Prior Lake’s Hofschild hits 63 but Park Center wins 99-95

Swift little guard breaks record that stood since 1982

By Bruce Strand

Sixty-three points, by one player. And her team didn’t even win. It was one spectacular basketball game.

Prior Lake guard McKenna Hofschild broke a 37-year-old state record but Park Center fought off the Lakers 99-95 on Saturday in the Breakdown Tip-Off Classic at Hopkins.

“It was a fun game for fans to watch as both teams shot well and both teams played to the final horn,” said Barbara Metcalf, Park Center coach. “Any time you have a special kid like Hofschild on the court and a team that complements her style, you need to be ready for anything!”

Hofschild, listed at 5-foot-3 (that’s probably a stretch) with blazing speed and deadly accuracy from NBA three-point range, tallied a mere 21 points at halftime, but poured in 42 in the second half.

“There wasn’t a moment in the game that I realized what was happening,” Hofschild told the Star-Tri-bune. “They didn’t show point totals on the scoreboard, so I had no idea how many I had. I was just trying to do anything and everything to help my team.”

Hofschild: continued on Page 3

McKenna Hofschild races up the court in the first half against Park Center. She had 21 points and halftime and erupted for 42 in the second half.

Bruce Strand
MN Basketball News

It was all the more impressive that the Seton Hall recruit was able to break the record in a close game against a strong opponent as she went 24-for-30 on free shots, one short of the record of 25 by Bryanne Engen of Sauk Centre in 2003, and 17-for-28 on field goals (5-for-11 on three’s) with five rebounds and two steals.

Hofschild also passed 2,000 career points in the game. Last year, she averaged 28.4 points on a 16-15 team that reached the state tournament, where she had 27 and 30...
## 2019 Pacesetter Newsletter

### Minnesota Youth Basketball State Championship Region Playoffs!

#### Region Playoffs Schedule

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### Team Entry Form - Minnesota Region Playoffs

All grades refer to the 2018-2019 school year.

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All players on a team must either be enrolled in the same school system or live or attend school in the same city, the same school district or the same tribal community. Smaller schools may combine to form one team if the combined enrollment of their high schools for grades 9-12 is 400 or fewer. Schools that combine should be from neighboring schools.

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**Register Soon!!**

Register online at www.pacesettersports.net

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**Team Name/Color**

**Team Contact**

**Cell #**

**Mailing Address**

**Email Address**

**Alternate Contact**

Send this form with check to: PACESETTER, PO BOX 222, PAYNESVILLE, MN 56362

or register online at www.pacesettersports.net • $175/team before Jan. 31 • $185/team after Jan. 31
Hofschild: scores record 63 in epic shootout loss

Continued from Page 1

points in two losses. Her previous high was 43 points in last year’s section finals against Minnetonka.

“I truly had no idea how many points she had,” said coach Mike Gidley. “But if anyone was going to break that record, it doesn’t surprise me it was McKenna.”

Gidley told the Star-Tribune last year, “McKenna has an incredible vertical. I’ve seen her block the shots of big post players. She might be tiny, but she is explosive.”

The state single-game record was 58 points, set by Kay Konerza of Lester Prairie in an 81-26 rout of Winsted Holy Trinity on Feb. 22, 1982. Konerza, who also had a 54-point game in 1981, was a blue-chip recruit who went on to play for Louisiana Tech, one of the top college teams at the time.

“Hofschild had a ‘magical’ night,” said Metcalf. “As an opposing coach, I admire not only her freakish ability to hit from anywhere, but her teammates’ display of unselfishness.”

The Pirates kept changing their defensive matchups to try knock Hofschild off her rhythm. “To no avail,” Metcalf said. “Our foul trouble led right into her hands.”

Park Center led 43-39 at halftime, opened a double-digit lead in the second half, and hung on despite the historic siege by Hofschild.

Propelling the Pirates were a pair of fleet sophomore forwards, Adalia McKenzie with 32 points and T’Naye Griffin with 28. Also in double digits were junior guard Lauren Frost with 18 and eighth-grade forward Aniyah Reuben with 10.

“I was pleased with our offensive performance, four Pirates in double digits,” Metcalf said. “We are a younger team, learning how to make each other better.”

