

# 50 YEARS



# OF MEMORIES

Ten schools nestled along the shoreline of Lake Winnebago in East Central Wisconsin have provided countless experiences and memories for tens of thousands of high school athletes and the communities they represent.

Founded with seven original members in the fall of 1970, the Fox Valley Association (FVA) has remained a constant through the years with few membership changes and a continued excellence in athletics and academics.

Appleton East, Appleton West, Kaukauna, Kimberly, Menasha, Neenah and Oshkosh comprised the original membership. In 1972-73, Oshkosh North opened and Oshkosh was renamed Oshkosh West. Two Rivers was added in 1977-78 and spent two years as a league member before the conference reverted back to an eight-team league. Fond du Lac joined the conference in 1989-90 in all sports except football and then began playing football in the fall of 1993. The conference sat at nine teams for two years before Appleton North opened its doors in 1995-96 and gave the conference 10 teams. In 2014-15, Menasha left the conference and was replaced by Hortonville, keeping the conference as a 10-team league.

Over the past half-century, FVA schools have achieved plenty of success at the state level, combining to win 113 state titles in 18 different sports. With Kimberly's boys volleyball title this past fall, the conference has won at least one state title in 45 of its 50 seasons.

There have been countless moments, teams, athletes and coaches who have made the FVA one of the state's premier conferences over the past five decades. Here is a look back at some of the best.

The first dominant athlete in FVA history was Neenah's John Whitlinger, who went 109-0 and is still the only boys tennis player in state history to win four WIAA singles titles, accomplishing the feat from 1969-72. Whitlinger went on to win an NCAA singles championship and served as head coach at Stanford University.

## 1970's

One of the first team state champions in FVA history was the 1972 Appleton East boys cross team under longtime coach Joe Perez. The Patriots totaled just 33 points, which is still the best winning score of any team over the past 90 years.

Neenah and Kimberly controlled the FVA in boys basketball during the 1970's, winning the conference title every year. Neenah made nine trips to state during the decade under legendary coach Ron Einerson, who won 556 games in 37 seasons. The Rockets broke through with a state title in 1975 led by Wayne Kreklow, who starred at Drake University and was a member of the Boston Celtics' 1981 NBA championship team.

Girls sports expanded throughout the decade and Neenah was one of the first preeminent teams in basketball under coach Jean Kessler and in volleyball under coach Ken Boivin. The Rockets swept boys and girls basketball and girls volleyball state championships in 1978 and also had girls volleyball runner-up finishes in 1977, 1979 and 1980. Kathy Hagerstrom, who went on to a stellar basketball career at the University of Nebraska, and Laura Coenen, whose basketball number is retired at the University of Minnesota, were among the standouts in both sports.

Kaukauna had a dominant run in boys volleyball in the early years of the FVA, winning four state titles in the 1970's after two titles in the late 1960's. The Ghosts added two more titles in 1980 and 1982 before the sport was discontinued until 2000. Kaukauna won a ninth title in 2015.

The WIAA offered boys golf during the fall at the close of the decade and with few schools around the state competing, FVA schools

dominated the event. Four different FVA schools combined to win the last six state titles and the conference also had the last five state runners-up until the fall program was discontinued in 1985. Oshkosh West's Bob Schuhart was the only two-time individual state champion in conference history, winning titles in 1980 and 1981.

Girls golf also emerged at the turn of the decade and Appleton West was the team to beat. Under coach Mary Beth Nienhaus, the Terrors won four state titles in six years from 1981-86. Future LPGA professional and University of Texas standout Sue Ginter won the 1981 individual state title and Ellen Mielke won consecutive state titles in 1985-86.

## 1980's

Appleton West also had plenty of success in the pool under longtime coach Ed Zepka and swept every FVA boys swimming and diving title during the 1980's. Alan Hays is still the conference's only three-time state champion, winning the 500-yard freestyle from 1980-82.

In the early 1980's, Neenah posted an impressive streak in girls cross country, winning three straight state titles from 1982-84 sandwiched by runner-up finishes in 1981 and 1985. The Rockets' 37 points in 1982 is still the best score in state history and the titles remain the only won by an FVA school in the sport.

Boys soccer became an FVA sport in 1981 and Neenah dominated from the outset by winning the first 14 conference titles. Legendary coach Harry Kelderman guided the Rockets to 28 FVA titles in 36 seasons and a state-record 603 victories. His son, Kris, led Neenah to state championships on its home field in 1985 and 1986 and was the leading scorer for the University of Virginia's 1989 national title team before playing on the first two Major League Soccer championship teams for D.C. United.

