

SPORTS

Section 7AA Gymnastics

Long wait, then state

By Patrick Slack
Staff Writer

It was worth the wait.

Normally, after competing at the section meet, there's a short span of time in which gymnasts have to wait for all competitors to finish to discover if they have advanced to state.

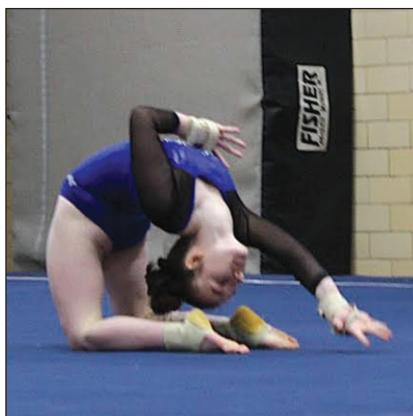
However, this season has been anything but normal.

With competition split into two time blocks due to COVID-19 distancing protocols, and Blaine competing five hours ahead of the other half of the teams in the Section 7AA meet in Forest Lake March 19, Bengal seniors Jenny Riley and Grace Gerard had to wait to see where two of their best routines ever stood up.

After an afternoon and evening, they found out: near the top of the leaderboard, and with tickets to state.

"Both Jenny and Grace had great performances at sections," Blaine head coach Ashley Howard said. "Grace had her career high score and Jenny had her second highest score of her high school career."

"Jenny stands out on vault because of the power she has and her air awareness. She always knows where she is in the air and even if she is slightly off, she can make the corrections in the air and land on her feet. Grace stands out because she has an uncanny ability to stick



Blaine seniors Grace Gerard, left, and Jenny Riley advanced past the Section 7AA Championships March 19 and onto state, with Gerard earning third on floor and Riley earning fifth on vault.



Photos courtesy of Blaine Gymnastics

all her tumbling passes. She has no club gymnastics training either, and is holding her own on all events against girls who have been in club their whole life. Both of them have a natural talent and are extremely coachable."

Gerard earned third place on floor with a score of 9.55 and Riley earned fifth on vault with a score of 9.325 to advance to the Class AA State Championships in Champlin March 27. It is the second state appearance for Riley in a row, and the first for Gerard.

"I would say the section meet went pretty well for me," Riley said. "I got an average all-around score compared to my other meets this year, (but) my vault at sections was

one of the best this season so I knew I had a chance at making it to state again this year. I was a little nervous waiting around for the second session to finish to see if I qualified, but I tried not to get my hopes up in case I didn't make it. I was very excited to hear that I made it to state again. It's such a memorable way to end my gymnastics career."

"I thought it went well," Gerard said. "I knew it could be my last meet — I wanted to have fun and hit my routines, and I think I accomplished that! Once I saw my score, I was pretty sure I qualified. Still, it was super nerve-wracking watching the scores for session two. I was so happy. State has been my goal for

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State Prelim Wrestling

Area trio move on to state's final 8

By Patrick Slack
Staff Writer

Blaine, Totino-Grace and Fridley each had one wrestler advance past their state prelim tournament and onto the final eight in the state in their respective classes March 20.

The state prelims paired the top four wrestlers from two sections into brackets of eight, with the top two moving onto state individual competition. Class AAA will wrestle March 25 and Class AA wrestles March 26, both at St. Michael-Albertville.

Blaine

Luke Studer navigated his way through a bracket with a three-time defending state champ and another wrestler ranked fifth to place second at 132 in the Section 7AAA/8AAA state prelim held in Coon Rapids March 20 to advance. Studer reached the finals with a 12-5 decision and a fall.



Blaine's Luke Studer sprawls and fights off a shot attempt during the finals of the Section 7AAA/8AAA state prelims March 20. Studer advanced to the final eight at 132 in Class AAA.

Photo by Patrick Slack

Cooper Larson (120) and Xavier Powers (285) both placed third for the Bengals, Jordyn Greseth-Clendenning placed fourth at 160 and Bryce Young placed sixth at 120.

Fridley

Josh Franklin fin-

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State Boys Swimming and Diving Championships

Fridley's Herder earns 7th, SLP medley 14th at state

By Patrick Slack
Staff Writer

Fridley's Tyler Herder earned all-state honors in diving in Class A to lead area athletes at the State Boys Swimming and Diving Championships at the University of Minnesota March 18-20.

