

By Randy Whalen

Jenny Krumlinde felt every emotion imaginable.

But in the end, she felt a lot of Porter pride.

That's because there was another trophy for her Lockport Township cheer team.

All season long, the Porters were focused on winning their third straight state championship. But in a world of one performance results any little mistake is costly or a team is just better that day.

Thus, Lockport took third in the Illinois High School Association Large Team Division State Finals on Saturday, February 4, at Grossinger Motors Arena in Bloomington.

But even more than the sting of not getting first, there was a realization that the competitive part of the cheer season was over.

"I never wanted this season to end," Krumlinde said. "I have never coached a more hardworking, driven, amazing team in my life. I didn't have to tell them to do extra reps, they just did them because they wanted to be the best. They crack me up every single day.

"Frankly, I wasn't sure how I would react if we didn't win. My standards are high, I am very competitive and the pressure was on. I replayed a million scenarios in my head of things I could have done better or changed and maybe the outcome would be different. These kids acted better in defeat than I ever could, which is a true testament to the values of our program."

At the State Finals, there is a preliminary round and the top 10 teams make it to the final day. This season, the preliminary round was on Friday, Feb. 3. There the Porters placed third with a score of 93.73 to advance to the final day for the 17th time out of their 18 state appearances. The first-day scores do not carry over as each performance is independent of the other.

The IHSA Cheer Finals have been in existence for 18 years. The Porters joined Conant, Lemont, Oak Forest, and Sandburg as the only teams to make it to state every season. Only Lemont, which has made the Top 10 every season, has more final-day appearances. Including this season, Lockport and Sandburg are both at 17. The only season the Porters missed the final day was in 2014, when they placed 11th in the preliminary, just .22 hundredth of a point out of 10th.

This year's final-day standings showed what sort of competition the Porters faced all season and that the Southland and especially the SouthWest Suburban Conference, are the best in the state.

Lincoln-Way East won the Large School title with a score of 98.13. It was only the third time that a team has registered a score of 98 in the State Finals. The others were both in 2021, where the results were done in a virtual competition. There the Porters captured first in the Co-Ed Division with a score of 98.20, while Lincoln-Way East won the Large School competition with a 98.73.

This season's title was also the seventh in the past 10 years for the Griffins, who have made 14 Top 10 appearances in their 17 qualifying seasons.

Lincoln-Way West (95.43) placed second, bringing home its first-ever trophy in the sport. Lockport (94.63) edged Sandburg (94.37) for third and Lincoln-Way Central (91.98) placed fifth, meaning that the SWSC completed the Top Five teams.

Edwardsville (91.73), Stevenson (91.63), Dundee-Crown (90.70), Jacobs (89.13), and Schaumburg (86.87), completed the Top 10 teams.

The Southland dominated the competition again. In addition to the SWSC teams, Oak Forest (97.67) won the Medium Team Division while Lemont (95.03) was second and Providence (90.70) placed sixth. In the Co-Ed Division, Buffalo Grove (94.57) won its fourth state title. SWSC team Homewood-Flossmoor (90.97) placed eighth.

"Congratulations to all of the teams that got to compete at State," Krumlinde said. "Truly incredible talent."

The top three placing schools get trophies. It was the school-record 12th overall trophy in a sport for Lockport. The Porters now have four third-place finishes (2009 - Large, 2018 - Co-Ed, 2020 - Co-Ed, 2023 - Large), four seconds (2006, 2010, 2012, and 2015 - all Large), and four firsts (2007, & 2008 - Large, 2021 - Co-Ed, and 2022 - Large).

Lockport also won a state title in 1986 via the Illinois Cheerleading Coaches Association, which was the official one at that time.

"We had a stunt fall in the first part of our routine," Krumlinde said of the Porter's final performance. But it was a testament to this group to still go get this. Our degree of difficulty was still high. So that and the fact that we went clean the rest of the way, helped us to get third place.

"Although the weekend was not our best, I wouldn't trade it for any first-place trophy. Seeing the kids be grateful to even walk the podium, their posts and texts thanking our program for the best year or four

years of their lives, the friendships that were made and the bond they share mean so much more to me. Yes, everyone wants to win but the life lessons we hope to teach are even more important and I am thankful for such respectful athletes and am proud we got to instill that in them."

There are a dozen seniors on the team. Those are, Alivia Czaplicki, Nya Ditter, Ava Judge, Grace Kelly, Maya Kendzior, Amber LaMorte, Jake McEntee, Megan Mecher, Isabelle Purpura, Madison Seymour, Jessica Vanerka, and Lexi Wrona.

The eight juniors are Alyssa Connell, Nina Fiorillo, Grace Gad, Autumn Haehnlein, Ally Namikas, Corinne Nowak, Bianca Richie, and Emme Sweis. There are three sophomores, Justyn Boyce, Mckena Miglorini, and Emily O'Day, along with a pair of freshmen, Maggie Calabrese and Carly Fiorillo. The senior manager is Audrey Chisholm.

The seniors who were on the team for all four years matched the 2006-09 squads with four straight trophies. The experience to be in a large crowd arena for the second straight season after the 2021 state finals were done by a video, was irreplaceable.

"Oh my God, it was packed," Wrona said of the crowd at Grossinger Motors Arena. "It's a great experience.

"It's something that I can say as a senior, I couldn't ask for a better experience. I know I have a home here at Lockport and this is where I want to be. I walked across the podium at state all four years here."

Seymour agreed 100 percent.

"We were all trying for a three-peat," Seymour said. "But nothing can compare to the feeling of a team supporting you. To walk across the podium all four years is something. That, and the bonds you make all four years with great friends is a great feeling."

The team will still cheer at the Porter home basketball games, so they aren't quite done yet.

But the cheer competitions are what the teams love most during the season. In its five regular season tournaments, Lockport won four and was second in the other. The Porters also won the Large School SWSC title on Jan. 20 at Lincoln-Way Central, beating out all three Lincoln-Way schools and Sandburg, for the second straight season.

The top five Large Division teams that advanced to state out of the Bradley-Bourbonnais Sectional, which was held on Saturday, Jan. 28, were Lockport (97.37), Lincoln-Way East (97.33), Lincoln-Way Central

(96.83), Andrew (90.33), and Downers Grove North (88.23). So the Porters place first six times, second once, and third once in eight competitions against the best teams in the state this season.

"We had one of the most epic routines in IHSA history and I will forever be proud of my kids," Krumlinde said. "My seniors that have been on varsity since they were freshmen got to walk the podium all four years of high school. We brought home our 12th State trophy in 18 possible years. That is legendary!"

"We were the SWSC Champions, Sectional Champions, and IHSA Large School Varsity third place. You win some, you lose some. But you live, you live to fight another day. We will be back."