



# THE BADGER BEACON

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~ SPECIAL EDITION ~

# GOOD AS GOLD

A SPECIAL TRIBUTE EDITION OF THE BADGER BEACON DEDICATED TO THE MANY NATIONAL CHAMPIONS THE BADGER REGION CELEBRATED IN RECENT MONTHS

## NATIONAL CHAMPS

### USA ALL-STAR CHAMPIONS:

- \* 2022 BADGER BOYS NATIONAL YOUTH
- \* 2022 BADGER GIRLS NATIONAL YOUTH

### COLLEGE CHAMPIONS:

- \* UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
2021 WOMEN'S NCAA DIV. 1
- \* UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE  
2021 WOMEN'S NCAA DIV. 3
- \* UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE  
2022 MEN'S NCVF DIV. 2 CLUB
- \* UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE  
2022 WOMEN'S NCVF DIV. 2 CLUB
- \* CARTHAGE COLLEGE MEN'S NCAA DIV. 3  
IN BOTH 2021 AND 2022

### 2022 CLUB CHAMPIONS:

- \* FC ELITE 16-NAVY (GJNC 16-NATIONAL)
- \* MKE STING 14-WHITE (GJNC 14-PATRIOT)
- \* MKE STING 16-LIGHTNING (AAU BOYS 16-CLUB)
- \* MKE STING 17-GOLD (GJNC 17-NATIONAL)



At the 2022 Badger Region Championships in March and April of this year, we celebrated the “Year of the Champion” to honor three schools in the Badger Region who won national collegiate championships.

Little did we know that a few months later we would have nine more national titles here in Wisconsin for a total of 12 national titles over the course of the past 14 months.

Talk about success — especially in a state whose professional and elite college programs in other sports are notorious for coming up just short of winning championships.

This winning tradition that has been brought to the Badger Region will be a great opportunity for success to breed success.

“Hopefully this gives future athletes and coaches in the Badger Region something to aspire to,” said FC Elite 16-Navy head coach Jeff Van Lannen, whose team won the 16-National Division at the Girls Junior National Championships.

MKE Sting club director Dave Bayer said the same.

“We hope this raises the level of all competition in Wisconsin,” he said.

It’s not every year that a Region, let alone one the size of Wisconsin, wins 12 national championships.

That’s why, as a way to put a bow on the 2021-22 club volleyball season, we offer you this special edition of the Badger Beacon highlighting all the national champions from our state. While we wish we had the time and staff to highlight all our medalists and top finishers, we hope this inspires all our teams to reach the next level in their 2022-23 seasons.

Go Badger Region!

JULY 2022

## ALL-STAR CHAMPS: BADGER BOYS NATIONAL YOUTH

# Athlete buy-in brings boys team to title

Last minute coaching changes? No problem for the Badger Region Boys National Youth team who came home with the gold medal at the 2022 USA All-Star Championships in Tulsa, Okla.

With head coach Brian Rushmer sidelined the week before leaving for Tulsa, assistant coach JW Kieckhefer stepped into the lead spot – a role the back-to-back NCAA Div. 3 men's national champion coach at Carthage College felt comfortable with.

"It was a total team effort," Kieckhefer said about the collaboration between coaches in preparing the team for the four-day tournament in Oklahoma. "We did a good job of getting them to train a system and everyone bought in."

Assisting Kieckhefer throughout the week were assistant coaches Curtis Madson (Concordia University-Wisconsin), Mike Stevens (Southport VBC/Carthage College volunteer assistant), BJ Bryant (St. Norbert College) and Brian Sharkey (Southport VBC/Badger Region Staff).

"Our athletes believed in their coaches and our system. I felt a lot like I was coaching my college team," Kieckhefer said "We gave high-level feedback, and they would try and go do it. There were a lot of in-game strategies being thrown their way like flipping our block, and they did it. There was no questioning what was going on -- just doing. They trusted all of the coaches and executed."

In addition to having the five coaches listed above on the bench throughout most of the week, the team benefited greatly from having Rushmer at home scouting future opponents and doing video sessions for the athletes during downtime, much like the college experience requires for the athletes headed to the next level.

While having an army of coaches was surely unique and helpful, the success of the athletes still came down to executing on the court.

