

HIGH SCHOOL

Strong local group off to OFSAA west meet

There will be a healthy local contingent heading to OFSAA west regionals after the CWOSSA track and field championships were contested over two days last week at the Davidson Centre in Kincardine.

Aside from the top six in each event moving onto the pre-OFSAA qualifier, Friday (May 27) and Saturday at Jacob Hespeler Secondary School, two city athletes set new CWOSSA records.

Jacob Hespeler's Thomas Weigl set a new senior pole vault mark of 4.70 metres, topping the old mark of 4.60m set by Eastwood's Ed Koschewitz in 1981. In addition, St. Benedict's Xavier Isaacs bested St. Benedict's Travis Cascanette's 100m para-intellectual time of 16.47 seconds last year by crossing the line at 14.22 seconds.

Qualifiers for OFSAA west were:

Midget girls: Charlie Ridge (GCI), fourth 400m, second 1,500m; Annemieke Tucker (GPSS), second 800m, sixth 1,500m, third 3,000m; Charlotte Crouch (GCI), fourth 80m hurdle; Cara Tenbruggencat (JHSS), fourth high jump; Yang Oyual (GPSS), fifth triple jump; Deanna Meacher (JHSS), sixth triple jump; Latavia Pearson (GCI), sixth javelin.

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HIGH SCHOOL

Ghosts surprise with Waterloo County title

The Galt Ghosts senior boys' soccer team finished off their Cinderella story in the Waterloo County playoffs by beating the Eastwood Rebels 3-2 in the final on Thursday at Woodside Park.

Ranked 11th out of 12 teams coming into the playoffs, the Ghosts beat second-ranked Eastwood in penalty kicks. They'll now play in AA CWOSSA in Walkerton.

BUSINESS

Entrepreneur prospers from 'arts and crafts'

Garrett Fisher's crude hockey lace hat now popular Lace Lidz

By Bill Doucet

Times Staff

Garrett Fisher's older brother Addison used to call it his sibling's "arts and crafts".

His friends used to bust his hump and "rip" on him for wearing his new creation.

But six years after Fisher took every free minute he had over the space of four days sewing wax hockey laces to an old baseball hat, the 23-year-old Cambridge native is now making deals to produce his invention, Lace Lidz, for dozens of hockey teams as the domestic production manager and sales and marketing associate at JJM Sportswear in Mississauga.

Teams include those in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), American Hockey League (AHL), Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL) and the New York Islanders of the National Hockey League (NHL).

"It's pretty surreal to be honest," said Fisher, on the phone at his desk, where he has samples of hats sitting above his computer.

The former Junior C hockey player is still trying to come to grips with the popularity of the hat, which really picked up momentum this year after he and his dad Mark initially made a deal with JJM in 2014 – giving them the rights for production, but accepting a smaller sum to accrue a sales percentage. They hired Fisher soon after to help guide the sales.

"I kind of pinch myself every day," he said.

"A big part of my job is to work with this product still, the one that I started so long ago just for fun.

When the first NHL team ordered,



BILL DOUCET, TIMES STAFF

PUTTING ON THE LIDZ: Garrett Fisher tries his Hockey Canada Lace Lidz hat on for size. Hockey Canada was one of the first organizations to come on board after he worked out a deal with JJM Sportswear for the product, one he came up with while working at a sports store, with the prototype made in his room.

I think I stared at my wall for 10 minutes. It was pretty unreal."

And to think, at 17 he was working in the pro shop at National Sports when his boss asked him to clean up the area. He found endless colours of hockey laces that had fallen out of their paper sleeve without a match, and asked the boss if he could take them home instead of pitching them in the trash.

After he was given the OK, Fisher brainstormed for something to do with the laces. At first he made a lanyard and carried that around for a while, but he still felt there was a better use.

How about a hat?

"I wish I could remember the exact 'uh huh' moment," he said.

The first thing he did was pitch the idea to his brother ... who laughed at him.

"Whether it was out of stubbornness or creativity, I made the first one."

