Lake Travis stays alive with thrilling series win

Cavaliers rally for a 7-4 victory in game three.

By Jay Plotkin
Contributing Writer

In a series with plenty of heroes and heartache, Lake Travis did just enough to stay alive in a three-game series against San Antonio Brandeis.

After a thrilling 2-1 win in the second game of the Class 6A Region IV second-round series, the Cavs rallied for a 7-4 win in the third game May 13 at San Marcos High School. Lake Travis trailed entering the seventh inning before the rally.

A third game wouldn’t have been possible without a dramatic win in game two May 12 at Lake Travis High School. Austin Sankie’s seventh-inning sacrifice fly helped Lake Travis (26-4-1) force the deciding third game against San Antonio Brandeis (20-10-2).

With one out, Sankie’s fly ball to right field proved deep enough to score pinch runner Bryce Weisinger from third and give the Cavaliers the come-from-behind 2-1 win.

“I just wanted to get the ball to the outfield and let my guys do the work,” Sankie said. “It feels really good to live to see another day.”

Sankie drove in both of Lake Travis’ runs. His two-out single

Baseball continued on A8

Colton Kent tags Bronco runner Connor Dayton (13) out in a rare triple play during the 2-1 win by the Cavaliers over San Antonio Brandeis on May 12 at Lake Travis in game two of the UIL Region 4-6A Area Round playoff series. PAUL BRICK FOR ACN.
in the fifth tied the game and ended a 15-inning scoreless drought for the Lake Travis offense, which lost the first game of the series 2-0.

“I just got lucky on a good pitch,” Sankie said of his game-tying single, which gave the Cavaliers much-needed life against Brandeis starter Sam Kuhn.

Lake Travis coach Mike Rogers credited his senior, who made his first playoff start in the must-win game.

“Hats off to Sankie,” Rogers said. “It’s been three or four games now where he hasn’t gotten in. We put him in there tonight and he comes up with two big hits in pressure situations, and I couldn’t be more proud of him.”

Brandeis missed a golden chance to take control in the third inning. With one out, Lake Travis starter Kyle Boyer loaded the bases by hitting Jesse Benavidez and walking Ryan McGowen and Kuhn. Dalton Buckingham came on and uncorked a wild pitch on his first offering to give the Broncos a 1-0 lead.

Buckingham threw two more pitches that missed badly and Rogers immediately turned things over to sophomore Brett Baty. Zach Vooletecth walked to re-load the bases, but Baty got Mason Corbett to pop out and Connor Dayton to fly out to end the inning.

Brandeis threatened in the fifth and sixth innings, but the Cavaliers turned to their defense to stay in the game. Baty got Manny Luna to bounce into a double play to end the fifth. After Corbett and Dayton reached to open the sixth, the Cavaliers escaped by turning Evan Perez’ liner to second baseman Spencer Wionzek into a triple play.

On the mound earlier than expected, Baty delivered five scoreless innings to give the Cavaliers a chance.

“He really stepped up,” Rogers said of his sophomore standout. “He gave us shutout innings and did an awesome job.”

Lake Travis catcher Jacob Wyeth lined a single high off the left field wall to lead off the bottom of the seventh, and Carlos Contreras sacrificed Weisinger to second. After Kyle Cronk walked, he and Weisinger executed a double steal. Kuhn then hit Garret Phillips to load the bases, setting the stage for Sankie, who drove a ball out to right field to get the winning run home.

Rogers said Sankie got off to a fast start this season but cooled off. But the coach had a hunch the senior outfielder was due, so he played it.

“The way he’s been swinging the bat lately - he’s made a few adjustments and we had a feeling he was going to get hot again,” Rogers said. “This time of year, you go with those hunches, and today it worked out.”

The Cavs will face San Antonio Churchill in a regional quarterfinal contest that starts May 18 at 7:30 p.m. at Blossom Athletic Center. Game two begins May 19 at 7:30 p.m. at Lake Travis High School. If necessary, a third game will take place May 20 at 2 p.m. at Smithson Valley High School.
The regional-quarterfinal round of the UIL baseball playoffs, meanwhile, tosses us a matchup between two Austin-area teams, with Hendrickson and Anderson squaring off for a three-game series. The teams will play Thursday, Friday and — just possibly — on Saturday. All games will be at Georgetown High School. These regional-quarterfinal playoffs involving area teams open Thursday:

**CLASS 6A**
Best-of-three series
Hendrickson vs. Anderson: 7 p.m. Thursday; 7 p.m. Friday; 2 p.m. Saturday, if necessary (All games at Georgetown HS)
Round Rock vs. Klein Collins: 7 p.m. Thursday; 7 p.m. Friday; 1 p.m. Saturday, if necessary (All games at Mumford HS)
Lake Travis vs. S.A. Churchill: 7:30 p.m. Thursday (Blossom Athletic Center, San Antonio); 7:30 p.m. Friday (Lake Travis HS);

**CLASS 5A**
One-game playoff
Dripping Springs vs. Boerne Champion: 7 p.m. Thursday (San Marcos HS)
Best-of-three series
Rouse vs. Brenham: 7 p.m. Thursday (Brenham HS); 5 p.m. Friday (Rouse HS); 8 p.m. Friday, if necessary (Rouse HS)
Cedar Park vs. Tomball: 7 p.m. Thursday; 7 p.m. Friday, 1 p.m.