The team worked heavily on being efficient in out-of-system situations, changing from a traditional off-the-net mentality to setting out of system



balls high, inside and tight.

"We did a good job of scoring in these situations, better than our opponents, and that's a huge part of why we won," Kieckhefer said.

Not only did many of the athletes who played on the Badger Region Boys National Youth team play together during the club season at Milwaukee Sting and Milwaukee Volleyball Club, they also made up the majority of the Badger Region Boys Select team that earned the bronze medal at the 2021 USA All-Star Championships in Orlando.

In addition, five of the 11 athletes on the Boys Youth team this season participated in the National Team Development Training Program's summer series that took place in Tulsa before the team competed in the USA All-Star Championships.

"Our group played so much volleyball together. They were used to playing with each other," Kieckhefer said. "This group played like a team. It's not a coincidence that we did as well as we did thanks to how much time these boys spent together"

## Results for Boys National Youth:

Match 1: Def. Oklahoma, 3-0  
 Match 2: Def. Great Lakes, 3-2  
 Match 3: Lost to Southern, 1-3  
 Match 4: Def. Iowa, 3-0  
 Match 5: Def. OVR, 3-2  
 Match 6: Def. Florida, 3-0  
 Match 7: Def. Arizona, 3-1  
 Gold Medal Match: Def. Southern, 3-2

All-Tournament Team: Ben Heise (MVP), Nathan Higgins and Vinny Coello

Unique note No. 1: Five boys were in Tulsa prior to the USA All-Star Championships for the USA Volleyball National Team Development Program series. Those athletes who spent 11 days in Tulsa included Ben Heise, Vinny Coello, Ambrose Engling, Charlie Andorfer and Owen Otto.

Unique note No. 2: JW Kieckhefer stepped in for Brian Rushmer as head coach of the Boys National Youth team and in doing so won his THIRD national championship in the past year. In 2021 and 2022, Kieckhefer led the Carthage Firebirds (NCAA Men's Div. III) to the National Championship the last two years.

JULY 2022

## ALL-STAR CHAMPS: BADGER GIRLS NATIONAL YOUTH

# 'Person over player' mentality pays off for Girls Youth team



How do you build a successful team in less than two weeks? Just ask Abbey Sutherland.

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay head women's volleyball coach and leader of the Badger Region's Girls Youth High Performance team will tell you it's not easy.

"In HP, you're with the athletes for such a short amount of time, it's important to create a language that we can all speak together," she said. "It needs to be meaningful and impactful."

If meaningful and impactful means bringing home the Girls National Youth Championship at the 2022 USA All-Star Championship in Tulsa, then Sutherland and her coaching staff of BJ Bryant (St. Norbert College) and Scott Spiess (Badger Region Staff) met their goals.

After selecting the team from the tryout and three days at selection camp at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh earlier in July, the coaches asked the athletes what the definition of being a good teammate was all about.

"We went over the definition of leadership. We went through the list of what it means to be a good teammate. They picked the words that meant the most to them," Sutherland said. "And as coaches, we wanted to emphasize the person over the player."

At the USA All-Star Championships, the Girls National Select team faced fierce competition from all over the country including a North Texas Region team with multiple NCAA Div. I recruits on its roster and bitter rival Florida who is a powerhouse year in and year out at the tournament.

Against Florida, the Badger



Region team was up two sets to none with the chance to finish out the match.

"We had match point against Florida," Sutherland said. "But they're a very good team and responded well. What showed that we were high level as well as we had a response to their response and only lost by two points in sets three and four. That's not easy to do, and we weren't going to hang our heads after that match."

While suffering the tough loss to Florida was not what the Badger Region team had hoped for, it meant a chance at fresh start on the final day in the Girls National Youth division.

And with that clean slate, the

Badger Region swept both the Ohio Valley Region and the Puget Sound Region to earn the title in the Girls National Youth Division.

According to the coaching staff, the athletes bought in to everything they asked them to do.

"They took care of the little thing and the details," Sutherland said. "They made sure to get warmed up on time, they spent time cheering on other teams from Badger Region and did things as a team. This group truly wanted to be together and spend time together. That's unique and important. There was so much maturity in this group across the board."

