

Bringing home OVAC cheering title once again

• St.C., Linsly, Toronto and Wheeling Park all maintain status as champs

By **MIKE PALMER**
Times Leader Staff Writer

WHEELING – The 20th Annual OVAC Cheering Competition took place Saturday, and for a change from most local sporting events, the cheerleaders were the ones being cheered for. Thousands of friends, families and supporters of the Valley's cheerleaders packed into WesBanco Arena to watch as 31 schools from all over the Ohio Valley competed in four divisions.

When it was all over, it was the same four schools from last year's competition repeating. The judges selected Toronto in the single A division, Linsly won the double A trophy, St. Clairsville won the triple A division and Wheeling Park won the four A competition.

Joey Takacs, head coach for the Red Knights cheer squad, was very excited when it was announced that Toronto had won the Class A trophy. "It is our fourth OVAC trophy and fourth in a row, and we are very happy to be here again."

See, **CHEER**, Page A2



T-L Photo/MIKE PALMER

THE ST. CLAIRSVILLE Red Devil Cheering squad took home its fourth OVAC title in a row for the AAA division Saturday night at WesBanco Arena in Wheeling. Members of the championship team include, in front, from left, Taryne Soukup, Jamie Matkovich, Lauren Cencula, Lauren Holler, Taylor Martin and Alexis Laurine. In back, from left, are Dana Bernard, Kylee Laurine, Andrea Greenwood, Meggan Burnett, Audra Vrotsos, Shalyn Cameron, Claire Slavik, Sarah Zink and Ayla Stewart. To view additional photos from this event, visit cu.timesleaderonline.com.

● Cheer

Continued from Page A1

Having graduated a talented group of seniors last year it was a nervous morning for the Red Knights. "We were always strong with our tumbling but after our seniors left we had to restructure," said Takacs who has just one senior on this year's squad.

"We shelled together and we had a lot of girls step up for us," the Red Knights coach added. "We needed a strong performance, it was a tough competition and the other teams gave us a run for our money."

Bellaire St. John Central would earn runner up in the single A competition.

Linsly was also in a tight battle for the AA crown. "The competition was fierce this year," said Cadets head coach Megan Stevens. "I really had no idea until the last second when they announced the runner-up that we would win."

"It was a special feeling, really exciting to win back-to-back; our cheering team has never done that before," Stevens added. "Our girls have worked really hard for this, they persevered and came through today."

Fourteen-time past champion Wheeling Central was runner up in double A, followed by Shadyside in third and Monroe Central taking a fourth place award.

Following the break Union Local came out and gave a strong performance that set the bar high in class AAA competition. The division is the largest in the competition with 10 teams and the large crowd



T-L Photo/MIKE PALMER

JAMIE MATKOVICH of the St. Clairsville Varsity Cheerleading squad strikes a pose during the teams routine at the OVAC Cheerleading competition Saturday at WesBanco Arena. St. Clairsville took home its fourth OVAC Cheering title in a row. To view additional photos from this event, visit cu.timesleaderonline.com.

of fans was very appreciative of each team as they battled on the floor for the title.

Martins Ferry finished fourth and the Jets third in the AAA division before the announcement that Magnolia had earned the runner up trophy.

St. Clairsville's team huddled in a tight circle awaiting the call and began celebrating as they won the title for the fourth straight year and added an 11th team trophy for the Red Devils.

"Our fourth-peat performance was amazing. It feels like heaven," said Joanne Verba, head coach for the St. Clairsville High School Varsity Cheerleading Competition Team. "It has been a fabulous year."

"This 15-member squad knows they have to have the winning attitude and put in a strong performance on the floor to win in this strong field," Verba explained. "We knew Magnolia wanted this title and we worked extra hard to make sure we would score at least a 10 in every category."

"They truly are amazing, they are kind, bright, talented and dedicated, and it is a pleasure to coach these young women," she

added. "I would like to thank our school administration, parents, choreographer for all of their support, they truly are our angels."

Once again the competition left teams guessing in 4A with all the schools huddled on the floor awaiting the judges final tally. When the winner was announced it should not have been too much of a surprise to Wheeling Park as the Patriots claimed a 15th cheering title. "That is the most titles of any OVAC team," said Shawna Shepherd head coach for the Patriots.

"I am very proud of this year's title," Shepherd explained. "We have 16 members on our competition squad and we have been battling injuries all season."

"We competed with only 10 but they put their heart and soul into it and brought home another trophy," Shepherd said. "I have to say we have the six best seniors this year and they have been inspirational leaders for us this year."

John Marshall finished second in class AAAA, Indian Creek third and Buckeye Local fourth.

Palmer can be reached online at mpalmer@timesleaderonline.com.

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Let the cheers begin

• Championships on tap Saturday

By **MIKE PALMER**
Times Leader Staff Writer

CHEERLEADERS FROM all over the Ohio Valley will wake up WesBanco Arena Saturday at the 20th Annual OVAC Cheering Competition, where 31 squads will compete.

