

SPORTS

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STATE GIRLS TENNIS PREVIEW

Central's Hammond seeks grand finale



PHOTO COURTESY JEFFREY WILSON

Racine Prairie's Jaelyn Palmen, a Kenosha resident, is excited to return to state at doubles this weekend after going as a sophomore in 2020.

Senior won state title in 2020 with Wilmot's Rosentreter, ranked in DI Thursday

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Gwen Hammond may be the only ranked girls tennis player from Kenosha County at this weekend's WIAA state tennis tournament, but it's for a good reason.

You see, Hammond is at-

tempting to reach some rarified air this weekend.

It was only two years that she and Halle Rosentreter won the WIAA Division 1 state doubles championship for Wilmot Union High School.

Now a senior, Hammond is 31-3 and the No. 1 singles player at Westosha Central, and she will be seeded eighth and earn a bye before taking on the winner of Lake Geneva Badger's Tinker Trent (14-12) and Sarah Horth of Sheboygan North.

On Tuesday, Hammond shared her thoughts about this week-

end's main event.

"Words can't describe what it means to have the opportunity to compete at state," Hammond said. "If you would have told me at the beginning of the season that I would be competing and seeded in the state tournament, I wouldn't have believed you. Through all I have endured, I look back at where I have been and where I am now, and I know I wouldn't be where I am standing without my loved ones, all my tennis coaches, friends and

Please see **TENNIS**, Page C6

WIAA GIRLS GOLF

Lawler, Prairie falls short in playoff

Union Grove finishes third in Division 2

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VERONA — It all came down to one putt.

And Sophia Lawler nailed it. After The Prairie School girls golf team took a four-stroke lead after Monday's first round at the WIAA State Championships at University Ridge Golf Course, things got hectic on Tuesday.

A back-and-forth, heated duel with two-time defending champion Prescott eventually resulted in the final hole, where Prescott's Ava Salay, who totaled 149 (75-74) to win her second straight Division 2 state title, found the bottom of a cup with a long par to give her squad a one-stroke lead with one shot — yes, literally one shot — left in the tournament.

Lawler, the Hawks' lone senior, stepped up, however, needing a birdie to send it to a playoff.

With ice in her veins and complete confidence, the Prairie star with college golf aspirations sunk it and sent her team to the playoff.

"Ava made a longer putt, and I had to make birdie to tie it up," Lawler said moments after her team received a state runner-up trophy. "The fact we got to the playoff, I was like, 'Oh, my God!' My putt was probably a few feet. That got us to the playoff. It was a slight right to left, a little bit, but mostly straight. I was calm, and I drained it."

Lawler finished third overall with a 155 (81-74), earning a medal for the third straight year. Belle Kongshaug of Colfax/Elk Mound was second with a 151 (72-79).

In an extremely rare case where a shocking final score of 684-684 sent both teams to a playoff, the University Ridge spectators were buzzing, watching the five Prairie girls tee off on hole No. 8, the five Prescott players tee off next, and all 10 girls play the hole against each other.

Lawler, a savvy veteran to the state tournament, could sense tension among her teammates.

Two key chip shots, including a long hole-out from far off the fringe, sealed Prairie's fate, and Prescott won the first playoff hole by one stroke to capture its third straight Division 2 title.

"It was like match play on the back nine today," Prairie coach Carrie Massey said. "It was really close — you could really feel the tension. It was super-close at the end. I'm surprised it was a tie then. I've been here 10 times, it's our first playoff."

"Their girls had a par at the end of the playoff, and we had a bogey. We had four bogeys in the playoff."

Please see **GOLF**, Page C5

WIAA DIVISION I STATE GIRLS GOLF TOURNAMENT



MIKE RAMCZYK PHOTOS, MRAMCZYK@KENOSHANews.COM

The Central girls golf team receives the WIAA Division 1 state championship trophy for the second year in a row Tuesday afternoon at University Ridge Golf Course in Verona. The Lady Falcons shot a 307 Tuesday and totaled 626 over two days to best second-place Middleton (645) and third-place Union Grove (660).

A second helping



Central junior Kylie Walker chips onto the ninth green on Tuesday.

Central girls win back-to-back state golf championships

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VERONA — The Lady Falcons are back on top of the state girls golf perch.

For the second consecutive year, Central won the WIAA Division 1 state championship Tuesday, cruising past the field with a score of 319 to hold on and capture the overall title with a two-day total of 626.

