

# Hesse caps off historic career at Sleepy Eye

Travis Rosenau

SLEEPY EYE - There wasn't a whole lot Kadence Hesse couldn't or didn't already do on a basketball court entering her senior year, but that didn't stop her from leaving more imprints on the Sleepy Eye girls basketball program.

Hesse became the school's all-time leading scorer last season and set the school's all-time steals and assists record this season. The senior guard also passed 1,000 career rebounds in her final year at Sleepy Eye.

With 2,750 points, 1,020 rebounds, 526 assists and 529 steals during her prep career, it goes without saying she's more than left her mark at Sleepy Eye.

After being named the Tomahawk Conference Girls Basketball Player of the Year for the second year in a row this past weekend, she was also named the All-Journal Girls Basketball Player of the Year for the second consecutive season as voted on by The Journal's sports staff.

"It's really just been gratifying to be able to see that's how your season and career ends," Hesse said. "There's no better way than to end it like that. It could have been better if we would have went to the state tournament, but, individually, it really makes you feel like you did all you could and you put everything you could into your program. I'm just happy to be able to play along with some of these players and against some of these other tough conference players. It's been so fun and it breaks my heart that it's over, but it was really great while it lasted."

Hesse averaged 23.7 points, 9 rebounds, 6.1 assists and 5.5 steals per game this season, more than enough to earn her All-Conference honors for the fifth year in a row. Hesse was also an All-State player twice during her career and was an All-State Honorable Mention this year.

Sleepy Eye finished the regular season this year with a 15-1 conference record, giving it a share of the conference title with Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart.

Sleepy Eye's season came to an end after an overtime loss to cross-town rival Sleepy Eye St. Mary's in a Section 2A quarterfinals game at Sibley East High School on Feb. 29.

"Looking back on it, it annoys the crap out of me in general," Hesse said of the overtime loss. "That's not how you want to end your season and it hurts even more when it's against a conference rival that we've seen the past three years in tournament play, going into playoffs. But it was fun. The atmosphere was so fun and the adrenaline was so high and the energy was so high from everyone. It was really a fun game to play."

Hesse added that the loss stung as she thought the team had a good shot to get to state if they could have gotten past that and played BLHS in the semifinals. BLHS and Sleepy Eye split during the regular season.

Regardless, Hesse said she's more interested in looking back on the season and her career as a whole and realizing how successful it all was.

There are many memories to look back on for Hesse, but it all began with her first varsity start during her seventh-grade year under head coach Ryan Hulke.

"That first game that I started against Springfield as a seventh-grader, I was sitting on the bus, and all the sudden Hulke comes up to me and is like, 'Yeah, you're starting tonight,'" she said. "And I was like, 'What?' So I had to try not to be nervous as we were driving to Springfield, knowing that I was going to go from playing barely some JV to starting on varsity against - at the time - one of the best teams in the conference. So I was scared out of my mind. Me and Hulke still talk about it. Looking back on it, it was a great moment and watching videos of it, it's amazing."

Hesse said that first season she got to start wasn't the strongest season for Sleepy Eye as the team graduated several top players from a 2017-18 state tourney team that finished second at state. But Hulke gave Hesse a chance late in the season and made it clear what he expected from her.

"Our season wasn't going great and we needed just another point guard position, just to take care of the ball," Hesse said. "And that's what he told me when I'd go in, 'We don't need you to score, we just need you to take care of the ball.' I give him so much credit for how my career has turned out because he's helped me so much, just develop my game and build confidence in myself. Never put that big of pressure on me, but he knew I was capable of so much."

Hesse also said winning the subsection title last season against St. Mary's was another big moment and memory for her and the team during her career.

Hesse wasn't alone during her journey to becoming one of Sleepy Eye's top girls basketball players of all time as she finished her career as one of the team's two seniors this season alongside Brea Mertz.

"We have such a special bond," Hesse said of Mertz. "We have played together, we both got pulled up at seventh grade together and we've just been able to play with each other nonstop, whether it was school ball or summer ball or just working out together, so it's just been so special.

"That last game was horrible, it wrenched all your emotions, realizing that was the last time we're ever going to play together. We played so many games together, probably a countless number of games together. It's just really hard to kind of grasp on to. But there's no one else I'd rather have led the team with than her because we were able to accomplish so much. ... The time that we had, we really made it count."

Hesse, who will play basketball at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall next winter, said she was thankful for the teammates she's had during her career and will always appreciate the time they had together.

"They have been my family that you spend so much time with during the year," Hesse said. "We got so close and had some of the best memories and the best laughs. There's no better way than to just say thank you. And I hope that I made an impression on these coming grades to want to play basketball and have a leader that they could look up to and enjoy to watch. Ultimately, that's what I love the most is seeing all the little fans and being able to interact with them, so I hope I left my name in a good way at Sleepy Eye."

While her prep basketball career has come to an end, Hesse wasn't going to bow out without crediting her mother, Sarah, who has decided to end a five-year run as the Sleepy Eye girls basketball head coach.

"This is my mom's last season now as the head coach at Sleepy Eye and I think she deserves a shout-out of how much she's done for this program, whether people saw it or not," Hesse said. "She took over in my eighth-grade season and didn't really want to but took the challenge and she put all her time and heart into the program. I think she has helped this program at Sleepy Eye so, so much. I think she deserves just as much credit for every success that I have had and this team has had as anyone else."

