

The Big 9

The Big 9 was one of Minnesota’s dominant conferences throughout the single class era and beyond, with state titles in 1915 (Red Wing), 1917 (Rochester), 1919 (Albert Lea), 1920, 1922 and 1933 (Red Wing), 1935, 1946 and 1958 (Austin) and 1969 (Rochester John Marshall). How strong was the Big 9? Well, of the five state champions crowned after the conference was formed in 1929, only one of them was the Big 9 champ in that same year (Rochester JM 1969). As late as 1967, Red Wing (four) and Austin (three) were #1 and #2 in state titles.

The conventional wisdom is that Mankato coach Louis Todnem was the “founder of the Big 9” in that he articulated the idea and pushed for its adoption. Initially the Big 9 consisted of one high school each from 9 southeastern Minnesota towns—Albert Lea, Austin, Faribault, Mankato, Northfield, Owatonna, Red Wing, Rochester and Winona. Today, 12 teams from those 9 towns make up the conference as Mankato split into East and West, and Rochester to Century, John Marshall and Mayo. New Prague wanted to join the Big 9 a few years ago after the demise of the Missota Conference, but was turned away because 13 did not strike them as a favorable number of teams and there was no reasonable #14. New Prague, with more than 1,200 students, is bigger than Owatonna, Northfield, the 2 Mankatos, Austin, Albert Lea, Faribault and Winona. Everybody has more than 1,000 students except Albert Lea, Faribault and Winona, which have under 800, and one-time athletic powerhouse Red Wing, which now has less than 600. Southeastern schools like Byron and Kasson-Mantorville have now surpassed Red Wing, while Stewartville is just 2 short of the Wingers, and they all play Austin, Red Wing, et al, in Class AAA. So the landscape of southeastern Minnesota has changed, but the Big 9 has been a rock, representing the same 9 towns for almost 100 years. Good for them.

But, of course, the picture has also changed as it relates to the Big 9’s statewide basketball success in the multi-class era. After winning ten of 58 single class titles, the Big 9 has won just three state titles in 49 years of multi-class play, a period in which no less than 77 titles were available to Big 9 teams (because Big 9 teams have been spread out across two different classes for 28 of those 49 seasons). Owatonna won back-to-back AAAA titles in 1989 and 1990, and Mankato West defeated Red Wing for a Class AAA title in 2004. Two of those three state champions (Owatonna and Owatonna, to be precise) were Big 9 champions.

So, what the heck, let’s take a little stroll through the Big 9 Conference over the years. In the column listing the regular season champion, teams shown in boldface are those who won the conference title, then went on to post the best post-season record among Big 9 teams while also earning some state tournament hardware. There have been 19 of them in 94 years

Year	Regular Season Champion	State Tournament Entries	The Big Games	Big 9 MVP (our pick)

1929	Red Wing	Red Wing (Region 7)	Moorhead 20 Red Wing 16 (OT) (State Final)	Wilburn Olson, Red Wing, C
1930	Austin	Red Wing (7)		Wilkins, Red Wing
1931	Mankato	Mankato (Region 2), Rochester (Region 1)	Rochester 19 Austin 18 (Region 1 Final)	Kennedy, Rochester
1932	Winona	Mankato (2), Northfield (4), Winona (1)	Mankato 17 Northfield 15 (State 1 st) Winona 29 Mankato 10 (State 3 rd)	George Davies, Winona, F
1933	Faribault	Red Wing (4), Rochester (1)	Rochester 35 Faribault 18 (Region 1 Final) Red Wing 16 Mpls. North 13 (State Final)	Art Lillyblad, Red Wing, G
1934	Mankato	Mankato (2), Winona (1)		Woodrow Olson, Mankato, F
1935	Northfield	Austin (1)	Rochester 17 Northfield 14 (Region 1 SF) Austin 12 Rochester 7 (Region 1 Final) Austin 26 Glencoe 24 (OT) (State Final)	Art Hanson, Austin, F
1936	Red Wing	Albert Lea (1), Red Wing (4)	Albert Lea 29 Faribault 21 (Region 1 Final)	Hougard, Albert Lea
1937	Austin	Rochester (1)	Albert Lea def. Austin (District 2) Rochester 26 Albert Lea 19 (Region 1 Final) Rochester 30 Crosby-Ironton 24 (State 5 th)	Kendall Erbes, Rochester, F
1938	Red Wing	Faribault (1)	Faribault 28 Albert Lea 26 (Region 1 SF) St.Paul Central 31 Red Wing 26 (Region 4 SF)	Bruce Smith, Faribault, F
1939	Northfield	Austin (1)	Austin 35 Northfield 28 (Region 1 Final)	Lewis Vogel, Austin, F
1940	Mankato	Red Wing (4), Rochester (1)	Mankato TCHS def. Mankato (District 5) Rochester 34 Austin 29 (Region 1 SF) Rochester 39 Northfield 33 (Region 1 Final) Breckenridge 43 Red Wing 40 (State Final)	Bill Peterson, Red Wing, C
1941	Mankato	Austin (1), Mankato (2), Red Wing (4)	Austin 32 Rochester 27 (Region 1 Final) Red Wing 45 Austin 29 (State 1 st) Mankato 41 Austin 33 (State 5 th)	Jim Lewison, Owatonna, C

