

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Rematch with the Otters awaits

Cards cruise past Sabres in semifinals

By Jared Rubado
jrubado@echopress.com

Alexandria girls basketball head coach Wendy Kohler likes to say that she has “a team of no stars.” She sings her praises of effort and intensity on both sides of the floor. Fueled by a drive to win as a team, the unselfish play of Alexandria willed this program to another Section 8AAA championship game.

On Saturday night, the Cardinals (22-4) tightened their clamps on defense against the Sartell-St. Stephen Sabres (10-17) and won 45-26.

“We finally got a full week of practice,” Kohler said. “We got to polish up a few things and we knew we had to work because Sartell is a very well-coached team. They have a bunch of great kids and we were really focused coming in.”

The Cardinals exploded offensively for the first seven minutes of the game. Before the Sabres got on the board with a free throw, Alexandria led 16-0. Sartell-St. Stephen found its legs midway through the first half and went on a 9-2 run of its own. Alexandria’s defense remained solid despite the pushback.

“Our offense can carry us through games, but we really focus on defense,” senior guard Kaye Paschka said. “We know our defense wins games for us. We know that if we are struggling on the offensive end, our



Jared Rubado / Echo Press

Alayna Strand looks to avoid a defender in the second half of Saturday night's Section 8AAA semifinal game between the Alexandria Cardinals and the Sartell-St. Stephen Sabres.

defense can pick us up.”

The Sabres were able to clog the paint and not surrender easy points to Alexandria’s forwards. After sophomore Jaya Hatlestad hit a three-pointer as time expired, Alexandria took a 29-14 lead into the intermission.

The Cardinals would not open the half with the same scoring rush they had in the first. It

wasn’t until five minutes had passed that they got their first points. Even though their shots weren’t falling, the Cardinals only allowed four points in that stretch.

“We work hard defensively,” Kohler said. “We do so many defensive drills. Most teams go through a drought like that and we know that our defense

SECTION 8AAA CHAMPIONSHIP

Who: Alexandria (22-4) vs. Fergus Falls (22-4)

When: 7 p.m. Thursday, March 7

Where: Halenbeck Hall at St. Cloud State University

has to hold the fort down and rip boards until the offense can start flowing again.”

There was no looking back for the Cardinals when their shots began to find the bottom of the net again. They opened up a 20-point lead as Alexandria wrapped up its first playoff game of the season with an impressive performance.

“It feels really great,” Paschka said. “We know what it’s like to play in these games. They’re a battle and the next one will be too.”

Paschka was the leading scorer for Alexandria with 12 points.

The championship game will see the third matchup between Alexandria and Fergus Falls (22-4). Even though the Cardinals swept the season series, beating a team three times in a single season isn’t an easy thing to do in sports. Alexandria will rely on experience from years past to get them ready for Thursday night’s game at St. Cloud State University. The tip is set for 7 p.m.

“We’ve been here before. We know what it’s like,” Paschka said. “It’s going to take hard work and dedication. It has all year.”

SARTELL-ST. STEPHEN 14 12 - 26
ALEXANDRIA 29 16 - 45
ALEXANDRIA SCORING- Kaye Paschka- 12; Mia McGrane- 6; Ella Grove- 7; Emily Jones- 8; McKenzie Duwenhoeffer- 6; Alayna Strand- 2; Jaya Hatlestad- 3; Mataya Hoelscher- 2
SARTELL SCORING- Gretta Mahowald- 2; Courtney Snoberger- 6; Aubri Akervic- 9; Emily Driste- 5; Sydney Lund- 3; Adyn Larson- 1

SPORTS SCHEDULE

MARCH 7

BOYS BASKETBALL
Osakis vs. Wadena-Deer Creek in Section 8AA opener, 7 p.m.

Parkers Prairie vs. Wheaton/Underwood winner in Section 6A playoffs, 7 p.m.

WCA vs. Ashby in Section 6A playoffs, 7 p.m.

Brandon-Evansville at Hancock in Section 6A playoffs, 7 p.m.

Minnewaska vs. Morris Area in Section 3AA quarterfinals in Willmar, 7:30 p.m.

GIRLS BASKETBALL
Alexandria vs. Fergus Falls in Section 8AAA Championship at SCSU, 7 p.m.

REGROUP

From Page B1

The Cardinals finished with six top-eight finishes in all. Freshman Anthony Hoyt was seventh in the 500 freestyle in 4:54.20, and sophomore Thomas Williams was eighth in the 100 backstroke in 54.85 to join the relays and Chromey on the podium.

