

- All the Sweet 16 scores and placements
- John Lieser: 64 years as a ref and still going strong
- * Keep the ball bouncing...



CHAMPS:

Alexandria boys, Rosemount girls



Alexandria's Grady Starzl (front) gets fouled by Hopkins' Julius Ellis, who was trying to block his shot, in the championship game.



Rosemount's Ashna Ramlall scores in the finals.

GIRLS TOP 3

1. Rosemount
2. Lakeville North
3. Forest Lake

BOYS TOP 3

1. Alexandria
2. Hopkins
3. Mankato East

Another crown for Alex

Alexandria will not repeat as Class 3A boys basketball champions next March, because the school has been bumped up to Class 4A, but the Cardinals repeated as Pacesetter Sweet 16 champions on Aug. 2-3, despite graduating their Mr. Basketball.

Alexandria scuttled Hopkins in the title game for the second straight year, 78-70. The Cardinals reached the finals beating Cannon Falls 98-39, St. Cloud Apollo 78-61 and (semifinals) Sartell 95-61.

“We are excited about the challenge of moving up to 4A,” coach Forrest Witt said. “I believe we will compete very well. Our kids are used to that level of competition, and they are eager for the opportunities ahead. We had a great summer with many successful tournaments and hard work in the gym.”

Chase Thompson, who averaged 25.4 points for the 29-3 Cardinals last season, has moved on to Clemson. Three other double digit scorers are back: Mason and Talan Witt



Above: Alex's Mason Witt scores against Hopkins on a fast break. Left: Hopkin's Jayden Moore drives against Thomas Hinrichs.

and Gavin Roderick. Grady Starzl and Thomas Hinrichs were the other Sweet 16 starters. Also playing were Myles Gray, Brendan Behrens, and Max Janssen. Coaching them were Jerry and Zach Witt, father and brother of the head coach.

The Cardinals were torrid on free shots and three-pointers while slashing to the hoop time after time against Hopkins.

Hopkins is coming off a 26-2, section-runner-up season, losing 76-72 to state champion Wayzata in the section finals. The Royals return two of their five double-digit scorers: Jayden Moore and Ahmed Nur. Hopkins advanced with wins over Orono 78-63, Red Lake County 83-65, and, in the semifinals, Mankato East 82-80. They were coached by Royce White, the 2009 Mr. Basketball on a state champion Royals team.

Mankato East, 29-2 and state runner-up in March, claimed third place at the Sweet 16, beating Sartell 73-58. Rushford-Peterson beat Pelican Rapids for fifth, 64-62.

FIRST TWO ROUNDS

- Alexandria 98, Cannon Falls 39
 - St. Cloud Apollo 56, Pequot Lakes 50
- Sartell 69, Waseca 64
 - Pelican Rapids 82, Totino-Grace 75
- Hopkins 78, Orono 63
- Hopkins 83, Red Lake County 65
 - Red Lake County 74, Orono 69
- Mankato East 88, Ada-Borup West 25
 - Rushford-Peterson 68, Mahtomedi 62
- Alexandria 78, St. Cloud Apollo 61
 - Sartell 59, Pelican Rapids 51
 - Mankato East 85, Rushford-Peterson 48

Semifinals

- Alexandria 95, Sartell 61
- Hopkins 82, Mankato East 80

Championship

- Alexandria 78, Hopkins 70

Third place

- Mankato East 74, Sartell 58

Fifth place

- Pelican Rapids 67, St. Cloud Apollo 56
- Rushford-Peterson 77, Red Lake County 80
- Rushford-Peterson 64, Pelican Rapids 62

CONSOLATION ROUNDS

- Pequot Lakes 81, Cannon Falls 57
 - Waseca 89, Totino-Grace 69
- Mahtomedi 77, Ada-Borup West 66
 - Pequot Lakes 60, Waseca 45
 - Orono 69, Mahtomedi 62
 - Waseca 69, Mahtomedi 67
- Cannon Falls 67, Ada-Borup West 56
- Montevideo 69, Cannon Falls 45
- Montevideo 83, Ada-Borup West 60

(Consolation championship)

- Orono 56, Pequot Lakes 43

Rosemount wins in 2OT

Rosemount, led by the three Ramlall sisters, captured the Pacesetter Sweet 16 girls championship on Aug. 2-3 at The College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph.

Rosemount (15-14 this past season) clipped Lakeville North in double overtime, 72-69, in the championship game. The Irish beat New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Genève 62-38 and Breckenridge 73-50 in pool play, and Forest Lake 72-47 in the semifinals.

