State tourney brought to halt

Due to coronavirus fears, semifinals and finals axed; boys action also ends

Clockwise from top right: Henning’s Megan Weber beams during a break in the action as she scored 29 points in a win over Fillmore Central; Lakeville North’s Michaela Juaire (left) and St. Michael-Albertville’s Vanessa Alexander battle over a rebound in a game won by STMA; Stillwater guard Alexis Pratt drives past Hopkins’ Amaya Battle in a semifinal won by Hopkins; Providence Academy’s Grace Counts (41) manuevers in the lane during a first-round upset of Sauk Centre.
Springfield, NUC in finals of loaded section

New Ulm Cathedral and Springfield were the finalists in the Section 2A tournament that had five of the top seven teams in the state Class 1A rankings. The Crusaders and Tigers, both 26-3, were slated to duel Friday before the boys sectionals were canceled.

NUC, ranked No. 6, toppled No. 1 BOLD 82-68 in the semifinals. BOLD (27-2) had beaten the Crusaders 59-53 in the regular season. With nobody taller than 6-3, BOLD packed the paint to make the taller Crusaders shoot from the outside, which backfired. NUC reserve Jon Adema shot 5-for-9 on three’s for his 15 points. Chris Knowles scored 24 points and Jon Zinniel 21 points.

BOLD got 30 points from Drew Sagedahl and 20 from Matt Morse, but Gavin Vosika (19.3 ppg) struggled with only three points and Jordan Sagedahl (18.1), dealing with a right ankle injury, was limited to eight.

“I told the guys they had the best year in program history. It ended this way, so that’s unfortunate,” Jake Brustuen told the West Central Tribune.

No. 7 Springfield edged No. 5 Springfield 70-66 in the other semifinal. Decker Scheffler powered the Tigers with 26 points. WEM (26-3) made 15 three-pointers but struggled with Springfield’s physicality, especially Scheffler. Grant McBroom scored 28 (with seven three’s) for WEM, Domanik Paulson 15 and Zach Sticken 12.

Pine Island boys (17-12), who upset No. 17 ranked Lewiston-Altura and No. 4 Lake City (as reported in last week’s edition) got no further as Stewartville shackled the Panthers 71-59 in the semifinals with Nolan Stier hitting 29 points.

The No. 5 ranked Pelican Rapids girls, after posting first unbeaten regular season, earned their first trip to state, grinding out a 43-41 win over No. 3 Fergus Falls for the Section 8AA crown. Maddie Guyer, senior guard, banked home the go-ahead basket with 5.6 seconds left at UM-Moorhead. Greta Tollefson scored 18 points and Anna Stephenson 16 for No. 5 ranked Pelican Rapids. Ellie Colbeck scored 22 for No. 3 Fergus Falls (25-5).
Almost 50 years ago, on March 21, 1970, the Minnesota High School League handed out the last one-class Minnesota state basketball championship trophy. The history of the traditional 8-team one-class tournament — which was long and storied and immensely popular — came to an end that night. Over 18,000 fans had again crammed their way into Williams Arena as they did every day of the 3-day tournament.

No one seemed to know in 1970 that that one-class state tournament would be the last. Plans for a two-class system were implemented two months later. Maybe the MSHSL did know it was the last, since they arranged to have the governor of Minnesota, Harold Levander, hand out that final trophy. Or could it be that the governor, who was a resident of South St. Paul, was offered to give out the trophy because the South St. Paul Packers were favored in the championship game?

There was just one small school with 54 seniors standing in the way — the Sherburn Raiders from two small towns in southern Minnesota, Sherburn and Dunnell. Only 1,221 residents in Sherburn and about 200 in Dunnell. Small schools were no longer considered a threat to win the state championship. Edgerton had won in 1960, and Marshall and Luverne continued the southwestern Minnesota dominance with titles in 1963 and 1964, but in 1965 Mnetonka won, followed by the 3-year reign of the mighty Edina Hornets 1966-68. In 1969 Rochester John Marshall, another large school, took home the honors, so the two-class system was formulated and ready to install in the spring of 1970 ... to give smaller schools a chance.

