

# Several strong teams lead way in upcoming playoffs

## Section 6AA boys field loaded with talent

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

The playoff outlook for teams in the upcoming Section 6AA boys basketball playoffs can be summed up in one word: daunting.

The 16-team bracket features five teams with 20 or more victories this season and three teams with at least 18 wins. Ninth-ranked Annandale is the top seed. Mora, Albany and 10th-ranked Osakis round out the top four seeds.

The Falcons (5-21), which completed the regular season with a 42-38 loss March 4 at Pierz, are the 14th seed and play third-seeded Albany (21-5) at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 10.

Sauk Centre, Rush City and Pine City also have the potential for long section tournament runs.

Foley coach Nate Larison realizes the challenge his team faces when the tournament begins Thursday with games at the highest-seeded school. Four quarterfinal games are set for Saturday, March 12, at St. John's University's Sexton Arena in Collegeville.

"Year in and year out, our section is almost always the most competitive from top to bottom, and we end up playing most of our games against section teams too," Larison said. "There are usually three or four conference champs in our section, and sometimes a 20-win team will have to travel for their first-round game."

Larison said the top-ranked squad is going to be a challenge for any team they come across.

"Annandale is definitely a step ahead of everyone this season, and they have a very real shot at winning the state tournament," Larison said.

### Albany 72, Foley 49

The Falcons fell behind early to a high-powered Albany Huskies team at home March 1 and could not recover despite playing a solid second half that left Foley narrowly outscored, 31-30.

Foley had two players reach double digits in the game, as Ryan Piepgras scored 14 points while Teagan Duevel added 11. Albany pulled away with an 11-for-19 performance from the 3-point line.

"We played pretty well overall and did a solid job handling Albany's pressure defense with just 11 turnovers," Larison said. "We were also able to get some things going offensively with Piepgras and Daniel Dahmen. To our credit, we played right with them the entire second half."

ALB 41 31-72  
FOL 19 30-49

Foley: Piepgras 14, Duevel 11, Daniel Dahmen 10, Ethan Novak 7 (5R), Derek Dahmen 4, Gavin Gross 2 and Tommy Smith 1.

# Falcons archery bounces back with first-place showing

## Archers shoot season bests

BY AMBER KOSEL | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Through the rain, snow and ice March 6th, the Foley Falcons Archery teams participated in the Becker Meltdown tournament with 26 other schools from 15 different cities.

The Falcons had several archers shoot their personal highs, and had five 50s. Lane Lane Stangler, ninth grader, shot perfect score at 10 meters with three 50s, an impressive and challenging feat.

The high school team took first place, the middle school team took second place and the elementary team took third place.

Elementary boys: Kyle Studanski, fourth; middle school boys, Robinson, second. Middle school girls: Abigail Klinker, fifth place. High school boys: Lane Stangler, first place, overall high score in boys division (296); Beau Herbst, second place. High school girls: Kara Reding, first place, overall high score in girls division (291); Elaina Schneider, third place.

### Elementary team takes third

Milaca hosted an archery tournament Feb. 26 with 23 schools from 14 cities, including the Foley archery squad, and it was a challenging duel this time for Foley. The elementary school team took third place, and no other teams placed.

With only having two days of practice leading up to the tournament, due to a very short week, a lot of archers could only sign up for one day of practice before competing. Foley also had a couple of archers with broken or sprained feet who shot with a brace or walking boot and crutches. Despite all the hiccups, every archer put effort and positivity into the tournament.

Milaca also hosted 3D archery, where archers can shoot at animal decoys. Milaca is the first and only tournament to be hosting a 3D competition around the area before the state tournament, March 26. Foley was only able to get 6 archers on the line.

Elementary boys: Reid Erkens, second, 265; Studanski, third, 263. Elementary girls: Alexis Carlson, second, 263; Maggie Reis, third, 256; (3D shoot) Ries, first. Middle school boys: Kole Robinson, second, 284; (3D shoot) Colton Stangler, fourth. Middle school girls: Klinker, third, 273. High school girls: Schneider, fourth, 285.



Foley wrestling assistant head coach Jake Helmin (left) and head coach Chris Ratke (right) embrace Elijah Novak after his championship win March 5 at Xcel Energy Center. A heavyweight, Novak went 48-0 in a spectacular senior season.

## State champion

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"It will motivate him; I know that," Ratke said. "He'll be getting to work here in the next week or so, getting back to it."

Rudnitski, who put together a spirited Section 6AA run to clinch a spot at state, once again stood strong against a high-caliber opponent. After taking a 4-2 lead against Zumbrota-Mazeppa's Kaleb Lochner, Lochner rallied back to take the win, 7-4.

"He improved every week, and you could see it every single week," Ratke said. "He got better, and



PHOTO BY EVAN MICHEALSON

there's another step. He got here, and next year, what are we going to do to get on the podium?"

And as the state tournament signals an end to another excellent wrestling season for the Falcons, Ratke is excited to see how his team learns from this year's experiences.

