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PREPS

MENARDS · Carrier turn to the experts

A lost coach, a winning season

Lakeville South regrouped in wake of Krebs' resignation.

By DAVID La VAQUE
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Ben Burk, above, took over as head football coach at Lakeville South amid an ongoing police investigation of former coach Tyler Krebs. The Cougars are 7-1 and ranked No. 2 headed into the Class 6A playoffs, led by RB Johnny Shabaz, left.

Photos by MATT BLEWETT Special to the Star Tribune

Unfamiliar penmanship on the dry erase board in the Lakeville South locker room told senior running back Johnny Shabaz something was amiss in the lead-up to his team's football game on Sept. 20.

Shabaz knew the handwriting did not belong to head coach Tyler Krebs. Moments later, offensive coordinator Ben Burk walked in.

"Coach Krebs is the first one in the room all the time, so I thought, 'Uh-oh, what's going on?'" Shabaz said.

Burk kept it simple. He told players that Krebs, who led the program to a surprise Class 6A tournament semifinals appearance last November, would not be on the sideline against Eastview.

"Everyone's heart dropped," Shabaz said.

The Cougars won the game to go 3-1 for the season. Three days later, they learned Krebs, in his third season as head coach, had resigned amid an investigation by Apple Valley police into "suspected breach/unauthorized computer access" at Eastview High School.

The team just kept on winning. Lakeville South (7-1) was ranked second in the final Associated Press poll and earned one of the four No. 1 seeds for the Class 6A playoffs. The Cougars open play at 7 p.m. Friday at home against No. 8 seed Roseville.

"They are super-resilient kids," Burk said. "For a long time, that was the knock on this community, that the kids weren't resilient and weren't used to having negativity. But they just have it in the back of their minds now that whatever happens, we'll overcome it."

Rallying after midseason changes is becoming commonplace. A year ago, the Cougars installed a new offense and transformed from an irrelevant team to a state tournament semifinalist.

The straight-T rushing attack, borrowed from Elk River, features three running backs in the backfield and misdirection that keeps defenses guessing and the chain gang hustling to keep pace.

"Most of the people in the stands say they don't even know who has the ball," said Shabaz, who leads the team with 582 rushing yards and nine touchdowns. "It fools a lot of people. When I first watched film of Elk River, I was like, 'Where is the ball?'"

The sleight-of-hand offense fueled a charming story last fall as a No. 6 playoff seed went further than anyone expected. This season, against the backdrop of Krebs' stunning departure, there's a poignant symbolism in how the offense represents the program's identity.

Now you see the narrative: Up-and-coming football team loses its coach and falls back into mediocrity. Now you don't: Two weeks after the departure of Krebs, Lakeville South crushed defending Prep Bowl champion Lakeville North 34-19 and entered the discussion of Class 6A title contenders.

These playoffs offer the challenge of fulfilling expectations. Playing at U.S. Bank Stadium brought the underdog Cougars glory. Not returning this year would invite criticism.

"People know we're not a six seed coming out of nowhere," said Shabaz, a co-captain. "People overlooked us and now they are going to take us more seriously because they know we're the real deal this year."

Senior defensive back/tight end and co-captain George Brekke, who has played football with most of the senior class since third grade, said the Class of 2020 "all treat each other as leaders. That's helped us, knowing we have each other."

A similar brotherhood exists among the coaching staff and helped ease the unprecedented transition. Like the players, Burk found himself "right away kind of in shock" when the Krebs news came down.

"But as I was standing there with all the coaches, they said, 'We got this. Let's take care of business,'" Burk said. "It was a great job by all of the assistant coaches jumping in and filling gaps. That allowed me to just take a deep breath and do my part."

The Krebs investigation remains active. Apple Valley police Capt. Nick Francis said Thursday that authorities "are working with school district IT groups to analyze the computer access data. If it is determined a crime was committed, we intend to file charges."

Krebs, a business education teacher at Lakeville South, remains on paid administrative leave.

Shabaz said the sting of Krebs' departure took a few weeks to subside.

"It was odd not having him there," Shabaz said. "It was a sort of emptiness."

