

- Articles for all four championship matches
- All-tournament teams
- Pacesetter's grade 7-8-9 state champions & runners-up

# Champs: Lakeville South, Marshall, Hawley, Mayer



Clockwise from top: Marshall players celebrate a point against Benilde-St. Margaret's • Lakeville South rejoices at the moment of victory against Prior Lake • Mayer Lutheran yelps with joy after the match point against Russell-Tyler-Ruthton • Hawley players huddle during their comeback win against Chatfield.

# Lakeville South reigns again

Lakeville South was the South Suburban Conference champion this fall, a feat almost as impressive as the state title they won for the second straight season. That's because the SSC had the top three teams in the state tournament. Prior Lake was runner-up — South beat the Lakers 25-17, 25-15, 25-19 in the finals Nov. 10 — and Apple Valley captured third place.

## 4A: Lakeville South 3, Prior Lake 0

"I just am really super proud of our conference," said Steve Willingham, Lakeville South coach. "Mike has an excellent team and so does Apple Valley. To have three from the same conference all there at the end. But these girls (his team) know; they play that schedule every year."

Mike Dean, Prior Lake coach, tipped his hat to the champions: "They're a fantastic team with a lot of weapons that put a lot of stress on teams they play. But I'm really proud of the way my team conducted itself out there, trying to keep fighting throughout."

Lakeville South, in its fourth state trip, finished 31-3. The Cougars overwhelmed the 4A field with routs of Sartell and Roseville Area before blistering Prior Lake with a .371 kill percentage, by far the best of any of the eight finalists.



**Elleora Utech spikes against Olivia Arlt (13) and Ryah Cotton.**

They rattled off 48 kills against just 12 errors. Romi Chlebecek, a slender, soaring 5-foot-11 senior, spiked 25-for-29 with 17 kills and led them with 47 in the tournament. "I feel there wasn't a team that Romi can't score against," said Willingham. "This year she's really hit her stride as an all-around player." Elleora Utech was 28-for-31 with 16 kills. Kaelyn Bjorklund, their highly-regarded setter, made 39 assists. Kate Utech had three of their four aces. Amanda Cullen made 14 digs, and Utech and Bjorklund 11 each. Addy Quandt made five blocks (two solo) and four kills.



**Romi Chlebecek smacks a kill against Prior Lake's Lauren Wise.**

with two aces. Burley led with 18 digs.

Lakeville South lost to 3A champion Marshall and Lakeville North. They split with Eagan and beat Lakeville North twice, including 3-2 in the section finals.

It was Prior Lake's fourth state trip and second runner-up finish. The Lakers tripped Chanhassen (24-5) for the section title and got past Centennial and Apple Valley to reach the state finals. With a 23-11 record, the Lakers were a rare finalist with double-digit losses, including a pair of three-game losing streaks. Players in the press conference said those skids only served to motivate them.

Apple Valley (20-10) beat Roseville 25-20, 23-25, 27-25, 25-16 for third place. Centennial was consolation champ.

Ashtyn Wolf, defensive specialist, asked about repeating, said: "We definitely had a target on our backs all year. We've been working up to it all year. It felt really awesome to do it again .... We lost a bunch of big players from last year, but we knew we could fill it and get back if we worked hard."

The Cougars held the Lakers to an .070 kill percentage with 25 kills against 18 errors. Dylan Ravelin had eight kills for the Lakers and Isabella Hawkins and Addison Barbo five each. Sidney Burley served 10-for-10 with two aces and Ryan Cotton 11-for-12

# Marshall is back on top

Marshall is the state volleyball record-holder by far with 34 state trips and 10 championships, including four of the last five. The exception was 2024 when Alexandria interrupted the Tigers dynasty, beating them in the finals. And that really stuck in the Tigers' craw.

"Awful!" said Avery Pahl, asked how that felt. Added Brooke Gillingham, "Once you've lost the state championship, you really, really don't want to do that again." At least, that's how you react if you're Marshall.

