

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2019

SPORTS

STAR TRIBUNE C15

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PREPS VOLLEYBALL STATE TOURNAMENT

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CLASS 3A CHAMPIONSHIP WAYZATA 3, EAGAN 2

# Wayzata ekes out first state title

The Trojans beat previously unbeaten Eagan in five sets.

By JIM MULLEN  
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Three months ago, when his volleyball team was kicking off the season, Wayzata coach Scott Jackson felt the Trojans had state championship potential. In fact, there were times when he pictured a Wayzata vs. Eagan championship match. Two years ago, closing out the season on volleyball's biggest stage, Xcel Energy Center.

Jackson's vision came true Saturday, and it's safe to say the result lived up to his hopes. Exceeded them actually, both in length and drama.

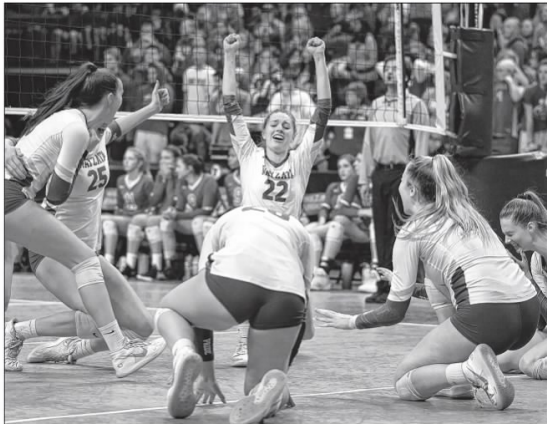
When it was over, Wayzata had won a tense, back-and-forth five-set marathon, defeating top-seeded Eagan 25-20, 14-25, 25-21, 19-25, 16-14 for its first Class 3A state championship.

"I'm speechless," Jackson said. "It was a great-out effort, never believing we were done. There were some moments where it was dark and tough, but we just kept grinding."

With the match tied at two sets apiece, the dramatic fifth set pitted Wayzata's relentless attack against Eagan's depth and versatility. The lead never grew larger than a single point.

Eagan had one chance to close out the match after a kill by Abby Hennessy made the score 14-13. Wayzata (13-1) rallied and scored three straight points, the last on a tip kill by senior Kate Long that went against pre-match preparations.

"Going against Scott's words, I tipped on the last point," said Long, who finished with 20 kills, with a laugh. "It's the capital area, but I tipped deep-line on match point. It's



Wayzata setter Olivia Johnson (22) celebrated with her teammates after the Trojans defeated Eagan in five grueling sets for the Class 3A state title.

the goal, to end your senior year this way."

Said Jackson: "We wanted to go out on the arm of the kid I had the most confidence in at that point, and that was Kate." Eagan (11-1), awaiting a more powerful attack, couldn't handle Long's change of pace, resulting in match point and setting off a wild celebration.

"It was a battle," Eagan coach Kathy Gilen said. "Wayzata played a great game. If we play this game 10 times, we probably each win five. It was just great faith to a great season."

Wayzata, attacking from the outset, jumped to a quick lead in the first set and rode it to a five-point victory.

Eagan adjusted in the second set, closing down the alyps that Wayzata was finding with a strong block. The set was practically over before Wayzata countered the adjustment, with Eagan winning the set 11-9.

The third and fourth sets settled into a back-and-forth pattern, with each team tak-

ing turns making plays, only to see the other come up with answers. Wayzata won the third set by four points, Eagan the fourth by six, setting up the dramatic fifth set.

Sophie Josenwitz led Wayzata with 25 kills and Long added 20. Sophomore Sierra Hill led four Eagan players with double-dig kills with 13.

For Eagan, it was a third consecutive loss in the state championship game.

"I'm exhausted from it," Gilen acknowledged. "But I can't look back again. Last year, I was super proud of the team and when they did it, I'm equally proud of this team. I don't know what we could have done much different."

CLASS 2A CHAMPIONSHIP STEWARTVILLE 3, NORTH BRANCH 2

## Lingering pain is forgotten; Stewartville unseats champs

Lamb returns from injury, buries final two kills.

