

By Randy Whalen

It wasn't a traditional Senior Night for the Lockport Township girls bowling team.

But it couldn't dampen the spirit for the Porters, who had an excellent regular season and hoped to once again bring home a state trophy.

The Senior Night was on Tuesday, Feb. 1. The Porters were supposed to bowl against Minooka, but because of a looming snowstorm, which ended up dumping upwards of a foot of snow in the area, the Indians canceled.

That left the Lockport seniors to celebrate themselves as the five of them, Caitlin Bosko, Isa Colon, Pennie Earnest, Demi Kontos, and Emma Punter were honored.

"I've known these girls since they were four years old and it's hard to believe that it went so fast," Lockport coach Lynda Siezega said. "I got emotional and I cried more this year than I did last year when my own daughter graduated."

A year ago Siezega's daughter, Chloe Siezega, was one of four seniors on the team. The others were Meghan Bacys, Grace Sullivan, and Payton Vandenburg. But last season was shortened by COVID, included very few tournaments, and basically only lasted a month, until mid-March.

"This season was a little more normal," coach Siezega said. "It's been nice to have that sort of normal season for them.

"Even without an opponent, Senior Night was still fine. Since we only had five seniors I had them bowl against the juniors and the seniors were there together."

Punter was on the state title team as a sophomore but didn't get to bowl in the finals. She missed a postseason opportunity last year and was happy that this season was held and went well.

"It means a lot," Punter said of having a mostly complete season. "We knew we could do the same amount of tournaments and it was great to see the teams we competed against. There are a lot of girls we are friends with and there was some great competition and the teams were supportive of one another.

"I had a great opportunity as a sophomore to see the team dynamic at work at the varsity level. Just knowing that we had to be reliant on each other and use that knowledge coming into this year. It's just being there for the team and having a positive attitude and focus helps in the long run."

A positive was the return of Colon to the team. She had stepped away from the game to start the season. But missed it and came back in mid-December before the Porters hosted their Walker Invite.

"I kind of missed the feeling of bowling in a team atmosphere," said Colon, whose older sister, Monica, was on the 2015 state title-winning team as a sophomore. "I missed that and being with friends. From the moment I came back, there was a bigger and stronger connection.

"I'm very glad that coach Lynda took me back."

As a sophomore, Colon was the second-highest bowler on the Porters state title team. She came up big in the shortened season last year too. But after spending the first three seasons as a varsity starter, she needed a break.

"I just had to focus on myself but I'm very glad to be back," she said. "Senior Night was great. We were a little bummed not going against any team. But hopefully, we will have big hardware to come."

The Porters had plenty of hardware in the regular season. They won numerous tournaments, including the Dixon Invite on Saturday, Jan. 29 at Plum Hollow Family Center in Dixon. Lockport (5,855 pin total in 6-games) was nearly 200 pins better than second-place Hononogah (5,665) while Freeport (5,617) was third in the 22-team invite.

The trio of seniors, Colon (1,212 - high of 268 in Game No. 4), Punter (1,197 - high of 221 in Game No. 2), and Kontos (1,167 - high of 226 in Game No. 3) led the way.

At the SouthWest Suburban Conference meet, which was held on Saturday, Jan. 22 at Strike N' Spare, the Porters (5,833) edged Andrew (5,759) by 74 pins to win the league title for the 13th time since it formed in the 2005-06 school year. It was also the sixth straight season that Lockport has won the SWSC, all of them in a combined format. They also won a trio of Blue Division championships from 2011-13)

Stagg (5,593) was third. Lincoln-Way East (5,331), Lincoln-Way West (5,228), Bradley Bourbonnais (4,506), Lincoln-Way Central (4,490), Sandburg (4,408), and Bolingbrook (3,825) rounded out the nine conference teams. Homewood-Flossmoor doesn't have a girl's bowling team.

During the regular season, Lockport actually lost a pair of SWSC dual meets. Those were 1,046-1,018 to Andrew on Dec. 9 at Strike N' Spare, and to Lincoln-Way West on Jan. 11 at Laraway Lanes in New Lenox. But those don't factor into the conference championship, it's all based on the season-ending tournament.

The Porters had four girls in the Top 12, including junior Morgan LiCausi who won the individual varsity title with a 1,277 series. She had five games over 200, including a high of 237 in the fourth game. Colon (1,210 - high of 243 in Game No. 4) was fourth, while Punter (1,155 - high of 258 in Game No. 4) and sophomore Paige Matiasek (1,146 - high of 206 in Game No. 2) were 11th and 12th.

At the halfway point, the Porters (2,858) trailed Andrew (2,971) by 113 pins. But a huge fifth game of 1,138, which was 218 pins better than the Thunderbolts put Lockport up for good. Then, ahead by just 42 pins going into the final game, the Porters pulled away with a 907 to Andrew's 875.

After missing a month or more during the regular Demi Kontos was extremely happy to be back contributing to the team by the end of her senior season.

"I was messing around, landed wrong, and fractured my left foot," Kontos said of her injury. That's my sliding foot, so I just had to rest it and get back as fast as I could."

Kontos and Bosko were part of the SNS Boats, National Championship team from last summer that consisted of Lockport bowlers.

"That was cool," Kontos said of the National Title experience. "It was good to be back this year (for high school bowling) and have the tournaments. It was great that our parents were able to watch us bowl.

"We had a tournament at Rock Island (on Nov. 27) which we won. That was the first big tournament of the year and to be able to go on that and bond with the team was really excellent. I appreciated that bond all season."