

- Minnesota Nice Rises Again!
 Top 20 teams listed
 - 3rd gen 1,000-pointer
 - Youth region champions

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2023-24

Pride of the town

Hancock girls keep winning with vets of state champ team

By Bruce Strand

Hancock is enjoying the fifth year of a stellar stretch of girls basketball in which they are 101 games over .500 with 117 wins against 16 losses. The Owls were state Class 1A champions two years ago and still have five players who scored 112 points in that tournament.

"The pride of the town," said coach Chad Nuest, a Hancock alum himself, about girls hoops program in this western Minnesota burg of 711 people. "Some of the best kids I have ever been around."

The Owls are ranked No. 3 in Class 1A with a 24-2 record including wins over No. 1 Goodhue 51-47, No. 9 Minneota 75-62, No. 7 Underwood 56-55 and 78-73, and, last week, No. 4 Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart 75-72. The Owls have lost to Becker

(No.13 in 3A) and have split with unranked Brandon-Evansville in conference.

Hancock fended off an upset bid by West Central Area 57-55 on Thursday evening to finish 17-1 in the Little Eight, one game ahead of Underwood. They'll start Section 6A playoffs Thursday.

The Owls were 23-5 last year, losing to Underwood in the section finals. They were 30-1 and state champions in 2022. The two previous years they were 18-1 and



Hanock's Misty Zempel powered to the hoop during a win over Goodhue.

Bruce Strand, MN Basketball News

22-7 and derailed by West Central Area in the section each year.

Junior guard Kaitlyn Rohloff averages 22.6 points, 3.7 assists and 3.6 steals. Senior guard Kaitlyn Staples averages 15.6 points, 4.3 assists and 2.3 steals. Senior post Misti Zemple averages 14.3 points and 9.9 rebounds. Junior post Brooke Versteeg averages 10.7 points and 9.0 rebounds.

The squad is shooting 42 percent on three-pointers, making 181 of them, led by Rohloff with 68 (hitting an astonishing 55 percent) and Staples with 64 (40 percent). Staples had 12 in one game, one short of the state record. The lowblocks players can hit them also: Versteeg has 15 (35 percent) and Zemple 11 (45 percent).

Don't foul the Owls, either: they are crushing it at the free throw line, making 80 percent as a team, led by Zempel 85-for-98, Rohloff 70-for-79, Versteeg 55-for-72 and

Staples 39-for-53.

In the 2022 state tournament, Kaitlyn Rohloff scored 46 points, Kaitlyn Staples 23, Misti Zempel 20, Karleigh Rohloff 17 and Brooke Versteeg six. Karleigh, who made the all-state tournament team along with Kaitlin (they are twins) and Carlee Hanson, has been sidelined with a hip injury most of the year but played in the last four games.

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Hancock has scored in the 90's three times, the 80's five times and the 70's twelve times.

"We have shot the ball very well this year," Nuest said. "Zempel and Versteeg give us two inside threats, and when you have both a strong post presence and good shooting, you have the ability to put up points. Our defense has sparked our offense. We have done a good job of turning steals and turnovers into easy baskets."

The Owls made a 90-mile trip to Hector on Saturday for a duel with Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart that lived up to its billing as a top-five

matchup. The Owls were missing Zempel with an injury but prevailed 75-72. Versteeg had a huge game with 23 points and 11 rebounds.

BLHS, propelled by St. Cloud State recruits Rachel and Kristi Kottke, led by nine in the second half before the Owls made some defensive stops and got a pair of three-pointers from Kaitlyn Rohloff to start a comeback. Rohloff scored on a runner to regain the lead in the last half minute and BLHS had a three-point shot rim out. Also giving the Owls a boost, Nuest said, were Karleigh Rohloff, shooting 4-for-4, and seventh-grader Taylor Nesvig with four points and "her defense, hustle and energy."

Underwood and Hancock have been duking it out in close games the last two seasons. Underwood won two of three last year including the section finals 64-50. Hancock has edged the Rockets twice this year and





Sharpshooter Kaitlyn Rohloff leads Hancock with 22.6 ppg.

likely will face them again in the section.

"The Underwood rivalry has been so intense," Nuest said. "They are a great program, with talented girls who play hard and play the game the right way. They have a great coach and we have so much respect for them."

Hancock beat Brandon-Evansville 84-48 on Jan. 16 but got upended by the Chargers 70-67 in overtime on Feb. 15. Hancock was missing Zemple, while Versteeg and Rohloff had foul trouble. "B-E played hard and were ready to give us their

best shot," Nuest said. Haddy Baune led B-E (17-6) with 26 points.