The Rosemount sibs are juniors-to-be Arshia and Amisha Ramlall and sophomore-to-be Ashna Ramlall. Other starters were Harper Chappuis and Isla Silk. Their roster also included Olivia Danner, Greta Kemming, Hana Tyrrell, Maggie Shaffer, Liv Owusu, Mackenzie Krulich, Hannah Cherney, and Emma Theisen.

In the finals, the Irish led by as much as 10, but Lakeville North chipped away and pulled even at 61-61 when Lauren



Above: Amisha Ramlall scores for Rosemount.



Left: Sahara Wilson scores for Lakeville North.

Robison swished three free shots with :25 left. Rosemount missed a 3-pointer and it went to overtime. Each team made a layup early in the first two-minute extra session, which ended 63-63. In the second OT, Amisha Ramlall sank a 3-pointer and a pair of free shots to give the Irish a 70-67 lead, then blocked a three-point shot with five seconds left.

Lakeville North, led by 6-foot-3 forward Sahara Wilson, defeated West Central Area 52-42, Mayer Lutheran 63-57 and Minnetonka 55-44 in the semifinals. The Panthers were 19-13 and placed fourth in the state tournament in March.

The Panthers were led by 6-foot-3 power forward Sahara Wilson, a sophomore-to-be. Their roster had Payton and Braylee Hinze, Nivaya Koles, Lauren Robison, Stella and Sophia Perry, Lily Christianson, Parker Vossen, Madilynn Bell, Abby St. Aubin, and Maraya and Savannah Ball.

Forest Lake edged Minnetonka 61-58 in the third-place game. Orono won Division II (teams 1-1 in pool play)

POOL PLAY

- Orono 64, Sleepy Eye-St. Mary's 35
 - Forest Lake 60, Orono 57
 - Forest Lake 84, Sleepy Eye St. Mary's 66
 - Lakeville North 52, West Central Area 42
 - Lakeville North 63, Mayer Lutheran 57
 - Mayer Lutheran 50, West Central Area 47
 - Minnetonka 70, MACCRAY 28
 - Minnetonka 75, Mahtomedi 27
 - MACCRAY 49, Mahtomedi 40
 - Rosemount 62, NRHEG 38
 - Rosemount 73, Breckenridge 50
 - NRHEG 53, Breckenridge 51

DIVISION 1 (2-0 teams) Semifinals

- Rosemount 72, Forest Lake 47
 - Lakeville North 55, Minnetonka 44
- ### Championship
- Rosemount 72, Lakeville North 69
- ### Third place
- Forest Lake 61, Minnetonka 58

DIVISION II (1-1 teams) Semifinals

- Orono 69, NRHEG 57
 - Mayer Lutheran 64, MACCRAY 32

Championship

- Orono 61, Mayer Lutheran 54
- ### Third place
- NRHEG 64, MACCRAY 49

DIVISION III (0-2 teams) Semifinals

- Mahtomedi 60, West Central Area 57
 - Breckenridge 61, Sleepy Eye St. Mary's 50
- ### Championship
- Breckenridge 76, Mahtomedi 46
- ### Third place
- Sleepy Eye-St. Mary's 65, West Central Area 43

Sweet 16 champions



Alexandria Cardinals

Coach Zach Witt, Myles Gray, Grady Starzi, Brendan Behrens, Gavin Roderick, Tom Hinrichs, Mason Witt, Talan Witt, Max Janssen, coach Jerry Witt.



Rosemount Irish

Front: Harper Chappuis, Olivia Danner, Greta Kemming, Ashna Ramlall, Arshia Ramlall, Hana Tyrrell. Back: Maggie Shaffer, Liv Owusu, Mackenzie Krulich, Amisha Ramlall, Hannah Cherney, Isla Silk, Emma Theisen, Hattie Chappuis.

Sweet 16 runners-up



Hopkins Royals

The Hopkins roster included Jayden Moore, Tre Moore, Ahmed Nur, Kyle Nelson, Julius Ellis, Eddie Walker, Quinn Bjerkvedt, Cash Becker, Raynerd Williams, Masal Leonard, Dom Thompson, Tony Hudson, and Kyle Joyner.



Lakeville North Panthers

Front: Braylee Hinze, Sophia Perry, Maraya Ball, Savannah Ball, Stella Perry, Nivaya Koles, Payton Hinze. Back: Abby St. Aubin, Sahara Wilson, Madilynn Bell, Parker Vossen, Lauren Robison.



