

- State finals reports for all four classes
- Eagan surprises
- All-tourney teams and MBBN's super five

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Boys champs: Tonka, Totino, Breck, Cherry



Celebrating state championships on Saturday were Breck (top), Totino-Grace (above right), Cherry (below right) and Minnetonka (below) at Williams Arena.



Photos by Bruce Strand, MN Basketball News

Tonka shocks Wayzata

4A: Skippers end 19-game skid vs. Trojans 72-61 for title

By Bruce Strand

Minnetonka picked the perfect time to end a nine-years-long losing streak against its illustrious neighbor Wayzata. The Skippers shackled the top-ranked Trojans 72-61 in the Class 4A championship game at Williams Arena on Saturday, capturing the school's fourth title in boys hoops and giving their school a girls-boys sweep to boot.

Minnetonka had lost 19 consecutive games to their Lake Conference rival, including 98-87 and 103-88 this year. Somehow they held the Trojans to 61 in the state finals -- using just six players.

"The energy tonight was the best all season. We knew we didn't have to play perfect, but we needed to be great, on both ends of the floor," coach Bryce Tesdahl said. "And these guys were great, especially on the defensive end. Wayzata is so offensively skilled, the whole team. Holding a team like that to 61 points is a huge credit to our guys' energy and focus every possession."

The Skippers, who finished 25-6, were ranked No. 4. Wayzata, easily the No. 1 team after the regular season, finished 29-2, playing in their fourth straight final, of which they've won two.

Andrew Stefonowicz delivered 19 points and eight rebounds for Wayzata. Kayden Wells logged 19 points (shooting 7-for-9) and 10 rebounds. Jordan Cain notched 17 points and nine rebounds. Stefonowski made five assists, and Wells and Cain three steals each. Greyson Uelman added nine points. All are seniors. Juniors contributing were Isa El-Amin with four points and nine rebounds, and the lone sub, Malachi Boadi-Aboagye, with four points in 7:35. The Trojans' big edge was in rebounding, 45-32. The teams were near even in all the other categories.

"They were very physical," said Wayzata coach Bryan Schnetter. "We were just a little bit off. We



Greyson Uelman (left) and Andy Stefonowicz embraced, with victory at hand.

Photos by Bruce Strand, MN Basketball News

did not have the edge like we usually do. Whenever we got close, we couldn't keep going."

Jackson McAndrew, the versatile 6-foot-9 marvel whom Schnetter calls "the best player Wayzata has ever had," closed his career with a 21-point, 10-rebound, four-block performance but very dejected. He had 17 points in the first half including 3-for-4 on three's, and just four points in the second half, 0-for-4 on three's. When he left the court, he paused for a long, pained embrace from Schnetter before sitting down. Christian Wiggins added 18 points for the Trojans. Next was Drew Nepstad with nine.

Wayzata took extra inspiration from a couple of sources. One was social media. "I'd say we were definitely fired up," Uelman said. "We saw it all over Twitter, Instagram. We lost to them, like, 19 times in a row previously. We knew that this would be the game to beat them." Cain added:

“We played them twice (before), and we just didn’t execute. Tonight, we executed. We saw all the comments ... That was all fuel for our fire.”

The other was a painful personal anecdote imparted to them by their coach, who was the star of a Crosby-Ironton team that was 32-0 before



Jordan Cain dunked for Minnetonka in the second half.

losing to New London-Spicer in the 2008 Class 2A finals, a game that “haunted” him so badly that he got into coaching “because I wanted that day back.” He told the team “that if they could help me do that, not only will they be legends in my heart, but legends in the Minnetonka community.”

Tonka roared to a 27-13 lead. Wayzata got as close as 33-28 and 52-47. Minnetonka repelled every challenge, their



Drew Nepstad penetrated for a Wayzata basket.

rugged defense limiting the Trojans to 11-for-31 shooting in the second half.

The loss was devastating for Wayzata. It took a half-hour for Schnettler to emerge from his locker room, alone, to meet the media. He explained that his players were too sad to participate. “Until tonight, this was the best basketball season Wayzata ever had,” Schnettler said. “We had the most wins ever. We won the conference and section, and we won the state academic award.”

Minnetonka has been champion four times and runner-up once in six state trips. Wayzata has three titles in nine trips. To reach the finals, Wayzata beat Rogers 77-64 and Cretin-Derham Hall 74-48, McAndrew logging 25 points and 13 rebounds against CDH. Minnetonka cruised against Coon Rapids 88-36 and Eagan 68-45.

