

NEXT GENERATION | SCHOOL NEWS

Applegate School fosters athletic greatness

BY WILLIAM C. WHITNEY

Nestled inconspicuously within Applegate Valley's picturesque rural landscape, Applegate School might go unnoticed, except for the long fence that lines Highway 238 and the 20 miles-per-hour school-zone signs. But from this small and unassuming school, athletic greatness has sprung, in particular, with four local athletes who have gone on to Division 1 colleges to continue their academic and athletic pursuits.

Applegate School alumna Kaiah Fisher, now a sophomore at Stanford University, distinguished herself in track and field as a freshman, winning the Payton Jordan Invitational in the shot put. She was also the 2021 USATF (USA Track & Field) Junior Olympic discus champ and all-state, first-team in basketball and soccer, helping the Hidden Valley High School (HVHS) Mustangs to state titles in both sports. Parents Dale and Paula Fisher were themselves fine athletes, Dale garnering accolades like three-time NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) All-American in track and field and Paula a volleyball record-breaker for the Southern Oregon University (SOU) Raiders. Both parents were also throwers for the SOU track team. While continuing to pursue her athletic endeavors at Stanford, Kaiah also volunteers her time on behalf of the Sparrow Club, which raises money for children with medical needs.

Another athletic standout from Applegate School and Hidden Valley High School is Sam Vidlak, quarterback for the Montana Grizzlies and currently a redshirt (see note below) sophomore. Vidlak played varsity football and baseball

at HVHS. As a junior playing quarterback for the Mustangs, he racked up respectable stats, throwing for over 3,400 yards with 44 touchdowns. He attended Oregon State University for a brief period before transferring to Boise State for a single season. His collegiate journey finally landed him in Missoula with the University of Montana Grizzlies football squad, where he currently shares quarterback duties. In 2023, Vidlak had 56 completions for 566 yards. The Grizzlies finished the 2023 Big Sky Conference with an impressive 13-2 record.

The Vidlak name also emerges in the sport of wrestling with Gabe Vidlak, currently at the University of Oklahoma. While attending Cascade Christian High School, Vidlak posted a 45-0 record in his senior year, with 32 pins and four technical falls, winning 3A state at 126 pounds. Vidlak won the title as a sophomore (113 pounds) and also as a junior (120 pounds). Debuting as a redshirt freshman at University of Oklahoma, weighing in at 133 pounds, he earned a second place in Pool A of the 133C division at the Journeymen Classic and picked up his first career win via decision (7-6) in the second round of the Michigan State Open. Gabe is the son of local wrestling legend and coach Dan Vidlak.

Also from Applegate School is athlete Isaac Hill, who pitches for the Oregon Institute of Technology Owls baseball team in Klamath Falls. Hill, another graduate of HVHS, is in his first season with the Owls and was tabbed as Oregon's No. 1 pitching prospect in the 2022 recruiting class. He also was a two-time



Kaiah Fisher, a sophomore at Stanford, won the Payton Jordan Invitational as a freshman.



Sam Vidlak attends the University of Montana, sharing quarterback duties.

4A All-State selection, helping the Hidden Valley Mustangs to consecutive 4A state titles. He is a former two-time Skyline Conference Player of the Year and spent the 2023 season at Division 1 Oregon State University. He currently studies marketing at Oregon Tech.

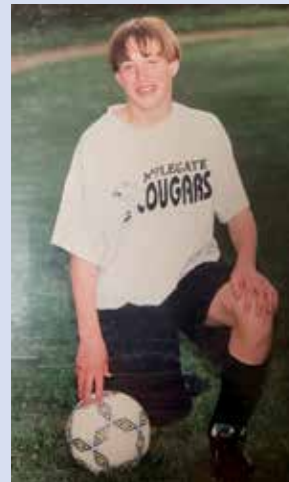
While it may be humble in stature and recognition, Applegate School has fostered several impressive athletic careers, with many other alumni moving on to Division II and NAIA schools. Applegate's Athletic Department philosophy includes

an emphasis on solid character values, sportsmanship, and a commitment to excellence, promoting respect of self and others. By all accounts, Kaiah, Sam, Gabe, and Isaac have surely demonstrated this philosophy—one we might all hope to follow.

William C. Whitney
williewhit52@gmail.com

Note: Redshirt, in college athletics, is a delay or suspension of an athlete's participation in order to lengthen their period of eligibility (Wikipedia).

And from Williams, an even smaller school...



Matthew Tavis Johnson, left to right, got his start on the Applegate School soccer team and is still winning trophies today.

Although Matthew Johnson attended Williams School, he played soccer on the Applegate School soccer team, then for Hidden Valley High School (HVHS) and Oregon State University (OSU).

At HVHS Matt was district player of the year in 2000 and 2001, state player of the year in 2001, and record-holder for most goals ever scored in a career.

At OSU Matt received honorable mention All-Pac-10 in 2002 and set two records: one for the most games ever played and one for most minutes ever played. While Matt was a starter at OSU, the team made it to the playoffs twice: in 2004 and 2005, the first time ever in the school's history.

After graduating, Matt continues to play competitive soccer and has had six championships in the Medford League since 2018.



Gabe Vidlak is on the wrestling team at the University of Oklahoma.



Isaac Hill pitches for the Oregon Institute of Technology Owls.

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