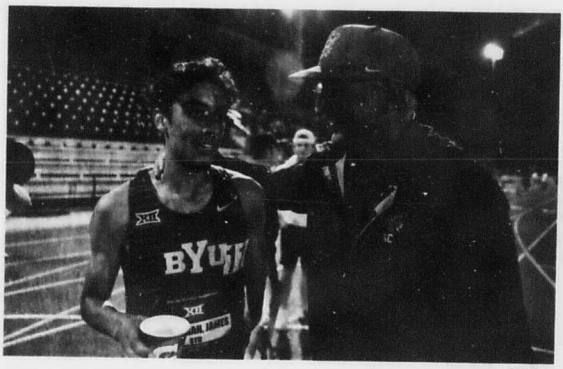

BYU Athletics

BYU runner James Corrigan won the Big 12 title in the 3,000-meter steeplechase this year in Waco, Texas. He'll be one of 21 Cougars headed to the NCAA championships in Eugene, Ore., next week.

How to watch Utah athletes at NCAA track championships

By KEVIN REYNOLDS

BYU is sending a cavalry to Eugene.

The NCAA Track and Field Championships are this week and the Cougars will have title opportunities across several events.

On the men's side, Dallin Shurts comes in as the second seed in the discus. His main competitors will be South Alabama's Francois Prinsloo and Kansas' Dimitrios Pavlidis.

"That chip on my shoulder I finally got off," Shurts said after qualifying. " For months, I've been working on the same cues. It's just about refining them and doing them a little bit better."

BYU will have multiple runners in the 3,000-meter steeplechase in sophomore James Corrigan and freshman Wyatt Haughton. Southern Utah's Hayden Harward will join them in that event.

"I'm super excited to move on to nationals. Last year, I missed out by half a second, so this year I was happy to be in a situation where I didn't have to guess if I was making it," Corrigan said. " It feels good to be in contention for the win consistently and I'm gaining the confidence I need for the next race."

For the women's side, senior Jaslyn Gardner will be running the 100-meter dash.

"I'm feeling really good," she said. "I was a little injured earlier this season so it took me a little bit to be patient with myself to get to this point of dropping my times a little faster, so it feels good to have a big drop like that."

Cierra Allphin will be in the women's high jump. Both come in as six-seeds in their event. Gardner ran an 11-second 100 meter. That is less than two-tenths of a second behind top-ranked Jadyn Mays of Oregon.

BYU will send multiple distance runners. Riley Chamberlain will run the 1500 meter. Sadie Sargent will run the 5K. Jenna Hutchins will enter the 10K.

NCAA Track and Field Championships on TV

» **Men's Day 1:** June 5, 5:30 p.m. (ESPN2)
» **Women's Day 1:** June 6, 6:30 p.m. (ESPN2)
» **Men's Day 2:** June 7, 7 p.m. (ESPN2)
» **Women's Day 2:** June 8, 3:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Beehive State qualifiers

BYU
» Dallin Shurts, senior, discus
» Cameron Bates, senior, javelin
» Danny Bryant, junior, shot put
» Wyatt Haughton, freshman, 3,000-meter steeplechase
» James Corrigan, sophomore, 3,000-meter steeplechase
» Aidan Troutner, junior, 5K
» Sebastian Fernandez, junior, 800 meters
» Jaslyn Gardner, senior,100 meters
» Riley Chamberlain, sophomore, 1,500 meters
» Gretchen Hoekstre, junior, discus
» Sadie Sargent, senior, 5K
» Jenna Hutchins, sophomore, 10K
» Taylor Lovell, sophomore, 3,000-meter steeplechase
» Cierra Allphin, senior, high jump
» Rebekah Erikson, junior, pole vault
» Eli Hazlett, junior, men's 4x400
» Abram Schaap, senior, 4x400
» Jace Jensen, junior, men's 4x400
» Trey Jackson, junior, men's 4x400
» Josh Taylor – men's 4x400
» Logan Hubler, sophomore, men's 4x400

Utah
» Josefine Eriksen, junior, 800 meters and women's 4x400
» Erin Vringer, sophomore, 1,500 meters
» Harley Danie, sophomore, 400-meter hurdles
» Ally Gomm, junior, women's 4x400
» Harley Daniel, sophomore, women's 4x400
» Bailey Kealamakia, junior, women's 4x400
» Chloe Shewell, junior, women's 4x400
» Emily Martin, sophomore, women's 4x400

Southern Utah
Hayden Harward, junior, 3000-meter steeplechase

Utah State
» Logan Hammer, sophomore, pole vault

PREP SPOTLIGHT » LEWIS KNECHT

Courtesy photo

American Fork High School junior Lewis Knecht finished the 2024 season with 20 goals and 17 assists for the Cavemen.

American Fork star changed his team's attitude and helped it win a state title

By ERIC BUTLER
Special to The Tribune

If the players were largely the same, then what was the difference between an American Fork boys soccer team that went 8-9 overall in 2023 to winning the Class 6A state championship?

According to Lewis Knecht, the top goal-scorer and assist man for both the Cavemen and in 6A overall, it all has to do with attitude.

"It's been a lot better experience than last year, it's been great. I remember last year wasn't exactly like a positive experience," said Knecht, who finished the season with 20 goals and 17 assists.

American Fork had not won a state title since the incipient stages of the sport in Utah high schools — when the Cavemen claimed the first two 3A crowns in 1983 and 1984.

