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CHIPPEWA HERALD

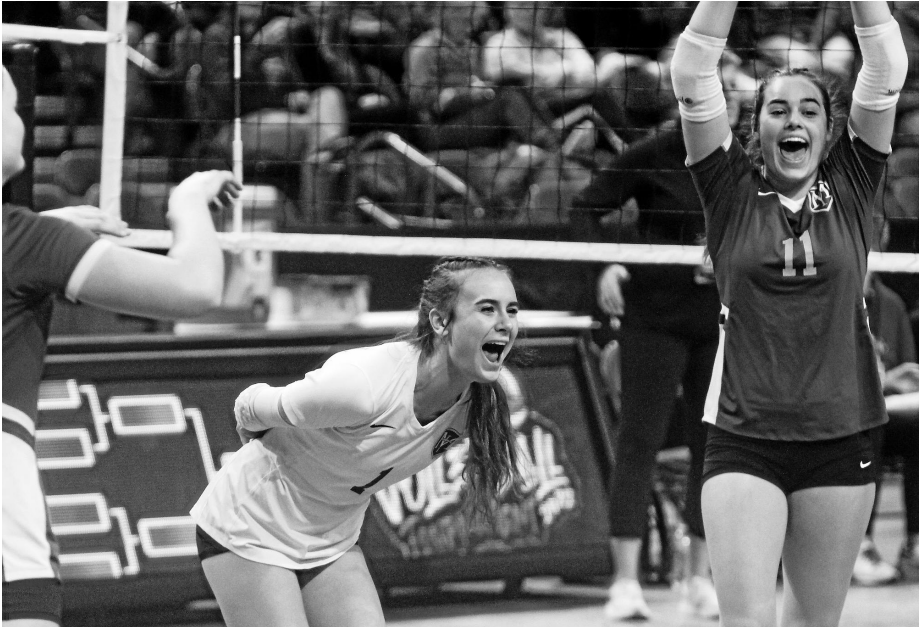
STATE CHAMPIONS

**ABOVE:** The McDonell volleyball team won its second straight Division 4 state title Saturday with a win over Monticello in Green Bay.

**LEFT:** The McDonell volleyball team celebrates after defeating Monticello to win the Division 4 state championship.

**BELOW LEFT:** The McDonell bench looks on prior to the final point.

**BELOW RIGHT:** McDonell's Sydney Retzlaff (1) and Gracie Goettl (11) celebrate after a point.



Champs

From A7

the Division 4 state tournament with the program's third state title, joining 2009 and 2021 with a silver ball in 2020 and a state semifinal loss in 2010. All three of those championships have come

under coach Kat Hanson. "We just really built I think a really big bond over this past season," McDonell senior Sydney Retzlaff said. "We've gone through hard times but we celebrate the good times and we found ways to get out of those hard times so we have more good times."

McDonell shared the Western Cloverbelt Conference championship with Bloomer and Stanley-Boyd during the regular season. The Macks graduate a strong seven-player senior class of Jena Geist, Retzlaff, Hughes, Ella Schemenauer, Emily Thaler, Goettl and Witkowski. "This group is a very special

group where they care about each other," Hanson said. "There were a number of girls on our bench that didn't get to play and they were the best teammates ever and were very supportive of each other. That goes to show what kind of bond and connection they have. This group is truly selfless and I think it's something they

created. They bought into that. That's something they have to be able to do and I think that they were so successful with that and that's where this (state championship trophy) comes from. "This piece of metal is great. Everyone loves that but it's the memories that are created in the process of attaining them."

Berg

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champions after playing on last year's team as well — the juniors will return next year with an opportunity to follow up a landmark three-year stretch for the program. "I think there's no greater reward than being in a state championship and as you go through the moments of the morning that lead up to the match you want to soak it in and you want to soak it on while staying focused," Hanson said. "Sometimes that can be a challenge but I think it's important that we enjoy those because while we're sitting up here very blessed we know it is a blessing and we know that we put in a lot of hard work and they've made sacrificed a lot to

be called a champion." Chi-Hi was at state for the first time and opened a busy county weekend at the Resch Center, falling to Burlington in Thursday's Division 1 quarterfinals. The Cardinals outthit the Demons, but serving errors hurt Chi-Hi in a tight defeat. The support for the Cardinals on Thursday, and throughout the season, was easy to see with a quick look into the stands where Cardinal red was the most prominent color among the four quarterfinalists in Thursday night's session. "The crowd we had in Hudson and then we had an enormous crowd at Eau Claire North and then we had an enormous crowd here tonight in Green Bay," Chi-Hi coach Luke Heidtke said after Thursday's match. "These athletes are not only outstanding

volleyball players, they're outstanding people and our whole school and community just wanted to come here and support them and to be able to live in this outstanding moment. It's a wonderful testament to not only to our team as volleyball players but who they are as young women." The Cardinals graduate seniors Sami Perlberg, Maddy Bauer, Emma Lenfant and Bella Murry but should have five starters back from a team that won its first Big Rivers Conference title since 2013 in addition to the first-ever state bid. No doubt the Cardinals will enter 2023 with the talent to contend once again and with the motivation to hit another level after coming so heartbreakingly close on Thursday. The Blackhawks were in the Division 2 semifinals for the

second time in program history and the second time since 2019, falling to eventual state champion Appleton Xavier in straight sets. Like Chi-Hi and McDonell, the Blackhawks spent the regular season represented in their respective division's Wisconsin Volleyball Coaches Association state coaches poll and was playing its best at the right time to get to Green Bay for the second time in four seasons. Bella Seibel had a taste of state as a freshman player while her senior teammates Cicely Kiecker, Jensyn Skaar and Zoe Pielhop were cheering that year's team on from the stands as fans and players in the lower levels. The Blackhawks will bring back key contributors next season in the quest for an encore. "I think in August we didn't really know how the season

would play out and it as a lot of new people playing together," Bloomer junior Amelia Herrick said. "So just remembering that next year when we start that anything could happen and I think we worked really hard all season and that can happen next year too." Chippewa County teams had a clean sweep of all winnable conference titles during the regular season as Chi-Hi won the Big Rivers, McDonell, Stanley-Boyd and Bloomer split the Western Cloverbelt and Cornell continued its domination of the East Lakeland. Many of those teams will return heavy hitters for 2023. And while it will be hard to follow up a historic 2022 season, what happened this fall shows that great things are always possible.