Girls soccer started in 1986 and Neenah was also an immediate force, winning the first 16 FVA championships and a state title in 1990 under coach Ade Van Geffen.

Neenah also dominated the 1980's in girls tennis with seven straight FVA titles. John Whitlinger's twin nieces, Tami and Teri, both won four straight state individual titles.



Neenah's Teri Whitlinger (left) won four WIAA girls tennis doubles titles, including two with Kris Whitney (middle), while Tami Whitlinger (right) won four state singles titles.

Tami went 105-0 and won four singles titles, while Teri lost one career match and won four doubles titles. Like their uncle, both girls played at Stanford University. Tami reached at least the third round of every grand slam tournament in singles, including the fourth round of the 1991 French Open.

In girls volleyball, Appleton East won four conference titles in six years during the 1980's and captured a state championship with future U.S. Congressman Reid Ribble as head coach.

Appleton West won 14 conference baseball titles in a 17-year span from 1979-95 under legendary coach Bruce Erickson. Erickson, who also coached at Appleton North, has the best winning percentage of any coach in state history (.808) with a 500-119 record over 28 seasons. Ron Parker, who also was a successful boys basketball coach at Appleton East, guided the Terrors to back-to-back baseball titles in 1975 and 1976 before Erickson took over and won four more state titles. Appleton West later won its seventh state title under Gary Lemons in 2004.

best winning percentage of any coach in state history (.808) with a 500-119 record over 28 seasons. Ron Parker, who also was a successful boys basketball coach at Appleton East, guided the Terrors to back-to-back baseball titles in 1975 and 1976 before Erickson took over and won four more state titles. Appleton West later won its seventh state title under Gary Lemons in 2004.

## 1990's

Erickson's son, Matt, played at the University of Arkansas and appeared in four games with the Milwaukee Brewers. He also quarterbacked West to the conference's first state football title in 1992 under coach Paul Engen and now serves as the manager of the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers.

Another former FVA baseball player who attended Arkansas and played professionally was Menasha's Eric Hinske, who was the 2002 American League Rookie of the Year with the Toronto Blue Jays and played in three straight World Series with three different American League teams from 2007-09 during his 12-year career.

Hinske led Menasha to state in 1995 and the following fall, the Bluejays broke Neenah's sovereignty in boys soccer by winning the FVA title before earning a state runner-up trophy two years later in 1997.

Neenah has dominated the conference in boys tennis since its inception, winning 41 conference titles under 48-year coach Tom Berven. The Rockets were at their peak in the 1990's, winning five straight state titles from 1991-95. In 1993, Neenah achieved the only perfect score in the history of the WIAA tournament under its old format with its top two singles and doubles teams both playing each other in the state finals.

Kimberly had a memorable decade of basketball in the 1990's in Division 2, winning back-to-back boys state titles in 1994-95 and capturing girls state championships in 1996 and 1998.

While Kimberly won state titles, Fond du Lac had the most basketball success during the decade as the boys won eight of nine FVA titles from 1993-2001 and the girls also won three titles. Diener was the big name at the time as Dick coached throughout the decade and several Dieners were prominent athletes, excelling in more than basketball. Travis, who went on to a six-year NBA career after helping Marquette University to the 2003 Final Four, also was the leadoff hitter for Fond du Lac's state baseball championship team in 2000. The Cardinals prevailed behind an improbable performance from No. 3 pitcher Neil Fischer with only the second solo no-hitter in state championship game history. It was coach Marty Paulsen's lone state title in a 51-year career that is still active and saw him win his 600th game at the state tournament in 2019.

## State Championships Won as FVA Members

### Appleton East (11)

Baseball-Spring 1996D1  
Cross Country-Boys 1972L  
Golf-Boys 1985(fall)  
Golf-Girls 1983  
Hockey-Boys 2016\*  
Hockey-Girls 2007\*, 2019\*  
Softball D1-2000  
Track & Field-Girls 1990A  
Volleyball-Boys 1971  
Volleyball-Girls 1986A

### Appleton North (9)

Basketball-Girls 2017D1, 2018D1  
Golf-Boys 2000D1  
Hockey-Boys 2016\*  
Hockey-Girls 2007\*, 2019\*  
Soccer-Girls 2011D1  
Softball 2005D1  
Volleyball-Boys 2012

