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Photo by Angela Rose

SANTA MADE HIS arrival in Braidwood on the top of a Braidwood Fire ladder truck on Saturday during the annual Braidwood Lighted Christmas parade. The jolly St. Nick waves to youngsters as the parade route was west on Main Street to the first station where he listened to young girls and boys tell what they want for Christmas.



THE DEPENDABLE Reed-Custer Marching band played holiday music while marching in Saturday's parade.



Photo by Angela Rose

FAMILY EVENT—A family watches the Braidwood Lighted Christmas parade pass down Main Street on Saturday evening. The parade warmed the hearts of residents, despite snow on the ground and a chill in the air.

Grieving mother seeks justice for son killed by hit-and-run driver

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

At 8:29 a.m. Nov. 25, a mother's worst nightmare came true.

It was then that Tashondra Smith of Dallas, Texas, learned her son De'Avion Smith, 25, had been killed in a hit-and-run accident.

On that Tuesday morning, Illinois State Troopers responded to a report of a person on the ground on southbound Route 53 at Thele Road in Elwood.

Upon arrival, Troopers found De'Avion Smith's body. Nearby was his bicycle, the very one he had used to get to his job at Amazon because his car was in the shop.

De'Avion Smith was transported to St. Joseph Medical Center in Joliet where he was pronounced dead. An autopsy was performed by the Will County Coroner's office.

State Police determined that the crash occurred sometime between 6 and 6:30 p.m. the night before, which means the young man was discovered more than 12 hours after he had been struck.

"The fact that he was just left there on the side of the road, it's really painful to think about, because you could have at least stopped and rendered aid to my child," Smith said.

Lying near De'Avion's body were a headlight and the front bumper of a black vehicle—the one that likely killed the young man.

Police say the vehicle involved is most likely a black 2007-2013 Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck.

At the time of the accident, the vehicle had been traveling southbound on Route 53, toward the city of Wilmington, where De'Avion Smith lived after moving to Illinois from Dallas.

Hard working and industrious

By all accounts, Smith was a humble, hardworking and driven soul. Not only was he employed by Amazon in Elwood, he held a second job, closer to home.

"He worked at Burger King in Wilmington," Smith said.

De'Avion was described as hard-



De'Avion Smith

working and professional. Though he took his jobs seriously, he was said to always have time for others, giving those in need a gentle smile that reached his eyes.

Tashondra Smith shared that she taught her son to be professional. She understood life could be difficult, and it was most certainly unfair. Equipping him with the tools he would need to succeed was one way she showed her love for her son and his siblings.

Close relationship with God

Another gift passed on from mother to son was faith in God.

"The fact that he had a close relationship with God gives us comfort," Smith said. "It's really helping us through this tragic time right now."

De'Avion's religious family buoyed him up as he adjusted to life in Illinois.

He was a member of the of the Second Baptist Church of Joliet, where he mentored others and reportedly played a mean game of basketball.

Following his death, his team played

SEE SEEKING JUSTICE PAGE 2

Infant's body found buried in backyard

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

A Wilmington woman and Manhattan man were charged with desecration of a corpse after the remains of an infant girl were discovered buried on property in the 1900 block of Roberts Street in Wilmington.

Nicole L. Pokrzywa, 36, of Wilmington, and William Cosmen, 38, of Manhattan were taken into custody in Will County Adult Detention Facility on Saturday, Dec. 5, and later charged with the abuse of a corpse.

Detectives learned Pokrzywa, the mother of the infant, had given birth in Oct. 2024.

At this time, it is not known whether Cosmen is

the father of the child.

Buried in a beer box

After conducting interviews, detectives secured a search warrant for the property on Roberts Street. The infant's remains were marked with a large rock at the burial site.

"Crime scene investigators proceeded to dig down approximately 36 inches and located what appeared to be an Old Style Beer box," police said. "The remains of an infant were found inside of the box wrapped in a plastic bag and cloth," the Will County Sheriff's office reported.

The Will County Coroner's Office was summoned, and the infant's remains were autopsied on Dec. 6.

A forensic pathologist with the coroner's office conducted the autopsy.

"The pathologist concluded that the age of the female, infant child was between 22 to 27 weeks old," detectives said. "Additional testing of biological materials removed from the female infant is needed due to the level of decomposition of the deceased."

The exact cause of the infant's death has not been determined at this time.

