

BOYS HOCKEY

# Cathedral too much in the title game

**By Jared Rubado**  
jrubado@echopress.com

“Leaving it all on the ice” is one of the common cliches referenced when a season comes to an end. However, for the Alexandria boys hockey team, head coach Ian Resch can say his boys did just that in their Section 6A championship loss to top-seed St. Cloud Cathedral 4-1.

“We made some mistakes tonight – had some neutral zone turnovers that we wish we could have back,” Resch said. “But that doesn’t change the way our guys played. I’m proud of the way our guys battled. Cathedral has a good team and they were the better hockey team tonight.”

From the drop of the puck to the final buzzer, the Crusaders had an edge that Alexandria (20-6) wasn’t able to match consistently.

For the first time all season, St. Cloud Cathedral (24-4) stacked its top line with its three star juniors. Blake Perbix, Nate Werner and Jack Smith provided a large chunk of the chances. Perbix was able to beat Alexandria senior goaltender Bailey Rosch halfway through the first period.

onds later, Cathedral took a two-goal lead when senior forward Jackson Savoie put one through the legs of Rosch.

“We made some little mistakes in the first and it cost us,” Resch said. “We were chasing the rest of the game. We weren’t able to get a good forecheck established. In some ways you could say that we beat ourselves tonight.”

Alexandria was tasked with trying to replace one of the centerpieces on its team. Senior forward Ben Doherty separated his shoulder in the semifinal game against Sartell-St. Stephen. The Cardinals’ leading goal scorer suited up, but was unable to play his usual amount of minutes.

“He’s a team-first guy,” Resch said. “I know he was playing with a lot of pain and he could hardly move his arm. He willed his way and gave us what he could.”

The Crusaders scored midway through the second period to take a three-goal lead. Alexandria senior forward Zach Wosepka cut the lead back to two with 58 seconds remaining in the period. The goal gave his team and the hundreds of Alexandria fans some life. “Our crowd was loud tonight,” Wosepka said.



Eric Morken / Echo Press  
The Alexandria boys hockey team takes a knee around senior goaltender Bailey Rosch after St. Cloud Cathedral won a 4-1 contest in the section title game on Feb. 28.

“That’s what you get when you play for this team.”

St. Cloud Cathedral was quick to silence the noise when sophomore forward Cullen Hiltner scored his second goal of the night 1:37 into the third period. The air in the Municipal Athletic Complex was sucked out of the Alexandria side of the rink. As each minute ticked

off the clock, the reality of the Cardinals’ season coming to an end set in for everybody in attendance. For the seniors, a missed opportunity at a back-to-back trip to the state tournament is not how they will choose to remember their playing days.

“I’ve grown up with these guys ever since I was four-years-old,” Wosep-

ka said. “They’re not my team, they’re my family. I love those boys more than anything and it’s been a hell of a ride. I can’t thank them enough for what they’ve done for me.”

The people that have followed Alexandria boys hockey over the last four years have heard the names Jack Westlund and Ben Doherty more times

than they can count. As two players that produced more than most high school hockey players dream of, the lasting impact of what they did in an Alexandria jersey won’t be forgotten.

“Those two took our program to another level,” Resch said. “They set a standard that the rest of the guys aspire to be like and they were leaders. Those two played a huge role and they’re going to be greatly missed. You don’t replace guys like that. What a treat it was to stand behind the bench and watch them the last four years.”

Another cliché that is often repeated when a career comes to an end is words of advice – “don’t take anything for granted.” Wosepka reflected on his last three years and gave that simple message to the guys who will return next season.

“You hear it a lot but it really does go by so fast,” Wosepka said. “There was a line from ‘The Office’ where someone said ‘I wish there was a way to know you’re in the good old days before you left them.’ I had the best times of my life playing with these boys and for that I am thankful.”

# Giving everything he had

Doherty plays through pain against Crusaders

**By Eric Morken**  
emorken@echopress.com

Alexandria senior Ben Doherty was the last to leave the bench as St. Cloud Cathedral players celebrated a 4-1 win in the Section 6A title game on Thursday night.

It wasn’t the way Doherty envisioned his standout career ending with the Cardinals. Not just the loss, but the fact that he wasn’t able to play his normal role on the top line of Jack Westlund and Caleb Strong that has been so good all season.

Doherty separated his left shoulder on a hit along the boards during the third period of Saturday’s section semifinals against Sartell-St. Stephen. He did not start in the championship five days later, but he dressed and played limited shifts.

“It was a tough decision,” Doherty said after the game. “It was real last minute, but I knew this could be my last run. I wanted to give my team any help I could. I’m the type of guy where it’s hard for me to sit out. It was just trying to help my team out any way I could.”

Doherty played through a lot of pain. “It was enough to keep me off the ice,” he said. “It’s hard to explain.”

One of his first shifts was met with a big check near center ice in the first period. That jolted him, but he regrouped on the bench and got back on the ice in a very limited role the rest of the way, including for part of a second-period power play.

