system that will go into effect in the fall and move his school into Class AA in all sports.

So Unger did something about it. And while his plan will likely never see a conference table in the IHSA's Bloomington office, you have to give Unger props for not just sitting idle.

"I was taught to stand up for what I believe in," Unger says. "The IHSA shouldn't have done this."

What Unger did was develop a Web site, www.gohomeihsa.org, as well as a plan.

His plan is for the IHSA to adopt the Advancement Based on Ability system that is widely used in club soccer.

In essence, according to Unger, winning teams move up a division (which is considered a reward) and losing teams move down a division (which is embarrassing).

Unger's site has gotten just under 1,000 hits since he launched it March 28. He also has a blog on the site and offers his e-mail address for feedback.

"It's mostly been supportive right now," said Unger, who has the full support of his parents, Mike and Gina. "If people disagree, I just try to show them my side."

In a press release dated April 11, Unger states his side.

"It appears in their haste the IHSA lost sight of the standards of fairness that we expect from our educators," he writes. "The new IHSA rules throw a broad net over the entire small school population, catching the few fish they are after but also entrapping the many they are not."

Unger has another contention, one that many people have regardless of



Wheaton St. Francis student Matt Unger is a Web-based advocate for changing the IHSA's multiplier, which is aimed at leveling the playing field between boundaried and non-boundaried schools.

their stance on the collective public/private issue.

"They should have added more classes before they did anything else," Unger says. "But I think the ABA is the right system."

Unger won't get any argument from here that the IHSA should have added classes before applying the multiplier. As Unger points out on his Web site, Illinois is one of only five states that doesn't have more than two classes of high school sports competition. And Illinois, with 752 high schools, is by far the largest of those five to still be stuck in a two-class system.

Regardless of all else, Unger believes the ABA is the way to go, and he promotes it heavily on his Web site.

"I think the ABA is the right system," said Unger, who has been building Web sites since he was in the sixth grade. "And the reason I made the site is that I'd rather do something than sit around

and do nothing."

While IHSA executive director Marty Hickman gives Unger a thumbs up for expressing his beliefs through a Web site — "There's nothing wrong with that," Hickman said — he doesn't believe Unger's proposal is viable.

"I don't think our membership would be interested in something like that," Hickman said. "Take, for example, Liberty High School, which has an enrollment of 183. If they had won the Class A boys basketball tournament, you can't put them in Class AA."

"It may create some interesting conversation but I don't think it's something the member schools would be interested in."

Unger says he's received no response from anyone at the IHSA about his proposal, and he probably won't. That's not to say Hickman and his staff are ignoring Unger, but what's done is done.

"The proposal that's been approved is saying there are distinct advantages in the 30-mile radius that (private schools) are able to draw from," Hickman said. "We have to do something to create a level playing field for all our schools."

I asked Hickman why, as Unger contends it should have, the IHSA didn't implement more classes before enforcing a multiplier. Those schools that are moving up to Class AA in the fall are pretty much stuck with their Class A-heavy schedule for next school year. It certainly seems it would have been fair to allow those schools to prepare for Class AA competition by enforcing the multiplier beginning in the fall of 2006.

"In theory it could have waited but our membership has been really patient with this issue," Hickman said.

But Unger, who attended public schools in the Bloomington area until enrolling at St. Francis last year, still

believes the IHSA has put the cart before the horse, so to speak.

"I just hope the IHSA would add more classes before doing anything else," he says.

Hickman believes more classes will happen, but not before this fall.

"At the end of the day I believe we'll have a lot of good discussion about more classes," he said. "And while I generally don't get into predicting things, it won't surprise me if our membership votes to go to four classes."

"Those schools with under 300 students really struggle, even in Class A, and the schools between 800 and 1,000 generally struggle in Class AA. So, yes, I think we'll see more classes."

While that might appease Matt Unger somewhat, he still doesn't believe the multiplier is a fair system.