**CLASS 4A**
Best-of-three series
Salado vs. Robinson: 7 p.m. Thursday (Murff Field, Belton); 7 p.m. Friday (Murff Field, Belton); Game 3, if necessary, TBD
Wimberley vs. Boerne: 7 p.m. Thursday (Wimberley HS); 7 p.m. Friday (Boerne HS) noon Saturday, if necessary (Dripping Springs HS)

— AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF
UIL BASEBALL REGIONAL QUARTERFINALS
CLASS 6A
BEST-OF-THREE SERIES

- Hendrickson vs. Anderson: 7 p.m. Thursday; 7 p.m. Friday; 2 p.m. Saturday, if necessary (All games at Georgetown HS)
- Round Rock vs. Klein Collins: 7 p.m. Thursday; 7 p.m. Friday; 1 p.m. Saturday, if necessary (All games at Mumford HS)
- Lake Travis vs. S.A. Churchill: 7:30 p.m. Thursday (Blossom Athletic Center, San Antonio); 7:30 p.m. Friday (Lake Travis HS); 2 p.m. Saturday, if necessary (Smithson Valley HS)
Lake Travis’ Jesse Wikso is 1-2 in non-UIL matches against Pearland Dawson’s Kevin Zhu, his opponent Thursday. Wikso and Zhu have never faced each other in a high school tournament.

CONTRIBUTED BY JOHN GUTIERREZ

Lake Travis’ Wikso facing early showdown

Sophomore to meet nation’s No. 19 boys player in opener at state meet.

By Mike Schoeffel
American-Statesman Correspondent

Jesse Wikso won’t have to wait long Thursday for a showdown match at the UIL tennis championships.

Wikso, a sophomore at Lake Travis, has drawn Pearland Dawson’s Kevin Zhu in the quarterfinals of Class 6A boys singles. Zhu, also a sophomore, is the 19th-ranked boys player nationally in his age group, according to the United States Tennis Association, and he’s third-ranked in Texas.
By Mike Schoeffel
American-Statesman Correspondent

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Wikso, a sophomore at Lake Travis, has drawn Pearland Dawson's Kevin Zhu in the quarterfinals of Class 6A boys singles. Zhu, also a sophomore, is the 19th-ranked boys player nationally in his age group, according to the United States Tennis Association, and he's third-ranked in Texas.

Wikso, who will make his state tournament debut, said he isn't intimidated by his opening opponent in the two-day event at Texas A&M. Nor should he be. After all, Wikso himself is a highly regarded junior player -- and he's already beaten Zhu.

"It was in a league tournament outside of school," he said. "It was exciting then, too, because it was also a pretty big upset."

Wikso recalls defeating Zhu in "three sets ... I ended up winning by two games."

Tennis continued on C3
Tennis

continued from C1

He added that the match was “pretty close all the way through.” Wikso is 1-2 against Zhu in non-UIL matches, and the two have never faced each other in a high school tournament.

When they face each other in College Station, their match will be the most anticipated first-round matchup in the Class 6A boys bracket, and the only reason it will happen is a quirk in the UIL rule book.

The UIL doesn’t seed entrants competing at the state tennis tournament, opening the door for players of Wikso and Zhu’s stature to face off in an early round of the bracket.

Lake Travis coach Carol Creel hopes that the reality of two of the state’s best players competing in the first round of the 2016 tournament will nudge UIL officials to “change their stance on not seeding in the near future.”

That debate aside, Wikso and Creel have another match to play.

“Zhu is very good,” Creel said, “but Jesse has the game and mind of a champion and will make him prove he is better. Every point, game and set. Believe me, Zhu will not take him lightly.”

Creel said Wikso’s chances depend on him being “ready to jump on the few openings a player of Zhu’s level gives you.”

With that in mind, Wikso has been working to shore up areas of his game he thought needed improvement – his serve, in particular. He’s a smaller guy, which means his serves sometimes don’t rocket off his racket with as much speed as he would like. As he put it, the players at the state tournament will “tee off on my serves if I’m not hitting them with enough speed.”

Wikso will be one of three Austin-area players in a field of eight vying for the Class 6A boys singles title. Depending on how the bracket shakes out, Wikso could meet either Anderson’s Andres Almazan or Westlake’s Roger Chou in the final Friday.

“It’s motivating to see rival schools in the same draw as me,” Wikso said. “It’s exciting to know I might be paired up with them with so much on the line.

“Getting here was a realistic goal. Winning state is a realistic goal, too. That’s what I’m striving for.”
Jesse Wikso of Lake Travis is among three local players chasing the Class 6A boys singles title, along with Anderson’s Andres Almazan and Westlake’s Roger Chou. CONTRIBUTED BY JOHN GUTIERREZ
UIL TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: Thursday-Friday
Where: Mitchell Tennis Center and Smith Instructional Tennis Center, College Station
Admission: $7, students; $12, adults. All-tournament pass costs $20.
Parking: $5, cash only

AREA QUALIFIERS

■ Class 6A
Boys singles: Jesse Wikso, Lake Travis; Andres Almazan, Anderson; Roger Chou, Westlake.
Girls singles: Kiana Graham, Westwood; Gabby Cusano, Vandegrift.
Girls doubles: Emily Bhan-Mitali Khoje, Lake Travis; Jolie Francis-Gigi Francis, Bowie; Alex Reinhart-Keegan McCain, Westlake.
Mixed doubles: Marcus Sweeney-Loli Perim, Westlake; Zach Delmonico-Charli Delmonico, Vandegrift.