Minnetonka 35 37 – 72
Wayzata 28 33 – 61

Minnetonka – 28-64 (2-12 3FG), 14-20 FT, 43 rebounds, 8 turnovers, 16 fouls ... Scoring: Isa El-Amin 4 (9r, 1a, 1s), Andy Stefanowicz 19 (8r, 5a, 1s, 1b), Kayden Wells 19 (10r, 3s, 2b), Greyson Uelmen 9 (6r, 2a), Jordan Cain 17 (9r, 2a, 3s), Malachi Boadi-Aboagye 4 ... 3-pointers: Stefanowicz 1-3, Cain 1-4

Wayzata – 21-56 FG (7-24 3FG), 12-16 FT, 28 rebounds, 11 turnovers, 19 fouls ... Scoring: Isaac Olmstead 4 (2r, 4a, 1s), Christian Wiggins 18 (3r, 2a, 1s, 1b), Ben Shaffer 5 (3r, 2a, 1s), Brayden Sandmann 2 (3r, 1a, 1s, 1b), Wyatt McBeth (3r, 1a, 1s, 1b), Jackson McAndrew 21 (10r, 1a, 4b), Drew Nepstad 9 (2r, 9a, 1s) Jack Simon 0 (2r) ... 3-pointers: Wiggins 3-7, McAndrew 3-8, Nestad 1-2

Wayzata pulled within 66-61 on a three by Wiggins with 1:23 left and made a defensive stop, but, with :34 left, Shaffer missed a three and Stefanowicz finished them off. The North Dakota State recruit snagged the rebound, dashed the length of the court, hit a layup while fouled, and added the free shot for a 71-61 lead, setting off a tremendous ovation from the Wayzata crowd and some celebrating on the floor. “I saw the open court and I knew they’re probably going to foul,” said Stefanowicz, “so I thought I’d just take it strong, regardless, and see what happens.”

Three-peat by Totino-Grace

3A: Eagles cap 'tough run' beating Mankato East 73-64

By Bruce Strand

Totino-Grace, which plays a Class 4A schedule all season, then competes in Class 3A for tournaments, rolled to its third consecutive state title, capped by a 73-64 conquest of Mankato East in a duel of the teams ranked 1-2 ranked all year.

Isaiah Johnson-Arigu, their Mr. Basketball contender, led with 25 points and 11 rebounds. The 6-foot-7 Miami recruit shot 11-for-17 with a pair of breakaway dunks in the first half and a spectacular one-handed slam late in the game that seemed to finish off the Cougars at Williams Arena.

Eagles Nicholas Carroll praised the 3A field, calling this "for sure the toughest run for us" of the three titles.

"We had three really challenging opponents. Stewartville was awesome, and obviously DeLaSalle, you always have a handful with them. I thought Mankato East played as well as I've seen them play all year today."

Tyler Wagner contributed 17 points (6-for-8 on field goals) and seven rebounds, Chase Watley 10 points, and Dothan Ijadimbola six points and 10 rebounds, as the Fridley school capped a 27-5 season against a daunting schedule.

"They are a gifted team and their size is pretty overwhelming compared to us," Mankato East coach Joe Madson observed. "You don't see a lot of teams like that in the Big Nine and in our section."

Mankato East, playing in the finals for the first time after three third-place finishes in 12 state appearances, finished 28-3.

"I can't be prouder of these guys. They are just a great group," Madson said. "We have different guys step up each game."

Coach's son Brogan Madson, a slashing junior guard, pumped in 27 points, shooting 9-for-18 from the field

and 9-for-11 from the line. Carson Schweim, 6-foot-7 forward signed by MN-Mankato, snagged 14 rebounds while limited to 10 points on 3-for-17 shooting as the Eagles put intense pressure on him. Gandon Gooch was next with nine points. The Cougars, normally a good three-point team, were just 5-for-29 in a game where they really needed three's.

"We knew they (Totino-Grace) were a really good team but we knew we had a shot," Schweim said. "We're happy to get here. We've had a lot of support from the fans and we really appreciate that."

Totino-Grace opened a 25-16 lead sparked by two breakaway dunks from Johnson-Arigu. East closed to 37-34 at the half with Madson hitting 14 points. They took a 44-43 lead on a drive by Madson but it lasted just 17 seconds with Wagner scoring on a fast break, then a short jumper.

Another dunk by Johnson-Arigu was a crusher. With the Eagles up 56-49, Watley lofted an alley-oop pass to him on the far side of the basket and he one-handed the ball above the rim and crushed it

through the net, opening a nine-point lead and revving up the Eagles fans along with the team.

"Chase threw a good pass and I felt the adrenaline kick in. It gave us energy for like the last five minutes," Johnson-Arigu said. The play, he said, is called a



Isaiah Johnson-Arigu yelled after one of his dunks for T-G.

Smug Mug

“Zona,” short for Arizona.

Madson, asked about East’s defense against the Eagles, said, “We’re a predominately man to man team. We try to play a little zone; we’re just not as good at it ... We stuck with what we wanted to do, and I think we handled it well a lot of times, but we gave up some easy hoops.”

Totino-Grace faces all 4A teams in the Northwest Suburban and their non-conference slate includes powers from other states. The Eagles beat No. 2 ranked Park Center 72-63 and No. 3 Hopkins 79-75. They lost to 4A state finalists Minnetonka 77-73 and Wayzata 83-81 and to No. 8 East Ridge 74-72. They lost to a Nebraska state champion (Bellevue West) that finished 27-1 and to a 29-4 Tennessee team (Cordova). “There’s not a challenge they haven’t seen,” Carroll said about his team.

Class 3A continues to be in the grip of metro private schools. The three-year run by Totino-Grace was preceded by Minnehaha Academy winning in 2021, and DeLaSalle capturing six of seven crowns from 2012 to 2019. The only public school champ in the last dozen tournaments was Delano in 2018.

