

A HISTORY-MAKING WINTER IN DETROIT LAKES SPORTS

## 3 GIRLS TEAMS COMPETE AT STATE

All 3 teams are led by female head coaches

By Jared Rubado  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

To say this was a monumental winter for girls sports in Detroit Lakes would be an understatement. It was a historic winter.

For the first time ever, Detroit Lakes High School saw three of its girls teams compete for state championships in the same season. What's more, all three teams were led by women head coaches.

On Feb. 15, the Laker jazz team clinched its first state berth since 2010.

The gymnastics team won its seventh section championship in its last nine tries one week later.

Fast forward to Mar. 10, where the Detroit Lakes girls basketball team shocked Section 8-3A to earn its first state tournament berth since 2009.

"It sets a tone (for future Laker basketball teams)," said girls basketball head coach Rachel Johnson. "As a program, this season is setting the bar... Setting the tone for the program as a whole is something that not many coaching staffs and girls have, and it makes us really excited for the future."

Johnson is a second-year head coach. One of her goals from the start was to get the program back to what it was like in the mid-2000s, when the Lakers went to state three times in the span of five years.

The girls basketball team rode the underdog mentality to the Class 3A consolation championship game. Johnson said what was even more important than proving people wrong was setting an example for the future of the program.

"There were so many little basketball players running around and seeing us do all of this," she said. "That's so invaluable for the future of this program and girls sports in our community. To have them see all of these community members, the band, the students, the media and everybody else with us every step of the way is so important. It just sets the tone for what we want this program to be, and it encourages a lot of people to buy into this."

Like the basketball team, the Laker Dance Team was a surprise representative out of Section 8-2A at the state tournament. Britton Ramsey has been at the helm for a decade and finally saw her girls climb the mountain.

"We have dancers from all three dance studios in town coming together to represent DLHS, and that is so special," Ramsey said. "I'm hopeful this year



Detroit Lakes head gymnastics coach Leesa Lindgaard drapes first-place medals on Laker gymnastics team members after winning the Section 8A championship on Feb. 12 at Lakeshirts Fieldhouse.

Photos by Jared Rubado / Detroit Lakes Tribune

"This season is setting the bar."

GIRLS BASKETBALL  
HEAD COACH  
RACHEL JOHNSON

will get younger dancers in the community excited to represent DLHS as a Laker when it's their turn. Our current seniors were in first grade the last time DL advanced to state. They all have a memory of hearing about it and have talked about it all their years on the team. Knowing that current first graders will feel that same impact is really exciting."

Even for a program like Detroit Lakes gymnastics, which has five state titles since 2014, this year's team was filled with inexperience. Despite being on the coaching staff for the previous seven of the Lakers' section championships, this was the first time Leesa Lindgaard was the head coach for a championship-winning team at the high school level.

"It was great making it back to state this year," Lindgaard said. "We have such a young team, and only four girls on the team have been to the state meet before, whether it was individually or with our state championship teams. Being such a young team, it was very impactful for the girls to experience and



Detroit Lakes Girls Basketball Head Coach Rachel Johnson, left, talks strategy with sophomore Ella Okeson in the Class 3A consolation semifinal game at Concordia-St. Paul on Mar. 17.

know and believe that they belong at that state meet, just like our state championship teams. They are very talented gymnasts that need to believe in themselves a little bit more and gain confidence. I believe this state experience helped a lot with that."

### Women led by women

Winning a section championship and competing for a state title has a lasting impact that goes far beyond the act of hanging a banner in the gym. Coaches say success can be a crucial aspect in dictating a

program's culture.

"I always like to remind my Laker gymnasts that you never know when a little kid is watching. What do you want your legacy to be when you graduate?" Lindgaard said. "How do you want people to remember you? Being a mom with young girls who love and look up to high school gymnastics, I love that my little girls are impacted by hard-working, caring and determined women who aren't afraid to go after their goals and push to the limit even when they don't necessarily want to."

It's one thing to have a banner season for girls sports. It's another to highlight how each of them was led by women head coaches.

"Even though these girls have male coaches that are so awesome, to have gymnastics, dance and girls basketball get to this level says a lot about the women leadership Detroit Lakes has in their coaches," Johnson said. "It's something many girls out there don't get to experience. It's just really powerful."

Johnson was emotional talking about how proud she is to have played

a part in this historic winter season.

"My coaching staff is the best. Josh (Bettcher) and Dave (Hutchinson) are awesome, but to see all of these programs have influential women leaders is something that even I as a 25-year-old didn't grow up in," Johnson said. "It's really special for me to see these girls have that. It's hard, and it's difficult to be a teenage girl and not have women in sports that you can go to."