■ Class 4A
Girls doubles: Cassidy Gillis-Nora Lawson, Lampasas.
Mixed doubles: Abby Boles-Reese Griffith, Taylor; Kennedy Coleman-Gunnar Ortega, Liberty Hill.

■ Class 3A

■ Class 2A
Girls singles: Landry Laywell, Thorndale.
Sophomore to face off against Pearland Dawson’s Kevin Zhu.

By Michael Schoeffel
Contributing Writer

Jesse Wikso won’t have to wait around for his first big test at the state tennis tournament.

Wikso, a sophomore at Lake Travis, has drawn Pearland Dawson’s Kevin Zhu in the quarterfinals of the UIL Class 6A tennis state championships. Zhu, also a sophomore, is the eighth-ranked player in the nation and the second-ranked player in the state of Texas. The two young phenomenons will square off on May 18 at 8:30 a.m. at Texas A&M University.

Wikso, who is making his state tournament debut, isn’t intimidated by his decorated opponent. Nor should he be — after all, Wikso himself is the third-ranked player in Texas and the 77th-ranked player in the nation.

Additionally, he’s already beaten Zhu.

“It was in a league tournament outside of school,” he said. “It was exciting then, too, because it was also a pretty big upset.”
Wikso recalls beating Zhu in “three sets ... I ended up winning by two games.” He added that the match was “pretty close all the way through.”

Wikso is 1-2 against Zhu in non-high school matches. The two have never faced each other in a high school tournament. When they square off in College Station this week, it will be the most anticipated first-round matchup in the 6A bracket, and the only reason it’s happening is because of a quirk in the UIL rule book.

The UIL doesn’t seed players at the state tournament, opening the door for players of Wikso and Zhu’s stature to face one another so early in
UIL STATE SPRING TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS
Thursday-Friday, Texas A&M University, College Station

‘Zhu is very good. But Jesse has the game and mind of a champion and will make him prove he is better.’

Carol Creel
Lake Travis tennis coach

Lake Travis coach Carol Creel hopes that the reality of this year’s situation — that is, two of the state’s best players competing in the first round — will urge the UIL to “change their stance on not seeding in the near future.”

Rule debate aside, Wikso and Creel have a match to prepare for.

“Zhu is very good,” Creel said. “But Jesse has the game and mind of a champion and will make him prove he is better. Every point, game and set. Believe me, Zhu will not take him lightly.”

Creel emphasized that Wikso’s chances of victory will hinge on him being “ready to jump on the few openings a player of Zhu’s level give you.” With that in mind, Wikso has been working to shore up the areas of his game he felt needed improving — his serve, in particular. He’s a smaller guy, which means he sometimes doesn’t put quite as much speed on his serve as he’d like. As he put it, the players at the state level will “tee off on my serves if I’m not hitting them with enough speed.”

Wikso is one of three Austin-area players in a field of eight vying for a state boys singles title. Depending on how things shake out, Wikso could meet either Anderson’s Andres Almazan or Westlake’s Roger Chou in the finals on May 19.

“It’s motivating to see rival schools in the same draw as me,” Wikso said. “It’s exciting to know that I might be paired up with them with so much on the line.”

“Getting here was a realistic goal. Winning state is realistic goal, too. That’s what I’m striving for.”
COLLEGE STATION — When the Class 6A boys singles bracket was first released, Roger Chou quickly spotted the potential rematch.

On Thursday at the UIL tennis championships at Texas A&M, the showdown Chou, a junior at Westlake, had envisioned came to fruition. Facing Southlake Carroll's Arman Dave for a spot in Friday’s state title match, Chou won in straight sets 6-2, 6-3, knocking off the defending 6A boys singles champion.

A year ago, Chou and Dave also met in a state semifinal. Dave won in straight sets on his way to a state title. This time, Chou flipped the script.

“I just wanted to get my revenge,” Chou said. “I want to win state this year so I had to face him anyway if I was going to get there.

“Last year I just thought too much and played too risky. This year I was more conservative and more consistent. I just made less errors and I gave him fewer free points.”

Now Chou will try to become the first Westlake boys singles player to capture a UIL championship since Russell Bader did it in 2010.

Chou wasn’t the only Austin-area entrant to dethrone a recent champion Thursday.

Westwood’s Kiana Graham knocked off the defending Class 6A girls singles champion, Sammi Gillas of New Braunfels, in the quarterfinals. Graham took the match 6-2, 6-3. Graham went on to beat Daniela Padron-Castillo of Duncanville, 6-0, 6-0, to advance to the 6A girls final.
The LBJ boys doubles team of Naveen Yarlagadda and Chaitu Aduru knocked off College Station's Rohen Sukkawala and Desmond O'Shea in straight sets (6-4, 6-0) in the 5A boys quarterfinals. A year ago, Sukkawala teamed with Kyle Miller to win the 5A boys doubles title.

Yarlagadda and Aduru then dispatched Quentin Scharfenberg and Indy Axton of Lubbock Coronado in three sets (1-6, 6-3, 6-2) to advance to Friday's state title match.

A pair of challenging showdowns faced Lake Travis freshman Jesse Wikso and Anderson junior Andres Almazan in their first appearances at the state tournament. Wikso drew Pearland Dawson's Kevin Zhu, the 19th-ranked player nationally in his USTA classification, while Almazan was matched against Dave.

Playing through an on-and-off drizzle in the opening hours of the tournament, Wikso battled back in the opening set only to lose it 6-4. He then dropped the second set 6-3.
“Great experience for me,” Wikso said. “Got a feel for some of the players I might see next year. Got a feel for having the crowd behind me. I think it’ll help me in the next couple of years if I make it here again.”

