

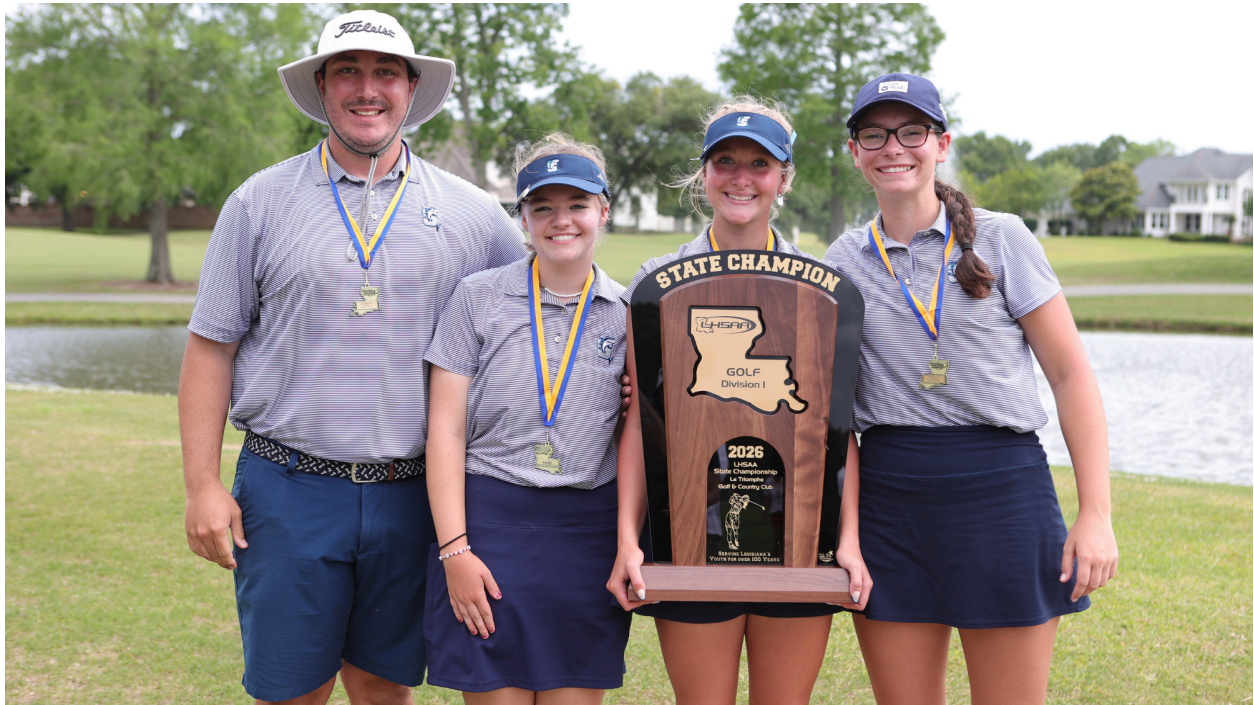


The Best Thing I Saw at State: Writing History for Southside

Southside Girls' Golf Captures First Team State Championship in School History.

By Ethan W. Anderson

The *Best Thing I Saw at State* is a new column that brings to life the moments that make high school sports so meaningful. Through the stories, emotions, and details that often go unseen at the state championships, it captures what the box score can't.



LAFAYETTE — The LHSAA State Golf Championships stretch across Acadiana in a way few other state events can match. Six divisions. Four courses. Hundreds of golfers. From Carencro to New Iberia, Broussard to Lafayette, the championship spreads across an entire region instead of fitting neatly inside one stadium or arena.

In my first year serving as Director of Golf for the LHSAA, I quickly learned that golf may be one of the most challenging championships to coordinate, but it also may be one of the clearest examples of what makes high school sports special. Not because of the logistics, the scoreboards, or the trophies. Because of the people.

That's why I'm so thankful for the opportunity to help put this event together. To watch so many people come together with one goal in mind: creating a memorable experience for student-athletes. And in the end, that's always the best part.



Watching golfers fight through first-tee jitters as their names are announced like a professional tournament. Watching fist pumps after a darted approach shot. Watching teammates gather greenside on the final hole cheering each other on. Watching student-athletes smile during the trophy presentation, thankful simply for the opportunity to compete on that stage.

The many groups deserving thanks include the Lafayette host committee, the golf courses that open their doors during peak season, the volunteers stationed across every course for two long days, and the Louisiana Golf Association and Kelly Gibson Foundation, two organizations that dedicated their staffs to helping create a first-class championship experience for Louisiana's student-athletes. It takes all of them working together to make this event possible.

But in the middle of all the moving parts, all the radios, scorecards, and tee times, there was one story that stood above the rest.

The Southside High School girls golf team walked onto the grounds at Le Triomphe Golf & Country Club chasing more than a state title. They were chasing history. And by the time the final putt dropped Tuesday afternoon, history belonged to them.

