

# Lumberjacks hold on late for thrilling win

Granite City wins first of three straight games versus Willmar

BY EVAN MICHEALSON | STAFF WRITER

The Granite City Lumberjacks have rarely found themselves in nail-biters, having played only two games this season decided by one goal.

However, the Willmar WarHawks gave Granite City a scare in the final period of their most recent showdown, scoring a pair of goals in a minute-and-a-half to cut drastically into a three-goal Lumberjacks lead.

Despite this sudden adversity, the Lumberjacks buckled down and picked up a 4-3 victory Nov. 5 at Willmar Civic Center Arena in Willmar.

“Every time we play them and beat them, it’s a good win for us,” said D.J. Vold, associate head coach. “I didn’t think it was our best game, but we did enough to win.”

Granite City and Willmar sit first and third in the West Division, respectively, and the game reflected that close competition. Neither team found the scoreboard for the first 28 minutes of the contest, with the Lumberjacks’ man advantage coming up empty time and time against Willmar’s penalty kill.

“The first period felt like kind of a chess match,” Vold said. “Everyone was feeling each other out and that’s why there was no scoring. We kind of went back and forth.”

The WarHawks broke through with the first score of the game eight minutes and 24 seconds into the second period, and that appeared to be a wake-up call for the 14-1 Lumberjacks. On Granite City’s first shift following the goal, Kullan Daikawa found the back of the net to tie the game up at one.

Lumberjacks page 5B



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• Fri., Nov. 19 at 8:30 pm

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Granite City Lumberjacks vs. St. Louis Jr. Blues at Affton Ice Rink

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# SPORTS

## Title hopes dashed in opening round

### Storm fall to finely-tuned KoMets at state

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

ST. PAUL – There would be no upset this time.

A Kasson-Mantorville team that lacks size and power made up for it with a back row that digs up pretty much everything and hitters who stress accuracy. Put it this way, the KoMets put the “volley” in volleyball.

The strategy worked to perfection against a Sauk Rapids-Rice team that found their groove when the playoffs began but could not muster the same energy that helped them to a section title. Second-seeded Kasson-Mantorville scrapped their way to a 25-16, 25-11, 25-15 victory in the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament quarterfinals Nov. 10 at

Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

It was the first state tournament appearance for the program since 1988. The Storm (13-17) faced Chisago Lakes in the consolation semifinals Nov. 12, also at Xcel Energy Center. The consolation championship is Saturday, Nov. 13.

“I’ve been here to watch a couple of times, but it’s completely different when you’re playing,” SRR senior Darci Peterson said. “I never thought I’d be here, but we believed in ourselves and we got here. We had a good time soaking it all in and we were doing the best we could to have fun.”