## 3A: Marshall 3, Benilde-St. Margaret's 1

The southwest Minnesota power is back on top after reaching the Class 3A finals again and defeating Benilde-St. Margaret's 25-20, 25-15, 27-29, 25-17 on Nov. 8.

"I think ever since we took that loss to Alexandria, our kids have just had a tremendous amount of resolve and said, 'Nothing is going to get in our way this year,' " coach Dan Westby said. Even in summer practices, the girls worked hard on their skills. "We didn't just roll the ball out and have fun," he said. During the season, practices were "war," he added. "Steel sharpens steel."

The Tigers finished 33-2 and, impressively, 3-1 against the Class 4A finalists, splitting with Lakeville South and beating Prior Lake twice. Their other loss was to Eagan (25-5). They beat Willmar in the section finals and got past Big Lake and Cretin-Derham at state.

In the finals, Avery Fahl and Reese Drake blasted 21 kills each. Julia Fahl had nine. Avery, a setter/middle blocker, made 21 assists. Brooke Gillingham made

27 assists. Nora Holmgren logged four blocks. The Tigers served nine aces and missed just two in 101 attempts. Julia Fahl had three aces, Avery Fahl and Kelzlyn Pinckney two each, and Drake and Gillingham one each.



**Brooke Gillingham soars to set up Reese Drake.**

For the Red Knights, Avery Minor led with 19 kills and 18 digs. Sailor Friedly had 13 kills and 17 digs. Brooke Kinkead added 12 kills. Sydney Friedly put up 46 assists. The Red Knights served 93 percent but had only one ace.

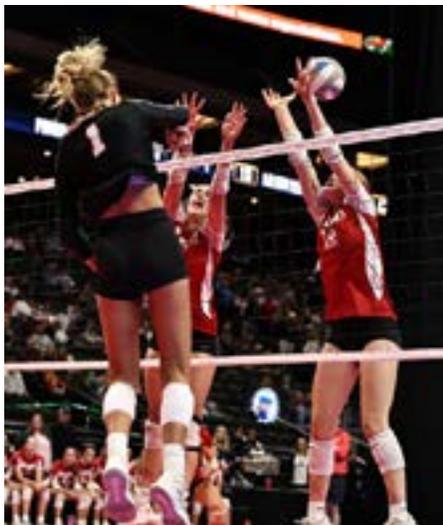
The Red Knights' shining moments came when they fought back from a 24-19 deficit, evading eight match points, to win the third set 29-27. Sailor Friedly delivered the last two kills. "Great effort by Benilde; they certainly could have gone away when we were up 24 to 19," Westby said.

Unfazed, the Tigers took a quick 6-0 lead in set four and coasted to the clinching win. "Just 'being Marshall,' that's what we always say," said Avery Fahl. "They're a good team, but we can do this."

BSM, a Catholic school in St. Louis Park, had only two previous state trips, 1983 and 2022 (runner-up). The Red Knights were 28-6. They upset Delano 3-0 in their section finals after losing twice previously to the Tigers, then clipped Grand Rapids and Stewartville at state. Before the finals loss, they had won 11 straight in 3-0 sweeps.

Marshall also had a state runner-up finish in basketball sticking in their craw. In the hoops finals in March, the same two schools clashed, Benilde-St. Margaret's beating Marshall 73-57. Volleyballers in that game were Sydney Friedly with 13 points for BSM, and Avery Fahl and Drake with 13 and 11 points, respectively, for Marshall. And Westby is also the basketball coach.

Stewartville (28-5) edged Cretin-Derham Hall for third place. 25-19, 25-23, 19-25, 24-26, 15-0. Sauk Rapids-Rice was consolation champion.



**Avery Fahl launches one of her 21 kills against Benilde-SM.**

# Hawley gets scare but repeats

Hawley's route to a second straight Class 2A championship took a serious detour in the finals Nov. 8. The Nuggets found themselves down two games to none against Chatfield, a team on a serious revenge tour. However, Hawley had one more burst in them.

