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# Boys' State High School Hockey Tournament Preview: Class 2A



By [Heather Rule](#) - March 7, 2018

This year's boys' state hockey tournament is stacked with heavyweights, talented players and experienced programs that keep coming back again and again.

Class 2A will crown a new champion this year, since the 2017 winner Grand Rapids was shut out 6-0 to Section 7 champion Duluth East in the section quarterfinal. Expect a full Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul to watch some of the best high school hockey around. The Class 2A quarterfinals start at 11 a.m. on Thursday. Consolation games shift to the University of Minnesota starting on Friday.

Three of the eight teams are making state appearances after the girls' programs at their schools played at state. Edina won the girls' Class 2A title, Centennial finished as the runner-up and Hill-Murray lost both games at state.

A few ways to keep up with the action on social media (other than following the Zone Coverage team, of course): #TheTourney18, #mshsl, [@FollowThePuck](#), [@tourney\\_18](#). Quarterfinal, semifinal and championship games are televised locally on KSTP Channel 45.

Let's take a look at the Class 2A quarterfinal matchups on Thursday.

### **Lakeville North v. No. 2 seed Edina – 11 a.m.**

*Lakeville North Panthers (16-10-2), Section 1 champion, South Suburban Conference*

The Panthers are back in the state tournament for the seventh time (as Lakeville North) after a brief absence. Before the North-South split, Lakeville also made the tournament from 2002-04. The Panthers made history in 2015, capping an undefeated season with a Class 2A title for their only championship. They finished as a runner-up in 2014.

Top-line senior defenseman Garrett Daly is a Bowling Green commit with six goals and 21 assists this season. The rest of the top line leads the way in points as well. Junior left winger Spencer Schneider leads the team in goals and points with 25 tallies and 45 points. Junior Shane Griffin and senior Blake Brandt each have 38 points. The Panthers have a two-goalie tandem in Caleb Mayer (6-7-1) and Will Johnson (10-3-1).

Lakeville North tied top-seed Minnetonka 2-2 early in the season, then lost to state entrants Duluth East 6-5 and St. Thomas Academy 4-0. They beat Lakeville South 4-2 in the section final.

*Edina Hornets (26-2-0), Section 6 champion, Lake Conference*

If there's one team that people might think of when it comes to the state hockey tournament, it's Edina. The Hornets will make their 33rd trip to state (including five appearances as Edina East in the 1970s and one as Edina West in 1981), though they had a two-year absence after nine straight state appearances from 2007-15. They last won the Class 2A title in 2014 and are in search of a 13th state championship.

They're led by Star Tribune Metro Player of the Year, Sammy Walker with his 32 goals and 36 assists. Junior defenseman Ben Brinkman is a 40-point scorer this year. Junior forward Mason Nevers had

21 goals and 34 assists in the regular season.

They pounded Wayzata 8-1 in the section championship game. They collectively outscored opponents 165-45 during the regular season. Their only losses have come to the tournament's top seed, Minnetonka 5-2 in the Schwan's Cup and 5-3 at Minnetonka. They also beat Minnetonka 8-2 at home, and they also beat state tournament teams Centennial (twice), Hill-Murray and St. Michael-Albertville during the regular season.

The Hornets are led by long-time coach and former North Stars player Curt Giles.

### **St. Michael-Albertville v. No. 3 seed Duluth East – 1 p.m.**

*St. Michael-Albertville Knights (23-5-0), Section 8 champion, Mississippi 8 Conference*

This marks the inaugural state tournament appearance for St. Michael-Albertville. The Knights already made school history with a record 23 victories this season, plus they're on a 12-game winning streak. To get to the Xcel Energy Center, the Knights knocked off the section's top seed and last year's Class 2A runner-up Moorhead by a 6-5 score. They scored four straight goals after going down 2-0 just 1:41 into the game.

Their team boasts 12 seniors and a talented sophomore class. Luc Laylin scored twice in the section final; he has 12 goals and leads the team with 32 assists. Adam Flammang is the team points leader with 47 (25 goals, 22 assists). Co-captain Blake Spetz has 35 points (14 G, 21 A) and co-captain Zach Sjelin has 11 goals and 13 assists.

Senior goaltender Justin Damon (22-5) has six shutouts this season.

*Duluth East Greyhounds (23-2-3), Section 7 champion, Independent*

The Hounds are the lone team from greater Minnesota in the Class 2A tournament – and they almost didn't make it. They were down 2-0 to Andover in the section final to start the third period but came back with a pair of goals, including the tying goal from junior Ryder Donovan (a North Dakota commit) with 1:14 left in regulation. Sophomore Logan Anderson was the overtime hero at the 4:50 mark as the Hounds completed their comeback for a 3-2 victory.

Senior Garrett Worth leads the team with 64 points (42 G, 22 A), followed by Donovan's 58 (14 G, 44 A). Both are on the first line with senior defenseman Luke LaMaster, who has four goals and 39 assists and is committed to play hockey for the University of Wisconsin.

Twenty years ago, the Hounds won their third state hockey championship in a victory over Anoka at the St. Paul Civic Center. The other titles came in 1995 and 1960 during the one-class tournament. This marks the 23rd state appearance for Duluth East. The last time they were in the tournament in

2015 (their seventh state trip), the unseeded Hounds knocked off No. 2-seed Edina 3-1 in the state semifinals before finishing as a runner-up to Lakeville North in the title game.

Long-time coach Mike Randolph earned his 600th career victory this season in a win over section-rival Andover on Dec. 9. Duluth East has regular-season victories over state tournament entrants Centennial, Lakeville North and Minnetonka.