The Pirates shot 31-for-57 overall (54 percent) including 8-for-17 on three’s while struggling at the free throw line, 29-for-48. Prior Lake was 29-for-54 (53 percent), 9-for-20 on three’s and 28-for-42 at the stripe. Rebounds and fouls were nearly even. By the way, that adds up to 90 free shots in one game.

While Hofschild is the first Minnesota girl to break 60, there have been 27 players who’ve scored in the 50’s on a total of 33 instances, according to lists compiled by Matthew Pederson, state basketball record-keeper.

The 50-point club leaders

Braham’s Rebekah Dahlman (who played for Vanderbilt) had 56 in 2011. Notching 55 were Debbie Harms of Christ’s Household of Faith in 1982, Amanda Gehrke of Cass Lake-Bena in 1998, Kierah Kimbrough of Badger-Greenbush-Middle River in 2005 and Ta’Kendra Elbert of Tartan in 2014. Carlie Wagner, former Gopher star, had the most half-century games, with 53, 50 and 50, for New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Geneva, the last of those in a state finals win her senior year. With two 50-or-more games each were Konerza, Elbert, Chisholm’s Judy McDonald and Byron’s Ayoka Lee.

“It’s crazy,” Hofschild said, “to think I’m at the top of that category.”
East Ridge trips Hopkins in 1 vs. 2 duel, heading gala Breakdown Big 12 lineup

By Bruce Strand

The top two teams in the Class 4A boys rankings met in the season opener with No. 1 East Ridge foiling No. 2 Hopkins 74-65 on Saturday.

And that was just one of six marque matchups involving a dozen of the best teams in the state at the first annual Breakdown Big 12 Classic held at Cretin-Derham Hall in St. Paul.

Breakdown, owned by Justin Hegna, put together this unique boys showcase while also conducting their 15th annual girls Breakdown Tip Off Classic in Hopkins. Breakdown will host its regular boys Tip-Off Classic this Saturday at Hopkins with many of the same teams among 16 matchups.

In the one vs. two showdown, Kendall Brown, 6-6 sophomore, scored 26 points for East Ridge, 18 in the second half when he shot 7-for-8 (with two 3-pointers). Courtney Brown added 17 points, Ben Carlson 16 and Zach Zebrowski 13 as the Raptors had too many weapons to cover.

For Hopkins, Zeke Nnaji sank 20 points, Jalen Dearring 17, Andy Stafford 14 and Dane Zimmer 11.

The Royals had the early lead at 12-4 but that didn’t last. East Ridge went on a 20-4 run helped along by coaxing turnovers.

Coach Bryce Tesdahl told Minnesota Basketball Hub: “Every team we play is going to give us their best shot. I thought it was good to take a bit of a punch in the mouth because we didn’t stress about it. It was a good wake-up call for us.”

Hopkins played without one of its stars, Kerwin Walton (concussion) and lost Dearring late in the game (charlie horse).

Also at the Big 12 Classic:

DeLaSalle scuttled Eden Prairie 76-66, buoyed by Tyrell Terry with 28 points, eight assists and seven rebounds. Jamison Battle chipped in 21 points for the top-ranked team in Class 3A. Eden Prairie, No. 3 in Class 4A, had Drake Dobbs with 20 points, Austin Andrews with 17 and Connor Christensen with 14.

Park Center edged Prior Lake 66-64 after leading 39-22 at halftime in a duel of the No. 5 and 6 ranked teams. Dain Dinja had 15 points and seven rebounds, and Tommy Chatman 13 points. Dinja and Detavious Fiersen (seven points) fouled out. The Pirates overcame 32 points and 12 rebounds by Prior Lake’s 6-10 junior Dawson Garcia, and 6-9 senior Robert Jones’ 17 points and 12 rebounds.

No. 4 Lakeville North tripped No. 11 Edina 70-62, powered by Tyler Wahl with 28 points and 12 rebounds, with Tommy Jensen adding 17 points. Jack Middleton notched 24 points (11-for-12 at the line) and Charlie Haff 20 for Edina.


