

By Randy Whalen

Three-peat.

Or would it be a four-peat?

All the Lockport Township girls bowling team knows is that it is out to make history this season. The Porters certainly have the potential to do that as they look to capture another state championship.

The results from the opening three weeks of the season show that is certainly a possibility. The Porters won three of their first four invites and their JV team won a varsity invite along the way as well.

"We lost three good bowlers from last year," Lockport girls bowling coach Lynda Siezega said of then-seniors Isa Colon, Emma Punter, and Demi Kontos, who had the top three scores at state as the Porters pulled away from Harlem in the afternoon to win the state championship. "But I think we are really good this season and have got off to a great start."

The Porters were certainly that as they won their opening invite, at Rock Island, on Saturday, Nov. 26 at Highland Park Bowl in Moline. There they rolled 6,071, which was nearly 300 pins better than Harlem (5,772). Hononegah (5,435) was third and Freeport (5,057) was a distant fourth in the 16-team tourney, which is regarded as the top opening one in the state.

In addition to the state champion Porters, Harlem was second, Hononegah placed fourth and Freeport took eighth at the State Finals last February.

"In the week of tryouts, I liked what I saw," Siezega said. "We took our top 12 bowlers to Rock Island (for the varsity and JV tournament) and the scores were amazing. Last year I told the girls we wanted to come out with a bang and we didn't always do that. But we did (at Rock Island)."

Lockport had three of the top four and four of the top nine bowlers at Rock Island. Senior Morgan LiCausi was the individual champion for the Porters with a total of 1,292 total, including a high game of 255. She edged out fellow senior Madison Davenport from Hononegah (1,291. high game of 248) by a single pin.

Junior Paige Matiasek (1,286) placed second, senior Madi Lave (1,266) was third, and senior Abby Miller (1,143) took ninth for the Porters.

The following Monday, Nov. 28, the Porters hosted Joliet West in an always great dual meet local matchup between teams that have captured state championships in the past seven seasons. Given what transpired between the two teams at invites in December, this was an even bigger matchup.

On this day, Lockport bowled very well and won the three-game match, 3,052-2,781 at Strike N' Spare II.

LiCausi had games of 206, 244, and 225 to roll a 675. That tied Tiger senior Malaya Chavez (246, 187, 242) for the top series of the day.

"I'm excited, I'm so excited," LiCause said of the season. "I think we are all closer and it's my senior year. I just think our communication is better this season.

"I love bowling for the team and think we are like a big family."

Something else that LiCause loves is the fact that she is going to continue her bowling career at Stephen F Austin University in Texas. She had just made the decision the week before, at the end of November.

There's a great family environment," LiCause said of her decision to attend Stephen F Austin. "I liked the makeup of the program. Just everything about it.

"I also have a new personal coach this year. That's Kevin Coleman. He's helped me a lot with my confidence."

Also doing well for the Porters in that dual meet against Joliet West was seniors Cassie Kontos (636, high of 242 in the first game), Miller (606, high of 223 in game 3), and Lave (577, high of 223 in game 3). Rounding out the Porters lineup and having nice games were Matiasek (520, high of 201 in game 3), and senior Cece Gilbert (493, high of 190 in game 2).

"We got off to a great start," said Siezega, who saw her team roll games of 984, 1,012, and 1,056 against Joliet West. "Morgan has worked like crazy and everyone is throwing well. We've got a lot of practice."

Then on Saturday, Dec. 3, Lockport went to the Palatine Invite at Brunswick Zone in Deer Park. There the Porters were dominating, winning by 851 pins. They placed first with 6,122 pins, with four games over 1,000 including a high of 1,078 in the fifth game. Grant (5,271) was second and Warren Township (5,227) placed third in the 18-team tournament.

LiCausi bowled outstanding again to win the individual title with a score of 1,264, including a high of 244 in the first game. Junior Kayla Cameron, from Warren, was second with 1,245 and had a 255 in the fifth

game. The Porters then had the next three placers with Lave (1,237, high of 223 in the first game), Kontos (1,236, high of 236 in game 6), and Miller (1,209, high of 256 in game 5) placed third through fifth. Matiasek (1,176, high of 215 in game 2) placed eighth.

Then on Monday, Dec. 5, Lockport hosted a three-game dual meet at Strike N' Spare II. There the Porters shot 3,138 to defeat Oswego, which had 2,876. Matiasek (267, 199, 203) led the way with 669, and freshman Brooke Stroud (224, 193, 235) also did well for Lockport, rolling a 652.

Two days later, on Wednesday, Dec. 7, the Porters won a two-game SouthWest Suburban Conference dual meet over Andrew by a count of 2,041-1890 at Thunder Bowl in Mokena. Matiasek (214, 246) with a 460, and LiCausi (205, 222) with a 427, led the way.

Then on, Saturday, Dec. 10, Lockport was at the largest regular-season invite, which was Strikefest, which is hosted by Plainfield North at Town & Country Lanes in Joliet. There the Porters found themselves in a very unfamiliar position after they rolled a 778 in the first game. That put them in 27th place out of the 44 teams there.