### **Hill-Murray v. No. 1 seed Minnetonka – 6 p.m.**

*Hill-Murray Pioneers (13-11-4), Section 4 champion, Metro East Conference*

Hill-Murray pulled off the section-final upset of top-seeded and rival White Bear Lake 3-1 at their home Aldrich Arena. Sophomore Henry Eischen, who started the season the JV squad and only had one goal on the year, scored a pair of goals in the game.

The Pioneers are extremely young with only four seniors who scored goals this season. They got 31 goals from their nine-man junior class and 16 from their sophomores. Their goaltender, Remington Keopple, is also a sophomore. He's allowed just four goals in the last four games heading into state tourney play.

This is another program with a lengthy history at the state hockey tournament. It's the 30th time Hill-Murray has been represented. Since 2006, they've been to state every year except 2011, 2014 and 2016. Their third state title came back in 2008. The last time they made it past the quarterfinals was in 2013 when they finished runner-up to Edina.

The Pioneers lost to St. Thomas Academy (twice), Edina, Minnetonka and tied with Centennial during the regular season. Junior Ben Helgeson, University of Wisconsin commit, has 19 goals and 20 assists at the top of the stats sheet. Senior Michael Fleischhacker has 31 points (17 G, 14 A). His younger brother, Matthew, is a freshman defenseman – the lone ninth grader on the roster.

Hill-Murray is 11-7-1 all-time versus Minnetonka.

*Minnetonka Skippers (24-2-2), Section 2 champion, Lake Conference*

Minnetonka was ranked No. 1 in the last coaches' poll and received the No. 1 seed in the tournament. Like some others, though, it took a little extra work to make it back to state for the first time in eight years. They fought off another hockey power, Holy Family, for a 5-4 victory in double overtime. Sophomore Teddy Lagerback tied the game with just three seconds remaining in regulation. Then junior defenseman Josh Luedtke, a Northern Michigan commit, scored the winner at the 11:33 mark in the second overtime period. Luedtke scored both the team's overtime winners this season.

This year's Lake Conference co-champions, filled with a squad of 10 seniors, are tied for the second-most victories in school history at 24. Junior Jack Bayless is a 50-point scorer this season with 22 goals. Lagerback has 19 goals and 18 assists. Bobby Brink, a sophomore forward committed to Denver, has 16 goals and 33 assists. Their lineup is pretty deep with a lot of points across the board.

Because of their depth, the Skippers thrive in the third period. They have outscored teams 58-20 in the final frame and are 20-0 when leading after two periods.

They also feature a potent penalty kill that has as many short-handed goals (12) as power-play goals allowed.

The Skippers are led by first-year head coach Sean Goldsworthy, a 1990 graduate of Minnetonka High School. He helped his team to third place in his senior season as player before playing hockey at St. Olaf College in Division III. He also played some professional hockey, as the apple didn't fall far from the tree. He's the son of former North Stars player Bill Goldsworthy.

Minnetonka is back at state for its sixth overall appearance in search of the elusive state title. They were also the top seed in 2010 but were upset by 2-seeded Edina 4-2 in the championship game.

### **No. 5 seed Centennial v. No. 4 seed St. Thomas Academy – 8 p.m.**

*Centennial Cougars (19-6-3), Section 5 champion, Northwest Suburban Conference*

Centennial is making its fourth state tournament trip. They won the Class 2A title in their first shot at state in 2004 and were back again in 2013 and 2014. They beat out conference-rival Maple Grove 6-4 in the Section 5 championship game this season. They're in the middle of an eight-game winning streak.

Senior Lucas McGregor has 68 points this season, which is tied for third on the all-time scoring list at Centennial for a single season. Additionally, he is the fourth all-time scorer at Centennial with 159 career points. He needs four more points to pass Centennial graduate and Dallas Stars player Tyler Pitlick. McGregor had a stretch earlier this season with three straight hat tricks and has currently scored nine goals over the last four games.

Senior Hayden Brickner has 22 goals and 26 assists for the season and scored six goals in a single game against Anoka. Senior Carter Wagner adds 18 goals and 29 assists.

Centennial lost twice to Edina, to Duluth East and tied Hill-Murray during the regular season.

*St. Thomas Academy (25-2-1), Section 3 champion, Metro East Conference*

Expect to see a sea of Cadets in the seats to cheer on St. Thomas Academy for the 11th state tournament appearance, though just the third in Class 2A. St. Thomas won five Class 1A titles before moving up. They also went to state in 2015 and 2017 in Class 2A.

The Cadets have plenty of depth with eight different players scoring double-digit goals and six players with at least 30 points this season. Center Payton Matsui and right winger Ray Christy lead with 58 points each; Matsui has 28 goals and Christy leads the team with 43 assists.

Senior goaltender Atticus Kelly (21-1-1) is one of the best in the state, is up for the Frank Brimsek Award and has a .941 save percentage with five shutouts this season. Ray Christy, Rob Christy and Chase Foley are all set to play Division I hockey for Colorado College.

This season, the Cadets' blemishes have been few, with an overtime loss to Duluth Marshall, a season-opening 5-4 overtime loss to Minnetonka and a 3-3 tie to the Skippers in the Schwan's Cup in December. They haven't trailed after two periods since the season-opener against Minnetonka.

St. Thomas is a special teams machine with 39 power-play goals scored (36 percent) and just nine allowed on the penalty kill (87 percent).

They're led by the coaching duo of Tom Vannelli, who won two national championships under coach Herb Brooks at the University of Minnesota, and Greg Vannelli, an All-American player at the University of St. Thomas.

*Sam Ekstrom contributed to this preview. He'll be calling five tournament games on AM 660/1440.*



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