Carroll was asked if T-G is considering a move up to Class 4A. He said it’s hard to make a decision like that which has to be made two years in advance. He pointed out that the Eagle football team, after dominating Class 5A, moved up to 6A and nabbed one more title, then struggled



Chase Watley laid in two for Totino-Grace.



Brogan Madson penetrated for a three-point play on his way to 27 points for Mankato East.

and moved back down to 4A. “We’re excited about where the program is at and definitely ongoing conversations with our athletic director.”

To reach the finals, Mankato East smoked Chisago Lakes 80-41 with 32-for-54 shooting and 12 players scoring led by Madson with 15, then survived a meat-grinder with Alexandria 65-62, after trailing 14-0, with Schweim hitting 15 points on five 3-pointers, Manaow Omot 11 and Dwayne Bryant 10. With a 34-27 edge, they were the first team this season to out-rebound the Cardinals at full strength.

Totino-Grace tipped Stewartville 57-48, after trailing 41-36, as Johnson-Arigu and Watley netted 13 points each and Wagner 12. They outlasted another perennial parochial power, DeLaSalle 74-67, powered by Johnson-Arigu with 28 points, 15 rebounds and six assists. Watley had 15 points and Dothan Ojadimbola 14.

Mankato East 34 30 – 64
Totino-Grace 37 36 – 73

Mankato East – 22-56 FG (5-29 3FG), 15-20 FT, 29 rebounds, 8 turnovers, 18 fouls ... Scoring: Amari Nobles 3 (2r, 2a, 1s), Brogan Madson 27 (3r, 2a, 4s), Lucas Gustafson 5 (2r, 3a), Manaow Omot 3 (2r, 1s), Dwayne Bryant 7, Gaden Gosch 9 (6r, 2s, 2a), Carson Schweim 10 (14r, 1a, 1s, 2b) 3-pointers: Nobles 1-1, Gustafson 1-3, Omot 1-3, Bryant 1-4, Schweim 1-11

Totino-Grace – 29-52 FG (3-8 3FG), 12-22 FT, 35 rebounds, 11 turnovers, 14 fouls ... Scoring: Dothan Ijadimbola 6 (10r, 3a, 2s), Tian Chatman 6 (3r, 2a, 1s), Malachi Hill 0 (2r, 2a), Isaiah Johnson-Arigu 25 (11r, 3a, 2s), Tyler Wagner 17 (7r), Chase Watley 10 (3a), Will Brands 3 ... 3-pointers: Johnson-Arigu 1-1, Wagner 1-3, Brands 1-1

STATE BOYS BASKETBALL RESULTS

CLASS 4A

QUARTERFINALS WEDNESDAY

- Wayzata 77, Rogers 34
- Cretin-Derham Hall 57, Farmington 56
- Eagan 73, Park Center 70
- Minnetonka 81, Coon Rapids 36

SEMIFINALS THURSDAY

- Wayzata 74, Cretin-Derham Hall 48
- Minnetonka 68, Eagan 45

FINALS SATURDAY

- Minnetonka 72, Wayzata 61

CONSOLATION GAMES

- Farmington 98, Rogers 69
- Park Center 90, Coon Rapids 54

Fifth-place

- Park Center 90, Farmington 76

Third-place

- Eagan 84, Cretin-Derham Hall 65

CLASS 3A

QUARTERFINALS WEDNESDAY

At Williams Arena

- Totino-Grace 57, Stewartville 48
- DeLaSalle 70, Orono 64
- Mankato East 80, Chisago Lakes 41
- Alexandria 72, Minneapolis South 70

SEMIFINALS THURSDAY

- Totino-Grace 74, DeLaSalle 67
- Mankato East 65, Alexandria 62

FINALS SATURDAY

- Totino-Grace 73,, Mankato East 64

CONSOLATION GAMES

- Stewartville 72, Orono 69
- Minneapolis South 77, Chisago Lakes 73

Fifth-place

- Stewartville 90, Minneapolis South 48

Third-place

- DeLaSalle 58, Alexandria 53

CLASS 2A

QUARTERFINALS WEDNESDAY

- Breck 76, Waseca 42
- Minnehaha Academy 63, Pequot Lakes 47
- Albany 87, Jackson County Central 66
- Lake City 72, Pelican Rapids 61, OT

SEMIFINALS FRIDAY

- Breck 70, Minnehaha Academy 45
- Lake City 69, Albany 59

FINALS SATURDAY

- Breck 76, Lake City 72

CONSOLATION GAMES

- Pequot Lakes 51, Waseca 48
- Jackson County Central 74, Pelican Rapids 65

Fifth-place

- Pequot Lakes 51, Jackson County Central 44

Third-place

- Albany 70, Minnehaha Academy 53

CLASS 1A

QUARTERFINALS THURSDAY

At Target Center

- Cherry 78, Russell-Tyler-Ruthton 46
- Nevis 78, Mountain Lake Area/Comfrey 54
- West Central Area 64, Heritage Christian 53
- Fertile-Beltrami 64, Goodhue 57

SEMIFINALS FRIDAY

- Cherry 76, Nevis 58
- Fertile-Beltrami 84, West Central Area 75, 3 OT

FINALS SATURDAY

- Cherry 78, Fertile-Beltrami 40

CONSOLATION GAMES

- Russell-Tyler-Ruthton 83, Mountain Lake Area/Comfrey 65
- Heritage Christian 68, Goodhue 54

Fifth-place

- Heritage Christian 63, Russell-Tyler-Ruthton 62

Third-place

- Nevis 64, West Central Area 51



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 jmac8144@yahoo.com



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.



