



Ellie Gustafson - Monticello

THE DIVISION 4 FIELD

The cast of Division 4 teams at this year's WIAA state volleyball tournament is made up of the defending runner-up and three programs making their state debuts.

#1 MONTICELLO (24-1)

The Ponies pulled off a perfect season in the Six Rivers East Conference after dethroning multi-time league winner, Black Hawk and holding off runner-up Barneveld.

Coincidentally, Monticello is coached by W-C alum, Becky (Schmidt) Gustafson, who was a member of the 1992 Indians volleyball team that qualified for a sectional final. Gustafson's daughter, Ellie, leads MHS with nearly 400 kills on the season.

#2 MCDONELL (34-12)

The Chippewa Falls McDonell Macks finished as the D4 state runner-up a year ago. The Macks finished fifth in the Western Cloverbelt Conference, but did challenge eventual WCC champ, Fall Creek, by pushing the Crickets to five sets before losing 3-2. The Macks ousted defending sectional champs, Eau Claire Immanuel Lutheran, 3-2 in a regional final.

#3 WONEWOC-CENTER (26-4)

The Wolves will make their state debut this week, joining the likes of Bangor (1990), Hillsboro (2003, 04, 05, 06, 07, 2011, 12, 19) and Royall (2020A) as teams to have represented the Scenic Bluffs Conference at the state volleyball tournament.

#4 WABENO/LAONA (37-7)

The Wabeno/Laona co-op was the runner-up to Three Lakes in the Northern Lakes Conference. However, W/L topped Three Lakes 3-0 in a sectional final before besting Cloverbelt East champion, Marshfield Columbus Catholic 3-1 on Saturday. Laona qualified for state in 1977 and 78, but this is the first time the co-op will play at state.

HISTORY

made in

HIGHLAND

By ZACH RASTALL
HSE Sports Correspondent

No coach is ever fully comfortable until the final whistle is blown, but Justman couldn't help but know that moment was destined to arrive.

"You can feel it. You can feel that change in the air in the gym," she said. "And then, all of a sudden, everybody knows

it. It's just a matter of time. And that feeling is wonderful."

There would be no denying Wonewoc-Center's date with destiny Saturday night. For a second straight match in sectional play, the Wolves dropped the first set. For a second straight match, it didn't matter. Another four-set victory sent the Wonewoc-Center volleyball team to a place it has never been before: the state tournament.

The Wolves roared back from their first-set setback to defeat fellow No. 1 seed Highland 22-25, 25-12, 25-16, 25-15 in a WIAA Division 4 sectional final Saturday, October 30 in Highland. The victory clinched the first state berth in program history for Wonewoc-Center.

"I cannot pick a single word that describes how everyone's feeling," said Wonewoc-Center senior middle hitter Nicole Totzke. "It's so amazing, especially to have all the support and to know that this is history. We're going (to state) and, if nothing else, we're going to keep pushing."

HISTORY
cont. on pg. 9



Wonewoc-Center rushes the court after the final point to secure the sectional championship. HSE photo by Nate Beier.

WONEWOC-CENTER'S PLAYOFF PATH

HISTORY

continued from pg. 8

Totzke was one of the leading performers for the Wolves on this historic night, recording 18 kills and 4 blocks. Kelsey Justman fired in a team-high 19 kills, Shelby Justman finished with 7 kills and 3 aces and Jae Stowe dished out 40 assists as well.

Not only does this mark the volleyball program's first-ever trip to the state tournament, it's also just the second time any of the school's teams has made it to state. The 1985 Wonewoc softball team is the only other one.

These opportunities don't come around often for the Wolves — something Nikki Justman knows well. She was a member of the 1992 Wonewoc-Center volleyball team that was among the best in the state and got to sectionals, only to fall to this very same Highland program in the match that decided who went to state.

Nearly three decades later, the opportunity came knocking again with Highland being the only thing standing between them and state. That 1992 team's coach, Cyndi Gade, and several players from the squad were on hand for Saturday's sectional final.

The fact that the biggest win in program history came against the same team that had handed it its greatest heartbreak only added to the occasion.

The Wolves, who are now riding a 16-match winning streak, were awarded the No. 3 seed among the Division 4 state semifinalists and will square off against No. 2 seed McDonell Catholic Friday, November 5 at 9 a.m. at the Resch Center in Green Bay.

The winner of that match advances to Friday's state championship to face either No. 1 seed Monticello or No. 4 seed Wabeno/Laona at 9 a.m.

Coincidentally, that Monticello team making their first-ever state trip is coached by Rebecca Gustafson, who was also a member of the 1992 Wonewoc-Center volleyball team.

It remains to be seen whether there will be a 1992 reunion of sorts in the state championship match, but everything past this point is just gravy for this Wonewoc-Center team and the community that has fully embraced them.

Of course they would love nothing more than to bring home a state championship from Green Bay, but being there at all is a massive accomplishment. Last Saturday night in Highland was an all-time high for Wonewoc-Center sports and a memory — from the hugs to the tears of joy to the tinge of disbelief hovering over it all — that will live on for decades to come.

"I really, truly cannot believe it," Justman said. "We sold out of those tickets quick and it's just awesome that all these people wanted to be a part of it."

WONEWOC-CENTER 3, BANGOR 1

A loss to Bangor on September 27 left Wonewoc-Center sitting at 5-2 in league play and made their goal of a Scenic Bluffs championship seem awfully distant. Since then, the Wolves are 16-0 overall and have captured conference, regional and sectional titles along the way.



Kadence Hamburg

WONEWOC-CENTER 3, HIGHLAND 1

Before this year, Wonewoc-Center's best shot at a state appearance came back in 1992 at the North Crawford sectional tournament. A loss to Highland in the final quashed that state dream, but the 2021 Wolves finally made it a reality nearly three decades later against the same Highland program.



Bryn Ertel



Jaelyn Stowe

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Nicole Totzke

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