

Lady Bulldogs Win Division VI State Championship

Quick Start Propels Bulldogs to Title

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont – March 19, 2025

DAYTON – Columbus Grove and Rootstown were both playing in their first girls state championship game Saturday afternoon in the University of Dayton Arena.

While nerves can be a factor in a situation like this, the Lady Bulldogs weren't fazed by the atmosphere of playing on the 'big stage' in front of a big crowd.

Employing their signature defenses from the onset, the Bulldogs took Rootstown out of their game by building a 20-2 lead in the opening quarter. While Rootstown was able to settle down after the opening quarter, the Rovers' early deficit was too much for them to overcome as Columbus Grove walked away with the Division VI State Championship, 65-46.

Columbus Grove captured its first State Championship in girls' basketball as they finished the season at 27-2. The Bulldogs finished the 2024-2025 season by winning 16 straight games after back-to-back losses in mid January to Ottoville and Ottawa-Glandorf.

The Rovers finished as the State Runner-Up with a 27-2 record.

"There's a couple of minutes left and you're up by 15-20 points and you know you have it in the bag, you've won a State Championship," lone Bulldog senior Lauryn Auchmuty said. "As time is dwindling down, you see the JV lineup by the scorer's table, you realize it's happening, it's actually real. There is just a lot of emotions coming out."

"I don't know about them, but I hugged the coaches, I hugged the players, started crying because we made school history. I was a water girl from the first grade and it's just an accomplishment I wanted to see or achieve. Once the buzzer went off and we realized we had the win there was just a mix of emotions from everyone."

"It's been such a journey," Bulldog head coach Brian Schroeder said. "It's a long grind. This is the 20th week of the basketball season and, as a coach, your mind is always on the next one. What do we have to better? What are we not so good at?"

"It's just so surreal. Oh my gosh, we are going to win, this is the last game of the year, we are going to finish as winners. Lauryn's motto this year was defend until the end and I thought that was very fitting as our defense set the tone today for the end of the journey for this historical season for our school"

Columbus Grove never trailed in the game after Allison Thompson hit a three-pointer to start the scoring before Rootstown's Colbie Curall made it a 3-2 game with a pair of free throws with 6:51 left in the opening quarter. Then the Bulldogs defense took over as they held the Rovers without a point for nearly six minutes.

Using a combination of 1-2-2 fullcourt pressure and their customary 2-3 halfcourt, the Bulldogs frustrated Rootstown as they turned the ball over seven times and was 2 of 11 shooting from the field in the first quarter. The Bulldogs had six steals in the opening quarter that helped them to a 17-0 run as they took a 20-2 lead on two Kendal Palte free throws with 1:05 left in the quarter.

"I thought we did a good job of starting fast," Schroeder said. "That has been our motto during the tournament run by throwing the first punch - being aggressive defensively, pressuring them, making them uncomfortable and offensively looking to attack the rim."

"Our 1-2-2 gave them some issues. Rootstown has some really good guard play, but we thought our length in our zone press could disrupt them a little bit. Kendal did a really nice job at the point of the 1-2-2 making them uncomfortable and our second level did a good job covering the middle and the back line did a good job with their positioning."

Palte had a big first quarter for the Bulldogs with 10 points, four of those coming from Rootstown turnovers. Thompson had five points in the quarter that included a fastbreak layup after a steal.

"It felt great," Palte said of the first quarter. "I know my advantage is my speed and my defense. We practiced situations like that quite a bit and that was something I was bad at (finishing fast breaks) in the

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beginning of the year. I would run full speed and brick the layup. I definitely put a lot of work into getting better at that.”

Nadia Lough ended the Rovers scoring drought with a basket with 52 seconds left in the quarter. After another two points from Palte, Sophia Smith closed the opening quarter with a basket as the Bulldogs had a 22-6 lead.

Rootstown went on an 8-3 run to start the second quarter behind three-pointers from Elliot Smallfield and Kelsey Bittecuffer that left them trailing by 11 at 25-14. Four points from Grove senior Lauryn Auchmuty pushed the Bulldog lead back to 29-14.

After a Smallfield basket for the Rovers, junior post Nicole Nesby scored two straight baskets for a 33-16 Bulldog lead before the Rovers scored the final three points of the first half to trail 33-19 at halftime.

Grove returned for the second half with a new wrinkle for the Rovers as they used some 1-3-1 zone in the halfcourt. Schroeder said the players suggested using the 1-3-1 zone at halftime and the coaches agreed. The zone paid dividends for the Bulldogs as they started the second half with a 13-3 run to take a 46-22.

Four different players scored for the Bulldogs in the run as Nesby had five points, with a three-point play, Aubrey Schroeder had three points, while Auchmuty hit a three and Palte added a basket.

“Our kids never quit,” Rootstown coach Joe Leonard said. “But every time we’d get a little momentum; we just couldn’t quite get there. Maybe it wasn’t so much what we did or didn’t do as Columbus Grove just wouldn’t let it happen.”

Columbus Grove outscored the Rovers 22-13 in the quarter for a 51-32 lead going to the final quarter. Nine of the Rovers points in the third quarter came on three-point goals as they hit eight long range shots in the final three quarters.

Both teams scored 14 points in the final quarter. Rootstown pulled within 12 points at 55-43 before

Columbus Grove went on a 10-2 run to seal the program’s first state title.

Auchmuty paced the Bulldogs with game high 17 points while dishing out six assists and coming up with five steals. Palte and Schroeder both added 14 points, while Nesby scored 13 points and grabbed 16 rebounds while coming up with four steals.

Bittecuffer led the Rovers with 12 points and Smallfield added 10 points. Lough grabbed six rebounds for Rootstown.

Columbus Grove 22/42 18/24 65
Auchmuty 3-9-17. Myers 0-0-0. A. Thompson 3-0-7. Palte 6-2-14. Nesby 5-3-13. A. Schroeder 5-4-14. Fortman 0-0-0. Benroth 0-0-0. Patchet 0-0-0. Witteborg 0-0-0. Verhoff 0-0-0. E. Schroeder 0-0-0. Hoover 0-0-0. D. Thompson 0-0-0.

Rootstown 13/42 12/16 46
Curall 1-4-6. Germann 3-0-9. Smallfield 2-4-10. Bittecuffer 4-1-12. Lough 1-2-4. Smith 1-0-2. Bengston 1-0-2. Damicone 0-0-0. O’Neil 0-0-0. Soika 0-0-0. Kidd 0-0-0. Pownail 0-0-0.

C. Grove	22	11	18	14	65
Rootstown	6	13	13	14	46