



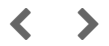
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TOP STORY

Young athletes made Maricopa proud in 2017

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Maricopa's Dakota Halverson is crowned champion of the 285-pound weight class at the Division II state wrestling tournament on Feb. 11 in Prescott Valley. Halverson pinned Scottsdale Chaparral's Isaac Marroquin in 4:15 to win the state title.

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1 Rams' Halverson rises to top of the podium

It's possible that the feeling hasn't sunk in for Maricopa's Dakota Halverson, but when it does the feeling will be the same — state champion.

Halverson entered the third period of his Division II 285-pound final down 3-1 to Scottsdale Chaparral's Isaac Marroquin before turning the tables on him by getting out of a grip and pinning him in 4:15.

Halverson, who placed sixth at last year's state tournament, finished the year 45-6 and pinned all four opponents he faced en route to giving Maricopa its first state champion since 2006.

2 Pumas take home first baseball state championship

They stood under the lights of a major league stadium, and they did so as champions.

The second-seeded Sequoia Pathway Pumas, a team still in its relative infancy as a program, won the Canyon Athletic Association's Division II state championship in May at Maryvale Baseball Park, the spring training home of the Milwaukee Brewers.

And unlike almost all of their games over the course of the season, that trophy did not come easy in the final. It was a back-and-forth affair, with top-seeded Phoenix South Pointe High School regularly knocking on the door of a comeback, but always being denied entrance. In the end, the Pumas came away victorious, 9-7.

The school held a ceremony in November to celebrate Charlie Cancellieri, Kalani Klepfer, Ryan Jackovich and Jackson Lee signing letters to play baseball at the collegiate level. It's another day of joy for the program, which won the CAA state championship this past season.

3 Pair of Rams named county's top basketball players

A pair of local players rose to the top in county basketball.

The Maricopa Rams went through big ups and downs this season, but someone they could count on every night was junior point guard Josh Johnson.

Johnson may stand a shade under 5-foot-5, but his game stood tall among all others in Pinal County, making him the PinalCentral boys basketball Player of the Year for the 2016-17 season.

At the top girls basketball program in Pinal County, Tyra Williams was clearly the leader and best player for the Maricopa Rams.

Williams finished a stellar career with Maricopa by averaging 20 points, 10 rebounds, three blocks and four steals per game in her senior season. Because of her outstanding skill and leadership qualities, Williams is the PinalCentral girls basketball Player of the Year in Pinal County.

4 Maricopa 12-year-old on fast track to stardom

After logging nearly 300 visits the past four years to K1 Speed in Phoenix, an indoor kart racing track, Aidan Greene is now a team driver in the Mod Truck racing division for Pinnacle Off-road Motorsports, which is under the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series umbrella.

Aidan, 12, caught the eye of Pinnacle because of his record-breaking lap time at K1 Speed and his overall finish last season.

Aidan currently holds the fastest quarter-mile lap time in the track's history with his blazing 24.678-second finish Feb. 12. He's one of only two racers to record a time of less than 25 seconds.

The Pima Butte Elementary student is also the youngest participant ever to walk into the adult league and race in the general bracket. Once he met the height requirement, Aidan left the junior league and began racing in the adult league last year at 11 years old.

5 MHS volleyball seals first playoff spot in 35 years

The Maricopa Lady Rams volleyball team finally have their chance at the playoffs for the first time since 1982 after their win in October against McClintock.

The Lady Rams' final week of the season pushed them up from No. 22 to No. 20 in the 5A conference, narrowly getting them into the 24-team playoff. They traveled to Gilbert to play No. 13 Mesquite. Their season ended then, as they fell to the Wildcats in three sets.

The Lady Rams finished regular-season games with a 12-8 record.

Coach Jecksan Quinones said for a team that hasn't made the playoffs in 35 years, this is big for the team, the school and the community.

6 Club baseball team excels on the field

While many of their peers enjoy some of their last days of leisure before school starts, one Maricopa club baseball team will be spending a weekend playing some of the best competition in the country.

The Dusters baseball club traveled to Colorado to compete in the USSSA World Series July 20-23. The group of boys, who are mostly 11 years old, earned their spot in the series after winning the USSSA Veterans Day NIT Tournament in November.

7 Handy brothers excel in track at state

Just three days after Maricopa's Darrell Handy took second place in the high jump at the Division II state track meet, his brother Terrell brought home a state championship in the triple jump.

The Handy brothers did their share of damage at the state meet, as Darrell also finished sixth in the long jump. Terrell didn't have much experience competing in the triple jump before this season, but he had confidence that he could be a state champion, and he made it happen at Mesa Community College.

8 MHS grad signs with pro club FC Arizona

Aaron Mendez, a 2012 graduate of Maricopa High School, recently signed a one-year contract with the FC Arizona Red Lions, an expansion team with the National Premier Soccer League (NPSL).

The professional soccer club will compete in the West Region's Southwest Conference and play its home matches at John D. Riggs Stadium on the Mesa Community College campus. One of the largest community colleges in the country, MCC's stadium seats 6,000.

Mendez, who has been playing soccer since age 4, grew up in the city of Maricopa and played youth soccer at Maricopa Wells Middle School and four years on varsity for the Maricopa Rams.

9 Maricopa hosts its first Special Olympics tournament

For many weeks, the Maricopa Special Olympics team could be seen running, drilling and scrimmaging for its upcoming soccer tournament. The team finally got the chance to show off its hard work.

The Special Olympics team is run through the Maricopa Unified School District and includes about 30 students who are split into three different teams.

During the fall, the team focuses on soccer. The team began practicing about two and a half months ago to prepare for the tournament, which was Saturday.

This tournament was particularly special to the team because it was hosted in Maricopa, and this is the first time there has been a Special Olympics event like this in the city.

10 Jordan Sisk living out hoop dreams

Not every athlete was born with a natural ability for their sport. Many of them had to dedicate their lives to learning, and that is the case with Jordan Sisk.

As a kid, Sisk was a wrestler, but only because his dad was a state champion wrestler when he was in high school and he wanted his sons to follow in his footsteps. Sisk, however, never had the passion for it like his father, so at age 11, he started playing basketball.

Now, Sisk plays guard at the University of Wisconsin-Richland. He graduated from Maricopa High School in 2014 and after taking some time off, he connected with the coach there. Pretty soon he was on his way to the Midwest.

His first season had its ups and downs. He came off the bench during the first half of the season, and then worked his way into the starting lineup. Sisk is training for his second season at Wisconsin-Richland, and he remains focused on the bigger picture.