Asked to assess his veteran players, Nuest dubbed Staples as "the heart of our team, just so consistent. Good ball handler and a great shooter." She is playing healthy this year after knee and foot injuries the last two seasons. Kaitlyn Rohloff is "one of the best shooters I have ever seen." Zenpel is a strong inside threat who can hit from outside. A healthy Karleigh is a talented scorer, smart player and defensive stopper. Versteeg, already a force with her size and athleticism, expended her game this year with a good outside shot.

"Most of the girls play three sports," Nuest said. "Most are also involved in band and choir and are great students. I am a lucky guy to coach kids of this caliber. They are raised right and have parents who push them to be good people on and off the court."

3rd generation 1,000-pointer

Lauren Arnold, Chanhassen senior, became a third-generation 1,000-point scorer on Jan. 12 when she sank 24 points in a win over Bloomington Jefferson. Lauren's father, Matt Arnold, was a thousand-pointer for Hopkins, graduating in 1995, and played college ball for St. Thomas. Her grandfather, Roger Arnold, scored 1,220 points for Effingham, Illinois, then moved to Minnesota to play for the Gophers from 1968-72. Lauren, a 5-foot-7 guard, is averaging 17.8 points for the Storm (13-12). "She shoots the three, attacks the basket. Good allaround player," said coach Bart Inniger.

Minnesota NICE rises again

By Jeff McCarron Pacesetter Sports Director

Pacesetter held regional playoffs for 63 teams in grades 4-7 at three sites last weekend: Alexandria, Grand Rapids, and Mountain Iron. We have tournaments the next six of seven weekends: February 24 in St. Cloud (Regions 4-5), March 9-10 in Redwood Falls (Region 3), March 16-17 in Stewartville (Region 1) and Bemidji (Region 8), March 23-24 in Lake Crystal (Region 2 and SOUTH Super Section), March 24 in St. Cloud (North Super Section) and April 6-7 in

St. Cloud for our Minnesota State Championships. Along with the MSHSL tournaments March 13-16 (girls) and March 20-23 (boys), "The Madness" is coming on fast!

I directed the tournaments at Grand Rapids High School with the able assistance of Pat Dewey with Roger Sutherland at the front table and Connie Sutherland – just a few

days after her gall bladder surgery – hard at work in the concession stand, raising money for the basketball association. Every school should be blessed with a Roger and Connie Sutherland, people who do the work behind the scenes to helps kids get better programs and experiences.

Over dinner Saturday night, we were all tired, but Connie and Roger shared one of their frustrations. In the late 1990's, Grand Rapids was one of the schools that changed their team's nickname. They had been the Indians. The students and community voted on a new name, and the result was close between Thunder and Hawks, so someone randomly suggested Thunderhawks! The mascot became a bird. Now the State of Minnesota is asking them to change that name because an Indian leader in the 1870's was named Thunder Hawk. "An administrator in our district said it will cost our district between \$500,000 to \$1 million to change the name," Connie said, wiping her brow. "I don't think we can do it. We have already cut our budget by millions the last few years, putting teacher to student ratios in a tough place. We have 26 to 28 kindergartners for one teacher without a para. It's crazy. It's espehard for those teachers to give individual attention to kids who might really need it."

We all know that schools and kids and education took a major hit – as did the mental health of all residents



- when the state mandated lockdowns, school closings and masks...while police were defunded, buildings were burned, and riots rampaged Minneapolis. The damage is deeper than we realize. We wonder "Will we ever get back to 'normal? Will Minnesota Nice rise again?"

Well, all is not lost. People are still wonderful, hardworking, and caring. People like Connie and Roger, coaches like Jeff Buffetta and Dawn Savela at Mountain Iron-Buhl, traveling parents like the Stephen-Argyle Central and Cass Lake groups - all give me hope.

In one of the tournaments on Sunday, I could sense something special was happening by the way the crowd was cheering. A player with Jordan's No. 23 on his back was running up the court with incredible enthusiasm. He was a very special player. It was obvious he didn't get many chances to play, so everyone – players, coaches, and fans – were all cheering for him to do well. His excitement was "through the roof" and was rubbing off on everyone. His teammates passed him the ball, so he could take a shot. The other team softened their defense to raise his odds. He got more passes and took more shots, but the buzzer went off to end the game before the ball found the net. I ended my video too soon, but the last frozen frame revealed a teammate walking up and putting his arm around his little teammate as they walked across the floor. The score no longer mattered at this particular time, in this particular faraway gym, as the crowd applauded and cheered...and No. 23 was beaming in the center of it all.