For the past year, Almazan has been dealing with pain in his right shoulder, and the ailment flared up Thursday during his straight-set loss (6-0, 6-1) to Dave.

“I wasn’t feeling super good out there,” Almazan said. “My shoulder was bothering me. My forehand wasn’t feeling too good. The balls were getting kind of damp, and it was hard to keep a long rally going because of that. That’s usually more my game.”
Lake Travis’ Jason Protass and the Cavs will compete in next week’s Class 6A state tournament after a surprising season. FILE PHOTO

Cavaliers embrace status as underdog

Despite predictions, Lake Travis is headed to state tournament.

By Michael Schoeffel
Contributing Writer

Last June, the Austin American-Statesman made a prediction. The Lake Travis boys golf team, it said, would be “fortunate to finish fifth” in the District 25-6A tournament.
It’s 11 months later, and the Cavaliers have blown up that prediction like a hot drive off the tee box.

Not only did Lake Travis finish second at the district tournament, but the Cavs repeated that feat at the regional tournament. Now, the team that “no one expected anything out of,” as coach Erik Henson put it, is headed to the Class 6A state tournament for the first time since 2013.

The two-day tournament will kick off on May 22 at Legacy Hills Golf Club in Georgetown.

“We’ve told them all year that you have nothing to lose,” said Henson. “We felt like if we could get out of district, we would have a terrific chance to get to states. Fortunately, that’s how it’s played out.”
The 2017 Cavaliers, it seems, are channeling some of the energy and mysticism that led them to three straight state championships from 2011-13. They’ll head into the state tournament riding high after finishing just three shots behind Westlake, a state-championship favorite, in the second round of the regional tournament.

Senior Jason Protass has felt the significance of the moment, calling it “surreal.”

“Every day, you hear about how good our 2011, 2012, and 2013 teams were,” he said. “Now, to be affiliated with those guys,

Golf continued on A7

IF YOU GO
What: Class 6A boys golf tournament
When: Monday-Tuesday
Where: Legacy Hills Golf Club, 301 Del Webb Blvd., Georgetown
is unbelievable.”

Henson has noticed similar characteristics running through this year’s team that championship squads of yore also possessed, saying “they’re all selfless...and we have a couple of guys we know will deliver each time out.”

What’s unique about this year’s team – and perhaps any other team in the state this year – is that the two guys leading the pack are freshmen: Nathan Petronzio and Trey Bosco.

Petronzio and Bosco have posted the two lowest single-season scoring averages in the history of the program this season, according to Henson. They showed their might at the regional tournament, as Petronzio finished third and Bosco tied for fifth. With so much success so early on, the two phenoms have every reason to be a bit arrogant.

Yet, as Henson points out, they’re anything but.
“Both are dynamic players who are gifted and humble at the same time,” said Henson. “We’ve been very fortunate that players of their caliber don’t have any ego at all.”

It would also be easy for the upperclassmen – in this case, Protass, Tristan Stalker and Grayson Litowitz – to feel threatened by a pair of high-achieving nine-graders. As Henson put it, “as older guys, being beaten by a younger player can sometimes be frustrating.” Yet there seems to be a minimal amount of jealousy running through the ranks.

“The older guys have handled it well,” said Henson. “I think, in some ways, it takes the pressure off them, knowing that we have two guys who will score low each time out.”

And it’s not as though those older guys are slouches. Each finished within the top 34 at regionals, and when push comes to shove, they’re just happy to be part of a team
that’s taking Lake Travis back to the promised land.

“It means a great deal because of the hard work we put in to get there,” said Stalker. “The team has struggled the past few years. It was time for Lake Travis to get back to the standard that was set in 2013.”

They won’t enter the state tournament as the favorites, but then again, this mold-breaking Cavaliers’ team has been defined bydefying predictions.

“We just need to focus on being ourselves,” said Pro-tass. “That’s when we play our best golf.”
Lake Travis girls shoot for another title

Experience to serve Cavaliers, rival Chaps at Legacy Hills tournament.

By Mike Schoeffel
American-Statesman Correspondent

Lake Travis girls golf coach Richard Wager doesn’t like to call his team the “defending” state champion. “People graduate, new people come up and fill in,” he said. “We don’t like to say we ‘defended’ a title because it’s a different team every year.”

In truth, the Cavaliers are actually the two-time defending state champions – not that Wager will mention it – and they have an opportunity to win a third consecutive UIL Class 6A title this week at Legacy Hills Golf Club in Georgetown. If they pull it off, it will be the third time a Lake Travis program has won at least three consecutive state titles: the boys golf team did it from 2011-13 and the football team

Morgan Lay, who will play golf at Texas A&M next year, and her Lake Travis teammates are chasing a third state championship this week.

Golf continued on C10
Golf

continued from C1

won five in a row from 2007-11. “It will be fantastic if we can do it,” said Wager, “but for us, it’s just another year.”

Another year that has brought another shot at a state title and another round of victories over Westlake, a perennial power that last won a state championship in girls golf in 2011, two years before the Cavaliers began a run of three state titles over a four-year stretch.

For some time now, Westlake has attempted to break the spell Lake Travis has cast upon the Chaparrals program. The Chaps have finished second to the Cavaliers in seven consecutive postseason tournaments, including at the 2017 Class 6A, Region IV tournament and at last year’s state tournament.
“Lake Travis is a talented team, no doubt,” said Westlake coach Chuck Nowland. “There are other strong teams from around the state, too, so we’ve got to take care of our own business. We need to play the course with intelligence and a tough, positive mindset.”