Libby Shepherd, director of the event, said she only hopes bad weather will not be a factor for this yearly occasion.

"I hope that the weather cooperates this year," Shepherd said.

Doors will open for the public at 8:30 a.m., but the event will begin at 9:30 a.m. with the Class A division, followed by Class AA, then awards. The afternoon session, Shepherd said, will start at approximately 12:45 p.m. with the Class AAA division, followed by the Class AAAA division and finish with awards.

Shepherd also said there will be performances by the three winners of the annual Junior High OVAC. Performing their winning routines will be Warwood Middle School in the small school division, Bridgestreet Middle School in the medium school division, Triadelphia Middle School in the large school division, John Marshall in the freshman division and St. Clairsville won the championship in the JV competition but declined to participate.

Each team will cheer it out while trying to top the champions of previous years and beat old rivals. The defending champions are Toronto in Class A, Linsly in Class AA, St. Clairsville in Class AAA and Wheeling Park in Class AAAA.

Shepherd said each squad is judged based on cheer, dance and overall impression, but only has three minutes to perform its routines.

"Each team has three minutes to incorporate cheer, dance and tumbling in any manner they choose," Shepherd said. "Judges look for facials, timing, spacing

See, OVAC, Page A2

OVAC CHEERING

WHAT: Conference championships.

TEAMS: 31

WHEN: Saturday.

WHERE: WesBanco Arena.

CLASS A: 9:30 a.m.

CLASS AA: 10 a.m.

CLASS AAA: 1 p.m.

CLASS AAAA: 1:30 p.m.

TICKETS: Available at door. \$6 adults, \$4 children.

● OVAC

Continued from Page A1

and use of the floor. This is just a fun day for all the squads to show their skills and hard work and perform for their fans."

The teams competing this year in the Single A the following schools will compete at 9:30 in this order: Madonna, Paden City, Toronto, St. Johns & Bishop Donahue.

"As defending champions for the past three years, the pressure is at an all-time high," said Joey Takacs head coach for the Red Knights cheer squad.

"We have overcome many struggles this year, which ultimately has made us a stronger team," Takacs said. "We hope to bring the title back to Toronto, which would be bittersweet."

In 2A, starting around 10:00 will be Frot Frye, Linsly, Steubenville Catholic Central, Wheeling Central, Bridgeport, Monroe Central, Barnesville, Shenandoah & Shadyside.

"As defending champions, The Linsly School is extremely enthusiastic for the upcoming competition," said Cadets head coach Megan Stevens. "We look forward to showing all we have to offer this year, as well as supporting the other teams performing this weekend," Stevens added. "Feeling more prepared than ever, we are ready as a team for OVAC's."

Awards will be presented to A/2A around 11 am. In the afternoon session beginning at approximately 1:00 will be the 3A competition with Union Local, Tyler, Edison, Harrison Central, Oak Glen, Bellaire, Weir, Magnolia, Martins Ferry & St. Clairsville.

Joanne Verba and Mackenzie Earliwine coach the St. Clairsville High School Varsity Cheerleading Competition Team.

"The St. Clairsville Red Devil Cheerleaders have been practicing for months to defend their AAA OVAC cheerleading title. This amazing squad plans to perform, for those in attendance this Saturday at the WesBanco Arena, a four-peat OVAC cheering routine," Verba said.

"The squad's routine will catch the attention of spectators and judges alike as soon as the Red Devil Cheerleaders take the floor. The girls open with full squad standing tumbling and carefully orchestrated running tumbling passes. The team's cheer will incorporate a surprise combination jump. And their artistic dance is comprised of many challenging level changes," the coach added. "The Red Devil cheerleaders are true performers and will enjoy pleasing their audience."

"This has been a fantastic year for the Red Devil cheering squad. The team went to an AmeriCheer Cheer Camp at The Ohio State University this summer and brought back many trophies, including the trophy of 'Most Admired Team.' This award is won by the vote of all of the cheerleaders attending the camp. And our senior, Jamie Matkovich, was named as an 'All American Cheerleader', Verba continued. "The team went on to win the first place award at Kennywood Park's Cheering Competition in August and the first place trophy at the Buckeye 8 Cheering Competition in October. Bringing home another 1st place OVAC trophy to our school will be, as our cheer states, 'Feel Like Heaven.'"

The final division of the day will be 4A with the following schools: Indian Creek, Parkersburg South, East

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Liverpool, Buckeye Local, Wheeling Park, John Marshall & Beaver Local. Awards will be presented following the conclusion of 4A.

"The girls have been working for a few months on their ovac routine. We have had several injuries & illnesses that we have to deal with this year, but the girls who will be competing on Saturday are very excited & confident about their routine," said Shawna Shepherd head coach for the Patriots. "We are going for our 15th OVAC title this Saturday and we would love for our four seniors to go out with a win!"

