

★ STAR TRIBUNE
SPORTS
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Dance pioneer leaves lasting legacy

Wayzata's Leslie Swiggum will be coaching in her final state tournament.

By JACK WARBICK, special to the Tribune

Leslie Swiggum stands in the gym watching the Wayzata Trojets go over their routine for yet another run at a Minnesota dance team state championship. It's a scene the coach, better known around the school and state dance circles as "Twig," has been a part of for almost all of her 44 years at Wayzata.

But there's something different in the way she stands, observes and coaches the girls this year. This is her last state tournament, which runs Friday and Saturday at Target Center. "It's a bittersweet moment. I love the kids, I love the other coaches, I love the relationships with the families," Swiggum said. "You reach a point where, 'OK, this is good.' And I've got awesome coaches that are going to take over."

After over four decades and countless hours of coaching generations of dancers, Swiggum, 66, will retire from her post with one of the most decorated dance programs in the state.

Though Swiggum didn't dance growing up, she became a local legend in dance. She was among those instrumental in helping it gain official status as a Minnesota State High School League-sponsored activity more than 20 years ago. She has helped lead the Trojets to 11 state championships, and many of the hundreds of dancers she has instructed have become dance coaches themselves.

Humble beginnings
When Swiggum started coaching in 1975, dance team in Minnesota was in its early stages, with no governing organization. Three-division coach Cindy Clough sent Swiggum and other dance coaches a letter in the summer of 1980, and they created the Minnesota Association of Dancettes (MAD).

"We pretty much had to invent everything. We had to invent the judging system. We had to write the sheets. We had to write bylaws and mission statements, and we had to hire an attorney and become incorporated for a non-profit," said Clough, who now owns a dance business called Just for Kids. "Swiggum's probably one of the most ethical people that I know, and trustworthy, and she was a constant presence on the board."

With guidance from MAD and its successor organization, Minnesota



had raised concerns before the tournament that Fairbault had copied another team's routine.

Swiggum declined to discuss the episode in a recent interview, saying she wanted to focus on positives. When she wasn't allowed on the floor during meets, Alyse Lorio was in charge and gained enough experience to take over the Trojets this season and going forward.

"She'll be here all week, and then we'll go to competition and I'll be in charge, and she came and sat in the stands and watched, so that had to be ridiculously hard," said Lorio, who was coached by Swiggum and later danced at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Swiggum still fills in as a substitute teacher from time to time at Wayzata. She said she plans to stay around dance while pursuing a new passion: leading civil rights tours in the South. She and her husband fly with as many as 20 people to Atlanta, drive through Alabama and Mississippi, and finish the walking trip in Memphis, site of the National Civil Rights Museum. They visit historical landmarks and talk to veterans of the movement along the way.

"We make no money. We do it because people need to understand our history and how it relates to what's going on today," Swiggum said.

Wayzata looks to close out the season with a good showing this weekend at the Class 3A tournament. The Trojets took first in both jazz and high kick in their section.

"It's amazing to have someone who's been here for so long, to be a part of the legacy," senior captain Lauren Hinkle said.

"We're doing it for each other, but we're doing it for Swig. It's her last year, we want to get her a double blue."

DANCE TEAM STATE TOURNAMENT
Where: Target Center
When: Just competition Friday high kick Saturday
Schedule: Issues for both days: Class 1A qualifying at 11:30 a.m., Class 2A and 3A at 2 p.m., Class 1A finals at 5:30 p.m., Class 2A and 3A at 7:15 p.m.

the kids, and girl, and work ethic," said Swiggum, who retired as a teacher at Wayzata in 2011. "Some coaches are screamers and yellers, and we never operate that way. Everything is calm. Everything is encouraging, and then kids will do things for you. You can't yank kids for 44 years and feel OK about that... They know the same Swig shows up every day."

The final years
Her role changed starting in the 2012-13 season, when she and the head coaches of these other teams served one-year MSJSL suspensions after they and their teams stood off to the side of the Target Center floor holding hands in protest as Fairbault was named high-kick champion in Class 3A in 2015. The coaches

SECTION 5 BRECK 7, MINNEAPOLIS 0



Minneapolis goaltender Maave Talman stopped a shot by Breck forward Sadie Lindsay in the third period Thursday night.

Qualley's hat trick sparks Breck

Breck junior forward Ally Qualley scored a rare hat trick — her first one — in a span of 10 minutes, 12 seconds in the first period.

"Amazing," Qualley said. "Specially in a section final. It's unbelievable."

Her goals propelled No. 2-ranked Breck to a 7-0 stanza over Minneapolis in the Class 1A, Section 5 title game Thursday night at the Ice Garden.

First-year Breck coach Steve Perrin and Keith Radloff were on the other bench last year when

Qualley scored the overtime winner against Cross. This season, it's been fun to see Qualley, who has 13 goals and 40 points, pick up her intensity and emotion, Perrin said.

"She's playing at a different level," Perrin said.

Sophomore Sadie Lindsay opened the scoring 1:11 into the game with her 26th goal of the season. Then senior defenseman Ella Brophy made a 9-2 on Breck possession offensively.

"We had a lot of energy," said senior co-captain Carly Benick, who finished

with five assists. "We moved the puck really, really well."

Junior co-captain Olivia Morkley scored her 26th and 27th goals of the season for the Mustangs (19-11) eighth-grade goalie Uma Correas made 24 saves for her first shutout.

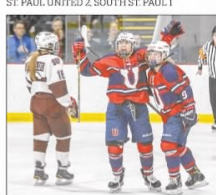
The Mustangs now look to win back-to-back Class 1A state titles.

The Minneapolis Storm (15-11-1) played without eighth-grader and second-leading scorer Maddy Helmsmeier, who was injured in the section semifinal.

REACTOR FILE

GIRLS' HOCKEY CLASS 1A SECTION FINALS

SECTION 4 ST. PAUL UNITED 2, SOUTH ST. PAUL 1



St. Paul United's Catherine Kerin, center, celebrated her second-period goal against South St. Paul with teammate Jenna Hoppe.

St. Paul United back in state field

For the third time in four years, St. Paul United edged South St. Paul in a closely played Class 1A, Section 4 championship game.

This time, United won 2-1 at Doug Wong Arena in South St. Paul on Thursday night. With the victory, St. Paul United (15-12-1) headed to its fourth consecutive girls' hockey state tournament.

Senior goaltender Konnie Giese made 18 saves to key the victory.

"You had to stay laser-focused the entire game, and then as soon as the buzzer went off it was a huge sigh of relief," Giese said.

St. Paul United junior forward Sophia Hoppe scored the game-winner with about 30 minutes left in the game, beating Packers goalie Delaney Norman high on the goal.

Hoppe's goal came less than two minutes after South St. Paul defenseman Lili Ramirez tied the score at 1-1.

United senior forward Catherine Kerin scored the first goal of the game on a slip shot about 11 minutes into the second period.

South St. Paul (16-7-3) outshot St. Paul United 24-13, but Giese stayed solid, especially when United played shorthanded on a 5-on-3 Packers power play for 1:44 late in the first period.

"The goaltender played really well, she just really covered things up quick, we didn't get a lot of rebound chances," South St. Paul coach Dave Palmquist said.

"But I was really proud of our team. I feel like we did everything right but win."

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