Freshman Nicolas Welle had two ninth-place finishes by winning the consolation finals. He was right behind Chromey in the 100 free (48.26), and had that same finish in the 200 IM in 1:58.69, almost two seconds faster than his prelims time.

The Cardinals showed their depth from there as Hoyt (200 free), Maras (50 free), Olson (100 butterfly), and Jameson Molesworth (100 breaststroke) added scoring in the consolation finals.

“The competition here is very fierce,” Olson said. “One mistake could bump you down a couple places because everyone is so close. It’s hundredths of seconds that people are being pushed out or into the top eight.”

That’s why these swimmers left the University of Minnesota with little regret on Saturday. Their finish at state was the culmination of one of the best seasons in recent history for Alexandria.

The Cardinals were undefeated in duals ahead of winning the Central Lakes Conference championship and Section 5A titles. Walker saw a group rise to the occasion to surprise a lot of people after Alexandria lost a state champion in Nic Chromey to graduation off of last year’s fourth-place team at state.

“We did it because of the hard work, integrity and quality of character of the kids on this team,” Walker said. “They showed up every day. Even though we may be competing against teams with more kids, or more depth, we have more heart. We have more determination, and I think that’s what I remember the most from what they accomplished.”

The seniors on this team hope it’s a tone-setter for the program. The Cardinals have a proud history that includes state titles in 1999 and 2000. Back-to-back solid showings at state have now raised the bar again in Alexandria.

“The biggest thing I hope the underclassmen take away from the season is having the mentality that you can win,” P. Chromey said. “If you put in the work in the offseason and join summer club and get the yards in and try your best in practice, you can make it to this meet. I hope that all the alternates who came and helped cheer us on can see that. I want them to succeed.”

TOP-FIVE TEAM SCORES - 1. Breck/Blake - 423; 2. Northfield - 188; 3. Winona - 177; St. Thomas Academy - 162; 5. Alexandria - 149

ALEXANDRIA RESULTS
FINALS - 200 FREESTYLE - Patrick Chromey - fifth, 1:44.69; Anthony Hoyt - 13th, 1:50.31; 200 IM - Nicolas Welle - ninth, 1:58.69; 50 FREESTYLE - Garrett Maras - 12th, 22.46; 100 BUTTERFLY - Nick Olson - 12th, 57.76; 100 FREESTYLE - Chromey - eighth, 47.91; Welle - ninth, 48.26; 500 FREESTYLE - Hoyt - seventh, 4:54.20; 200-FREESTYLE RELAY - Garrett Maras, Nick Olson, Nicolas Welle, Patrick Chromey - third, 1:26.77; 100 BACKSTROKE - Thomas Williams - eighth, 54.85; 100 BREASTSTROKE - Jameson Molesworth - 12th, 1:01.90; 400-FREESTYLE RELAY - Maras, Olson, Welle, Chromey - third, 3:12.99
PRELIMS THAT DID NOT SWIM FINALS - 100 BREASTSTROKE - Logan Tung - 19th, 1:03.45

STATE WRESTLING

A bittersweet finale
Wyatt Olson wraps up his career with the Knights in third place

By Eric Morken
emorken@echopress.com

Wyatt Olson was the last man standing for the West Central Area-Ashby-Brandon-Evansville wrestling team on Saturday, and the senior did not disappoint.

Olson finished his career by bouncing back from a semifinals loss to control both of his final two bouts, including an 8-3 win over Derek Werner (33-7) of Wabasso-Red Rock Central. Olson led 4-0 early and never lost control of the match. The win gave him a third-place finish at 195 pounds at the Class A state meet.

“At the beginning of the year, that was my goal was top three in state,” Olson said. “Obviously now, I wanted more than that. I wanted that finals match, but overall that was my goal.”

Olson came close to getting a chance in the finals. He wrestled Minnewaska’s Tyler VanLuik (39-3) in the semifinals. VanLuik had pinned his previous two opponents in 1:29 and 30 seconds, but Olson gave him a good match in a 5-3 decision.

“I wrestled him twice before and lost two close matches to him,” Olson said. “I thought I could get him this time, but he came out ready and got me on a takedown right off the whistle. I couldn’t really rebound from that.”

Olson put the loss behind him

quickly knowing he had to finish business. He wrestled Daniel Erlandson (33-10) for the right to wrestle the third-place match and won a 6-1 decision. Olson had wrestled Erlandson three other times this season and beat him all three times.