So the scene was set in 1970 to crown another metro area powerhouse: the governor was ready, the trophy was polished, and the 18,000 fans were ready to rock in Williams Arena. This game can actually still be seen on YouTube at wtcn 1970. It is a weathered version with some fuzzy gaps — appropriate in black and white — but most of the game can be watched, through the trophy presentation. Fortunately for the governor, the red on his face cannot be seen as he hands out the championship trophy to the “Hicks from the Sticks.” Sherburn 78, South St. Paul 62.

You can watch it. The boys from corn field country who had played in hay mows and shot the ball at baskets tacked to barns upset the city slickers. That is the “Hoosiers Story” that many feel transpired. It could be described that way and it has been by many. But in reality the game was played by young men from both teams that were well-educated and well-mannered and very similar in almost every way.

I was fortunate to have played in that game on the winning team. It stands as a lifetime treasure I wouldn’t trade for a gold medal or NBA championship ring. As players from small schools understand, there is a powerful force behind you when you know everybody you are playing for — every student, teacher, bus driver, custodian, cop, waitress, grocer, banker, baker, postman,” everybody. You carry the name of the town on your back and the town has your back It is a unique force in the world of sports.

While winning is wonderful, the greatest benefit of playing sports is the great network of friends made available. I enjoy telling young players in camps that their opponents are all just “friends you haven’t met yet” so be respectful and kind. People who stay close to the game into adulthood find this to be true as they meet so many past foes and create wonderful lasting
friendships. The tears running down Michael Jordan’s face as he talked about his friend and former foe, Kobe Bryant, are a powerful testament to the basketball brotherhood.

So 50 years has nearly passed since that final one-class trophy presentation ... and a group of teenagers known as “Raiders” in 1970 will be returning to Minneapolis as 65- to 67-year-old men for a special anniversary celebration with coaches, cheerleaders, families, friends and fans. We plan to have two gatherings, at Donovan’s Pub next to the Target Center, on Friday and Saturday, March 20-21, from 3 to 6 p.m. The trophy that an embarrassed Governor Levander had to give to the “Hicks from the Sticks” that final night will be there with the net from Williams Arena still hanging on it.

We invite any Minnesota fans who enjoy the nostalgia of the one-class tournament, and all former high school players or coaches from that era, to stop by and say hello. You are certain to meet some “friends you haven’t met yet.”
State tournament snapshots

Kalley Fischer of Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa sinks a 3-pointer against Cromwell-Wright.

Alyssa Ustby of Rochester Lourdes speeds toward the hoop, guarded by Sydney Hackett of Concordia Academy. Ustby hit 25 points as Lourdes won 71-55.

Taya Hakamaki was about to score after stealing the ball against Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa. She had 34 points in a 67-58 win.

These teams would have been dueling for titles

News of the cancelation of the rest of the girls basketball tournament due to coronavirus came just as your Minnesota Basketball News editor/writer/photographer was finishing up this week’s issue, so we have left in place the coverage that was supposed to be leading up to the tournament’s conclusions.

The Class 4A championship would have pitted Hopkins (30-0) against Farmington (29-2). Hopkins, with the finals axed, became the first girls team in Minnesota history with two straight unbeaten seasons.

The Class 3A championship would have been rematch between defending champ De La Salle (26-4) and Becker (28-2). In Class 2A, the semifinalists were Rochester Lourdes (28-2) vs. Waseca (25-6), and Providence Academy (26-5) vs. Duluth Marshall (26-5). In Class 1A, the semifinalists were defending champion Minneota (31-1) vs. Waterville-Elysian-Morristown (28-4), and Cromwell-Wright (29-2) vs. Henning (29-2).