#### Results for Girls National Youth:

Match 1: Def. Great Plains, 3-1

Match 2: Lost to North Texas, 0-3  
Match 3: Def. Garden Empire, 3-2

Match 4: Def. Gulf Coast, 3-0

Match 5: Lost to Florida, 2-3

Match 6: Def. Ohio Valley, 3-0

Gold Final: Def. Puget Sound, 3-0

All-Tournament Team: Andi Spiess (MVP), Rebecca Ring and Alexis Gardner

Unique note No. 1: Andi Spiess and Gillian Koening were part of the team that earned the bronze medal last year in the Girls National Select division in Orlando.

Unique note No. 2: Asst. Coach BJ Bryant (the head men's and women's coach at St. Norbert College) earned two gold medals this week in Tulsa working as an assistant coach on both the boys and girls teams.

DECEMBER 2021

## NCAA DIV. 1 WOMEN'S CHAMPS: WISCONSIN

# Badgers put Wisconsin in national spotlight

We always knew Wisconsin was the center of the volleyball universe. And the University of Wisconsin women's volleyball team helped us solidify that.

It took athletes Dana Rettke, Sydney Hilley, Lauren Barnes and Grace Loberg using an extra year of eligibility brought on by the pandemic after deciding they couldn't leave Wisconsin without winning the program's first national title.

And they didn't have to.

The No. 4-seeded Badgers volleyball team took down Big Ten foe No. 10 University Nebraska in a dramatic five sets — 22-25, 31-29, 25-23, 23-25, 15-12 — in the NCAA Women's Volleyball national championship game in Columbus, Ohio, in December of 2022.

Wisconsin won its first title behind a block that tormented the Huskers. The Badgers began the fifth set on a 7-0 run that was punctuated by a kill and two blocks on three straight points by Rettke, the American Volleyball Coaches Association Player of the Year. The Badgers thought they won when outside hitter Madi Kubik hit the ball out, but a successful challenge



from Nebraska coach John Cook overturned the call as officials ruled there was a touch at the net.

The next play, after a couple of tremendous defensive plays by Nebraska, Rettke terminated the championship point.

"I honestly don't think it's set in yet," Rettke said in a USA Today article. "I mean, I kind of imagined, like, dropping to the floor and crying and I kind of just stood there in shock."

The Huskers were all over the Badgers in the first set and led most of the way in the second set. Trailing 13-8 at one point, the Badgers tied the game at 20 on a monster block by Loberg and Rettke, and took the lead on the next point, which was only Rettke's second kill.

But behind what Wisconsin coach Kelly Sheffield called the best

defense in the country, Nebraska gave itself numerous opportunities with some incredible digs, and battled the Badgers to an epic conclusion of a second set that was tied at 23 through 29.

Like she had done so many times before, with Wisconsin down 29-28, Rettke got a solo block on Nebraska middle blocker Lauren Stivrins, followed by a kill and another block on Stivrins to win the set.

Middle blocker Devyn Robinson had back-to-back kills to seal the third set and put the Badgers one set away from a championship. But the drama was far from over.

Nebraska had a 24-20 lead in the fourth set before the Badgers won three straight points. It took an incredible diving save by Nebraska outside hitter Madi Kubik to keep the point alive, which was finished emphatically by Ally Batenhorst to send the match to a final set.

The Badgers had 24 blocks to Nebraska's 10. Neither team hit above .200. Middle blocker Anna Smrek led the Badgers hitting .500 with 14 kills while Rettke hit .290 with 11 kills.

"Epic weekend. Just an epic weekend," Sheffield said in the article. "I'm so happy for these guys

and the other seniors. They came back for a goal and a dream and had some adversity along the way and were rewarded."

On the first championship point, Barnes, the libero, took a long exhale to calm herself and possibly make the final pass of her college career. But the Badgers had to endure four of them, plus a timeout at 14-11, then a painstaking challenge after believing they won.

"During the challenge we kind of just kept making eye contact with each other, looking at each other in the eye, saying, 'All right, if this doesn't go our way, we're still playing volleyball,'" Barnes said to USA Today. "We haven't done anything yet. The game isn't over."

The second celebration was just as historic as the first.

"I think most of it was just shock," Hilley said in the USA Today article. "You look around, everyone's crying. You could see how much love there is with every single person on this team. And the fans were incredible. And it's an amazing moment I'll never forget just seeing how happy my teammates were. And that's the best feeling."