Gave birth in toilet

Pokrzywa and Cosmen reportedly made

SEE ARRESTED PAGE 2



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COMET SPORTS

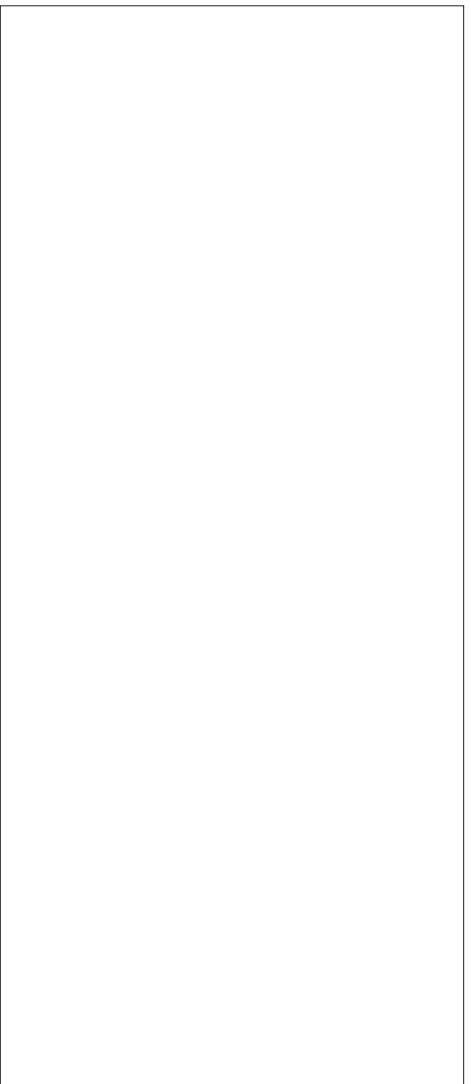


Photo by Eric Fisher
COMET Chase Isaac drives the lane during Friday's game against Wilmington.

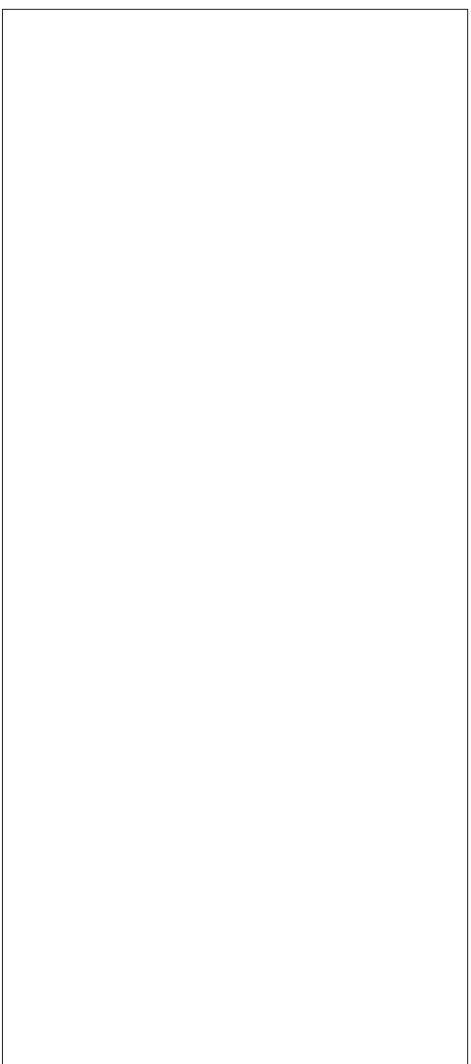


Photo by Eric Fisher
RCHS COLTON WALDVOGEL puts up a shot during Friday's game against Wilmington. Waldvogel finished with nine points.

Comets clash with the 'Cats

Conference rivals Reed-Custer and Wilmington clashed on the court Friday in a physical battle that was won by the Wildcats.

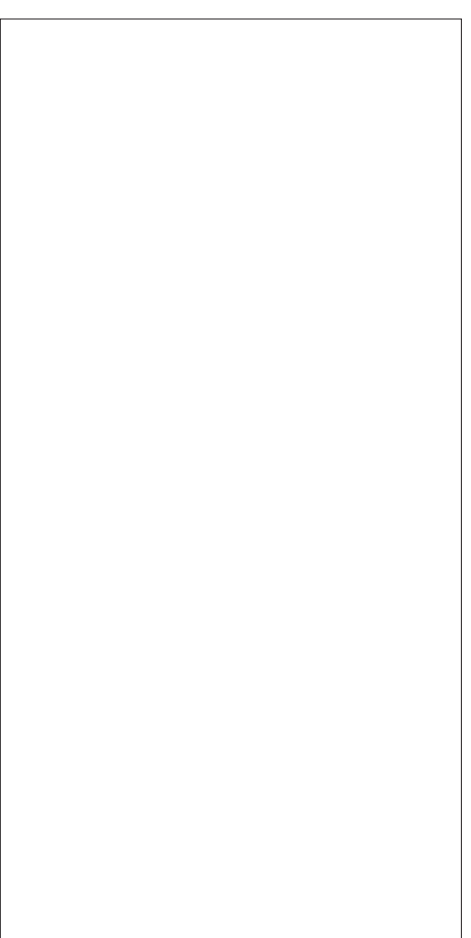


Photo by Eric Fisher
REED-CUSTER'S Kaiden Klein makes a three-pointer from the top of the key at Friday's game against Wilmington. Klein led the Comets with 12 points.