"It was like, let's just go out there and treat it like it's the beginning of the game — and let's go 3-0 and beat them," said Annaka Johnson.

## 2A: Hawley 3, Chatfield 2

That's just what the Nuggets did. After Chatfield won the first two 25-20, 25-21, Hawley started anew and cruised 25-17, 25-16, 15-9 to snatch the trophy out of the Gophers' grasp, thrilling their large gold-clad student gallery.

"They just turned the switch; it was all gas and no brakes," said coach Kathleen Rustad. She added, "This was their first five-set match of the entire season."

Hawley had persistent hitting around the dial as Katie Vetter smacked 15 kills, Annaka Johnson 12, McKenna Walker seven, Adrian Liebenow six, Kendalynn Hill five, and Sella Fleming five while making 41 assists.

Selling served 15-for-15 with three aces and Vetter 16-for-16 with two aces. Hannah Stotts made 27 digs and Vetter 22, Liebenow six blocks and Vetter five.

For Chatfield, Amaya Harmening delivered 18 kills, Trindy Berkelium 17 and Cora Bicknese 15. Harper Goldsmith lofted 44 assists. Goldsmith made 28 digs, Bicknese 26 and Hannah Tweten 21.

A year ago, Hawley beat Chatfield in the state semifinals, then downed Southwest Christian in the finals. This year, Chatfield avenged two regular season losses with big wins



**Hawley setter Sella Fleming lunges to dig a spike against Chatfield.**

But revenge eluded the Gophers this time.

"It does feel good to beat them (Caledonia and Albany) but this (Hawley) is the one we wanted the most," said coach Kristi Rindels. She praised Hawley as "a team that does not give up," and when they make difficult saves, she said, "It causes you to panic a little bit."

Hawley, top seeded, finished 31-2, with losses to Watertown-Mayer and Minnewaska Area. The Nuggets beat Wadena-Deer Creek in the section finals and New London-Spicer and New Life Academy at state.

Hawley is an old railroad town just east of Moorhead on the Buffalo River. Chatfield is nestled in the Root River Valley, 25 miles from Iowa. The two combatants, located 350 miles apart, are both new powers in volleyball. Hawley has made just three state trips, all in the last five years, and Chatfield had never gone to state until last year.

About her current successful group, Rindels said, "We have a lot of talented athletes, sure, but also great human beings that little girls look up to. They will be a tough group to lose."

Rustad said the back-to-back titles have lit up volleyball fever in Hawley. "I swear the whole town of Hawley is down here. Young and old. Babies in strollers. Grandmas and grandpas. It's pretty impressive."

New Life Academy (28-5) beat Albany 14-25, 25-15, 25-20, 25-15 for third place. Southwest Christian won the consolation title.

in the play-offs, toppling Caledonia in the section finals and Albany in the state semifinals, after beating Esko in the first round. And they were up 2-0 on the team that stopped them last season.



**Annaka Johnson of Hawley spikes against Chatfield's Cora Bicknese.**

# Mayer Lutheran rolls again

Mayer Lutheran continues to make the 2020's their Mown decade in small-school volleyball. The Carver County parochial school on the Crow River South Fork capped another run to a Class 1A championship beating Russell-Tyler-Ruthton 25-17, 25-15, 25-23 on Nov. 8.

The Crusaders reached the state finals for the fifth straight year and captured their second title in a row and third in that five-year stretch. It's the school's sixth overall in their 19th state appearance.

## 1A: Mayer Lutheran 3, Russell-Tyler Ruthton 0

They finished on top again with what their coach called a peak performance. "This match was by far our best match of the season," said Joelle Grimsley. "And what a time to peak. We're done. They don't have to come to the gym on Monday ... Anybody that's seen us all season will know that we peaked today, and that's a coach's dream."

So dominant was Mayer Lutheran that the all-tournament committee selected five Crusaders. Normally the champs get three or four. They were Izabella Keaveny, Clara Keaveny, Hallie Hunter, Courtney Tuttle and Ada Hahn.

