

By Randy Whalen

For 10 straight seasons, the Lockport Township girls' bowling team won a sectional title. For nine straight seasons, ever since the Illinois High School Association changed its bowling format to include those a decade ago, the Porters captured a regional championship.

This season, they did neither one. But that's OK, as the Porters are right back where they want to be this weekend.

That's at the Illinois High School Association State Finals. Those will be held this Friday and Saturday, February 16 and 17 at The Cherry Bowl in Rockford.

There Lockport will look for an unprecedented fourth consecutive State Championship. The Porters have won the past three IHSA ones (2020, 2022, 2023) and an unofficial one in the COVID season of 2021.

"We bowled better than we did at the regional," Lockport coach Lynda Siezega said of the sectional. "Richards had a big second game, otherwise we were right there with them. We will see where this takes us."

Riding the wave of a 1,172 second game, Richards rolled a 5,884 total to edge 3-time defending state champion Lockport (5,857) by 27 pins on Saturday, February 10 in the Stagg Sectional at Palos Lanes. Andrew (5,630), and Stagg (5,408) also advanced to the State Finals.

Plainfield East (5,171), TF South (5,154), Evergreen Park (5,115), Plainfield North (5,026), Morgan Park (4,879), Thornridge (4,649), Bremen (4,554), and Chicago Christian (4,358) rounded out the sectional field.

But there was a winner for the Porters. That was freshman Alyvia Matiasek, who won the individual sectional title by rolling a 1,369 total for the six games. That included a 256 in the first game and a 247 in the last game to clinch the individual championship.

Andrew senior Jana Mihalovich (1,322, high of 278 in Game No. 3) and Richards sophomore Ulyssa Garcia (1,318, high of 257 in Game No. 5) were second and third.

But to win the sectional as an individual was a surprise to Matiasek, whose older sister, senior Paige Matiasek, has been a 4-year varsity bowler.

"No, I didn't expect as a freshman to win the sectional, with all these great bowlers," Alyvia Matiasek said. "It's a very amazing feeling. But, also going to state with the team is just as amazing."

"I'm very proud of myself. It took me a long time to get here. I've been bowling since I was four but it took me a long time to get consistent and to be that good of a bowler."

Siezega has seen that throughout the course of the season.

"Alyvia is great," Siezega said. "Alyvia and her sister are both so competitive but at the same time such opposite personalities. Alyvia being as competitive as she is isn't all business all the time. She likes to joke around and talk about everything. So you would never know how competitive she really is."

"She had absolutely no idea that she had won and when she found out she was crying. Such raw emotion. It's not often I see that. About the only other time has been at State. It's going to be great to watch her grow over the next three years. I'm very proud of her."

Seniors Kadie Kontos (13th, 1,162, high of 235 in Game No. 3), Paige Matiasek (15th, 1,160, high of 236 in Game No. 2), and Lauren Lane (1,070, high of 212 in Game No. 3) also bowled all six games for Lockport. Sophomore Brooke Stroud (946, high of 247 in Game No. 4) bowled five games, and sophomore Taylor Lane had a 150 in the third game.

Junior Emma Charest and freshman Grace Szmergalski didn't bowl for the Porters.

The sectional championship was the first in 32 years for Richards. The Bulldogs had a 3,150 total at the break, which led Andrew (3,036) by 114 and Lockport (2,875) by 275 pins. The Porters tried to catch up with a great 1,082 fourth game and a 1,001 fifth game. But they fell short with a final game of 899 and Richards hung on.

"We had a tough time on the two lanes in the morning," said Siezega of the Porters' 971, 1,006, and 898 scores in the morning session. "It just wasn't there and we had some bad breaks."

"We just have to work hard (before state). We picked it up going into the last game and we will see where that takes us. We will be working on our mental game and picking each other up."

At the Romeoville Regional, which was held on Saturday, February 3 at Bowlero Bowl in Romeoville, Andrew won its sixth regional title in school history, and fifth in the past seven seasons, beating out the Porters by 126 pins.

The final standings were Andrew (5,604), which was led by Mihalovich (1,313, high of 243 in Game No. 2), who won the individual title, placing first. The Thunderbolts finished strong, with their best game of 972 being their last. Lockport (5,478), Plainfield North (4,800), and Plainfield East (4,699) advanced to the sectional.

Hinsdale South (4,515), Sandburg (4,491), Downers Grove South (4,418), Tinley Park (4,157), Romeoville (4,114), Naperville Central (4,019), Bolingbrook (4,019), Lemont (3,967), Neuqua Valley (3,886), and Naperville North (3,623) completed the regional field.

Paige Matiasek (2nd 1,309, high of 258 in Game No. 2) led Lockport Alyvia Matiasek (4th, 1,210, high of 213 in Games No. 2 and No. 4), Stroud (10th, 1,053, high of 209 in Game No. 5), and Kontos (998, high of 181 in Game No. 2) bowled all six games. Lauren Lane (546, high of 141 in Game No. 2) bowled the first four games, and Szmergalski (362, high of 200 in Game No. 6) rolled the last two games. Charest and Taylor Lane didn't bowl for the Porters, who had the top team game of the day, a 997 in the second game.

Alyvia Matiasek traveled to state the last couple of years to watch her older sister win the state. Now, in her first season bowling there, she hopes to help the Porters capture another state championship.

"We know what people expect," Alyvia Matiasek said of state. "So there will be a lot of cheering for each other and picking each other up."