

# Crofton, Cedar Catholic Set For C2 Tournament

## Warriors Head To State For First Time Since '28

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK

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CROFTON, Neb. — With five state titles in the past nine years, the Crofton girls' basketball team is a household name in the state of Nebraska.

Coach Todd Strom wants to put the boys' basketball team on the map as well.

The Crofton boys will make their first state tournament appearance since 1928 when they take the court against top-seeded Sutton on Thursday at 9 a.m., the opener of the Nebraska State Class C2 Boys' Basketball Tournament.

The last times Crofton went to state, any team that could make it to Lincoln, Neb., and back was invited to play, making the Warriors' trip this season the first time the team has qualified for the event. Since beating Hartington Cedar Catholic on Feb. 25 to qualify for state, the team has been inundated with congratulatory comments.

"We've had several comments, emails, texts from the community, from alumni, from other teams," Strom said. "They're happy to see the team reach this milestone."

Crofton had been 7-13 going into its regular season finale, but a 60-56 victory over Boone Central-Newman Grove, 21-6 and qualified in Class C1, showed the Warriors they could compete in the post-season.

"I think the Boone Central win helped us gain a lot of confidence," Strom said. "It made our team realize that a sub-district championship, that a district championship was possible, and that state was only three games away."

Crofton edged Boyd County (32-26) and Creighton (46-38) to win the sub-district title, then beat out Hartington Cedar Catholic 51-50 in the district final for the state berth. Both Cedar Catholic (20-7) and Creighton (17-6) had

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## Commentary: What Makes NE Nebraska Girls' Basketball So Dominating?

BY JEREMY HOECK

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There is a certain visual that has become a regular occurrence around the first weekend in March.



Jeremy  
**HOECK**

A line of vehicles and school buses driving south on Highway 81, on their way to the Nebraska State Girls Basketball Tournament in Lincoln.

Another regular? Northeast Nebraska girls' basketball teams, namely those in Crofton to the west of Highway 81 and Wynot to the east, coming home with championship hardware.

You don't have to venture very far south from Yankton to find some hoops

powerhouses. Crofton has won two straight Class C2 state titles (and five in the past nine years), while Wynot has won three consecutive D2 crowns.

As I covered both title games in Lincoln on Saturday, I found myself wondering, 'What makes northeast Nebraska girls' basketball so good?'

"I think it's the small school atmosphere," Crofton senior Tiffany Tramp said. "We all know each other and we're all competitive; we want to beat the other schools."

"Or maybe there's something in the water," she added with a smile.

Part of it could be genetics, sure, but competition level and off-season preparation were the two key areas pinpointed by the coaches and players I talked to over the weekend.

First, a look at the teams in Crofton's and Wynot's conferences is like looking at a mini state tournament bracket.

The Lewis & Clark Conference, of which Wynot is a member in the Clark Division, featured state qualifiers Emerson-Hubbard, Homer, Osmond and the Lady Blue Devils.

In the Mid-State Conference, which Crofton joined this season, includes state tournament qualifiers Guardian Angels Central Catholic, Norfolk Catholic, Pierce and the Lady Warriors.

Out of those two leagues came three state champions — Pierce, located northwest of Norfolk, won the Class C1 title, followed by Crofton and Wynot. And for good measure, Pender, located southwest of South Sioux City, was the Class D1 champion.

"It's pretty incredible to have that many good people in one area," Wynot coach Steve Wieseler said. "To play each other that much, you can't replace that competition."

"We played one of our toughest schedules this year, but you could tell it prepares you for something like that."

Testing yourself against the best possible competition no doubt gears you up for a deep post-season run, as Wynot can attest to. The Lady Blue Devils played in the Crofton Holiday Tournament last December and beat O'Neill St. Mary's (which finished 22-2 in D1) and lost to Crofton.

Such a schedule fuels the competitive fire, according to Wynot junior Maggie Schulte.

"Everyone wants it; we all want to be the best," she said after Saturday's championship win at the Devaney Center. "It's great competition, every game."

Crofton, meanwhile, also played a tough schedule and came away unbeaten — no easy task given the conference games we already listed.

"We played 27 games (in the regular season) this year and about 10-12 of them were against teams that are here," head coach Aaron Losing said. "Looking back at the season, it really is amazing that we could go undefeated with that schedule."

Of course, to gear up for potentially 30 tough games during the season, teams like Crofton and Wynot have to prepare themselves in the summer. Those are the key months.

In Crofton, for example, the players — many of whom also train for cross country and volleyball — spend three to four days a week working out in the weight room and participating in shoot-arounds, Tramp said. The Lady Warriors also attend between 5-6 team camps, she said. "It's a lot of basketball," Tramp said.

Those players who choose to can also participate in AAU basketball during the summer. Beyond simply serving as a key step in the college recruiting process, AAU ball ensures kids see top-level competition all summer.

Wynot's Schulte has experienced that firsthand. She played AAU ball with the NEN Xtreme

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## coming up

### State Basketball Previews

**Wednesday:** Neb. Class D2 Boys (Wausa, Wynot)

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## Trojans Make Fifth Straight Trip

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK

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HARTINGTON, Neb. — After graduating four starters from a team that finished third in the state in 2011-12, the Hartington Cedar Catholic Trojans had a little work to do if they expected to make a fifth consecutive state tournament appearance.