The hosting Wildcats, still unwinding from a state football championship a week earlier, held the visiting Comets to just three points in the second quarter to win their second basketball game of the season 50-34.

Reed-Custer got a good start from senior Colton Waldvogel and sophomore Kaiden Klein who combined for all 12 of their first quarter points to lead 12-11.

But the Wildcats went on a 16-3 run in the second thanks to a pair of three-pointers by senior Ryan Kettman and one by Brysen Meents, a junior who ended up with four for the game to lead the 'Cats with 24 points.

The Wildcats kept drawing fouls by driving the lane in the final frame and were awarded 10 free throw opportunities, missing three.

The Comets kept up the pressure in the fourth, making 7-of-8 free throws but the damage was already done as the two teams matched each other in total points in the period.

Meents finished 4-for-6 at the line to pace the 'Cats. Kettman followed with 12 points while Declan Moran muscled up eight points. Ryker Feil scored four while Brodie Strong came off the bench to finish with two points.

Klein was impressive at the line, sinking all six of his free throws to finish with 12 points. Jesse Tresouthick contributed 11 points while Waldvogel chipped in with nine. Scoring two points each were Orion Bergman and Chase Isaac. Overall the Comets shot 14-for-18 at the line but were out-rebounded by the more physical Wildcats.

On Wednesday the Comets upended Somonauk 54-47 at home.

Reed-Custer is 2-3 overall, 0-1 in the conference. They will host Peotone on Friday.



Photo by Angela Rose
REED-CUSTER was a double winner last week at 190 pounds when the Comets defeated Princeton and hosting Morris.

Comets go undefeated during Prairie Central Multi Duals

The Reed-Custer wrestling team turned in an impressive performance during Prairie Central's North/South Duals on Saturday, finishing third overall behind Coal City and Gibson City in second. Ottawa Marquette placed fourth, followed by Monticello, El Paso-Gridley, Hoopeston Area and Williamsville.

The Comets posted convincing team wins over El Paso-Gridley (61-15), Prairie Central (81-0), Monticello (65-15), Williamsville (78-6), and Hoopeston (62-18) on their way to the podium finish.

"The team was excited to compete in five duals. Reed-Custer had a great day with five dominant wins," said coach Yale Davis. "All 11 wrestlers that competed for RC wrestled tough and represented the school well."

Collin Bryant (106) earned wins including a fall against Williamsville and forfeit victories against Monticello and Prairie Central. He was pinned by El Paso-Gridley and Hoopeston.

Jakub Lichaj (113) had a strong day, recording wins by technical fall over El Paso-Gridley and Prairie Central, plus falls against Monticello, Williamsville, and Hoopeston Area.

Cole Harris (120) went undefeated with falls against Monticello and Williamsville, plus forfeit wins over El Paso, Prairie Central and Hoopeston.

Kaaden Wood (126) picked up multiple quality wins with a major decision over El Paso-Gridley, a fall against

Prairie Central, and a fall against Williamsville. He was pinned by Hoopeston Area.

Jayden Sanchez (132) impressed with a forfeit win over El Paso-Gridley, falls against Prairie Central, Williamsville, and Hoopeston and a technical fall against Monticello.

Rylan West (138) recorded a forfeit over El Paso, plus falls against Williamsville and Hoopeston. He dropped decisions to Monticello and Morris.

Nathan Kuntz (144) picked up a technical fall over El Paso, a fall against Prairie Central, and forfeit and pin wins against Williamsville and Hoopeston. He was pinned by Monticello.

Jordan Hickman (150) earned forfeit wins over El Paso-Gridley, Prairie Central, Williamsville, and Hoopeston Area.

Adrian Aleman (157) collected forfeit victories over Prairie Central and Williamsville, along with a fall against Monticello and a high-scoring decision win over Hoopeston.

Reed Newbrough (165) recorded falls against El Paso-Gridley, Monticello and Morris, plus forfeit wins over Prairie Central and Williamsville.

Nathan Vogler (175) went undefeated with falls against El Paso-Gridley, Prairie Central, Monticello, Williamsville and Hoopeston.