The Falcons followed up Monday's 307 and beat second-place Middleton (645) and third-place Union Grove (660), the Falcons' Southern Lakes Conference rival.

Central junior Kylie Walker, who was tied for the first-

round lead at 69 with Payton Haugen of Brookfield East, had four bogeys and a double bogey on the front nine Tuesday to shoot a 41.

Walker started a strong comeback by opening the back nine with five straight pars, then making back-to-back birdies on holes 15 and 16, but couldn't quite catch Waunakee's Izzy Stricker and finished second at 145 (69-76) for the two days.

Stricker, the daughter of professional golfer and Edgerton native Steve Stricker, won the individual title at 143 (73-70).

"If feels great," Central coach Ryan Dahl said moments after the girls finished and started celebrating on hole No. 18 Tuesday. "Winning back to back, obviously this was the goal all year. It's a little bit easier this year than

it was last year."

"It's just a good feeling right now, and I'm happy for the girls."

Walker's twin sister, Katelyn, also earned a medal, tying for fifth at 151 (73-78) with Vivian Cressman of Middleton. Katelyn's round Tuesday included a 1-under 35 on the front nine, but she had three double bogeys on the back nine for a 42.

Elle O'Reilly had back-to-back birdies on the eighth and ninth holes and tied for 18th at 160 (81-79), and Chloe Brown matched Kylie Walker with three birdies and tied for 33rd at 170 (84-86) to round out the Falcons' top four. Central's No. 5 player, Emily Mallace, tied for 72nd at 202 (97-105).

Dahl said he was impressed by Kylie Walker's back-9

Please see **CENTRAL**, Page C5

Walker twins have supporting cast

O'Reilly, Brown, Mallace crucial to Central's title

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MADISON — Everyone knows about junior twins Kylie and Katelyn Walker.

They've been Wisconsin high school golf staples since freshman year in 2020, and their top-five finishes at Tuesday's state golf tournament only reiterates the obvious.

The Walker twins are good. They have their own Twitter page. They're a whole thing of awesomeness. But they count four scores in a team state golf championship, and that means three

other girls had to play their best Monday and Tuesday at University Ridge Golf Course in Madison in order for the Falcons to prevail as back-to-back champions.

And Central did just that, shooting a 626 — the third-lowest score in team state history — to lap the field in dominant fashion and secure a historic second consecutive WIAA Division 1 state title.

However, the Walkers could have each shot a 60, but the golf trophy wouldn't be at Central High School right now had it not been for senior Elle O'Reilly, junior Chloe Brown and Emily Mallace.

O'Reilly's 37 on the front-9 Tuesday was "huge," according to head coach



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Elle O'Reilly watches her putt closely on No. 9 Tuesday at the state tournament.

Please see **SUPPORT**, Page C5

Central

From C1

Tuesday, when she holed two straight birdies. They were in constant communication between shots, and Dahl asked Kylie if she wanted to win the whole thing.

Kylie didn't hesitate. "Elle shot a 37 on the front, which was huge for us," Dahl said. "At about 15, I asked Kylie if she wanted to push it a little bit. She was like, 'I'm OK, let's not do anything dumb,' and then she drives 15's green."

"She made birdie there, then birdie on 16, but she just missed a little slider (for par) on 17, that's where she bogeyed. She was just off the green, with a funky lie, and putted it six or seven feet within the hole."

As for O'Reilly, she's been the lone senior and biggest leader. The last few weeks, when the stakes have been highest, O'Reilly has taken charge.

"They found team camaraderie is a huge, huge thing when it comes to girls golf," Dahl added. "We kind of let that get away from use early in the year. We really started building that camaraderie the last couple of weeks, and Elle was really instrumental in all of that."

"Obviously, her length off the tees is a lot of fun to watch, too."

Dahl said the girls got a bit frustrated losing regionals to Union Grove, but it helped his Falcons to play competitive golf in every meet leading up to state. Having that constant competition back-and-forth, every single time you go out there, set up the Falcons up for success.

"They were just as even-keel as can be," he added.

Katelyn Walker had just as much of a chance to win as Kylie did early Tuesday.

She was tied for the lead with Stricker through 10, but she got stuck in a bunker on 13, and that derailed her chances.



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Central golf teammates try to stay warm at University Ridge Tuesday, as heavy winds, rain and cold temperatures chill the course.

"Katelyn and Kylie care so much for each other that they want each other to do well," Dahl said.