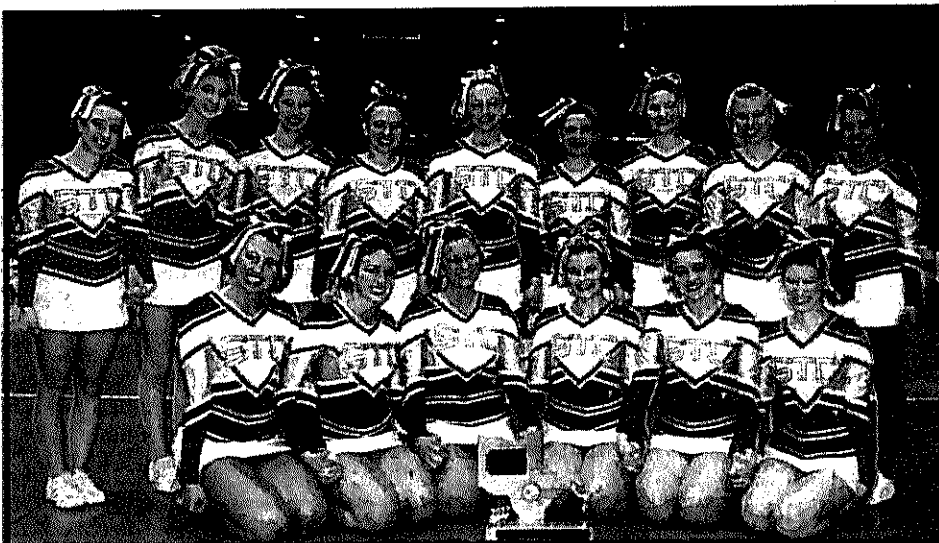
The event is open to the public. Admission prices have remained unchanged and will continue to be \$6 for adults and \$4 for students.

Palmer may be reached at mpalmer@timesleaderonline.com

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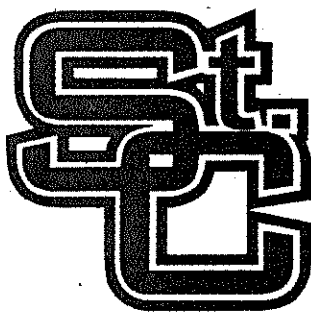
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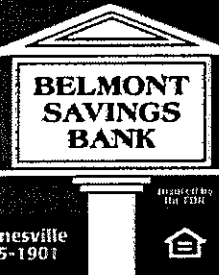
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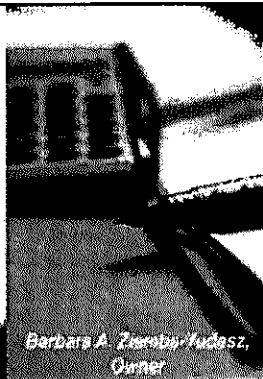
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Park Wins Cheering Title

By ART LIMANN
Staff Writer

WHEELING — The Wheeling Park High School Cheerleading Squad on Saturday claimed its 15th 4-A OVAC cheering title with the John Marshall High School squad taking the runner-up spot.

Prior to performing, Alicia Bonar, one of Wheeling Park's four senior co-captains, said, "Because it will be our 15th, it means a lot to us. We all worked really hard. It's been a long year and we've had to overcome a lot of injuries."

This is the 20th year for the competition.

In the 3-A division, the St. Clairsville Red Devils squad took top honors with Magnolia coming in second. The 2-A title went to Linsly with Wheeling Central capturing second place. The Toronto squad took first place in 1-A with St. John Cen-



The Wheeling Park Cheerleading Squad performs during the OVAC Championships Saturday. Wheeling Park captured first place in the 4-A division. View additional photos at cu.news-register.net

Photo by Art Limann

tral taking second.

Libby Shepherd, OVAC director of cheering, said more than 500 cheerleaders from 31 schools took part in event. She

said this will be the last year for only four divisions — next year there will be five.

Please see Park, Page A7

PARK

Continued from Page A1

Judging was based on cheer, dance and overall impression.

"Everything has gone real smooth," she said. "We were a little nervous about the weather but we lucked-out there. Every year the competition gets tougher and tougher. Judges say all squads have improved, especially the Ohio squads — they have really improved."

Tom Rataiczak, OVAC executive secretary, agreed.

"The event itself is amazing," he said. "These girls literally put in two seasons of practice for three minutes on the floor. This is their show."

He continued, "Ten years ago some squads were

happy to just get out on the floor. They have come up so far. The level of competition has come up to where it's wide open. You have some real athletes out there. I'm amazed when I see some of these girls perform. They are athletes. It's fantastic."

In the 1-A division Bishop Donahue finished third, Paden City fourth, and Madonna fifth. In 2-A Monroe Central came in third, Steubenville Central fourth, Fort Frye fifth, Bridgeport sixth, Barnesville eighth and Shenandoah ninth.

In 3-A Union Local took third, Martins Ferry fourth, Weir fifth, Tyler Consolidated sixth, Bellaire seventh, Oak Glen eighth, Edison

ninth, and Harrison Central placed 10th.

In the 4-A division Indian Creek finished third, Buckeye Local took fourth, Parkersburg South fifth, Beaver Local sixth, and East Liverpool seventh.

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