

What If? Mythical Catholic Tournaments

Minnesota's Catholic schools petitioned for admission to the MSHSL in 1937, in the depths of the Great Depression, but they were turned down. Almost 40 years later, they petitioned again and this time they were granted membership in the larger organization, previously limited to public schools. They (the Catholic schools) participated in their first MSHSL tournament in 1975.

Before joining the MSHSL in 1975, Minnesota's Catholic schools had several post-season opportunities.

- The first was the "open" national tournament in Chicago, which accepted both public and private schools from 1920 to 1923. Beginning in 1924, a separate Catholic national tournament was offered. Catholic schools from Minnesota participated in these two national tournaments most years from 1922 to 1941.

- Beginning in 1923, they also participated in a so-called Northwestern Tournament, which also included teams from Wisconsin and the Dakotas. The Northwestern Tournament was discontinued after the 1930 tournament.

- The following year, DeLaSalle became the only Minnesota high school ever to win a non-mythical national championship when it won the national Catholic title. Surely this meant that it was the Catholic champion of Minnesota. Minnesota's Catholic schools continued to play in the national tournament for another decade without ever coming close to a second championship.

- For three years in the late 1930s, Catholic high schools in southern Minnesota competed in what was euphemistically called a "state tournament," though Catholic schools in the Twin Cities and all points north did not participate. Austin St. Augustine (previously Austin Columbus, later Austin Pacelli) retired the trophy by winning the tournament all three years. But, make no mistake, these were not state championships.

- Then, from 1941 through 1970, Minnesota's Catholic high schools held a tournament of their own. Meanwhile, Minnesota's non-Catholic private schools started a third tournament for so-called Independent schools in 1946. Then, in 1971, the two private school tournaments merged and play continued in this configuration through 1974.

The winners of all of the above tournaments are presented in separate pieces titled Private School Tournaments and Minnesota at the Nationals. The question before us today, here in this article, is, What if those Catholic schools had had a state tournament from 1931 to 1940, and if they had continued to play among themselves after 1970? Who would have won the Catholic (only) tournament under those assumptions from 1932 to 1940 and from 1971 to 2019? The real Catholic champions are found elsewhere. These are the mythical Catholic state champions in seasons in which there was not a real Catholic tournament.

Year	Mythical Final	Rationale
1931	DeLaSalle 38 Winona Cotter 14	DeLaSalle and Cotter played in the national Catholic tournament. DeLaSalle beat Nashville Father Ryan 29-14 while Cotter lost to the same opponent 28-19.
1932	Cretin 26 DeLaSalle 19	Based on comparative scores from the national Catholic tournament.
1933	Cretin 29 St. Thomas 25	Cretin beat Harding and Central of the St. Paul City Conference by an average of 28-23, while St. Thomas split with them by an average of 27-29.
1934	Cretin 27 St. Thomas 24	St. Thomas beat Harding by 7 while Cretin beat Harding by 6, but Cretin played well at the nationals while St. Thomas did not go.
1935	Duluth Cathedral 28 DeLaSalle 22	Duluth won one game at the national tournament, DeLaSalle lost their only game.
1936	DeLaSalle 29 Austin St. Augustine 25	Based on comparative scores from the national Catholic tournament.
1937	DeLaSalle 30 Winona Cotter 29	Based on comparative scores from the national Catholic tournament.
1938	St. Thomas 32 Austin St. Augustine 28	Based on comparative scores from the national Catholic tournament.