Breck caps swift rise to top

2A: Mustangs edge Lake City 76-72 in finals thriller

By Bruce Strand

Breck's first-ever season as a state boys basketball power ended with a state championship Saturday but not before Lake City battled the Mustangs to the last seconds. The Mustangs, after routing five section and state opponents by an average of 28 points, fended off Lake City 76-72, making a steal with two seconds left to protect a two-point lead.

And that was just what Breck, ranked No. 1 all season, wanted. "We've been waiting for a challenge like that," said Breck coach Harry Sonie. "It's nice to win by 20 or 30, but this (championship) is the biggest game on the high school stage, for your state and for your class, and you want to be in that kind of game."

The Mustangs met the challenge, led by Wisconsin recruit Daniel Freitag's 33-point performance. The Mustangs finished 31-1, losing only to a Class 4A top-ten team.

"This is what we wanted," agreed Freitag. "We didn't want to come in and win by 30. We wanted a game. We wanted competitiveness. That's exactly what we wanted."

Lake City, ranked No. 3, finished 26-6 with a senior-dominated team in their third varsity season together. "Obviously a great basketball game," said Greg Berge, Lake City coach. "Our hats off to Breck. They were a phenomenal team. Our guys left it all on the court. We battled them to the end, and had chances against a very, very good team. I couldn't be more proud." Said Sonie: "That's (Lake City) a really good team. We knew they were going to be physical, and they were going to be very skilled. But, credit to our guys, man, we just battled them all 36 minutes."

It was the first state hoops title in just the second state trip for Breck, which hadn't even won a conference title

for 40 years until this year. Their lone loss was 66-64 to Minneapolis champion Washburn. It was Lake City's ninth state trip, and fourth time in the finals; they won the first three (1978, 1980 and 1990).

Freitag, 6-foot-2 guard, got his 33 points on 11-for-20 shooting from the field (with three 3-pointers) and 8-for-11 at the line. He snagged eight rebounds and made five steals. Miles Newton delivered 18 points and seven rebounds, DeAngelo Dungey hit 10 points and three blocks, and Hanif Muhammad, who averages 16 points, had 6 points, four assists and three rebounds.

Lake City had an inbounds play under their own basket with :02 left, trailing 72-70. But Breck's JP Musoke intercepted Keegan Ryan's pass on the baseline. Freitag was fouled and made two free shots. As Freitag saw the play: "It was the right play (for them). DJ just got in the way. He did just what he was supposed to do and got the steal. It would have worked if he wasn't there."

Sonie credited assistant coach Brock Bertram for walking the team through "that specific backdoor set" earlier in the

day, having noticed that Lake City had done well with it in the tournament. Berge said: "We were trying to run a back door to Hunter (Lorenson) and I think it was maybe a tough angle to make that pass. They had a guy there. So we had to go to plan B. We tried to sneak one in there and it didn't quite work for us."

Breck earned a huge edge in turnovers, eight to 20, keying their win, with that final one the most crucial.

Lake City did everything else well. The Tigers shot a blazing 56 percent at 28-for-50 and out rebounded the Mustangs 38-28. Lorenson logged 19 points and seven rebounds. The other guard, Joshua Wohlers, added 11



Daniel Freitag beamed after leading the team he joined this year to the title.

points (3-for-3 on three's). The rugged front line gave Breck fits. Rylee Fick had 15 points and seven rebounds; Ryan 13 points, 12 rebounds and three blocks; and Jaden Shones 11 points and four rebounds.

"We had a stretch of turnovers that killed us," said Lorenson, who sank 60 points in the tournament. "Otherwise we basically played a perfect game ... We had them, we just had the one bad stretch."

He referred to a six-minute span where Breck shook loose six turnovers and went from a 46-46 tie to a 64-52 lead. The Tigers battled back, pulling within 66-63 on two free shots by Fick and one by Ryan. Freitag drilled a three-pointer and Wohlers did the same for Lake City, making it 69-66. Freitag fouled on a drive, sank two free shots for a 71-66 lead. Ryan scored on a daring, off-balance drive. Freitag missed a three, Fick rebounded, Shones made two free shots. It was 71-70.

Breck held on. Muhammad sank one of two free shots, Dungey stole the ball, and Freitag sliced for a layup, giving Breck a 74-70 edge. Lorenson slashed into the paint for a short jumper that made it 74-72 with :57 left. Breck missed three shots, and Ryan rebounded with

:19. Lorenson missed from the paint with :08 left but the Tigers kept possession, leading to that last in-bounds play.