### Appleton West (19)

Baseball-Spring 1975, 1976A, 1982A, 1988D1, 1991D1, 1995D1, 2004  
Basketball-Boys 1970  
Football 1992D1  
Golf-Boys 1981(fall), 1983(fall), 1984(fall)  
Golf-Girls 1981, 1982, 1985, 1986  
Hockey-Boys 2016\*  
Hockey-Girls 2007\*, 2019\*

### Fond du Lac (5)

Baseball-Spring 2000D1  
Hockey-Boys 2007  
Hockey-Girls 2004\*, 2006\*  
Wrestling 1991D1

### Hortonville (1)

Hockey-Girls 2019\*

### Kaukauna (18)

Basketball-Boys 2016D2, 2018D2  
Hockey-Girls 2019\*  
Softball 2010D1, 2017D1  
Track & Field-Girls 2001D1  
Volleyball-Boys 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1982, 2015  
Volleyball-Girls 2010D1  
Wrestling 2014D1, 2015D1, 2016D1, 2017D1



## State Championships Won as FVA Members

### Kimberly (31)

Baseball-Spring 1989B, 2007D1, 2017D1  
Basketball-Boys 1994D2, 1995D2  
Basketball-Girls 1987A, 1989B, 1996D2, 1998D2  
Cross Country-Boys 2015D1  
Football 2007D2, 2008D2, 2013D2, 2014D1, 2015D1, 2016D1, 2017D1  
Hockey-Girls 2019\*  
Softball 1980A, 1981A, 1988B, 1989B, 1993D2, 2007D1, 2014D1  
Track & Field-Boys 2014D1, 2017D1, 2018D1, 2019D1  
Volleyball-Boys 2019  
Volleyball-Girls 1990D2

### Menasha (0)

### Neenah (27)

Baseball-Spring 1972  
Basketball-Boys 1975A, 1978A  
Basketball-Girls 1978A  
Cross Country-Boys 2001D1, 2018D1  
Cross Country-Girls 1981A, 1982A, 1983A  
Golf-Boys 1977(fall), 1982(fall)  
Hockey-Girls 2019\*  
Soccer-Boys 1985, 1986, 2007D1  
Soccer-Girls 1990  
Softball 1990A, 1995D1  
Tennis-Boys 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995D1  
Tennis-Girls 2015D1  
Track & Field-Boys 1971A  
Volleyball-Girls 1978A, 2016D1

### Oshkosh North (3)

Basketball-Boys 2018D1  
Football 2000D1  
Softball 2019D1

### Oshkosh West (5)

Basketball-Boys 2006D1, 2007D1  
Basketball-Girls 2003D1, 2004D1  
Golf-Boys 1980(fall)

(Note: list only includes state championships won since each school joined the FVA.)

\* - indicates co-op title with multiple schools

Another Diener made his mark on the golf course as Dallas Diener won the state title in 2000. However, Appleton North edged the Cardinals by one stroke for the school's first state team title in any sport and the only spring boys golf title in FVA history. Mick Gilbert, who won the 1984 individual state golf title playing for Appleton West, coached the Lightning.



Kaukauna's Brooke Novak set the WIAA state girls track and field meet record in the 1600-meter run in 2001.

## 2000's

In the fall of 2000, Oshkosh North won its first state title in school history with an undefeated football season under coach Steve Jorgensen, who would also achieve FVA prominence at Kimberly and Fond du Lac. The Spartans were led by future University of Wisconsin standout Darrin Charles, who is also the only FVA boys track and field athlete to win three straight state titles with a trio of high jump victories.

Kaukauna's Brooke Novak won three events at the 2001 girls track and field state meet and combined with Christy Cazzola to earn all of the Ghosts' 41 team points in capturing the state team title. Novak broke her own state meet record from the previous year that still stands in the 1600-meter run and had an illustrious career at the University of Tennessee. Cazzola also won a state cross country title in 2002 and proceeded to win 17 individual NCAA Division III national championships at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

Kimberly's Kelly Bogard was the conference's only two-time state girls cross country champion, winning titles in 2005 and 2007. She also was the only four-time FVA girls cross country champion from 2004-07.

One of only two times that two FVA teams met in a state championship game came in 2007 when Kimberly defeated Appleton North 3-1 in the softball final. It was the sixth of seven state softball titles for the Papermakers, who won the 2014 title in a 15-inning thriller over Westosha Central. In all, six different FVA schools have combined to win 14 state softball titles. The other all-FVA state final came in the 2013 Division 2 football championship game when Kimberly beat Oshkosh North 51-10.

Five times during a seven-year span from 2001-07 an FVA school played in the Division 1 boys basketball state final. Appleton West reached the final in 2003 with McDonald's All-American Brian Butch setting a state tournament record with 45 points in the quarterfinals.