			Buhl 31 Red Wing 29 (State Final)	
1942	Red Wing	Austin (1)	Farmington def. Red Wing (District 14) Austin 34 Bagley 26 (State 5 th)	Pat Geraghty, Austin, F (Jr.)
1943	Rochester	Austin (1), Mankato (2)	Kasson def. Rochester (District 3)	Geraghty
1944	Austin, Red Wing	Mankato (2), Rochester (1)	Rochester 31 Austin 27 (Region 1 Final) Stillwater def. Red Wing (District 14) Mankato 34 Virginia 33 (OT) (State 5 th)	Dewey Nelson, Mankato, F
1945	Faribault	Faribault (1), Mankato (2), Red Wing (4)	Faribault 39 Austin 37 (Region 1 SF) Mankato 37 Faribault 33 (OT) (State 1 st) Mankato 44 Hutchinson 32 (State 3 rd)	Don Olson, Mankato, F
1946	Mankato	Austin (1)	Austin 59 Rochester 13 (Region 1 Final) Mountain Lake 31 Mankato 23 (Regional 4 Final) Austin 63 Lynd 31 (State Final)	Dick Ravenhorst, Austin, C
1947	Albert Lea, Red Wing, Rochester	Austin (1)	Austin def. Albert Lea (District 2) Kasson def. Rochester (District 3) St. Paul Marshall 51 Red Wing 42 (Region 4 Final)	Cliff Uher, Austin, F
1948	Mankato		Mountain Lake 30 Mankato 29 (Region 4 Final)	
1949	Mankato	Mankato (2), Rochester (1)	Rochester 47 Austin 41 (Region 1 Final) Mankato 42 Rochester 34 (State SF) St. Paul Humboldt 47 Mankato 35 (State Final)	Shorty Cochrane, Rochester, F
1950	Austin	Mankato (2), Rochester (1)	Albert Lea def. Austin (District 2) Owatonna 50 Albert Lea 39 (Region 1 SF) Rochester 50 Owatonna 47 (Region 1 Final)	Jim Larson, Rochester, C
1951	Austin	Austin (1)	Austin 59 Rochester 57 (Region 1 SF)	Burdie Halldorson, Austin, C

1952	Mankato, Red Wing	Austin (1)	Mountain Lake 49 Mankato 47 (Region 2 SF) South St. Paul def. Red Wing (District 14)	Dayle Rasmussen and Don Rasmussen, Austin, G (tie)
1953	Red Wing	Austin (1), Red Wing (4)	Austin 63 Owatonna 61 (Region 1 Final) Red Wing 84 Austin 67 (State Cons. SF) Red Wing 77 Madelia 62 (State 5 th)	Bernie Raetz, Red Wing, G
1954	Austin	Austin (1), Red Wing (4)	Austin 69 Renville 43 (State 3 rd)	Jerry Olson, Austin, F (Jr.)
1955	Austin	Austin (1)	Austin 57 Rochester 56 (Region 1 SF) Mpls. Washburn 67 Austin 58 (State Final)	Olson
1956	Red Wing	Winona (1)	Winona 70 Austin 61 (Region 1 Final) New Prague 76 Red Wing 70 (Region 4 Final)	Tenold Milbrandt, Winona, F
1957	Red Wing	Red Wing (4), Rochester (1)	Red Wing 63 Rochester 54 (State 1 st) Mpls. Roosevelt 59 Red Wing 51 (State Final)	Steve Malmar, Red Wing, G
1958	Red Wing	Austin (1), Mankato (2)	Austin 68 Brainerd 63 (State Final)	Roger Voss, Austin, F
1959	Austin	Austin (1), Mankato (2)	Austin 70 North St. Paul 47 (State 3 rd)	Tom Kezar, Austin, G
1960	Austin	Austin (1)	Edgerton 72 Austin 61 (State Final)	Clayton Reed, Austin, G
1961	Austin	Winona (1)	Winona 60 Austin 57 (Region 1 SF)	Bob Larson, Winona, F
1962	Albert Lea		Lyle def. Albert Lea (District 2)	
1963	Red Wing	Austin (1)		Miller, Austin
1964	Faribault	Rochester JM (1)	Rochester JM 68 Faribault 66 (Region 1 Final) Luverne 72 Rochester JM 66 (State Final)	Dave Daugherty, JM, C (Jr.)
1965	Rochester JM	Faribault (1)	Faribault 61 Austin 55 (Region 1 Final) Minnetonka 71 Faribault 60 (State Final)	Tom Weaver, Faribault, C
1966	Winona			