Volleyball page 3B

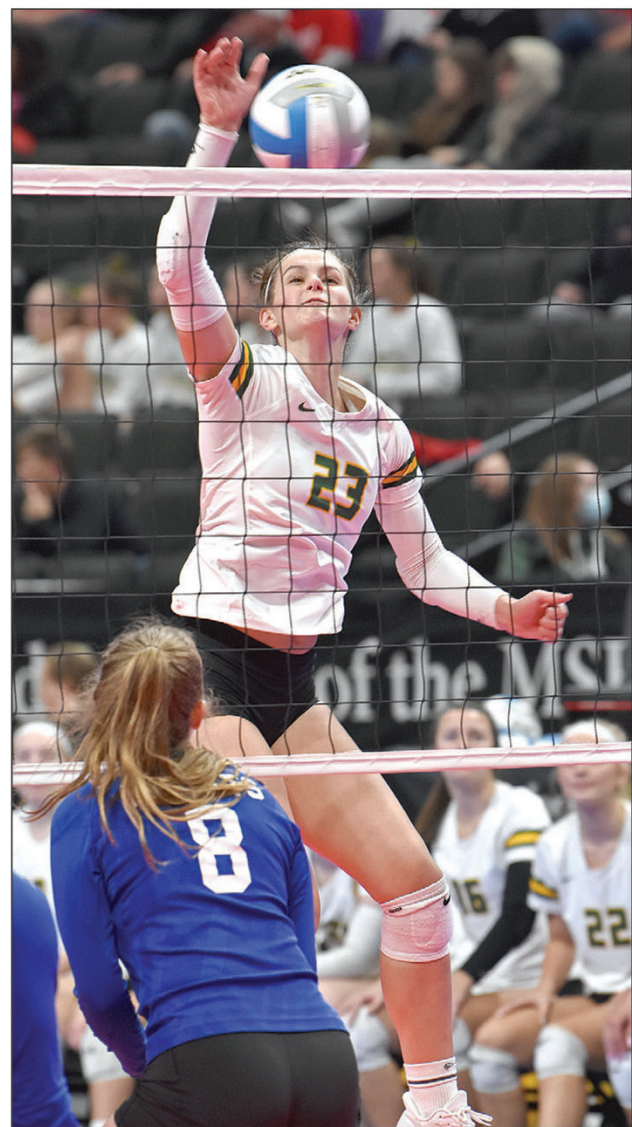


PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Senior Darci Peterson goes up for an attack in the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament Nov. 10 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. The Storm were swept in the quarterfinals by second-seeded Kasson-Mantorville.

## Leading the

# Sophia Rothstein

**Parents:** Keith and Steph Rothstein  
**Accomplishment:** Senior on the Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team.

Alexandria team. It was also great to finally beat our rival, Sartell, in three sets for the first time in many years.

**What other activities are you involved in at SRRHS?** Minnesota Honor Society and Storm Media Network.

**What annual SRR event do you look forward to each year?** I enjoy looking forward to supporting our other sports and activities throughout the year. I also enjoy the homecoming football game and the dance following.



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**What is your favorite aspect of volleyball?** I love the connection we have formed because we have been teammates together for many years. It is great to be competitive and work hard with so many of my great friends. It is fun to see how much we have improved and how well we always play together.

**What has been your most memorable moment playing volleyball?** The most memorable thing while playing volleyball is making it to state for the first time in 33 years. It was the best feeling ever to win against an almost undefeated



# Youth a dominant theme for Storm'n Sabres on the ice

Girls hockey team looks to get to speed quickly after losing 13 players

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

There is plenty of newness when it comes to the Sauk Rapids-Rice/Sartell girls hockey team for the 2021-22 season.

One, the Storm'n Sabres lost 13 seniors and have six eighth graders on the roster. Two, they have a sparkling new facility in which to practice in the RDR Arena – the second sheet of ice inside the Scheels Athletic Complex in Sartell.

“We’ve got a lot of young and new players,” said Marty Anderson, who is in his 13th season as SRRS head coach. “There’s been a lot of focus on getting them up to speed of what we’re trying to do. We’ve had more turnover this year than I’ve ever had, and I’ve been pleasantly surprised with how they’ve taken to it. We’ll continue to have growing pains, but I like the progression and work ethic.”

The Storm'n Sabres are coming off a 4-12-2 record in a shortened 2020-21 season, and they

will have to replace a huge chunk of their offense. Four of the top five scorers – Lauren Wensel, Rachel Wieland, Jayden Lommel and Morgan Cromwell – graduated.



Marty Anderson

Expected to replace that offense will be senior co-captains Kelly Carriere, Erik Johnson and Chloe Reiter. Carriere is the top returning scorer with seven goals and four assists

last season, followed by Johnson with three goals and three assists.

“It’s definitely a dramatic change with losing so many seniors, but we’re seeing improvement going on,” said Reiter, who had one goal last season. “We’ll need to put together plays. As we progress and get to know each other more, we can put pucks on sticks more. I hope we can be in the top five in the section. We have a bunch of positivity, and we’re communicating well.”

Early in the season, SRRS will be anchored by



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Captains for the 2021-22 Sauk Rapids-Rice/Sartell girls hockey team are Kelly Carriere (from left), Chloe Reiter and Erika Johnson. The Storm'n Sabres opened the regular season Nov. 11 in Rogers.

the experienced defensive core of Johnson along with juniors Tia Vogt, Anna Lundeen and Peyton Sabart. Morgan Dorn, who played every game in goal as a freshman last season, is also back.

