

St. Mary's girls prepare for state quarterfinals matchup with Mayer Lutheran

SLEEPY EYE - For the first time since 2005, Sleepy Eye St. Mary's will have its girls' basketball team in state tournament action.

The Knights will take on Mayer Lutheran at 5 p.m. this Wednesday at Mankato East High School in a Class A state quarterfinals game.

The Knights (22-0) advanced to state for the third time in program history after defeating Waterville-Elysian-Morristown this past Thursday in the Section 2A finals game at Sibely East High School.

After coming up a game short of state last season when the Knights fell to WEM in the Section 2A finals, the Knights got their redemption twice this season. They defeated WEM on March 5 in a regular-season matchup and then again last Thursday to make it to the state quarterfinals.

"It's awesome that we had a second opportunity to get back here," Knights junior guard Reagan Severson said. "We really just see all the hard work pay off. We've been working for this for how long, we've been together since fourth grade. It's really nice to see all of our hard work together - not just individually - pay off."

St. Mary's is led by junior Madison Mathiowetz's 33 points and 11 rebounds per game this year, while senior Sydney Windschitl is averaging 18.1 points and 6.2 rebounds per game. Severson is also adding 10.3 ppg for the Knights.

Mathiowetz said that making state has been the team's goal for many years and that the seniors on the team have been great leaders.

"It's what we've been dreaming of since we started playing basketball," Mathiowetz said. "This group of seniors has led us through since we were in fourth grade playing together. And our goal from eighth grade has been that we want to get to that state tournament. Last year we got that taste of how close we were to it, and I think this year we just knew this was exactly what we wanted, and we just made it happen."

The Knights' seven seniors this season are Windschitl, Emma Currans, Leah Miller, Sophie Portner, Megan Ahlness, Emily Weiss and Maryanne Larsen.

Windschitl added that she was proud of the team's efforts to reach the state tournament this year in her final season with the Knights.

"I'm so proud of my coaches and teammates, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to play at a state tournament," Windschitl said.

Knights head coach Bruce Woitas said that Mayer Lutheran (19-2) is a very athletic team, but he thinks his team will match up with them well.

"They are a very athletic team and have good size," Woitas said. "They like to play pressure defensively, however, not real physical play. They have two good guards and a good post player. However, we like how we can match up. They did lose a close game to WEM early in the season, so I think that says we should be able to play with them."

Windschitl said that keeping a strong defensive effort and finishing at the rim will be key in the Knights' first state game on Wednesday.

"Just tightening up our defense a little bit and working on finishing more shots," she said. "Definitely in the playoffs, they're harder to finish, they're not going to call as many fouls, so just finishing under the hoop stronger."