“I was ready whenever coach needed me,” Doherty said. “I knew I’d be vulnerable to any hit, so it was wher-



Eric Morken / Echo Press  
Alexandria seniors Bailey Rosch (left) and Ben Doherty embrace after the Cardinals fell 4-1 during the Section 6A championship game in St. Cloud.

ever I could help out. If it was blocking shots or just being a cheerleader on the bench, I was ready for it.”

Head coach Ian Resch has frequently lauded Doherty for what he brings to Alexandria as a captain on and off the ice. He led the team in points through the regular season and will go down as one of the leading point-getters in program history.

Doherty knew producing to that level would be all but impossible in Thursday’s title game, so he set out to try to make an impact any way he could.

“I wasn’t going to be at full strength or to my normal ability, but it was just real important to me to be there for the guys as much as I could,” Doherty said. “Just to be on the bench and encouraging them was kind of my goal.”

The Alexandria players went over to senior goalie Bailey Rosch right after the buzzer rang and went to a knee to

encourage him. As Doherty went over to join them, some of his teammates got to their feet to meet him with a hug.

Rosch and Doherty both embraced near the blue line before Alexandria accepted its second-place medals. Then the student section started a chant of, “We love Benny.”

“That support is awesome,” Doherty said. “It’s great to have those guys who have supported me and all the others guys. All the guys I went to school with, I grew up with, it’s great to have them. It’s hard to let them down, but sometimes stuff happens and you have to deal with it. The support was awesome to have them backing me up.”

The loss marked the end of Doherty’s high school hockey career, but he will be back on the ice next season. He plans to play juniors in the North American Hockey League with the Kenai River Brown Bears in Alaska. “Still have to make the team, but that’s the goal,” he said.

Doherty and Jack Westlund were regular contributors as freshman for the Cardinals and the two went on to help accomplish big things for this program. The list includes three straight trips to the section title game, and the program’s best-ever finish at state by taking second last year.

Those are ultimately the memories Doherty will take with him from Alexandria once the sting of a disappointing ending disappears.

“For both (Jack and me), that’s a lot of work we’ve put in together,” Doherty said. “A lot of blood, sweat and tears. We’ve been through a lot together as a duo, and it’s going to be hard leaving him next year and being apart from him. I hope we left behind a hard-working mentality and something future generations can grow on and use to their advantage.”

BOYS BASKETBALL

# Alexandria holds on to beat Willmar

**By Jared Rubado**  
jrubado@echopress.com

The final game of the Alexandria boys basketball season was decided by one possession against the Willmar Cardinals (14-12) on Friday night.

After leading by as many as nine, Alexandria held on to beat Willmar 63-61. Hundreds of Alexandria residents packed themselves into the gym for the main event of the evening, the Alexandria Aces final local performance, but they were treated to a thrilling game.

Sophomore forward Treyton Thompson had a great game on both ends of the floor. He scored 19 points and was all over the place on defense. He was a problem that Willmar struggled to solve.

However, Thompson got in foul trouble after Alexandria took a 34-31 lead into halftime. They were able to extend the lead to nine with 10 minutes to play but head coach Forrest Witt saw his center hit the bench early with four fouls. He returned to the game with about four minutes left but fouled out in the final seconds.

Alexandria made clutch free throws and forced two turnovers in the final 30 seconds to never let up its lead. After Willmar missed the



Thompson

half-court heave for the win at the buzzer, Alexandria let out a sigh of relief.

Alexandria earned the third seed in the Section 8AAA playoffs this week. The second seed, Sartell-St. Stephen, had a lower QRF rating by 5.4 points and the two teams split the two head-to-head matchups this season. If both teams win their quarterfinals games that were set for Tuesday night, they are set to play the rubber match in the semifinals.

Alexandria had to get past Sauk Rapids-Rice at home on Tuesday night. The two teams split their two regular-season matchups.

The Cardinals finished the regular season with two straight wins after also beating Big Lake on Feb. 28.

**WILLMAR** 31-30 - 61  
**ALEXANDRIA** 34-29 - 63  
**ALEXANDRIA SCORING:** Roderick - 8, Hoepner - 12, Thompson - 19, Hedstrom - 13, Jones - 9, Hoskins - 2.  
**WILLMAR SCORING:** Ty Roelofs - 13, Jake Evans - 11, Bryan Weidemann - 4, Drey Dirksen - 18, Ryan Slette - 2, Hazma Mohamed - 4, Connor Stevens - 3.  
**ALEXANDRIA 67, BIG LAKE 62**  
**ALEXANDRIA:** Trey Hoepner - 10 points, 2 assists, 2 rebounds, 3 steals; Cody Branson - 5 points, 1 rebound; Carrson Jones - 10 points, 8 assists, 1 block, 2 rebounds, 4 steals; Kristen Hoskins - 4 points, 1 rebound; Anders Hedstrom - 8 points, 1 block, 3 rebounds; Colton Roderick - 12 points, 3 assists, 1 rebound, 1 steal; Treyton Thompson - 18 points, 5 assists, 4 blocks, 2 rebounds, 2 steals

## PERFECTION

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hopes is a long run of state titles.

“I’m going to be better next season,” Meyer said. “More wins, same amount of losses.”