DECEMBER 2021

## NCAA DIV. 3 WOMEN'S CHAMPS: UW-EAU CLAIRE

# UW-EC basks in historic winning season

The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Women's Volleyball team made history with its first NCAA Division III National championship victory in early December of 2021 in St. Louis, Mo. Coaches and players say the win put the team on the map and will strengthen the program moving forward.

The championship title also marked the first time the UW-Eau Claire women's volleyball team made it to the NCAA Division III quarterfinals. After defeating Tufts University, the fourth-ranked Blugolds swept top-ranked Juniata College in the semifinals to advance to the title match.

UW-Eau Claire faced sixth-ranked and traditional Division III powerhouse Calvin College in the championship match. It was a



rematch of sorts — Calvin defeated Eau Claire in the 2018 NCAA Division III semifinals.

But the 2021 championship was all about UW-Eau Claire as the team swept Calvin in

three sets.

Head coach Kim Wudi, also a longtime member of the Badger Region Board of Directors, said at the time that the gravity of the situation "hasn't really sunk in yet."

"We're just really, really proud to bring home a national championship," Wudi said in an NPR article posted following the event. "There's really only been a couple of other sports at the university who have been able to win the team championship and to be able to do it for women's volleyball for the first time is really, really special."

Wudi said clinching the championship follows a historic winning season for the team. She

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MAY 2021 &amp; APRIL 2022

## NCAA DIV. 3 MEN'S CHAMPS: CARTHAGE COLLEGE

## Firebirds win back-to-back men's titles

Carthage men's volleyball won its second-straight NCAA Division III national title with a 25-21, 25-22, 18-25, 25-22 victory over top-ranked Springfield on April 23, 2022, at Carthage's Tarble Arena in front of standing-room only crowd in Kenosha.

"It was a storybook the way last year ended," head coach JW Kieckhefer said in an interview with the Badger Region. "The fans. Doing it at home. And validating it by doing again in 2022 when they wanted to take away of what we did in 2021 because some teams didn't compete due to COVID or didn't make the tournament. I feel accomplished about validating that first national championship."

The Firebirds claimed their second-straight national title behind defensive efforts from Peyton Wieter (16 digs) and All-American libero Kyle Cohan (12 digs). All-Americans Matt Slivinski (18 kills) and Germantown native and former Badger Region member Carter Schmidt (11 kills) led the offensive effort, while All-American setter Gene McNulty had 43 assists.

This was also the second-straight national title under the direction of Kieckhefer, who is a Badger Region member (coach at Milwaukee Volleyball Club) and was named the



College Conference of Illinois & Wisconsin's (CCIW) Coach of the Year.

Slivinski, McNulty and Cohan were named to the NCAA all-tournament team, while Slivinski was named the tournament MVP for the second-straight year.

"I think the excitement, the happiness, the accomplishment has finally sunk in for all of us," Kieckhefer said. "I think we love battling for each other. That's what makes the practice gym so much fun. But when you enjoy being around this group as much this group does, the accomplishment feels amazing."

In the match, each team traded points early in the first until an

attack error for Springfield (29-2) and a block from McNulty put Carthage (24-3) up 4-2. Slivinski put in a kill which extended the Firebird lead to 10-5 forcing a timeout. Springfield rallied getting within one with two straight kills but an 8-3 run for the Firebirds made it 20-15. Another rally from Springfield got it to three until a service error for the Pride made it set point. Carthage won the set with a closing kill from another current Badger Region member David Markes (a coach at Milwaukee Volleyball Club and former player at the club).

The second began similar to the first with each team trading points until a Springfield service error and a block from Wieter put the Firebirds ahead 10-7. The Pride got within three with a kill then an ace made it 14-12 before Markes connected on another kill. After Carthage scored the next three of five points, Springfield got within two with a kill. Slivinski registered another kill extending the Carthage lead to 20-17. Later, Schmidt tallied a kill moving the score ahead to 23-20. Another Slivinski strike gave Carthage the set 25-22.

In the third, the Pride scored the first three with a pair of kills and an ace, before an attack error for Springfield tied it at six. After back-to-back attack errors for the Pride put Carthage in front 11-8,

Springfield tied it at 11 with an ace. The Pride later went up three with a kill 18-14 as a kill widened the margin to five. Springfield won the third 25-18.

