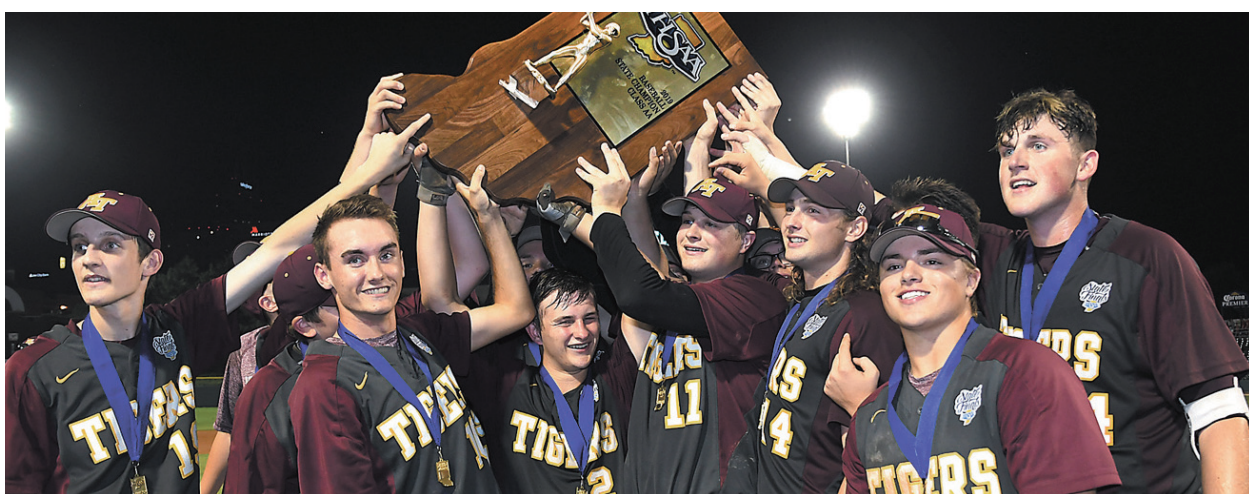


TEAM OF THE YEAR



STATE CHAMPS

BY ROB HUNT
THE HERALD BULLETIN

Their season started before any other area baseball team, a four-game road trip to Tennessee which helped them bond and come together.

Their baseball season was the last to end for anyone, a one-game trip to Indianapolis on which they earned the right to hoist a state championship trophy.

As a result of their 29-6 record and a Class 2A baseball state championship, Alexandria Tigers baseball is the THB Sports Awards 2019 Team of the Year.

The Tigers had all the ingredients for a first-rate season and were in the top 10 preseason rankings. Behind 13th-year head coach Jeff Closser and his staff, the Alex lineup was led off by Baseball Player Athlete of the Year Trey Stokes and didn't get any easier from there.

With Stokes (.345) and sophomore Kole Stewart (.306) getting on base at the top of the order, pitchers had to deal with some serious thunder in the heart of the lineup. Junior Brennan Morehead, Nick Williams and Rylan Metz followed and kept the line moving and runners crossing the plate. Even

nine-hole hitter Cade Verneti was productive as the lineup was rounded out by LF Miller Abernathy, 3B Bub Misner, and catchers Brandon Patz and Brendan Luzader.

As a team, the Tigers stole 167 bases, led by Metz's 32, and averaged better than nine runs per game, which was plenty for a pitching staff with a team ERA of 2.25.

That staff was anchored by Morehead, the Baseball Pitcher Athlete of the Year, with an 11-2 record and a 1.50 ERA. He hurled 10 complete games, including five of the team's 14 shutout wins.

COACH OF THE YEAR - GIRLS

Hagerman guides PH to early success

BY ROB HUNT
THE HERALD BULLETIN

If ever there was going to be a year that other county and area schools could catch up with the Pendleton Heights girls cross country team, 2018 looked like the one.

Not so much. The Arabians, who had graduated a large group of seniors, including the 2017 Girls Cross Country Athlete of the Year Christina Magers, had a largely inexperienced roster comprised of 10 freshmen, a sophomore, and a senior who had not been able to run the previous two seasons due to health issues.

But, under the expert and experienced tutelage of coach Melissa Hagerman, all the Arabians girls team did was dominate at the Madison County meet and advance through the postseason all the way to semistate. Their surprising success this season has earned Hagerman the 2019 Girls Sports Coach of the Year.

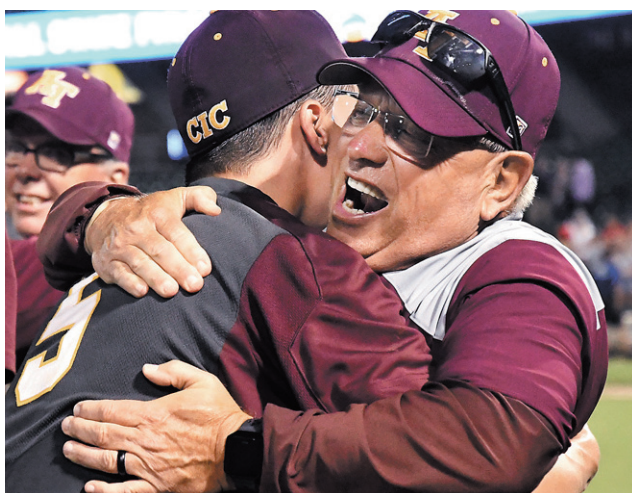
Led by six All-County performers, the Arabians won

the Madison County meet with relative ease, scoring 26 points and bettering the runners-up from Lapel by 40 points. Freshman Laney Ricker was the county champ and sophomore Madison McKee placed fourth that day. Four more freshmen, Hailee Brunner, Berkeley Lord, Catherine Dudley and Katie Jones posted top-10 finishes for Hagerman and the Arabians.

It was the 11th straight, and possibly the most unlikely, Madison County championship for PH under Hagerman.

Dudley would take a turn as the top PH runner with a ninth-place finish at the Hoosier Heritage Conference meet where the Arabians placed second.

But it was Jones who would ultimately lead the way in the postseason and earn THB Girls Cross Country Athlete of the Year for 2018. The Arabians placed third at both sectional and regional, with Jones finishing 10th and 17th, respectively, before a placing of ninth at the New Haven semistate.



Closser reaches pinnacle in 13th year

BY GEORGE BREMER
THE HERALD BULLETIN

ALEXANDRIA — Jeff Closser's 13th season in charge of the Alexandria baseball program proved to be the charm.

The Tigers' stunning rally during the state championship game against Southridge gave the school its first state title since 1998 and made Closser the 2019 THB Sports Awards Boys Coach of the Year.

Closser's son, J.D., was a

COACH OF THE YEAR - BOYS

member of that championship baseball team 21 years ago, giving the family a dynasty of sorts some two decades apart.

For Closser, it was a championship long in the making.

He's been meticulous in rebuilding the Alex program from the ground up, starting with the youth leagues.

The Tigers tore through the competition for 29 wins this spring, but the final one was

the most surprising.

Alexandria trailed 3-0 in the sixth inning before Williams started a two-run rally with a one-out single. Junior Brayton Gaines drove in the Tigers' first run with a single, and Metz scored on a wild pitch to make it 3-2.

That set up an improbable seventh inning that appeared to end when sophomore Kole Stewart swung and missed for

Strike 3 with two outs. But the catcher couldn't hold onto the ball and threw wildly into right field as Stewart raced to first base.

He wound up on second base and was driven home on a single by Morehead to center field. The Raiders again appeared poised to escape the inning when Williams hit a short fly ball to left field, but the hit dropped between two defenders and Morehead raced home with the winning run.



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