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PREP BOWLING

Cougars roll to title

Coronado captures first state crown for a boys sports team

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Coronado High School's boys bowling team was swept by rival Green Valley in the regular season, just as it was the past two years. In the playoffs, though, the Cougars finally got by the Gators, beating them 5-2 to capture the Sunrise Region crown.

Coronado went on to top Palo Verde, the Sunset Region champion, 7-0, to claim the school's first state title in boys sports.

"They were real excited, especially to be the first men's team to do it. That was the goal for them," Cougars head coach Bob McKee said. "We knew we could win state, we just had to get past a couple teams we hadn't beaten before.

"They all bowled well, they bowled as a team, and they picked each other up, especially in the Green Valley game."

The Gators won two of the last four boys state bowling titles — settling for second in the state last year — and won all six Southeast Division showdowns with the Cougars over the last three years heading into this season's Sunrise Region final.

Coronado, which went 9-3 overall and finished second in its division this year, won the first game of the best-of-three match, 987-961, but dropped a heartbreaker, 1,019-1,022, in the second game, in which Green Valley's Scott Kwasniewski took a perfect



SPECIAL TO VIEW

The Coronado boys bowling team went 9-3 overall and finished second in its division this year before beating Sunset Region champion Palo Verde to win the state title. From left, coach Bob McKee, Nathan Heckman, Louis Brown, captain Greg Garofalo, Chris Hooks, Bobby Sherman, Sam Ficalora and assistant coach Walter Ollriksen.

game into the final frame before settling for a 297.

The winner-take-all third game was close to the finish, but Coronado prevailed, 997-945, sparked by senior captain Greg Garofalo's 231.

"It was pretty hard to come back after that second game, because we've never beaten Green Valley before in any match, so it was nice," McKee said. "Every game came down to the 10th frame. It was nip and tuck all the way in the third game. It came down to the last two bowlers for each team and our last two bowlers marked in.

"That was the biggest match of the year. Being able to finally beat Green Valley gave them a lot of confidence going into the final. We knew we had the talent to do it and it was just our turn. They hung in there and finally got the monkey off their back."

Garofalo, who averaged 206 pins per game this year, shot more than 200 in all three

games against the Gators, finishing with a 649 series. He added a 233 game and a 685 series against Palo Verde.

"He's always been our anchor bowler, he's always clutch," McKee said. "He can pick up all the spares and we count on him to come through when we need him."

Chris Hooks, a sophomore with a 191 average, shot a 622 series against the Gators and a 623 series against the Panthers.

"He probably has the smoothest stroke of all our bowlers," McKee said. "He's got a great stroke into the pocket."

Bobby Sherman, a sophomore with a 198 average, shot a 605 series in the region final and a 663 series in the state final, with a 247 game.

"He can do a lot with his ball. He has a lot of different shots and is probably the most versatile of all our bowlers," McKee said.

Nathan Heckman, a junior,

turned in a 601 series against Green Valley, but saved his best for the final, firing a pair of 259s and finishing with a 744 series to lead Coronado to a 3,278 score, which tied Green Valley's state record. Palo Verde finished with 2,730 pins.

"We were telling him he was due to have a 700 series, because he'd been so consistent all week, and he's had a 300 game in the past," McKee said. "He leads off because he has an explosive ball, and eight times out of 10, he'll strike on his first shot and that's what you want from a leadoff bowler."

Garofalo shot his first perfect game just a couple of days after winning state.

"We had two kids who have bowled perfect games and any of them are capable of doing it," McKee said.

The Cougars also featured sophomores Sam Ficalora and sixth man Louis Brown.

Ficalora, the only left-hander on the squad, fired a 526 series against the Gators and shot a pair of 200-plus games against Palo Verde. Brown also saw action in the state title tilt. Both average close to 190.

Coronado, which averaged around 980 as a team, opened the state tournament by beating Rancho and then topped Eldorado, avenging last season's region semifinal loss on the same lanes.

"They're always tough. They can win any night, so it was nice to beat them," said McKee, whose volunteer assistant coach is Walter Ollriksen. "It's hard now. There are four or five good teams and every year anyone can win it. You have to be on top of your game and have a few breaks, if it's close."