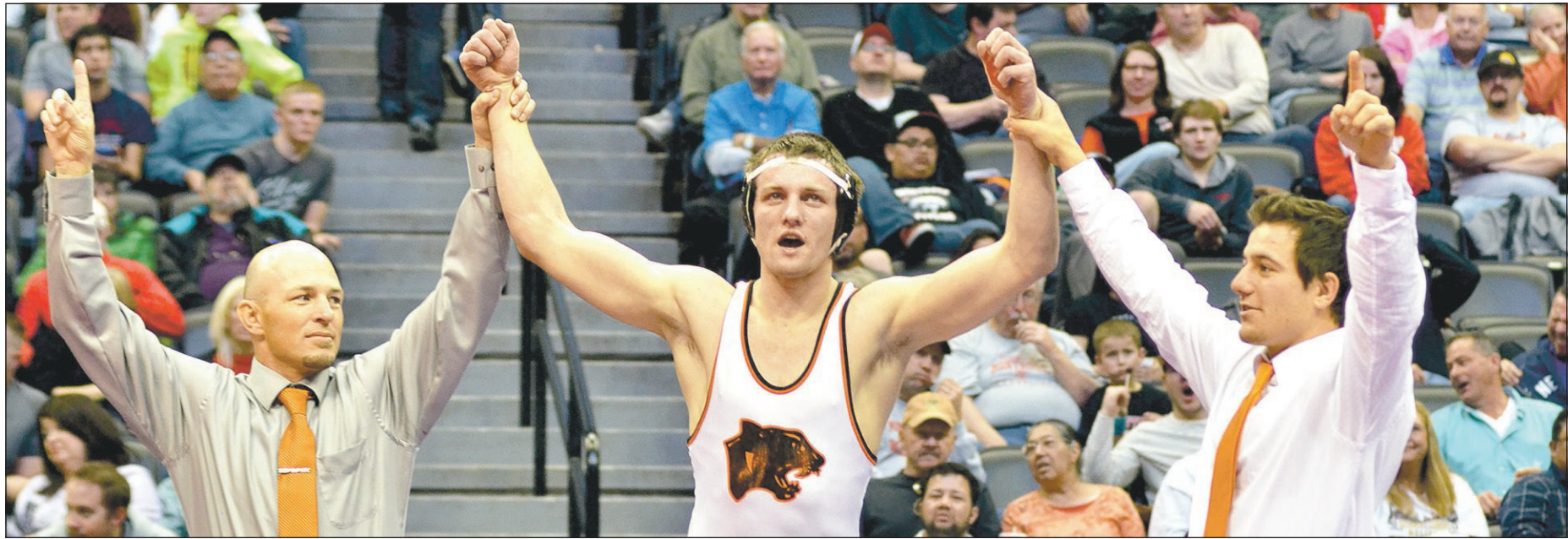


The Year in Review



SAM GREEN/Cortez Journal photos

Coach Shad Bellmire, Seager Oliver and assistant coach Casey Lynn celebrate after Oliver finished first at the Colorado State High School Wrestling Tournament in Denver on Feb. 22.



M-CHS celebrates after beating St. Mary's 40-37 in Round 1 of the Class 2A playoffs on Oct. 31.



Cortez Little League star Makayla Long delivers a pitch during a game in Cortez on July 7.

Top Sports Stories of 2014

Montezuma-Cortez High School wrestler Seager Oliver won a state wrestling title, the M-CHS football team won its first playoff game since 1957, and several local athletes enjoyed success at home and aboard. Below is a recap of the top 10 sports stories of 2014.

BY IAN MACLAREN, JOURNAL SPORTS EDITOR

Seager Oliver wins state wrestling title

Over the course of the 2013-14 wrestling season, Montezuma-Cortez High School junior Seager Oliver cemented his spot among the area's all-time wrestling greats.

Competing in the Colorado State High School Wrestling Tournament, Feb. 20-22, Oliver won four consecutive matches in dominant fashion to secure the state championship in the 170-pound division of Class 4A.

