

By Randy Whalen

At first glance, some might say the Lockport Township girls' bowling run is over.

No, it's very much continuing.

Sure the Porters didn't win an Illinois High School Association State Championship this season after winning the previous three and even an unofficial one (in 2021) in the four seasons, starting in 2020.

But what Lockport did do was bring home another trophy. That was a third-place finish from this season's Illinois High School Association State Finals which were held on Friday, February 16, and Saturday, February 17, at The Cherry Bowl in Rockford.

The trophy is the 11th in girls bowling for Lockport. That is second in school history to the 13 by the competitive cheer team, which had another one with a third place Large School one this season. But the Porter girls' bowling team still has the most state championships in school history, seven. Those came in 1994, 1999, 2009, 2015, 2020, 2022, and 2023. Lockport placed second in 2017 and has third-place trophies in 1997, 2016, and 2024.

Paige Matiasek finished as an All-Stater for the Porters, who have won seven state trophies in the past nine completed postseasons.

"I'm really satisfied with the way we bowled," Lockport coach Lynda Siezega said. "We made some mistakes and could have made some spares. But I'm really happy for the girls to have this experience."

The experience of placing in the state looked in doubt as the Porters didn't capture a regional for the first time in the 10 years that the IHSA has had them in place. Then they didn't win a sectional for the first time since 2012. Lockport placed second in both. But the teams they lost to, Andrew in the regional and Richards in the sectional, placed ninth and 13th respectively at state.

"I'm really proud of my team," Lockport senior Lauren Lane said. "We worked really hard (state) weekend and pushed through it. I'm proud of the way we pumped each other up and picked each other up. Joliet West was just on another level."

Yes, the Tigers were that. Led by the All-State performances of senior Ella Steinke (4th, 2,586) and sophomore Mia Antomez (5th, 2,578), Joliet West rolled a 12,223 total. That beat out local rivals Minooka (11,983) by 240 pins, and Lockport (11,732) by 491 as the Joliet area finished a fantastic run with the Top 3 teams.

Minooka started the final day in third place and was 344 pins out but closed the gap to 129 heading into the last game. The Indians put up a 1,037 final game but Joliet West responded with a 1,148. That was the Tigers' top game of the season and clinched their second state championship. They also won one in 2016 and placed second, by 33 pins, to Lockport last year.

The second-place finish for Minooka tied for its highest-ever (2012) and was its fifth state trophy. Seniors Annie Honsik (6th, 2,538) and Jenna Ritchie (10th, 2,506) were All-State for the Indians.

Going into the final game, Lockport was in fourth place, 13 pins behind Harlem, out of Machesney Park. But the Porters came through with their second-best game of the final day, a 973. That held off a late charge from Collinsville, which had a 1,036 final game but still fell 79 pins behind the Porters.

"At the end, I had flashbacks to last year," said Siezega of going down to the final frame to win the State Championship over Joliet West. "I was like 'Let's finish it and beat out Harlem.'"

Collinsville (11,653), Harlem (11,649), Mascoutah (11,433), Hononegah (11,381), Oswego East (11,362), Andrew (11,190), Salem (11,164), O'Fallon (11,052), and Oswego (11,023) rounded out the Top 12 teams.

The fifth-place finish for Harlem ended a run of six straight seasons of placing in the state. The Huskies, who also have seven state titles and a record 13 trophies, finished second to Lockport in 2020 and 2022 and were third last year.

Paige Matiasek, a senior, who was a varsity bowler all four years, finished in seventh place overall with a total of 2,535. She was 15th last season, just missing making the Top 12 medalists by 33 pins. This time around, she had eight games of at least 205, including a high of 279 in the third game on the first day.

"I think we faced a lot of challenges and our carry wasn't as good as Joliet West," Paige Matiasek said. "But we did well. We fought and we got a trophy."

And Matiasek got a medal, becoming the 18th different Lockport girls bowler to do so. Half of those 18 have happened since 2015.

"It felt really good to medal after all the hard work I have put in on and off the lanes," she said. "From drills to practice to workouts and everything else. I think that it was a great way to end my senior season and move on to college."

"I had a few rough games where transition was harder and I had to make ball changes, but I was able to overcome those challenges and find ways to bounce back. So with that, I am proud of myself and so grateful to have my coaches and teammates to talk to throughout everything."

Senior Kadie Kontos finished with a 2,390 total. that included a high of 247 in the opening game of the second day. Fresh off an individual sectional championship, freshman Alyvia Matiasek, Paige's younger sister rolled a 2,324 total. She had a high of 225 in the third game of the second day. Lauren Lane rounded out the Porters who bowled all 12 games with a 2,271. She had a great start with a 267 in the opening game on the first day. That helped Lockport to its best game of the tournament, a 1,077.

The Porters (5,906) placed second behind Joliet West (6,160) after the first day, while Minooka (5,816) was third at that point.

"We had a good season and I'm proud to end my high school career here as a senior," Kontos said. "We have great coaches and they are always there for us. It felt good to continue to do well. There's always a bright future here and I will remember all the friends I made."

Sophomore Brooke Stroud rolled the first nine games of the tourney for the Porters, who finished with four games over 1,000 and never had a game lower than 910. Stroud had a total of 1,642, with a high of 198 in the third game of the first day. Sophomore Taylor Lane bowled the final three games for Lockport, getting a 570 pin-fall with a high of 211 in the last game.

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

While this team may not have been as deep as some of the past Porter ones, it was still great, especially as people.

"This was a great group," Siezega said. "There was no drama and we had a tight-knit group with personalities that all got along and held each other up. We had three seniors and I love them all. They're my girls and I'm going to miss them."

Paige Matiasek will go on to bowl Division 1 in college at Tulane University in New Orleans. But she will always remember Lockport and the bonds she made on this team.

"Everything was a bittersweet moment and the last few shots (at state) were very emotional just because it was the end of an era for me and the other seniors," Paige Matiasek said. "Kadie, Lauren, and I have been bowling together for six years and are a family to me."

"That's the real victory. We all got along and there were no issues. I will miss all of them and I will miss this."