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ILHS volleyball takes home 3rd straight state title

4 in graduating class lead team to victory

By BOB MARTIN, The Laconia Daily Sun

Nov 24, 2025



The Inter-Lakes High School volleyball team wins the Division III state title on Nov. 8, with a sweep win over Farmington. It was the third straight championship for the Lakers, and the fourth consecutive finals appearance. In the back row, from left, are Hannah Nesbitt, Summer Hamill, Avery Holmes, Assistant Coach Jordan St. Cyr, Gracie Stephens, Ivy Evans, Alyssa Snow, Stevie Poehler, Assistant Coach Beth Doda, Emily Doda, Kiera Moynihan and Head Coach Randy Mattson, and in the front row, from left, are Adelina Gasque, Katy Bivolcic and Lillian Lybrand. (Courtesy photo)

MEREDITH — Winning one state championship is something most high school athletes and coaches dream about, but a three-peat is an especially rare accomplishment.

The Inter-Lakes High School volleyball team recently completed this feat, knocking off Farmington in a sweep win to be crowned Division III champions for the third straight year. Some of the players on this squad have gotten quite used to winning, as it was the fourth straight finals appearance by the Lakers.

Inter-Lakes topped Farmington with scores of 25-13, 25-17, and 25-19, a dominant finals performance by the Lakers on Nov. 8. However, the playoffs were quite humbling to a team that went in without losing a single set most of the season.

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After a bye week, the Lakers made easy work of No. 8 Concord Christian with a 3-0 win. The No. 4 Belmont Red Raiders were up next, with something to prove.

The Lakers were fortunate with a powerful lineup, led by Kiera Moynihan, co-player of the year this season, and earned the award in 2024, as well. But Belmont were no slouches, and they had Liv Chandonnait, who shared the honor with Moynihan.

Inter-Lakes swept Belmont twice in the regular season, but the team knew the Red Raiders had improved since the last time they faced off.

Belmont went up 7-3 with a rush of confidence, and while the Lakers battled back, they still suffered a 25-23 defeat. For the first time all season, the Lakers had to play from behind.

“Our team was calm and didn’t lose their cool at all,” Coach Randy Mattson said. “Even when we were behind a bit, we took care of business. We realized we were making unforced errors and had to figure it out.”

Inter-Lakes went on to win the match 3-1, sending them to the finals once again. The winning matches were close as well — 25-20, 26-24, and 25-22 — but a win is a win, and away they went.

Moynihan led the way with a perfect serving night at 23 for 23, with 16 service points. She was an anchor when it mattered, serving the team’s final seven points to secure the win.

“This is particularly noteworthy, because Kiera is our No. 1 hitter, and for those seven points she was in the back row,” Mattson said. “Everyone stepped up and did what they needed to do to win. It was a good team effort.”

The Lakers traveled to Pinkerton Academy for the title match against No. 2 Farmington, whose only losses in the regular season came from Inter-Lakes and Belmont. Once again, the opponent came in ready to face the division’s top seeded team, and Inter-Lakes found themselves down 7-1. It didn’t last long, however, and the Lakers went on to win the first set 25-13, followed with wins of 25-17 and 25-19, to be crowned champions.

The team was led by Alyssa Snow, the team's back row libero, who was 21 for 21, serving with 16 points, and five aces. The Lakers had a 0.324 hitting percentage, and Mattson was happy with their efficiency, with only seven attack errors, and three dig errors.

"We were really just focused and steady," Mattson said. "Everyone was performing and doing their jobs."

Mattson was excited for the players in the graduating class, saying it isn't common to be in the finals every year of high school sports. The team was focused right from the beginning of the preseason in August, making it their goal to come out on top of the division again.

While there were five 12th graders on the squad, the team also had two 11th graders, as well as five players in 10th grade who had never experienced varsity play. These younger players were not only a key part of this season, but have now been exposed to this winning mindset, which Mattson hopes will carry over for years to come.

"It was an important thing for them to come on board and understand what needed to be done to accomplish the goal," Mattson said. "The seniors had confidence and hunger to win another. There was a feeling of determination knowing they had the experience."

The Lakers were led this year by four co-captains, including Moynihan, Emily Doda, Stevie Poehler and Lillian Lybrand. Mattson said she doesn't normally do this, but each one had something important to offer the team.

"They were absolutely brilliant as a leadership team," Mattson said. "They did everything and more as captains, and that was everything for this team. They showed the younger players, and the JV team, what it meant to be a leader."

Mattson said the seniors never got cocky, though. They knew it would take hard work, but in the end it was the second straight 19-0 season for the Lakers. In all, they have won 48 matches in a row. Their last loss was halfway through the 2023 season.

Moynihan has been first team All-State three years running, but Mattson said it is important to note she was also the only Granite State player to be named to the American Volleyball Coaches Association All Region Team, as well as being included on the Best and Brightest First Team, thanks to her 4.2 GPA.

In an interview following the championship win, she was humble, and gave credit to her teammates for their work.

“There is so much talent on this team, and they have been great to practice and play with,” Moynihan said.

Moynihan had 208 kills, 103 digs, and 167 service points, and led the team with 60 aces. She had 648 kills in her career, as well as 412 digs, 102 blocks, 641 service points and an outstanding 0.327 hit percentage.

“She is one of the best, but also a terrific young woman,” Mattson said. “Not just in volleyball, but she is just a humble, quiet leader.”

Snow has done nothing but win state titles in her three years, starting as a first-year student, then moving into her natural position of libero. The first-team All-Stater posted 159 digs, and led the team with 174 service points.

“She has defensive prowess,” Mattson said. “She’s just everywhere on the court.”

Doda was the backup setter for three years, and accepted this roll willingly, knowing this would be her season to shine. This year, she tallied 504 assists to shatter the school’s former record of 471, and made first team All-State. Mattson said she was critical to the team’s success.

Also making first team All-State was Lybrand, who was the team's best server at a 95% clip. She also had 109 kills and 100 digs as a right-side hitter for the Lakers.

This is the 33rd season for Mattson, and she said it is tough to compare titles. She admits 2019 was special being her first win, and the first of the three-peat was memorable with an upset over Somersworth. She knows three in a row is rare in any sport.

With a junior varsity team who just won the state tournament with an undefeated season, and some younger players coming up looking to make their mark, Mattson said the future is bright for an already surging squad.

"There are a lot of girls in this program who are excited," Mattson said. "There is a lot of enthusiasm, and I think these championships are fueling this. There's a focus on building on this culture."

Editor's note: Kiera Moynihan is an intern this semester at The Daily Sun.

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