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#TheTourney17: Grand Rapids Ends 37-Year Title Drought





By [Heather Rule](#) - March 11, 2017

Throw the year 1980 and hockey together and the logical tidbit is about the Miracle on Ice when Herb Brooks led Team USA to a gold medal. Another hockey note from that year? It was the last time Grand Rapids won a state hockey title.



"I don't even know how to put this into words," said head coach Trent Klatt. "Just so excited to see the excitement in the kids' eyes."

Grand Rapids also won back-to-back titles in 1975 and 1976 with Don Lucia on the team, the current coach of the Gophers men's hockey team. Klatt played for the Gophers and spent 15 years in the NHL as a player.

The Thunderhawks (23-7-1) won the state tournament this year as the No. 5 seed in Class 2A. They beat Maple Grove in the quarterfinal Thursday night before pulling off the mega upset of top-seeded Eden Prairie in the semifinal.

"Tonight and last night was our best hockey that we've played all year," Klatt said. "And I guess if there's a time to play your best, it'd be down here if you're fortunate enough to get here."

He said he saw his players do things the last couple days of the state tournament that he hadn't seen them do all year. The culmination of stuff the coaches tried to teach them throughout the season. No doubt the state tournament was impressive, but they had quite the run in their Section 7 tournament, too.

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They came out of a stacked section as the No. 4 seed, beating Andover, top-seed Elk River/Zimmerman and then No. 2 seed Duluth East. The Thunderhawks were down 2-0 to Elk River before scoring five goals in the third period – including a hat trick from junior Gavin Hain – for a 5-3 victory in the section semifinal.

Against Duluth East, it took double-overtime to get the 3-2 victory and send themselves to state. Senior Micah Miller was the hero in that game, scoring at the 10:18 mark. Those tough games probably helped the Thunderhawks.

"I think we were a little battle-tested more than maybe some of the other teams," Miller said. "I think we really came together as a group, especially coming into sections."

In Saturday night's all-north championship (the first one with non-metro teams since Roseau beat Grand Rapids in 2007), Hain led the offensive outburst for the Thunderhawks, netting a hat trick with 5:12 left in the second period.

"Pucks were bouncing on my stick," Hain said. "I was lucky enough to bear down and bury them."

Throughout the tournament, with the championship not being any different, the Thunderhawks routinely pounded their helmets with one fist as they skated by their bench in celebration of goals. The act is in a scene from the movie "The Wolf of Wallstreet," which is kind of a team movie, Hein said, and the pounding is something they've done all year.

Hein's third goal made it 4-0. The Spuds didn't go away, though. Junior Carter Randklev scored a power-play goal late in the second and junior Jack Stetz finished off a tic-tac-toe play with 15.3 seconds remaining in the period to make it just a 4-2 game headed into the final period of hockey.

Ultimately, getting down 4-0 is a pretty tough deficit to completely overcome for the Spuds.

Grand Rapids scored again in the third for a three-goal lead before Moorhead answered again. The Thunderhawks sealed the game with an empty-netter.

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“Our kids didn’t give up though,” he said. “There wasn’t really a doubt that they were going to give up.”

The Spuds are still known for always being the bridesmaid and never the bride, finishing as a Class 2A runner-up seven times and another second-place finish in 1992 as a Tier I team.

HEATHER RULE



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