1939	Cold Spring St. Boniface 42 Austin St. Augustine 33	Based on comparative scores from the national Catholic tournament.
1940	Cretin 29 DeLaSalle 26	Based on comparative scores from the national Catholic tournament.
1971	Cretin 52 St. Thomas 50	Cretin defeated Shattuck 52-50 in the 1 st combined Catholic-Independent tournament. Based on comparative scores, St. Thomas was as good or better than Cretin, but we don't have any other post-season results.
1972	Fridley Grace 63 DeLaSalle 42	This was the actual tournament final (before the days of Totino).
1973	Rochester Lourdes 47 Cretin 46	Lourdes defeated Southwest MN Christian 47-46 in the actual final.
1974	Cretin 50 Rochester Lourdes 33	This was the actual tournament final.
1975	DeLaSalle 63 Austin Pacelli 55	DeLaSalle was the only Catholic to make it to the MSHSL tournament on their 1 st try. They upset unbeaten Waseca 49-45 but then got clobbered by Chisholm 80-73 and Fulda 70-43. Pacelli won the District 2A title.
1976	Cretin 55 Winona Cotter 54	Cretin and Cotter made it to state. Cretin won 1, then lost 2 to finish 21-6. Cotter lost, won and lost to finish 22-6. Cretin lost to champion Jefferson by 18 in a AA semi. Cotter lost to Windom by 9 in the A 1 st round, and Windom lost to champion

		Marshall-U by 9. Jefferson and Marshall-U were both unbeaten and rated as a toss-up had there been an overall championship as in previous years. We think Jefferson was a little better and therefore Cretin was a little better.
1977	Winona Cotter 60 St. Thomas 47	Cotter won the Class A championship beating Pelican Rapids 60-47.
1978	Winona Cotter 60 Austin Pacelli 52	Cotter lost to Class A champion Lake City and Randy Breuer by 1 in the District 3A final. Pacelli was the only other private school to win a district title.
1979	Winona Cotter 48 Cretin 44	Cotter lost to Lake City and Randy Breuer 32-27 in the district final. Cretin and St. Thomas joined the St. Paul City Conference where Cretin went 15-3, 17-4 and St. Thomas 9-9, 9-10. They split 2 regular season games. Still, Cretin was better than St. Thomas, not better than Cotter.
1980	Cretin 61 St. Thomas 52	Cretin went 11-5, Hill-Murray 10-6 and St. Thomas 7-9 in the City. Cretin won 2, St. Thomas 1 and Hill-Murray no playoff games. There were no private schools in the MSHSL tournament.
1981	St. Thomas 55 Winona Cotter 53	St. Thomas (17-5) lost to Class AA 3 rd place St. Paul Central 64-61. Cotter (23-3) lost to Class A champion Bird Island 49-47 in 2OT. We think that suggests an edge to the Tommies.

1982	Winona Cotter 56 Benilde 51	Cotter was the only private in the MSHSL tournament and beat Chisholm 48-46 to win the Class A title. Benilde was the only other private to play in a region semi.
1983	Cretin 56 DeLaSalle 53	DeLaSalle was the only private in the tournament and lost 2 games by a total of just 3 points to finish 17-8. Cretin (16-5) lost in the 4AA region which produced the champion, undefeated Woodbury.
1984	Winona Cotter 57 St. John's Prep 53	It was a year of close calls. Cotter (22-5) and St. John's (20-7) played in the Class A tournament where 6 of 7 championship bracket games were decided by 4 points or less. Champion Pelican Rapids won 3 games by a total of 5 points, beating Cotter by 2 and St. John's by 1. Among the big schools, Cretin had the best record but lost twice to St. Thomas, who lost to DeLaSalle 68-45, who lost in Region 5A, which was won by St. John's.
1985	DeLaSalle 56 St. Thomas 47	DeLaSalle (26-2) defeated Cotter (23-3) in an all-Catholic Class A final. The Islanders also beat both Cretin and St. Thomas at the St. Thomas College holiday tournament. Still, was St. Thomas (21-6) better than Cotter? Yes. DeLaSalle need OT to be the Tommies, who went on to take 5 th place in Class AA.
1986	Cretin 55 Totino Grace 50	SW MN Christian was the only private in the state tournament and they quickly lost 2 out of 3 games.

