

C6 • STAR TRIBUNE

SPORTS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2023



PREPS
STATE TOURNAMENTS



THE PICKS

Can experts' streak hold up in playoffs?

By JIM PAULSEN and DAVID LA VAQUE
Star Tribune staff writers

The 32 football teams that make up the field for Class 6A — the largest schools in Minnesota — begin their playoffs Friday with 16 first-round games in four eight-team brackets seeded from top to bottom.

There's purity in that, and we're over the fact that one of the games is an 8-0 team vs. an 0-8 team. Elsewhere in the bracket are much better matchups, even in cases where there's plenty of separation in wins and losses.

Preps prognosticators David La Vaque and Jim Paulsen, who make an annual event of seeing who can predict the most winners over the course of the season, are heading into the Class 6A tournament. They are perfect over their past two rounds of picks — 0 over that span, and they are tied for the season at 22-8.

Here are three Class 6A first-round games that got their attention:

Coon Rapids Cardinals (2-6) at Lakeville North Panthers (7-1), 7 p.m.

Jim says: Coon Rapids is a far better team than its record indicates. Four of its losses have come in one-score games, including an overtime loss to Farmington last week after leading by 15 in the fourth quarter. Lakeville North, No. 2 in the final Class 6A state rankings, is hitting its stride, averaging 50 points in its past three games. It won't be a walkover, but Lakeville North wins comfortably. **The pick:** Lakeville North 38, Coon Rapids 14

David says: Senior receiver Knihtom Cummings-Coleman provides Coon Rapids the luxury of having the best athlete on the field. Until the Cardinals figure out how to come the young man, the talent depth is with Lakeville North. QB Riley Grossman (14 touchdown passes) and RB Sawyer Wilkie (1,341 rushing yards) have quietly become one of the metro area's top backfield tandems. **The pick:** Lakeville North 42, Coon Rapids 7

Farmington Tigers (9-5) vs. Edina Hornets (5-3), 7 p.m., at Edina Community Center

Jim says: After starting 0-5, Farmington has revived its season and is riding a three-game winning streak. Edina has won four in a row, having found its running game. During that streak, Hornets RB John Warpinski has rushed for more than 100 yards each game and has found pay dirt eight times, taking the pressure off sophomore QB Mason West. **The pick:** Edina 26, Farmington 17

David says: Farmington must ride its Big Three on offense to spring the upset. They are QB Jonah Ask (12 touchdown passes), RB Jeffrey Branson (team-high 514 rushing yards) and WR Brock Wyandt, who leads the Tigers with 36 receptions and 595 yards. Give Edina the edge based on toughness of schedule — though not by much. **The pick:** Edina 21, Farmington 14

Prior Lake Lakers (4-4) at Mounds View Mustangs (4-4), 7 p.m.

Jim says: Prior Lake, always loaded with high-end talent, needs to face down a dubious streak that has reached Twins-like proportions: the Lakers have lost their past 18 playoff games away from home. They won three games in a row to finish the regular season, thanks to a relentless rushing attack averaging more than 260 yards per game. They'll need that physical style against a Mounds View team that thrives in tight games. **The pick:** Prior Lake 24, Mounds View 20

David says: If Prior Lake were facing another team, the redemption angle would be appropriate. But Mounds View is a tough out. The Mustangs aren't flashy or flush with top college football prospects. But they don't beat themselves, and they play like a unit. That will matter in a game in which weather could lend itself to turnovers. **The pick:** Mounds View 28, Prior Lake 21

GIRLS TENNIS

She's come a long way, in all respects

Winona Cotter player from Mexico pulls off Class 1A upset.

By HEATHER RULE
Special to the Star Tribune

Winona Cotter sophomore Emma Hageman came back from a set down and grabbed a 4-0 lead in the third set of her Class 1A quarterfinal match. A couple of breaks later, the match was knotted at four games apiece. Hageman said she started to get nervous.

"All these thoughts going through your head about the future," Hageman said. "But I had to really focus in the present and what I was doing at the moment. That's what got me back for those last two games."

Unseeded Hageman held serve and then broke at love to seal the comeback, a 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 upset victory over No. 2 seed, Annika Harberts Ott. The Class 1A quarterfinal lasted about 2 hours, 45 minutes Thursday afternoon at Bees-Sweatt Family Tennis Center in Minneapolis.

A Providence Academy senior, Harberts Ott came into the match as a seeded player with state tournament experience. The whole experience is brand-new to Hageman. She's an international student from Mexico City in her first year at Cotter and her first season on the tennis team. So far, Hageman said, "It's been an exciting journey."

Hageman credits her backhand as a strength on the court, but one of the biggest improvements her coaching staff saw in her this season was her mental capacity, said Cotter coach Anne Besek. Hageman was tentative with her shots at the start of the season.

Now she's solid, Besek said. "She can be down and then turn it around just by really focusing on just breathing and going out there and not worrying," Besek said.