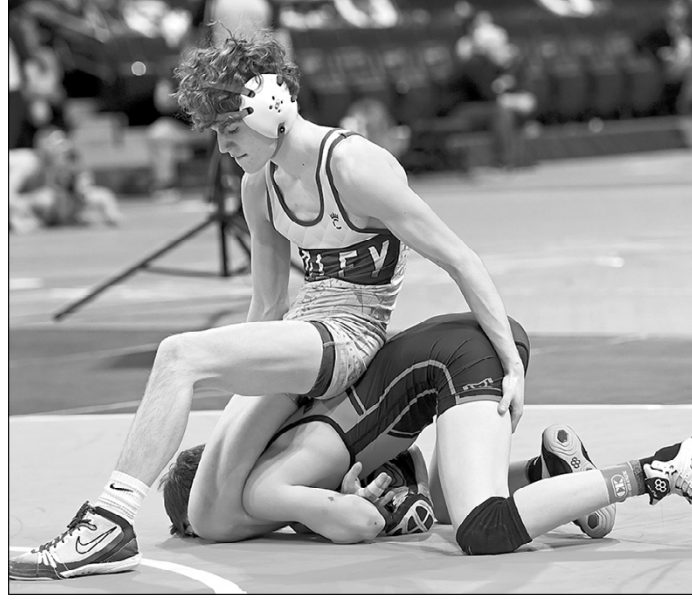
"I know they can put the work in," Ratke said. "Once these young kids figure out how to wrestle in the varsity room, how to practice, how to drill, things like that, they improve."

Novak, who stood down the greatest competitors the state had to offer and came away victorious at the highest level, knows what it takes. And with this chap-

ter of his wrestling career closed and a collegiate destination of St. Cloud State University lying ahead, he can rest well knowing he finally did it.

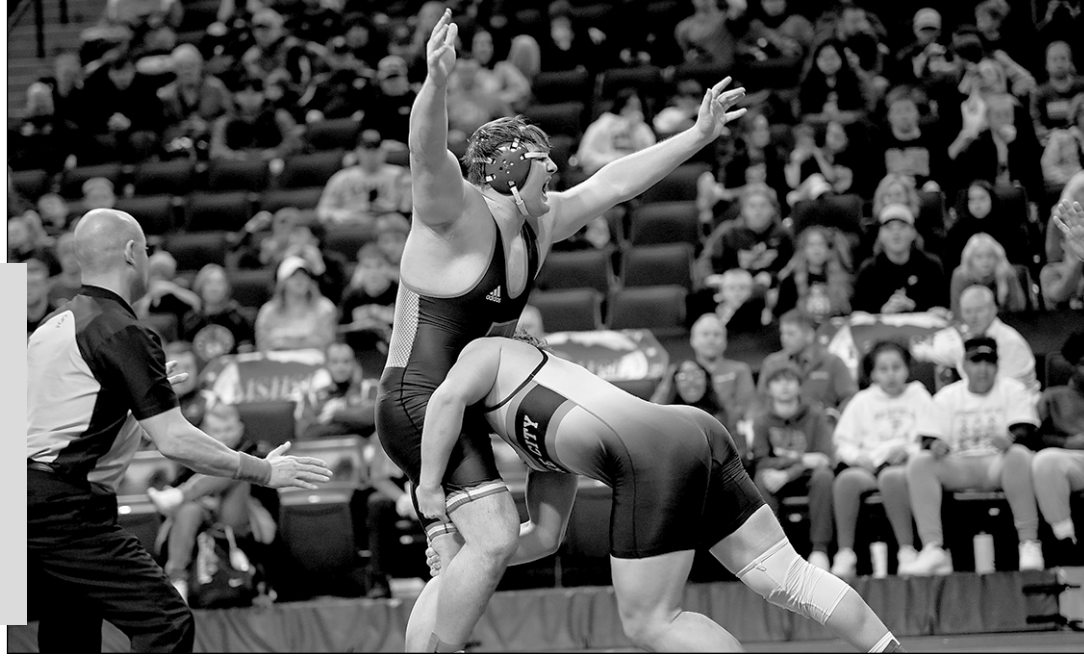
"I'm just probably going to go home, sleep in my own bed and sleep with the medal on my chest, dreaming sweet dreams or being so excited I can't sleep until 1 a.m.," he said.

**106:** Ruhoff went 1-2 and did not place. He won by technical fall 17-1 (5:15), lost by decision 3-2 and lost by decision 5-4.  
**145:** Rudnitski went 0-1 and did not place. He lost by decision 7-4.  
**285:** Novak went 3-0 and took first. He received a bye, won by fall at 3:37, won by decision 7-2 and won by decision 5-4.



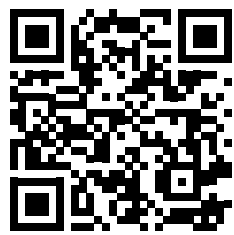
Cyler Ruhoff stops himself from being taken down March 4 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. Ruhoff won his first-round matchup before falling in two close contests.

Elijah Novak (left) shouts as time runs out in the Class AA 285-pound championship match March 5 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. Novak guarded well against Max Balow's late takedown attempt to find the win.



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Girls basketball playoffs  
State wrestling



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