		Cretin went 16-6 but lost early in Region 3AA while Grace gave Mpls. Henry a good run for it in 5AA.
1987	DeLaSalle 55 Holy Angels 50	Crosby-Ironton took 2 nd in Class A after beating DeLaSalle (21-4) in 3 OT in the region final. Holy Angels beat Cretin 65-38 in December, and for that one night at least was the 2 nd best Catholic team in the state.
1988	DeLaSalle 76 Holy Angels 64	DeLaSalle won the Class A title easily. SW Christian also made the field at 21-4 but lost 2 games. And, St. Thomas surprised Cretin in OT to get to state at 11-13, but they also lost 2 games. Holy Angels lost to Osseo in OT in their region and Osseo took 3 rd place at state.
1989	Winona Cotter 58 Cretin 55	Mankato Loyola was the only private in the state tournament and quickly lost 2 games. Winona Cotter (22-2) lost to the Class A champs from Rushford 50-45 in the Region 1A final. Cretin took St. Paul Central into OT in the Region 4AA final and Central went on to lose 67-66 to Armstrong in a semi. Armstrong then lost to Owatonna 45-43 in OT in the final.
1990	Cretin 60 Mankato Loyola 59	Cretin (21-4), DeLaSalle (22-7) and Loyola (24-4) made it to state. Cretin lost 2 games, DeLaSalle won 1 and lost 2, and Loyola took 2 nd place, losing to Lake City 52-51 in the Class A final. Cretin played a vastly tougher schedule and was the better team.

1991	Cretin 80 DeLaSalle 61	Cretin won the Class AA title at 27-1. In December they defeated DeLaSalle 80-61.
1992	Cretin 64 DeLaSalle 61	In mid-February, DeLaSalle and Faribault Bethlehem were 34-1(combined) and #1 and #3 in the Class A poll. But Austin Pacelli, which finished just 19-11, upset FBA in the region final 54-51 and DeLaSalle in the state final 68-62. Yet, if they played 1992 Class A 10 times, DeLaSalle would win 7 of them. Meanwhile, in Class AA, Cretin (24-4) crashed in the final, losing to Anoka 50-47. If they played a Catholic tournament 10 times, Cretin would win 5, DeLaSalle 2, Bethlehem Academy 2 and Pacelli just one.
1993	Cretin 58 Faribault Bethlehem 44	Cretin (28-1) won Class AA easily, avenging last year's loss to Anoka, and winning their last 4 games by an average of 67-52. By comparison, Faribault Bethlehem (28-2) lost in the Class A final and outscored their last 4 opponents 47-39.
1994	St. Agnes 65 Faribault Bethlehem 55	St. Agnes (25-5) won its 1 st and only state championship while Faribault Bethlehem (28-2 and coming in at #1) again fell short. Morris defeated FBA 50-42 in a semi, but the Aggies then beat Morris 78-71 in the final. St. Agnes routed DeLaSalle 75-54 in a region final. Meanwhile, Cretin returned to the AA tournament but lost 2 of 3.