Senior linebacker Nick Austin, the team leader with 52 tackles, said he keeps in contact with Krebs. Austin called his former coach "a great guy and a great mentor."

"On senior night, he texted all of us to thank us for being part of the program," Austin said.

Players want to make a strong playoff run one more source of pride for the school, the community, Burk and the assistant coaches and Krebs.

"Last year we were hunting everybody," Austin said. "Now everyone is hunting us. The next step is to hopefully make it to the championship game and win that."

THE PICKS

Class 6A starts the weeding-out process

Class 6A football joins the playoff party Friday while all other classes engage in semifinal games Saturday. High school sports reporters Jim Paulsen (23-6) and David La Vaque (10-19) offer their best insights into who moves on and who moves out.

FARMINGTON (5-3) AT SHAKOPEE (3-5), 7 P.M.

David says: Both teams' records reflect the up-and-down performances by their top offensive players. Shakopee, a tested team predicated on running the ball, looks more poised for postseason success than Farmington's passing attack. **Shakopee 21, Farmington 17**

Jim says: Farmington hasn't shown the offensive firepower of earlier this season. The defense hasn't been good recently, although the past two foes — Lakeville South and Lakeville North — have a lot to do with that. Shakopee has the look of a team on the verge of good things. **Shakopee 34, Farmington 24**

EASTVIEW (3-5) AT EDINA (4-4), 7 P.M.

David says: Three consecutive, grinding victories make Edina the team no one wants to play. The common thread in those games: senior Jonathan Bunce averaging 112 rushing yards and the defense not allowing any second-half points. **Edina 24, Eastview 14**

Jim says: It pains me to say, David, that I agree once again. Edina has lost four games, all to teams at or above .500. The Hornets are playing their best football right now, whereas Eastview's strong start has dissolved into five losses in its past six games. **Edina 20, Eastview 7**

CRETIN-DERHAM HALL (4-4) AT PRIOR LAKE (4-4), 7 P.M.

David says: These teams have combined for one victory in the past four weeks, zero for Cretin-Derham Hall. Yet the Raiders might be the one trending upward. Why? The Raiders have been within a touchdown of victory each time. **Cretin-Derham Hall 17, Prior Lake 14**

Jim says: The battle-tested Lakers' schedule has been brutal. The combined record of opponents in the Lakers' four losses is 26-6. Cretin-Derham Hall's four consecutive losses seem to be the opposite of trending upward. **Prior Lake 23, Cretin-Derham Hall 15**

STATE TOURNAMENT
CLASS 6A (FIRST ROUND)
All games Friday at 7 pm

- Anoka at Eden Prairie
- Blaine at Woodbury
- Buffalo at St. Michael-Albertville
- Burnsville at Mounds View
- Cretin-Derham Hall at Prior Lake
- Eagan at Wayzata
- Eastview at Edina
- Farmington at Shakopee
- Forest Lake at Totino-Grace
- Hopkins at Lakeville North
- Minnetonka at Maple Grove
- Osseo at East Ridge
- Roseville at Lakeville South
- Stillwater at Centennial
- White Bear Lake at Rosemount

GIRLS' TENNIS STATE TOURNAMENT

Copeland mixes game to mix up opponents

By HEATHER RULE
Special to the Star Tribune

If Edina senior Nicole Copeland feels any added pressure as the two-time defending Class 2A girls' singles champion, she's certainly not showing it.

"I feel like I earned my spot here, so I'm happy with the pressure," Copeland said Thursday at Baseline Tennis Center on the University of Minnesota campus. "I always take pressure as a privilege."

Copeland

The No. 2-seeded Copeland won both of her matches in the girls' tennis state tournament. She won her first match 6-0, 6-2 over St. Paul Harding senior Amanye Reynolds, then defeated St. Cloud Tech junior Ashley Tarrolly 6-1, 6-3 in the quarterfinal.

Copeland fell behind 2-1 in the second set against Tarrolly before grabbing leads of 3-2 and 4-3 on her way to closing out the match. Though she had to adjust to Tarrolly changing the pace of the ball early in the second set, Copeland didn't let the deficit balloon.