Sweet 16 action



Clockwise from left: Talan Witt (4) of Alexandria is guarded by Jayden Moore of Hopkins. A Hopkins player takes aim. Amari Nobles of Mankato East scores on a breakaway. Maddox Lewis of Sartell tries to penetrate against Mankato East.



Articles and photos by Bruce Strand,
Minnesota Basketball News



Sweet 16 action



Clockwise from top: Orono's Bethany Totman launched a shot that connected. Forest Lake's Hailey DeReu was about to draw a foul. Orono's Lilah Rice (24) looks for an open teammate. Minnetonka's Tate Addler snags a rebound. NRHEG's Chloe Stork (15) reaches for a rebound. Lakeville South's Stella Perry (below middle) battles through Rosemount defenders.



10,000 games and counting

15 questions for remarkable ref John Lieser

John Lieser, who was officiating the Sweet Sixteen this year, is a long-time favorite of Pacesetter — and of high school coaches, the MSHSL and various college conferences as a referee for most of his 81 years. A star all-around athlete at Melrose six and a half decades ago, now living in St. Cloud, Lieser is undaunted by running up and down football fields and basketball courts in a striped shirt, and still sharp enough to recently shoot a 74 in golf. We had 15 questions for this remarkable man. Here are his responses — Bruce Strand

What is your current age?

I will be 82 on September 21. I was born in Freeport, went to a Catholic school for eight years and then to Melrose High School and graduated in 1961.

How many years have you been a referee?

I have been an official for the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) for six decades and more: football for 61 years, and basketball for 64 years.

How old were you when you started, at what level?

I started working basketball while attending St. Cloud State University in the fall of 1961. I worked grade school games in the Central Six program in Melrose and the men's city league in Saint Cloud, under the aegis of legendary official and assigner Dick Putz. I was 20 when I started officiating games and worked my first varsity basketball in Grey Eagle in December of 1961.



John Lieser, 81, officiating the Sweet 16 boys finals.

What organizations/leagues have you officiated for?

Besides the MSHSL, I worked college football and basketball in the now defunct North Central Conference (NCC), Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC), Northern Intercollegiate Conference (NIC), Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC), the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC), and currently in the Minnesota Collegiate Athletic Conference (MCAC).

Do you still do regular season officiating?

I currently work around 30 football games in high school and college and a similar number in basketball. I am a referee in football for both the MSHSL and the MCAC. Additionally, I have been an observer for the MSHSL for the past 20-plus years in football and basketball. I observe officials who aspire to officiate at the state tournament in both sports. I taught officiating basketball and football at St. Cloud State University for 12 years.

Have you ever counted up how many games you've done?

I have kept records since 1969 and have probably officiated close to 10,000 games, including freshman, JV, varsity, Pacesetter, Breakdown, junior college, college, and so on. I even worked two

Big Ten preseason basketball games at the University of Minnesota. I have officiated hundreds of region games for the MSHSL (I worked all original eight regions when there was only one class), have officiated more than 20 state tournaments in football and basketball, and have worked six state championships in both sports.

Lieser, still blowing the whistle at 81 years old

What are the most memorable games you've done?

The most memorable high school football game was the one December 3, 2023, when New London Spicer beat Dilworth- Glyndon-Felton 27-26 to win the Class 3A title on the last play of the game (a 48-yard pass and lateral play). The play ranked No.1 on ESPN's top-10 that Saturday. It has been labeled the New London-Spicer miracle and can be viewed on You Tube.

Probably the most memorable basketball game was between Little Falls and St. Cloud Tech in the early 1980's. The game went into eight overtimes and still might be a state of Minnesota record for the most OT's. I worked this game with Mike Spanier, who I mentored when he started in the 1970's and who went on to a brilliant career in the Big Ten and the NFL. He's currently the state football coordinator for the MSHSL.

What players have been the most memorable?

