

Cracking down on Concussions

When people think of concussions in high school sports, football is the first sport that comes to mind. Although most concussions do take place in football, winter sports such as basketball and wrestling, also have very high concussion rates.

A concussion is described as a brain injury that is typically caused by a blow to the head or a violent shaking of the head and body. Higher contact sports have a greater risk of concussions.

Aproximately all sports-related concussions account for 3.8 million concussions per year and of that 2.4 million are from high school and teen sports. 63% of all concussions in the U.S. come from sport-related injuries. Of that 63%, 47% account for high school sports.

“I got my concussion in a basketball game last year,” junior Annika Yungner, a power forward on the girls varsity basketball team. “There was a cross-court pass and an elbow from an opponent that both hit my head at the same time.”

Girls basketball sees the third most concussions in all high school sports after football and girls soccer. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, girls are at a significantly higher rate of getting concussions than boys.

“At first I didn’t know I had a concussion,” Yungner said. “It was ten minutes later when I felt very dizzy and had blurry vision.”

Concussions can put athletes out of sports for weeks. Recovery from a minor concussion can take up to 24 hours and as long as three weeks. Symptoms like dizziness and nausea can last multiple weeks after the injury. A major concussion, however, is very different. An athlete can be out for more than a month

and is significantly more likely to get another one down the road.

“We have a pretty comprehensive program that we have at AHS,” athletic trainer Ryan Hughes said. “Every student that plays a sport has a baseline computer test. This tells us how their brain is working before a concussion. If a student does get a concussion we notify the parents and the student checks in with us every day until the symptoms go away completely.”

Once the symptoms have gone away, a rigorous five step return to play protocol. It starts with light conditioning then moves to longer conditioning. This leads to agility exercises, conditioning with the team, and finally contact practice.

Cumulative sports concussions are shown to increase the likelihood of catastrophic head injury leading to permanent neurologic disability by 39%.

Many think that new safety measures should be taken in sports to prevent injuries.

Wrestling has banned some high-risk moves in past years for fear of concussions and other injuries. Although wrestling has lower rates of concussions since the safety measures were implemented wrestling has had a slight drop off in concussion rates.

“You can’t entirely prevent concussions if you play a contact sport,” Yungner said. “All you can do is be prepared for it if it ever happens.”

Concussions and injuries, in general, are hard to prevent, but there are a couple things you can do on and off the court to be prepared. Wearing the proper equipment and talking to your coach or trainer after a knock to the head are good ways to ensure that you don’t have a concussion. Knowing the symptoms and taking the proper concussion education courses are ways off the court or field to help.

In no way should this discourage students from playing a sport. Concussions and other sports injuries are always a possibility in any sport you play, but playing a sport has so many other benefits for high school students.

New season, new sports

As the days get shorter and the weather gets colder, the fall sports season is coming to a close. From football to cross country to field hockey, the fall season had a few ups and downs, but overall was a great start to the school year.

There are many sports that students can participate in the fall season including cheerleading, cross country, field hockey, football, golf, and volleyball.

Although football had a decent season, with a 4-6 record, the players bonded through their long hours of practice. The highlight of football season was most likely the Atoms' victory in the homecoming football game against the Washington-Lee Generals by a score of 42-28. The Hype Squad was also very supportive and increased the audience's team spirit.

Field hockey also managed a strong season with a record of 6-9.

"I think that the season went pretty good," senior field hockey player, Ankita Bhurtel said. "Everyone hustled hard but we were missing the mental component on how to strategize our plays. There was a lot of heart and hustle throughout the season though, so for that, I am thankful to work with girls that worked almost as hard as I did when I play."

Field hockey players also built lasting relationships with

their teammates. Especially through the Big Sister-Little Sister program, where one varsity player and one JV player were paired together to bond through shared experiences.

“My favorite memory from the season was when I drove the ball in the corner during a tournament, and ultimately assisted because Emily hit the ball straight into the goal cage, making us like 4-0 against Justice HS.” Bhurtel said.