Being a coach is much more than just leading a team to wins and losses. The antithesis of coaching at the high school level is about teaching lessons that last far longer than the time on the floor, ice, track, mat or field.

"There have been many times in my years coaching that I was one of only a few females in the room for various coaching events," Ramsey said. "Seeing more and more women in those spaces is amazing. We know, as coaches, that athletics develops kids in so many ways. Creating space for girls to not only participate but feel supported and valued as athletes, allows them that development of character and additional leadership experience that will help them to be successful as adults no matter where their future takes them. I'm really proud of our community and school district for supporting so many ways for kids to get involved and create more leadership opportunities among our young women."

In a time when women's athletics are beginning to see the recognition they strive for at all levels, all three of these Detroit Lakes coaches feel supported by the community.

"It was so great to see our female coaches' success this year," Lindgaard said. "It is a big accomplishment to make it to that state competition. I feel the community does a fine job supporting us. We always would love to see a big crowd at home meets. We had a big turnout for sections, and that was great. I believe we truly fed off the atmosphere that day."

"One of the bigger factors to our success this year was having more time and space in the gym from previous years," Ramsey said. "Our whole program felt the impacts of that. We appreciate our community, booster clubs and school district in providing the much-improved space that benefits all Laker athletes."

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### TRACK AND FIELD

## Lakers compete in season-opening meet

By Jared Rubado  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

DETROIT LAKES – The Detroit Lakes track and field teams kicked off the spring sports season at the first Concordia-Moorhead indoor meet last Friday.

The boys and girls teams each took seventh place with several top-10

finished. Jackson Massjo took 10th in the 1,600-meter run with a time of 5:34.86. He also ran in the Lakers' 4x400-meter relay (4:00.63). Alexander Fletcher notched a sixth-place finish in the pole vault at 9-feet, 6-inches.

The Laker boys recorded a team score of 15.5. Alexandria took

first place (164.5), while Fergus Falls (109) and Moorhead (103) rounded out the top three.

The Detroit Lakes girls also took seventh with a team score of 21. In the 1,600-meter run, four Lakers finished in the top 11. Julia Steffl took fourth with a time of 6:08.56. Marin Johnson (6:44.71, Maria Foltz

(5:46.08) and Isla Pender (6:45.62) placed 9-11 respectively.

Jerzje Horner raced to a 10th-place finish in the 55-meter dash. Brenna Skadsem (28'6") and Lexi Gerdes (28'4") finished ninth and 10th in the shot put.

BOYS TEAM SCORES- 1- Alexandria 164.5, 2- Fergus Falls 109, 3- Moorhead 103, 4- Wahpeton 83.5, 5- Hillsboro-Central Valley, 6- Morris Area-Chokio-Alberta

29.5, 7- Detroit Lakes 15.5, 8- NCE-UH Titans 7, 9- Grafton 5.5  
GIRLS TEAM SCORES- 1- Alexandria 190, 2- Moorhead 119.5, 3- Wahpeton 67.33, 4- Morris Area-Chokio-Alberta 58.5, 5- Hillsboro-Central Valley 45.33, 6- Grafton 36, 7- Detroit Lakes 21, 8- Fergus Falls 19.33  
DETROIT LAKES BOYS TOP TEN FINISHERS- 4x800M RELAY- 1st- Fergus Falls 9:14.85; 5th- Barberg, Yliniemi, Guzman, Pace 10:25.54  
1600M RUN- 1st- Isaac Martel (Moorhead) 4:47.65; 10th- Jackson Maasjo 5:34.86  
4x400M RELAY- 1st- Wahpeton 3:51.05; 4th- Maasjo, Denardo, Skinner, Parks 4:00.63; 8th- Watz, Vargas, Hatch, Strand 4:14.66  
POLE VAULT- 1st- Jordan Lee (Fergus Falls) 12'0", 6th- Alexander Fletcher 9'6"

DETROIT LAKES GIRLS TOP TEN FINISHERS- 4x800M RELAY- 1st- Moorhead 11:04.06; 5th- Pender, Johnson, Skarie, Steffl 11:48.62;  
55M DASH- 1st- Olivia Lebrija (MACA) 7.72; 10th- Jerzje Homer 8.19  
1600M RUN- Ella Cole (Moorhead) 5:46.08; 4th- Julia Steffl 6:08.56; 9th- Marin Johnson 6:44.72; 10th- Maria Foltz 6:44.89; 11th- Isla Pender 6:45.62  
4x400M RELAY- 1st- Moorhead 4:36.14; 8th- Blahut, Hunter, Johnson, Lowell 5:10.41  
SHOT PUT- 1st- Scout Woods (Wahpeton) 34'8", 9th- Brenna Skadsem 28'6", 10th- Lexi Gerdes 28'4"

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