Scores of abbreviated 2020 tournament

**CLASS 1A**

**QUARTERFINALS THURSDAY** -- Minneota 57, Red Lake 37 ... Waterville-Elysian-Morristown 58, Heritage Christian 46 ... Cromwell-Wright 67, Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa 58 ... Henning 69, Fillmore Central 56

**CONSOLATION THURSDAY** -- Pelican Rapids 60, Concordia Academy 55 ... Waseca 38, Pelican Rapids 22 ... Providence Academy 47, Sauk Centre 42 ... Duluth Marshall 60, New London-Spicer 56

**CLASS 2A**

**QUARTERFINALS WEDNESDAY** -- Rochester Lourdes 71, Concordia Academy 55 ... Waseca 38, Pelican Rapids 22 ... Providence Academy 47, Sauk Centre 42 ... Duluth Marshall 60, New London-Spicer 56

**CONSOLATION THURSDAY** -- Pelican Rapids 60, Concordia Academy 45 ... New London-Spicer 59, Sauk Centre 54

**CLASS 3A**

**QUARTERFINALS WEDNESDAY** -- DeLaSalle 85, Herman-town 52 ... Simley 70, Holy Angels 62 ... Becker 63, Alexander-dria 55 ... Waconia 52, Red Wing 45

**SEMIFINALS THURSDAY** -- DeLaSalle 74, Simley 52 ... Becker 96, Waconia 75

**CONSOLATION THURSDAY** -- Becker 63, Alexandria 55 ... Waconia 52, Red Wing 45

**CLASS 3A**

**QUARTERFINALS WEDNESDAY** -- Hopkins 85, Cambridge-Isanti 55 ... Stillwater 82, Park Center 52 ... Farmington 58, Eden Prairie 54 ... St. Michael-Albertville 67, Lakeville North 58

**SEMIFINALS THURSDAY** -- Hopkins 66, Stillwater 40 ... Farmington 78, St. Michael-Albertville 59

**CONSOLATION THURSDAY** -- Park Center 70, Cambridge-Isanti 62 ... Lakeville North 75, Eden Prairie 70

Marshall duo netted state win, lofty milestone

Duluth Marshall’s dazzling duo of guards, Gianna Kneepkens and Grace Kirk, passed the 5,000 marker for combined points in the quarterfinals. GK-squared was a lot more elated by the outcome of the game than the milestone, if they even noticed it. The Hilltoppers rallied to beat New London-Spicer 60-56, snapping a 22-game win streak by the Wildcats. In Marshall’s first-ever state tournament victory, in just their second appearance, Kneepkens poured in 26 points and grabbed 15 rebounds, and Kirk delivered 25 points off a slow start, both heating up as the game wore on. Kneepkens, 5-11 junior averaging 31 points, had 2,720 after beating NLS. Kirk, 5-5 senior averaging 22 points, had 2,327. That adds up to 5,047.

Most of the Waterville-Elysian-Morristown and Minneota basketball players were also volleyball players. Minneota beat WEM three straight games in the volleyball state finals this fall, which is why their Class 1A semifinal match Friday was to be a rematch of sorts. WEM, in its first-ever state hoops tournament, beat Heritage Christian 58-46 in the quarterfinals, with Brielle Bartelt sinking 23 points and Torny Richards 14. Minneota, shooting for its fourth straight championship (they won hoops last year and volleyball the last two), foiled Red Lake 58-37 with Abby Hennen hitting 23 points.

In Henning’s first-ever state girls tournament game, Megan Weber’s sharpshooting — six 3-pointers, 29 points — led the Hornets past Fillmore Central 69-56. Ellie Dague added 22 points (after hitting 32 in the Section 6A finals to get them past West Central Area 56-50.) Fillmore Central, also making its state tournament debut, got 30 points from Kassidy Broadwater.