Volleyball, although they did not have the best season with a record of 2-12, still enjoyed the time they spent playing with each other. The highlight of the fall season for volleyball was the Dig Pink game, where the team raised both money and awareness for breast cancer (\$900). They also had unique handshakes before the game, as well as celebrated their ritual of selling baked goods.

Cross Country had an excellent season, especially during regionals.

“The Cross Country season was very successful and the girls on the team were super dedicated, supportive, and focused. The team put in the effort and it really paid off.” Senior cross country runner, Nadya Droujinsky said.

They attended the Gunston District Championship, where Sophomore Julia Ghiselli came in first, running two miles in just over 6 minutes. Similarly, Junior Mikyas Sahlu, also came in first for Boys, with a speedy time of 5:11.

“My favorite memory was seeing the consistent growth and improvement of the girls from one race to another.”Droujinsky said.

The fall sports season had a good run, but the winter sports season are fast approaching. Winter Sports include Basketball, Wrestling, Track, Swim & Dive, and Gymnastics. Everyone is anticipating an excellent Winter season, especially for Basketball, Wrestling, and Track.

Atoms qualify for Indoor Track Nationals

The Atoms track team competed at the indoor track state meet on Feb. 24 and Feb. 25.

There was a total of five Atoms competing at the meet including senior Jacob Weber and junior Joseph McCoy both competing in the 55-meter hurdles event, junior Matthew McKiver competing in the High Jump, freshman Jay Pendarvis in the 300-meter dash and senior Jeremiah Bethea in pole vault.

The Atoms competing were highly successful in their respective events. Weber and Pendarvis both received All-State recognition with Weber coming in at 7.60 seconds and Pendarvis finishing with a time of 35.97 seconds, in their respective events.

McKiver who placed sixth overall in the high jump at the meet came in at 6-02.00 feet.

The most notable accomplishment at the state meet was senior Jeremiah Bethea who with a 14 foot score in the pole vault set a new school record for the event with the previous record being 13.6 feet.

“It honestly felt really amazing knowing that I broke the school record at the time,” Bethea said. “I had to quickly stop thinking about the record after because I had to focus on qualifying for nationals, so I didn’t have that much time to celebrate the accomplishment.”

However, despite Bethea breaking the previous school record, he missed the national qualifier height of 14.6 feet.

“It was great seeing him (Bethea) break the school record because he nearly improved a whole foot at the state meet,” Head Coach Phil Harris said. “Jeremiah put on a clinic at the meet, his form and everything was perfect.”

Three of the Atoms who competed at states: Weber, Pendarvis and McKiver have qualified to compete in the National meet.

“It’s great having multiple runners qualify for the national meet because normally we would only have one person qualify but this year with everyone giving it their best effort, we had many more make it,” Harris said.

The Atoms that have qualified for the National Meet will be competing on Mar. 10 through Mar. 12 in New York, New York.

Girls track finishes strong

Girls Indoor Track and Field closed out its season with a solid showing at districts at Episcopal High School in Alexandria.

The Atoms competed on Feb. 1 through Feb. 4 against rivals from the Patriot Conference.

Facing strong opposition, many of the girls ran personal bests, but sadly, none were able to qualify for regionals.

Junior Ellie Hohenstein qualified for regionals in the pole vault but will be unable to compete due to a disappointing back injury.

“I’m sad, but there’s always next season. My back will get

better," said Hohenstein.

Phillip Harris, the girls distance coach, believed that they did well this season but had more to offer in seasons to come.

"This is probably one of the most improved seasons we had for the girls in a long time," Harris said. "The relays really came along. They made a lot of improvements."

Harris believes that what the team needs is more girls to fill the events and guarantee the team's constant improvement.

"The girls numbers need to go up. We need more girls. The leadership of some of our seniors, like Emily Pope was vital to our success," said Harris. "New leaders will be crucial to the success of the team next year."

Sophomore distance runner Vitalina Fuentes believed the season was great for herself and the team as a whole.