And if nothing else, he can have the piece of mind that he tried to do something about it.

Nevolo's return boosts Warren

BY MIKE GAROFOLA

Daily Herald Correspondent

Warren freshman Dennis Nevolo made a giant step forward in his world of tennis after finishing second in the prestigious international Easter Bowl singles title last weekend in Palm Springs, Calif., in the under-16 boys division.

Nevolo, who has yet to appear in the Blue Devils' lineup this season for coach Greg Cohen, was the talk of the town during the Huskie-Knights Invite as coaches discussed his advancement into the semifinals as reported by Cohen.

A day later, Nevolo struck gold with his 3-set victory (4-6, 6-1, 6-4) over Jeffrey Gast of Saratoga, Calif.

"He'll give Warren some 1-2 punch with Keith Moran at singles," said Highland Park coach Steve Rudman.

Nevolo's likely return this weekend at the always-tough Hinsdale Central Invite strengthens the Blue Devils' lineup from top to bottom as they prepare for a tough tourney schedule and a run at the North Suburban Conference title against Lake Forest.

It also could set up a potential singles title match with another superb singles player in P.J. Rose (New Trier), who, according to several coaches who have seen the senior play this season, is ready to make a serious run at a state title this spring.

If this were to occur, it would take both players to survive a grueling, yet unique format at Hinsdale which tosses Nos. 1 and 2 singles players into a big 16-man draw.

The same is done at doubles, where the field is expanded. Nos. 1 and 2 are thrown together while Nos. 3 and 4 are mixed into a group.

In addition to Warren and New Trier, the host Red Devils will greet Barrington, Deerfield, Highland Park, Lyons and Oak Park-River Forest.

"It's really fun to even add our name in that line of teams appearing," said Cohen, whose club joins this tournament for the first time. "This tournament, aside from the Pitchford-32 (next week) is right there with the big Deerfield Invite at the end of the year."

Steinhaus jumps at her big chance

BY TOM KUPFER

Daily Herald Correspondent

Second place in hand, last jump coming up.

Vernon Hills coach Corey Atwell figured the time was right for a gamble.

"We talked a little and I said, 'You've got nothing to lose,'" said Atwell, who wanted to see just how far Cougar senior Tori Steinhaus could cut it loose on her final triple-jump attempt at last weekend's Glenbard South invite.

"I said, 'Attack the board,'" Atwell said. "You know where the board is, just go get it and see what happens."

Thirty-five feet later, Steinhaus hit the pit with first place assured and an impressive PR that tabs her as one to watch as the hop, step and jumpers sort things out over the next few weeks.

"She's been a 32 for the last three years," said Atwell. "I was hoping for the high-33 range. To get a 35, I was pretty excited."

"She came down the runway and hit the board perfect. I haven't ever seen Tori hit the board like that. She got herself out there and hit 35."

One of the area's top hurdlers over the past couple seasons, Steinhaus won both of those races as well.

"She had a great day down there," said Atwell, who started the season with a young team overall and is beginning to see where VH might best fit when the postseason meets arrive.

Two likely possibilities are the 800 medley relay and the 800-meter relay. Steinhaus, Allison Nardini and Jessica Price figure prominently in both events. The trick will be finding fourths.

Freshman Kelsey Wall shows promise as a 4-by-2 contributor while Alyssa Peno, who has gotten under 63 seconds for 400 meters, might be the key for the medley.

Vernon Hills recently turned in an area-leading time of 1:48.9 for the 800 relay.

Girls track notes

"We didn't hit that time probably until conference last year so we're a little ahead of the schedule," Atwell said. "We're starting to get that 4-by-2 team going, and even our medley is coming along."

Atwell's attack philosophy also seems to be paying off for Price, who just missed the state mark of 17 feet while setting a PR of 16-11 earlier this week.