Fourteen games and an 8-6 record in, it looked like that fifth straight trip might be out of reach, but a late-season surge has the Trojans back in Lincoln.

Cedar Catholic (20-7) will take on North Platte St. Patrick's (22-3) on Thursday at 10:45 a.m. at Lincoln High for the opening round of the Nebraska State Class C2 Boys' Basketball Tournament. It is a rematch of last year's third place game, a contest the Trojans won 69-51.

After a 6-1 start, Cedar Catholic lost five of

seven to drop to 8-6 on Jan. 18.

"I felt that we had played some good teams, but I thought we weren't gelling the way we should have," said Cedar Catholic head coach Matt Steffen. "After we lost to Wayne (on Jan. 18), we started to gel. Down the stretch, we grinded it out."

The Trojans ran off 12 straight victories, with their overtime victory over Wakefield in the sub-district final giving Steffen his 100th career coaching victory. Crofton upended the Trojans in the district final, but Cedar Catholic's late run proved to be enough to get the team to state on a wild card.

"We got a second chance," Steffen said.

"Hopefully we can make the most of it." Sophomore James Kaiser (3.9 rpg, 61 assists, 61 steals), who was an all-tournament se-

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# Hochstein Headed To Wayne State

BY JEREMY HOECK

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HARTINGTON, Neb. — Adam Hochstein has a knack for clocking good times in races that require him to run for a while, but it when came time for him to choose a college, he chose to stay near his starting line.

Hochstein, a senior at Hartington High School, signed Monday morning to compete in track and field for NCAA Division II Wayne State College — a short 35-mile trek from his home.

"From the tours and everything, I just really liked the atmosphere in Wayne, so I thought 'Why not?'" Hochstein said Monday afternoon. He said he also had offers from Mount Marty and Briar Cliff.

The defending Class D runner-up in the 1,600-meter run at the Nebraska State Meet, Hochstein owns the school record in the event which he has qualified three times for state.

"He does have a lot of untapped potential, even for being so successful in high school," Wayne State coach Marlon Brink said Monday. "We always tell kids as they get older and more mature, they should continue to get faster as an athlete."

"Hopefully we can do that for him."

Having helped the Wildcats finish 11th as a team at last year's state meet, Hochstein deserves a chance to take himself to the next level after high school, according to Hartington track coach Blair Kalin.

"It was important that he gets that opportunity, he's been very good for us throughout his career," Kalin said. "He's been a huge part of our program, so it's nice to see he gets that chance."

A three-time state qualifier in the 1600, Hochstein has also proven his worth in other events. Last year he qualified in the 400-meter dash, and ran a leg in Hartington's 1,600-meter and



Hochstein

3,200-meter relays in Omaha, Neb. — the Wildcats took sixth place in the 3200.

As a sophomore in 2011, Hochstein qualified in the 800, finished sixth in the 1600, and also

earned third place in the 1600 as a freshman in 2010.

"I probably could run the 2-mile, but I just never really wanted to," Hochstein said. "I'm OK at the sprints, it's just not my forte."

Versatility is an important quality to have for a successful program, not to mention a college recruit, Kalin said.

"He could probably compete in some of the jumping events and could probably run sprints, but his biggest strength is the middle distances," Kalin said. "He's good enough where he could compete and probably win some of the field events."

Can Hochstein compete at the D-II level?

"I think I can compete with them," he said. He also said his senior year goals include breaking the Class D mile record and winning a state title in the event.

Hochstein joins Hartington classmate Michaela Dendinger on the 2013 Wayne State recruiting list, a trend Brink said he would like to continue. Of the five athletes Wayne State is bringing to Alabama for the D2 indoor nationals, two are from Albion, and one each from Ewing, Wayne and Pierce.

"It's nice whenever we can get kids from northeast Nebraska, and even in South Dakota," Brink said. "It just give better support system, with more family and friends at their meets, and the convenience of being able to get home within a few minutes."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoeck](https://twitter.com/jhoeck)



P&D FILE PHOTO

Hartington's Adam Hochstein competes in the Class D boys' 1600-meter run at the 2012 Nebraska State Track and Field Championships this past May in Omaha, Neb. Hochstein will attend Wayne State College and compete for the Wildcats.

# Minn. Budget Chief Faces Backlash On Vikings Bill

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota's budget chief said Monday he will likely wait until summer before deciding whether to activate so-called blink-on revenue options for the new Vikings football stadium.

Minnesota Management and Budget Commissioner Jim Schowalter faced sharp questions from lawmakers, who said they are worried that general tax dollars will be needed to compensate for poor results from expanded gambling. Finance officials said last week that the electronic pull-tabs are producing only a tiny fraction of anticipated revenue to pay off future state debt on the stadium.

Last year's stadium law gives Schowalter power to initiate a sport-

themed lottery game and impose a luxury suite tax to make up for shortages in e-pull tab revenue. Tax dollars going toward the stadium are already off by millions and the amount being generated per gambling site averages about half what forecasters projected.

