

FLETCHER

From Page 10

confidence going into the meet.”

The Cardinals started on the floor where Ailynn Fettig scored a 9.1 to go with Fletcher’s 9.325.

Sara Eddy had a 9.15 and Fettig a 9.125 on the vault. Eddy also scored a personal-best 7.825 on the bars, while Fletcher (9.075), Amaya Hughes (8.875) and Fettig (8.525) rounded out their days on the beam.

Fletcher’s all-around score was a personal-best 36.625. Fettig scored a 35.125. Hughes

finished at 33.925, and Eddy posted an all-around score of 32.825.

“We found out the results on the bus,” Kaufman said. “I kept refreshing my phone every three seconds to see if the results came. It felt like an eternity.”

Fletcher will compete at Champlin Park High School

at the state meet with the rest of the Class AA field on March 27. Section 8 competitors will compete with other qualifiers from Sections 1, 2 and 3 starting at 6 p.m. that day.

“This will be my first time coaching an athlete at state and it definitely won’t be my last. I’m really excited for it,” Kaufman said. “Kelsey has

been in gymnastics forever. I’m so proud of her and that she made it to state her senior year. Last year, Kelsey didn’t compete or have a chance at state after breaking her foot days before the section meet. I’m glad that the nerves of competing at sections for the first time wasn’t too much for her.”

HOCKEY

From Page 10

visiting bench as gloves, sticks and helmets lay spread out over the defensive zone ice.

“It’s an unimaginable feeling,” O’Kane said. “It’s a moment that every goalie dreams of feeling. To see your teammates come off the bench and dog-pile you because you won a championship is just hard to put into words.”

The Cardinals didn’t need O’Kane to be good. They needed her to be near perfect. After stopping 41 shots in last Thursday night’s 2-1 triple-overtime win over Brainerd-Little Falls, she made 36 saves en route to winning a section championship. “She’s been our

backbone to this whole section tournament,” Arola said. “We couldn’t have done it without her. I’m so proud of her. It’s so well-deserved of her. She’s earned it.”

Roseau dominated the better part of the first period and took a 1-0 lead on a goal from Helgeson. O’Kane was tested for 16 shots in total through the first period, while the Cardinals only got six on Roseau freshman goaltender Jada Pelowski.

Alexandria turned its game around at the start of the second period. Maras beat Pelowski on the power play with a bar-down shot during a zone-entry. Maras scored again midway through the second when she put home a rebound shot from senior forward Marki Oberg to put the

Cardinals up 2-1.

“It feels amazing, but the credit goes to my teammates,” Maras said. “They were pushing hard, going to the net and doing everything they could to play hard and grind. Especially our goalie. She worked her butt off in all of these playoff games.”

The Cardinals’ penalty kill was stellar on Saturday night. Not only did Roseau have two power-play chances in the final four minutes, but four more throughout the night. The Rams’ vaunted power play went 0-for-6 despite several quality scoring opportunities.

Alexandria has been to the state tournament 13 times but never as a Class AA team. Arola was overcome with emotion when thinking about what her girls accomplished, 240 miles



Jared Rubado / Echo Press

Alexandria sophomore forward Lauren Maras takes a first-period shot on goal during Alexandria’s Section 8AA championship win over Roseau on Saturday, March 20. Maras scored both of the Cardinals’ goals in the 2-1 win.

from home.

“It sounds corny, but it’s just love,” Arola said. “I just love this group and the love they have for each other to finally come together and get the job done for

the girl next to them.”

Each of Alexandria’s section tournament games ended in a 2-1 score. Most notably, the Cardinals took down two regulars of the state tournament in

Brainerd-Little Falls and Roseau. In the section semifinals, the Cardinals pulled a rabbit out of their hat when senior forward Hanley Block scored with one second remaining in regulation to force overtime. Three overtimes later, senior forward Anna Doherty sent the Cardinals to the title game.

To beat the top two teams in Section 8AA is an accomplishment on its own. Doing it in each of their home arenas in three days is just another reason why this playoff run is so remarkable.

“They’re the cardiac kids,” Arola said. “It’s a huge testament to them and the leaders on this team to come together to play united. This group is so deserving, and I couldn’t be more proud.”

SWIM

From Page 10

at sections, we were hoping they would get down to the state meet and realize they belonged there and they were in charge of their own destiny. They went after it.”

The Cardinals had athletes in every event at state and finished with 250 points. Sartell was just behind in third place at 237, while Breck-Blake ran away with the title with 418.5 points. Alexandria’s divers helped the Cardinals as Caden Kavanagh was 10th at state with 337.30 points, and Aidan Staples was 16th (295.85) on March 18.

The swim meet at the University of Minnesota was a stark contrast to the normally raucous environment there during state meets. No fans were allowed to attend.

Alexandria normally heads to the Twin Cities the night before state and stays in a hotel. This

year, they drove down the morning of the meet for a noon start time. Then it was on them to provide their own motivation.