Finishing the season with a 40-2 record, Oliver became the first M-CHS wrestler to claim an individual state title since Casey Lynn won in 2010.

After beating Erie High School's Ladd Bunker in the state finals on Feb. 22, Oliver let out a spirited "yes" before congratulating his opponent and leaping into the arms of M-CHS head coach Shad Bellmire.

"I never thought that being a state champion would feel this good, but it sure does," he said.

"We had a blast coaching (Oliver)," said Bellmire. "He just (had) that can't-stop-me attitude."

M-CHS football team enjoys historic season

After suffering years of mediocrity, the M-CHS football team came alive in 2014, finishing the season with an 8-3 record and qualifying for the playoffs for the first time since 1994.

The Panthers 40-37 win over St. Mary's in the first round of the Class 2A playoffs marked the program's first postseason victory since 1957 and left players, coaches community members overjoyed.

"To win with these kids, with the hard work that they put in was great," said head coach Casey Coulter. "It meant everything."

Eight M-CHS players were named to the Western Slope South League's all-conference team, including Randy Haley, who rushed for 1,942 yards and scored a school-record 36 touchdowns.

"Coming from where we were our freshman year to where we ended up our senior year spoke volumes of our work ethic and heart," Haley said after M-CHS lost to Kent Denver, 56-18, in the second round of the playoffs.

"All our work together over

the last four years made us close," said senior quarterback Jonathan Walck. "It was been a special season."

Eli Tomac's star continues to rise

After winning the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championship in the 250cc class in 2013, Cortez native Eli Tomac stepped up to the 450cc class in 2014 and continued his ascension to the top of the motocross world.

After battling injuries, Tomac finished in the top three at seven of the final eight races.

Tomac's top finish at Spring Creek Motocross Park in Millville, Minn., helped him finish the outdoor season at No. 5 in points in the 450cc class.

The 22-year-old then traveled to Latvia in September along with Ryan Dungy and Jeremy Martin to represent the U.S. at the Motocross of Nations event. The U.S. team finished third.

"I'm somewhat satisfied," said Tomac. "The (injuries) were not normal for me. I got seven podiums, so hopefully next year I can start the series out fresh."

Jake Cruzan turns rescue horse into champion

For local resident Jake Cruzan, the summer of 2014 was an exciting one as the aspiring horse trainer won the American Quarter Horse Association World Championship Show aboard an unlikely horse.

Cruzan purchased the sick and dying horse, known as Peppy, in April 2013.

"It was pretty sad to see Peppy in the shape he was in, and I knew that nobody was going to take care of him," he said. "He was a shot in the dark, but I had always liked that horse."

After nursing Peppy to health, Cruzan qualified for the World Championship show, and the horse finished first.

"Everybody thought I was crazy for buying (Peppy), but I bought him, and here he is now," said Cruzan. "I think he's grateful for what I've done for him, and he's paying me back."

Lauren Hall cycles toward superstardom

During the 2014 season, Dolores resident Lauren Hall solidified herself as a rising female cyclist in the world.

Most-read sports stories online

Sports

1. Jake Cruzan turns rescue horse into champion
2. M-CHS football team loses to Kent Denver
3. Seager Oliver wins state wrestling title
4. Pinto Bean Golf Tournament thrills again
5. Ute Mountain Roundup Rodeo in full swing
6. M-CHS football team defeats St. Mary's
7. Four local schools head to state wrestling tournament
8. M-CHS football team defeats Grand Junction Central
9. Girls Who Hunt: Dove Creek hunters relish experience
10. Anthony Presnell coaches at college level

Sports business

1. Cortez Gun Show a 'can't miss'
2. Moab Outback opens tipi dealership
3. Heart and Core Yoga Studio provides wholesome experience
4. Kokopelli Bike and Board produces custom bikes
5. Para Bellum gym offers beneficial workouts

After opening the season with a win at the Old Pueblo Grand Prix in Tucson on March. 8, Hall won the prestigious Gent-Wevelgem road race in Belgium on March 30.