Oshkosh West had a historic run in basketball during the 2000's as the Wildcats won back-to-back girls and boys state titles. The girls won titles in 2003-04 under former West standout Terri Schumacher. On the boys side, veteran coach Steve Randall led West to the FVA title in 2003-04, but passed away a month before the start of the next season. His son, Lance, left his Division I assistant job at St. Louis University to assume coaching duties and the Wildcats went undefeated during that impassioned regular season, but lost in the sectional to undefeated Wisconsin



Lance Randall coached Oshkosh West to back-to-back WIAA state boys basketball titles in 2006 and 2007 shortly after the passing of his father and former Wildcats' coach, Steve





Steve Jones coached Kimberly to five straight undefeated seasons and WIAA state football titles from 2013-17. The 70 straight wins are a state record.

Rapids. Lance then led West to an undefeated state title in 2005-06 and another state title the following year.

Kaukauna became a powerhouse in wrestling during the 2000's and has continued into the next decade. The Ghosts have won every FVA title since 1999 with the exception of 2005. Kaukauna won four straight team state titles from 2014-17 led by eventual University of Pittsburgh wrestler Robert Lee, who was a four-time state

finalist with three championships from 2012-15. Current University of Wisconsin wrestler Eric Barnett of Hortonville is the only other FVA wrestler to win three state titles, going undefeated three straight years from 2017-19.

## 2010's

The 2010's were headlined by Kimberly's dynasty in football. After the Papermakers won back-to-back state titles during the previous decade

in 2006 and 2007 under Steve Jorgensen, they followed with a Division 2 crown in 2013. That season started the state's longest winning streak and the 13th longest in national history under coach Steve Jones. The Papermakers added four more Division 1 state titles and won all 70 games over five seasons before losing to Jorgensen's Fond du Lac team in the 2018 season opener. Numerous Kimberly players went on to collegiate success, including linebacker A.J. Klein, who starred at Iowa State University and recently completed his seventh NFL season with the New Orleans Saints.

Kimberly's football success carried over to track and field where the Papermakers won the conference's first boys state title in 2014 and added three straight from 2017-19 under coach Brad Hoerth. In girls track and field, Neenah's twin sister duo of Jennifer and Jessica Parker teamed to win four straight 3200-meter relay state titles, including a state meet record in 2012 that still stands. Their sister, Alison, was on three of the relay titles and added another individual title. All three sisters competed together at Marquette University.

Neenah had another four-time state champion later in the decade as Av Osero won four state girls diving championships from 2016-19. Neenah has had the state girls diving champion seven of the

past eight years as Hazel Hertting set the state meet scoring record in 2014 for her second straight title after her sister, Greysen, won state in 2012.

Appleton North had a memorable decade with undefeated state championship teams in three different sports. The girls soccer team went 23-0-1 in 2011, the boys volleyball team went 34-0 in 2012 and the girls basketball team was 28-0 in 2017. The girls soccer team run included a dramatic 1-0 semifinal win over Kimberly with a goal in the final three minutes. North's girls basketball title was the first of two consecutive titles.

Hortonville has been in the FVA for a short time, but has made an immediate impact in girls basketball, winning conference titles in its first two years and then advancing to state each of the previous three seasons. The Polar Bears also won back-to-back FVA baseball titles in 2017-18.

Oshkosh North boys basketball coach Frank Schade ranks seventh in state history with 585 wins in 41 seasons, but retired one season prior to the school's first Division 1 state championship in 2018. Just two hours previously, Kaukauna won its second Division 2 state title in three seasons under longtime coach Mike Schalow.

There are surely many names and memories not listed here with the conference's rich history. It's been an incredible half-century of athletics in the FVA and the conference is sure to produce many more great athletes and memorable moments as it moves into its sixth decade in 2020. Thank you to all the athletes, coaches and fans who continue to make high school sports so special in the Fox Valley.

- researched and written by Neenah Joint School District communications manager and Kimberly High School alum Jim Strick

(anniversary logo designed by Jack Pingel, senior at Appleton East High School; photo credits: Whitlinger family, WIAA-Visual Image Photography and Appleton North High School).



Appleton North won back-to-back WIAA state girls basketball titles in 2017 and 2018, joining Oshkosh West (2003 and 2004) as the only FVA schools to accomplish the feat.



Catch up with former FVA athletes in a weekly "Where are they now?" feature on the official website of the FVA:

[www.fvasports.net](http://www.fvasports.net)