“We’re going to be strong on the defensive end,” Anderson said. “We’ve got four returning defensemen who will play a lot and a goalie who played every game last year. We’ll expect a lot out of them and hope that solidifying the defensive end will lead to some offense.”

Dorn had a 3.75-goals-against average last season

**“We’re going to be strong on the defensive end. We’ve got four returning defensemen who will play a lot and a goalie who played every game last year. We’ll expect a lot out of them and hope that solidifying the defensive end will lead to some offense.”**

- Marty Anderson

with a save percentage of .870. She said she enjoys the responsibility and pressure involved with being a goaltender.

“I like that I have the ability to change the game,” Dorn said. “I can make a big save and change the way the momentum goes. So far, I really like our defense. We have some strong skaters there, and we’re hoping we can turn some of that defense into goals.”

Anderson, an Ely native who played college hockey at Gustavus, said he has been impressed with his team’s willingness to learn.

“You have to remind yourself that you probably can’t expect them to know everything we’re doing, so you’ve got to slow down a little bit and go through some more details that you take for granted with a more experienced group,” Anderson said. “It’s more of a teaching phase, especially in the beginning.

That’s a good thing. It’s fun to see young energy.”

The Storm'n Sabres got their first taste of action in a three-team scrimmage Nov. 6 in Lakeville and opened the season Nov. 11 at Rogers. Their home opener against North Wright County is at 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 13, at Bernick’s Arena in Sartell.

The extra sheet of ice allows for the team to have consistent practice times in addition to extra ice time for the youth program, which Anderson said is extremely important.

“The extra sheet of ice has allowed us to practice a little bit more and a little longer,” Anderson said. “We’re not fluctuating to 6 and 9 p.m. practice times, which gives us some continuity. We take it in phases. We look at it as what is our progression up to Thanksgiving, then what’s our progression to Christmas and then to playoffs?”



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Kelly Carriere (left) and Chloe Reiter skate during practice drills Nov. 9 at RDR Arena inside the Scheels Athletic Complex in Sartell. Carriere is the leading returning starter for the Storm'n Sabres.



# Volleyball

from front

The teams traded points in the early goings. The KoMets led 12-10 before finding their rhythm as the Storm struggled with service receive and finding continuity on offense.

"I thought we did pretty well," Kasson-Mantorville head coach Adam VanOrt said.

"Just like every team in this tournament, you get out there in the big space and you start playing and it takes a while to get into your normal style of play.

We were able to do that mid-way through the first set. Once we got used to that, I was very happy."

The Storm again kept things close in the early stages of the second set. They trailed 8-6, but the inconsistencies returned. The KoMets went on a roll with their quick offense and a back row that did not allow many SRR attacks to hit the floor.

"They



Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball players – Emma Portner (from left), Chelsey Vogel, Hailee Cullen, Darci Peterson, Morgan Eggert, Lauren Schloe, Jordyn Lee, Kiernyn Hirdler and Brielle Andvick –prepare to take the Xcel Energy Center court before the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament Nov. 10 in St. Paul. The Storm lost in three sets to Kasson-Mantorville.

PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

hustle and are scrappy," Storm head coach Karen Beckmann said. "They do a great job of reading our offense and where we're going.



They just have really good timing, and they have a great program. We

practiced for a lot of their tendencies. We were there, but it was just a matter of following through. We've just got to finish."

Showing flashes of the team that downed sixth-ranked Alexandria in four sets to get to the state

tournament, SRR found its game to start the third set on its way to a 10-7 lead. A seven-point KoMets run with senior setter Madelyn Converse firing serves followed, putting an end to the Storm hopes.

"They're just really quick and they know how to read defense," said Peterson, who was watched closely by the KoMets defense and was held to one kill. "They play the ball really well and put it in the right spots. We've been working all season on putting the pressure on the other team, and we did a good job at the start of the third set."

Senior Hailee Cullen led the Storm offense with 10 kills, with Lexi Helmin

next with five. Sophia Rothstein added three kills, Kiernyn Hirdler had 19 set assists and eight digs, and libero Grace Urbowicz had a team-leading 13 digs. Sophomore Ava Athman, an offensive force all season, was held to one kill.

