



CRUSADERS WIN IT ALL

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MADISON — Dating back to her fourth-place finish at the individual state tournament, Jessica Jacobson had lost three straight matches at Nielsen Tennis Stadium.

A good way to make that a distant memory is to create a new one you'll never forget — sealing a state championship for your team.

The Catholic Memorial sophomore bounced back from a thirdset tiebreaker loss earlier in the day to win the title-clinching fourth match against Regis in the WIAA Division 2 Girls State Tennis Team Championships Saturday, giving the Crusaders their second gold trophy in three years.

When the dust had settled, CMH won by a 6-1 margin over the Ramblers, the same score by which it knocked off Xavier in the semifinals.

"Pure happiness," Jacobson said. "I got the chills. It was just so awesome."

Jacobson was able to shake off a 4-6, 7-5, 10-4 loss to Xavier's Maggie McGinnis, who was seeded one slot above her in the individual state tournament. The match had no bearing on the result, as the Crusaders already won the first six matches of the semifinal, but Jacobson needed to remind herself what was most important in the long run.

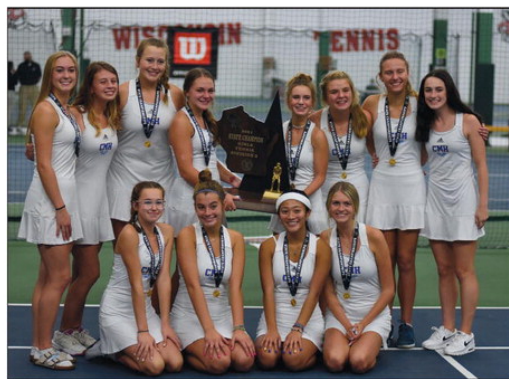
"I still wanted to win," Jacobson said. "I got a little angry with myself, but again, the mindset that this is for my team, that kind of helped calm me down."

That's been the M.O. for the Crusaders since the final year of Carl Veenendaal's reign as head coach in 2018, when they made their first trip to team state and finished runner-up.

In Jeff Mrochinski's first season at the helm in 2019, CMH won it all. And with Chris Benyousky in his inaugural campaign calling the shots, the team-first mentality has remained — and paid off in a big way.

"We knew we had some really good players individually each year, but we've built this culture of team first and the players bought into that," Benyousky said. "We

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The Catholic Memorial girls tennis team poses with the first-place trophy after winning the WIAA Division 2 Girls State Tennis Team Championship Saturday at Nielsen Tennis Stadium in Madison.

Dave Radcliffe/Freeman Staff

found ways to win at all the different flights. All that started with Carl and then passed the baton to Jeff Mrochinski and we're just trying to carry that forward."

Everyone got a taste of victory on Saturday. That included seniors Courtney Sturm and Jeslyn Singson, one of five CMH flights to go 2-0 on the day, who were determined to end their high school careers on a high note.

After dropping the first set against Regis, Sturm and Singson battled back for a 4-6, 6-1, 7-5 victory to give the Crusaders their sixth and final match.

"I think it's been really good having experience here, especially as a senior on the team to show our younger teammates how it is out here and how different it is and how to fight for every point and to not think about everybody watching and the pressure that we have," Sturm said.

At two singles, CMH junior Shannon Kutcher also fended off her Xavier counterpart 6-3, 6-4. Singson, joining Sturm on the No. 1 doubles team this season, was a singles player the last time CMH won it all.

"I feel like it's just remaining humble and keeping that respect and that energy and the hype all the way up," Singson said. "All the matches, just constant cheering and positive energy, good mindset for every

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single point.”

Following the first wave of matches in the final, top-seeded Catholic Memorial held a 3-1 lead over No. 3 Regis, who defeated No. 2 Edgewood in the other semifinal, courtesy of victories at four singles, two doubles and three doubles.

Sophomore Rachael Borg (No. 4 singles) completed her 2-0 day with a 6-2, 6-1 victory, as did the No. 2 pairing of senior Reagan Rebholz and freshman Mary McCaffery with a 6-1, 6-2 win, and the three doubles duo of junior Kallyn Sauer and sophomore Maggie Schmitzer, who topped their Regis opponents 6-3, 6-2.

That had the Crusaders feeling pretty comfortable, but the Ramblers kept each of the final three matches tight.

“We saw Regis twice this year and were able to come out winners, but it’s hard to beat a team three times and that’s a good team,” Benyousky said. “We certainly didn’t take them for granted. Two years ago we had lost to Kohler during the season twice. We were able to knock them off in the final. So that was in the back of my mind.”

But once Jacobson fended off Regis’ Brittany Martin 6-2, 6-4, the celebration was on.

“Absolutely amazing, and I’m so happy that we could do it for our seniors,” Jacobson said.

It was a dominant showing for CMH in the semifinal against fourth-seeded Xavier, as it won five of the seven bouts in straight sets. Sophomore Grace Dorow rallied for a 5-7, 6-2, 7-5 victory at three singles.

“What we said to the kids is this is really hard to do,” Benyousky said. “The girls have stayed humble and we just said let’s see if we can get back to that spot. It’s not something that happens every year. We’ve been accustomed to that in recent years, but every year’s special.

“We’re quite proud of the way this group of girls went about their business throughout the season. They looked for opportunities to get better and better, and recognized they each had to do their part so the team could perform optimally. Also, importantly, we made sure we had a good amount of fun along the way.”

And there’s nothing more fun than hoisting a first-place trophy at the end of the journey.

“Once you finally hear that you won state, you’re on cloud nine,” Rebholz said. “Everyone’s so happy, everyone’s cheering. It’s an experience to remember.”