If you have a tip for Minnesota Basketball News about a team, coach, issue, achievement or upcoming event, please feel free to contact us. Send a message to bruce.a.strand@gmail.com.
Hopkins, Stewartville snap long win streaks of defending champs at Breakdown

By Bruce Strand

Two unbeaten state girls champions of 2017-18 saw long winning streaks snapped at the Breakdown Tip-Off Classic on Saturday.

Hopkins pummeled defending Class 4A champion Eastview 78-45, ending a 35-game streak by the Lightning.

Stewartville snapped defending Class 2A champion Sauk Centre’s 34-game streak 71-67 in overtime.

Top-ranked Hopkins (4-0) was powered by Paige Bueckers with 25 points. Amaya Battle added 14 points and Dlayla Chakolis with 13. Lauren Glas had 18 and Macy Guebert 11 for Eastview (2-1).

Hopkins guard Paige Bueckers leans to pass the ball during the Royals’ 78-45 win over Eastview.

Eastview graduated three of their six all-conference players (including Miss Basketball) from the 32-0 squad that beat Hopkins in the 2018 state finals 68-63.

For Stewartville, Kailee Malone gave the Tigers the lead with a 3-point shot in OT and Olivia Quam iced it with two free shots. Lilly Welch potted 22 points, Malone 15 and Maia Peterson 13 for the Tigers (3-1). Their 1,000-point sophomore star Erin Lamb had early foul trouble and was limited to seven points.

Sauk Centre got 19 points from Julia Dammann, 15 from McKenna Westby and 12 from Tori Peschel, the lone returning starter. Peschel’s slashing 3-point play tied the score at 63 with 20 seconds left in regulation forcing overtime.

Stewartville’s Lilly Welch, who scored 22 points, drives against Sauk Centre’s Megan Klapake (13) and Julia Dammann (35). Stewartville won 71-67 in overtime at the Breakdown Tip-Off.

Photos by Bruce Strand, MN Basketball News

Eastview graduated three of their six all-conference players (including Miss Basketball) from the 32-0 squad that beat Hopkins in the 2018 state finals 68-63.

For Stewartville, Kailee Malone gave the Tigers the lead with a 3-point shot in OT and Olivia Quam iced it with two free shots. Lilly Welch potted 22 points, Malone 15 and Maia Peterson 13 for the Tigers (3-1). Their 1,000-point sophomore star Erin Lamb had early foul trouble and was limited to seven points.

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Pacesetter Expecting 1,000 Teams for 5-State Youth Playoffs - Grades 4-9

State championships in five states, Great Five-State championships at Target Center in Minneapolis

Even beyond the dream comes true!

Teams in grades 4-9 now have a state championship in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota - and a 5-state championship at the Target Center in Minneapolis, home of the Timberwolves and 3-time world champion, Minnesota Lynx.

“I remember when I was in 5th grade,” said Jeff McCarron, Director of Pacesetter since 1980. “We played two halftime games at varsity games. That was it. In 7th grade we played six games - total. I remember where I was then when I dreamt of being able to play off against the state’s best 7th grade teams. Pacesetter is now giving kids that dream. The Great Five-State at the Target Center is beyond that dream!”

Last year over 900 teams played in the Pacesetter 5-state system, which was the first year for Wisconsin.

“We had some incredible games!” said McCarron. “We had both ends of the spectrum - from small towns winning championships to a team near Milwaukee (New Berlin West) with a young Jordan-like player on their team - he was big-time dunking in 8th grade - winning it on a last-second shot. Our first Wisconsin Great State champion. They had seven seconds left. He took the ball full court in four seconds and dished to a teammate in the corner for the winning shot.”

All teams that enter the playoffs begin in their own state with state championship playoffs, playing 3-4 games in one day. Minnesota has an 8-region state playoff March-April with eight region champions advancing to state in June. Minnesota’s state champion and runner-up will be invited to Great State.

North Dakota and South Dakota have Class A and Class B tournaments March-April in Jamestown and Huron with a “Border Battle Class B” tournament for one bid to the Great State in Minneapolis. The Class A state champions will get direct invitations to Great State. Iowa and Wisconsin will both have one-class state tournaments in Des Moines and Ripon. The two state champions and one state runner-up team from those two states will get a bids to Minneapolis.