The players for Lake Travis or Westlake had the chance to play at Legacy Hills in November as well as at the 2016 state tournament. That experience figures to be invaluable on a course where “scores around par are good” and “red numbers are hard to come by,” Wager said.

Nowland is a vocal proponent of Legacy Hills, saying “every hole and each green complex is uniquely challenging but fair.” He praised the course’s “flow,” commenting on its “variety and staggering of the par-3s, fours and fives.”

“I love Legacy Hills for the state tournament,” he said. Wager had a slightly different opinion.

“You just try to survive that place,” he said.
The teams at Lake Travis and Westlake, though, typically do better than simply survive. Each team boasts a group of players who have signed with an NCAA Division I program or committed to one.

The Cavaliers have Kaitlyn Papp (University of Texas), Morgan Lay (Texas A&M) and Sara Camarena (Texas A&M). Westlake has Randi Romack (Tulsa), Jordan Shackelford (Baylor) and Bentley Cotton (Baylor).

Papp, Lay and Romack will be competing at state for the third time. Camarena, Shackelford and Westlake’s Madelyn Jones will be there for the second time. Both coaches believe having a strong contingent of tournament-tested upperclassmen will pay dividends over the two-day event, which begins Monday.

“It’s always valuable to have experience at that high level,” Wager said.

Nowland and Wager are keeping their pre-tournament messages simple and to the point.

“There’s no defense in golf,” Wager said. “We just try to control our own golf ball. If that’s good enough, great. If not, you tip your hat to the team that beat you.”

Nowland struck a similar tone.

“Be prepared, be confident and always believe,” he said. “Bring the strength and spirit of this incredible team.

“Oh, and make a lot of putts.”
AUSTIN-AREA QUALIFIERS

- **Class 6A**
  - Teams: Lake Travis (Morgan Lay, Sara Camarena, Kaitlyn Papp, Macy Fox, Hanna Liu); Westlake (Sadie Engleman, Jordan Shackelford, Randi Romack, Madelyn Jones, Bentley Cotton)
  - Individual entrants: Sophia Digesuado, Vandegrift; Elena Castanon, Westlake

- **Class 5A**
  - Individual entrants: Olivia Stokes, Austin High; Hannah Chol, Austin High

- **Class 4A**

- **Class 3A**
  - No area teams or individual entrants.

- **Class 2A**
  - Teams: Thrall (Colby Jaeger, Whitney Gibbs, Kathryn Renfro, Shelby Hoffman)

UIL GIRLS GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS

Monday-Tuesday, with play beginning at 8 a.m. each day

Sites: Class 6A, Legacy Hills Golf Club (Georgetown); Class 5A, Wolfdancer Golf Club (Bastrop); Class 4A, Sillick Rock Golf Course (Horseshoe Bay); Class 3A, Grey Rock Golf Course (Austin); Class 2A, Roy Kizer Golf Course (Austin); Class A, Lions Municipal Golf Course (Austin)

Admission: Free to any tournament, but parking will cost $5 a day at Wolfdancer, Grey Rock, Kizer and Lions. Legacy Hills will charge $10 (cash only) for parking while Horseshoe Bay recommends that spectators carpool to the course, which has free but very limited parking.
Lake Travis jumps out front in pursuit of third straight UIL title

By Thomas Jones

GEORGETOWN — When Lake Travis senior Morgan Lay finished her opening round Monday at the Class 6A girls golf championships, she hurried to the scorer’s table and stole a glance at the incoming team scores.

That done, Lay, a Texas A&M signee, quickly breathed a sigh of relief. The two newcomers for the two-time defending state champion Cavaliers — sophomore Hanna Liu and freshman Macy Fox — had carded scores of 73 and 77, respectively, to help Lake Travis finish the first round with an even-par total of 288.

Allen will begin the second and final round Tuesday with a 295 total, while Westlake was third Monday after an opening-round 297.

“I saw those scores and thought, ‘Thanks, God,' ” Lay said with a laugh. “I was so relieved. The whole round, I was struggling a little bit. I was thinking ‘Oh, don’t let your team down’ — but Hannah and Macy were playing well the whole time.”

Lay’s modest description of her play at Legacy Hills

UIL continued on C3
Golf Club didn't exactly match her round of 2-over 74, which tied her with teammate Sara Camarena for 14th place. Cavaliers senior Kaitlyn Papp, a Texas Longhorns signee, shot a 5-under 67, leaving her two strokes in back of first-round leader Ellie Szercyk of Allen.

Displaying some senior leadership, Lay took Fox out for a practice round at Legacy Hills a couple of days before the tournament. “Just to keep her mind off the stress and just go through a routine and stay focused and stay calm,” Lay said.
The Cavaliers certainly looked to be focused down the stretch Monday, when they combined to shoot 9-under par on the last two holes, including an eagle by Lay on the par-5 18th.

“It was a slower start than usual for us, but to finish like that was fantastic,” said Lake Travis coach Richard Wager, whose team raced to a 24-stroke lead after the first round last season en route to the Class 6A championship.

Still, Lake Travis’ top rivals find themselves within striking distance of the Cavaliers, Westlake coach Chuck Nowland said.

The Chaparrals, who have finished second to Lake Travis in seven consecutive postseason tournaments, overcame three double bogeys and one triple bogey Monday to finish nine strokes off the team lead.