1995	Cretin 61 St. Agnes 52	Cretin (24-5) and St. Agnes (21-10) were the only 2 Catholics among the 1 st Sweet 16. St. Agnes beat DeLaSalle 64-61 in the region final and finished 6 th among the 16. Cretin lost 2 of 3 to drop out of the running, but lost to champion North just 51-48.
1996	St. Thomas 57 Cretin 50	St. Thomas was the only Catholic in the 2 nd Sweet 16 and the Tommies almost knocked off the eventual champions Mpls. North, losing 67-65 on a last-second 3 by Khalid El-Amin. St. Thomas beat Cretin twice by an average of 57-50, and Cretin beat DeLaSalle 44-42.
1997	DeLaSalle 57 Totino Grace 56	Not a big year for the Catholics, which allows DeLaSalle to sneak in despite a 21-8 record and a 69-47 shellacking in the AA final to Caledonia. Grace finished 17-6.
1998	DeLaSalle 59 St. Thomas 56	St. Thomas won the AAA title at 22-6, DeLaSalle the AA title at 24-3.
1999	DeLaSalle 52 St. Thomas 47	DeLaSalle repeated as AA champions, again at 24-3. St. Thomas edged Cretin 48-46 to claim the 2 nd spot.
2000	St. Thomas 55 Rochester Lourdes 53	The toughest choice ever: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cretin swept St. Thomas (21-7) but lost to Benilde. St. Paul Central was 0-5 vs. Cretin, Grace and Highland Park in the regular season before beating Cretin in the section.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Thomas was 2nd in AAA and beat DeLaSalle, but got swept by Cretin. AAA champ Henry beat St. Thomas by 14, Cretin by 15, Benilde by 16 and Grace (23-3) by 39. Defending state AAA champ Highland Park lost to De 50-39 and St. Thomas 70-66 and split with Cretin. • Waterville-E-M beat Lourdes (23-6) 50-49 and DeLaSalle (22-7) 51-46 before losing to Litchfield in the AA final. DeLaSalle lost to St. Thomas but beat Benilde. • Cretin, DeLaSalle, Grace, Lourdes and St. Thomas were all capable of winning a Catholic tournament, with Benilde close behind.
2001	Cretin 69 St. Thomas 58	Cretin took 3 rd place in AAAA at 29-2. St. Thomas took 2 nd in AAA, but lost a pair of games to the Raiders 69-53 and 69-64.
2002	Cretin 71 St. Thomas 70	Cretin finished 25-4 but lost to Mpls. North 55-54 in the section final. St. Thomas lost to AAA champion Henry 75-63 in the section final. Hill-Murray went to state in AAA and lost to Waseca 49-46. Waseca lost to Red Wing 71-59, then Red Wing lost to AAA champion Mpls. Henry 61-44. Cretin split 2 games with Henry with an average margin of 78-68 in favor of Henry.
2003	Mankato Loyola 57 DeLaSalle 48	Loyola won the Class A title at 32-0. De took 2 nd in AA.
2004	Cretin 62 Holy Angels 56	

		<p>Cretin went 24-5, including 14-1 vs. St. Paul City opponents but was no longer a member of the conference. The Raiders lost to Tartan in their section final. Holy Angels (21-10) finished 3rd in Class AAA after beating Hill-Murray 53-51 in their section final.</p>
2005	Benilde 63 Cretin 58	<p>DeLaSalle (19-11), St. Agnes (18-12) and Sleepy Eye St. Mary's (27-3) made it to state, but all lost in the 1st round. De LaSalle beat St. Agnes 60-52 in the regular season but lost to Holy Angels, then lost to Class AA juggernaut Braham. Meanwhile, Benilde (22-7) lost to eventual AAA champion Shakopee 64-50 in a section final and Cretin (20-8) lost in a AAAA section semi-final.</p>
2006	DeLaSalle 57 Benilde 55	<p>This was an actual section final. DeLaSalle (27-5) then defeated St. Thomas 63-44 in a Class AAA semi-final. De also beat St. Thomas in OT in the regular season, while the Tommies also lost to Cretin by 1. Cretin lost in a AAAA semi-final.</p>
2007	St. Thomas 56 Benilde 40	<p>St. Thomas (30-2) defeated Benilde (28-4) 56-40 in the Class AAA final, while Holy Family took the AA title at 25-7. St. Bernard's came into state at 29-0 and finished 3rd in Class A, losing to Ellsworth 85-73. St. Bernard's defeated Blake and St. Anthony by 42 total points, while the Fire lost to both. Benilde beat De by 13 and 20, while St. Bernard's beat De by 12. St. Bernard's beat St. Paul Como by 40. St. Thomas beat them twice by a total of 30.</p>