Aiden Shultz (190) earned falls against El Paso-Gridley, Prairie Central, Monticello, and Princeton, but took losses to Williamsville and

Hoopeston Area.

Dominic Alaimo (215) remained perfect on the day with forfeit and fall victories against El Paso-Gridley, Prairie Central, Monticello, Williamsville and Hoopeston.

Christian Mounts (285) picked up key falls against Hoopeston and forfeit wins over Prairie Central, Monticello, Williamsville and Morris. He was pinned by El Paso-Gridley.

The Comets' depth across every weight class proved to be the difference throughout the tournament, as they accumulated numerous falls, technical falls, and forfeit victories while surrendering very few total team points.

The Comets are 7-0 thus far in the season.

Dual meet at Morris

Earlier in the week, Reed-Custer opened with a pair of dual victories at Morris.

The Comets opened with a 51-25 victory over Princeton, highlighted by wins from Kaaden Wood, Jayden Sanchez, Nathan Kuntz, Jordan Hickman, Adrian Aleman, Nathan Vogler, Aiden Shultz, Dominic Alaimo and Christian Mounts.

In the nightcap, Reed-Custer battled Morris to a 38-38 tie, then won by tiebreaker criteria, 39-38. The Comets at one point trailed 33-3 before winning five of six matches to end up with the tie. Wins for the Comets came from Rylan West, Reed Newbrough, Aiden Shultz, Dominic Alaimo, Christian Mounts, Collin Bryant and Jakub Lichaj.

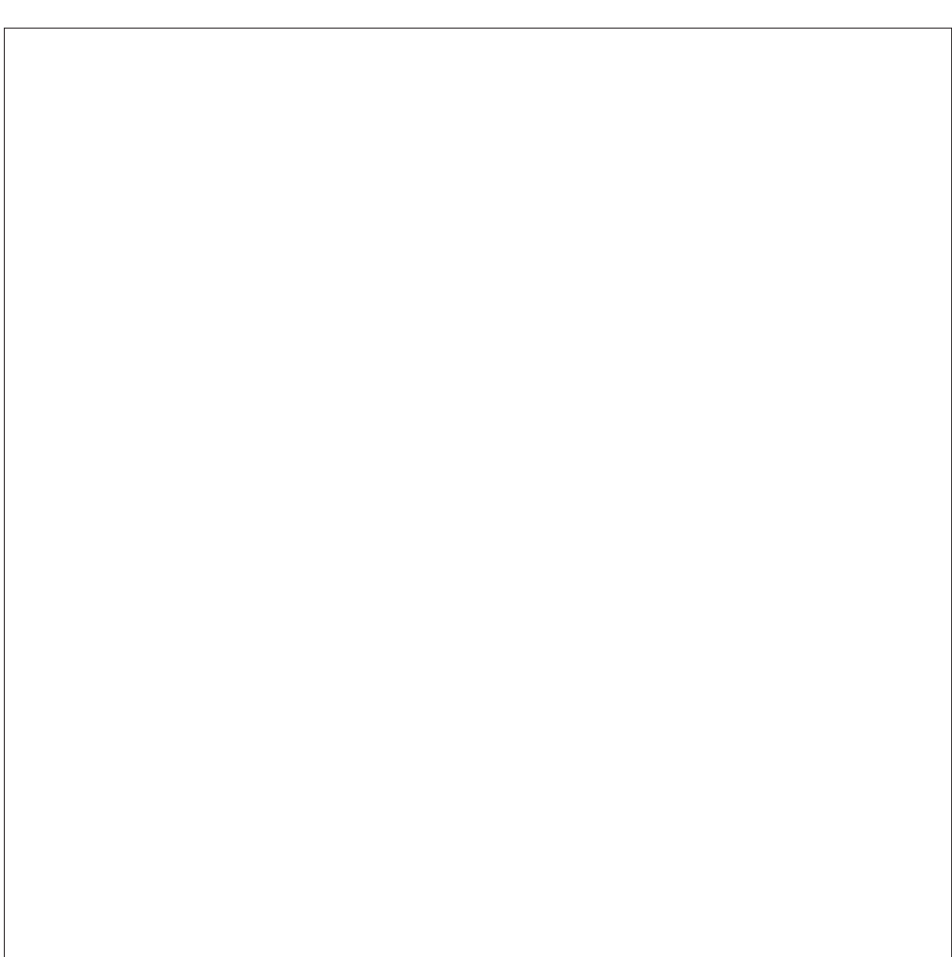


Photo by Angela Rose
TAKING DOWN her opponent from Princeton is Reed-Custer's Sophia Flowers.