Appearing before the House Ways and Means Committee, Schowalter said officials are concerned by the lagging gambling proceeds and are looking for ways to aid the expansion of the new games. But he urged patience and said he believes "estimates over time still balance out."

Bonds for the stadium won't be sold until August and major construction is even further away. It is due to open in time for the 2016 season.

If the gambling money and the backup sources fall short of the roughly \$30 million a year in debt payments, lawmakers could have to dip into its general treasury to avoid an embarrassing default. That prospect angered some opponents of the stadium bill, including Republican Rep. Mary Liz Holberg of Lakeville.

She said it's wrong to put the stadium in competition with bread-and-butter programs. She said more than \$13 million shortfall in the stadium reserve account was covered by money that otherwise would have gone to repay state IOUs to schools.

"Already who's paying?" Holberg said. "The kids are paying for the Vikings stadium."

Schowalter didn't contest her portrayal and a spokesman for him didn't immediately return a message. By law, schools are first in line for excess tax collections reflected in the twice-yearly economic forecasts. The one released last week showed a \$295 million balance for the budget that closes June 30, a figure arrived at after the stadium tax shortage is taken into account.

Others who voted against the bill basked in the chance to reflect on their prior warnings of shaky stadium financing.

"I hope all of you who voted for the Vikings bill are feeling appropriately chagrined," said Rep. Phyllis Kahn, DFL-Minneapolis.

# Suhr Relishes Breaking Indoor Pole Vault Mark

(AP) — Jenn Suhr wanted to spend their short vacation time in Florida riding roller-coasters at Disney World, while her husband preferred to visit some water parks.

To settle the matter, the couple went with this: Whoever just broke the world indoor pole vaulting record got to pick.

"I guess Disney wins," Suhr's husband and coach Rick Suhr said in a phone interview Monday. "That jump she made, wow, it was incredible."

Jenn Suhr topped the mark of Yelena Isinbayeva last weekend at the U.S. indoor championships when she cleared 16 feet, 5 1/2 inches. No one other than the Russian great has held that indoor mark in nine years.

Well, until now.

For so long, Isinbayeva has been an overwhelming presence in women's pole vaulting, almost unbeatable and setting world records that were virtually untouchable.

And then along came Suhr, who cracked Isinbayeva's aura of invincibility when she upset Isinbayeva for gold at the 2012 London Games.

Now Suhr has her world indoor record as well. Isinbayeva had the mark up to 16-5 1/4 with a jump last year.

"No one really ever thought it would ever be broken by someone else," said the 31-year-old Suhr, who's from Churchville, N.Y. "That's what is so shocking about it and exciting about it."

Knocking Isinbayeva's name from the top spot in the record book was viewed as the equivalent of beating Usain Bolt's time of 9.58 seconds in the 100 or someone surpassing Sergei Bubka's vault of 20 feet 1 3/4 inches.

"There were people saying that Yelena's record could be up there for 30 years," her husband said. "That's how monumental of record it was."

Not bad for a converted bas-

ketball star who trains in a facility custom-built by her husband in western New York. Rick Suhr has connected two steel Quonset huts, one with a long, narrow tunnel measuring 100 feet for the run-up. That feeds into the bigger room which has a ceiling with enough clearance for any vault — or so they once thought.

The way she's leaping lately, he may have to do some remodeling.

This record could be the sign of things to come, especially if she can stay healthy.

Jenn Suhr has recently been plagued by one nagging ailment after another, dealing with an Achilles injury, a gluten allergy that has caused sometime-debilitating sickness and lower back problems.

"She's been jumping at only about 75 percent for two years straight," her husband said. "Somehow, she's still been ranked No. 1 in the world. If I can if I keep her healthy, I know what

Jenn can jump high. I don't think she's been fully healthy since 2009."

This season got off to a tough start, too.

In January, she was vaulting in their unique facility when she drifted left, missed the pad and struck her left hip on a steel support beam.

She kept on jumping.

Two days later at a meet, her hip began really hurting. So much so that she backed off training and only did shorter vaults to let her hip mend.

A week before nationals, she competed at a small meet in Indiana, just to get her timing down. In that meet, she put it all together — a perfect approach and flawless form over the bar.

"We thought, 'If I did that at nationals, the world record could be in danger,'" she said.

Around that time, Rick Suhr had a heart-to-heart discussion with his wife. He had a similar one with her in London, telling

her that nobody was unbeatable and she could knock off Isinbayeva.

She went out and did just that.

This time, the message wasn't so pleasant.

After a so-so training session, he tersely told her that she just wasn't jumping "anywhere near her potential" and that she could soar so much higher if she just believed in herself.

Sure, she was upset. But she knew he might be on to something.

Just before attempting the world record at nationals last Saturday, Jenn Suhr's mind began gravitating toward some negative thoughts: This is too high. This can't be cleared.

As quickly as those thoughts arrived, she cast them aside. She flew down the runway and glided over the bar for the world mark, a big weight lifted off of her as she fell back into the landing pad.