

By Randy Whalen

The Lockport Boys bowling team is in its 22nd season and has done many things over the years. In its first 21 seasons as a program, the Porters came in second in the state in 2009 and won a State Championship in 2013. They have also produced a couple of individual state champions, Kyle Anderson twice in 2010 and 2011, and Shane Matejcek in 2013.

But the Porters had a unique way to kick off their dual meet season by doing something they may never have done. That's because they tied.

Yes, they tied Plainfield Central 3008-3008 on Tuesday, Nov. 7 at Strike N Spare II in Lockport.

"No, not that I recall," Lockport coach Ron Davis said when asked if he ever had a team tie before. "I was kind of surprised. But we just want to get better and figure things out."

In the three-game Plainfield Central match, sophomore Caden Malczewski saw his first varsity action and led with a 594, which included a 223 high game. All six Porter bowlers had 200 games. Sophomore Austin LiCausi led that list with a 255. Senior Ross Karraker (218), sophomore Aaron Chrusciel (216), senior Steven Talaski (214), and senior Aaron Wendell (207) polished off that list.

The Porters have won all their other dual meets since, however. They were 5-0-1, including 4-0 in the SouthWest Suburban Conference heading into this week's match on Wednesday, Nov. 29 against Bradley-Bourbonnais at Brookmont Bowling Center in Kankakee.

That win streak started on Wednesday, Nov. 8, in a 2080-2036 two-game victory over Andrew at Thunder Bowl in Mokena. The Porters were led by Wendell (237, 252) for a 499 total. Talaski (244) and LiCausi (209) had the other high games.

Back at home on Monday, Nov. 13, Lockport won two of three games and won the series against Naperville Central 3037-2865. Chrusciel led with a 620 series and had a 224 high. LiCausi (222, 209), Karraker (244), senior Ryan Schmitt (212), and Malczewski (216, 205) also had good games.

"Aaron Chrusciel is like a catalyst for the team," Davis said. "He gets everyone all fired up."

The next day, Tuesday, Nov. 14, the Porters split two games against visiting Lincoln-Way West but held on for the series win by a count of 2043-1998. Chrusciel (258,207) and Karraker (233, 232) each shot 465 while LiCausi (217, 201) with a 418 pitched in as well. Then, on Nov. 16, Lockport overcame bad lane conditions and defeated host Bolingbrook 1534-1356 at Bowlero in Romeoville. No one shot a 200 game.

On Tuesday, Nov. 21, Lockport swept two close games against Sandburg in a key SWSC contest and had an overall 2105-2043 win at Strike N Spare. Karraker and Wendell led the way, each finishing with a 461 score. Chrusciel chipped in with a 239 game.

Of course, the tournaments are what the Porters are measured on. They've already been in four of them and have got progressively better. They started the season with a fifth-place finish on Nov. 4 in the Gold Division of the Naperville Central Baker Kickoff Challenge at Lisle Lanes.

Then, on Nov. 11, Lockport was 15th out of 42 teams at the Lake Park Lancer Invite at Stardust Bowl in Addison. The next Saturday, Nov. 18 brought a 48-team tournament, the largest in the state outside of the state tournament. That was the Plainfield North Invite at Town and Country Lanes in Joliet. In what Davis termed "working in the right direction," Lockport finished seventh. Karraker had an awesome invite, coming in third place with 1307.

Back at Town and Country Lanes on Saturday, Nov. 25 for the Plainfield South Invite, the Porters had their best showing of the season rallying for a second-place finish. Their total score was 5945 but Joliet West ran away with it, finishing with a 6287 total. Karraker was 12th overall with a 1238 score while LiCausi was right behind in 13th with a 1233 total.

"We finished second without a Top 10 individual and we went 1050 in the last game with only two opens to climb into second place," Davis said. "I told them that's what it takes. We have to get our spares and strike some."

Town and Country Lanes haven't always been good for the Porters, however. Lockport has qualified for state 13 times, including six times in the first seven played postseasons (there was no postseason in 2021) that Davis has been the coach, between 2015-2022. But last season ended in heartbreak this past Jan. 21 as the Porters sat in second place after four games of the Plainfield North Sectional and then fell short down the stretch and finished in eighth place.

Talaski is using that as a catalyst this season.

"We think about it every day," Talaski said. "We use that as motivation. Coach Davis has said that's our biggest motivational factor."

Another motivational factor for Talaski is being a senior on a team with a lot of good young talent.

"Personally I've got off to a pretty slow start," Talaski said early in the season. "I've got to get better on spares and 10-pin shooting. But for our seniors, it's our last chance to win it. So we want to go out, give it one last shot, and power through to win."

With the Lockport JV team doing very well, and a lot of talented freshmen on that team, there could be some lineup movement as the season progresses. The thing about bowling is so much of it is mental. Davis is looking forward to the team having a new challenge this coming Saturday, Dec. 2 in the Minooka Invitational at Channon Lanes.

"We're grinding along and it's going to be interesting since we've never bowled the Minooka Invite before," said Davis of the tourney that replaced the Oak Forest one on the schedule after Oak Forest Bowl burned down in a fire. "The biggest thing is to get the guys out of their own heads.

"Everyone handles pressure differently. I'm focused on getting the guys to make better shots but you have to be truthful with yourself out there."