

By Randy Whalen

Madi Lave finished her final-ever home bowling game for Lockport Township in style.

With a 300.

Lave rolled the perfect game, her second ever, in the last game to cap off her home high school career. That helped the Porters topple Minooka 2,941-2,836 in a three-game dual meet on Tuesday, Jan. 31 at Strike 'N Spare II in Lockport.

It was the final dual meet of the season and the last home competition for the Porters, who finished undefeated (11-0) in dual meets this season.

"To bowl a 300 in my last game is crazy," Lave said. "I was definitely scared. I couldn't feel my arms. I had one other one, in a Monday night league last April. But this one came out of nowhere.

"I had a 179 and a 168 in the two games before that so I wasn't doing as well. When I did it, it was an 'Oh My God' moment! I used my Reality Check ball the whole time. On my last ball, I got around on it a little too much and thought I hooked it, but it held in."

Lockport girls bowling coach, Lynda Siezega was extremely happy for Lave.

"That was awesome, it brought tears to my eyes," Siezega said. "For her to do that in the last home meet of her senior season is pretty special. I know she said that she couldn't feel her arms, but she looked calm, cool, and collected out there. She certainly kept her cool."

That's what the Porters have been doing all season. Especially their seniors. It's shown in the results. As they have had perhaps the most outstanding season in a long line of girls' bowling success.

"It's really crazy," Lave said of the season and the fact that it's winding down. "I'm sad that high school is coming to an end but I've had the best experience and I will never forget it."

Neither will the other four seniors. They are Cece Gilbert, Cassie Kontos, Morgan LiCausi, and Abby Miller.

LiCausi was nursing a sore left shoulder and didn't bowl against Minooka. LiCausi, who signed her letter of intent on Wednesday, Feb. 1, to attend Stephen F Austin University to continue her bowling career, also only bowled in the morning in the final regular season tournament at Dixon.

"I strained a muscle in my left shoulder," said LiCausi, who is a lefty. "So I've rested it and it will be OK.

"This season just shows that we are good and it makes me so happy, especially my senior year. We just have to keep working together to do great things. It's crazy that it's winding down. But we've got to grind it out and be mentally prepared."

What's it going to take for the Porters to prevail again at the state meet this season and three-peat as Illinois High School Association State Champions?

"That's four-peat," Gilbert said as the Porters won the unofficial state championship tournament in the COVID season of 2021. "I'm just really happy to be part of the state team this year. We just have to keep the morale up and cheer for each other. We've worked on our spares and that's helped.

"Plus, we just all know each other personally and that's lifted our spirits up."

Kontos, who had games of 157, 207, and 214 for a 578 series against Minooka, agreed.

"I feel like it's our teamwork and how well we work together," she said of the success. "Cheering a lot is also a big thing. It just helps us do well and we cheer on ourselves. We have a lot better communication. We are always talking about what ball to use and everything."

Miller echoed the communication theme.

"This season has been the best," Miller said. "We've all been so close and we work together as a team. Communication is our biggest asset. We just help each other to push through. We are going to have to push through at state if we are going to go back-to-back-to-back."

Siezega is so happy about the senior's success.

"The seniors have put in a lot of work," she said. "I didn't know how competitive we'd be this season. But they surprised me and we've really been a striking team."

Including the SouthWest Suburban Conference Tournament, Lockport was in nine regular-season tournaments this season. The Porters won eight of them, with the Plainfield North Strikefest on Saturday, Dec. 10 at Town & Country Lanes in Joliet, being the only one they didn't. Lockport placed fifth out of 44 teams there and was only 36 pins out of fourth.

Starting with their own invite, on Saturday, Dec. 17, the Porters captured first in the final six regular-season tournaments.

Leading Joliet West by 43 pins at the midday break on Dec. 17, the Porters came out with 1,085 in the fourth game and won with a pin-fall total of 5,855. Even though the Tigers outscored Lockport by 84 pins in the last two games, they still fell short by 90 pins.

For the second straight season, junior Paige Matiasek won the individual title. She had a 1,262 to edge out LiCausi (1,261) by a single pin.

On Wednesday, Dec. 28, Lockport won the Oswego East Invite, which was held at Landmark Lanes in Peoria. The Porters scored a total of 6,096. Matiasek placed second scoring a total of 1,323, while LiCausi was fourth, scoring a total of 1,282.