Freitag was a 28-ppg scorer for a 14-13 team at Bloomington Jefferson last year. He signed up with a California prep team but changed



Lake City's Rylee Fick tries to score against Hanif Mohammad.

his mind and wound up in the Golden Valley private school. "I'm happy with my decision," Freitag said. "I grew a bond with the players and coaches and people at school." After playing on a .500 team in Class 4A, he cast his lot with a Class 2A team on the rise. Breck was 19-9 last year and returned four starters who combined for 40 ppg. Suddenly, Breck found itself ranked first. "I remember seeing the number one spot, before the sea-



Hunter Lorenson of Lake City drives with Breck's Miles Newton guarding him.

son even started," Freitag said, "and, I mean, we kept it. We stayed there. We did what we had to do."

Berge hailed his squad that went 74-13 over three seasons. "We have nine seniors and they had a phenomenal run," he said. The Tigers were 26-1 last year before an upset loss in the section. At state, Lake City dethroned 2023 champion Albany 69-59 in the semifinals as Lorenson logged 22 points and 14 rebounds and Shones 17 points. They beat Pelican Rapids 72-61 in the first round as Lorenson hit 19 points and Ryan 14 points, 10 rebounds, four blocks and five steals.

Breck scuttled No. 2 ranked Minneapolis North 91-74 in the Section 5AA finals with Freitag and Muhammad each sinking 27 points. In each of the first two state games, they had five players between 11 and 13 points, with torrid shooting (a combined 21-for-47 on three's) to beat Waseca 76-42 and Minnehaha Academy 70-45.

Lake City 32 40 – 72
Breck 33 43 – 76

Lake City – 28-50 FG (6-13 3FG), 10-18 FT, 35 rebounds, 20 turnovers, 14 fouls Scoring: Hunter Lorenson 19 (7r, 4a), Joshua Wohlers 11 (5r), Keegan Ryan 13 (12r, 3a, 3s, 3b), Jaden Shones 11 (4r, 4a), Rylee Flick 15 (7r) ... 3-pointers H. Lorenson 1-3, Wohlers 3-3, Ruan 1-4, Shones 1-2

Breck – 24-64 FG (9-30 3FG), 13-18 FT, 27 rebounds, 8 turnovers, 16 fouls ... Scoring: Hanif Muhammad 6 (3r, 4a), DeAngelo Dungey 10 (3b, 1s), Daniel Freitag 33 (8r, 5s), Miles Newton 18 (7r, 4a 1s), JP Musoke 5 (6r, 3a, 2s), Mu Muhammad 4 (3s) ... 3-pointers: H. Muhammad 1-5, Dungey 2-3, Freitag 3-7, Newton 2-4, Musoke 1-7

Cherry romps, all the way

1A: Tigers top Fertile-Beltrami 78-40 for title in 3rd try

By Bruce Strand

Cherry got it done this time. The darling little school from the Iron Range, with their future Gopher leading them, shook off two state tournament disappointments and roared to the Class 1A championship.

Top-ranked from the opening tipoff, Cherry won seven section and state games by an average of 42 points, capped by a 78-40 conquest of Fertile-Beltrami in the finals at Williams Arena.

The Tigers finished 31-2, losing to a pair of strong Class 4A teams after Christmas. The past two years, with mostly the same guys, they had cruised into the state finals but lost twice to finish fourth.

“That really left a bad taste in our mouths,” said Isaac Asuma, who’ll return to Williams Arena next year with the U of M. “Everyone worked hard in the summer. We were ready to bounce back and knew that if we play to the best of our abilities that we could do it. We came out here and we showed it.”

Cherry held the Falcons scoreless for the first 5 1/3 minutes, taking an 11-0 lead. The closest score after that was 28-16. Cherry led 43-21 at the half and outscored FB 35-19 in the second half.

Noah Asuma, Isaac’s sophomore look-alike brother, logged a game-high 22 points, along with eight rebounds and three assists. Noah Sundquist notched 15 points and nine rebounds, and Carson Brown 14 points. Isaac Asuma contributed the last dozen points of almost 3,400 in his career while dishing out eight assists and blocking five Falcon shots. Isaiah Asuma, a cousin, had four points and five rebounds.

The Tigers shot a crisp 55 percent at 32-for-58, with nine three’s, and owned the backboards with a 49-19 rebound edge.

“They are one of the best teams in the state in all classes, in my opinion. We tried our best,” said Caiden Swenby, Fertile-Beltrami’s 2,000-point scorer, whose squad was a bit gassed after a triple-overtime win Friday.



Ready for action: Carson Brown, Isaiah Asuma, Noah Asuma, Isaac Asuma and Noah Sundquist.

Cherry coach Jordan Christianson made sure that Cherry’s greatest athlete got a proper sendoff. When he sent in the first four subs, he had Isaac return to the court with them, then pulled him out a few seconds later. “I wanted everyone to give him a standing ovation,” Christianson said. The Cherry fans did just that, while Isaac went down the line and embraced every teammate, coach and student manager.

