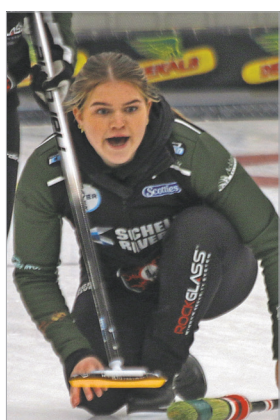


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Steinbach fans mob the Sabres team after the final point hit the floor. Steinbach fans dominated the stands, appearing to vastly outnumber their St. Paul's counterparts.



Nik Reimer's kill with the score sitting at 14-13 for St Paul's in the fifth set saved the Sabres from the loss. Reimer went on to serve an ace to take the lead, and the Sabres won with him at the line. Reimer was named as a tournament all-star.



Tournament all-star Boston Thiessen and Micah Bergman go up to try and block a St. Paul's hit.



Provincial Volleyball AAAA tournament MVP Hudson Rempel passes a ball over the outstretched arms of two St. Paul's blockers during the championship match.

Sabres survive Crusaders to win provincial championship

by CASSIDY DANKOCHIK

All season, the Steinbach Regional Secondary School (SRSS) boys volleyball team bench and fans would yell "hard for two," throwing two fingers in the air and signaling to the team on the court anytime they were two points away from winning a set.

Players raised their fingers after the boys volleyball AAAA provincial final at the University of Manitoba, but this time it was only one pointed to the sky in victory, as Steinbach cemented their place as the best high school volleyball team in the province.

The Sabres were able to defeat the St Paul's Crusaders 3-2 (25-23, 25-20, 24-26, 23-25, 16-14) in a dramatic five set battle Dec. 5. Steinbach took the first two sets before the Crusaders stormed back to force a decisive fifth set, even earning a match point before Steinbach rattled off three points in a row to take the banner, prompting many of the SRSS students and fans who made the trip to the University of Manitoba to rush the gym floor in celebration.

It was Steinbach's first boys varsity volleyball championship since 2014.

"The Steinbach support was electric," Sabres head coach Joe Thiessen said after the match.

"The fans were absolutely awesome. I'm thrilled with the support, I'd say we absolutely dominated in the stands today — more than 16-14 in the final set."

The Sabres led 24-22 in the third set, but the Crusaders were able to fight off two match points to keep their chances alive.

A Nik Reimer kill would stop a St Paul's match point in the fifth set.

Reimer went on to serve out the match, including an ace to set-up Steinbach's third match point. The umpire ruled the grade 11's serve stayed just in, despite St. Paul's head coach Dustin Spiring's protests. In his frus-



Eight Sabres fans came to the match shirtless with 'go Sabres' written on their chests. The Steinbach fans were raucous all night, including getting in St. Paul's players faces as the teams switched sides, and chanting "daddy's money" in reference to St. Paul's status as a private school.

tration, Spiring kicked the ball, earning a red card from the head umpire. He was forced to watch the final point from the stands as Boston Thiessen feinted setting the ball to a teammate, instead cleverly passing the ball to an open spot on the other side of the net to lock up the banner for Steinbach.

Reimer and Boston Thiessen were named as tournament all-stars, with Hudson Rempel earning the most valuable player award.

"Amazing, that's my only word for that," Rempel said on being named MVP.

Reimer's clutch service came after he was

the one who had a chance to win the match in the third set. Both teams had problems serving the ball throughout the match, with players battling the pressure of a provincial final.

"There were certainly moments where each team took turns struggling a little bit," coach Thiessen said.

"That can happen these are young guys, high school guys there's a lot of pressure with the big crowd."

Despite struggling throughout the match, Steinbach's service game came alive in the fifth set.

"When we made that first ace in the fifth set, right in the back, that's when everything changed," Rempel said on what he thought the turning point of the match was.

"We got momentum, we took it, and rolled with it."

The crowd impacted the game, with Steinbach supporters heckling St. Paul's players throughout the night, at times appearing to fuel the Crusaders players, but at other times appearing to negatively affect their game.

Steinbach's bench crew turned into coaches and cheerleaders, with Zane Milburn, who didn't see the court in the semi-final or final, leading the team emotionally from the bench, even delivering a passionate speech in the huddle during a fifth set timeout.

"The last two sets before the fifth set were pretty rough, we didn't battle like we did in the first ones," Reimer said.

"I think the turning point was when we switched sides (in the fifth set). We took a timeout, and we really just wanted it. Our bench was loud, our fans were loud and that brought up the energy on our whole team."

Coach Thiessen also had no shortage of praise for the grade 12 player.

"Our bench has been absolutely awesome," he said.

"(Milburn) is kind of our leader on that crew, and he has just got passion and energy for every point of every day, every practice, and that just pays off over the course of a season."

Neither team could string together a long run of points, especially as the game stretched into the fourth and fifth sets.

"Give (St. Paul's) some credit, they battled back," coach Thiessen said.

"That fifth set, that was just back and forth, that was anybody's set there. I'm just really happy we were able to finish it."

The SRSS girls varsity team lost in the quarter-finals last week.