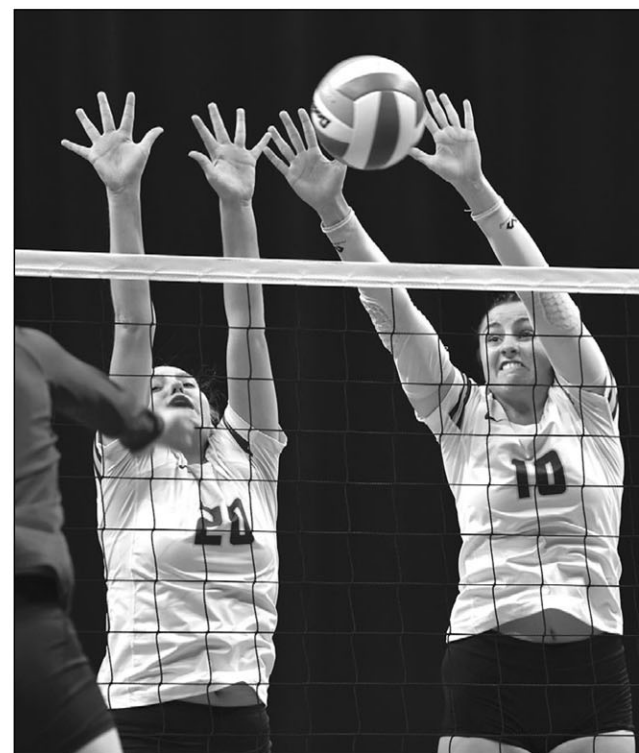
Sophomore Jordyn Lee admitted the state tournament experience was overwhelming, especially early, and that the team was excited to tackle the consolation bracket.

"Once we were on the court, it felt like there were lots of things going on and it was hard to put all of your focus and heart into that game," Lee said. "All day I was talking about, 'Guys, we're going to be playing where all the big teams play.' It's just been so exciting."

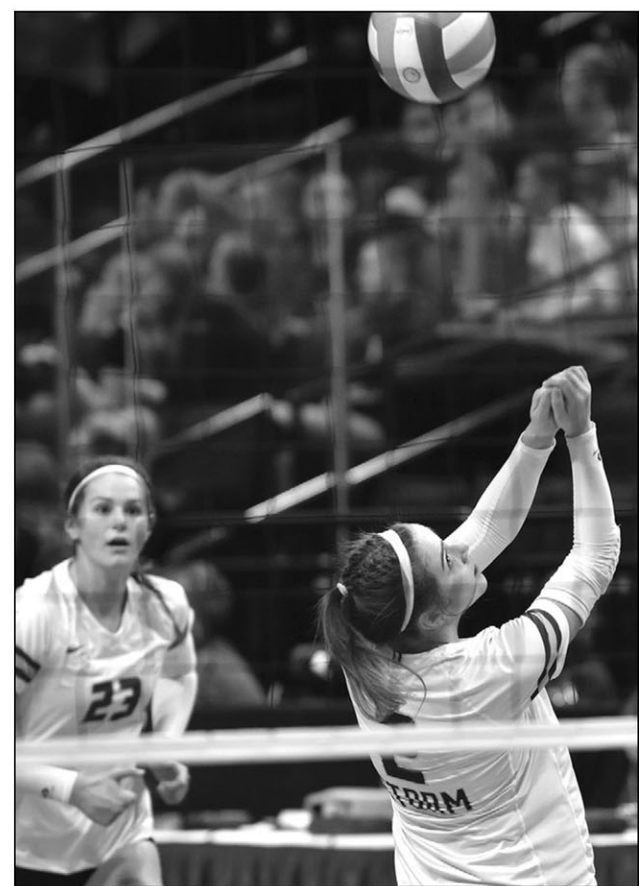
For Peterson, the chance to play at this level is not something she will forget.

"For me, it was the best feeling ever being here," Peterson said. "I've been dreaming of this forever. It's really awesome to know we did it and got here. I like to think we have the best school because I believe that we do. We're really supportive of each other."