“Lake Travis is on a roll,
UIL GIRLS GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS

Concludes Tuesday, with play beginning at 8 a.m.

Sites: Class 6A, Legacy Hills Golf Club (Georgetown); Class 5A, Wolfdancer Golf Club (Bastrop); Class 4A, Slick Rock Golf Course (Horseshoe Bay); Class 3A, Grey Rock Golf Course (Austin); Class 2A, Roy Kizer Golf Course (Austin); Class A, Lions Municipal Golf Course (Austin)

Admission: Free to any tournament, but parking will cost $5 a day at Wolfdancer, Grey Rock, Kizer and Lions. Legacy Hills will charge $10 (cash only) for parking, while Horseshoe Bay recommends that spectators carpool to the course, which has free but very limited parking.

... but you can’t let it get in your head,” Nowland said. “You have to stay patient and work hard. If they win it, they earn it — but we have to make them earn it. You can’t give strokes away just because Lake Travis is in the tournament.

“They’ll go out and make birdies just like they did today. Tomorrow, there will be some holes where we need to go really low together and make up some ground.”

Westlake senior Randi Romack played particularly steady, carding 16 pars and a pair of birdies while firing a 2-under 70.

“I was a little nervous starting out,” said Romack, who will play for the University of Tulsa next fall. “I mean, this is my last high school tournament ever. It’s kind of weird going out there, but I felt good.”

The Chaparrals also received a low score from freshman Bentley Cotton, a Baylor pledge who shot an even-par 72.

Montgomery’s team totaled a 304, and its players will join those from Lake Travis, Allen and Westlake in the final foursomes when the tournament resumes Tuesday.

Contact Thomas Jones at 512-445-3527.
Lake Travis’ Sara Camarena fires a shot on the 14th hole at Legacy Hills Golf Course during the Class 6A girls golf tournament Monday. DEBORAH CANNON / AMERICAN-STATESMAN
Texas signee Kaitlyn Papp smiles as she celebrates Lake Travis’ third consecutive Class 6A state title with teammate Morgan Lay on Tuesday. Papp led the Cavaliers to an 11-stroke victory over runner-up Westlake. JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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<td>Lake Travis</td>
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<td>Houston Memorial</td>
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TOP 5 INDIVIDUALS

- **K. Papp, Lake Travis** 67-70 137
- **J. Berry, Kingwood** 69-71 140
- **R. Romack, Westlake** 70-71 141
- **E. Szeryk, Allen** 65-78 143
- **G. Kaur, Cy-Woods** 72-72 144

Lake Travis senior Papp is medalist after two-round score of 7-under 137.

By Thomas Jones
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GEORGETOWN – Kaitlyn Papp first donned a Lake Travis golf uniform three years ago. Not coincidentally, the Cavaliers have been winning state titles ever since.

Papp, a Texas Longhorns signee, won medalist honors Tuesday while helping Lake Travis to its third straight Class 6A championship in girls golf. Papp shot a two-round score of 7-under 137 at Legacy Hills Golf Club, and the Cavaliers totaled a 4-over 580 to top Westlake, their West Austin rival, by 11 strokes.

Allen finished third at 599.

“I was just trying to hit fairways and greens and keep a putter in my hand,” said Papp, who opened play with a 5-under 67 on Monday.

“My goal was to help the team win another (title) and for myself to win state. I really believed that we could pull off the three-peat.”

Lake Travis coach Richard Wagel

UIL continued on C5
said the latest championship proved particularly satisfying since it came after the departure of Kristin Gillman, a former Cavalier who was the Class 6A girls individual champion last season before joining the women’s golf team at Alabama.

“Our belief was that once Gillman was gone, we could still get it done,” Wager said. “Some people thought that once she was gone, the run was over, but we never thought that. To see our goals come true feels good, and I’m so happy for Kaitlyn to finish like this.

“It’s a cap on a fantastic career.”
Papp topped Allen freshman Ellie Szeryk and Humble Kingwood junior Jackie Barry in the individual competition. Papp trailed Szeryk by two strokes after the first round, but she wore down the freshman with play as steady as the southerly breeze that whipped across Legacy Hills throughout both rounds. Neither a bogey nor a birdie broke Papp’s second-day string of pars until she birdied three holes on the back nine. She suffered her only bogey of the round on the 17th hole.

“I’m a pretty consistent player,” Papp said. “There’s a lot of pars and not a lot of drama.”

By the time the leaders reached the back nine Tuesday, Lake Travis held a 14-stroke lead over then
second-place Allen. Westlake had opened the second round with three cumulative birdies on the first two holes to close within five strokes of the Cavaliers, but Lake Travis' steady play wore down their opponents.

The Cavaliers recorded seven birdies before the turn, including three by sophomore Hannah Liu, who tied for eighth overall with a 2-over 146.

In contrast, Westlake had nine bogeys and one double-bogey on the front nine while falling into a fight for second place with Allen.

A spectacular back nine by senior Randi Romack, a Tulsa signee, helped the Chaparrals defeat Allen while finishing second to Lake Travis for the eighth consecutive postseason tournament. Romack had three birdies in the final four holes to card a third-place score of 3-under 141.

"She came to play today," Westlake coach Chuck Nowland said about Romack. "Her demeanor, concentration and confidence was at an all-time high."

But Romack's run wasn't enough to lift Westlake to Lake Travis' level. Morgan Lay (146), Sara Camarena (149) and Macy Fox (155) aided Papp as Lake Travis won its fourth state title in the past five years.

