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WESTWORD

WEB EXCLUSIVES

Academic teams' competitive spirit rivals athletes'

Science Olympiad, Math Team, WYSE and Scholastic Bowl represent school

w Morgan Quilici
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Most students know the score of the boys' basketball team's game against Glenbrook South on Jan. 30, and others are aware of the girls' basketball team's score of its game that night. However, it would be a solid bet to assume that almost no one knows the results of Jan. 30's Science Olympiad regional.

Although it is clear the Science Olympiad members, Mathletes, WYSE students and Scholastic Bowlers labor in obscurity, their competitive juices flow just as freely as any participant in the school's sports teams.

Science Olympiad, led by sponsors Elizabeth Ramseyer, Chris Barnett, Chris Hawker, Susie Lim and Howie Swider, competes in 23 different events. The events are split into two different divisions, building and study.



Math team coach Bob Nortillo gives a pep talk. Photo by Morgan Quilici

In the study division each student studies a specific science topic, and takes a test on that topic. In the building division, students are given a goal and they have to accomplish that goal by building something. During a competition, each event is scored with points. The first place team gets one point, the second place team gets two points, and the third team gets three points. All the points are added, and the school with the least amount of points wins first place. Individuals can also win separate metals for their events.

For the last 15 years, Science Olympiad has been in the top five in state. In 2006, the team went to nationals where they placed 19 out of 60 teams.

"There is always something going on. Whether it's launching eggonauts or breaking an elevated bridge, we are always having a good time," senior varsity member Kyriaki Ades said.

Ramseyer concurred.

"It is fun to learn new things and work with students in areas they would not necessarily explore in their four years here at Niles West," she said.

The Science Olympiad varsity members include seniors Maureen Gullen, Angie David, Karissa Moy, Ann Lee, Andrew Lee and Kyriaki Ades; juniors Daniel Kim, Benjamin Pichler, Steven Chang, Joshua Lee, Mitch Balke and Urveel Shah; sophomore Kara Mui and freshmen Jessica Sutfin and Erin Balke. The junior varsity members include seniors Adersh James, March Kopsombut; juniors Jake Balke, Michael Radko; sophomores Nathan Kerr, Alex Lupas, Antonio Kim and Jenny Lee and freshmen Despina Ades and Rishy Chacko.

The Math Team, coached by Bob Nortillo, competes in two different organizations of competition. The first involves 55 Chicagoland area high schools called the North Suburban Math League. The North Suburban Math League consists of five competitions starting in late September and ending in early March. The five competitions are separated into five divisions based on strength of school.

The next competition is The Illinois Council of Teachers of Mathematics. This statewide competition consists of two meets, one in February and one in May. The February competition is a qualifying completion for the state competition at The University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in May.

For Nortillo, the best part of coaching is the competitions.

"They're great because we never have to show our work, just the answer to the problem. It is either right or wrong," he said.

Junior Kevin Lim expressed enthusiasm to competing.

"Competitions are really fun. They are challenging and hard, but our team always has a good time,"

Lim said.

For a number of years, the Math Team has done very well in the February competition. Most of the team members qualify for the May competition.

The Math Team members include seniors Manjo George, Sonal Kumal and Dan Kim; juniors Trace Hiyama, Weipang Jan, Danny Kim, Karim Lakhani, Josh Lee, Kevin Lim, Kiran Nair, David Park, Michael Paul, Prachi Shah, Urveel Shah, Alex Truong, Jennifer Wond, Jimmy Xamplas and Jeffery Yoo; sophomores Jose Alvarez, Neha Jain, Antonio Kim, Eric O'Neill and Aneesh Sehgal and freshmen Rishy Chacko, Min Suk Song, Askshar Kumar, Ari Lazar, Michael Nissan and Sarah Nordin.

Members of Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering (WYSE), sponsored by Martha Lietz and Sharon Mikula, take a plethora of 40-minute multiple choice tests in seven different subjects.

Coach Martha Lietz expressed excitement on coaching WYSE.

"One of the nice things about coaching is giving students the opportunity to challenge themselves to learn a few topics and detail and compete against students from other schools. Even though competitions only consist of multiple choice tests, the students are very competitive and get very excited at the events," Lietz said.

"WYSE is challenging because a lot of the questions being asked we haven't learned in school yet. Personally you want to perform well so your team can reap the benefits and advance," junior Allie Guiang said regarding the challenges that WYSE faces.

The participants take two tests per competition, and are tested in a variety of subject areas, including biology, chemistry, physics, computer fundamentals, English, math and engineering graphics. The judges take the team's top two scores from each category and use them to compute a team score. Even if the whole team doesn't place high, a team member may still advance to the regional, sectional or state meet.

According to Lietz, Niles West is in the hardest regional and sectional in the state. For the past two years, WYSE has advanced to regionals and sectionals. This year, senior Derek Wong advanced to state for engineering graphics.

The WYSE members include seniors Angie David, Jacob Friedland, March Kopsombut, Sonal Kumar, Michael Masanek, Karissa Moy, Derek Wong and Morgan Yates and juniors Aaron Goldfein, Allie Guiang, Weipang Jan, Daniel Kim, Joshua Lee, Kevin Lim, Danny Lohan, Michael Paul, Ureel Shah and Alexander Truong.

Scholastic Bowl, advised by Howie Swider and Lia Gerambia, competes against other teams in Jeopardy-style matches.

"Scholastic Bowl is a team that really focuses on competition versus other high schools," Gerambia said.

Varsity member Maureen Gullen concurred.

"We are pretty competitive. We want to win," Gullen said.

During a regular competition, two groups of five compete against each other at a time. Each team is asked questions varying in topics from English and history to miscellaneous. Whoever answers in the fastest time gets control of the toss up question. After the team correctly answers the toss up question, it gets the first shot at the bonus questions. If they answer the bonus questions correctly, points are added to their score. If the team incorrectly answers a question, the other team has the opportunity to answer.

Scholastic Bowl has 11 meets all together with a conference meet at the end of the season. After the conference competition, the varsity team then moves on to the regional competition.

The Scholastic members include seniors Maureen Gullen, Calvin Klint, Angie David and Sonal Kumar; juniors Steven Chang, Aaron Goldfein, Thea Ledesma, Benjamin Pichler, Ilya Raskin, Michael Paul, Jimmy Xamplas, Trace Hiyama, Jennifer Wong, Jeremy Berman, Joshua Lee and Frank Kaufhold; sophomores Alex Lupas, Dahlia Ahmed and Akshar Kumar and freshmen Carolyn Wong, Despina Ades and Rishy Chacko.

When asked why he thinks Niles West students pay more attention to the sports teams rather than the academic teams, Science Olympiad assistant coach Chris Barnett said, "I think that since athletics are more popular in the U.S. in general, the student body reflects what is going on in the U.S. as a whole."

Varsity Science Olympiad member, Mitch Balke agreed.

"I think the reason why people don't really pay attention to academic teams is because of the way society has shaped our thinking of them. People don't think that academic teams are cool, exciting or worthwhile. A lot of the academic teams at Niles West have been doing really well and it is unfortunate that they don't get the recognition that they deserve."