

By Randy Whalen

Survive and advance.

The Lockport Township boys bowling team did that. All the way to a sectional championship.

The Porters were nearly eliminated as a team from the regional tournament. Instead, they survived and advanced to the sectional, where they were dominant in capturing their first sectional championship in 11 years.

That happened on Saturday, January 20 as the Porters shot an amazing 6,501 total and captured the title of the Sandburg Sectional at Palos Lanes in Palos Hills. Of course, every house is different but that score was the highest of any team in the state for the four sectionals.

It was the sixth sectional championship in the 21-year postseason history for the Porters and the first under coach Ron Davis, who is in his 10th season. The last time Lockport won a sectional, in 2013, it went on to win the state.

It will be the Porters' 14th trip to the Illinois High School Association State Finals, which will be held this Friday and Saturday, January 26 and 27 at St. Clair Bowl in O'Fallon.

"It's really cool," Lockport coach Ron Davis said of the story of his team coming back from the brink to once again advance to state. "But I'm more happy for the boys than myself. Especially the seniors, who didn't have the opportunity to bowl at state last year."

Last season the Porters didn't make it to state for only the second time in the held postseasons (there was no postseason in 2021 due to COVID) since 2013. They were in second place with two games to go at the Joliet West Sectional but fell off to eighth place.

There was no falling off this season. Lockport opened with games of 1,165 and 1,167. A 965-third game still had the Porters in first at the break. The afternoon brought two more outstanding games of 1,099 and 1,152 before a 953 closed it out.

Spurred by freshman Nate Cantrall, who fired a 300 game, every Lockport bowler averaged nearly 200 or more on the day. Sophomore Aaron Chrusciel led the way with a 1,370, which included a 268-second game and a 265-fifth game, and placed 13th individually. Cantrall had an excellent 1,359, with the 300 coming in the second game to finish 14th

Senior Ross Karraker had a 1,305 and opened the day with a 278 for a 20th-place finish. Sophomore Austin LiCausi shot 1,276 and also got off to a great start with a 258 in the opener and placed 28th. Senior Steven Talaski tallied 1,191, which included a high of 236 in the second game, and placed 61st.

Seniors Hunter Phillips and Aaron Wendell, along with freshman Evan Charest, didn't bowl for the Porters.

"Beforehand I had a big decision to make," Davis said. "So I decided to start one of our freshmen, Nate. He had some really good looks in practice and then went out and threw a 300. (Assistant coach) Alan Bean told me that I had my crystal ball out again. So far, so good."

Cantrall came up the the varsity on Thursday, Dec. 21 in a 3,338-3,123 dual meet victory over the host Joliet West at Town & Country Lanes in Joliet. He had no idea that he was going to start the sectional.

"No, not really," he said if he would have believed someone if they told him before the season that he'd start the sectional and bowl a 300. "I didn't know until that day of the sectional that I was going to start. I was working hard in practice to get here.

"I was a little nervous beforehand. but after I got a couple of shots, I felt fine."

When did he realize that he had a 300 going?

"It was like the eighth frame when I realized it," he said. "I was nervous but felt good the whole last frame. My final ball felt good too."

It was the first-ever 300 for Cantrall, a two-handed bowler. But it didn't take him long to shoot his second one. On Monday, January 22, he shot a 300 at practice at Strike & Spare II in Lockport.

Lemont senior Trevor Anifer was the individual champion at the sectional with a 1,527 total, which also included a 300 game. Lockport (6,501), Morgan Park (6,322), Joliet West (6,307), Oak Lawn Community (6,209), Lyons Township (6,207), and Lincoln-Way Central (6,166) were the Top Six teams that advanced to the IHSA State Finals.

Lincoln-Way East, Andrew, and Naperville Central all tied for seventh with a total of 6,128. Lincoln-Way West (6,002), Reavis (5,937), Brother Rice (5,884), Sandburg (5,835), St. Laurence (5,609), Simeon (5,538), and Hinsdale South (5,143) rounded out the team scores.

"There were 10 teams over 6,000 there which is crazy," Davis said. "But we started great and didn't look back the whole day."

That was a contrast to the Naperville Central Regional, which was held on Saturday, January 13 at Lisle Lanes. The team standings were Joliet West, led by senior medalist Bryce Jinks (1,350) winning with a 6,089 score. Sandburg (6,033), Naperville Central (5,956), and Lockport (5,832) edged Plainfield Central (5,827) by five pins for the final sectional qualifying spot.

Senior Jacob Chavez (1,258) struck out at the end to help the Wildcats rally but they fell five pins short. This was fine by the Porters, who survived a subpar day, which included anxiety and guys in and out of the lineup, trying to find the right combination.

"We bowled below par all day but made it out," Davis said. "I told them at this point that mediocre isn't good enough. That it's time to excel. So they made a lair out of me."

Romeoville (5,619), Joliet Central (5,536), Stagg (5,372), Bolingbrook (5,193), Shepard (5,181) Lemont (5,143), and Plainfield East (5007) rounded out the 12 team field.

Chrusciel (1,196), LiCausi (1,187), Karraker (1,146), Talaski (1,138), Phillips (624), and Wendell (541) were the leaders for Lockport.

"I got in for one game in the regional," said Cantrall, who bowled in the third game. "It was a close one. We felt that we had to make better shots and pick up the pins that we needed to.

"It feels good to go to state. I expect the team to adjust, do fine, and hopefully make our shots."

No matter what happens, it's been a heck of a season for the Porters, who went 12-1-1 in dual meets and finished second behind Sandburg on Saturday, January 6 at the SouthWest Suburban Conference Tournament at Strike & Spare II. Karraker, LiCausi, and Wendall made All-Conference.

"I really like this team," Davis said. "The eight boys have jelled together. They like to jab at each other but they all support each other too."