San Antonio Churchill holds the record for the most consecutive girls golf state championships in UIL's highest largest classification, winning five from 1996-2000.

"We're closing the gap on them," Nowland said. "You have to work hard because they're not going to give in.

"But they (the Cavaliers) are class acts, and they're great kids. I'm really happy for Kaitlyn, because she deserves to be a champion. I'm just ready for it to be our turn."

Contact Thomas Jones at 512-445-3527.
Lake Travis golfers cheer on Cavaliers senior medalist Kaitlyn Papp on the 18th green in Tuesday’s UIL Class 6A state tournament. JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN
By Rick Cantu
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Sam Worley closed a brilliant high school career with an even more brilliant finish. It likely won’t be his last memorable race on the track at Myers Stadium on the campus of the University of Texas.

With a near-capacity crowd standing and urging him to finish strong, the senior from New Braunfels Canyon captured gold in the Class 6A 1,600 meter run — his second gold medal of the day — in record-breaking time.

The University of Texas-bound Worley crossed the tape in 4 minutes, 2.30 seconds, just ahead of Southlake Carroll’s Reed Brown, who was clocked in 4:02.49. It was the marquee race on the final day of the UIL State Track and Field Championship.
Both runners’ times were better than the previous 6A record of 4:03.27 set by Steve Magness of Klein Oak in 2003, but Worley’s name will be the one in the record books.

As a warmup for that race, Worley won gold in the 800 with a time of 1:48.25, narrowly missing a state record.

Worley was not the only future Longhorn who shined Saturday at their future collegiate home.

Lake Travis senior Megan Rourke set a personal best with a time of 2:08.48 to earn silver in the girls 6A 800. Senior Julia Heymach of Houston Lamar came from behind to win in 2:07.86.

The most decorated Central Texan of the state meet was Taylor senior Virginia Kerley, who earned medals in four events, culminating with gold in the 4A 400.

Suffering from muscle cramps after crossing the finish line on her final event,
Kerley had ice bags wrapped around both thighs after the medal presentation.

Kerley, who will compete at Texas A&M next season, finished her high school career with nine state medals.

Earlier Saturday, Kerley won silver in the girls 4A long jump, finishing at 19 feet, 5.25 inches. An hour later, she took third in the triple jump.

Round Rock’s Shelby West earned silver in the girls 6A 300 hurdles. Houston Lamar’s Milan Young won the event in 40.97 seconds, breaking the 6A record set by Chava Demart of Houston Cypress Creek in 1998.

Burnet’s Ian Carter won bronze in the 4A boys 300 hurdles. Stony Point senior Sydney Washington closed her high school career with a bronze medal in the girls 6A 200, running the race in 23.94 seconds.

Wimberley’s Mikayla Sanders, Ashlyn Royal, Anna Olmedo and Zorina Reed earned a bronze medal in the girls 4A 1,600-meter relay.

Bowie senior Carolyn Evans had a fifth-place finish in the girls 6A 1,600 meters.

Earlier Saturday, Whittier senior Zada Swoopes, sister of former Longhorns quarterback Tyrone Swoopes, finished her high school career with a gold medal-winning performance in the girls 3A discus. Her toss of 164 feet beat the old 3A state record, set by Precious Thibodeaux of Van Vleck in 1997, by nearly 10 feet.

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Rourke takes 2nd place at state meet

Lake Travis senior runs to a new personal best.

By Chris Bilis
Contributing Writer

It took half of the first lap for Megan Rourke to realize something was off. Crossing the 200-meter mark in the girls Class 6A 800 Saturday at Myers Stadium, the Lake Travis senior glanced at the time of 27 seconds. For the first time all season, Rourke had company — really fast company.

“I knew I was going pretty fast and had to slow it down a little bit,” she said.

Cypress Springs freshman Wonders Oguejior set the early pace, and Houston Lamar senior Julia Heymach took the lead entering the second lap. If Rourke wanted gold, she was going to have to work for it.

She couldn’t quite close down Heymach, but the blistering pace pushed Rourke to a new personal best of 2 minutes, 8.48 seconds: more than two seconds faster than the personal best she set at the Class 6A Region IV meet and good enough for a silver medal at the state meet.

“That’s all I could ask for was to go out there and do my best,” she said. “It was a very fast race. I knew it was going to be great competition and it was. I pushed myself, and I’m happy with my time.”

Running on the track she’ll call home next season, the University of Texas signee got her first true taste of college-level competition. Her time would have been good enough for gold at the Big 12 Championships, which took place Sunday.

Heymach, who posted a time of 2:07.86 and later took silver in the 1,600, is signed with Stanford. Rourke said she hadn’t been pushed to that degree all season long, and the visual of a runner in front of her — both at the start and the finish — provided something that even the most intense training exercise couldn’t replicate.

“You try, but all year, I’ve been running by myself pretty much,” she said. “This is my first time actually running against girls that close to me. It was good to have someone pushing me.”

Consider it a final exam. Even though she had to settle for second, Rourke passed with flying colors.

Lake Travis’ David Patrick finished fifth in the boys 300 hurdles with a time of 37.86, and Westlake’s Matthew Kearney finished seventh in the 3,200 in 9:31.64.
Lake Travis quarterbacks, from left, Matthew Baldwin, Connor Hess, Payton Janecek and Hudson Card take warmup throws during the Lake Travis Cavaliers’ football spring practice at Lake Travis High School on May 11. Photos by John Gutierrez / For American Statesman

Newcomers ready to shine
As former Cavs move on to play for college, new talent steps up.