“There is great pressure on school-team sports now due to club team expansion as teams split for AAU-style tournaments,” said McCarron. “Pacesetter supports ‘Hometown Teams’ - school and community teams - by providing a first-class, high-profile tournament system for school and community-based teams - the teams that will be playing together in high school. Kids can certainly do both, but we emphasize that playing for your school or community is the top priority. The AAU-style tournaments put too much emphasis on individuals...for my taste. Basketball is a great TEAM sport...and character builder through effort, sportsmanship, and teamwork...and it should always be played that way.”

Teams may register online at www.pacesettersports.net. All teams will play 3-4 games in one day at every tournament. Team discounts are offered for early registration - $10 off - by Jan. 31 - and multiple team entries - $10/team off with three of more teams registering online in the same transaction.

Let the DREAMS begin!
Another Thielen? NLS’s Zylstra creates his opportunity with Vikings

By Bruce Strand

Minnesota small-town athlete. Didn’t play Division I football. Didn’t get drafted. Lands with the Vikings as a free-agent wide receiver.

Sound familiar?

That scenario worked out pretty well for Adam Thielen, former basketball/football star from Detroit Lakes.

And now there’s Brandon Zylstra from New London-Spicer.

With one catch for 23 yards as a rookie this season, Zylstra is actually ahead of the pace of Thielen, who was a taxi-squadder his first year on the purple payroll. Of course, very few free agents pan out like Thielen, currently one of the NFL’s premier receivers, but the 25-year-old Zylstra at least has a foot in the door, after two seasons in the Canadian Football League.

“It’s definitely something I’m proud of, but I’m never really satisfied,” Zylstra told the West Central Tribune, the regional daily that covered him at NLS, where he made all-conference in basketball, football and track. “I’m here, but now I have to make sure I stay here and contribute every week. As much as I would like to exhale and relax a little bit, you can’t really with this job.”

Zylstra, the only current Viking from a Division III team, got his first, and so far only, NFL catch from Kirk Cousins on Oct. 21. It was a 23-yard advance, keeping alive a drive that led to a touchdown in a 37-17 win at home. No. 15’s main duties so far are serving on punt and kickoff teams.

“We thought the ability was there to be an NFL player,” said Dan Essler, his football and track coach at NLS, “but, was he ever going to get his shot? His big chance? He’s worked so hard to be the best he can be and it has worked out for him.”

At NLS, he played for two state championship teams his junior year in 2009-10, as a backup forward in basketball (seven points in three games at state) and starting wide receiver in football (five catches, 56 yards In the 28-21 win over Glencoe-Silver Lake at the Prep Bowl).

“It was his senior year when he really improved and his performances took off,” said Essler. “Brandon made such huge strides. He worked out hard. He knew he would have to carry the load in all his sports as a senior.”

Zylstra caught 42 passes for 819 yards and nine touchdowns, while making 86 tackles at linebacker, on 9-2 football team. He averaged 10 points and seven rebounds for a 19-9 basketball team, then placed third in the state track meet in triple jump, also qualifying in high jump and long jump.

At Concordia-Moorhead, Zylstra caught 18 touchdown passes but, after a big junior year in both football and track, he didn’t have great stats his senior football seasons when the Cobbers went to a running offense with a new quarterback. That seemed to diminish his long-shot chances for the pros.

However, in track that spring, he high-jumped 6 feet, 10 3/4 inches at the MIAC meet. He’d been clearing 6-8 and 6-9 previously. “Phenomenal, for a guy his size, 6-4 and 215 pounds. That can really catch attention of scouts,” said Essler, adding that an impressive Pro Day at North Dakota State also helped.

The Edmonton Eskimos signed Zylstra. He sparkled in the CFL with 134 catches for 2,195 yards and eight touchdowns in 22 games over two seasons. That led to his free-agent shot with the Vikings. He made the 53-man roster, getting that terrific news on final cut-down day Sept. 1.