I saw something similar last summer at the Target Center among teams playing in our Great Five-State Championships. The teams were from different states, yet somehow, the coaches had made an arrangement. Again, the sound of the crowd gave it away that something special was happening. A player in jeans with a cast on his foot entered the game and took his position near the lower block of the free throw lane. A pass was sent his way. He caught it and "made a basket in the Target Center." The crowd cheered. The ball then was passed in and passed down court. A boy in a sling with a cast on his arm had entered the game and moved into position under the basket...and the pass was graciously delivered. He balanced the ball on his free hand and he also "made a basket in the Target Center." The crowd stood and cheered. "Minnesota Nice" rose again.

People are good. People are caring. And good people will work together for the benefit of kids, their schools, and each other ... if they just get the chance.

Pacesetter Youth Region 6 champs



BENSON 4th Grade Boys



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ALEXANDRIA 4th Grade Girls



WEST CENTRAL AREA 5th Grade Girls



ALEXANDRIA RED 5th Grade Boys



FERGUS FALLS 6th Grade Boys



HAWLEY 6th Grade Girls



EAST GRAND FORKS 7th Grade Boys



PILLAGER 7th Grade Girls

Pacesetter Youth Region 7 champs



STEPHEN-ARGYLE CENTRAL 4th Grade Boys



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NORTH WOODS 4th Grade Girls



MT. IRON BUHL 5th Grade Boys



MT. IRON-BUHL 6th Grade Girls



DULUTH EAST 5th Grade Girls



HIBBING 6th Grade Boys



MT. IRON-BUHL 7th Grade Girls



MT. IRON-BUHL 7th Grade Boys

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series of camps in the 5-state area. These camps will be 1-2 days and feature the very best coaches in the Midwest – coaches who have won state championships or head college coaches or coaches who have reached other high levels of success – Hall of Fame, Coach of the Year, etc. Host coaches may also invite their coaching staff to attend these special camps as a free coaching clinic.

Camp of Champions...that comes to YOUR gym! Customize your camp to YOUR program

To set up a camp at your school, please email Tracey at pacesettersportsmbbn@gmail.com



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Wayzata nips Royals in rematch

By Bruce Strand

Wayzata, top-ranked Class 4A boys team, edged No. 4 Hopkins 71-70 at home Feb. 15, powered by Jackson McAndrew with 27 points and 12 rebounds. McAndrew sank a left-handed hook with 30 seconds left for the game-winner. Wyatt McBeth supplied 14 points and eight rebounds as the Trojans avenged their lone loss of the season as Hopkins beat them 80-69 on Jan. 23. JJ Semanko led the Royals with 24. Wayzata is 9-1 in the Lake for a two-game lead on Hopkins and Minnetonka in the state's strongest conference.

Hopkins had a second straight thriller on Tuesday and won that one in triple overtime over host St. Michael-Albertville 111-109. It was 79-79 after regulation and 17-17, 8-8 and 7-5 in the extra sessions. JJ Semenko netted 34 points, Jayden Moore 32, Anthony Smith 15 and Dave Hart 13. Jordan Holm sank 30 points, Hudson Hochstedler 26, Jeremiah Johnson 22 and Andrew Luster 17 for the Knights (10-13).

Minnetonka (No. 3 in 4A) shaded Totino-Grace (No. 1 in 3A) 77-73 on Saturday with Greyson Uelman hitting 31 points and Andy Stefanowicz 18. Chase Watley tallied 22 points and Dohan Ijadimbola 17 for the Eagles. "The biggest thing was holding Isaiah Johnson to 11 points," Tonka coach Bryce Tesdahl said, referring to the Eagles' top scorer, "and keeping T-G off the boards." He added, "It was a back-andforth game with a March atmosphere."

Hopkins girls are top-ranked, 23-2 overall, and undefeated in Minnesota. The Royals lost in December to a pair of Iowa big-school powers: No. 1 ranked Johnston 70-61 and No. 3 Dowling Catholic 61-58. The Royals have won 17 straight and lead the power-packed Lake by two games over No. 2 Minnetonka, whom they beat 79-62. They'll have a rematch tonight (Friday) to close the regular season. Hopkins is led by Florida recruit Liv McGill, senior guard, averaging 23 points. Their next four scorers are sophomores Tatum Woodson (13 ppg) and Lauren Hillesheim (11.6) and freshmen Ava Capito (8.6) and Le Sedra Williams (8.0).

