



# Finishing touch

A young and relentless Hill-Murray squad tops Eden Prairie for a fourth state title

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They came in green and black waves, different sizes and tendencies but a shared relentlessness.

Hill-Murray boys' hockey coach Bill Lechner joked his team, led by only six seniors, was young on paper.

On the other bench, Eden Prairie relished the chance to redeem last season's overtime loss in the Class 2A state championship game.

Eagles coach Lee Smith, overseeing an already deep team supplemented by three standout players new to the fold this season, said the team that wants it most would prevail.

On Saturday, Hill-Murray was that team. Inspired play throughout fueled the Pioneers' 4-1 victory and fourth state championship in program history. The Maplewood private school's previous titles came in 1983, 1991 and 2008.

Senior forward Charlie

Hill-Murray players skated their Class 2A championship trophy around the Xcel Energy Center ice.

Photo by AARON LAVINSKY  
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#### HILL-MURRAY STATE TITLES



Strobel, whose father and uncle starred for the 1991 team, scored twice to lead the charge.

"We finished this off," Strobel said after the game. "I told all these 20 working guys that we're gonna finish it tonight. And we did it."

Bad news threatened No. 5 seed Hill-Murray's chances to win even before puck drop. Junior defenseman Joey Palodichuk, a Star Tribune All-Metro third-team selection who made a verbal commitment to Wisconsin, was scratched from

the lineup.

But a shorthanded Hill-Murray team received the game's first power play and made good on the opportunity. Defenseman Matthew Fleishhacker's 10th goal of the season put the Pioneers (21-6-3) ahead 1-0 at the first intermission.

On paper, Fleishhacker and the diminished defensive crew looked suspect. Hill-Murray used two sets of defensemen (senior Seamus O. Regan with sophomore Axel Bagley and

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Hill-Murray goaltender Remington Keopple eyed the puck as Edén Prairie players attacked in the second period.

# Hill-Murray captures title

◀ **CLASS 2A** from C1  
junior Matthew Fleishhacker with sophomore Luke Hause) with sophomore Leo Gruba receiving spot shifts.

They were more than capable of slowing No. 3 seed Edén Prairie (24-5-1) and the Eagles' offensive weapons. Senior goaltender Remington Keopple held the Eagles scoreless into the third period. But his blue line corps deserved credit for permitting 22 shots and few second chances.

"Our defense kept them to the outside and our forwards were blocking shots all game," Keopple said. "It made my job a lot easier."

Relentless Hill-Murray opened the second period with sophomore forward Nick Pierre sending a puck off the crossbar on Hill-Murray's first rush.

Then senior forward Owen Quast, who Lechner has called "the little engine that could," corralled the puck near the red line and headed for the Edén Prairie zone. His shot whizzed over goalie Axel Rosenlund's stick and put the Pioneers ahead 2-0 at 3:46



Hill-Murray forward Owen Quast got elbow bumps from the Pioneers bench after scoring a second-period goal.

of the second period.

Strobel tightened Hill-Murray's grip on the Eagles with a play combining his skill and determination. Stro-

bel maneuvered around defenseman Mason Langenbrunner, then continued behind the net before depositing a wraparound goal from the back side.

That gave Hill-Murray a 3-0 lead with less than two minutes to go in the second period.

Ben Steeves gave Edén Prairie a spark with a goal at 5:49 of the third period. An Eagles team that had not been outworked since an early February loss, a team that in Smith's words was "in total control" of its first two state tournament games, got the opposite results in the championship game.

Hill-Murray's metamorphosis into a championship contender began early in January with a three-game slump. Injury and illness thinned the Pioneers' lineup, and the resulting losses to Benilde-St. Margaret's, Mahtomedi and Wayzata forced a regroup.

Lechner praised his team for consistent effort at practice. His senior group, while not impressive in number, played roles with vigor. Strobel was "the heartbeat," Seamus O. Regan "the father figure," and Henry Eischen and Keopple the quiet leaders by example.

Together, they leave Hill-Murray as state champions.

## SATURDAY'S RECAP

### FAVORITE MOMENT

**David La Vague:** Joe Miller scoring a hat trick in Blake's quarterfinal victory against Maple Grove. The 2-on-0 shorthanded passing clinic he and Gavin Best displayed, and Miller's finish, were absolute beauties.

**Loren Nelson:** Hill-Murray's Charlie Strobel flying into the Hill-Murray bench Lambeau Leap-style to celebrate his second-period goal in the championship game against Edén Prairie.

### ATTENDANCE

An announced crowd of 8,978 fans saw the Class 1A championship game. The Class 2A title game drew 17,634.

### QUOTE

"It was a clinic on how to play goalie because he makes everything look easy."

— Patrick Andrews, Hermantown coach, on a 40-save performance for Mahtomedi's Ben Dardis.

## 2A THREE STARS

### 1. Charlie Strobel, Hill-Murray senior forward:

Added to the Strobel family state tourney scrapbook — dad Mike and uncle Mark won a title with Hill-Murray in 1991 — by scoring twice against Edén Prairie.

### 2. Remington Keopple, Hill-Murray, senior goaltender:

He stopped 21 of 22 Edén Prairie shots and backstopped a Pioneers defense that played without junior defenseman Joey Palodichuk.