After the team celebrated their big victory together by huddling and jumping around in sheer bliss, Katelyn talked about her maturity these past few years.

"I feel great about the team win," Katelyn said. "Today definitely could have been better. The weather definitely affected me. Some of those triples should've been bogeys at worst."

"The people I've met this year, they're all really great people. They're always positive. I do the same thing, because of what they do. I've matured. I came to state freshman year, and I didn't have a good attitude about it."

"I blew up, couldn't come back from it and got sad. Today, I had

a blowup hole and didn't care. I came back. It's just maturing and realizing, no one cares. No one cares, why get sad about something in the past? Think about the present."

Communication plays a big part with Dahl and his players.

He was able to stay the course, no pun intended, when his girls had a big lead, and keep them all calm and not let pressure overwhelm the Falcons.

"We're just talking numbers, where is the spot we want to be to give us a shot at birdie, she's (Kylie) very meticulous," Dahl said. "It's 'Where's the pin? Where do I want to be to give ourselves a look at birdie? Where do I want to miss?' That's nice when we talk about stuff. She didn't really talk about individual stuff until 15, it

was more about team score all day."

"On 17, the wind was in her face. It was a tough spot. The pin was up front, and she just blocked it a little bit right off the green. There were a couple other balls that were hit in the water."

If Kylie miraculously holed her 50-yard approach on 18, it would've led to a playoff.

Instead, she enjoyed a score 1-over par, the culmination of a four-hole stretch of exceptional golf.

More history

This marks the first time a Southern Lakes Conference team has won back-to-back state golf championships.

Also, Central's impressive two-day score of 626 is the third-low-

est in state history.

It helps to have the Walker twins, Brown and O'Reilly consistently providing rounds in the 70s and low 80s, and the loss of O'Reilly to graduation could affect the team's chances next year.

But with one more year of the Walkers and Brown, the sky's the limit for perhaps an impossible third state championship.

"It's pretty cool, and it feels cool," Dahl said. "Those pictures will go up in the gym, and those live forever. We really talk about conference championships and how important those are. Those numbers only get up there if there's a conference championship or a state championship."

"When you come back here, their families and their kids will see that."



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Central's Chloe Brown watches her putt on No. 9 Tuesday at University Ridge in Verona at the state tournament.

Support

From C1

Ryan Dahl, and she finished with a 160, plus Brown added an 84 and 86 to tally a 170.

Mallace provided a 97 and 105, but gained valuable state experience and was ready if needed to factor into the final team score.

"Emily played really well yesterday, shot a 97 which is a career low for her," Dahl said. "And got stung by a bee. Today was a bit higher, but conditions were worse. And then Chloe played great today, just stayed the course."

"Our big thing has been big numbers at times, and she didn't do that at all. It was pars and bogeys, and that was perfectly fine. Elle shooting a 79 today was huge.

That's definitely where she should be all the time, in the high 70s, and she proved that today."

Brown and O'Reilly both either live or work at Strawberry Creek Golf Course, the same subdivision where the Walkers live.

They're all friends on and off the links, and it shows in their chemistry and performance.

For O'Reilly, Tuesday meant a lot, being her last high school golf tournament.

"The four we have right now, are the top four we had last year, so it's our last run as the original four," O'Reilly said. "It's kind of sad they'll be here without me, and I hope it's sad for them, too."

"On the way here, I was thinking if we have four returning players, we should win, we just have to play good. Being in the lead, I

was telling everyone 'it's OK, because I doubled the first hole. We had a cushion, I was relaxed, and I ended up birdieing the last two holes on the front to cancel that out, anyways."

O'Reilly shot a 37 on the front and a 42 on the back-9.

"Our goal was 310-315, and we shot a 307 Monday."

Katelyn Walker and Brown both agreed playing with a lead made things easier.

On Tuesday, the weather made things tricky, but luckily the negative effects reverberated throughout every team and every player.

"It feels pretty good to win, because we did pretty good," Brown said. "It feels better when there's a big gap of strokes. I tripped on the last hole, but I felt way better than last year (Central won by only 7 to

beat Hamilton in 2021)."

"I felt really calm these last two days, because I felt really confident."

So what's one things that stands out from this historic, never-going-to-happen-again run?

"That was the 10th time I've played this year with Lexie (Manteufel) from Union Grove, and we were just talking about playing together later this week," O'Reilly said. "The people that I've met, I'll always take with me. I've met a lot of people through golf that are genuinely good people."

Brown agrees on the people part, and she's really been happy meeting new ones.