Herder put together an overall score of 349.10 in the meet, earning seventh place overall.

The Tigers also had three state qualifying swims — earning 17th was the 400-yard freestyle relay team of Jeremy Fischer, Andrew Ramirez, Logan Wuertz and Christian Henrikson (3:32.89), earning 19th was the 200 medley relay team of Logan Wuertz, Derek Severson, Christian Henrikson and Tim Yocum (1:46.30) and earning 21st was Wuertz in the 200 free

(1:54.59).

Fridley earned 24th as a team in Class A.

Spring Lake Park

Spring Lake Park had state entrants in six events in Class AA, led by the 14th-place 200 medley relay team of Sam Clark, Will Privratsky, Nick Starcevich and Braden Ripken (1:38.75).

The 200 free relay team of Ripken, Starcevich, Privratsky and Clark earned 17th (1:30.11), Privratsky earned 17th in the 100 breaststroke (59.85) and 32nd in the 100 butterfly (54.00) and Starcevich earned 19th in the 100 free (47.93) and 20th in the 200 IM (2:00.75).

Spring Lake Park earned 34th as a team in Class AA.

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Fridley had entrants in four events in the State Boys Swimming and Diving Championships March 18-20, earning 24th in Class A. Photo courtesy of Fridley Boys Swimming and Diving

SPORTS

Section Basketball and Hockey

SLP girls, TG boys hoops advance to section finals

By Patrick Slack
Staff Writer

Dominate. Repeat. Section finals.

Back-to-back routs to open the playoffs secured a spot in the Section 5AAAA championship game for Spring Lake Park girls basketball for the second time in three years.

The Panthers opened the postseason with a 71-28 victory over Mounds View March 20, flummoxing the Mustangs with relentless pressure in building an early lead that wouldn't be challenged. Macy Smith put in 23 points to lead the Panthers offensively, with eight apiece from Mikayla Thomas, Averi Dunbar and Kylie Diaz and six each by Madi Ngene and Camryn Smith.

Spring Lake Park, the No. 3 seed, followed by going on the road and knocking off second-seeded Roseville 71-58 in the semifinals March 23, taking control with a 26-5 run to end the first half in taking a 16-point lead into the break.

Smith netted 27, Ngene had 13 and Dunbar scored nine to lead the Panthers offensively.

Spring Lake Park was scheduled to play at top-seeded Centennial for a trip to state March 25. The Class 4A state quarterfinals are March 30-31, at sites to be determined.

Fridley won its Section 5AAA quarterfinal 66-33 at DeLaSalle March 19 before falling 67-36 at Hill-Murray in the semifinals March 23. Cadence Hansen scored 19 points and Meadow Gillispie added 12 in the win over DeLaSalle.

Columbia Heights fell 80-50 against Mahtomedi in the Section 5AAA quarterfinals March 19. Lilah Bergan scored 17 and Saniah Howard Reynolds scored 13 to lead the Hylanders.

Blaine fell 67-59 against Coon Rapids in the Section 7AAAA quarterfinals March 20. Madison Hoehne scored 22 points and Lexi Imdieke scored 13 to lead the Bengals.

Section boys basketball

Totino-Grace pulled away from Columbia Heights 91-65 in a top-five showdown in the Section 4AAA semifinals March 23, setting up a showdown against top-ranked Minnehaha Academy in the section championship March 26.

The third-ranked Eagles received a balanced effort offensively, with five players in double figures. CJ O'Hara led the way with 20 points, Taison Chatman scored 18, Devin Burger scored 12 and Demarion Watson and DJ Akpati each scored 11.

Hassan Kamara scored 23 and Muja



Spring Lake Park's defense was too much for Mounds View to overcome in the Section 5AAAA quarterfinals March 20, with the Panthers rolling to a 71-28 win. Spring Lake Park followed with a 71-58 win at Roseville in the semifinals March 23, earning a spot in the finals against Centennial. View more photos from the week's section basketball action online at abcnewspapers.com/sports. Photo by Patrick Slack

Burton scored 20 for the fifth-ranked Hylanders.