Spring Lake Park had lost 13 straight games to perennial power Park Center before upsetting the No. 2 ranked Pirates 81-80 on Feb.14. Myles Thomsen sank the game-winner with two seconds left, after taking the ball coast to coast off an inbounds play. Thomsen had 24 points and Andrew King and Brock Remme 20

AROUND THE STATE

each for the Panthers (14-10). Casmir Chavis netted 23 points, Jackson Fowlkes 22 and Ari Gooch 21 for the Pirates. "The key was our ability to not let their pressure get to us too much," coach Oliver Major said, along with some good shooting. The Panthers were an upset victim themselves Wednesday as Centennial (7-18) tripped them 69-64.

Buslee is a prominent name in Eagan basketball this winter as Drew Buslee leads the girls team in scoring and her twin brother Max Buslee leads the boys team. They were profiled this week by the Star-Tribune's Ron Haggstrom. Drew, a 5-foot-9 guard, averages 13.1 points, five rebounds, 3.5 assists and two steals for the Wildcat girls (15-10). Max, a 6-foot-2 guard, averages 14.7 points and just under two steals, assists and rebounds for the Wildcat boys (13-10). Drew recently had a 16-for-16 game at the free throw line, totaling 27 points, in a loss to Lakeville North. Drew has committed to Sioux Falls and Max to Gustavus Adolphus.

Mahtomedi boys started the season 0-7 with an allrookie lineup — and now the Zephyrs are 13-10. Coached by Keith Newman, they have won 10 of their last 11, and hold second place in the Metro East at 10-3 behind Tartan (13-1). The top four scorers are seniors Ben Carlson with 13.1 ppg, Tyler Swanson 12.0, and Micah Schmidt 9.9, and freshman Willie Roelofs with 9.2. Their current six-game win-streak includes a 72-71 overtime win over Columbia Heights team followed by three games holding opponents under 40 points. Mahtomedi was 25-4 last year with all seniors, losing to state champ Totino-Grace in the Section 4AAA finals.

Two-Thousand-Point Club new girl members are Claire McGregor, Maple River senior, while scoring 25 in a win over Waseca, and Regan Juenemann, Duluth Marshall junior, while scoring 19 in a win over Esko, both on Thursday evening.

Cass Lake-Bena, a top-five boys team in pre-season rankings, started the season 4-6 while dealing with a spate of injuries. The Panthers are finally back to full strength, coach Alvin Wind reports. They are now 17-6 with 13 straight wins. Kaydin Lee, four-year starter, was one of the sidelined players, along with sophomores Brandon Wind and Brandon Masten. One team leader who stayed healthy is Dominic Staples-Fairbanks, who tallied his 2,000th point in January.

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RORD TO THE TARGET CENTER Boys & Girls Grades 4-9 2024 Minnesota YOUTH BASKETBALL STATE CHAMPIONSHIP Region Playoffs

NEW in 2024!

Limit of 8 teams - grades 4-7 in 8 regions
 Limit of 16 teams - grades 8-9 in 4 Super Sections
 All MN school/community-based teams may register to play at any site.



ALL GRADES REFER TO THE 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR

Region 1

Stewartville/Rochester • March 16 • Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7 Stewartville/Rochester • March 17 • Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6 Region 2

Lake Crystal • March 23 • Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6 Lake Crystal • March 24 • Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7

Region 3 Redwood Falls • March 9 • Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7 Redwood Falls • March 10 • Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6

Region 4 St. Cloud • February 25 • Boys Grades 4-7 St. Cloud • March 3 • Girls Grades 4-7

Region 5 St. Cloud • February 24 • Boys Grades 4-7 St. Cloud • March 2 • Girls Grades 4-7

Region 6 Alexandria • February 17 • Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6 Alexandria • February 18 • Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7 Region 7 Grand Babids • February 17 • Boys & Girls Grade 5

Grand Rapids • February 17 • Boys & Girls Grade 5 Grand Rapids • February 18 • Boys & Girls Grade 4 Mt. Iron-Buhl • February 17 • Boys & Girls Grade 7 Mt. Iron-Buhl • February 18 • Boys & Girls Grade 6 Region 8