"It was amazing," said Hall. "To win on this stage and to win wearing the U.S. kit...to win representing my team was like, 'oh my god.'"

Hall finished third in the Philly Cycling Classic on June 1. She and five others were selected to represent the U.S. at the UCI Road World Championships in Ponferrada, Spain, Sept. 21-28.

"I've already started preparing for (the Olympics) as far as races that I want to win now," said Hall, adding, "You have to back up until today to be ready for summer 2016."

Micah Conrads leads Colorado Mesa to Final 4

Playing his final season of college soccer, M-CHS graduate Micah Conrads helped Colorado Mesa University reach the NCAA Division II semifinals for the first time in school history.

Starting at goal, Conrads helped the Mavericks amass an 18-4-1 record, win the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC) regular season championship and three NCAA Tournament wins.

He led the Mavericks in wins, saves, save percentage, shutouts and minutes played.

"It was always my dream to be able to play in an NCAA tournament," said Conrads. "It was definitely very exciting for everyone on the team. We have a good group of guys that have played together for the last two years and worked very hard."

Kirk Archibeque flourishes on European courts

Competing in Poland's top basketball league, former M-CHS standout Kirk Archibeque enjoyed his finest season as a professional in 2014.

Starting at center for Rosa Radom, Archibeque averaged 13.7 points per game and a team-high 8.6 rebounds per contest. Archibeque also registered a league-leading 11 double-doubles on the season and was named the league's player of the week three times.

Thanks in part to Archibeque's play, Rosa Radom finished fifth in the league during the regular season and advanced to the semifinal round of the playoffs for the first time in team history.

"The (2013-14) season was probably my best as a professional," Archibeque wrote in an email to the Cortez Journal. "I really worked on my midrange jumper...and my offseason preparation really paid off."

After wrapping up the season in Poland, Archibeque signed with the Port of Antwerp Giants and is averaging 6.3 points and 4.6 rebounds per game in Belgium's top pro league.

Dove Creek seniors leave lasting legacy

For six Dove Creek High School seniors, the first five months of 2014 served as a capstone to high school careers defined by athletic achievement and scholastic excellence.

During the winter sports season, Shelby Knuckles, Kristin Knuckles, Jessica Guynes, Corissa Guynes, Madison Young and Jennifer Fury led the girls basketball team to a 19-6 record and a fifth-place finish in the Class 1A state tournament.

During the spring sports season, the same group helped the girls track team finish third in the state among Class 1A teams.

Shelbie Knuckles was named valedictorian of her graduating class, Madison Young set a Class 1A state record in the shot put, and Corissa Guynes won state titles in the 100-meter hurdles and 300-meter hurdles. All six of the super-seniors currently attend college.

"(Our seniors) set an outstanding example of what it means to be a student athlete," said track coach Shane Fury. "They were outstanding on the track and in the classroom and in our community."

Makayla Long stands out in Cortez Little League

Playing against boys in the Cortez Little League's Major League Division, 11-year-old Makayla Long stood out as one of the league's top stars.

Crushing several home runs, pitching multiple shutouts and making several outstanding defensive plays, Long helped her team, the Scrappers, bring home the league title.

Long then pitched and hit for the Southwest Colorado All-Stars in the 11-to-12 year-old division and helped the team finish second to Durango in its regional tournament.

Long said she plans to practice throughout the offseason and return as a top league player next season.

Dove Creek baseball finishes second in state

After finishing the regular season with a 4-14 record, the Dove Creek High School baseball came up big in the postseason, winning three consecutive games and advancing to the Class 1A state championship.

Although the Bulldogs lost the state championship game by a score of 17-1, the team's determination and grit left an indelible mark on the local community.

Seniors Tyson Smith and Nick Jones led the team, while sophomores Jordan Ernst, Alex Ogas and Case Baughman played major roles in the Bulldogs' late-season success.

"(Our players) showed a lot of leadership," said Dove Creek manager Curtis Garver. "We played great baseball and we just (tried) to keep riding it all the way to the end."