1967	Red Wing			
1968	Rochester Mayo	Mankato (2)		George Hendrickson, Mankato, G
1969	Rochester JM	Rochester JM (1)	Rochester JM 76 Austin 66 (Region 1 Final) Rochester JM 58 Duluth Central 42 (State Final)	Dan Halvorson, Owatonna, F
1970	Red Wing		Kenyon 59 Red Wing 57 (Region 1 Final)	Rick Knutson, Austin
1971	Austin, Mankato	Mankato (2AA), Red Wing (1A)	Melrose 64 Red Wing 53 (A Final)	Jim Freeburg, Mankato, F
1972	Mankato	Austin (1AA), Red Wing (1A)	Mounds View 62 Austin 54 (AA Final)	Jim Riles, Austin, G
1973	Red Wing, Rochester JM	Rochester JM (1AA)	Rochester JM 72 St. Cloud Apollo 66 (AA 3 rd)	Kal Kallenberger, Austin, F
1974	Austin	Rochester Mayo (1AA)		Mark Brandenburg, Mayo, G
1975	Austin	Mankato West (2AA)		Jim Northenscold, Mankato West, F
1976	Mankato West, Rochester JM		New Prague 39 Rochester JM 37 (Region 1AA SF)	
1977	Rochester Mayo	Rochester Mayo (1A)		Brad Boisen, Mayo, C
1978	Albert Lea, Mankato East, Rochester JM, Winona			
1979	Albert Lea, Owatonna	Winona (1AA)		Mark Whetstone, Winona, F
1980	Rochester Mayo	Mankato West (2AA), Rochester Mayo (1AA)		Paul Woodside, Albert Lea
1981	Austin	Austin (1AA)	Anoka 61 Austin 53 (AA Final)	Bruce Anderson, Austin, F (Jr.)
1982	Faribault	Austin (1AA)	Austin 69 Mpls. North 62 (AA 5 th)	Anderson
1983	Faribault			Mark Dusbabek, Faribault, C
1984	Rochester JM	Mankato East (2AA), Rochester JM (1AA)	Rochester JM 61 Mankato East 49 (AA CSF) Rochester JM 66 North Branch 56 (AA 5 th)	Paul Goetz, Rochester JM
1985	Rochester Mayo	Rochester JM (1AA)		Glaeser, Rochester JM