"I was able to improve [my time] by 15 seconds which is a lot in the mile. The team did great as a whole," said Fuentes, "The majority of us got personal bests compared to our old times. It was a big improvement since last year in winter track."

Fuentes is looking to make some serious gains in the off season so she can come back better than ever next winter.

"To improve I have to put in more mileage and work more in the weight room to gain some muscles," said Fuentes.

It was a strong end to the season for the Atoms. Many of the athletes plan to continue their training in the upcoming season of Outdoor Track.

Boys track prepares for regionals

The boys track team competed at the Patriot Conference Championship meet on Feb. 1 and Feb. 4. The team ran against conference rivals such as Lake Braddock, Woodson, and T.C. Williams.

With many running at the conference finals some excelled in their respective events. A number of runners have qualified to move on to the Region 6A Championship meet on Feb.18.

“Qualifying for regionals was one of my goals, but last year I ran the relay so I had teammates, this year I only have myself to count on,” senior Mahiteme Tigabu said. Tigabu, one of the runners to move on to compete at the regionals meet ran an impressive time of 4:34 in the one mile run at the conference meet.

A total of 10 runners will be moving on in seven different events. This indoor track season has been a major improvement from prior seasons as many more Atoms have qualified to compete at regionals.

The Atoms moving on to the regionals meet will be freshman Jay Pendarvis who ran a 36.68 in the 300-meter dash at conference, Senior Dagim Tigabu and freshman Mikyas Sahlu in the two-mile run each running a 10:02 and a 10:06 respectively, senior Mahiteme Tigabu in the one-mile run, and junior Joseph McCoy and senior Jacob Weber in the 55-meter hurdles running an 8.11 and 7.76.

In the field events at the regionals meet, juniors Matthew McKiver and Ty-ree Anderson will compete in the high jump, senior Jeremiah Bethea will compete in the pole vault and senior Brandon Hunt in the shot put.

“I am very happy with the number of runners going to regionals, however our relay team had a good chance of making regionals this year but we had a mishap, we’re going to work hard to improve before regionals,” Head Coach Phil Harris said.

Three of the Atoms, Weber, McKiver and Bethea excelled in their respective events well enough to already qualify for the state meet later in the month.

“It feels great to know that I have already qualified for states and even nationals, I’m just working on strengthening my calves so I can try to beat the school record,” junior Matthew Mckiver said.

The Atoms competing at regionals will be looking to improve their times and move on to the state meet later this month on Feb. 24 and Feb. 25. If they move on, the Atoms will face tough competition from around the state at the state finals.

Girls Basketball defeats Mount Vernon 63-44

The Girls Basketball team bounced back on Friday against the Mount Vernon Majors picking up a key victory by a score of 63-44. The win came following a loss against the West Potomac Wolverines 59-32.

“As a team we played really good defense and had a lot of positive energy within the team throughout the game which allowed us play at our best,” junior Grace Hatch said.

Against the Majors, the Lady Atoms came out of the starting gates strong with 18 first quarter points giving them a nine

point lead. The team would not let up in the second quarter with 21 more points to expand their lead to 39-23 going into the half.

The top two scorers for the Atoms going into the half were sophomore Sarah Shamdeen with 22 first half points and senior Katie Garrish with 10 points.

Sophomore Bordley led the Majors with 11 first half points as they trailed by 16 at the end of the second quarter.

Coming out of the half into the third quarter, the Majors were able to make adjustments defensively holding the Atoms to 11 third quarter points.

Despite improvements on defense, the Majors would struggle to cut into the Atoms' lead and put more points on the board as the Atoms maintained a 16 point 50-34 lead heading into the final quarter.

In the fourth quarter, the Atoms would continue to play lock-down defense and force turnovers to prevent the Majors from shrinking the Annandale lead.

The Atoms outscored the Majors 12-10 in the fourth quarter to win the game 63-44.

Shamdeen and Garrish would finish the game with 33 and 21 points respectively, a combined total of 54 points for the two players.