Besides using her powerful ground strokes, Copeland also won points with her volleys and overhead winners at the net. It's a change from the past two years when, Copeland said, she was more of a baseline player "just kind of scrapping balls back."

It's something she said she's worked on improving over the past year.

"I've been trying to become a more full-court player and come into the net and try and finish points at the net more," Copeland said. "It's been working pretty well."

Even though she's seeking her third state singles title, she's not focused on comparing this tournament to years past. The last three-time Class 2A singles champion was Edina's Whitney Taney, who won in 2004-06.

Copeland will face Maple Grove sophomore Zoe Adkins in the semifinals Friday in a rematch from last year.

Adkins, who took third last year as an unseeded player, won her quarterfinal 3-6, 6-0, 3-0 over Roseville sophomore Nicole Ridenour, who retired in the third set because of a back injury. In the first, unseeded Ridenour got off to a 4-1 lead before taking the set.

"It just wasn't my best tennis," said Adkins, the No. 3 seed. "But I think she made me play worse. So all the credit to her. It's too bad she got hurt, because I feel like it could've been a more competitive second set."

Top-seeded Karin Young, an Eastview sophomore, dropped only two games in her pair of matches to advance to the semifinals. She will face Woodbury senior and No. 4 seed Delaney Schurhamer, who defeated fifth-seeded Nicole Snezhko, a senior from Armstrong, 6-1, 6-1 in the quarterfinals.

Class 1A

The top three seeds in the Class 1A singles tournament advanced Thursday to the quarterfinals set for 8 a.m. Friday at Reed-Sweatt Family Tennis Center in Minneapolis.

Defending state champion Arlina Shen of Blake will play sophomore and fifth-seeded Megan Muller of Pequot Lakes. The other semifinal will be senior Clare Palen of Rochester Lourdes, the No. 2 seed, against Blake junior Sonia Baig, seeded third.

RESULTS AND SCHEDULE

CLASS 2A
Individual tournament
At Baseline Tennis Center

Singles
Thursday • First round
- Zoe Adkins, Maple Grove, def. Claire Loftus, Rochester Mayo, 6-7, 6-1.
- Nicole Copeland, Edina, def. Amanye Reynolds, St. Paul Harding, 6-0, 6-2.
- Annika Munson, Mahtomedi, def. Ancele Bolensek, Rochester Century, 6-2, 6-3.
- Nicole Ridenour, Roseville def. Alli Hietala, Duluth East, 6-0, 6-3.
- Delaney Schurhamer, Woodbury, def. Peyton Kopel, Foley, 6-0, 6-0.
- Nicole Snezhko, Armstrong, def. Greta Gillach, Chisago Lakes, 6-2, 6-1.
- Ashley Tarrolly, St. Cloud Tech, def. Lily Anderson, Orono, 5-7, 6-4, 6-3.
- Karin Young, Eastview, def. Karina Elvestrom, Minnetonka, 6-1, 6-0.

Quarterfinals
- Adkins def. Ridenour, 3-6, 6-0, 3-0 (injury default).
- Copeland def. Tarrolly, 6-1, 6-3.
- Schurhamer def. Snezhko, 6-1, 6-1.
- Young def. Munson, 6-0, 6-1.

Doubles
Thursday • First round
- Paige Anderson-Kaitlin Tran, Elk River, def. Brittany Nguyen-Julie Nguyen, Woodbury, 7-5, 7-5.
- Julia Baber-Paige Sargent, Rochester Century, def. Molly Austin-Paige Trondson, Mounds View, 6-3, 6-4.
- Shay Calloway-Maggie Payette, Duluth East, def. Kate Ingebrigtsen-Natalie Petersen, St. Cloud Tech, 2-6, 6-3, 7-5.
- Amanda Biao-Katerina Smirinschi, Mounds View, def. Meadow LaBuke-Emma Thole, St. Michael-Albertville, 6-4, 6-0.
- Annika Elvestrom-Sarah Shahbaz, Minnetonka, def. Cora Andersen-Georgia Bent, Lakeville South, 6-1, 6-2.
- Jessica Ip-Shaylynn Reger, Edina, def. Taylor Gil-Carli Olsen, Orono, 6-3, 6-1.
- Emme Johnson-Joey Trella, Benilde-St. Margaret's, def. Julia Bengtson-Alayna Lindquist, Becker, 6-4, 6-0.
- Alaina Lee-Anna Lee, Buffalo, def. Jaelyn Orth-Madeline Smith, Henry Sibley, 6-4, 6-2.