In the Bird-Island-Lake Lilian basketball win, double overtime, over Baudette Lake of the Woods in 1980 (my first state championship in boys' basketball), BI-LL had one of the best players I've worked with in Barry Wohler, who now coaches the Orono boys' team. I worked Melrose when Mark Olberding was one of the best ever in Minnesota; he went on to play for the Gophers and the San Antonio Spurs. Kevin McHale in Hibbing. My partner Rich Weigel and I drove in a blizzard to get to the game site and Hibbing blew out Grand Rapids by 60 points. (Also) Kevin Lynch (Bloomington Jefferson), Frank Wachlarowicz (Little Falls), Maddyn Greenway (Providence Academy), Lindsey Whalen (Hutchinson), Janet Karvonen (New York Mills), Mary Joe Miller (Tracy-Milroy), Todd Bouman (Russell-Tyler-Ruthton), Bobby Jackson (Gophers) and others I have since forgotten. In the 16 NCAA college football playoffs I have worked, players that stood out are John Randle (who went on to play for the Vikings), Heath Sherman (Eagles), John Bailey (Bears) and Jim Kleinsasser (Vikings).

What do you like about reffing to stay with it so long?

I like to stay involved in the game. Being on a football field on a crisp Friday fall night is my ideal place. To mold a football crew and try to reach a goal, get better each week, and most importantly, to have fun doing a difficult job is a reward in itself. To give back to the games of football and basketball is a legacy I hope to give.

In the Sweet 16 boys finals, a couple fans harped at you and you harped right back, but a few minutes later you were having a jovial conversation with them. Do you have a pretty good ability to handle things like that?

In that game, I had a fan or coach give me some grief, but officiating is more than calling fouls. The salient quality for an official is tact and diplomacy. How do you get along with people who have a bias and only see one side? As I have preached in my officiating classes at SCSU, keep moving to get the best angle to make the correct call.

I tried to humor that fan with this retort: "Why am I out here if the best angle was from your seat? I could be sitting with you, and it would be less running for me." We both got a good laugh. There is more to officiating than being an arbiter of the rules. The most important trait is to act human, not arrogant; show empathy, hustle, and stay passionate. We all make mistakes — move on, be the best you can be. HAVE FUN is paramount.

What other sports have you officiated?

I umpired baseball, but when I became the boys' golf coach at Apollo High School in 1970, I quit umpiring. I also officiated girls' flag football this year and that was a blast. I have registered for volleyball but have not worked any games.

How do you stay in such good shape?

I try to walk 10,000 steps a day (and) I have good genetics.

What sports did you play yourself, and for whom?

I was the leading scorer for Melrose's 1960 state tournament team. I was QB in football, guard in basketball, shortstop and pitcher in baseball, ran 100 and 440 in track, and played on the golf team. I was the only one playing golf at that time. Most proud of graduating third in my class of 104.

Any thoughts on fan behavior? In recent years there's been a shortage of refs, one reason being the younger ones are not as thick skinned as the older ones.

Most of the time, I ignore fans. I think with the paucity of officials, the players appreciate us more. As I say, "Without officials, it's just a scrimmage."

Keep the Ball Bouncing...

Pacesetter 46th Year Ends with Exciting Finish!

Is there a more comforting sound than basketballs bouncing? One ball by one little girl during a break in a Pacesetter game...or 48 in a camp!

Thank you to all players, parents, coaches, officials, fans, and the Pacesetter staff for another successful year: BB and VB youth state championships, the Great Five-State basketball championships at the Target Center, over 60 day camps, the College Prep Camp, the Top 100 Expo Showcase, and the crowning finale – The Sweet 16 – which ended with two exciting championships: Alexandria over Hopkins (boys) in a tight battle and Rosemount over Lakeville North in 2OT for the girls' title. And, of course, another year of Minnesota Basketball News.

Thank you, Bruce Strand, for your coverage of Minnesota Basketball throughout the year and for the special Pacesetter events this summer. As always, great work and dedication to the game. Your interview with John Lieser was GREAT – highlighting this remarkable man who inspires us all! At 81, he has reffed for 64 years and is still doing a masterful job of it.

John reffed college games when I played and that was 52 years ago. He also reffed our Minnesota Rockin' Rollers in the International Basketball association in 1995-96. He's been everywhere and sets a great example for young people to "Get into the Game" and give back to the game you love. I'm also not going to forget those 10,000 steps each day – that's a lot – and a good goal for everyone – even 5,000. He's in better shape at 81 than many teenagers in school today.