Adam Thielen can relate. “I just try to be a soundboard for him,” Thielen said, asked about Zylstra. “If he has any questions, if he has anything that he thinks he needs help with, I just want to make sure he knows I’m there. I’ve been down that road and played a lot of special teams in my day.”
Breakdown Tip-Off Classic snapshots

Chaska’s Elizabeth Cornell scores on a break against Maple Grove during her team’s 56-23 win.

Cheyanne Carter (11) and Anisah Wolf of Benilde-St. Margaret’s battle for the ball with Marshall Kaia Sueker. BSM beat the Tigers 43-39.

Francesca Vascellaro of Holy Angels pulls up to score after chasing down a loose ball, trailed by Cooper’s Jayla Reliford. Holy Angels won 74-66.

Stillwater’s Alexis Pratt checks the floor during a 66-40 win over Lakeville South.

Tessa Johnson of STMA scores, trailed by Annaliese Tschaida of Lakeville South. STMA won 74-53.

Abigail Groeneweg of Forest Lake takes a deep breath before a free shot during a 57-52 win over Centennial.

Adeline Kent pivots with the ball in Becker’s 56-42 win over Bloomington Kennedy.

Centennial’s Sarah Lavell duels Forest Lake’s Abby Leach.
GIRLS TOP 20s

CLASS 4A
1. Hopkins 4-0
2. Wayzata 3-0
3. Eastview 2-1
4. Roseville 5-0
5. St. Michael-Albertville 3-0
6. Stillwater 2-1
7. Forest Lake 4-0
8. Farmington 1-0
9. Eden Prairie 4-0
10. Chaska 3-0
11. Centennial 1-1
12. Lakeville North 1-2
13. Park Center 1-2
14. Prior Lake 0-2
15. Robbinsdale Armstrong 3-0
16. Apple Valley 3-1
17. Burnsville 3-0
18. Maple Grove 1-2
19. St. Louis Park 2-1
20. Moorhead 3-0

CLASS 3A
1. Alexandria 2-0
2. Northfield 2-0
3. DeLaSalle 1-2
4. Willmar 2-0
5. St. Paul Como Park 5-0
6. Mankato West 3-0
7. Waseca 4-0
8. Waconia 3-0
9. Hill-Murray 4-0
10. Simley 3-1
11. Red Wing 3-1
12. New Ulm 2-1
13. Holy Angels 3-1
14. Benilde-St. Margaret’s 4-1
15. Kasson-Mantorville 3-0
16. Robbinsdale Cooper 0-2
17. Becker 3-1
18. Princeton 3-1
19. Grand Rapids 1-1
20. Hibbing 2-1

CLASS 2A
1. Roseau 2-1
2. Stewartville 4-1
3. Sauk Centre 2-1
4. Eden Valley-Watkins 2-0
5. Proctor 4-0
6. Minnehaha Academy 2-3
7. Holy Family Catholic 4-2
8. Rush City 2-1
9. Norwood-Young America 2-0
10. Lake City 3-0
11. Crookston 3-0
12. Maranatha Christian 1-1
13. New London- Spicer 2-1
14. Annandale 3-0
15. Albany 3-0
16. Redwood Valley 2-0
17. Duluth Marshall 4-0
18. Pine City 3-0
19. Concordia Academy 2-1
20. Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton 3-1

CLASS 1A
1. Minneota 3-0
2. Mountain Iron-Buhl 3-0
3. Heritage Christian 3-0
4. Menahga 3-0
5. Pelican Rapids 2-0
6. Ada-Borup 1-1
7. Grand Meadow 3-0
8. Goodhue 3-1
9. Lac qui Parle Valley 3-0
10. SW Minn. Christian 1-0
11. Hills-Beaver Creek 2-0
12. BOLD 0-2
13. Cromwell-Wright 2-0
14. Parkers Prairie 3-0
15. Stephen-Argyle 3-0
16. Red Lake 1-0
17. Wabasso 1-1
18. Pine River-Backus 2-0
19. Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa 2-0
20. Park Christian 4-0

Menahga’s Alyssa Peterson drives for a basket against Celia Carney of Hayfield. Menahga won 52-33.
### Boys Top 20s