Quarterfinals
- Baber-Sargent def. Al. Lee-An. Lee, 6-1, 4-6, 6-2.
- Biao-Smirinschi def. Johnson-Trella, 4-6, 6-1, 6-0.
- Elvestrom-Shahbaz def. Anderson-Tran, 6-1, 6-6.
- Ip-Reger def. Calloway-Payette, 6-0, 6-2.

Friday
- **Singles & Doubles:** Semifinals and consolation semifinals, 8 am; Consolation final, third place and championship, 11:30 am

CLASS 1A
Individual tournament
At Reed-Sweatt Family Tennis

Singles
Thursday • First round
- Sonia Baig, Blake, def. Ally Agerland, Holy Family, 6-0, 6-2.
- Vanessa Sarkosky, Maple River, def. Emma Fagerstrom, Thief River Falls, 6-3, 6-3.
- Lydia Delich, Eveleth-Gilbert, def. Kori Douglas, Montevideo, 6-3, 6-3.
- Tia Dykema, Osakis, def. Greta Nesbit, LeSueur-Henderson, 6-4, 6-0.
- Ava Hanson, New London-Spicer, def. Jade Lentus, Perham/New York Mills, 6-3, 7-5.
- Megan Muller, Pequot Lakes, def. Izzy Schmiesing, New London-Spicer, 6-2, 6-3.
- Clare Palen, Rochester Lourdes, def. Claire Nommers, Fairmont, 6-0, 6-0.
- Arlina Shen, Blake, def. Jane Spading, Rochester Lourdes, 6-0, 6-0.

Quarterfinals
- Baig def. Hanson, 6-0, 6-0.
- Muller def. Delich, 6-4, 6-3.
- Palen def. Dykema, 6-1, 6-0.
- Shen def. Sarkosky, 6-0, 6-0.

Doubles
Thursday • First round
- Elise Bierbaum-Avery Stilwell, Litchfield, def. Anneka Lundgren-Jacie Smith, Virginia, 6-2, 6-1.
- Emma Brurlow-Ava Waller-Kih, Lake City, def. Tasha Achermann-Rose Han, Staples-Motley, 6-2, 6-1.
- Caroline Cameron-Emily Melin, Blake, def. Emily Melin-Ryann Witter, Rochester Lourdes, 6-0, 4-6, 6-4.
- Camryn Helfarth-Mara VanNyhuis, Osakis, def. Haley Cichon-Jenna Dvorak, Staples-Motley, 6-2, 6-1.
- Alyson Jay-Bella Suk, Blake, def. Elle Becker-Jaelyn Haler, St. James, 6-0, 6-1.
- Khloe Lund-Bera Nelson, Thief River Falls, def. Tea Armstrong-Ariba Howard, Blue Earth Area, 6-1, 7-6 (1).
- Alissa Thorfinnson-Danielle Thorfinnson, Minnewaska Area, def. Emma Borowicz-Catherine Tiedemann, Crookston, 6-0, 7-6.
- Anna Seitz-Ava Warren, Virginia, def. Valeria Betzner-Nerah Lara, Litchfield, 6-2, 6-0.

Quarterfinals
- Bierbaum-Stilwell def. Lund-Nelson, 6-4, 6-2.
- Cameron-Melin def. Helfarth-VanNyhuis, 6-1, 6-0.
- Jay-Suk def. Brurlow-Waller-Kih, 6-0, 6-1.
- Seitz-Warren def. A. Thorfinnson-D. Thorfinnson, 6-4, 5-7, 7-5.

Friday
- **Singles & Doubles:** Semifinals and consolation semifinals, 8 am; Consolation final, third place and championship, 11:30 am

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