Issac was a 5-foot-2 starter in seventh grade when Cherry went 0-22. Things got better... The

Tigers were 15-11 the next year, when Christianson arrived to coach, then 12-7 in a Covid-shortened season. Then everything kicked in. The Tigers were a top-five team, going 27-6 with fourth place in the state the last two years. And every year since eighth grade, Isaac was a captain. “I’m the guy who counts the votes, and he’s received every vote for five years,” Christianson said. “He’s just a true leader, a leader by example, a vocal leader. He does our team prayers before games.”

While the core of the team is the Asuma family, Cherry was fortified the last two seasons with Sundquist and Carson transferring in, from Chisholm and Hibbing, respectively, each leaving a struggling program for one with a shot at a state title.

The Asuma trio, in the post-game press conference, said they first took inspiration from the neighboring Mountain Iron-Buhl girls, who were advancing to state every year starting, when the boys were in elementary school. “We said we’re going to get down there one day and we’re going to win it. Be just like them,” Noah said.

Fertile-Beltrami, after a 3-OT win over West Central Area, was overmatched and worn out in the finals. The No. 11 ranked Falcons finished 27-7. “We tried to play a little zone today, thinking that, after the game we played yesterday, we were probably going to be a little tired,” coach Neil Steffes said. “Unfortunately, our legs weren’t quite there. We had a hard time making shots. Our shots were short. We were always a step behind.”

Steffes allowed that it’s difficult to get into an offensive rhythm against Cherry in any case. “Every cut you make, they’re banging you ... They’re so athletic, they can switch everybody onto anybody so it’s difficult to get open.”



Five-year captain Isaac Asuma savored a state title in his final game as a Cherry Tiger.

losses came against Forest Lake (16-13) by 69-65 and Park Center (27-4) by 92-73 on Dec. 28-29. They were 24-0 since then.

At state, Cherry pummeled Russell-Tyler-Ruthton 78-46 and Nevis 76-58 to reach the finals. Against RTR, Isaiah Asuma had 26 points, Isaac Asuma 20 points and 13 rebounds, and Noah Sundquist 16 points. Against Nevis, the Asumas dominated: Isaac with 20 points and nine assists, Noah 20 points and Isaiah 14 points.

Cherry’s semifinal losses the last two years were against the eventual champions Hayfield in 2022 and Russell-Tyler-Ruthton in 2023. Worse, they got pounded in the third place games by New Life Academy and Spring Grove.

This year, Cherry scored over 100 points nine games and in the 90s in 12 other games. Their



Caiden Swenby of Fertile-Beltrami looks for an opening against Cherry's Noah Sundquist.

Fertile-Beltrami got past Goodhue 64-57 as Swenby logged 23 points and 12 rebounds and Hanson 19 points and 11 rebounds. In the triple-OT win over West Central Area, 84-75, Hanson delivered 23 points, and Swenby 19 points and 13 rebounds before fouling out. Mason Nowacki hit a game-saving three in the first OT. Derek Sorenson scored seven of their 17 in the third.

Swenby was grateful to be playing in a state final after fouling out Friday and missing the three overtimes. “My teammates carried me,” Swenby noted. Steffes said the team told him, “We’ve got you, buddy, and we will give you a chance at a state championship. Because he’s worked so hard all year and deserves it.”

It was Fertile-Beltrami’s fourth state trip and second runner-up finish. In 1996, they were the de facto small school champ, but that was the second year of the Sweet 16 experiment and they lost in the finals to Minneapolis North, officially placing runner-up. Cherry made its fourth state trip overall as they also qualified in 1997.

Fertile-Beltrami 21 19 – 40
Cherry 43 35 – 78

Fertile-Beltrami – 17-52 FG (5-19 3FG), 1-1 FT, 19 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 10 fouls ... Scoring: Derek Sorenson 6 (2r, 2s), Masen Nowacki 4 (3r, 2s, 2a), Caiden Swenby 14 (5r, 6a), Preston Hanson 13 (5r, 2a), Easton Petry 3 ... 3-pointers: Swenby 2-8, Hanson 2-5, Petry 1-1

Cherry – 32-58 FG (9-22 3FG), 5-6 FT, 40 rebounds, 11 turnovers, 9 fouls Scoring: Andrew Staples 5 (3r, 2a, 1s), Noah Sundquist 15 (9r, 2a, 1s), Isaac Asuma 12 (8r, 2s, 5b), Mason Heitzman 0 (2r), Noah Asuma 22 (8r, 3s, 1b), Isaiah Asuma 4 (5r, 3a), Landon Ruotsalainen 6 (1r, 1s), Logan Ruotsalainen 0 (1a), Carson Brown 14 (4r, 4a, 1s) ... 3-pointers: Staples 1-1, Sundquist 1-1, N. Asuma 3-6, Lan. Ruotsalainen 2-4, Brown 2-5

VARSITY BOYS & GIRLS "SWEET 16" CHAMPIONSHIPS**PACESSETTER***By Invitation Only***SWEET SIXTEEN
TOURNAMENT****August 3-4, 2024****COLLEGE OF ST. BENEDICT ST. JOSEPH, MN**

The Pacesetter "Sweet Sixteen" Basketball Championship has become the premier summer tournament for varsity players as 32 top boys' and girls' teams in Minnesota gather to play for two over-all championships.