The score was locked at 11 in the fourth as the Pride connected on a kill. Once again, both teams traded points until Slivinski recorded another kill moving the score to 18-17. Springfield went on to tie it at 22 however, a bad set for the Pride gave the Firebirds set point. Carthage won the game off an attacking error for the 25-22 set win.

With the graduation of Slivinski and Cohan, the question becomes do the Firebirds have enough in them to make a run in 2023?

"I think we have the team to do it," Kieckhefer said. "I am very excited for this group of young men. But it's going to be different. It's tough to lose guys who have been leaders for us the last three years. We'll combat matches differently. But we're excited for the guys who have been behind Matt and Kyle."

Winning back to back titles in any sport or competition is never easy, let alone going for three.

"It's going to be hard. But we're going to battle," Kieckhefer said. "Think about how hard it was going back to back. Now triple that."

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said they've gotten support from fellow coaches, former players and other alumni excited about the future of the volleyball program.

"That's our goal, is to win championships," Wudi said to NPR. "And so to have that not just be something we're striving toward, but something that we've done, is really great in terms of the ability to recruit high-level players and high-level student athletes from really across the country."

Abby Volk was a senior at UW-Eau Claire and the team's middle hitter.

"It was surreal," Volk said to NPR. "We still

talk about it today even, we just don't believe that it's real."

Volk said beating the best-ranked teams in the nation the year after all fall sports on campus were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic was special. She said defeating Calvin College, with some members of the 2018 Eau Claire team in attendance, was an added bonus.

"So, I mean, it was kind of a revenge match, but we also wanted to continue making history," Volk said.

Arianna Barrett, Kendra Baiert, and Charlie Nelson were named to the NCAA Championship All-Tournament team. Barrett was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player.

The American Volleyball Coaches Association announced Jodi Risen of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire volleyball team as the AVCA Division III Assistant Coach of the Year.

Risen, a former Blugold volleyball athlete herself, is in her 13th year with the UWEC coaching staff and has helped Eau Claire reachover 300 wins while on staff.

As a player, she led the team to a share of the WIAC Conference title in 2006 and to the Sweet Sixteen round of the NCAA tournament in 2005 and 2006.

Risen is the first WIAC Assistant Coach to receive the award since the award started in 2009.

APRIL 2022

## NCVF DIV. 2 MENS & WOMEN'S CHAMPS: UW-EAU CLAIRE



# UW-EC men & women win club titles

The University of Wisconsin Eau-Claire wasn't just the top team in the NCAA Women's Div. 3 Volleyball Tournament this past season, the Blugolds also came home with two championships at the National Collegiate Volleyball Federation Championships held in Phoenix.

The three-day tournament brought together hundreds of collegiate club teams from around the country, including close to 20 from the Badger Region including the men's and women's club teams from UW-Eau Claire who played at the Div. 2 level designed for colleges and universities around the same size.

On the women's side, No. 3-ranked UW-Eau Claire went undefeated on the week, dropping only one set along the way. The Blugolds were forced to face off against one of their rivals, UW-La Crosse in the championship, which was played on Chase Field, the home of the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Results for the UW-Eau Claire women's team:

- Def. Colorado School of Mines, 2-0
- Def. Missouri S&T, 2-0
- Def. Dartmouth, 2-0
- Def. Sonoma State, 2-0
- Def. Xavier, 2-0
- Def. Colorado Christian, 2-0
- Def. Dartmouth, 2-1
- Def. North Dakota State, 2-0



- Def. UW-La Crosse, 2-0
- On the men's side, the road to the championship came with lots of bumps in the road for UW-Eau Claire, who was the No. 1-seed

heading into the tournament. In Day 1 pool play, the team dropped a close match to Cal State-San Marcos. And in the power pool on Day 2, the Blugolds dropped an

even closer match to Case Western Reserve University 19-17 in set three. Thanks to the tiebreaker procedures, UW-Eau Claire escaped as the top seed from that pool.