1986	Faribault	Faribault (1AA), Mankato East (2AA)	Faribault 56 Mankato East 55 (AA 5 th)	Bernie Vellan, Faribault, F
1987	Albert Lea, Rochester Mayo			Mike Peterson, Albert Lea, G
1988	Austin, Owatonna		Apple Valley 36 Owatonna 35 (Region 1AA Final)	Matt Hollander, Owatonna, F (Jr.)
1989	Owatonna	Owatonna (1AA)	Owatonna 45 Robbinsdale Armstrong 43 (OT) (AA Final)	Hollander
1990	Owatonna	Owatonna (1AA)	Owatonna 72 Mpls. North 46 (AA Final)	Chad Kolander, Owatonna, C
1991	Rochester Mayo	Mankato West (2AA), Owatonna (1AA)	Mankato West 56 Mounds View 49 (AA 3 rd)	Pat Coleman, Mankato West, F
1992	Rochester JM, Rochester Mayo	Rochester JM (1AA)		Mark Swenson, Rochester JM, F
1993	Rochester JM	Rochester JM (1AA)		Brent Solheim, Rochester JM, F (Jr.)
1994	Rochester JM			Solheim
1995	Faribault			Mitch Ohnstad, Faribault, G (Jr.)
1996	Faribault	Rochester Mayo (1AA)	Rochester Mayo 76 Faribault 63 (Region 1AA Final)	Ohnstad
1997	Rochester Mayo	Rochester Mayo (1AAAA)		Mike Restovich, Mayo, F
1998	Rochester Mayo	Faribault (1AAA)	Faribault 55 Red Wing 47 (Section 1AAA Final)	
1999	Austin, Rochester Mayo	Mankato East (2AAA), Red Wing (1AAA)		Justin Voigt, Red Wing, G
2000	Rochester Mayo	Mankato East (2AAA), Red Wing (1AAA)	Red Wing 57 Rochester Mayo 49 (1AAA Final) Mankato East 61 Red Wing 57 (AAA 3 rd)	Ben Kaus, Mankato East, G (Jr.)
2001	Mankato East	Mankato East (2AAA), Red Wing (1AAA)		Kaus
2002	Rochester JM	Red Wing (1AAA), Rochester Century (1AAAA)	Mpls. Patrick Henry 61 Red Wing 44 (AAA Final)	Taite Plaas, Red Wing, F
2003	Rochester JM	Mankato East (2AAA), Red Wing (1AAA)	Red Wing 59 Mankato East 48 (AAA 1 st)	Pat Herzog, Red Wing, G (Jr.)
2004	Faribault			

		Mankato West (2AAA), Red Wing (1AAA)	Mankato West 50 Red Wing 42 (AAA Final)	Scott Nessler, Mankato West, G
2005	Mankato West	Albert Lea (1AAA), Mankato East (2AAA)	Albert Lea 51 Faribault 44 (1AAA Final) Mankato East 50 Mankato West 49 (OT) (2AAA Final)	Ben Woodside, Albert Lea, G
2006	Mankato East		Waconia 53 Mankato East 44 (2AAA SF) Waconia 60 Mankato West 56 (2AAA Final)	Chop Tang, Mankato East, F
2007	Mankato West, Owatonna	Winona (1AAA)	Waconia 42 Mankato West 39 (2AAA Final) Lakeville South 56 Owatonna 53 (1AAAA Final)	Paul Blacklock, Winona, F (Jr.)
2008	Mankato West	Rochester Mayo (1AAAA)	Willmar 66 Mankato West 62 (2AAA Final) Rochester Mayo 54 Owatonna 52 (1AAAA Final)	Alec Brown, Winona, C (Soph.)
2009	Mankato West	Mankato West (2AAA), Winona (1AAA)	Winona 31 Owatonna 26 (1AAAA Final) Mpls. Washburn 58 Mankato West 45 (AAAA Final)	Brown (Jr.)
2010	Winona	Owatonna (1AAAA), Winona (1AAA)	Winona 48 DeLaSalle 32 (AAA 3 rd)	Brown
2011	Owatonna	Owatonna (1AAAA)		Vaughan Thada, Owatonna, G
2012	Austin	Austin (1AAA), Mankato East (2AAA)		Joe Aase, Austin, F (Jr.)
2013	Austin	Austin (1AAA)	Austin 51 Winona 49 (1AAA SF) Austin 52 Red Wing 43 (1AAA Final) DeLaSalle 50 Austin 33 (AAA Final)	J. Aase
2014	Austin	Austin (1AAA)	DeLaSalle 60 Austin 40 (AAA Final)	Zack Wessels, Austin, G
2015	Rochester JM	Mankato East (2AAA)		Michael Hurt, Rochester JM, F (Jr.)
2016	Red Wing, Rochester JM	Red Wing (1AAA)	Red Wing 75 Monticello 59 (AAA 3 rd)	Mi. Hurt
2017	Rochester JM	Austin (1AAA)	DeLaSalle 72 Austin 44 (AAA Final)	Matthew Hurt, Rochester JM, F (Soph.)

