

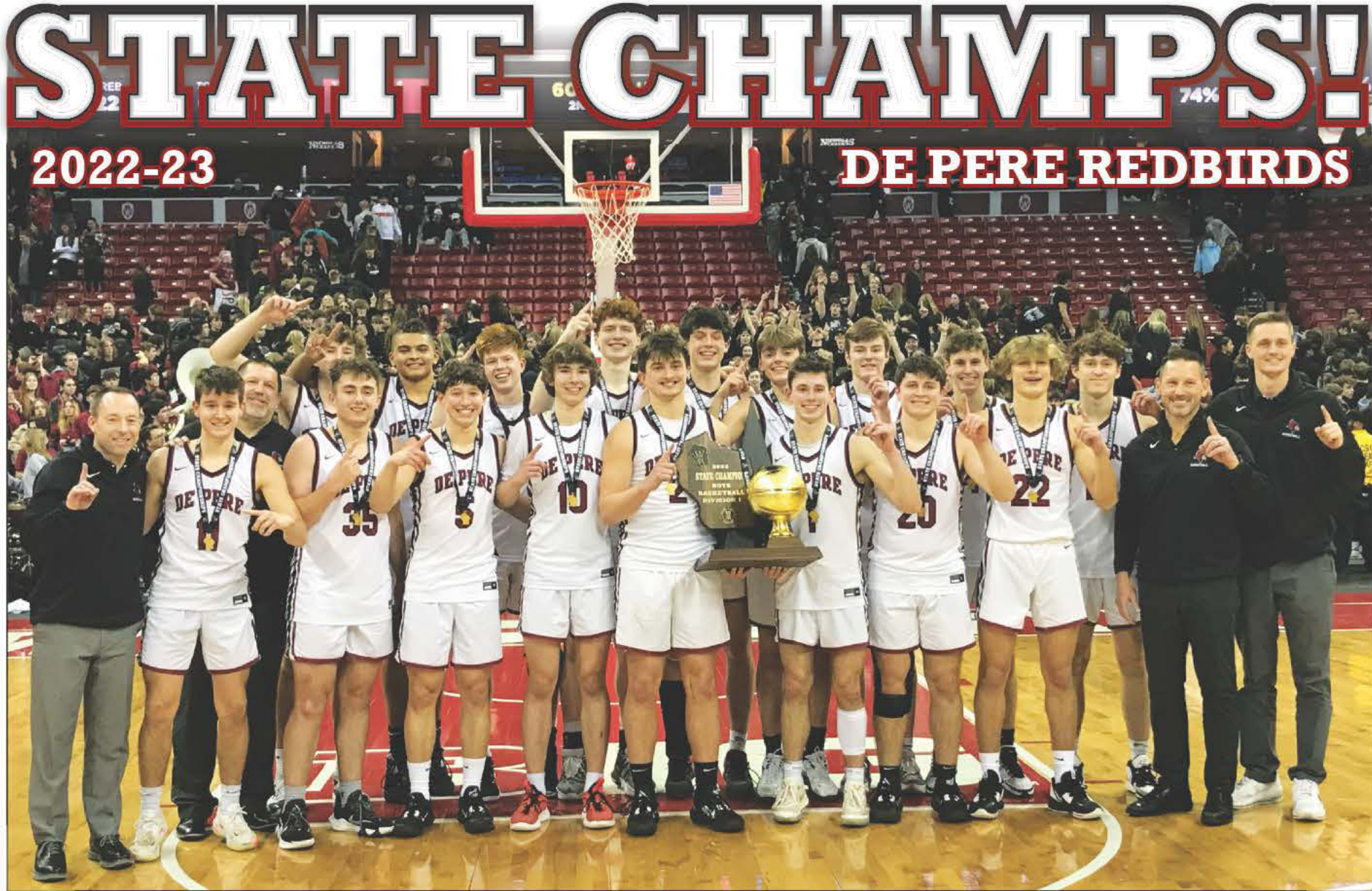
The Times SPORTS



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The De Pere boys' basketball team capped off an undefeated season by winning the Division 1 state title on March 18 at the Kohl Center in Madison. The Redbirds are the first boys' basketball team in state history to win 30 games in a season. Greg Bates photos

STATE CHAMPS! 2022-23 DE PERE REDBIRDS

BY GREG BATES
SPORTS EDITOR

MADISON – As the De Pere boys' basketball players jumped around half court at the Kohl Center, John Kinziger and Gabe Herman were off to the side in a tight embrace.

The two seniors shared a moment they were looking forward to since elementary school.

The longtime friends had just realized a lifelong dream: winning a state championship.

Kinziger, Herman and their teammates had done the unthinkable by capturing the Division 1 state title and capping off an undefeated season.

With De Pere clinging to a one-point second-half lead, the Redbirds went on a 20-6 run to finish off Arrowhead, 69-49, on Saturday night at the Kohl Center.

"It's so special knowing it's our last game and we gave it all for each other because we knew this is how we were going to go out," said John Kinziger about his hug with Herman. "It was a really cool moment to just embrace that with Gabe."

De Pere — which won its only other state title in 1934 — became the first team in boys' basketball state history to finish 30-0.

"We're obviously trying to chase perfection from the start of the season, but to actually accomplish 30-0, it's something special," De Pere sophomore Zach Kinziger said. "It was fun out there the last time playing with this group and to finish off 30-0 in the state championships is really special for me and all my teammates as well."

The top-ranked Redbirds had a target on their backs



Seniors John Kinziger (1) and Gabe Herman embrace after the duo helped De Pere win the state championship.

all season, but they came ready to compete every night. And every night they went home with a W.

"You feel that pressure and the only way to not feel that pressure is to take it game by game," John

Kinziger said. "This whole year we want to stay in the present, we wanted to go off one game at a time and that's how we got to 30-0."

De Pere coach Brian Winchester was happy to finish off the season unbeaten as his guys came through in the biggest moments of the season.

"Whether you want to admit to it or not, you feel it," Winchester said. "I certainly felt it a little bit coming into this game, not so much, 'Hey, we've got to go 30-0.' But we want to win a state championship. And I think any coach that says you don't feel that a little bit has got to be lying, because I know I felt it today."

De Pere was led by John Kinziger, who scored a game-high 24 points. After shooting 3-for-7 in the opening half, he was 5-for-6 in the second.

De Pere needed to have a


big second half in order to secure its place in history.

The Redbirds were down 18-14 last in the first half when Herman drained back-to-back 3-pointers to put De Pere into the break up 22-20.

Coming out of halftime, De Pere hit its first three shots, getting a 3-pointer from John Kinziger, Zach Kinziger converted a layup and Will Hornseth hit a jump shot. The Redbirds went on a 12-3 run to go up 34-23.


"John, Zach, with some ball screens from Will, really got us going and just got some movement offensively for us," Winchester said. "We started attacking. We got a little bit more aggressive, the ball started going through the rim and I think we just felt a little bit more confident building

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