The ending was much the same as the women's team -- a match against rival UW-La Crosse on Chase Field. The rest of the week went as such:

- Def. Butler, 2-0
- Def. North Dakota State, 2-0
- Lost to CSU-San Marcos, 2-1
- Def. Carnegie Mellon, 2-0
- Def. Army, 2-0
- Lost to Case Western Reserve, 2-1
- Def. Gonzaga, 2-0
- Def. University of San Diego, 2-1
- Def. St. Thomas, 2-0
- Def. UW-La Crosse, 2-0

UW-Eau Claire and UW-La Crosse among the many schools who play under in the Wisconsin Volleyball Conference (WVC), which requires its members to be Badger Region / USA Volleyball members.

The WVC has had a long partnership with the Badger Region and offers services that include event management, Sports Engine access and assistance, referee assigning for events and other services and aid.

The NCVF Championships return to Kansas City, Mo., in mid April in the spring of 2023.

JUNE 2022

## GJNC 16-NATIONAL CHAMPS: FC ELITE 16-NAVY

# 'We got this' says FC Elite 16-Navy

The greatest feeling a coach can have is when their team says during a timeout, "Don't worry coach, we got this."

Truer words were never spoken by the FC Elite 16-Navy team to their head coach Jeff Van Lannen en route to winning the 16-National Division at the 2022 Girls Junior National Championship in Indianapolis.

And even with their backs up against the proverbial wall, the 16-Navy team fought their way out of near-elimination multiple times in ways that only Hollywood could have scripted.

On the final day of competition, the team was the 8-seed having to play the No. 1 overall seed in the quarterfinals in Absolute from the Northern California Region.

The first set was a nail biter, with FC falling 30-32. But the second set was not as close, as Absolute pulled ahead and managed to be serving up 24-18 for the match. But 16-Navy was not done.

They ran the score all the way up to 24-24 before allowing Absolute to sideout. And before you know it, FC won set two, 27-25.

The roller coaster continued in set three as FC fell behind again and faced elimination down 9-14. But the comeback kids showed zero worry.

"We always had that feeling that this could be the end," said head coach Jeff Van Lannen. "But we weren't going to show it."

Point by point, FC Elite chipped away and came out on top in one of the best matches of the tournament.

"Two coaches came up to me after the match and said we staved off 11 elimination points," Van Lannen said. "It was almost statistically impossible for us to win that match, but we did."

That was only the first match of the day.

FC Elite 16-Navy had another three-set match in the semifinals against Maverick Elite from the Ohio Valley Region.

"Maybe they sort of liked that feeling of playing from behind,"



Van Lannen said.

In the finals, 16-Navy fell to Iowa Six Pack in the first set and was down 22-23 in set two – but the team wouldn't have had it any other way.

As the story goes, FC Elite battled back, took control of set three and let out a sigh of relief – along with screams of joy – when victory was officially theirs.

"When the last point landed, you saw it in their eyes, 'We did what?' It was pretty great," Van Lannen said. "From there it was podium, celebration and so much more."

Outside hitter Peyton Carlson, who was only 14-years-old at the time of the tournament, was named the Most Valuable Player event.

Heading into the tournament, 16-Navy was ranked 10th in the National Division after earning their bid at the Badger Region Qualifier in late February. The team had a good Day 1 and a good Day 2, losing only to Houston Juniors on a missed served.

"After losing on a missed serve early in the tournament, I stopped saying the word 'serve,' stopped looking at the endline and just let them go. I trusted them," Van

Lannen said. "Anything I wanted to say, I wrote it down and then I didn't say the first three things I wanted to say. I stood back and let them do it on their own."

The hardships and hurdles the team overcame didn't just stop with a missed serve.

Throughout the tournament, the team was without Kam Kaminski, who had torn her ACL just weeks prior to leaving for Indianapolis for the national tournament.

On top of that, one outside hitter and one right side hitter suffered minor injuries throughout the week in Indiana but were able to return by week's end.

The team knew it had the ability to win, and Van Lannen knew that as well.

"When we were making our final run on Day 4, I was like, 'What am I going to say at this point?'" Van Lannen said. "There were some points you tell the kids 'you got this.' And you say that over and over. And then after a while, they started telling that to me. It was so heartwarming."

The official celebration for the team did not happen until they returned home and could unite in full, with Kaminski, back in the

Fox Cities

At a team gathering, Van Lannen was able to enjoy highlighting the success of all the players and hear all the other "little stories" that you find out about after the fact. The team (and the entire club) were also honored by the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers at a minor league baseball game in late summer.

You hear about the teams that are forever linked, and this is one of them, Van Lannen said.