2018	Austin, Rochester JM	Austin (1AAA), Mankato East (2AAA)		Ma. Hurt (Jr.)
2019	Austin, Mankato East	Austin (1AAA)	Waseca 79 Austin 69 (AAA state SF)	Ma. Hurt
2020	Mankato East (22-0)	Austin (1AAA) and Rochester Mayo (1AAAA) made it to section finals that were cancelled		Gabe Madsen, Mayo, G
2021	Austin (15-2)	Owatonna (1AAAA)	Byron 52 Austin 50 (1AAAA Final)	Brayden Williams, Owatonna (Jr.) G
2022	Owatonna (22-0)	Owatonna (1AAAA), Austin (1AAA), Mankato East (2AAA)	Mankato East 77 Princeton 74 (AAAA 3 rd place)	B. Williams
2023	Mankato East (18-4)	Mankato East (2AAA)	Mankato East 65 Owatonna 63 (regular season, #1 vs. #2)	Isaiah Hanson, Rochester Mayo, G

Big 9 Top 20

Boldface is state champion, *italics* is Big 9 champion

1. Red Wing 1922 (19-0) <i>2. Austin 1955 (21-1)</i> 3. Austin 1946 (22-3) <i>4. Red Wing 1953 (24-1)</i> 5. Owatonna 1990 (23-2) 6. Red Wing 1933 (22-3) 7. Owatonna 1989 (24-1) 8. Albert Lea 1919 (17-0) 9. Rochester 1917 (11-2) 10. Rochester JM 1969 (23-1)	11. Austin 1958 (20-3) <i>12. Red Wing 1957 (23-4)</i> 13. Red Wing 1915 (15-1) <i>14. Austin 1959 (19-3)</i> <i>15. Red Wing 1929</i> <i>16. Mankato 1949</i> 17 (tie). Rochester John Marshall 1964 (17-6) 17 (tie). Faribault 1965 18. Mankato East 2004 (24-4) <i>19. Austin 1960</i> 20. Red Wing 1920
--	---

Big 9 History (1929-2023)

Schools	Big 9 Titles Outright	Big 9 Titles Shared	State Tournaments Since 1929	Total Points
Austin	16	6	26	45
Red Wing	11	5	19	32.5
Mankato	8	2	13	22
Mankato West	3	2	5	9
Total Mankato/Mankato West	11	4	18	31
Rochester John Marshall	9	6	7	19
Rochester	1	1	8	9.5

Total Rochester/Rochester JM	10	7	15	28.5
Mankato East	4	2	12	17
Rochester Mayo	8	3	6	15.5
Faribault	9	0	5	14
Owatonna	4	3	7	12.5
Winona	3	1	8	11.5
Albert Lea	1	4	2	5
Northfield	2	0	1	3
Rochester Century	0	0	1	1

All-Time All-Big 9 Team

Pre-1929	1929-1949	1950-1969
Neal Arntson, Red Wing, F 1915 Fred Enke, Rochester, G 1917 Carl Lidberg, Red Wing, F 1921 Butsie Maetzold, Red Wing, G 1922 Gordie Malmer, Albert Lea, F 1919	Art Lillyblad, Red Wing, G 1933 Dewey Nelson, Mankato, F 1944 Don Olson, Mankato, F 1944 Dick Ravenhorst, Austin, C 1946 Dick Seebach, Red Wing, F 1933	Dave Daugherty, Rochester John Marshall, C 1964 Burdie Halldorson, Austin, C 1951 Tom Kezar, Austin, G 1959 Jerry Olson, Austin, F 1955 Bernie Raetz, Red Wing, G 1953
1970-1999	21st Century	
Bruce Anderson, Austin, F 1982 Pat Coleman, Mankato West, F 1991 Chad Kolander, Owatonna, C 1990 Mitch Ohnstad, Faribault, G 1996 Jim Riles, Austin, G, 1972	Alec Brown, Winona, C 2010 Matthew Hurt, Rochester John Marshall, F 2019 Michael Hurt, Rochester John Marshall, F 2016 Brayden Williams, Owatonna, G 2022 Ben Woodside, Albert Lea, G 2005	
All-Time	2nd Team	3rd Team
Fred Enke, Rochester, G 1917 Matthew Hurt, Rochester John Marshall, F 2019 Chad Kolander, Owatonna, C 1990 Carl Lidberg, Red Wing, F 1921 Art Lillyblad, Red Wing, G 1933	Burdie Halldorson, Austin, C 1951 Butsie Maetzold, Red Wing, G 1922 Dewey Nelson, Mankato, F 1944 Mitch Ohnstad, Faribault, G 1996 Jerry Olson, Austin, F 1955	Alec Brown, Winona, C 2010 Dave Daugherty, Rochester John Marshall, F 1965 Tom Kezar, Austin, G 1959 Dick Seebach, Red Wing, F 1933 Ben Woodside, Albert Lea, F 2005