The top-seeded Crusaders finished 27-7 including wins over North Woods and Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa in the first two rounds.

Four of their losses came against Class 3A Final Four teams Marshall, Benilde-St. Margaret's (two) and Stewartville, along with Minneota and 4A teams Wayzata and Chanhasen.

RTR, making only its second state trip, is 5-1 in state tournament matches, having won the 2023 title.

The Knights, coached by Daynica Brown, were 30-6, including two losses to Mayer Lutheran and one to Minneota. They beat Minneota in a section finals rematch, and got past Nevis and Ada-Borup-West at state. They



**ML's Courtney Tuttle (6) duels RTR's Brezlyn Buchert (5) as Preslie Hunter (1) and Clara Keaveny look on.**

had won 14 straight before the finals.

RTR got within 24-23 in the third set, but Tuttle smashed a crosscourt kill to end the match.

The Crusader attack was potent around the dial as Hahn delivered 12 goals, Tuttle 10, Hunter 10 and Izabella Keaveny nine while providing 26 assists. Hahn served three aces and Tuttle two. Keaveny made 22 digs, Hahn 18 and Tuttle 16.

Paisley Thooft had nine of RTR's 26 kills, Sara Thooft seven kills and two aces, and Laken Baartman 19 digs.

Mayer Lutheran had 3-0 sweeps all through section and state except for a challenge from Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa. The Jaguars won the first game and led in the second before Tuttle took matters into her own hands; she hammered down a kill, then served for 13 straight points. After that, they won going away.

Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa (26-7) beat Ada-Borup-West for third place 25-21, 25-18, 25-14. Cleveland captured the consolation championship.



**Mayer's Izabella Keaveny spikes against RTR's Paisley Thooft.**

# ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAMS



## CLASS 4A

- Lakeville South — Romi Chlebeczek, Elleora Utecht, Kaelyn Bjorklund
- Prior Lake — Sidney Burley, Dylan Raveling, Addison Barbow
- Apple Valley — Sophia Cowan, Ginny Gores
- Roseville Area — Sophia Gholson-Johnson
- Centennial — Elena Hoecke



## CLASS 3A

- Marshall — Brooke Gillingham, Kezlyn Pinckney, Reese Drake, Avery Fahll
- Benilde-St. Margaret's — Avery Minor, Sydney Friedly, Sailor Friedly
- Stewartville — Dream Peterson, Matilda Dube
- Cretin-Derham Hall — Caroline Banks



## CLASS 2A

- Hawley — Katie Vetter, Sella Flemming, Annaka Johnson
- Chatfield — Trindy Barkheim, Cory Bicknese, Harper Goldsmith
- New Life Academy — Marisa Michaelis, Alexa Lilly
- Albany — Brynn Panek
- Southwest Christian — Breanna Beckering



## CLASS 1A

- Mayer Lutheran — Hallie Hunter, Ada Hahn, Courtney Tuttle, Izabelle Keaveny, Clara Keaveny
- Russell-Tyler-Ruthton — Paisle Thooft, Sara Thooft
- Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa — Kacey Fischer
- Ada-Borup/West — Malayna Syverson
- Fillmore Central — Kyla Hellickson

# ROCORI 7th Graders win Pacesetter Minnesota State Championship



## 7th grade State Champion: ROCORI

ROCORI emerged as champion among 16 entrants, defeating Pequot Lakes 25-23, 25-14 in the championship match. ROCORI reached the finals beating Rock Ridge 25-16, 25-15, Breckenridge 25-20, 28-26, and Randolph 25-16, 16-25, 15-9. Pequot Lakes reached the finals beating Minneapolis 25-5, 25-15, Paynesville 25-15, 25-18, and New Ulm 25-17, 25-22. Randolph beat New Ulm 27-25, 25-10 for third place. Mountain Iron-Buhl placed fifth, Paynesville sixth and Breckenridge seventh. Rock Ridge won the 8-team consolation championship.