As for the Majors, Bordley would finish with 19 points along with senior Hannah Smith having nine points.

Closing out their regular season with a victory heading into the conference tournament was a major confidence booster for the Atoms.

The team will continue on to face the top seeded Lake Braddock Bruins in the conference tournament on Feb. 14 on the road.

The team looks to make improvements in order to prepare to take on the Bruins.

“We can improve on having better communication as a team and ball movement in preparation for Lake Braddock,” Hatch said. “We are also preparing by watching game films and getting better during practice.”

The game proves to be a challenging one for the Atoms as they have been defeated twice this season by the Bruins, once on Jan. 10 by a score 53-44 and on Feb. 2 by a score of 50-38.

Wrestler hits huge milestone in career

Junior Allen Kokilananda became the 8th wrestler in Annandale history, and the 3rd as a junior to reach 100 wins. He reached this feat at the King of Beasts Tournament at Tallwood High School.

He also was awarded the “Most Outstanding Wrestler” in the tournament, defeating the 8th ranked wrestler in the state in the finals.

“It feels amazing to reach this milestone. It’s hard to put into words this incredible feeling and sense of accomplishment,” Kokilananda said.

“I am ecstatic about Allen reaching 100 career wins... it truly is incredible. What makes it even more remarkable is that Allen has reached this milestone during his Junior year, so he can make a serious run at the all-time career wins record by the end of next year,” said Varsity Wrestling Coach Derek

Sweet.

Allen is thankful for his companions that assist him on the path to greatness. "My coaches, parents, teammates, and friends all helped me along the path to get 100 wins because they constantly believed in me and knew I could accomplish anything I set my mind to," Kokilananda said.

"Allen is a great wrestler because he devotes tireless hours to perfecting his craft. Few people can walk into a wrestling room having never wrestled before and become successful," said Sweet.

Kokilinanda believes his work ethic is key to his success. "I am always pushing myself to be the best I can be. Just working hard whether it was in the weight room, on the track, or in the wrestling room," said Kokilananda.

Coach Sweet sees big things in Allen's future. "Next year I see him being at the top of everyone's list as the top guy in whatever weight class he enters, which will cause most coaches to want to avoid him and his weight class," said Sweet.

Boys basketball upsets West Springfield

After a disappointing six game losing streak, varsity basketball bounced back with an impressive win against the West Springfield Spartans. The boys barely won by a narrow score 58-54. With the season coming to an end, lets hope our Atoms can get fired up and keep up the good work.

After the win against West Springfield, Senior Dontae Johnson

had 21 pts, the highest on the team. Senior Jordan Adams followed Johnson with 16 points. The Atoms were in the lead in the second and third quarter.

Senior Youni Eskinder has played varsity for the past 2 years. Eskinder felt that his team has stepped up big. "I felt we played very good, some aspects we had to clean up like on the defensive side. We're happy to come out with the win," Eskinder said.

With their next game away against T.C. Williams, the boys look to improve from last game against T.C. and win. "I felt like T.C. disrespected us in our own house. They also think we're not a threat in the conference. We are looking for revenge," Eskinder said.

With four more games in the season, the Atoms are looking to come in clutch and finish strong.

Wrestling sees improvement

The Grappling Atoms took part in the Joe Verciglio Charger Classic on Jan. 6 and Jan. 7. The event took place at Chantilly High School.

The team fought hard at the meet, six wrestlers were able to place, and one was able to come out victorious. Junior Allen Kokilananda battled and came out on top of the 145 lb. weight class, beating 23 other wrestlers for the title.

"I went in the tournament the 15th seed which really surprised me but I had no problem proving everyone wrong and winning the tournament at 145 pounds," Kokilananda said. "We saw a lot of improvement from young wrestlers and our veterans

are always putting up a good show.”

Although Kokilananda was the only wrestler to win, Varsity Coach Derek Sweet believes in his team, and believes they have what it takes to succeed.

““We’re starting to see the hard work in the [weight] room pay off on the mat on game-day,”” said Sweet.

