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All-Empire Awards Ceremony: Top male, female athletes make the grade

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By **ERIC BRANCH**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The Redwood Empire's top athletes and scholars were recognized Wednesday night at The Press Democrat's 17th annual All-Empire Athletes of the Year ceremony at the Friedman Center in Santa Rosa.

The top male and female athletes and scholar-athletes from 40 schools were recognized for their accomplishments. In addition, four overall athletes of the year and four scholar-athletes of the year were honored and presented with \$500 scholarships.

Casa Grande's Nick Sherry was named the large school male athlete of the year after helping lead the Gauchos to undefeated Sonoma County League records in football and basketball. Sherry, a 6-foot-5, 222-pound quarterback, threw for 2,623 yards and 25 touchdowns and signed with UNLV. In the winter, he averaged 10.5 points a game, was named the Gauchos' co-MVP and earned all-Empire honors.

The large-school female athlete of the year was Casa Grande's Elaine Weaver, an all-league selection in volleyball and basketball who also owns the Empire's best marks in the shot put and the discus. Weaver will attend Sacramento State.

The small-school male athlete of the year was Fort Bragg's Cody Ryden, the NCL I North MVP in basketball who had 1,041 receiving yards, 24 touchdowns and added nine interceptions during the football season. Ryden, who is also hitting .333 and boasts a 2.53 ERA on the diamond this spring, will attend Cabrillo Junior College.

The small-school female athlete of the year was Sonoma Academy junior Kate Bayes, who won the award for the second straight year. Bayes, who scored 49 goals during the soccer season, earned her second Empire small-school MVP award. She also averaged 21 points and was named a first-team all-Empire basketball selection.

The large-school male scholar-athlete of the year was Montgomery junior Karl Nimtz, who has a spotless 5.0 GPA while playing baseball and basketball. Nimtz is batting .306 this spring after playing forward on the Vikings' basketball team, which went 28-4 and won the North Coast Section Division II title.

The large-school female scholar-athlete of the year was Santa Rosa's McKennan Bertsch, who has a 4.4 GPA and has volunteered as a veterinary assistant, an assistant basketball coach and a tutor. Bertsch, who will attend UC San Diego, led



The All-Empire High School athletes of the year, front, from left to right, **Kate Bayes**, Cody Ryden, Elaine Weaver and Nick Sherry, and the scholar athletes of the year, back, from left to right, McKennan Bertsch, Karl Nimtz, Josh Mehta and Brenna Jessup. (JOHN BURGESS / The Press Democrat)

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Do you think switching Elsie Allen and Piner to the SCL and Windsor and Casa to the NBL will make both leagues more competitive?

- Yes
- No
- To be determined

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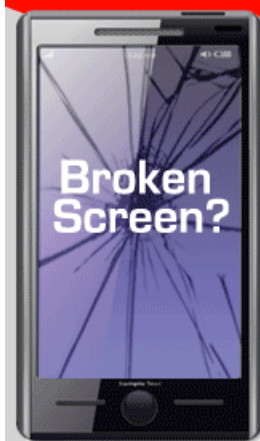
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the Panthers to a 23-9 record and earned first-team all-Empire honors by averaging 11.8 points and 9.1 rebounds a game. She is also the North Bay League's top high jumper with a leap of 5 feet, 2 inches.

The small-school male scholar-athlete of the year was St. Vincent's Josh Mehta, who has a 4.33 GPA and is the school's valedictorian. Mehta, a volunteer at a shelter for abused women and children, earned second-team all-Empire honors as a wide receiver in the fall and is currently hitting .377 on the baseball team. Mehta will attend the University of Pittsburgh.

The small-school female scholar-athlete of the year was Willits' Brenna Jessup, a three-time class president who carries a 4.46 GPA. Jessup, a talented singer and pianist, earned back-to-back NCL I North MVP awards in volleyball and was a two-time MVP in basketball. Jessup will attend UC Irvine.

Three coaches of the year were also recognized Wednesday night — Piner's Luis Rosales (cross country), Analy's Earl Pasamonte (girls' basketball) and Middletown's Bill Foltmer (football).

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