"She's a little bit more mature this year," Atwell said. "She was a little tentative last year going down the runway and getting to the board but this year she seems a little stronger and she attacks the board a little better."

Success at last: Maybe it was the best imitation of a mad scientist that a social studies teacher could muster.

The maniacal laugh needs work, but Mundelein coach John Osmanski clearly was pleased with the results of his tinkering when Amesha Baker ran amok at the Grayslake Invitational last week.

The Mustang junior put her state-caliber sprinting and jumping talents together for a clocking of 47.9 seconds in the 300 hurdles, an impressive showing for just her third hurdles race.

"The experiment is over," said Osmanski. "It worked. She will be doing it from now on."

The victory was Baker's third straight as a hurdler and the most impressive to date, Osmanski said.

"With these dual meets we've been putting her in, she's just been kind of running with the leader and finishing strong," Osmanski said. "On a night like this, where you have a lot of good people, she has to run it and she ran a tremendous race."

"She's got some nice little form. She's got some things to work on but

she did a tremendous job. I couldn't have been happier with that time."

"And then to come back in the 200 and run state-qualifying, that was a great job."

Baker was second to Grayslake's Kelly Washington and finished just ahead of Carmel's Keli Coleman in a shootout that saw both Washington (25.7) and Baker (25.8) reach the state-qualifying standard. She also won the triple jump.

"The girl from Grayslake nipped her at the end but it was a tremendous day for her," said Osmanski.

Even Igor would have been proud.

Live and learn: For on-the-job training, Mundelein freshman Mandy Ranck has been through tough races that have included some tough losses.

So Mustangs coach John Osmanski had the perfect description for her outing last week at the Grayslake invite.

"Just tough as nails," said Osmanski, who saw Ranck and teammate Erica Moffitt roll to a 1-2 finish. Ranck PR'd by a wide margin at 5:28.9 minutes while Moffitt wasn't too far back at 5:32.6.

"We had a game plan and she stuck with it," said Osmanski. "She's still young and learning how to run properly."

"Properly" in this case means expending enough energy to stay in position to win but having enough left at the end to finish the job.

"She took the lead when she should have," Osmanski said. "The pace slowed down a little bit and she took the lead. We were trying to take the kick out of the kickers. They were supposed to go a little bit earlier but they got boxed in."

"You want to be the first one to finish, you don't necessarily want to be the first one to the quarter. She's beginning to realize that now and, as she figures out what her body can do and what it can't do, she'll be even better."

Three's a crowd: Warren coach Jim Lobitz is looking for answers at some positions but his biggest question just might be:

"Who's gonna high jump?"

The ranks of the 5-foot club swelled to three when Arriana Johnson scaled that height in a dual meet on Monday.

With Lisa Vitale and Sam Greenwood already there, the Blue Devils' trio of leapers is in hot pursuit of area leader Keli Coleman of Carmel (5-2). But someone will be the odd person out for the postseason.

"We're going to have some choices to make," said Lobitz.

One easy choice has been plugging senior Paula Neiweem into the lineup and watching her throw.

Neiweem got her outdoor season on track with a put of 37 feet, 7½ inches in the shot at Grayslake. She's also over the state standard for discus at 121-3.

"She's been waiting for that kind of day," said Lobitz of Neiweem's breakout shot toss.

"She's usually been a little slow coming out of the indoor season. Usually she feels strong right when we go outdoors. It took her a couple meets to get ready but I think she's starting to get her form, so that's nice to see."

Warren's Brittany Bilderback is back on top of the area 400 leader board with her time of 59.6, although Round Lake's Sandra Smith is only two-tenths of a second behind her.

The Blue Devils also are getting good mileage from Gabrielle Stevenson in the jumps and relays, especially the 4-by-200 and the 4-by-400.

Lobitz said his biggest task right now is shoring up the sprints.

"We've got to find the kids," he said. "We may have them; we've got to identify them. That may be the coaching not seeing what we need to see. That's my fault."