(Left) Grace Urbowicz passes the ball to a teammate during the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament Nov. 10 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. Urbowicz had 13 digs and eight set assists as the Storm dropped their quarterfinal match to Kason-Mantorville.



Sauk Rapids-Rice front-row players Sophia Rothstein (left) and Lexi Helmin leap for a block in the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament Nov. 10 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. Helmin finished with five kills and Rothstein added three for the Storm.



Kiernyn Hirdler pulls off a backward pass to a teammate as the Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team took on Kasson-Mantorville in the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament Nov. 10 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. Hirdler finished with 19 set assists.



(Left) Senior Hailee Cullen passes the ball in the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament Nov. 10 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. Cullen led the Storm with 10 kills in their quarterfinal loss to second-seeded Kasson-Mantorville.



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# Twins offseason primer

The 2021 season was an unmitigated disaster for the Minnesota Twins. Coming off two consecutive division championships, expectations were understandably high for an organization that boasted a solid core of young talent and a cadre of veterans who were signed to push the team over the top. However, instead of taking the next step forward, the vast majority of the team's core players regressed or battled injuries while the team's free agent signings flopped. The result of that lovely combination was a woeful 73-89 record, which was a whopping 15.5 games below their projected over/under win total in Vegas. The Twins were worse than disappointing in 2021 – they were embarrassing.

Things really can't get much worse for the Twins in 2022. If you want to look at things through an optimistic lens, the team's weaknesses are clearly defined, and the front office reportedly has been given the green light from ownership to spend money to plug those holes in a strong free agent class. The team's three biggest needs are starting pitching, relief help and finding a shortstop who can hit his way out of a wet paper bag. Players who fit those descriptions are all readily available.

The problem with this front office regime in recent years has been that they've tried to thread the needle of not committing too much long-term money to free agents while still acquiring productive players. That's not an easy thing to do, and as we found out last year with signings like Alex Colome, J.A. Happ, Andrelton Simmons and Matt Shoemaker, you can't always rely on your coaching staff to polish up players you find in the bargain bin. I understand the Twins are a mid-market team and can't spend Boston, New York or Los Angeles money in free agency. I also understand they are going to consistently be a



**SPORTS COLUMNIST**  
BY ANDY THAYER

losing team if J.A. Happ is the best starting pitcher they acquire in a given offseason.

Complicating matters this winter is the looming expiration of the current collective bargaining agreement Dec. 1. It seems increasingly likely that baseball's owners will lock out the players starting in December, and that will forestall any signings or trades. While I'm fairly confident things will be resolved prior to the start of the 2022

regular season, I wouldn't be surprised if there's almost no significant movement with the free agent market prior to a frenzy in February. Remember, deadlines drive action, and the new collective bargaining agreement will likely be inked right before the start of spring training games when owners would start losing revenue. That hurts a team like the Twins, who like to find value by waiting out the market and signing veterans who missed out on top of the market deals. The Twins likely won't have that luxury this offseason.

We might see a few players sign prior to Dec. 1, but it will likely be guys who get surprisingly strong offers (like Andrew Heaney, who signed with the Dodgers for \$6.75 million despite posting a 5.83 ERA and 1.32 WHIP last season) or fringe players who want to lock in long-term financial security by taking under-market extended deals. Because it's unclear if draft-pick compensation will be required to sign free agents that were tendered qualifying offers, my bet is that none of the players in that situation will sign prior to Dec. 1.

In an upcoming column, we'll take a look at the available free agents to see who the Twins might pursue. Until then, let's cross our fingers the Twins can jump the market and ink a high impact player to a deal before December.

## Lumberjacks

from front

"Obviously, we want to score first in every game, but it was good to see us respond the shift after," Vold said. "I think them scoring woke us up a little."

From there, all of Granite City's scoring struggles subsided, with the visitors tallying three more goals across a 15-minute span of ice time. Nicholas Richert remained the team's leading scorer with two scores.

"He's been the driver of offense for us," Vold said. "He raises our pace of play, and when he's on the ice, he makes his teammates keep up with him."