Bemidji • March 16 • Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7 Bemidji • March 17 • Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6 Southeast/Southwest Super Section-Regions 1-4 Lake Crystal • March 24 • Boys & Girls Grades 8 & 9 North/Central Super Section-Regions 5-8 St. Cloud • March 24 • Boys & Girls Grades 8 & 9

Team fee: \$230 • 3-4 game guarantee



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See the list of Pacesetter regions and

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Post-season Invitations Regions – Grades 4-7 – Champion invited to STATE – SUN, April 7 Super Sections – Grades 8-9 – Top 4 teams invited to STATE - SUN, April 7 All Pacesetter registered teams - Grades 4-9 - invited to MIT - SAT, April 6



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- 1. Wayzata 23-1
- 2. Park Center 20-3
- 3. Minnetonka 19-4
- 4. Hopkins 17-5
- 5. Shakopee 19-4
- 6. Minneapolis Washburn 21-2
- 7. Lakeville North 18-5
- 8. Farmington 17-6
- 9. Edina 13-10
- 10. Lakeville South 16-7
- 11. East Ridge 15-7
- 12. Cretin-Der ham Hall 18-4
- 13. Tartan 19-4
- 14. Waconia 18-5
- 15. Spring Lake Park 14-9
- 16. Osseo 16-8
- 17. Maple Grove 15-8
- 18. Rogers 16-8
- 19. Mounds
- View 15-7 20. Rochester

Century 15-7

Records are through Tuesday

- 1. Totino-
- Grace 20-4
- 2. Mankato East 21-2
- 3. Minneapolis South 16-4
- 4. Stewartville 21-3
- 5. DeLaSalle 16-8
- 6. Delano 20-4
- 7. Mankato West 19-5
- 8. Alexandria 18-5
- 9. Benilde-St. Margaret's 14-8
- 10. St. Paul Johnson 16-3
- 11. St. Cloud
- Tech 16-7 12. Orono 14-9
- 13. Richfield 14-9
- 14. Fridley 16-5
- 15. Detroit Lakes 20-3
- 16. New Ulm 17-6
- 17. St. Paul Harding 16-5
- 18. Chisago Lakes 17-6
- 19. Hermantown 17-6
- 20. Columbia Heights 14-6

- 1. Breck 23-1
- 2. Minneapolis North 13-9
- 3. Lake City 19-5
- 4. Eden Valley-Watkins 21-3
- 5. Albany 21-2
- 6. Annandale 19-3
- 7. Caledonia 20-4
- 8. Esko 17-6
- 9. Crosby-
 - Ironton 19-3
- 10. Legacy Christian 21-3
- 11. Cannon Falls 21-5
- 12. Spectrum 20-4
- 13. Holy Family Catholic 15-9
- 14. Pequot Lakes 19-4
- 15. Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial 21-3
- 16. Southwest Christian 14-8
- 17. Osakis 18-4
- 18. Redwood Valley 20-4
- 19. LaCrescent-Hokah 19-7
- 20. Maranatha Christian 18-5

- 1. Cherry 21-2
- 2. Dawson-
 - Boyd 24-2
- 3. West Central Area 20-3
- 4. Henning 22-2
- 5. Red Lake County 23-1
- 6. Blooming Prairie 23-2
- 7. Hillcrest Lutheran 20-4
- 8. Mt. Lake Area/ Comfrey 22-2
- 9. Fertile-Beltrami 19-4
- 10. Ada-Borup West 20-4
- 11. Southland 20-4
- 12. Spring Grove 22-3
- 13. Cass Lake-Bena 17-6
- 14. Heritage Christian 17-5
- 15. Nevis 17-6
- 16. Springfield 18-6
- 17. Goodridge-Gry gla-Gatzke 19-5
- 18. Rushford-Peterson 19-7
- 19. Sleepy Eye-
 - St. Mary's 18-7
- 20. No. Woods 18-4

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2024 Minnesota Basketball News • An Invitation-only Event

TOP 100 EXPO SHOWCASE

College of St. Benedict St. Joseph, MN Tuesday, July 2

The Top 100+ Players in each class are being invited along with select players from North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Iowa.

Seeking player nominations from head coaches for the 2024-25 Watch List. Email player name and school to Jeff McCarron at <u>jmac8144@yahoo.com</u>

COLLEGE PREP BASKETBALL CAMP Monday, July 1

The Pacesetter "College Prep" program is designed for male and female players entering grade 9 through college freshman seeking to play basketball in college. Players will be taught high-level skills by college coaches in a comprehensive one-day, 7-hour format. Players will be given the best tips to become a successful college player on and off the court.



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