Front, from left: Kinzley Plautz, Avery Horace, Lydia Adams  
Back, from left: Sydnie Delong, Emery Rossman, Kameryn Ruegemer, Coach Steph Ruegemer, Ainsley Rademacher, Brielle Niemi

## 7th grade State Runner-up: Pequot Lakes

*The Pacesetter MN Championships for grades 7-8-9 were held Oct. 25-26 in Paynesville.*



Front: Anika Sullivan and Stella Jacobs  
Back, from left: Coach Alisa Den Hartog, Kensey Antonsen, Ruby Wolf, Harper Kennen, Ava Den Hartog, Berklee Berg, and Adora Sullivan

# ROCORI 8th Grade wins Pacesetter Minnesota State Championship



Front, from left: Avery Kremer, Hazel Noll, Averie Schug  
Back, from left: Coach Bobbi Noll, Ava Hoffman, Chloe Konz, Cadence Faber, Grayce Schreifels, Layla Feldhege, Sydney Spitzley

## 8th grade State Champs: ROCORI

ROCORI captured the championship among 16 teams, defeating BOLD 25-6, 25-19 in the finals. ROCORI advanced with wins over Trinity of Waconia 25-10, 25-13, New Ulm 25-9, 25-23, and Aitkin Red 25-10, 25-10. BOLD reached the finals beating Aitkin Black 25-19, 25-12, Cambridge-Isanti 25-14, 25-23, and Chatfield 25-19, 22-25, 15-13. Third place went to Chatfield, beating Aitkin Red 25-19, 18-25, 25-9. Cambridge-Isanti placed fifth, Breckenridge sixth, and Barnesville seventh. Cloquet was consolation champs.



## 8th grade Runner-up: BOLD



Front, from left: Haley Amsden, Kenley Everson, Piper O'Neill, Ali Slagter. Back, from left: Malissa Everson, Kooper Eiler, Halle Helin, Quinn Beckler, Amelia Dyrssen

# Park Rapids Freshmen win Pacesetter Minnesota State Championship

## 9th grade State Champs: Park Rapids

Park Rapids was champion in an eight-team field, defeating Paynesville 25-17, 25-18 in the finals. Park Rapids reached finals beating Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City 25-21, 25-20 and Wabasha-Kellogg 25-20, 25-22. Paynesville advanced beating Rock Ridge 25-20, 25-21, and Hawley 21-25, 25-23, 16-14. Wabasha-Kellogg topped Hawley 25-18, 25-22 for third place. Moose Lake-Willow River placed fifth.



Front, from left: Harper Fogarty, Ella Carroll, Ryann Hagen, Khloe May, Clara Kimball. Back from left: Elli Vandal, Jayla Pederson, Elliana Weaver, Kenzie Strasberg, Hadlea Appel, McKenzie Brady-Baso. Not pictured: coach Leah Weaver

## 9th grade State Runner-up: Paynesville



Front, from left: Kate Stoneburner, Cassie Wendlandt, Ruby Kluver. Back, from left: Coach Aubrie Spanier, Avery Pentz, Michelle Gottwald, Savannah Glenz, Bailee Gerding, Kinley Barten

Boys & Girls Grades 4-9

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 Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6  
 Bemidji • February 22  
 Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7

**Northeast Region**  
 Mt. Iron-Buhl • February 14  
 Boys Grades 5 & 7  
 Grand Rapids • February 14  
 Girls Grades 5 & 7  
 Mt. Iron-Buhl • February 15  
 Girls Grades 4 & 6  
 Grand Rapids • February 15  
 Boys Grades 4 & 6

**Central Region**  
 St. Cloud • February 14  
 Boys & Girls Grades 4 & 6  
 St. Cloud • February 15  
 Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7

**MN State**  
 St. Cloud • March 29  
 Boys & Girls Grades 8 & 9

**Southwest Region**  
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 Boys & Girls Grades 5 & 7  
 Redwood Falls • February 22  
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**December 20**

Boys and Girls Grades 4 & 6

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Boys and Girls Grades 5 & 7

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**Registration Deadline: December 10**



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