The new calendar year brought the normal Saturday, tournament schedule. On Jan. 7, Lockport won the Prospect Invite, which was held at Bowlero Bowl in Mount Prospect, with a 6,193 total for the six-game series. LiCausi took first place, shooting 1,435, and had the high game of the day, a 284. Matiasek took second place with a 1,309 total.

After celebrating their five seniors with a 1,909-1,496 over Sandburg in an SWSC dual meet on Thursday, Jan. 12 at Strike 'N Spare II, the Porters resumed tourney play. On Saturday, Jan. 14, they bowled in the 31st Annual Fred Green Classic, hosted by Fenton, at Wood Dale Bowl in Wood Dale. There Lockport took first place shooting a 5,725 total. LiCausi placed third individually with a total of 1,239. Junior Kadie Kontos placed eighth individually, with a total of 1,142.

Next up on the tournament schedule was the SWSC one on Saturday, Jan. 21, which was hosted by Bradley-Bourboinnais at the Brookmont Bowling Center in Kankakee. There, both the varsity and JV won the conference title. It was the seventh straight SWSC title for the varsity and 14th since the league formed in the 2005-06 season.

The varsity won with a total of 6,012 and had four All-Conference bowlers. Matiasek won the individual title, with a total of 1,350. Cassie Kontos (5th, 1,227), LiCausi (6th, 1,203), and Lave (10th, 1,139) were also in the Top 10.

On, Jan. 28, the final regular season tournament took place. That was the Dixon Invite at Plum Hollow Family Center in Dixon. There the Porters captured the title with a total of 6,031. Lave finished second individually, shooting a 1,287 and Matiasek was right behind in third with a 1,246.

The Minooka dual meet was the last one of the season. The state tournament started the following weekend and Lockport was in the Andrew Regional. Due to a conflict with the scheduling, that was held on Friday, Feb. 3 at the Thunder Bowl in Mokena.

Once again the Porters were dominant. They finished in first place with a total of 6,104. LiCausi returned from resting her shoulder and placed first with a total score of 1,305, which included a high of 243 in the fourth game. Her score was 20 pins better than Andrew junior Jana Mihalovich (1,285).

"It does feel good," LiCausi said of winning the individual title at the regional. "It's always an accomplishment and it shows that hard work pays off.

Miller (1,214, high of 231 in Game No. 2), and Matiasek (1,170, high of 243 in Game No. 1) placed fourth and fifth respectively. Lave (1,036, high of 245 in Game No. 4) finished 12th overall and didn't bowl the final game. Her 207 average would have placed her fourth. Cassie Kontos (987, high of 224 in Game No. 3) also only rolled five games and averaged 197.4, which would have placed her fifth.

Junior Lauren Lane (224) and Kadie Kontos (168) bowled the sixth game and freshman Brooke Stroud was on the active roster and didn't bowl for the Porters.

How dominant was Lockport in capturing its ninth straight regional, which accounts for every season since 2014 since there has been an IHSA regional? The Porters beat host Andrew (5,758) by 346 pins. The other two sectional qualifying teams, Lincoln-Way East (5,090) and Oak Forest (4,937) finished over 1,000 pins out of first.

Tinley Park (4,709), Thornton Fractional South (4,220), Thornridge (4,191), Hillcrest (4,176), Bremen (4,022), Rich Township (3,584), Crete-Monee (3,573), and Thornton Fractional North (3,497) rounded out the 12 teams that bowled all six games at the regional.

The Porters jumped out to a 125-pin lead with a 1,085 in the opener. They followed that with 1,062 and a 1,009 for a 3,156-morning session. That put them up by 319 pins over Andrew. Lockport's fourth game was 1,075 before finishing with a 941 and a 932.

"With the tournament switching to Friday it gives us an extra day of rest," Siezega said. "Our first four games were great and then we weren't able to make adjustments in the last two. Going down the hill a little bit is OK, but we have to figure out how to not fall down the top of the mountain and reap the rewards.

"Hopefully Morgan is back at full strength. She's put in a lot of work."

LiCausi believes she's all the way back and is looking forward to continuing the Porters state run, starting this week at the Oswego East Sectional on Saturday, Feb. 11 at Parkside Lanes in Aurora. Lockport will look for its 10th straight sectional championship.

"I'm excited about the sectional," LiCausi said. "It's going to be more competitive but I think we have a great chance to win again. We just have to keep up the communication."