

SPORTS

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PREP VOLLEYBALL DIVISION 4 STATE CHAMPIONSHIP | MCDONELL 3, MONTICELLO 1



BRANDON BERG PHOTOS, CHIPPEWA HERALD

The McDonell volleyball team poses with its newly won Division 4 state championship after defeating Monticello on Saturday morning at the Resch Center in Green Bay.

SWEEP REPEAT

Macks overcome early deficit to win second straight state title

BRANDON BERG
Chippewa Herald

GREEN BAY — All season long the McDonell volleyball team has credited its big-game experience and composure for its success.

There may be no better of example of that than Saturday when the Macks battled back from an opening set loss to repeat as Division 4 state champion by beating Monticello (22-25, 25-22, 25-15, 25-16) at the Resch Center in Green Bay.

The Ponies (31-2) came out of the gates strong, storming off to a 12-4 lead in set one before the Macks were able to chip back into the lead. McDonell (41-12) cut the gap to two at 23-11 after a kill from Gracie Goettl before Monticello closed out the set with back-to-back kills.

“I think we came out and we had some nerves and they put a lot of pressure on us right away and even after being down a big chunk in the beginning of the first set we were able to stay composed and mentally battle back through that,” McDonell coach Kat Hanson.

Set two started strong for McDonell before the Ponies mounted a rally of their own, getting within one at 23-22 before a kill from Aubrey Dorn helped the Macks score the final two points to even the match. McDonell took control early in the third set with Goettl and Dorn posting several kills early to grab a lead they wouldn’t relinquish and move one set for a repeat.

The final set went the same for the Macks in taking a lead and keeping the Ponies from mounting a charge. Leading 24-16, the Macks put the game away with a dig from Sydney Retzlaff into a set from Emily Cooper that Goettl punctuated for the final of her 13



The McDonell volleyball team celebrates with its newly won Division 4 state championship trophy after defeating Monticello on Saturday morning at the Resch Center in Green Bay.

kills to seal the deal on a second straight state championship and send the Macks and their fans into a frenzy.

Monticello senior Ellie Gustafson provided a tough foe across the net to the Macks as the 5-foot-11 senior outside/middle hitter led everyone with 28 total kills. She set a Division 4 record for four sets with 32 kills in her team’s semifinal loss to Wabeno/Laona last season and also had 28 in Friday’s semifinal win over Athens. She also had a team-high 25 digs for the Ponies, who were in their second-ever trip to state.

“She has every shot in the book. She’s a great player,” Hanson said of Gustafson. “She’s great defensively, she’s great passing, she’s great offensively. So we had a gameplan and we knew that she was going to get her kills and at

some point you have to say that’s a great hitter, that’s a great swing, we’ll go get ours and I think that the beginning of the game we struggled with that a little bit to settle in but I think we responded well.”

The Macks utilized more of a committee for their offense, led by 15 kills from Marley Hughes as the senior hit better than 48 percent for the match. Goettl hit 32.3 percent and tied Cooper for the team lead with 19 digs apiece. Junior Aubrey Dorn had nine kills and nine digs, senior Josie Witkowski had eight kills after leading the team in Friday’s semifinal win over Wonewoc-Center and junior Alayna Crawford chipped in with seven kills.

Defensively, the Macks also had three solo blocks and 10 block assists at the net. Hughes had two

of the solos and four assists, Witkowski added three assists and Anna Thaler had one solo block.

Abby Bresina had a team-high 32 assists but also came through with a strong effort from the serving line with seven aces and leading many of McDonell’s long rallies that helped the team take control. Bresina’s seven aces are one off the Division 4 state record for a four-set match.

“She served really effective short today and she has a great short serve, she also has a great deep serve and she did really well today executing that,” Hanson said. “I think as the match went on her serve wore on them and she went back and hit her spots and it put us in a great position and she got some big points when we needed them.”

McDonell returned to the Divi-

State Championships


- Division 1**
- (2) Divine Savior Holy Angels 3,
(1) Oconomowoc 2
- Division 2**
- (1) Appleton Xavier 3,
(2) Sauk Prairie 1
- Division 3**
- (1) Howards Grove 3,
(2) St. Croix Falls 0
- Division 4**
- (1) McDonell 3, (3) Monticello 1

sion 4 state tournament this year in a much different spot than the Macks entered the Resch Center in a season ago. The defending champion Macks were the top seed and the top-ranked team in the final Wisconsin Volleyball Coaches Association Division 4 state coaches poll of the regular season. The opening set of the title game marked the first time the Macks dropped a set in the postseason and the first set McDonell lost at state since falling to Burlington Catholic Central in the 2020 state title game.

“I think a lot of it is we can get through it because we trust each other and make the plays and we’ve built a really strong connection throughout the whole season and I think that showed even today when we were down that we can push through those hard times because we trust each other,” Goettl said.

The Macks cap their fifth trip to

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 **VIEW** a collection of photos from Saturday’s Division 4 state championship volleyball game by pointing your smartphone at this QR code and tapping the link. **NEWSVU**

COMMENTARY

Championship caps historic year for county

McDonell title, Chi-Hi and Bloomer advancing to state a fitting end to successful season

The Chippewa County prep volleyball season began nearly three months ago with many teams having high expectations.



BRANDON BERG

the county.
McDonell, Chi-Hi and

Bloomer ended their seasons at the state tournament in Green Bay at the Resch Center as three of the final 20 teams in the state.

The Macks completed the repeat by overcome an opening set loss to beat Monticello in Saturday’s Division 4 state championship game. McDonell has leaned on its big-match experience all season coming off the title and that came in handy in the title match. McDonell senior Marley Hughes said the team got off to slow starts early on in the year, something that happened again on Saturday. But the Macks were able to whether a storm from the Ponies and take control of the match.

“It happened today in this game but it feels good that we were able to tough through that, we were able to get ourselves ahead and not let it get to our

heads,” Hughes said. “A lot of people would let it get to their head and we don’t do that.”

The title enhances an already sterling legacy for the Macks program. McDonell has now won three WIAA state championships (2009, 2021, 2022) to go with one runner-up finish (2020) and a semifinal appearance (2010). Coach Kat Hanson has led the team to all of those milestones as the steady leader for a program her mother Deb built from the ground up, her father Steve has worked in for many years in various roles including as head coach and her sister Kari helped Kat lead from 2015-17.

While this year’s senior class gets to go out as champions — with many as two-year



BRANDON BERG, CHIPPEWA HERALD

The McDonell volleyball team celebrates after defeating Monticello to win the Division 4 state championship on Saturday morning at the Resch Center in Green Bay.

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