Entering this season, there was a little reason to believe that the 40-year drought would be broken anytime soon. But it happened when the Cavemen beat Farmington 1-0 in the 6A finale.

"This year was kind of a challenge for me and my teammates to make it as positive as it could be," Knecht said. "We started reading this book every single Wednesday. It's called 'The Energy Bus,' it basically talks about how negative energy can make the entire team environment or team spirit go away."

It turns out that Knecht, who is also a placekicker for the American Fork football team, had more than just a little to do with this particular exercise. Reading sections of the book is something that the gridiron Cavemen also do — and Knecht figured it might translate to the soccer team.

"I knew that we hadn't exactly been doing something correct and I think little things like that can make a big difference. When I played football, I saw that — they read the same book," Knecht said. "I asked my coach (Casey Waldron) and he thought it was a good idea, too."

Lewis Knecht

School » American Fork
Grade » Junior
Sport » Soccer, Football

Utah

C1

Whittingham has been hinting, or lamenting, that most power schools would go down this path at some point. When Utah played USC in 2022 — the year Lincoln Riley overhauled the Trojans with 26 transfers and won 11 games — he said it was getting harder to build programs through old-fashioned high school recruiting.

"You saw several teams this year have almost complete 180s because of talent brought in through the portal," Whittingham said back then. "It has turned into a one, two-year project [to rebuild]."

Whittingham seemingly adopted that approach this year. Utah only took 15 recruits out of high school. It was the lowest total for the Utes in a decade. At the same time, Whittingham signed 12 transfer additions.

On signing day, he openly admitted the light high school recruiting class was becoming more of the norm. He said he needed to leave room for transfer portal spots or late, high-end high school recruits that could sign in the spring.

"It used to be that you sign the bulk of your class on signing day," Whittingham said. "That isn't the case anymore."

For the last decade, Utah averaged 22.6 high school commits per year. The previous low was 17 in 2021.

But Whittingham and his staff saw the rule changes in recruiting, particularly with the removal of most transfer imitations, and figured they had to manipulate their roster differently or get left behind.

Even the most old-school coaches can learn new tricks when winning is on the line.

Whereas Utah used to sign three-star players and hope they developed, now the Utes can almost outsource the development and mitigate the risk. Utah can let that three-star player go to a Group of Five school and develop there. If the prospect hit, Utah could always recruit that player again and bring them in through the portal.

DAVID BECKER Associated Press file photo

Utah coach Kyle Whittingham looks on from the sideline before the Utes' Las Vegas Bowl matchup against Northwestern on Dec. 23, 2023, at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas.

And with the extra roster spaces that cleared, the Utes could sign ready-made transfers who were already proven. It would, in theory, immediately upgrade the depth and the talent. And it would decrease the amount of misses on the roster.

Utah would still recruit high school players, but mostly focus on four- and five-stars. These were players, the Utes think, that are probably the closest to contributing quickly out of high school anyway.

"You got your power schools and, forgive me, but everybody else G5 on down, you're really a junior college now," Elliss said. "Because these kids can transfer [out] right."

In Elliss' estimation, the rules have created a farm system. The Power Four has the most resources, most NIL and now unlimited access to G5 players to bring them up. Why wouldn't Utah use that to their advantage?

"You don't know moving forward what rules and regulations the NCAA is going to continue to put out to make it easier for guys to transfer. That puts a lot more stress on high school kids," Whitted said.

Plus, with the way NIL contracts are structured now, there isn't much of an advantage of signing a high school player over a transfer portal player anymore. That high school player could also leave after six months just as a portal addition could. So if there is a risk with both, Utah's staff figured it might as well err on the side of the player who could produce the quickest on the field.

"Hypothetically, we could sign a high school kid this spring and they could say, 'Hey man, it ain't working I'm leaving.' Boom," Whitted said.

Utah's most recent high school classes have reflected this emphasis on going after just the top-end players and letting the G5 gobble up the rest.

Utah signed two four-stars in the last class and eight the year before that. While the volume of recruits isn't there, the average recruit ranking is near the top of the Big 12. Most three-stars Utah is taking are high-end three-stars who are on the fringe of four-star status. There are still some projects, but fewer.

Just looking at Utah's in-state recruiting, it has mostly focused on the top five players in the state. Whereas BYU has recruited well from the 10-to-20th raked players, Utah has signed 12 top-five players since 2017.

The No. 1 player in the state has gone to Utah each of the last three years.

As for what could change this approach, and have Utah focus on high schoolers again, Elliss suggested a potential super league of some kind. "You have to blow up the system," he said.

It is possible, in a hypothetical football super league, there would be multi-year NIL contracts and portal guardrails. That would make schools more likely to want to dip back into the high school ranks where they can develop their own players over multiple years and not poach other players so easily.

College football is already slowly moving toward that with the introduction of revenue-sharing and salary caps after the House vs. NCAA settlement last week.

"You can't blame the kids. It's free agency. That's good for them," Elliss said. "It's just trying to take the NFL and have free agency every year. There's no current long-term contracts. There's one-year deals. Not even one year in reality. It's a couple months kind of thing. So how long would an NFL team and or the league survive under that kind of structure? It wouldn't."

But until then, Utah is still going to keep going down the transfer portal strategy.

The Utes may not love it, but it is the best business.

POOR