"Coaches have asked 'what's the secret sauce?' I tell them that every day, we ask the players what their job is," Van Lannen said. "And every day they say 'love each other,' and the coaches job is to love them, too."

Results for FC Elite 16-Navy

- Def. Michio Chicago 16-National, 2-0

- Def. PGH Elite 16-Elite, 2-0
- Def. Coast 16-Davis, 2-0
- Def. Spiral 16UA, 2-0
- Lost to HJV 16-Elite, 1-2
- Def. Dakine Warriors 16-Surf, 2-0
- Def. Excel 16-National Red, 2-1
- Def. Forza1 North 16UA, 2-0
- Def. Absolute 16-Black, 2-1
- Def. Maverick 16-Elite, 2-1
- Def. Six Pack, 2-1

JUNE 2022

## GJNC 14-PATRIOT CHAMPS: MKE STING 14-WHITE

# Waiting game pays off for Sting 14-White

Leading off the week at the 2022 USA Volleyball Girls Junior National Championship in Indianapolis was MKE Sting 14-White. The team had high expectations coming into the 14-Patriot Division of the tournament as the group was seeded No. 2 in the 39-team field.

They proved they were deserving of their high ranking by going 11-0 in matches and 22-2 in sets at the four-day event.

A few months after winning the title, head coach Liz Heidenrich says the feeling is still unreal.

"We knew these girls were capable of winning the whole thing, but it actually becoming a reality was one of the best feelings. It's indescribable," she said. "

Like with most national championship teams, it was a total team effort that helped the Sting 14-White team bring home the gold.

"The best part about our run at nationals was the 100% contribution from every single girl on the team. Without all 10 kids out there on, we would not have made it to that podium on day four," Heidenrich said. "We had so much confidence in our lineup and how they had been working together so seamlessly that it was a no brainer to run the lineup we did. The girls should be so proud of what they accomplished."

But it wasn't an easy road during the season to get them to where they ended in June.

"This group has improved drastically since day one. Occasionally, I will look back at



videos we took during those first few weeks of practice. We were taking a lot of their mechanics they had come in with and completely re-learning skills. It was a rough start that first month of practice," she said. "We weren't sure what this group was going to look like. But holy moly. These girls turned into a well-oiled machine come nationals. We had so many girls who could play different positions that our lineups rarely – if ever – looked the same."

MKE Sting club director said the 14-White team, which finished one place out of earning a spot in a bid division at the Windy City Qualifier, was one of his favorite teams to watch all season.

"The team was hoping to earn a bid. We spent the weeks leading up to nationals waiting and wanting," Bayer said. "It's surreal, because this team was the last team to be accepted into

the tournament in the Patriot Division. But the kids never gave up and the they always stayed positive about their situation."

Hiedenrich added that being able to step back onto the court in Indianapolis was a fresh start for the 14-White crew.

"Our team had to completely shift our mindset in a matter of weeks," she said. "When they stepped into the gym in Indianapolis, it was a completely different team. Third place wasn't going to be enough anymore. They wanted first. They wanted to prove that they were better than anyone could have imagined."

The results for MKE Sting 14-White throughout the weekend included:

- Def. BVC 14-2, 2-0
- Def. ACT VBC 14-Quon, 2-0
- Def. Superior 14-Adidas 2-0
- Def. Mintonette Sports – m.4, 2-0
- Def. EVA 14-National, 2-0
- Def. SG Elite 14-Elite, 2-0
- Def. I AM VBC, 2-1
- Def. Brazos Valley 14-National, 2-0
- Def. TAV Houston 14-Molten, 2-0
- Def. 14E Mash, 2-1
- Def. T-Street 14-Alicia, 2-0

Hiedenrich has a special place for her gold medal in her new home. And assistant coach Ari Cohen said the same.

"My medal is proudly on my mantle in my living room," Cohen said. "It has its own shelf and everything!"

JUNE 2022

## GJNC GIRLS 17-NATIONAL CHAMPS: MKE STING 17-GOLD

# Sting 17-Gold raises its bar to new heights

Over the years, the MKE Sting 17-Gold team has been on the rise.

And that couldn't have been more evident than by the way the group played at the 2022 USA Volleyball Girls Junior National Championships where the team won the gold medal in 17-National Division in convincing fashion.