Four Class A, four Class AA, four Class AAA and four Class AAAA teams are invited to make up the 16-team fields for both boys and girls. One team from each class will be placed into each 4-team section of the 16-team bracket.

All teams will play 4 regulation-length games in a 16-team format. Teams that win the championships will receive beautiful individual plaques. Teams that win two or more games will be awarded individual medals with neck ribbons.

The College of St. Benedict Fieldhouse in St. Joseph, MN, is a first-class facility with four full air-conditioned courts with ample seating.

**FOUR CLASSES...ONE CHAMPION**

MORE STATE TOURNEY ACTION



Clockwise from top left: Pequot Lakes' Ethan Quale runs down a loose ball; Alexandria's Chase Thompson blocks a shot by Minneapolis South's Jamari Stewart Scott; Nevis's Alex Lester tries to shoot while guarded by Cherry's Isaac Asuma; Blake Spiczka (1) of Pequot Lakes eyes the hoop with Minnehaha's Malachi Snell guarding him; Monteff Dixon of Cretin-Derham Hall scores against Wayzata's Drew Nepstad; and (middle) Wayzata's Kayden Wells passes against Eagan.

STATE CHAMPS

MINNETONKA SKIPPERS



TOTINO- GRACE EAGLES



BRECK MUSTANGS



CHERRY TIGERS



ALL-STATE TOURNAMENT TEAMS



CLASS 4A

Front: Liam Madigan and Alex Schroeffer, Eagan; Casimir Chavis, Park Center; Isaac Olmstead, Wayzata. Back: Kayden Wells, Minnetonka; Jackson McAndrew and Wyatt McBeth, Wayzata; Greyson Uelman, Jordan Cain, and Andy Stefonowicz, Minnetonka



CLASS 2A -- Front: Harrison Kennen, Pequot Lakes; Lorenzo Levi, Minnehaha Academy; Sam Hondl and Zeke Austin, Albany; Back: Hanif Muhammad, Miles Newton and Daniel Frietag, Breck; Jaden Shones, Rylie Fick and Hunter Lorensen, Lake City.



CLASS 3A -- Front: Grayson Grove, Alexandria; Carson Schweim and Brogan Madson, Mankato East; Ray James Jr., DeLaSalle; Henry Tschetter, Stewartville. Back: Gaden Gosch, Mankato East; Chase Watley, Tyler Wagner, Dothan Ijadbola, and Isaiah Johnson-Agiru, Totino-Grace

CLASS 1A

Front: Abu Tarawallie, Heritage Christian; Camden Anderson, West Central Area; Alex Lester and Austin Ahrendt, Nevis. Back: Isaiah Asuma and Noah Sundquist, Cherry; Preston Hanson and Caiden Swenby, Fertile-Beltrami; Isaac Asuma and Noah Asuma, Cherry.



MBBN picks all-tourney super five

By Bruce Strand

Minnesota Basketball News picks a super five all-tournament team from all the classes after each state tournament. Heading the MBBN list is **Isaiah Johnson-Arigu** (pictured), 6-foot-7 forward for Class 3A champion Totino-Grace, who delivered 66 points, 32 rebounds, 11 assists, and six steals, shooting a torrid 57 percent at 29-for-51 including several riveting dunks. **Daniel Freitag**, 6-foot-2 guard, led Class 2A champion Breck with 56 points, 29 rebounds, 17 assists and 11 steals, shooting 21-for-46 including six three's. **Isaac Asuma**, 6-foot-2 guard, unflappable leader of Class 1A champion Cherry, was stellar on both



ends of the court including 52 points, 28 rebounds, 21 assists, six steals, nine blocks shots, and just four turnovers. **Jordan Cain**, 6-foot-3 guard, led balanced Class 4A champion Minnetonka as he provided 50 points, 24 rebounds, seven assists, and 11 steals, with just four turnovers, shooting 21-for-43 from the field and 7-for-9 at the line. **Jackson McAndrew**, 6-foot-9 guard/forward for Wayzata's 31-2 state runner-up, amassed 63 points, 31 rebounds, 12 blocked shots, and just five turnovers, shooting 24-for-42 on field goals, 8-for-19 on three's. Asuma will play for the Gophers, Johnson-Arigu for Miami, Freitag for Wisconsin, and McAndrew for Creighton, with Cain not yet committed.

Class 1A power shifted northward

By Bruce Strand

Cherry vs. Fertile-Beltrami in the Class 1A finals was the northern-most title matchup in Minnesota prep hoops history. Cherry has students from Cherry and Iron Junction, just east of Hibbing, on the Iron Range. Fertile and Beltrami are in approximately the same latitude, about 190 miles west, near the North Dakota border, just south of Crookston.

Their locations makes this duel more northerly than those of Henning vs. North Woods in 2019, Norman County East vs. Carlton in 1998, Norman County West vs. Crosby-Ironton in 1987, Duluth Central vs. Bemidji in 1961, and Brainerd vs. Bemidji in 1954 (listing the winners first each time).

