

Prairie girls bowl them over

Written by Tom Fruehling

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MARSHALLTOWN – High school bowling tournaments usually don't feature cheerleaders.

But the iconic Totem Bowl in Marshalltown on Tuesday was nearly as raucous as any Friday night gym as former Prairie bowler Nick Blood and a bunch of his buddies were on hand to cheer on this year's record-setting girls team.

With a different chant for each of the six girls, they celebrated every made split and especially every strike. And by the end of the night the boys were hoarse as the Prairie girls bowled over the four-team field and easily danced their way into the state tournament next week in Des Moines.

With an unbeaten record and the highest team average in the state by far, the Prairie girls will be the team to beat.

Senior Sabrina Keiper rolled the high individual score of 462 in Tuesday's state qualifying meet. And the total team score of 3,270 was almost 400 pins higher than their season average.

It marked the fourth time this year they've set a new school record. The latest record of 3,126 was established just last Friday.

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"Needless to say, all the girls performed well today," said understated veteran Prairie coach Don Willfong. "Nobody had a bad series. The fact is, every one of them had a great series.

"Six girls, and they all play well together."

Their averages were high to begin with, but each topped their season average.

Senior team leader Rylee Blood (whose 396 series average ranks sixth in the state) rolled a 423 on games of 208 and 215. Keiper, whose 382 average ranks 12th, had games of 214 and 248.



The younger bowlers also shined.

Freshman Ashley Sundstrom, ranked eighth with a 390 average, rolled a 426 on games of 191 and 235. Sophomores Jade Klinefelter and Mikayla Hite bowled their best games of the year.

Klinefelter (357 average) scored 449 with games of 192 and 257. Hite (338 average) had 450 with 195 and 255 games. And junior Kaitlyn Early (ranked 19th at 376) bowled a 386 series with games of 213 and 173.

"The girls, all of them, were like ice out there today," Willfong said.

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Their usual calm and business-like approach to the game, in fact, is what prompted Nick Blood and his half-dozen pals to organize their own cheering section.

Nick finished seventh in the state tournament in his senior year at Prairie in 2013, the same year as his younger sister Rylee qualified for the first of her four straight state tournament appearances.

"The girls are so quiet out there and don't show any excitement," said Nick, 21. "So we just thought we'd show up and try to give 'em some energy."

It obviously didn't hurt.

"Actually, it helped us quite a bit to have them here," said Keiper, who earlier this year set Prairie girls records with a 278 game and 479 series.

"We had brothers, dads and moms and our teammates, too. All four of the Grady sisters were here, and they make up a cheering section all by themselves."

The secret to this squad's success, said Rylee Blood, is that there is uncommon team unity.

"We really care about each other and not how we do as individuals," said the four-year varsity star who will bowl at Mount Mercy University next year. "If somebody gets down, we try to build them back up."

Prairie finished fourth in the state meet two years ago and third last season.

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They have their sights on a championship next week.

“This is our year,” Hite said. “We’re gunna git ‘em.”

The Prairie boys finished fourth in their meet and did not qualify for state.