### 3. Matthew Fleischhacker

(below), Hill-Murray, junior defenseman: Part of the stalwart yet weakened defensive corps, he scored the Pioneers' first goal on a power play



# Strobel provides goals, leadership

The Hill-Murray captain added to the family hockey legend.

By LOREN NELSON  
Special to the Star Tribune

The goals were gorgeous. And incredibly clutch. The celebrations were wildly epic, too.

But senior Charlie Strobel's most important contribution to Hill-Murray's Class 2A championship season came long before he stepped onto the Xcel Energy Center ice Saturday night.

"Charlie was huge this summer on building camaraderie, taking the young guys out with the old guys," Hill-Murray coach Bill Lechner said. "That's not a guarantee for success, but you could see it coming."

Strobel, whose late second-period goal put the Pioneers ahead by three en route to their 4-1 victory over Eden Prairie, oozes all the traits coaches crave from their leaders. Selflessness, toughness, relentlessness.

He's the first at practice and last to leave. Never coasts through a drill. Says all the right things in the locker room and in postgame media sessions, when the answers are short and all about team, team, team.

Lechner, in his 23rd season leading the Pioneers, has had an abundance of great captains. A common trait binds them all, he said.

"He's got to be respected," Lechner said. "I use the analogy, in our coaching staff, as the leader of this group, if I'm sitting there with a cigarette, out of shape, with a beer in hand and going, 'You guys gotta behave and work hard.' Yeah, credibility is gone."



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Hill-Murray's Charlie Strobel scored twice in the Class 2A championship game and finished the season with 27.

"So Charlie is that voice. But he lives it."

The Pioneers were leading 2-0 with less than two minutes left in the second period when Strobel wheeled down the left boards. He went behind the Eden Prairie goal and — with feet still churning — wrapped around the net and stuffed the puck inside the right post. As pandemonium ensued, Strobel pulled his jersey from his chest, showing off the Hill-Murray

crest to the crowd, before leaping into a mosh pit of teammates at the bench.

Strobel scored again late in the third to put the Pioneers ahead 4-1 and all but secure the victory.

The goals, Strobel's 26th and 27th of the season, add another volume to the Strobel family legend. Twin brothers Mike — Charlie's dad — and Mark Strobel were the twin engines who powered Hill-Murray to the 1991 state championship.

Earlier this season, Charlie said his dad doesn't talk often about his championship exploits.

"I think he's letting me create my own path here at Hill-Murray," Charlie said. "I respect that."

Charlie shares the intensity displayed by his dad and uncle when they were hard-driven players who would settle for nothing less than a championship.

"Sometimes it's like, 'Take a chill pill, kid,'" Lechner said.

## CLASS 2A RESULTS

### Thursday • Quarterfinals

- Blake 7, Maple Grove 5
- Eden Prairie 4, Lakeville South 0
- Hill-Murray 5, Moorhead 1
- St. Thomas Academy 3, Andover 2

### Friday • Semifinals

- Eden Prairie 4, Blake 1
- Hill-Murray 3, St. Thomas Academy 2, OT

### Consolation semifinals

- Andover 4, Moorhead 1
- Maple Grove 3, Lakeville South 0

### Saturday • Fifth place

- Andover 4, Maple Grove 1

### Third place

- Blake 4, St. Thomas Academy 0

### Championship

- Hill-Murray 4, Eden Prairie 1

## SUMMARIES

### Championship

#### Hill-Murray 4, Eden Prairie 1

Hill-Murray ..... 1 2 1-4  
Eden Prairie ..... 0 0 1-1  
**First:** HM-Fleischhacker (Strobel, Pierre), 7:22, pp. **Second:** HM-Quast (Begley), 3:46. **HM-Strobel** (Eischen, Hardy), 15:06. **Third:** EP-Steeves (Mittelstadt, Langfells), 5:49. **HM-Strobel** (Eischen, Begley), 10:59. **Saves:** Hill-Murray: Keopple 5-6-10-21. Eden Prairie: Rosenlund 6-13-6-25.

### Third place

#### Blake 4, St. Thomas Academy 0

St. Thomas Academy ..... 0 0 0-0  
Blake ..... 1 2 1-4  
**First:** B-Sabre (Miller), 9:03. **Second:** B-Miller (Best), 5:12, pp. B-Miller, 10:30. **Third:** B-Sabre (Matzke), 6:56. **Saves:** St. Thomas Academy: Aitken 13-13-5-31. Blake: Reid 3-5-9-17.

### Fifth place

#### Andover 4, Maple Grove 1

Maple Grove ..... 0 1 0-1  
Andover ..... 1 1 2-4  
**First:** A-Kaiser (Jones, Kron), 12:18. **Second:** MG-Oakland, :22. A-Bauer, 4:00, sh. **Third:** A-DeBettignies (Bauer), 9:32. A-Kron (Schifsky, Thoreson), 16:43. **Saves:** Maple Grove: Slotsve 12-15-4-31. Andover: Swenson 4-4-4-12.

## ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Wyatt Kaiser	Andover
Joe Miller	Blake
Jack Sabre	Blake
Will Svenddal	Blake
Mason Langenbrunner	Eden Prairie
Luke Mittelstadt	Eden Prairie
Axel Rosenlund	Eden Prairie
Ben Steeves	Eden Prairie
Dylan Godbout	Hill-Murray
Remington Keopple	Hill-Murray
Nick Pierre	Hill-Murray
Charlie Strobel	Hill-Murray