**Class 4A**
1. East Ridge 1-0  
2. Hopkins 1-1  
3. Lakeville North 2-0  
4. Eden Prairie 1-1  
5. Park Center 2-0  
6. Prior Lake 0-1  
7. Wayzata 2-0  
8. Cretin-Derham Hall 0-1  
9. Shakopee 1-0  
10. Rochester John Marshall 0-0  
11. Edina 0-1  
12. Minnetonka 1-0  
13. Tartan 1-0  
14. St. Paul Central 0-0  
15. Champlin Park 1-0  
16. Eastview 2-0  
17. Chaska 1-1  
18. White Bear Lake 1-0  
19. Maple Grove 0-0  
20. Rochester Mayo 0-0

**Class 3A**
1. DeLaSalle 2-0  
2. Princeton 2-0  
3. Robbinsdale Cooper 1-0  
4. Mahtomedi 1-0  
5. Austin 0-0  
6. Waseca 2-0  
7. Marshall 0-0  
8. Mankato East 0-0  
9. Delano 0-1  
10. Columbia Heights 0-1  
11. Hibbing 2-0  
12. St. Paul Harding 0-0  
13. Willmar 0-0  
14. Bemidji 0-0  
15. Northfield 0-0  
16. St. Thomas Academy 1-0  
17. Hermantown 2-0  
18. Fergus Falls 1-0  
19. Orono 2-1  
20. Minneapolis Roosevelt 3-1

**Class 2A**
1. Minnehaha Academy 1-0  
2. Minneapolis North 0-0  
3. Perham 1-1  
4. Lake City 2-0  
5. Caledonia 1-0  
6. Melrose 1-0  
7. Rochester Lourdes 1-0  
8. Hawley 1-0  
9. Breckenridge 1-1  
10. Breck 1-0  
11. St. Charles 1-0  
12. New London-Spicer 2-0  
13. Osakis 1-0  
14. Brooklyn Center 0-1  
15. St. Cloud Cathedral 0-1  
16. Spectrum 1-0  
17. Pine City 1-0  
18. Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City 1-0  
19. Morris/Chokio Alberta 1-1  
20. Mesabi East 0-1

**Class 1A**
1. Minneota 1-0  
2. Springfield 1-0  
3. Cass Lake Bena 1-0  
4. Russell-Tyler-Ruthton 1-0  
5. BOLD 2-0  
6. North Woods 2-1  
7. Ortonville 1-1  
8. MN Valley Lutheran 1-0  
9. Cromwell-Wright 1-0  
10. Mt. Lake/Comfrey 0-0  
11. Mayer Lutheran 2-0  
12. Mahnomen-Waubun 0-0  
13. New Ulm Cathedral 1-0  
14. Henning 1-0  
15. Ada-Borup 1-0  
16. Murray Co. Central 3-0  
17. SW Minn. Christian 2-0  
18. Dawson-Boyd 1-0  
19. Randolph 1-0  
20. Westbrook-Walnut-Grove 2-0

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Sam Schwartz of White Bear Lake lines up a free shot on the way to scoring 27 points in a 96-76 win over Cambridge-Isanti.

Bruce Strand  
MN Basketball News
The Winter Classic will be held at The College of St. Benedict on Saturday & Sunday, March 2 & 3.

This tournament is open to all boys’ and girls’ teams in grades 4-5-6-7-8. All players must either be enrolled in the same school system or live or attend school in the same city, the same school district or tribal community.

A maximum of 40 teams can be accepted each day due to court space.

Each tournament is a ONE-day tournament. All teams will play 3-4 games.

Championship teams will receive a team plaque, and top finishers will receive individual medals with neck ribbons.

Registration is available at www.pacesettersports.net
Facebook/Instagram/Twitter: Pacesetter Basketball

Team Entry Form

Questions?
info@pacesetternet.com
320-243-7460

Team rating: (confidential)

Strong Good
Fair Weak

Mail check payable to Pacesetter & send with form to Pacesetter, PO Box 222, Paynesville, MN 56362

Registration fee: $160/team before Jan. 31 • $170/team after Jan. 31 • 3-4 game guarantee

Mail check payable to Pacesetter & send with form to Pacesetter, PO Box 222, Paynesville, MN 56362

Registration available online at www.pacesettersports.net
No more hoops for Gopher grid recruit

Jason Williamson, the sensational Owatonna tailback who led the Huskies to a pair of state championships, did not return to their basketball team this year, in order to get a jump start on his Gopher football career.