This year marked the first time the LHSAA held a state golf championship at the prestigious Le Triomphe Golf & Country Club, and the course more than lived up to its reputation. The Broussard layout has long earned praise for its tour-level feel, and throughout the week the conditions matched it. The fairways were pristine, the greens rolled true, and a comfortable south Louisiana breeze moved across the property for much of the championship. For two days, Louisiana's best high school golfers received a championship experience that felt every bit worthy of the stage.

Southside captured the school's first-ever team state championship, winning the Girls Division I title behind a trio of golfers who will forever hold a unique place in the school's history. Not the greatest yet. Not the most decorated. Simply the first. That matters.

Most athletic programs across Louisiana are built on generations of tradition. Championship banners hang in old gymnasiums. Alumni tell stories from decades ago. Records have stood for years. The LHSAA itself dates back more than 100 years.

But Southside is different.

The school is still young. Its athletic identity is still being written in real time. Every playoff run. Every district title. Every championship appearance becomes part of the program's foundation. There are no century-old stories to lean on yet. The students competing today are the ones creating them. Programs like Southside do not inherit tradition overnight. They build it slowly, one moment at a time. That's what made this championship feel bigger than golf.

Junior Rhyan Marcelissen led the Sharks with rounds of 75 and 77 to finish fourth individually at 6-over par. Caroline Endsley battled through injury concerns from earlier this season to post scores of 89 and 79 at the state tournament, while Avery Lusk rounded out the trio that delivered the title.



Just three golfers. That was the entire team.

In girls golf, each team currently fields three golfers, with the lowest two scores each day counting toward the team total. With such a small lineup, there is almost no margin for error. One bad hole can swing an entire championship. Every shot matters because every player matters. Beginning next season, after a proposal passed by LHSAA principals at last year's annual convention, teams will be allowed to bring four golfers while still counting the lowest two scores.

Southside entered the final round trailing Barbe by two strokes before slowly chipping away at the lead throughout the day. By the turn, the gap was down to one. Then came the back nine, where Southside stayed steady and the Bucs began to slip.

Even with the lead growing late in the round, the reality of a state championship never fully settles in until the scorecards are signed and the final putt drops. Standing along the cart path beside the 18th green, I watched Marcelissen walk toward the final hole knowing Southside was on the verge of history. The atmosphere felt different. Not loud or overwhelming, but tense in the quiet way only golf can create. Parents and coaches watched every shot closely as the championship slowly came into focus.

Marcelissen knew they were close walking up 18.

"It means a lot because this is one of the first state championships we've brought home for Southside," Marcelissen said. "So it's just very exciting to be one of those people to do it."

Then came the putt that made it feel real.

"I knew we had a pretty good lead coming into 18, but I missed the green and had a pretty decent long putt for par," Marcelissen said. "If I make the putt then it's definitely verified that we take it, so making that putt was extra special."

The Sharks' season had not been perfect. Marcelissen described it as "up and down," especially as Endsley battled injuries that at one point created uncertainty about whether she would even be able to compete in the championship. But somehow, everything came together at the right time. And perhaps the scariest part for the rest of Division I is this: Southside returns everybody next season.

"All three of us are returning next year," Marcelissen said. "Me and Caroline's senior year, so we want to try and win it our last year."

Maybe that will happen. Maybe it won't. Sports rarely follow scripts. But no matter what comes next, nobody can ever take this one away from them.

Years from now, when Southside adds more trophies, more banners, and more championship teams, people will still look back at this group differently because they were the first ones to do it. The first team to bring home a state championship. The first group to carve their names permanently into the foundation of a growing athletic program.



State championships are supposed to celebrate winners, but sometimes the best stories are about beginnings. Southside didn't just leave Broussard with a trophy. The Sharks left with a permanent place in school history.

That was the best thing I saw at state.

THE BEST THING I SAW AT STATE

Writing History for Southside
Southside Girls' Golf Captures First Team State Championship in School History.

SOUTHSIDE GIRLS GOLF
DIVISION I STATE CHAMPIONS

Author's Note: *In my role as the Director of Communications, I have the unique privilege of attending nearly all sanctioned LHSAA State Championship events. Although the schedule is demanding, I have the privilege of seeing student-athletes from all walks of life, united by two things: their participation in Louisiana high school sports and their pursuit of a state championship. In my first year in this role, I've gained a deeper appreciation for high school athletics and for all the dedication that goes into making each season and event possible. Although my current role involves less writing than my previous positions, it has given me the opportunity to return to something I've always loved. While much of my work now focuses on press releases and public statements, I also have the chance to reconnect with my passion for feature writing, this time highlighting what I consider the purest form of sport: high school athletics. The goal is to highlight the best thing I saw at each state championship and share the unknown stories behind these events, capturing memorable moments for student-athletes, coaches, administrators, officials, and fans.*