Gianna Kneepkens (left) and Grace Kirk are shown warming up for the second half.
Section champions were crowned before the bad news came

When the state boys basketball tournament was still on, the following section championship games produced what would have been their state tournament representatives. This is not a complete list of section finals that were played, and some were not played at all.

Class 4A

Maple Grove (23-5) earned its fifth consecutive state trip edging Buffalo 54-52 in Section 8AAAA RaShaun Parker’s 3-pointer with 32 seconds left gave the Crimson the lead and Buffalo (16-13) missed a shot in the final seconds. Caden Boettcher had 18 points and Lovell Williams 17. Buffalo’s Matthew Willert went over 2,000 points in his final game, hitting 30. He finished with 2,005.

Curtis Jones sank a 3-pointer with 3.7 seconds left in the Section 6AAAA finals to send No. 3 ranked Cretin-Derham Hall into the state tournament with a 51-48 win over East Ridge. Jones led the Raiders (25-4) with 16 points. Brody Kriesel tallied 18 points and Ben Carlson 15 for the Raptors (23-6), who beat CDH in the finals last year. They split in conference this year.

Class 3A


De La Salle (24-5) was to play in its ninth consecutive state tournament after repelling Waconia 71-45 for the Section 5AAA crown. Jalen Travis, 6-8 post, shot 10-for-11 and totaled 22 points and 13 rebounds. Connor Schwab led Waconia (23-6) with 16.

Richfield (23-6) reached state for the first time since 2006 as Junior Grayson scored 26 points to lead the Spartans past Holy Angels 67-53 in the Section 3AAA title game. Emmett Johnson had 18 for Holy Angels (19-10).

Top-ranked Minnehaha Academy (25-3) pummeled No. 4 Totino-Grace 94-58 in the Section 4AAA finals behind Jalen Suggs with 30 points and Chet Holmgren with 20. Princeton (25-4), after graduating five starters who totaled about 70 points per game, repeated as Section 7AAA champs. The Tigers edged Hermantown 67-64 in the finals with Cody Miller hitting 25 points, Kody Allickson 15 and Haydn Stay 14. Hermantown (21-8) was powered by Peter Soumis with 37 points.

St. Cloud Apollo (21-8) nipped Alexandria 72-70 for the Section 8AAA title, getting the game-winner from Thomas Diew on a layup with four seconds left. Diew was fouled and missed the free shot. Alexandria (20-9) missed a last-second shot. Puoch Dobuol scored 16 points for Apollo but fouled out with four minutes left. Alexandria sophomore Kristen Hoskins pumped in 30 points. The game at Melrose had no fans other than family members — one of the first games in the state to limit attendance.

Cambridge-Isanti (24-4) got 44 points from 3,000-pointer Henry Abraham and held off Duluth East 81-73 for the Section 7AAA crown. Will Van Scoy led Duluth East (24-5) with 18 points and Noah Paulson contributed 16. (Cambridge-Isanti coach Mike McDonald is the father of Duluth East coach Rhett McDonald.)

Delano (25-4) is Section 5AAA champion with an 80-51 conquest of Fridley with Terron O’Neill hitting 23 points, and Trey Longstreet and Keagen Smith 22 each.

Class 2A

Caledonia (28-1), top-ranked in Class 2A, fended off Stewartville 71-55 to capture the Section 1AA title. Noah King netted 24 points and Eli King 22. Will Tschetter, state scoring leader with 34 per game, had 29 for Stewartville (25-6).

Jackson County Central (20-7) outlasted Minnewaska Area 69-60 for the Section 3AA title, led by Rudy Voss with 21 points and Kobe Foster with 18. Grant Jensen led Minnewaska (21-7) with 19.

Class 1A

Henning (29-1), defending Class 1A champion, earned a shot at repeating by snagging another Section 6A crown beating West Central Area 57-45. Brandon Trana led with 19 points. Parker Fraki added 13 points and Blake Wallevand 11. Gage Staples led WCA (27-3) with 12.
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