Undaunted, he got to work and made a crude and heavy hat with white laces sewn around an old, beat up cap.

Fisher wore it everywhere. His friends ribbed him about it.

One even took the hat and hid it in his hockey bag.

"You could dump your coffee on it that morning and still wear it. It would roll right off," Fisher said with a laugh, noting that he even

ran over it once to test its durability.

After a while, his dad, who gave a supportive eye roll before the initial hat was made, thought he might be onto something. The concept had to be refined though, so the pair bought some stock hats and found a fabric adhesive to glue the laces on. The design changed, with the laces going the opposite way and the button on top covered.

It took about an hour to make each hat at their kitchen table, and eventually they made hats for minor hockey teams, adding logos and numbers.

Fisher figured that was the extent of the success with his hat. Especially since he didn't have a lot of extra time as student at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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"When the first NHL team ordered, I think I stared at my wall for 10 minutes."

Garrett Fisher

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BILL DOUCET, TIMES STAFF

HOMEMADE PRODUCT: Garrett Fisher shows off some of the teams that have signed on to sell Lace Lidz hats, while sporting the prototype that he keeps at his parent's home. This kitchen table is where he made the second incarnation of hats that he would show to JJM Sportswear.

Lace Lidz exceeded expectations: Fisher

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"That was as far as I ever thought it would go. It was farther than I thought it would go when I made the first one already.

"It was not very realistic to produce on any type of large scale."

In a strange bit of luck, his father and stepmother went on vacation to St. Lucia, where they sparked a friendship with another couple. Near the end of the week, probably during one of their many golf rounds, Mark mentioned the hat to his new-found friend and he suggested he pitch the idea to Steve O'Mara, the CEO of JJM Sportswear.

Not long after returning home, Mark called O'Mara and set up a meeting. While JJM wanted to buy the patent and manufacturing outright, the Fishers negotiated to hold onto a piece of the pie.

One of the first deals for Lace Lidz came from Hockey Canada and the hats were made to coincide with the world junior championships.

Now, their client list is upwards of 60 teams from various leagues, including the Erie Otters, who sold the hats during their OHL playoff run.

"It's pretty much my life now," Fisher said, noting how his career changed to sales despite a history degree from WLU, "this thing that I created when I was in Grade 10. I never thought I'd find myself here and now I am, and I love it."

Despite the success, Fisher hasn't forgotten where he came from. He recently had an order from the Ayr Centennials during their Schmalz Cup run that had Lace Lidz on most Junior C hockey fans' heads in the town.

"Funny, I think I played for every other

team in that league but Ayr. And I don't think Ayr liked me that much. So I kept my name in the background and let my dad do the talking," he said with a laugh.

Even though he's kind of a big deal, his brother still calls the hats arts and crafts, but with a little less sarcasm. That could be because every time Fisher sees him he's wearing a Lace Lidz hat.

"I take a lot of pride in that. Now I'm the one giving him a hard time calling it arts and crafts."

And his friends?

"My buddies, they eat their words a little bit. I still give them a hard time about it," he said.

"Whether it's amazing coincidence, divine intervention or incredible luck, I ended up where I am and the product has far exceeded I think everybody's expectations - my own, my father's, all my buddies; definitely all my buddies."

Fisher said his life could have easily taken a different path had he listened to other people instead of the voice in his head telling him to go for it.

"When I was in high school I probably wouldn't have listened to somebody like myself if they told me what to do. But all I can say is if you have an idea, at least see it through. Don't fall short just because someone else says it won't be good.

"If I listened to my brother's answer when I said, 'hey, I'm going to make a hat made out of skate laces,' it never would have happened. Everything was done out of good fun, but it's easy to get discouraged when everybody is telling you it's dumb. I guess you could say I'm living a dream."

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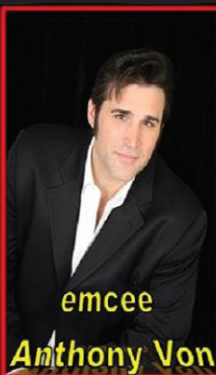
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