Emma Hageman of Winona Cotter upset second-seeded Annika Harberts Ott of Providence Academy.

Besek credited her assistant coach, son Matt Besek, for having "a way of calming" Hageman throughout the season, including during Thursday's quarterfinal.

Hageman also gained more confidence in herself during Thursday's match. After she started the third set with a pair of double faults, she reminded herself to stay calm and focused. "You can serve. You can do it," Hageman said she told herself.

She'll bring that confidence with her to the state semifinals Friday. "I'm super excited," Hageman said. "I never imagined that I could get this far. But I'm also so proud of myself. I'll just keep working hard and see where we get."

Hageman will face No. 3 seed

Leah Maddock, a sophomore from Osakis, in Friday's semifinals. Maddock used her powerful groundstrokes to defeat Foley's Amie Vanderweest 6-3, 6-2. Maddock is in her third consecutive state tournament, going a step further each year. As an unseeded eighth-grader, she lost in the first round in 2021. Last season, she lost her quarterfinal match as the fifth seed.

"This time, she's excited to reach her first state semifinal. "I think it's great," Maddock said. "It just shows how much I'm improving every year, and that I can just keep moving forward."

Hageman's victory was the only upset in the bracket. Top seed Isabelle Elness of Breck didn't drop a

game in her quarterfinal. She'll face fourth seed Casey Cronin of Holy Family after Cronin's 0-6, 6-3, 6-3 win over fifth seed Avery Skaar of Thief River Falls.

Class 2A

The only three-set quarterfinal in the Class 2A singles bracket at Baseline Tennis Center on Thursday was a 2-6, 6-2, 6-3 victory for fifth seed Aoife Loftus of Rochester Mayo over fourth seed Lucy Nabebrick of Wayzata. Loftus will face Eagan's Cassandra Li, the top seed, in the semifinals. Second seed Claire Loftus, Aoife's sister, didn't lose a game in her quarterfinal, and Elk River's Ava Nelson advanced with a 6-3, 6-2 victory.

GIRLS SOCCER



Maple Grove forward Felix Siaffa, left, battled for the ball with Andover defender Preston Bergeron during the Crimson's 1-0 quarterfinal victory.

Unseeded Maple Grove stuns No. 3 White Bear Lake

Maple Grove stunned third-seeded White Bear Lake 2-1 in the quarterfinal round of the Class 3A girls soccer state tournament Thursday at Kuhlman Stadium in Edina.

The unseeded Crimson withstood early pressure from the Bears. Crimson goalkeeper Diana Park made two saves early and saw a free kick from 25 yards out hit the crossbar. Park finished with four saves.

Class 2A

Totino-Grace 4, Alexandria 0: Senior Margaret Vootheers and sophomore Elisabeth Thompson scored on headers off corner kicks in the opening 30 minutes as the Eagles (9-8-2) scored three first-half goals vs. the Cardinals (15-2-3). Sophomore Zaley Streep and senior Olivia Schroeder also scored.

BOYS SOCCER



Maple Grove forward Felix Siaffa, left, battled for the ball with Andover defender Preston Bergeron during the Crimson's 1-0 quarterfinal victory.

First-half goal holds up, allows Crimson to advance

Anson Karn broke a scoreless tie with 5:15 left in the first half, helping second-seeded Maple Grove take a 1-0 over unseeded Andover on Thursday in the quarterfinals of the Class 1A boys soccer state tournament at Kuhlman Stadium in Edina.

When a shot by Collin Merritt from the far side slid through Huskies goalkeeper Christian Guenther, Karn settled the ball down and slid it past a Huskies defender for the game's only goal.

Class 2A

Totino-Grace 4, Alexandria 0: Senior Margaret Vootheers and sophomore Elisabeth Thompson scored on headers off corner kicks in the opening 30 minutes as the Eagles (9-8-2) scored three first-half goals vs. the Cardinals (15-2-3). Sophomore Zaley Streep and senior Olivia Schroeder also scored.

Olimb takes Mound Westonka/Southwest Christian job

Larry Olimb, who left the Orono girls hockey program amid controversy shortly after coaching the team to second place in the Class 1A state tournament last season, is the new coach of the Mound Westonka/Southwest Christian girls co-op.

Olimb, whose team went 24-4-4 in his only season at Orono, resigned from his job there after criticism of his coaching by parents. He didn't go far. Mound and Orono girls co-op and play together in youth hockey. Olimb was Mr. Hockey when he played for Warroad and went on to star for the Gophers, where he broke the team's assist record. He was the co-head coaching girls' hockey at Wayzata from 2000-06, then returned to coaching when he took the Orono job.

"I would have to say I appreciated all the support I received all summer," Olimb said. "It was gratifying to know so many hockey people were thinking of me. I heard a lot of 'Stay in the game. Don't let one situation ruin your passion for coaching hockey.'" DAVID LA VAQUE