### VanLuik takes second

VanLuik breezed through his opening two rounds by pinning his opponents in 1:29 and 30 seconds on Friday. Then on Saturday, West Central Area-Ashby-Brandon-Evansville’s Wyatt Olson gave him a good match that VanLuik prevailed in in a 5-3 final.

That meant a match-up with top-ranked Michael Nelson of Dover-Eyota in the title match. Nelson (45-3) was dominant in his first three wins, pinning his first two opponents and then winning by tech fall (16-1, 3:36) in the semifinals.

That trend continued in the title match as Nelson grabbed an early lead and then pinned VanLuik in

the second period at 2:41.

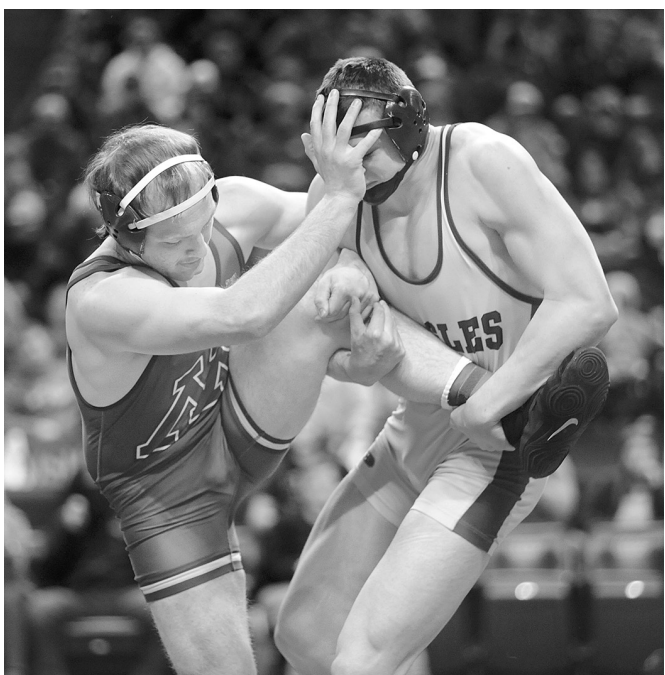
“He’s been above me all year. I never knew what he looked like,” VanLuik said of Nelson. “He’s pretty strong, and I just couldn’t slow him down. I knew he cradled a lot and that’s hard to defend when he’s real long like that.”

VanLuik finished his season with a 39-4 record. He said he will use the runner-up finish as motivation to continue to improve in the offseason with the hopes of winning the title as a senior. All six of Minnewaska’s state entrants could say the same thing of this state experience with none of them being seniors. That should bode well for the Lakers again next winter.

“If we all stay together as a team and as a family, it should be good,” VanLuik said.

► Minnewaska had four other wrestlers join Meyer and VanLuik at the state tournament. Here’s a look at how they did.

**113 POUNDS:** Freshman **Easton McCrory** (31-10)



Eric Morken / Echo Press  
Minnewaska junior Tyler VanLuik tries to get free during his match against top-ranked Michael Nelson in the 195-pound championship match.

finished his tournament with a 2-2 record after falling 5-4 in his final match against ACGC’s Brady Holien (33-13).

McCrory won his open-

er by fall on Friday before falling in the quarterfinals by a 3-1 decision. He won his wrestleback opportunity with a 12-4 major decision win before his season came

to an end against Holien.

**145 POUNDS:** Mason Blair, Minnewaska’s junior who is 35-6, could not generate enough offense in his opening match with Baxter O’Reilly of Goodhue at 145. O’Reilly (43-9) won a 7-0 decision in the opener. Blair never got a wrestleback opportunity as his season ended with 35 wins.

**220 POUNDS:** Junior Dylan Jergenson wrapped up his season in fourth place after losing a close 8-6 final in the third-place match. Jergenson (34-7) wrestled Kaya Lindell (29-10) of Kenyon-Wanamingo in that match.

Jergenson finished the state tournament 3-2 after wrestling three matches on Saturday. He started in the semifinals, where he lost a 13-6 decision to Luke Tweston (35-7) of Frazee. That sent him into a must-win situation against Kodee O’Reilly (44-10), and Jergenson took care of business there to advance to the third-place match.

**285 POUNDS:** Sophomore

**Jakob Swalla** (27-13) found himself in a close match against Alec Francis (28-12) of Caledonia-Houston, but Swalla held on for a 3-2 win in his opener.

That sent him to the quarterfinals, where he ran into top-seeded Craig Orlando (45-1) of Bertha-Hewitt-Verndale-Parkers Prairie. Orlando won his opener by fall in 2:28 and then pinned Swalla in 1:08. Swalla went into wrestlebacks and fell by a 6-3 decision to Quinn Mathisen (23-16) to end his season.

### Orlando of B-H-V-Parkers Prairie repeats

Junior Craig Orlando (47-1) of Verndale and the Bertha-Hewitt-Verndale-Parkers Prairie wrestling team repeated as the Class A state champion at heavyweight.

Orlando did it in dominating fashion with wins of all four of his opponents. The final of those came in 3:24 as pinned Scot Edwards (28-2) of Adrian in the title match.