But Lockport rebounded from that start to place fifth. Bowling on its home lanes, Joliet West (6,041) was first and also had the individual champion, senior Malaya Chavez (1,411, high of 278 in game 1). Minooka (5,773) took second, Harlem (5,758), Collinsville (5,635), Lockport (5,599), and Mascoutah (5,582) were the top six teams.

Matiasek (14th overall, 1,217, high of 226 in game 3), and LiCausi (16th, 1,212, high of 248 in game 6) rebounded from poor first games (164 and 158) to both average over 200 in the tourney.

"With the start we had, I was pretty happy with that," Siezega said of placing fifth. "Morgan was really struggling to start (158). We'd make a ball change and it didn't work. So we'd make another ball change and that didn't work. Finally, I said 'we can't keep changing.' So we picked a ball and went with it. She changed a couple of times in the afternoon but not all the time.

"We had been striking a lot to start this season and when we weren't, we were getting frustrated. But if we would have shot in the morning what we did in the afternoon, we would have been second. I still feel good about the season. I know that (Strikefest) is a big tournament but I'd rather win state."

Also on that same Saturday, the Porters JV team traveled to the Streamwood Invite, which was a varsity tournament. Lockport won the 24-team tourney with a total of 5,043. Resurrection (4,991) was second and Hersey (4,935) placed third.

Lockport cruised in a pair of SWSC matchups last week. The first one was a 1,859-1,135 win over Bolingbrook on Tuesday, Dec. 13 at Strike N' Spare II. Matiasek (211, 243) with a 454, and Kontos (244-201) with a 445, led the way.

The next day, Wednesday, Dec. 14, the Porters defeated Bradley-Bourbonnais 1,975-1,562 at Brookmont Lanes in Kankakee. LiCausi (222-227) with a 449, and Lave (206-198) with a 404 led the way.

For years the Porters have hosted their own invite and did so again this season. That was the 24th annual Dane Walker Bowling Invitational Tournament on Saturday, Dec. 17 at Strike N' Spare II in Lockport.

There Lockport pulled away starting in the fourth game to once again capture the championship with a pin-fall total of 5,855. Joliet West (5,765) was second and Andrew (5,557) placed third out of 15 varsity teams at the tourney.

Leading Joliet West by 43 pins at the midday break, the Porters came out with a 1,085 in the fourth game. Even though the Tigers outscored Lockport by 84 pins in the last two games, they still fell short by 90 pins.

"I told them it's our tournament and I know things aren't going the way we wanted," Siezega said of what she told the team at the break. "Then they came out like gangbusters.

"I jokingly told them that from now on they should eat lunch before breakfast."

For the second straight season, Matiasek won the individual title. She had a 1,262 to edge out LiCausi (1,261) by a single pin. Andrew senior Mary Graves (1,259) was a close third, and junior Ella Steinke (1,243) from Joliet West placed fourth.

"Paige has really stepped up lately," Siezega said of Matiasek, who bowled a 1,322 series last year to beat Chavez by 79 pins. "She's worked really hard to regain her top level and win with the top three girls only being three pins apart."

Also scoring well for Lockport were Kontos (9th, 1,181) and Lave (14th, 1,084).

The Porters were originally supposed to bowl against Harlem on Thursday, Dec. 22 at Forest Hill Lanes in Loves Park in a dual meet between the two top teams in the state. But it had to be canceled with semester finals that day.

Harlem has the most state championships in the sport with seven, while the Porters have six. But Lockport has won the past two official ones, in 2020 and again this past February. There was no state series in 2021 because of COVID.

But in an unofficial State Tournament, which was held on Sunday, Feb. 28, 2021, at Forest Hills Lanes (the Huskies' home lanes) the Porters won the title 5,963-5,910 over Harlem.

While Lockport is looking toward the second half of the season, it will be glad to have a break for the Holidays. The next competition is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 28. That is the Oswego East Tournament, which will actually take place at Landmark Lanes in Peoria.

"Yes, a break is good," Siezega said. "There have been a lot of sicknesses and with that and exams, I think we need a break."

The Porters will open up postseason play in the Andrew Regional, on Saturday, Feb. 4 at the Thunder Bowl in Mokena. The sectional is slated for Saturday, Feb. 11, and will be hosted by Oswego East at Parkside Lanes in Aurora. The State Finals are on Friday and Saturday, February 17-18, at The Cherry Bowl in Rockford.

Only one team has ever three-peated as state champions. That was Harlem when the Huskies won their first three titles between 2000-02. They won back-to-back championships in 2017 and 18 and have placed second in the last three held state tournaments (2019, 2020, 2022).

With the unofficial state championship two seasons ago, the Porters can sort of claim they have already matched that. But they hope to three-peat for real this coming February.

"The season is going fast but this team is ready and I'm ready," Siezega said. "Just get us to that point and to state."