



St. Charles dominated state in magical 1998-99

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Many Illinois high schools have never experienced the joy of winning a state championship.

A little more than 10 years ago, St. Charles High School experienced the joy of winning a state championship - seven times during the same season.

It all happened during the 1998-99 school year when the Saints captured state titles in boys golf, girls cross country, girls swimming, drill team, boys swimming, girls soccer and baseball.

You could say it was a magical and magnificent time for Saints student-athletes, coaches, faculty members and faithful followers.

I'd call it domination. From late-August to mid-June, St. Charles High School was the center of the Illinois prep sporting scene.

Let's take a look back at the glory year.

After capturing the Upstate Eight Conference, regional and sectional crowns, the Saints boys golfers headed to Bloomington in mid-October with one goal in mind - knocking off defending Class AA state champion New Trier.

Having recorded six top-5 finishes from 1988-97, including its state title run of 1991, St. Charles was a fixture on the high school golf landscape.

"I was lucky enough to inherit a great program," said former Saints coach Rob Prentiss, who compiled an amazing 141-21 dual-meet record in 12 years at the helm.

"If we weren't in the state finals, it was big news. You could almost put it (state tournament) on the schedule as part of our regular season."

Led by seniors Jeff Augustine (77), Scott Springer (79), Marques Morel (82) and Scott Parsons (82), St. Charles enjoyed a 4-shot advantage over New Trier after the first day of play.

On day two, conditions were better suited for football, but the Saints overcame the elements to pull away from the Trevians, 648-665.

"It was the first year the tournament was held at The Den and conditions were just brutal that second day," said Prentiss, now the boys golf coach at St. Charles North.

"There were sustained winds of 30-35 mph and everyone had a hard time because it was also cold. But our guys hung in there mentally and stuck with it."

It was just a harbinger of things to come.

"Since our title was the first one won, we had no way of knowing what was to come," Prentiss said.

Three weeks later, the Saints' girls cross country team repeated as Class AA state champion, scoring an 83-111 triumph over second-place Naperville North at Detweiller Park in Peoria.

"The goal was to run our best race at the state meet," said former Saints coach Tom Roderick.

The Saints did just that, as senior Tera Moody (12th) and sophomores Carrie Phelps (22nd) and Christine Wampach

(23rd) earned all-state status as a result of their top-25 finishes. Denise Hefferin, who will guide St. Charles East to this weekend's state meet in Peoria as coach, placed 32nd as a junior in 1998, supported by Renee Kleckner (50th).

"It was a great time to be a Saint," said Roderick. "It was really exciting. Everybody was pulling for each other. After your team won a state title, the question going around school was 'who's going to be next?'"

"I spent a lot of time back then comparing notes with (girls swim coach) Jennifer Heyer. The cross country team trained in the pool two mornings a week - at the same time the swim team was in there."

Two weeks after the girls cross country title, Heyer's girls swim team earned the fifth of its six straight state championships - this time by a 189-141 margin over New Trier.

Kristen Brennan played a part in four event titles, posting individual wins in the 100- and 200-yard freestyle races and swimming legs on the victorious 200- and 400-free relay squads.

Sophomore Laura Lipskis captured the first of her two 500-freestyle state titles. She also won as a senior.

After a three-month break, the Saints pocketed their fourth state title of the season in February when the boys swim team edged Marmion, 124-116.

Seniors Steve North and Jacob Wasinger went 1-2 in the 100 fly, while a talented freshman trio of Jim Brennan, Casey Dauw and Andrew Hime added valuable points.

"We had some experience and some guys who were a little green in the gills," said Saints coach Joe Camel. "But everybody meshed well together."

"We weren't the favorites - I think Naperville Central was. But some things fell into place."

And it was becoming evident that winning state titles were reaching the contagious stage.

"It's hard to describe what that's like," Cable said.

Former coach Kari Batka's drill team added the school's fifth state title in March at the University of Illinois' Assembly Hall.

Although school officially came to an end in early June, the state titles kept coming.

During the first weekend of June, the girls soccer team earned the fourth of five consecutive state titles with a 3-0 victory over Lincoln-Way.

Led by Patrice Feulner, Sarah Lynch, Anne Poulin, Lexi Stormo and Julie Atkocaitis, the Saints outscored their three state tournament foes 11-0 en route to state title No. 6.

"The support the student body gave all the teams that year was what I remember most about 1998-99," said former St. Charles girls soccer coach Joe Moreau. "It definitely was incredible to be a part of so many winning teams."

Adding to the school's trophy case wasn't the only pressure the team faced.

"We entered the season with an 80-plus-game winning streak," Moreau said. "We had some sort of media at practice and games all the time. The streak ended at 88 games (still a state record, ending in a 2-1 loss to Fremd) and it almost felt like a big weight was lifted off the girls' shoulders."

One week later, the Saints' baseball team added the school's seventh state title of 1998-99 with a 12-3 victory over New Trier at Elfstrom Stadium in Geneva.

Seniors Jim Caine (12-0, 1.24 ERA, 12 HR), Justin Lata (10-4), Pat Durr, Brad Zoelle, juniors Kyle Robinson and Tyler Sheehan helped contribute for the Saints.

"The winning attitude was contagious and our guys picked up on it," said former baseball coach Len Asquini, whose team celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the championship with a reunion in June.

"I think 19 out of 22 guys showed up for the reunion."

Another amazing part of the 1998-99 season was that St. Charles nearly added a few more state titles - the girls golf team finished second in the state, the girls gymnasts placed fourth, the badminton team was ninth, the girls tennis squad was 10th and the football team went 11-1, advancing to the quarterfinals.

"Other programs were knocking at the door," said Asquini. "It was a very special time."

A time that may not be repeated any time soon.

"Anything is possible, but it's (winning seven state titles) highly unlikely," Asquini said.

"It's nice to be a part of a record like that," said Prentiss. "I treasure it."

- Next week: Former athletes from St. Charles fondly remember 1998-99.
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