"They're always positive and stuff, and I try to do the same things because of what they do," she added.

Golf

From C1

Massey said she's no stranger to close battles at state. The Hawks have three state championships and four runner-up finishes, and have been represented at state for 13 of 15 years of the team's existence.

Prairie junior Kady Peery finished 10th at 169 (88-81), junior Aishani Dhar tied for 12th at 175 (89-86) and junior Addison Lalonde tied for 19th at 185 (90-95). The Hawks' No. 5 player, freshman Adelyne Ruetz, tied for 29th in the 38-player field at 199 (101-98).

Along with a solid day from Lawler, Peery enjoyed some of her best golf of her life.

She says she felt proud of her team when it was over, even though the Hawks didn't win.

"We've had a really good season, and I knew we all tried our hardest," Peery added. "I shot an 81 today, which is a really good round for me. It was sad, because we knew we didn't win, but we came in second, which is still awesome."

For Lawler, who said making state three times in four years is pretty "insane," she couldn't help but tear up in a post-tournament interview.

"I honestly couldn't have asked for more," Lawler said. "I've always loved the girls on the team, honestly...I plan on playing college golf, I just haven't committed. I have offers at Winona State and Louis University."

Finally, Massey is excited about the future of the Hawks, as she knows they'll be back at state.

She isn't lamenting falling so close to another state title.

Also, she's excited for Lawler, whose second-place finish is the



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The Prairie School girls golf team poses with its state runner-up trophy Tuesday at the WIAA State Championships at University Ridge Golf Course in Verona.

highest in school history.

"She'll be playing somewhere," Massey said. "She really played well, she was just grinding things out, I was so happy for her, and she deserves that. She's a really great leader and captain, and she's had an awesome four years."

What's interesting is Sophia's older sister played for Racine St. Cat's, so Massey assumed Sophia would play there, but she decided to attend Prairie, and it was a game-changer.

"Someone called me from Prairie four years ago and said, 'hey, this girl came here,' and I was super excited because I already knew her and I knew she was better than her

sister," Massey said. "With Sophia, we were able to rebuild because I graduated four kids in '16 after we went back-to-back state championships. Then we had a little lull, and when she came as a freshman, we were able to get back here. I can't complain about it."

Broncos take third, Roberts finishes eighth

It didn't necessarily turn out the way Union Grove head coach Eric Swanson wanted at this week's WIAA State Girls Golf Championships, but he can't complain about making a little history.

Thanks to a 335 Tuesday, Swan-

son's Broncos finished third overall in Division 1 at 660, behind champion Central (626) and runner-up Middleton (645).

Senior Norah Roberts, who won the Southern Lakes Conference and led the Broncos to the regional title, finished her illustrious career in eighth place, one year after taking second.

Roberts shot an 80 Tuesday, one day after firing 73, to total 153.

She said Tuesday evening this two-year run has meant a lot, and she isn't regretting anything.

"It hasn't really sunk in yet, but I was a little emotional mentally on the back nine," Roberts said of Tuesday's performance. "To-

morrow, when I don't have golf practice, I'll realize, yeah, it's over.

"I just really had two bad holes today, two doubles, that made it a little worse, but I just didn't have my putting game going."

Junior Lexi Manteufel was next for Union Grove, totaling 162 (80-82) to tie for 22nd in the 78-player Division 1 field. Senior Allie McBryde totaled 171 (87-84) and tied for 35th, and senior Larah Hood-Brennan, who was last in the field last year, shot 174 (85-89) and finished in the top half of the field, tied for 37th.

Swanson wanted to win it all, obviously, but he appreciates the run.

"It was a great run," he said. "We graduated our No. 2 (player) last year, so to come back and do even better is pretty impressive."

"For Norah today, conditions were tougher and she struggled on the greens a little bit. She hit the ball well, but just a couple bad breaks. The other girls did OK."

"Larah Hood-Brennan had another good round in the 80s, which was huge. Allie had a 39 on the back, so it was great to see her finish her career strong."

Swanson added that the Broncos made some history, but they were hoping to leave with a trophy.

"Westosha played unbelievable," he said. "We hoped for better, but nobody was beating Westosha, and Middleton played outstanding. We didn't play our best, but we gave it our best try."

"We only return one player, so it will be a complete rebuild. The team had great camaraderie these last two years. It was a lot of fun, we had great parents, and they are fantastic kids. This is a good way to end, and I will always remember this group."