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“That’s what you look for and hope for as a coach – dedication, hard work, and growth; both physically and mentally throughout the season. We’re starting to see everything come together, which hopefully means that we are, and will be peaking at the right time,” Sweet said.

The importance of grit and working hard is important in wrestling, and to get to the finish line, his team only needs to push themselves as hard as they can.

““The team has improved in many ways throughout the season we have bonded so much and technique wise we have gotten much better,”” said Kokilananda.

“Although the team is not as experienced as previous year’s teams, but Sweet believes his team has exceeded expectations this year, even after coming off two very successful seasons in a row.

““Taking into consideration the number of injuries we have had so far this season, I would say that we are exceeding expectations at this point. Wrestling is one of the most difficult sports to pick up if you’ve never done it before, and we have a lot of young talent doing just that day in and day out – I couldn’t be happier with the individual progress I have witnessed thus far,” said Sweet.

The Grappling Atoms are preparing for the final stretch of the season, with the Patriot Conference tournament coming up on

Feb. 3.

Boys track victorious at DCIAA Invitational

The boys indoor track team emerged victorious at the DCIAA Invitational at the Prince George's Sports Complex. The Atoms took on multiple opponents including South County, Jeb Stuart, Eastern High School, and South Lakes.

"To get the win we each did our part and worked together to rack up enough points to take the win," sophomore Kyle Dalsimer said.

The Atoms won multiple events including senior Jacob Weber's first place finish in the 55-meter Hurdles event. Junior Joseph Mccoy and senior Reece Carter finished second and third in the same event respectively.

The Atoms' victory came down to a coin toss in the end as the boys team was tied in the score count with South Lakes High School. The Atoms won the coin toss and claimed the victory for the meet.

"A lot of us runners put in many hours of hard work and practice which paid off at the meet because our hard work helped us pull out the win in the end," junior Nghia Nguyen said.

Along with the victory, the team also showed drastic improvement in times from the seasons opening meet to the DCIAA Invitational.

“We want to keep getting better as team and improve on getting some of the runners that are running borderline between JV and Varsity to run a little faster and get their times down,” Nguyen said.

Many runners improved their personal records at the meet in preparation for the Patriot Conference Championship meet taking place on Feb. 1.

“We have to keep working to improve for conference by putting in the hard work at practice and on our own to get better individually and as a team,” Dalsimer said.

“We want to improve a lot come the conference meet so that we can have as many runners as possible qualify for the Region 6A Championship.”

The conference meet will be vital for the Atoms because it will be the team’s final opportunity to qualify for the Regional meet on Feb. 28.

“We as a team are preparing heavily for conference because we will be trying to run qualifying times for regionals at the conference meet,” Nguyen said.

Before the conference meet, the Atoms only have two meets remaining, the Winter Jacket Classic on Jan. 21 and a quad meet against Patriot Conference rivals the Mount Vernon Majors, Lake Braddock Bruins and South County Stallions on Jan. 28.

Girls Basketball looks to

bounce back after loss

The girls varsity basketball team was defeated by the Lake Braddock Bruins by a score of 53-44 in a tight match-up. The Atoms came out of the gates strong knocking down multiple three point shots in the opening quarter to take a slim 13-10 lead over the Bruins.

In the second quarter the Bruins took the lead for the first time in the game with 16 second quarter points. The score going into halftime was 26-24 favoring the Bruins.

Going into the half, sophomore Sarah Shamdeen lead the Atoms with 10 points and senior Katie Garrish having eight points. For the Bruins, senior Kate Esper and sophomore Alaina Park lead their team with eight and seven points respectively.

In the the third quarter the Bruins defense stepped up playing full-court press in some circumstances with forced multiple Atoms turnovers.

“As a team we did not communicate well together and did not box out as well as we could have, we can always improve on those things as a team,” junior Grace Hatch said.

The Bruins capitalized on mistakes made by the Atoms which allowed them to open up their lead to 43-30. Lake Braddock outscored Annandale 17-6 in the third quarter which allowed for their 13 point lead heading into the fourth and final quarter.