By HEATHER BUE  
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Stewartville junior Erin Lamb suffered a concussion a couple of weeks ago, only to return and grab her make in the celebration in the section championship victory over Kasson-Mantorville, according to her coach, John Dushoy. She wasn't able to practice until Wednesday, and that was limited.

On Saturday evening, she put away two final kills to help top-seeded Stewartville win its fifth state volleyball title with a five-set victory over the defending champions.

"Instant relief," Lamb said of her reaction after the final point. "I just dropped to the floor."

Top-seeded Stewartville won the Class 2A crown by defeating No. 3 seed North Branch 20-25, 25-20, 25-22, 25-22 at Xcel Energy Center.

Stewartville, which had a 21-11 lead, stifled a late North Branch rally in the fifth set. Lamb finished with 21 kills, and 56 for the tournament.

Stewartville (30-4) returned all but one player from last year's team that translated to a more experienced and more confident team.

"The expectations from the start were pretty high," Dushoy said. "This is pretty



Stewartville outside hitter Lily Weich (12) fell to her knees as she celebrated the win over North Branch with her teammates.

dare special."

Stewartville senior Kaitlyn Prodzinski, who had 18 kills, also was wearing an injury, a pulled hip flexor. It's finally accomplish what her team set out to do all year long "until hand 'n' me yet," she said. "It's the best feeling ever."

North Branch (29-5) was a 4-in-five-set match in state tournament play dating to last year. It only needed to find a way to put a little more offensive pressure on Stewartville. North Branch coach Mike Soltbickha said, "We lacked the efficiency to

really put the pressure on," he said. "And they (Stewartville) did a better job of digging and passing."

The Vikings (29-5) finish as the Class 2A runner-up for the second time in three years.

Senior Cianna Soltbickha led North Branch with 13 kills, giving her 82 for the tournament.

"Knowing that our high school volleyball career ended with two second places and a first place in a state tournament is a great accomplishment," she said.

CLASS 1A CHAMPIONSHIP MINNESOTA 3, WATERVILLE-ELYSIAN-MORRISTOWN 0

## 'Phenomenal defense' lifts Minnesota to a sweep, repeat

Dig after dig wears away at second-seeded W-E-M.

By JIM MULLEN  
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The ball was, more often than not, right where the Waterville-Elysiyan-Morris town hitters wanted it. They leap, swing their arms and hit balls that, for most of the season, would then smack the floor on the other side of the set with a resounding thud.

Only this time, those balls were coming back at them.

Minnesota, the defending champ, employed a remarkably airtight defense, augmented by a full-court attack to defeat No. 2-seeded W-E-M 25-20, 25-20 on Saturday at Xcel Energy Center for its second consecutive Class 1A state championship.

"They played phenomenal defense," Buccaneers coach Crystal Lamont said. "They were the best defensive team we've played all season."

Minnesota (33-3) is led by two dynamic hitters in sophomore Natalie Rolbeck and junior Abby Hennessy. But the Vikings preach defense first, and it was that stone-wall defense that led to their victory.

They had 90 digs as a team and put up a block at the net that routinely stymied the W-E-M hitters.

"We're just really scrappy team," Hennessy said. "We don't want a lot of easy balls to hit the floor, and that kind



W-E-M middle hitter Delaney Donahue lined up a kill attempt as Minnesota's Abby Hennessy rose for a block in the third set.

of frustrates another team."

Perhaps the most notable defensive play in a match full of them came in the second set. Buccaneers hitter Kylie Pittman deflected a ball toward the corner that seemed a certain kill. But Morgan Hennessy, Abby's older sister, somehow got below it and not only dug out but sent it back for a crucial point.

It became obvious that W-E-M (34-3) was not about to crack the Minnesota defense.

"There's nothing better than if they're swinging really

hard and it comes your way and then you bring back the other way," Abby Hennessy said. "There's nothing more fun than that."

W-E-M outside hitter Delaney Donahue said: "It makes it hard. It's frustrating that they can never give up on a ball."

Abby Hennessy led Minnesota with 15 kills, while Rolbeck smashed 14 and Morgan Hennessy chipped in with 12. Torin Richards had 10 kills and Trina Herzig had nine, along with five blocks, for the Buccaneers.