After winning on the road in the quarterfinals, Fridley nearly upset the top seed in Section 5AAA in the semifinals, narrowly falling 70-67 in double overtime against Delano March 23. Tra'Vione Stevenson scored 23, Devin Williams scored 13 and Christian Crockett and Eli Nelson each scored 12 against Delano. The Tigers reached the semifinals by winning 55-53 at Becker in the quarterfinals March 19.

Blaine fell 80-67 against Coon Rapids in the Section 7AAAA quarterfinals March 20. Samuel Olson and Aaron Kaul each scored 16, Dylan Muyres scored 14 and Isaac Goin scored 10 for the Bengals.

Spring Lake Park fell 63-46 against Osseo in the Section 5AAAA quarterfinals March 20. Trey Johnston scored 13, Fitzgerald Wreh scored 10 and Payton Thomson scored nine for the Panthers.

Section boys hockey

Blaine opened the playoffs with a 4-1 victory over Osseo March 18 before falling 6-2 at Centennial in the Section 5AA semifinals March 20.

In the quarterfinal versus Osseo, Blaine got on the board first on a goal by Matt McIntyre late in the first period.

Osseo leveled the game at 1-1 after two periods, but the Bengals put together a strong finish to advance, picking up an-

other goal from McIntyre and goals from Ben Wallraff and Nate Shaffer. Goalie Ryan Wallin saved 18 shots for the win in net.

The Bengals' season drew to a close against Centennial in the semifinals after the Cougars broke a 2-2 deadlock with four goals in the third period. Finn Loftus and McIntyre scored for Blaine.

Totino-Grace won its Section 5AA quarterfinal 9-4 over Champlin Park March 18 before falling to top-seeded Maple Grove 7-1 in the semifinals March 20. Luke Delzer netted a pair of goals in the win over Champlin Park.

Spring Lake Park fell 9-1 against Centennial in the Section 5AA quarterfinals March 18, with Jacob Fritz scoring for the Panthers.

Section girls hockey

Blaine girls hockey's season came to a close in the Section 5AA semifinals March 18, falling 8-5 against Centennial.

Shelby Sandberg and Maddie Andrie both had a pair of goals and Macy Janssen scored once for the Bengals, who earned a bye into the semifinals with a strong closing push to the regular season.

Centennial went on to defeat Maple Grove in the section finals to advance to state.

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Area trio move on to final 8

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ished as the runner-up at 285 in the Section 5AA/6AA state prelim at Mound-Westonka March 20 to advance to the Class AA's final eight. Franklin reached the finals with a fall and a 10-3 decision, then after falling 5-2 in the first-place bout, battled back with an 8-6 tiebreaker victory in the true second round to clinch a spot in the state's final eight.

Jacob Nguyen placed third at 132, Jason Nguyen placed fourth at 126, and placing sixth were Gabe Arika (120), Luke Gerhard (170) and Michael Ude (195).

Totino-Grace

Adam Sylvester maintained his perfect record to claim the title at 170 and lead Totino-Grace in the Section 5AA/6AA state prelim, winning by scores of 15-9 and 16-7 before recording a fall in the finals.

Ethan Sylvester (113) and Cy Kruse (160) both placed third, and placing sixth were Parker Lang (126), Alex Temple (138), Anthony Arens (145) and Michael Loger (152).

Columbia Heights

Willie Katchmark earned sixth at 220 to lead Columbia Heights in the 5AA/6AA state prelim.

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Long wait, then state for Bengals

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years and I've been close for the past few years, so it was super exciting to find out that I actually made it. Getting to end my senior season at state is so exciting. Though I am sad to be done with gymnastics, I can't imagine a better way to end it."

Blaine earned fifth place as a team at the meet. Gerard (35.5) earned 10th and Riley (34.225) earned 14th in the all-around, with Destiny Torgerson (33.4) earning 17th and Jemma Koenigs (30.175) earning 22nd.

"After all the girls have been through with COVID and not being able to practice for almost two months before we started the season, I am so proud of all of the athletes on the team," Howard said. "Having two athletes qualify for the state tournament after this crazy year is such a great feeling. I am so proud of them and am so happy they will be able to finish out their careers at state."

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