By Jay Plotkin
Contributing Writer

During its roll to the 2016 6A Division I state championship, Lake Travis’ fans and foes alike marveled at the collection of college talent the Cavaliers sent out onto the field.

As many as 14 seniors who played in the championship game will continue their football careers in college— including six at Power 5 conference schools. With all that skill graduated, there’s one obvious question the Cavaliers face as spring practice rolls on: how do you replace all of that talent?

So far, each Cav has answered the question with a polite smile.

“When people see that this team graduated what we did, they definitely think we’re going to be down,” said senior center Matthew Herrera. “I don’t feel that way at all, personally. I think we’ll be just fine.”

Herrera and receiver Garrett Wilson will be the only returning starters for the Lake Travis offense. But don’t mistake the lack of returning players for a lack of talented ones. Quarterback Matthew Baldwin, who follows 6A Player of the Year Charlie Brewer, says this group of seniors has something to prove.

“That class was so darn talented,” Baldwin said. “And all these guys in [this year’s senior] class are really talented players. The guys who didn’t get to start...”

Football continued on A8
Football
continued from A6

last year, we would have started at almost any other school. We’ve never had a chance to shine because we had such talented people above us. It’s finally our time.”

At Lake Travis, perhaps more than anywhere else, the quarterback takes center stage, and Baldwin says he is ready for the challenge.

“It’s an honor to be the quarterback at Lake Travis,” he said.

So far, Baldwin’s living up to the standard. Each Cavalier quarterback dating back to 2004 has ended up with a Division I scholarship. He’s on track to be the seventh quarterback to play in college with a pair of offers already including Ivy League Brown.

As Brewer did before him, Baldwin has made himself a fixture in offensive coordinator Mike Wall’s office, where the pair are working on the mental nuances that make Lake Travis’ offense run. The quarterback can already feel a difference.

“The step that I’m taking from where I was last year to where I am now is colossal,” Baldwin said. “Coach Wall does a great job making a lot of it easier. We are surrounded by a lot of talent – so was Charlie last year. I think we can do some of the same things they did.”

Both Baldwin and Herrera understand that the 2017 Cavaliers aren’t likely to send a dozen players off to the college football ranks, but that doesn’t mean expectations change.

“We work hard,” Herrera said. “We’re strong. We all know what it takes, especially those of us who have been there and paid dues. We’ve experienced it, and we want it again. That’s the strongest feeling for us, that we all want to go back to Dallas and we want to make it our legacy, put our imprint on this program.”

Yes, he says, the 2016 team was talented, but at the Class 6A level, talented teams are everywhere. The Metroplex has a handful of programs that sent just as many graduating players off to college football. Of those teams, only one – DeSoto – claimed a state championship last season. Talent helps, but it doesn’t guarantee results.

“We didn’t win because we had 12 DI athletes,” Herrera said. “We won because we put in the work. We won because we don’t like losing. Everyone is extremely talented, but we worked for it. It wasn’t just given to us.”

Confidence, bolstered by last year’s title run, remains high.

“We may not be as electric as they were last year,” Baldwin said, “but when we square up against any team, I’d still take us.”
School’s top students ready for the freedom of college

Valedictorian, salutatorian to attend University of Texas.

By Rachel Rice
rrice@acnnewspapers.com

After years of studying hard to earn the top two spots in their class at Lake Travis High School, valedictorian Spencer Buckner and salutatorian Sara Flinn are ready to embrace the freedom that comes with attending college.

“I want the time to do things now,” Buckner said. “For four years, I sacrificed to get good grades, and now I want to have time to do the things I want to do. I want to play badminton; I don’t know why.”

Both of LTHS’ top-tier students will be attending the University of Texas – Flinn on a full scholarship with some extra money for studying abroad if she chooses. Flinn will be studying psychology, and Buckner will be studying government.

Buckner said government and politics are his passions, and majoring in government is a natural extension of debate, which has been Buckner’s niche through high school. He’s missed a collective 30 days of class to travel with the debate team to competitions

and has won several awards for his talent for argument.

“I got a lot of experience and exposure through [debate],” Buckner said. “It’s just something I like to do in my free time – researching, that kind of thing, learning more about it... To be a part of the legislative process, policymaking or going to law school would be super cool.”

Flinn said she hopes to eventually combine her knowledge of psychology with neuroscience, potentially going into medicine or staying in academia.

“With the psychology degree, I think understanding the softer sides of the mental health issues that face people today, and then also understanding biologically what’s going on, would help me a lot in being able to assess and help people get out of those places in their lives,” Flinn said. “That’s something I’ve just felt really strongly about.”

Flinn participates in a lot of extracurricular activities; in addition to creative writing, she participates in Model UN and volunteers with nonprofit Africa’s Promise Village, helping coordinate APV’s marketing materials.

Both Buckner and Flinn also have jobs outside of school, of

Students continued on A5
Students
continued from A1

“I think having other things besides school helps put everything in perspective,” Flinn said. “You recognize you’re not just working to get a trade - you’re working to actually do something with your life, and the grades act as a mechanism to do more things and impact more people.”

Buckner said his parents are “more excited” about his valedictorian rank than he is.

“There are definitely a lot of sacrifices you have to make,” Buckner said. “My parents have always let me do what I do. I’ve always been determined and set really high expectations for myself.”

Graduation takes place June 2.

Contact Rachel Rice at 512-445-3809.