Northern communities will take some pride in this tournament, said Neil Steffes, Fertile-Beltrami coach, especially with almost all the state boys champs through the years coming from the southern part of the state or metro area.

"That's kind of a big deal for us," acknowledged Steffes, in his 31st year of coaching the northland. "Up north, we don't get a lot of credit for the basketball that we play. We've got some good teams coming out of Section 8 and so forth."

And it wasn't just the two finalists this year, Steffes noted: "It was kind of cool to see that section five, six, seven and eight were all in the final four." The other semifinalists were West Central Area and Nevis.

Eagan was surprise of tourney

By Bruce Strand

Eagan, not ranked in the Top 20, was the surprise team of the tournament, toppling No. 2 Park Center 75-70 in the quarterfinals and No. 10 Cretin-Derham Hall 84-65 in the third-place game. Eagan entered the tourney 17-11 after winning a section (3) against three teams with a combined 21-63 record. Park Center was 25-3 and had reached finals the last two years. Eagan shot 8-for-20 on three's and, against the Pirates' notorious pressure, gave up only three steals while making ten. Alex Schroeffer, sophomore guard, scored 19 points, sinking eight of 10 free shots in the last minute. Charlie Birk and Owen Bockenstedt scored 15 each. Casimir Chavis had 36 points and seven rebounds for Park Center. Eagan lost to champion Minnetonka 68-45 in the semifinals, but thumped Cretin-Derham Hall for third place with Birk and Madigan scoring 20 points each.

Alexandria prevailed in a quarterfinal thriller against Minneapolis South 72-70 after South, down 69-59, reeled off several crisp layups to pull within 71-70 and had the ball with 20 seconds left. A blocked shot by Chase Thompson with :07 left saved the day. Thompson logged 18 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists — including an alley-oop to Groves for a highlight-reel dunk on a fast break — while Grove had 26 points and 15 rebounds.

Poet Davis will always be one of Minneapolis South coach Joe Hyser's favorite players. "When eight kids left the program two years ago, Poet was the one who stayed," Hyser said, after the Tigers' 72-70 loss to Alexandria in which Davis had 23 points. "He has such charisma, he went around the school and talked to the guys who had played as freshmen and sophomores, and got them to come back." Thanks largely to Davis, they were a state tourney team this year, after a 6-20 struggle last year following all the defections.

Farmington's first state tournament game in 87 years was a nail-biter against tournament regular Cretin-Derham Hall (15 trips since 1991). CDH edged the Tigers 57-56. Miles Bollinger won it with a three-pointer

with 40 seconds left. Joseph Mitchell scored 23 for the Raiders. Farmington's Nik Domier had 13 points, Brandon Hrnecir 12, Tyler Beckwith 11 and Liam Roche 10.

Triple-overtime was the scenario of a Class 1A semifinal thriller — extended by two dramatic three-pointers. Fertile-Beltami prevailed over West Central Area 84-75. WCA's Mitchell Dewey banked in a three-pointer from near midcourt at the horn in regulation to knot the score 51-51. FB's Masen Nowacki hit one from outside the NBA arc with :04 left in the first

OT to tie it 60-60, after which Dewey almost won it with another heave from mid-court that rimmed out. In the third OT, Derek Sorenson quickly hit a three-pointer and FB pulled away with Sorenson scoring seven of their 17 points. Preston Hanson scored 23 for the Knights, whose leader Caiden Swenby fouled with 2:59 left in regulation with 19 points and 13 rebounds. Ben Bye led WCA with 23 points.

Stewartville, ranked No. 3 by MBBN, was paired with No. 1 Totino-Grace in the first round, drawing the ire of Stewartville coach Parker Lyga.

He vented to the Star-Tribune: "We're a team that was ranked third in the state all year long. We're a team that was top four in QRF. We're a team that got screwed over by all the coaches here." Totino-Grace beat the Tigers 57-48. Stewartville earned fifth place with consolation wins over Orono 72-69 and Minneapolis South 90-48. Henry Tschetter scored 49 points and Parker Wangen 37 in the tourney.

Miles Newton of 2A champ Breck is the son of Milt Newton, a member of 1988 NCAA champ Kansas team who scored 15 points in the finals, helping the Jayhawks beat Oklahoma 83-79. Milt is an assistant general manager for the Milwaukee Bucks. Miles, a co-captain as a junior, made the all-tournament team, logging 35 points and 10 assists. Miles told the Star-Tribune that he finally was able to beat Milt one-on-one last year. He added, "I get most of my edge and hard work from him. Growing up, he didn't have the things I have available. I'm able to take that and much more."



Eagan's Owen Ford works against Minnetonka's Greyson Uelman.

MORE STATE TOURNEY ACTION



Clockwise from top left: Wayzata's Jackson McAndrew launches a 3-point attempt; Fertile-Beltrami's Caiden Swenby is double-teamed by West Central's Nasir Dotts and Bryce Kjesbo during their triple overtime semifinal; Cherry's Noah Asuma leads a fast break; Derek Sorenson of Fertile-Beltrami lays in two points against Cherry; Lake City and Breck players fight for a rebound; Dothan Ijadimbola throws down a dunk for Totino-Grace against Mankato East.



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