

Focus pays off as West wins 5th consecutive band title

B. Scott Anderson 8:48 a.m. PDT May 18, 2014



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CORVALLIS – If you didn't know that West Salem doesn't focus on competition, it might be hard to believe.

West Salem, however, captured its fifth consecutive Class 6A Band State Championship Saturday at the LaSells Stewart Center on the campus of Oregon State University.

West Salem director Todd Zimbelman said winning was never on the forefront of West Salem's collective mind prior to the competition.

"We talk about putting on our best performance," he said. "I'm sure the the students want to win and everybody comes here to be the best, but we focus on the music and doing our best. If the judges like it, they like it. If they don't, they don't. We just worry about ourselves."

West Salem was the final school to compete Saturday and completed four musical pieces en route to the title.

"It's pretty fantastic," Zimbelman said. "The kids had a great performance. It was very musical and it was a great combination of emotion and precision."

Zimbelman said he thought the difference for his group was the heart and passion it displayed during the performance.

"All of the kids work really hard, and we work really hard on getting the music as precise as possible, and then we work on getting as much emotion and passion as we possibly can," he said. "We're trying to send the energy of the music in every piece to the audience. It's all about communicating and it's a communication that you

can't really put into words. You can't really describe it. It's the intrinsic value of music."

Zimbelman pointed to the music educators at local elementary and middle schools, particularly Adam Stephens Middle School band teacher Jamie Hall and Walker Middle School band teacher Phil Rundquist, as keys to the West Salem program.

"They do an amazing job," he said. "It's a team effort. Our whole area is committed to excellence in music – band, choir and orchestra. I'm just so blessed to be a part of Salem-Keizer. I'm so blessed to be a part of that community in West Salem and the entire community."

Two other Salem-Keizer schools placed in the top-5 Saturday. McNary took home third and South Salem finished fourth.

"I thought the kids did fantastic," said McNary director Jennifer Bell. "They performed wonderfully."

Bell, in her third year at McNary, said one area McNary has lacked in the past was confidence in its own musicianship. On Saturday, McNary didn't have that problem.

"In the past, they played well, but never really played well at state," Bell said. "But today, they were confident when they walked in, they were confident when they began, and so when I look at the students, they're having fun, their music sounds good, they're playing it well and they know they're playing it well. They're just up there and they're into it – completely engulfed in the music. It's exactly how they wanted it to go off. It was much better than even they thought it would be."

The Saxons, who didn't place in the top-5 last year, were thrilled with their performance.

"We think it went very good overall," said Carlos Ramirez, a freshman trumpet player for South Salem. "There were some minor things that happened, but they weren't that big. In the sight reading, we did really good. We're all very happy about that."

Two other Salem-Keizer schools – North Salem and Sprague – competed Saturday, but did not place in the top-5. Still, the directors from both schools were happy.

"With everything we've been working on in the last five weeks since our last competition, it all kind of came together today," said North Salem director Brian Bell. "We feel pretty good about it and the kids had smiles on their faces which is better than them totally stressing out."

North Salem sophomore clarinet player Hannah Kutten echoed Bell's sentiments.

"I was happy with our performance," she said. "I think that we weren't nervous. Sometimes, we get nervous and we're just not as good as we could be, but I think we rocked it today."

While West Salem was the final performer Saturday, Sprague opened the day, kicking off the competition with an 8 a.m. performance.

"Our on-stage performance was the best we've ever done on this campus," said Sprague director Rick Greenwood. "A stage is usually terrible to play on because you can't hear anything, but we made some adjustments this morning, so our experience was good. They could hear each other and could perform together, so that was really helpful and we enjoyed it a lot."



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