MKE Sting 17-Gold dropped only one match and three sets in route to the championship in Indianapolis after qualifying in



the national division at the Badger Region Qualifier on Feb. 27.

"Each year, this team has gotten better since they have been together at 14s," said club director Dave Bayer.

The team won the bronze medal in the 16-National Division of GJNCs.

"Now this team is determined to qualify for Open as 18s," Bayer said. "They are a

very motivated group"

Within the organization, Bayer said that the 17-Gold team this year strived to meet all the standards at all times while chasing championships along the way.

"They trusted the process and Coach Bruce and Coach Ali were great for this group," Bayer said. "It takes a lot of trust and dedication, and these coaches and athletes built the relationships they needed to help this team succeed."

Results:

- Def. MN Select 17-2, 2-0
- Def. Arizona Storm 17-Thunder, 2-0
- Def. Spike and Serve G17-1, 2-0
- Def. Tejas 17-Black, 2-0
- Def. PVA 17-Elite, 2-0
- Lost to Premier Nebraska 17-Black, 1-2
- Def. Topeka Impact, 2-0
- Def. AVA TX 17-Adidas, 2-1
- Def. OJVA 17-1 Gold, 2-0
- Def. Union 17-1 UA, 2-0
- Def. 1st Alliance 17-Silver, 2-0



JUNE 2022

BOYS 16-CLUB CHAMPS: MKE STING 16-LIGHTNING

# Sting 16-Lightning continues to impress

Badger Region teams, athletes and coaches who competed at the 2022 Boys National Championships held in Orlando, Fla., also had a great showing this summer

There, the MKE Sting 16-Lightning (boys team) came home with the crown in the 16 Club division after going 11-2 on the week.

And for head coach Skylar “Choppy” Czaplewski, he finally overcame the podium hurdle that had eluded him over the years.

It still feels unreal. I’ve been lucky enough to have coached several podium finishing teams at nationals but couldn’t quite get over that hump to take home the gold,” he said. “It was great to see the look on my players’ faces on that final point, and it’s an image I’ll never forget because it was such an overwhelming rush of emotions. And also because it’s the wallpaper on my phone.”

When asked where his gold medal is currently, the West Allis-native had this to say:

“I had some different ideas on where to put the medal. My original thought was to just wear it for the rest of my life but that didn’t seem practical. Another thought was to hang it in my doorway like mistletoe so whoever walks into my home can see it,” had said. “But for now it’s displayed proudly on my bedroom wall above my bed.”

Czaplewski knew this team was going to be something special from the start, he said.

“We played our first tournament (AAU 3rd Coast) after two practices and managed to take 3rd place against teams that had been together for a few months already,” he said. “The players worked so hard all year. Putting in the work at practice and even at private lessons to get even better.”

MKE Sting club director Dave Bayer



echoed that sentiment.

“The 16-Lightning team was one of the most underrated teams in our area,” he said. “Throughout the years they showed flashes of greatness and showed amazing improvement. They committed to each other so much. And it all came together for them at nationals.”

The group knew how to have fun, too.

“They were all super supportive of each other and that’s a big part of success,” Czaplewski said. “It doesn’t matter how good you are if you don’t have any chemistry with your teammates.”

Results:

- Def. AJAX 16-Gold
- Lost to Miami United, 0-2
- Def. Sky High Adidas 16-1, 2-0
- Def. Exile Big Blue, 2-0

- Def. CVA, 2-1
- Lost to Coast 16-2, 0-2
- Def. MVP FL 16-Black, 2-0
- Def. Borinquen 16M Piro, 2-0
- Def. SG Elite 16-Elite, 2-0
- Def. Ultimate 160Blue, 2-0
- Def. HPSTL 16-Orange, 2-1
- Def. Bay to Bay 16-Premier, 2-0
- Def. Louisville Fury 16-Orange, 2-1

Czaplewski pointed out that in the championship match, the team lost set one 13-25, but the team never gave up.

“Honestly our biggest obstacle was ourselves,” he said. “When we are playing at our absolute best, no one can beat us. Every team is going to have some down games/matches and it’s how they responded to that adversity that defined this team.”

**Congratulations to all of our national champions.  
And good luck to everyone in the 2022-23 season!**



The Badger Region  
supports all of you