Sandwiched between Richert's goals was Brett Reed's fifth tally of the campaign. The third-year forward continuously made his two-way presence known on the ice.

"He's the heart and soul of our team," Vold said. "When we need a good shift or need somebody to be reliable all over the ice, he's probably the guy we turn to."

Quentin Sigurdson registered 25 saves to pick up his fifth win of the season in net.

The Lumberjacks played Willmar again Nov. 12. They will complete a two-game weekend series versus the WarHawks at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 13, at Sports Arena East in Sauk Rapids.

"It's like a mini-playoff series in the middle of the year," Vold said. "It will be fun to see how we handle it."

**GCL** 0 2 2-4  
**WIL** 0 1 2-3

Second period: 2. Daikawa (Sean Davidson, Ben Anderson) 8:55. 3. Richert (Tucker Skime, Nolan Widman) 16:40. Third period: 4. Reed (Wyatt Halvorson, Brock Maseth) 9:19. 5. Richert (Kyle Mortenson, Bjorn Jorgenson) 11:08. Goalie: Sigurdson 25-28.



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# Sensational

# Storm

## SRR volleyball stuns Alexandria to reach state tournament

BY TOM FENTON  
STAFF WRITER

The fact the Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team topped Alexandria for the Section 8AAA title Nov. 6 likely came as a surprise to many. Not included in that group were the Storm players.

The team talked confidently about their chances against heavily favored Alexandria, and they obviously believed it. The Storm blew past the Cardinals in four sets in front of a large and ear-splitting crowd at Melrose Area High School to reach the state tournament for the first time since 1988. Scores were 25-18, 13-25, 25-18 and 25-22.

“When we came out and won the first set, it really shook them, and we kept coming at them hard,” said sophomore Ava Athman, who had eight kills and four blocks. “I’m honestly in awe right now. It just came down to wanting to achieve our goal. Everything clicked. We worked together as a team and it all fell into place. We wanted this one.”

The Storm played Kasson-Mantorville in



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

The Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team consists of assistant coach Kari Meyer (front, from left), Morgan Eggert, Darci Peterson, Kieryn Hirdler, Chelsey Vogel and Hailee Cullen; (second row, from left) assistant coach Gail Bialke, Jordyn Lee, Grace Urbowicz, Lexi Helmin, Ava Athman, Emma Portner and Delia Gustafson; (back, from left) assistant coach Taylor Gerdes, Lauren Schloe, Sophia Rothstein, Katelyn Anderson, head coach Karen Beckmann, Lexie Johnson and assistant coach Jenn Kranz. The Storm clinched the Section 8AAA championship in a win over Alexandria Nov. 6 in Melrose. Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball players Darci Peterson, Kieryn Hirdler, Lexi Helmin and coach Karen Beckmann celebrate the team’s 3-1 victory over Alexandria in the Section 8AAA championship Nov. 6 at Melrose Area High School in Melrose. The Storm clinched the program’s first state tournament berth since 1988.

the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA State Volleyball Tournament quarterfinals Nov. 10 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul and regardless of the result were scheduled to also play a game Nov. 12.