“I knew his style,” Olson said. “He was no stranger.”

With the win, Olson finished the tournament 4-1 and his season with a 42-6 record overall. His older brother, Royal Crow, finished sixth in state at 160 pounds in the 2015 tournament, and Crow served as motivation to his younger brother this week.

“He is like an idol to me,” Olson said. “I was just hoping I could catch him.”

After coming to state a year ago and going 0-1, Olson had mixed emotions with how his season finished. Some disappointment lingered from falling just short of a shot in the title match, but third place and ending his career with a win was not a bad consolation prize.

“I’m kind of looking back on the steps I could have taken or the opportunities I didn’t take that could have gotten me into that finals match and maybe winning it,” Olson said. “Maybe some regrets there, but overall I never saw myself placing even when I was younger.”

► WCA-A-B-E also sent eighth-grader Anthony Sykora and sophomore Jordon Lohse to the state meet. Here’s a look at



Eric Morken / Echo Press

WCA-A-B-E senior Wyatt Olson (left) wrestles Derek Werner of Wabasso-Red Rock Central in the Class A third-place match on Saturday at the Xcel Energy Center. Olson won the match 8-3 to wrap up his season with 42 wins.

how they did:

126 POUNDS: Sykora was two minutes away from dropping a first-round match and leaving the rest of his stay at the Class A state tournament up in the air on Friday.

Trailing Gable Speltz (29-14) heading into the third, Sykora (29-9) wasted no time turning the tables on Speltz as he got him on his back and pinned Speltz to win the match by fall in 4:25. That advanced Sykora to the quarterfinals at 126 pounds where he matched up against

Brett Willaby (32-3) of Windom-Mountain Lake. Willaby won that match by fall in 4:47, and Sykora went to a wrestleback against Wyatt Lahr, where Lahr won a 5-0 decision.

138 POUNDS: Lohse (36-9) dropped his opening match at 138 pounds. Tagen Miller (42-4) beat him by fall in 3:01, leaving Lohse to see if he would get a wrestleback opportunity. He got it, but fell in a 5-1 decision to Trey Fairbanks (38-4) to end Lohse’s season.

STATE

From Page B1

Woodbury. West won that match by a 5-1 decision to end Borris’ season.

Borris has been solid all winter, but he got matched up against fifth-ranked Swensen of Wayzata in the first round.

Borris had a positive mindset when he saw the matchup.

“Let’s go out and bring my match to him, see if I can beat him,” he said.

Borris got an early escape, but that was the only point he could generate as Swensen (47-3) won a 6-1 decision to advance to the quarterfinals.

There are always things an athlete wishes



I can build on this. I want to come back and place. It makes you want to come back, try harder and go further.

RYAN BORRIS, Alexandria junior wrestler

would have gone differently after a loss, and Borris felt he needed to be quicker on his feet to compete with Swensen.

“I could have had at least two or three take-downs, but I needed to be quicker on the shot,” he said. “Then I needed to sprawl better and start going straight to the leg pass I was hitting, so just working on getting quicker.”

Borris was calm coming into this event. He has wrestled big tournaments through the

Northland Youth Wrestling Association and the stage was not too big for him. He’ll use this first-time experience at the MSHSL state tournament to try to improve as a senior.

“I can build on this,” Borris said. “I want to come back and place. It makes you want to come back, try harder and go further.”

Nelson balances nerves, confidence

Nelson admits that he

didn’t know he would be in this spot a week ago.

He surprised the 113-pound wrestlers at the Section 8AAA meet by taking second to earn his trip to state.

Nelson entered state at 13-11, the fewest wins in his bracket, but he was not backing down heading into a matchup against Class A’s eighth-ranked Zach Hanson (36-5).

“I honestly thought I was going to win,” Nelson said. “All last night, I was looking at a main matchup with Paxton Creese (46-1) of Shakopee. I thought he was going to be my main competition.”

Nelson stuck with Hanson through the first period and had an escape for his lone point of the

match.

Hanson did not leave many openings, though, as Nelson was left wishing he would have been a little more aggressive.

“I thought I wrestled OK,” Nelson said. “I feel like I could have done way better on my feet. Had better shot setups, better finishes. I didn’t really even take many shots.”

There is no doubt that Nelson was nervous right before his first time in this atmosphere.

“I think everyone would be,” he said. “I was nervous but excited to be here, happy.”

With four years left in the program, he will use the experience as motivation.

“Train harder for next year,” he said.