

By Randy Whalen

The Lockport Township boys bowling team has forced a reconfiguration of the banners in the main gym at the high school.

That's a good thing.

The Porters placed fourth in the state at the Illinois High School Association State Finals, which were held on Friday and Saturday, January 26-27, at St. Clair Bowl in O'Fallon.

It was the highest finish for Lockport since it tied for fourth with Machesney Park Harlem in 2016. Last year, the Porters didn't make it to state for only the second time in 10 played postseasons.

Any team finishing in the Top Four in the state gets a banner on the wall in the gym. This finish, coupled with the cheerleading team placing third in the state the following weekend, means that there will have to be banners moved around the gym to make room for the two new ones.

It's the Porters' fourth time placing fourth (2005, 2007, 2016, 2024). Only the Top 3 teams at state bowling get a trophy. Lockport has two of those, a second in 2009 and a state championship in 2013.

"Out of (212 teams that entered the state series) we got fourth in the state," Lockport boys bowling coach Ron Davis said. "The guys that needed to step up, stepped up,"

The Porters started great at state and were in second place after the morning session of the first day. Although they fell off in the afternoon of the opening day, they rallied to take fourth in a close contest for the fourth through seventh positions.

The final standings were Salem winning its second straight state championship with a 12,402 total over the two days. Harrisburg (12,351), which was in first place through the midway point of Day 2, and Glenbrook North (12,196) were the Top 3 trophy-winning teams.

"Salem and Harrisburg just outclassed the field," Davis said. "Plus they are almost all underclassmen (each of those teams had one senior starter), so they have a good shot again next year."

Lockport (11,983) edged local rival Joliet West (11,978) by five pins for fourth. O'Fallon (11,975), Harlem (11,957), Herrin (11,896), Rockton Hononegah (11,704), Dakota (11,661), Dixon (11,576), and Carterville (11,497) rounded out the Final 12 teams.

This was the Porters' 14th state appearance and 12th Top 10 finish since boys bowling became an official IHSA sport in the 2002-03 season. They have six Final Four finishes and every season they have advanced to state, they have made the second day.

Individually senior Charlie Hunt from Hononegah was the champion with a score of 2,767, which included a 300 in the fourth game on the first day. Junior Josh Sachs from Glenbrook North was second with a 2,740, which included back-to-back 279 scores in the third and fourth games of the first day.

Joliet West junior Tyler MacDonald placed third as an individual for the second straight season. In an almost unreal synchronicity, MacDonald ended up with the exact same pin-fall total as last season, 2,659. But this season's second-day performance was a little better for the lefty as he had a 1,384 on the final day.

MacDonald's high was a 262 in Game No. 2 on Day No. 1. He was 24th after the opening day but just tore it up on Day No. 2. with a 1,384 in those six games. That included a 258 to start it off and an amazingly consistent 236, 235, and 234 in the final three games

Also making the Top 10 locally was Lemont senior Trevor Anifer with a 2,656 total and fourth-place finish, which included a high of 268 in the fourth game on the first day. Junior Austin Cetwinski from Lincoln-Way Central was 45th after the first day and vaulted all the way up to seventh, finishing with a 2,626 total. That included a 279 third game and 269 final game on the second day, which saw him shoot a 1,388 total.

Leading Lockport was sophomore Austin LiCausi, who finished with a 2,495 total, which was 28th overall. That included a high of 255 in the second game of the first day. But he was more consistent on Day No. 2, rolling a 1,260 total with five games between 202 and 230.

"I've improved a lot since my freshman year," said LiCausi, who started bowling when he was nine. "I just feel like when it comes to bowling, it's fun and you get to meet a lot of new people. Being at state was pretty fun and a good first-time experience. It was exciting. I got to hang out with my teammates and also meet new people."

Sophomore Aaron Chrusciel (2,446, high of 265 in Game No. 2 on Day 2) and veteran 4-year senior Ross Karraker (2,353, high of 250 in Game No. 3 on the first day) bowled all 12 games for Lockport.

Aaron Wendell bowled in 10 games and finished with a 1,992 score, which included a high of 257 in the opening game of the second day. But a key to the Porters' late charge was fellow senior Hunter Phillips, who didn't bowl on the opening day. But he did great on Day No. 2, with a 1,234 score. That included four games of 200 or more and a high of 244 in the second game.

"Aaron and Austin bowled well and my plan came together to have my lefty and pair of two-handed bowlers all come through in the afternoon," Davis said of the second day. I was glad to see Hunter show up and bowl well."

After starting strong on the first day, including a high of 1,135 in the third game for a 3,241 second-place total at the break, Lockport fell off with a 2,688 total in the afternoon and fell to eighth. But the Porters were more consistent on Saturday, with the second-best morning score - a 3,194, and ended up placing fourth thanks to some clutch performances down the stretch.

"I was super excited to go in and bowl and I was not nervous at all," Phillips said. "I was really focused on what I had to do and pump up the team and get us going. But towards the end, it was starting to get emotional realizing that my senior year was coming to an end but it was the last time I would be wearing a Lockport High School uniform and on that note, I had to strike out and finish strong and got three strikes on a row."

That was a great finish for someone who has been known to be a bit overwhelmed by his coach.

"Hunter's mom told me that I intimidate him," said Davis, who is a big, vocal man. "But I tell them you shouldn't be intimidated by me. Let me intimidate the other coaches and players because I know the sport and know my guys."

Yes, he does and his guys wanted to show they were the tops in the Southland, which they did by edging out Joliet West.

"It feels good to beat them because they have always been one of the good competitions for us," Phillips said. "To beat them out this time and take fourth at state was amazing because there was a lot of back and forth battle. It was all about who can come out on top and perform."

"My teammates and I were able to stay focused, help each other out, and come out on top. It was all about the energy at the end of the day and our families cheering us on and keeping us going. It was a good feeling to get fourth for my final season."

Freshman Nate Cantrall, who helped the Porters win their first sectional title in 11 years on Saturday, January 20 at the Sandburg Sectional at Palos Lanes, shot a 570 for three games on the first day with a high of 199 in Game No. 3. Freshman Evan Charest bowled one game on the first day and two on the second, with a 556 total and a high of 207 in the fourth game of the second day. Senior Steven Talaski tallied a 337 total, bowling the first two games of the tourney, with a high of 178 in the opening game.

"When we couldn't get third, our main goal was to get fourth," LiCausi said. "Our first day afternoon wasn't pretty but we bounced back."

"This season went well. Winning the sectional was pretty amazing. I've worked on my mechanics and next year I want to do even better. I have two more years here and I hope to be back both times and end up winning state."

Winning state is hard but the Porters have done it before. In the meantime, Davis was happy with this season and looks forward to the next.

"State was great," Davis said. "They all got to enjoy it and everyone got to bowl. We had four seniors, two sophomores, and two freshmen on the varsity at the end. Those four guys coming back all got good experience and our JV team was good too."