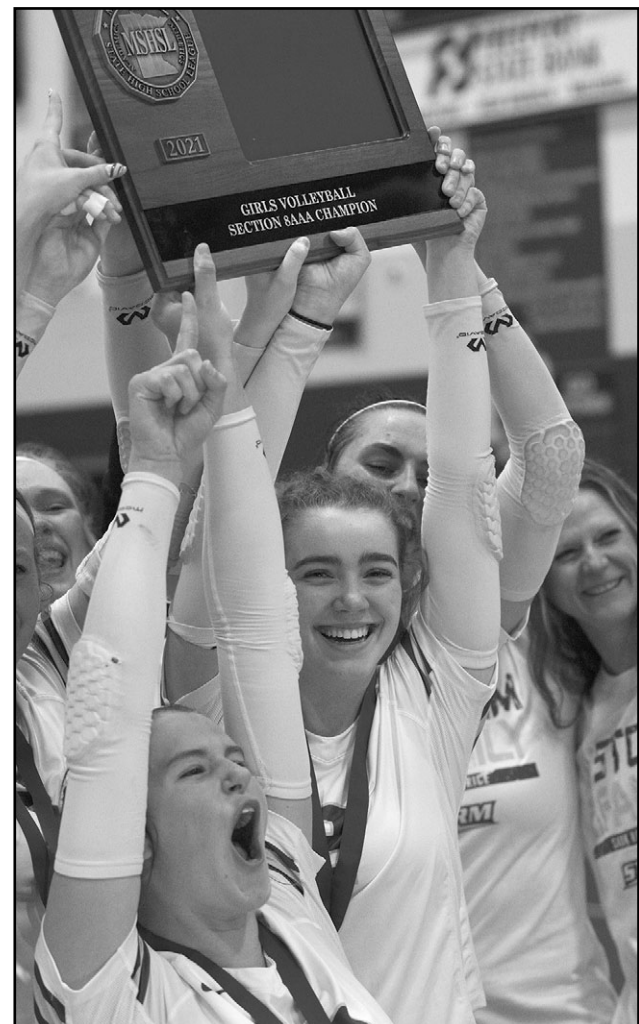
“I literally think my

soul left my body,” said senior Hailee Cullen, who had nine kills and 10 digs. “I can’t explain it. It didn’t hit me until five minutes after and people were screaming, then I started bawling. I can’t stop shaking. We knew the way we’re playing


right now that we had a shot. We’re one unit right now.”

Alexandria (26-2) defeated SRR twice during the regular season while only losing one set.

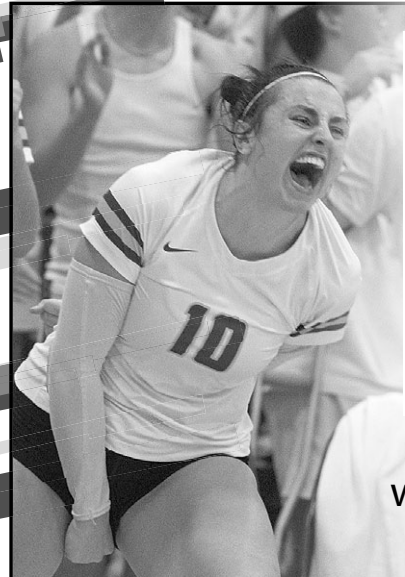
Volleyball page 7B




Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball players Darci Peterson (from left), Kieryn Hirdler, Lexi Helmin and head coach Karen Beckmann celebrate the team’s 3-1 victory over Alexandria in the Section 8AAA championship Nov. 6 at Melrose Area High School. The Storm defeated top-seeded Alexandria in four sets.



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Senior Hailee Cullen (left) and sophomore Katelyn Anderson cannot hide their excitement after Cullen threw down an emphatic block against Alexandria Nov. 6 at Melrose Area High School. Cullen finished with nine kills and 10 digs to help the Storm to a four-set victory.

PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

## Volleyball from 6B

The Cardinals were the overwhelming top seed in the section and were ranked fifth in Class AAA.

The Storm (13-16) had other ideas. They came out aggressive from the opening point and served notice they would not go away quietly, taking a 17-8 lead in the opening set on their way to a convincing win.

The Cardinals got the wakeup call and won the second set in the same fashion. SRR did not panic, pulling to an 18-14 lead in the third set.

"We decided to

start back at 0-0 with our record and knew we only needed to win three games to make it to state," junior hitter Morgan Eggert said. "We knew we could do it, and we all had the confidence in each other. We just came together to pull it off."

The fourth set was a back-and-forth affair, featuring many ties and lead changes. The Storm scored two straight points to pull ahead 21-19, leading to an Alexandria timeout.

Like it did all night, SRR found a way to

finish, clinching a victory and a wild celebration.

