

PREPS VOLLEYBALL STATE TOURNAMENT

CLASS 1A QUARTERFINALS

Better start for Mayer Lutheran

Top-ranked Crusaders won after exiting 2018 tournament early

By HEATHER RULE Special to the Star Tribune

The last time Mayer Lutheran's volleyball team was at the state tournament, it fell in five sets in the 2018 quarterfinals as a No. 2 seed. After Thursday's Class 1A quarterfinal match, Lily Wachholz remembered those sad feelings walking into that postgame team conference.

"She said, 'Last time we did it, we were crying and sad,'" Mayer Lutheran coach Jodie Grimes said. "So we're not going to repeat that this year. So far so good?"

This year's No. 1-ranked Crusaders had a reason to be all smiles and no tears after their 25-4, 25-20, 25-30 sweep over unseeded South Ridge. Mayer Lutheran got off to such a fast start that it rattled off a dozen consecutive points before South Ridge got on the board.

Wachholz, a senior middle blocker, led the way with seven kills to add to her team-leading total of 344 this season. Though the Crusaders received the wealth and got 34 kills from 11 different players.

"The Crusaders (30-2) are in search of their fourth state title in their 19th appearance. South Ridge (21-7) made its state tournament debut. Coach Brad Oleksiak and setter Isabella Schneider both used the word 'blockade' to describe the match against their tough opponent."

"We don't face many teams like that up north," Oleksiak said. "It's tough when you can't match up with their height and their athleticism."

**Bethlehem Academy 1, Breckneridge 0** Bethlehem Academy took an early lead before setting off a 10-3 run to finish the first set against Breckneridge. That momentum ended with a three-set sweep: 25-12, 25-14, 25-14. It was all part of a well-executed, well-planned game.

"We study teams a lot," Cardinals coach Chris Behm said. "We know who their big hitters were. We worked on our block a lot last week. We also know where the holes were in their defense."

The Cardinals focused on tipping and executing their block well, along with getting powerful kills from junior Kate Thye (15 in the match) and senior Ellie Cohen (6) to run away with the second set.

Bethlehem Academy (21-11) has a state record-tying seven state titles, the last in 2014. This is the fifth state tournament appearance overall for Breckneridge (29-0) that first in 41 years (finished as the Class 1A runner-up in 2001).

**Minnesota 3, Ridge Greenhush-Middle River 0** Senior Isabella Hoffbeck and Abby Freese each reached 17 kills to help No. 3-ranked Minnesota to a 25-14, 25-11 victory.

Minnesota had a bit of a different rotation in the match, while resting senior setter McKenna Yost, who took a number at Wednesday's practice but should be free to play in the semifinals, according to coach Hayley Frain. That created opportunities for younger players like sophomore defensive specialist Grace Hanson and freshman middle blocker Elvira Fain.

"I think that all of us stepped up," Hoffbeck said. "And our ball control and our passing was good, so that made it easier for everyone to run the offense."

Minnesota (30-4) makes its 14th appearance at state having won the last two state tournaments held (2018 and 2019).

Junior setter Cassie Dahl led the Gators (29-0) in their state tournament debut with 24 set assists and four digs.

**Walker-Hackenschack-Akeley 3, Legacy Christian 0** In its first state appearance, third-seeded Legacy Christian was upset in three sets by Walker-Hackenschack-Akeley: 25-12, 25-22, 25-28.

Senior Allyson See had 10 kills and 23 digs to help the Wolves (29-5) advance.

"I think we definitely know that we were the underdogs, but being the underdogs didn't stop us by how we played our game," See said.

Legacy Christian (24-7) couldn't get away from its errors. They made 29 hits in the match compared to only 20 for the Wolves.

CLASS 4A SEMIFINALS



Wayzata senior middle blocker Mel Goldstein stretched for the ball during the unbeaten Trojans' victory over Rogers in the Class 4A semifinals Thursday.

Raptors, Trojans reach final

East Ridge keeps improving, but Wayzata's still unbeaten.

By JIM PAULSEN jim.paulsen@startribune.com

The only uncertainty surrounding the East Ridge volleyball team after the Raptors beat Eden Prairie 25-13, 25-20, 25-17 Thursday in the Class 4A tournament semifinals at Xcel Energy Center was when the Raptors' season went from promising to exceptional, on the verge of a state title.

They didn't shy away from tough opponents early, taking tough losses while testing their mettle. They even took a loss at Wayzata, their opponent in Friday's night final.

"Pressure, we played all the main teams and now we're playing them again," said 6-5 senior outside hitter Brett Carlson, who knocked down 17 kills in the semifinals. "It shows the growth we've had all season. The wins we didn't have then, we're getting them now. It shows we deserve to be here."

Eden Prairie (20-7) had built a reputation as a gritty, determined group unafraid to fall behind and able to rally.

East Ridge (22-9) won the first two sets, Eden Prairie won the third set but this time, the Raptors couldn't complete the comeback.

"Being down 0-2, it's not easy," Eden Prairie coach Chad Becker said. "We did it once (against Forest Lake in the quarterfinals), but East Ridge made us pay for it. We just had too many unforced errors."

East Ridge, which took down Eagles — which had played in seven consecutive championship games from 2011 through 2019 — in the Section 1 championship to go to the state tournament, is counting on a repeat of Friday's success.

"This is the exact game every coach imagines when you talk about a state championship," Carlson said. "It's our turn to play our best game and hopefully take a 'W'."

Wayzata (30-0) For one set, the Trojans and the Raptors looked remarkably even.

Wayzata had lost only six sets all year, but one of them was to Rogers during a late-season tournament. The Trojans had played one of their best matches of the year in beating Lakeville North in the quarterfinals.

Call it state-tournament woe. The teams went back and forth in that first set. Rogers even held a late lead, 22-22. But as the state's top team all season, Wayzata has made a habit of taking its opponents best shot and not flinching.

The Trojans scored the last three points, took the set 25-23, and never let Rogers threaten again, winning in straight sets 25-23, 25-13, 25-13 to advance to Saturday's championship match.

"We did nice job in the first set, but a little pressure on them," Rogers coach Joe Schmidt said. "The second set, we tried to do a little too much. Ended up with a lot of errors on our side of the net."

Wayzata (30-0) has spent its entire season in opponent's cross hairs, knowing that everyone wants to take down the big dog.

"It's a big momentum shift," said Ella Vierkle, the Trojans' talented libero whose repeated ability to dig Rogers' attacks and turn them into playable passes was central to Wayzata's victory.

"After we took that first set, it kind of felt like we've reached their spirit a bit."

Wayzata's sublime setter, Stella Swenson, said the first set victory was crucial to what she called "the comeback."

"I think the first set was just a game for us because the first set is kind of a dog-eat-dog in volleyball," she said. "It can take momentum to a terrific season for first-time entrant Rogers (29-5), the players saw it as a first step on a journey to turn the program into a perennial contender."

It was amazing, putting the school on the volleyball map," Rogers' senior outside hitter Bryan Reines said. "It's not something this school used to."

"I think we broke down," Bombers senior Jack Whedell said. "We didn't play our best ball. They wanted a little more than we did."

**Jackson County Central 3, Annandale 0** Fourth-seeded Jackson County Central swept Annandale 25-11, 25-14, 25-19 to advance to the semifinals.

The Huskies (28-6) started the match on an 8-0 run and never looked back.

"I think it just really helped us build our momentum going into the whole match," Jackson County Central coach Diederik Wanson said.

They closed out the match with four straight points, including two kills from senior Belle Voss. She finished with 14 kills and 21 digs.

Kali Jones and Riley Peeper each had six kills for the Cardinals (25-9).

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