



## LOCKPORT GIRLS TENNIS



By Randy Whalen

Think golf and the word team doesn't always come to mind. After all, it is a sport based on individual performance.

The Lockport Township boy's golf team has had plenty of great individual performances in the past few years. After all, the Porters have the two-time defending Class 3A individual champion, Ben Sluzas.

But at this time of the year, when it counts the most, the Porters were also something else.

A team.

With its four carded players bunched within two strokes of each other, Lockport captured the team title of the Class 3A Lockport Regional on Tuesday, Oct. 6 at Broken Arrow Golf Course in Lockport.

The Porters were paced by Vincent Greci III (76), fellow senior, Ben Sluzas along with junior Brody McCarthy (77 each), and freshman Nathan Kwiatkowski (78) to finish with a 308. Freshman Joey Sluzas (80) and sophomore Nick Barry (89) rounded out the Lockport golfers. It was the 12th regional title in Lockport's history and first since 2017. The Porters. However, have qualified for State as a team for the past two seasons.

"I preach that it's a team sport until it's not," Lockport coach Matt Eber said. "It's a great accomplishment to win the regional. It's a compliment to the kids, they buy into what we preach.

"We've been struggling a little down the stretch. But last Saturday (Oct. 3) we beat Lincoln-Way Central in a fifth card tiebreaker (after the teams tied at 302 apiece) to win the Morris Invite. We're hoping to peak at the end of the season. Fortunately, we've been doing that the last few years."

Greci was part of the past two Porter teams, which placed third in 2018 and sixth last season. So he knows that anyone can step up at any time.

"On our team, anyone can be the No. 1 player on any day. Anyone is capable of doing it," Greci said. "I was just keeping the ball in play and driving well with my irons off the tee.

"Plying on our home course helped a little. But every time you play a course it's different."

Led by the top two individuals, junior Juney Bai and senior Sean Curran, Lincoln-Way Central came in with a 315 team score to place second. Bai defeated Curran in a playoff after both finished the 18-hole play with a 2-over 74.

By virtue of being the top two teams, Lockport and the Knights advanced to the Pekin Sectional on Monday, Oct. 12 at Lick Creek Golf Course in Pekin. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the advancing teams out of the regional were cut from three to two, and the number of individuals was trimmed from 10 to four.

Although any ties automatically advanced, so five individuals made it to the sectional. They are senior Zack Phelps (76), along with juniors Daniel Schaller (78) and Aidan Healy (79) from Lincoln-Way West. Also advancing as individuals were Homewood-Flossmoor senior Keegan Buksa (78) and Lincoln-Way East sophomore Dylan Drogemuller (79).

Lincoln-Way West (319), Homewood-Flossmoor (329), Lincoln-Way East (333), Andrew (357), Joliet Township (367), and Crete-Monee (467) rounded out the team scores.

While Ben Sluzas is the two-time defending Class3A State Champion, there's one thing that has eluded him in his four high school seasons. An individual regional title. Last year he was edged 72-73 by Curran in the H-F Regional at Balmoral Woods Country Club in Crete. But when the two were sophomores in 2018, Sluzas slipped past Curran 68-69 to win the individual State Title in a tournament that was one-day because of the weather.

"I don't think about it (not winning an individual regional) at all," said Sluzas, who won the individual title last fall with a 71 at the Pekin Sectional. "I just play and do my best. But, yes, this is my favorite time of year.

"I think our balance is a really great thing. It's worked so far and we will take that to the sectional."

McCarthy had to keep his balance, literally. The 3-year varsity veteran suffers from migraine headaches. He got one on the 11th hole but still came through with a 77 on the day.

"It's random," McCarthy said of his migraine's. "When it starts, things get blurry. But it wasn't like I couldn't see at all. I just have to trust my instinct more. I thought I played pretty well considering I got the migraine."

He did an so did Kwiatkowski, who has spent most of the season on the freshman level. But he went to the JV level for the SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division meet and won the individual championship with an 83.

"We put him in the lineup two weeks ago and he shot a 77," Eber said of Kwiatkowski. "He's quiet and doesn't say much. He just swings and goes."

That's what the Porters are still doing at this time of year. Which is great, considering a few weeks ago they didn't even know if there would be a sectional tournament.

"It's been weird," Eber admitted with the coronavirus pandemic. "But every time we go out we want to win this thing. It's nice to have the opportunity and we just want to win the last one."

At the moment there are no State Finals for golf. There's still hope for a final reprieve on that. But if there's not for Ben Sluzas, it would mean there would be no opportunity to 3-peat as state champion.

"Now that I look at it, I can't control it," Ben Sluzas said. "If it doesn't happen I won't feel too bad. It's a weird time and it is what it is."