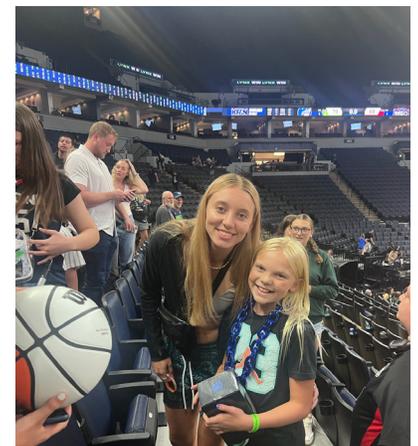


John Lieser reffing Sweet 16

A cheerleader for our high school team, Linda Stump, now married to teammate John Tirevold, also made it a goal to walk 10,000 steps a day. In the past 5 years, she has only missed "about two weeks" and recently had a string of 10,000-step days for 325 days in a row! She still laments that sports weren't offered to girls in the late 1960's-early 1970's. She would have been something!

I enjoyed hearing John Lieser talk about players he has watched in his 64 years as an official. I don't know if I dare start naming players who have played in Pacesetter or attended camps. All of the top Hopkins players over the past 20+ years for starters – including Royce White, who coached the Hopkins team in the Sweet 16. Coaches Kenny Novak, Jr., and Sr., made their annual pilgrimage to St. Cloud every August as did Brian Cosgriff, as Hopkins ran up too many high school state championships to count during those years.

Paige Bueckers played in it every year and posed with the Buffalo, SD, Pacesetter girls at a Lynx game in the summer of 2024 before leading her UConn team to the NCAA title. Maddyn Greenway from Providence Academy is another exceptional player who is a Pacesetter veteran of several Sweet 16's. She will be a senior this year and has a very promising future.



Paige with Pacesetter girl

I had the honor and delight to work with another Hopkins and Pacesetter veteran, Evelyn Knox, this summer. She works for the MN Lynx now and helped us coordinate our Pacesetter "Great State" games at the Target Center.

Other male players I recall who have played in Pacesetter and went on to notable success include Sam Jacobson, Kris Humphries, Mike Miller, Joel Pryzbilla, Tyus and Tre Jones, Amir Coffey, Jake Sullivan, Joel McDonald, and Nate Wolters. There are so many others, but those are players I recall off the top of my head.

My favorite story about Pacesetter camp players involves a little 4th grade girl from Kiester, MN, population 500, who attended camp in Minnesota Lake for several years in the 1980's. She was tall for her age, but she stood out the most to me by how eager she was to learn and absorb everything. She was also an incredible teammate – encouraging everyone on her team. That's not common in young players. Well, this little girl became 5-11, and her family moved to Apple Valley, where she played varsity basketball and earned a scholarship to play for the Minnesota Gophers. And guess what – she was awarded the Ware Trophy as the best female player in the country! Carol Ann Shudlick. She wrote to me after her career that "I never would have achieved what I did without my great start at Pacesetter." I just looked her up on Google, and guess what...she's 52 years old now and teaching 3rd and 4th grade girls' basketball. That's a full circle that's incredibly satisfying to see – her amazing success from a humble beginning – and her devotion now to teaching young players.

Another story involves a camp kid from Dawson, MN. We had a camp in nearby Madison, which attracted players from many small towns in the area. We once maxed out at 148 players with four sessions of 36 players – 2.5 hours each for 5 days. That was quite a week. One player stood out, winning both trophies we gave out – Hustle Award and MVP and probably every shooting contest ribbon as well. Jeff Nordgaard. He became 6-6 and led his

Dawson-Boyd team to the state tournament and a third-place finish. I was a big fan, of course. I'll never forget that a few of my friends were coaching college basketball at the time, but they were reluctant to recruit him. "His feet are too slow," was a common response. I said, "How about the 33 points and 26 rebounds?" It was something like that. So Mankato State and St. Cloud State and Augustana didn't offer him – to my knowledge – and certainly not the Gophers, but UW-Green Bay did! D-1. And a few years later Jeff was playing in the NCAA tournament as the Gophers watched it on TV and the North Central schools realized who they had missed. His size 17 feet may look slow – as does a giraffe when it runs. But a player is a player and what a player he became. Now the best part for me was being able to meet him as an adult. By coincidence, he joined a team in Warsaw, Poland, the year my family moved there in 2000. So I met him again, watched him play for five years, and we became good friends. His team won the Polish Division I championship, and he was named MVP. What a joy that was for him and for me!

So the years go on...and the ball keeps bouncing. People ask me when I'm going to retire or sell Pacesetter. After seeing 81-year old John Lieser still reffing with authority and grace, I'm thinking "why would I?" I'm still 8 years younger than him and about a million steps behind him. And I still love it. Let's keep walking...and keep that ball bouncing.

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