“We said in December when we were doing our Zoom dryland (training) for a month, would you ever have thought we would be here in the running for second place?” Walker said. “Or as they say, first place for public schools. They were like, ‘We hoped we would, but we never would have dreamt we would have the kind of season we did, especially beating Sartell.’”

Alexandria had four second-place finishes at state. Junior Nicolas Welle did so in the 50 and 100 freestyles, while junior Anthony Hoyt was second in the 500 freestyle, and Welle, Torrey Olson-Rodel, Hoyt and Carter Holm finished second in the 400 freestyle relay in 3:10.34.

Welle’s times in the 50 freestyle (20.74) and 100 free (46.05) were both new school records. So too was Hoyt’s time

in the 500 freestyle (4:43.22).

“It’s funny because the school record that Nicolas broke in the 100 free was set 20 years ago by Erik Esbjornsson,” Walker said. “He texted me asking for Nicolas’ contact. He was texting Nic in the van as we were driving back. (Former head coach) Mark Storhaug, (former athletes) Patrick Chromey and Luca Dauer, our former foreign exchange student from Germany, all those guys are texting the guys telling the whole team how proud they are. The family support they have for each other helps in their focus.”

Welle, Logan Tung, Hoyt and Holm were all-state as a top-eight finisher with a third-place finish in the 200 freestyle relay. Thomas Williams (100 butterfly, fourth; 100 backstroke, seventh), Holm (100 freestyle, fifth; 200 freestyle, eighth), Williams, Tung, Ethan Johnson, Olson-Rodel (200-medley relay, sixth), Hoyt (200 freestyle, sixth),

and Tung (100 breaststroke, sixth; 200 IM, seventh) all piled on the all-state performances.

“We knew that Nicolas and Anthony would be all state,” Walker said. “But to have Logan be all state in two events, Thomas be all state in two events, Erik Reincke dropping time as a 10th-grader who’s never been in that meet before. Torrey Olson-Rodel — they did better than they did last year. I’m just really, really happy with how they performed across the board.”

Williams is a senior for this group who was not happy with how he performed at state a year ago. Walker called his day Saturday the most pleasant surprise as he missed setting a school record by .03 in the butterfly and .01 in the backstroke.

“My heart went out to him, but he was so happy with how he swam,” Walker said. “He was just glowing. His college coach at St. Cloud State sent him a text congratulating him on a great

meet. That’s just a chapter in his career.”

Alexandria swam in the afternoon and then had to wait for more sections to swim their portion of the state meet on Saturday night before the final results were in.

The Cardinals watched the meet together in Alexandria Saturday night and were already talking about what they can do next year to fill the holes left by graduation.

“We’re graduating all three fliers, and Nic said, ‘I’ll swim butterfly next year.’ He swam it this year and made the state cut (time),” Walker said. “He said, ‘I’d go back to swimming IM because he went to state as a ninth-grader swimming IM. They’ve talked about how to fill holes from graduation... If I were to say anything, I think doing the dryland training in December was a tremendous help to us because they were stronger coming in.’”

This was Walker’s fifth season leading the Alexandria boys program.

She already had a hall of fame resume coming in, and she has taken what was a good program and helped it become one of the best in the state again.

“The families were texting during the watch party last night saying, ‘Wait a minute. Did we just get second?’ They’re just extremely proud, and they should be,” Walker said. “I expect sacrifice. I expect Saturday practices. I expect they’re not done until 6:30 at night and parents are waiting outside in the parking lot to pick up their kids. Those expectations pay off.”

ALEXANDRIA RESULTS - 200-MEDLEY RELAY - Thomas Williams, Logan Tung, Ethan Johnson, Torrey Olson-Rodel - sixth, 1:39.03; 200 FREESTYLE - Anthony Hoyt - sixth, 1:44.83; Carter Holm - eighth, 1:45.98; 200 IM - Logan Tung - seventh, 2:01.19; Olson-Rodel - 11th, 2:03.52; 50 FREESTYLE - Nicolas Welle - second, 20.74; DIVING (From March 18) - Caden Kavanagh - 10th, 337.30; Aiden Staples - 16th, 295.85; 100 BUTTERFLY - Thomas Williams - fourth, 52.19; Olson-Rodel - 16th, 55.09; Johnson - 18th, 56.20; 100 FREESTYLE - Welle - second, 46.05; Holm - fifth, 47.66; 500 FREESTYLE - Hoyt - second, 4:43.22; Erik Reineke - 15th, 5:06.03; 200 FREESTYLE RELAY - Welle, Tung, Hoyt, Holm - third, 1:27.66; 100 BACKSTROKE - Williams - seventh, 53.48; 100 BREASTSTROKE - Tung - sixth, 59.69; 400 FREESTYLE RELAY - Welle, Olson-Rodel, Hoyt, Holm - second, 3:10.34

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