In the fourth quarter, the Atoms made a run to cut into the Bruins’ significant lead but their efforts would not be enough despite outscoring the Bruins 13-10 in the fourth quarter. Late in the fourth quarter, Atoms Head Coach Jimmy Brown instructed the team to intentionally foul in hope of retaking possession and having an opportunity to tie the game.

However, intentionally fouling would not work out for the girls as the Bruins would go on to drain their free throw attempts to win the game 53-44.

“Lake Braddock didn’t do much offensively or defensively that we weren’t prepared for, we were just not playing our best basketball,” Hatch said.

Garrish lead the Atoms with 17 points and Shampen finished with 13 points.

For the Bruins, seniors Bailey Edwards and Kate Esper lead the team with 12 and 10 points.

The Atoms coming off a ten point 52-42 victory against the Woodson Cavaliers battled hard against the Bruins but were unable to pull out a victory.

“We plan on working harder in practice on things that we didn’t do well against Lake Braddock in order to improve for our next games,” Hatch said.

The team looks to improve for coming games against the Mount Vernon Majors and South County Stallions.

Wrestling looks to improve from tough meet

The Grappling Atoms faced a tough test at the NOVA Classic, hosted at Fairfax High School. The NOVA Classic is a 32 school tournament featuring teams from Northern Virginia and surrounding areas.

The Atoms struggled on Friday, they only had Junior Alan

Kokilinanda place in the top five.

The tournament has over 400 wrestlers participate, which is divided into 32 man brackets in each weight class.

The event stretched over 2 days, with the best wrestlers progressing in the tournament.

Admittedly, they had a high standard to meet but the Atoms wrestling team did not do as well in the tournament as the squads from the past two years. This was mostly due to a less experienced team.

"We are a little younger and inexperienced this year, but last year's team had 10 senior starters and filling those holes is proving to be a challenge so far," said varsity wrestling coach Derek Sweet.

The Grappling Atoms have won the past two conference championships, going back-to-back, and a chance at a three-peat is hanging in the balance. Coach Sweet is confident the team can improve and try and win their third championship in a row.

"We just need mat experience and mat time. Our aggression on the mat and our willingness to get better and observe what is going on around us is a positive on this team and when we put kids on our backs we are able to finish," Coach Sweet said.

He drew upon the positives of the meet saying, "We gained a lot of experience we are very young. Guys got to see what quality wrestling looks like and we had a couple guys do well."

Junior Allen Kokilananda and freshman Patrick Lee were star performers for the Atoms. Both of them survived the first day and progressed into the second day of matches.

Kokilananda fought his way to a fifth place finish in the NOVA classic while Lee surpassed expectations by making it to the

second day.

“Kokilinanda has been there before, placing in that tournament is a great accomplishment and it will fuel his fire. Lee reached the second day which most 9th graders don’t get to do it’s something most don’t get to do,” Coach Sweet said.

“I feel like it was good for being my first time, but i feel like i could’ve done a lot better. [As a team,] we did alright knowing we had a couple new guys, but we also could’ve done better,” Lee said.

Kokilananda agreed with him saying, “Since we are a young team, I feel we did well, but there’s still a lot to work on.” He also felt that he could’ve done a lot better.

If the grappling atoms are to meet the high bar set by the wrestling squad of the past years, they will need many underclassmen to step up.

“With hard work I believe that we can do what they did,” said Kokilananda.

“If we work as hard as them we then we can [do it],” said Lee.

“It takes a lot of effort and hard work and determination to become champions,” said Coach Sweet. A sentiment echoed by all of them is the importance of effort, hard work, and determination. If they want to be champions, they will need plenty of effort, hard work, and determination.

Coach Sweet and his grappling atoms have plenty of meets left to improve, with over a month’s worth of meets left. It will be interesting to see how they push themselves to the finish line.

Their next meet will be on Saturday Dec. 17, will be a Duals meet at Washington Lee.