



## WPIAL lacrosse playoffs: Pine-Richland girls, Mt. Lebanon boys win championships

Rams hold off Mt. Lebanon by 1 goal; Blue Devils

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Mt. Lebanon could not have asked for a better opportunity to tie things up late against Pine-Richland.

Trailing by a goal, the Blue Devils caught a break when Rams attacker Cate Gentile was hit with a yellow card with 4:48 remaining in regulation.

Instead of Mt. Lebanon riding a man-advantage opportunity to a game-tying goal and eventual victory, it was the Pine-Richland penalty kill that came to the fore and turned defense into offense and, in the end, a championship.

Pine-Richland (18-3-0) killed off the two-minute penalty to Gentile, then made Mt. Lebanon (16-3-0) pay for its failure to convert when Hannah

Young sent home her fourth goal of the game with 2:10 remaining in regulation.

That tally also proved to be the game-winner as the Rams staved off a late Blue Devils rally to pull out a 13-12 victory at Robert Morris University's Joe Walton Stadium on Thursday and win their first WPIAL Class 3A girls lacrosse title since 2018.

"It's stressful, but I think we've done so much situational stuff in practice that that's where the hard work pays off and you have to go and have fun with it," Pine-Richland coach Shannen Drennen said. "We worked on that power play in practice over and over again, so when it happened in the game, it was like we were in practice again."

Mt. Lebanon has not had much luck at Joe Walton Stadium in recent years. The Blue Devils have now lost three consecutive finals and are 0-2 in one-goal championship matches in that time.

"It's tough. Yes it is. But we have to look at the big picture that we got here three times in a row," Mt. Lebanon coach Brian Kattan said. "It's not easy to get here in a championship game three times in a row and we're looking to maybe get back here next year and get it."

Having a match this closely contested shouldn't have been a surprise. Pine-Richland also knocked off Mt. Lebanon, 13-12, in the regular season finale between the two that gave the Rams the No. 1 seed over the No. 2 Blue Devils heading into the tournament.

This one, though, was about as evenly matched as any game either had played. Neither could really get ahead of the other as the largest lead at any point was when Pine-Richland had a 5-2 advantage after Kendyll Jerry notched the second of her three goals at 15:53 of the first half.

"I don't think there was ever a moment I felt comfortable until the buzzer went off and we had won the game," Drennen said. "We knew the second we relaxed, they were going to come back."

And they almost did.

Down 13-11, Nora Austin scored on a free position shot with 1:13 remaining to cut the Blue Devils deficit to 13-12. Pine-Richland controlled the faceoff,

but Mt. Lebanon forced a turnover in its half and called a timeout with 42 seconds left to set up a play.

Mt. Lebanon wanted to go to junior all-American attacker Addison Murdoch - who already had five goals and two assists – but Pine-Richland triple-teamed her and she was forced to give up the ball to her freshman younger sister Quinn, who had a pair herself.

Quinn shook off a double-team and got off a shot with about nine seconds remaining, but Pine-Richland goalkeeper Claire Dosch made the last of her seven saves to preserve the victory.

“I have had nothing but amazing things to say about Claire since the beginning of the season,” Drennen said. “She just keeps stepping up every game.”

### **Class 3A boys**

Mt. Lebanon had sung this song before.

Last season the Blue Devils trailed by three goals against Shady Side Academy only to come back and tie it up before losing in overtime.

This time around, though, it was the Blue Devils playing some sweet music in the end.

Sophomore Keegan Green scored a critical goal with 2:50 remaining in regulation to give No. 2 Mt. Lebanon a critical two-goal lead and the Blue Devils held on down the stretch to pull out a 10-8 victory over defending champion and fourth-seeded Shady Side Academy.

It was the team’s fifth title overall and first since 2015.

“Yes, it’s been eight years since we won one, but we lost last year in overtime, we lost in 2019 in overtime,” Mt. Lebanon coach Mike Ermer said. “We’ve been hanging around and this year’s group was special.”

Shady Side Academy had a 7-4 lead after Seamus Riordan scored his second of the game 1:55 into the third quarter. But Mt. Lebanon came back and scored five straight, including two each by Joseph Hetz and Luke Prezioso, to take a 9-7 lead with 5:22 remaining.

“They started doing a better job at the faceoff ‘X’ and getting more possessions,” Shady Side Academy coach Cam Thompson said. “I felt like, offensively, we were going to get more to fall there at the end and we just got unlucky.”

Mt. Lebanon also got a huge contribution from junior Fred LaSota. He scored the team’s first four goals and picked up a loose ball late that allowed the Blue Devils to effectively run out the clock.

“He’s Steady Freddie. No question about it,” Ermer said. “Freddie has been a steadying force down that and, for him to pop those first four was really great and the ground ball is what he does all the time.”

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