Williamson scored on jaunts of 71 and 44 yards in the Prep Bowl as Owatonna beat St. Thomas Academy 14-3 in a duel of unbeatens for another Class 5A crown, giving him 46 touchdowns for the year.

Last winter, Williamson scored 11 ppg to help Owatonna post a 21-7 record. His superb athletic ability would benefit any kind of team.

But he will make football his lone sport from now on. “Jason is leaving (Owatonna) for the Gophers early, and enrolled at the ‘U’ for the spring semester,” reports Owatonna hoops coach Josh Williams. But this should be good news for long-suffering Gopher football fans.

New coach for Lyle-Pacelli girls

Defending state Class 1A girls champion Lyle-Pacelli lost its first two games, to Zumbrota-Mazeppa and Dover-Eyota, before defeating Spring Grove 72-56 behind Olivia Christianson with 35 points and 15 steals. The Athletics (now 3-2) graduated two pillars of the team (floor leader Brooke Walter and 6-5 post Kristi Fett) while returning their No. 2 and 3 scorers, Christianson and Abigail Bollingberg. They have a new coach, Anna Meyer, after Justin Morris moved out-of-state. Meyer played for Austin High School, then the local juco, Riverland, and Bemidji State. She had previous coaching stints with the Austin girls (interim coach one year) and boys (assistant last year) and with Riverland (assistant).

Cass Lake-Bena trips North Woods

Cass Lake-Bena boys stymied North Woods, state runner-up the last two years, 61-44 in their opener Saturday. “Hopefully we will have opportunity to play them again on the big stage: state 2019,” said coach John Wind. “We did not allow many lane penetrations or open set shots. Weak-side help was on point.” Jarell Jacobs scored 18 points, and Ethan Brown and Jarod Brown 12 each while small guard Miguel Reyes notched nine points and hustled for several long rebounds and loose balls. North Woods’ returning all-tournament players, Cade Goggleye and Trevor Morrison, were held to single digits.

Three notable transfers bolster Cretin-Derham Hall

Cretin-Derham Hall, state Class 4A champions last year, graduated all the starters except Jaeden King, senior guard. However, three established players transferred in this year: junior guard Curtis Jones from Minneapolis South (17 ppg last year), senior forward Karsten Broadley from Fosston (18 ppg) and freshman guard Tre Hollomon from Minneapolis North (10.5 ppg as an eighth-grader).

Delano, defending state Class 3A champion, has one returning starter: coach’s son Derek Techam, who’s averaged 10.2, 11.7 and 13.0 points as a starting guard since ninth grade (1,119 total). He was all-tourney last year.

Buffalo had two straight 6-21 seasons before going 15-14 last year including two section wins, and looks to continue that upward swing. Six of their top seven return, including two guards who made all-conference as sophomores last year, Matt Willert (19.9 ppg) and Tony Dahl (16 ppg).

Albany girls won their opener on a 3-point shot at the buzzer on Nov. 27 as Paige Meyer connected to beat Fergus Falls 50-47 at home. Meyer dominated throughout with 33 points. Fergus was led by freshmen Ellie Colbeck with 21 points and Tori Ratz with 13.

Erika Bute of Alden-Conger/Glenville-Emmons tallied her 2,000th point in the season opener. The senior guard scored 23 in a 77-61 win over Mountain Lake Area/Comfrey.

St. Clair is turning to its freshman class to carry most of the load this year, reports coach Charlie Freitag. “We will start three or four freshmen who are unbelievable players,” said the coach, referring to a group that won a Pacesetter state tournament in grade school. “They are going to be a lot of fun to watch over the next four years.” The freshmen on varsity are Devon Embacher, Thomas Loefler, Mason Ward, Connor Andree and Alex Freitag. Last year’s 18-11 squad had nine seniors. “We will begin a new legacy with these guys,” the coach said. “Same tradition, same goals, whole different group and style.” The youngsters got their first varsity win, over United South Central 52-34, on Tuesday, after two losses.