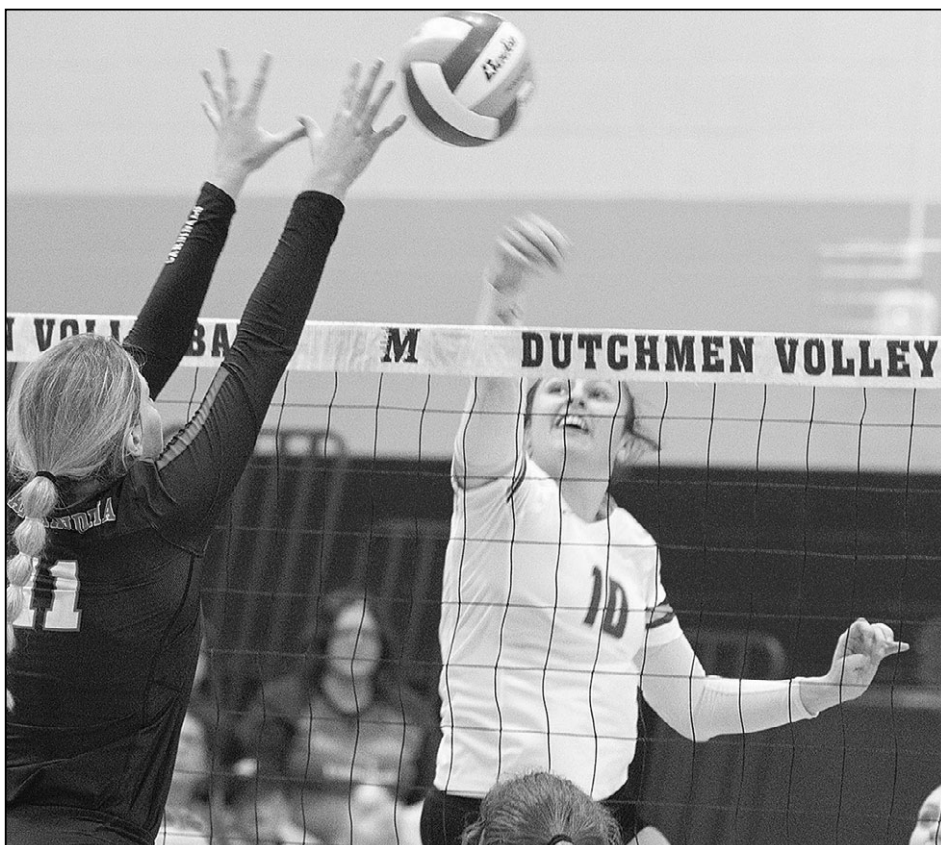
"We were so confident coming in and they were pretty cocky coming into it, so we worked really hard to prepare and it paid off," said senior Darci Peterson, who had team-best 12 kills and 14 digs. "It doesn't feel real. I tried to cry, but I was just so happy I didn't know what to do. I dropped to the floor and found my favorite person, Hailee. It's so amazing."

Senior Kieryn Hirdler led the Storm offense with 32 set assists to go along with four digs. Lexi Helmin added five kills and two blocks, Sophia

Rothstein had four kills and two digs, Grace Urbowicz had nine digs from the libero position, and Katelyn Anderson added three digs for the Storm.

For coach Karen Beckmann, who is in her fourth year leading the program, the victory was a culmination of a team that has been steadily progressing since mid-October.

"We had been practicing really hard and looking at what they do, what we do and what we need to do to overcome them," Beckmann said. "The last three weeks, it's been coming together. They've been overcoming things and not quitting. The part that was cool is when things weren't clicking, they sat down, talked about it and figured it out."



Lexi Helmin tips the ball over an Alexandria blocker in the Section 8AAA championship Nov. 6 at Melrose Area High School. Helmin finished with five kills in the four-set victory.

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I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old. I live in \_\_\_\_\_.

For Christmas this year I would like :

\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Parents - please fill out:**

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Note to Parents: Please use **this form** for submitting your student's "Letter to Santa" this year. Fill the forms out **completely** and be sure to include the child's full name, grade, and school name. Please keep letters to 50 words or less. We reserve the right to edit. Then turn them into the Sauk Rapids Herald office at 2 Second Ave. S., Suite 135 Sauk Rapids, MN 56379 **by the deadline** Friday, November 19, 2021. The Christmas Greetings tab will be published in the Sauk Rapids Herald December 18, 2021.

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