

# 'Put me in coach ...

The tiny troupe that fought to keep dance alive at St. Albert ended up mastering a baseball-themed routine that dominated at State.

**Lauren Cornelius**  
*Editor*

I squeezed the hands of my fellow St. Albert High School dancers as we listened silently to the announcer to hear if our routine had placed.

More than 1,000 people in the Wells Fargo Arena - including about 135 high school dance teams - hushed to hear who won the nation's largest dance team competition.

"Third Place, Westwood."

The silence was broken by the customary two-clap applause.

"Second Place, Graettinger-Terril/Ruthven-Ayrshire."

Again, clap clap.

In the split second before first place was announced, the team's hope faded a little. I thought, "That's okay, we can live with just a Division I rating."

But then, "First Place, Council Bluffs St. Albert."

Seniors Alyson Lenz, Katie Hopping and I let go of our grips and threw our arms around each other. The other four dance team members joined in the embrace, screaming. The team earned the divisional championship trophy for their novelty routine. Our joy made even sweeter by knowing we beat all odds to win it.

"The feeling I felt when the St. Albert Dance Team was announced for first place was indescribable," Hopping said. "It was a very jittery feeling. I was still nervous even after our name was called. I think my



**The Saintes perform their baseball-themed Novelty in Hy-Vee Hall at the Iowa State Dance Team Championships.**

instant reaction was that I was proud of what our team got to take home."

What makes the championship so amazing is that just six months before the competition St. Albert almost didn't have a dance team. The coaches had quit. The girls had walked away. Moral had bottomed out.

But there emerged a few dancers who fought to keep the team alive. The decades of dance team performances and competitions at St. Albert were not going to die with our class. And in April, the school began interviewing potential coaches.

"I was happy we were getting a new coach," said sophomore Savannah Campbell, "but also nervous because she could be mean."

She wasn't. She was just the tough, talented, dedicated coach we needed.

Lacey Corzine, a former dancer at Underwood High School and Northwest Missouri State University, took charge. Corzine, a teacher at Kirn Middle School, began work in late April - already a late start to the season.

Tryouts were announced in May, and the girls who wanted to dance another year tried to recruit. St. Albert had to add more numbers because the team would be disqualified from State if it didn't have at least six dancers. But even if we successfully recruited six, there were still worries. Would judges discriminate against our small

# I can be centerfield'

team when competing against bigger schools? And what would happen if one girl got injured? All hopes for State would be dashed.

On May 14, only six girls - returning from the previous year - showed up.

"I was a little panicked, hoping that everyone would stay interested throughout tryouts," Corzine said.

But she felt comforted knowing we were all returners with lots of experience to help her build the team.

Once practices started, there was no holding back. Even with the fear of injury looming, we still gave full effort for the new coach and each other. We learned State pom during 6 a.m. summertime practices, and conditioning helped build stamina to perform it. It all paid off in December when the team earned second place in Class IV Pom.

While dance is an art form, it is also a sport like no other. The team is together year-round, learning routines we will perform the whole year at foot-

ball and basketball games. We also learn to get along and bond.

During the summer, Coach Corzine had the team over for a bonfire. Each senior surprised a sophomore with a gift. We became each other's "Sainte sister" as a way for the team to become closer and motivate each other.

"I think it's nice because we all get to be close," said sophomore Trinity Marlow. "But it's hard sometimes because we're like a family and families fight sometimes or get mad at each other."

Because we are together for so long, it seems like every little thing someone does can get on our nerves. Someone forgets to bring a tie to put up their hair at practice, we get annoyed. Someone forgets to do a motion in the dance that was already cleaned, we get annoyed. Someone wants to borrow a bobby pin before a game starts, we get one out of our bag but we still get annoyed. In the end, even with all these annoyances, we still act like a team and we still care for each other.

The end of the football season meant the beginning of practice for State Solos and Nov- elty performances. All six girls danced solos in Newton, Iowa, on Nov. 5th. Prepping for State Solos involves costume fixes, perfect makeup, stretching, reviewing the dance, and getting sweaty palms before walking on the gym floor. Then when the music starts, all nervousness goes away and the dance takes over.

"Something that I love about State Solos is you truly show off your personality," Hopping said. "You can't hide behind anyone. The judges can always tell what's behind your smile."

Lenz received 6th place and Hopping received 10th place in the Class I Solo competition.

"Receiving 10th made my heart skip a beat," Hopping said. "And I will hold that feeling close as long as I live."

While prepping for State, the team made the decision that they needed a seventh dancer. Senior Sara Meyerring, a St. Albert cheerleader, was recruited so there would be more people on the floor and act as a backup if someone got hurt.

The team pushed hard to get ready for State Team competition. This meant having two-hour practices after school everyday. When basketball season started, we were evicted from the gym and forced to dance in the cafete-

**The ISDTA Championship show will air Feb. 6 from 8-10 p.m. and Feb. 12 from 1-3 p.m. on Iowa Public Television.**



**SPORTS**



**The Saintes perform their pom routine in Wells Fargo Arena, earning a second place Class IV trophy.**

ria. Practicing in a smaller space was a disadvantage, but we made it work.

We invited outsiders to watch our performance with fresh eyes. St. Albert alumni Rikki Ann Carlson and Katie Hammond, both former dancers, and the former Woodbine dance team coach and current St. Albert speech coach Andrea Harper critiqued our dances and give us input.

“I thought it was really helpful,” Lenz said. “We got fresh feedback from other experienced coaches who had never seen our dances before but had gone to State several times in the past. We heard critiques from them that were different than Lacey’s, which helped us focus on other things we needed to clean, sharpen up, or change before going to State.”

The night before the competition the team checked into a Des Moines hotel, with the girls in two adjoining rooms. We dined at a restaurant and opened gifts that would always remind

us of our trip. Then we went back to the hotel and watched Netflix in an attempt to calm our nerves and fall asleep.

The day of State competition was long. It began early, watching some of the other dancers perform at the Wells Fargo Arena.

“I felt super nervous and a little intimidated while watching other performances.” said sophomore Athena Arculeo.

We performed Pom first, then ate snacks while waiting and watching more performances. Then we got ready to perform our baseball-themed Novelty.

Overcoming our nerves, the performance was flawless. But we still had to wait hours for the judges’ scores. At 9 p.m. we were introduced by the announcer and walked onto the arena floor, standing among the other competitors who danced that day. They announced the awards for every category. It took more than an hour to hand out trophies, and only a minute to announce our State win. But it will be a moment that will last a lifetime for this team who wouldn’t let dance die.

“Class I Novelty. Council Bluffs St. Albert.”

We got 1st place in Novelty and 2nd Place in Pom.

“The last time our team took home a first place Novelty was my freshman year,” Hopping said. “I was extremely overjoyed that I got to have that same feeling all over again.”



**The Saintes take home 1st place in Novelty and second place in Pom. Photos by Keith Cornelius and Julie Marlow.**