		Cretin beat St. Thomas but was never rated and lost in a AAAA section semi-final again.
2008	Benilde 58 St. Thomas 52	Benilde (28-3) defeated St. Thomas (24-7) 58-52 in the Class AAA final. St. Bernard's (29-3) finished 3 rd in AA. DeLaSalle lost to all 3—the Bernies by 17, Benilde by 11 and St. Thomas by 3. Cretin beat St. Thomas 59-52 in the regular season, was rated as high as #4, and lost to the eventual state runner-up Sibley 60-57 in the section while Sibley split a pair with St. Thomas.
2009	St. Bernard's 76 Holy Angels 70	St. Bernard's (28-4) was runner-up in AA, Faribault Bethlehem (28-2) lost its only game in A. AAA champion Mpls. Washburn beat Benilde by 12 and Holy Angels by 11 in the section. St. Thomas lost to New Prague in a section final.
2010	Cretin 65 DeLaSalle 62	This was the score of an actual regular season meeting. DeLaSalle ended up 4 th in AAA, while Cretin lost to 3 rd place AAAA Sibley 55-53 in the Section 4AAAA final.
2011	DeLaSalle 60 Benilde 56	Cretin took 4 th in AAAA while neither Benilde nor DeLaSalle got to state at all, losing in AAA section finals. But, both beat Cretin—DeLaSalle 61-50 and Benilde 62-60.
2012	DeLaSalle 62 Benilde 60	Benilde defeated DeLaSalle 60-59 in the regular season. In the playoffs, Mpls. Washburn beat

		Benilde 71-66 in a section final, while DeLaSalle defeated Washburn 57-56 in the state final.
2013	DeLaSalle 85 Cretin 49	This is an actual regular season score. DeLaSalle also demolished Benilde 71-16!
2014	DeLaSalle 68 Cretin 50	DeLaSalle (26-3) repeated as Class AAA champion. Cretin (25-7) shocked #1 rated, defending state champ Apple Valley in the section and took 3 rd place in AAAA. Holy Family (28-4) took 4 th in AA.
2015	Cretin 77 DeLaSalle 65	DeLaSalle won its 4 th straight AAA title, but lost to Cretin 77-65 in the regular season. Cretin lost to Apple Valley in the section this time, and Apple Valley went on to win the AAAA title.
2016	DeLaSalle 66 Benilde 63	Benilde defeated DeLaSalle 69-52 in Janaury, but in March Benilde lost to Mpls. Henry 83-56, then De beat Henry 76-69. Benilde had lost 2 starters who scored 35 points against De, while De added Goanar Mar, who scored 34 against Henry. De also defeated Cretin 64-49.
2017	Cretin 72 DeLaSalle 68	Cretin performed a little better than DeLaSalle against a variety of AAAA opponents—Cretin was 15-8, De was 4-2—but when the 2 went head to head, DeLaSalle won 60-59 (at DeLaSalle). Still, on a neutral court, we like Cretin.
2018	Cretin 71 DeLaSalle 62	

		Cretin (30-2) took the AAAA title. DeLaSalle (26-5) was shocked 71-69 by Columbia Heights in a AAA semi.
2019	DeLaSalle 83 Cretin 63	DeLaSalle won its 7 th Class AAA title in 8 years while Holy Angels took 5 th place. Cretin did not make it to state, but De swept the Stars in the regular season with an average margin of 89-61 and beat Cretin by 20.
2020	Cretin 75 DeLaSalle 61	Cretin defeated DeLaSalle 80-56 at home in February. Both had won a spot in the state tournament when it was called off due to coronavirus.
2021	Totino Grace 67 DeLaSalle 63	Grace (16-5) lost to Minnehaha 73-60 in their section final, while DeLaSalle (15-6) lost to Minnehaha 79-58 in the state AAA semi. Cretin (18-6) got to the AAAA final and would have given either one of them a game. Cretin and DeLaSalle did not play one another due to COVID. This is just Grace's 2 nd "Catholic title" ever, and first since 1972.
2022	Totino-Grace 55 DeLaSalle 51	This is the average score of 2 games between these powers, one in the regular season and the 2 nd in the state AAA final (50-44). Grace finished at 26-6, DeLaSalle 22-8. DeLaSalle beat Cretin 71-51, leaving no doubt that the Raiders were not one of the top 2 teams.

2023	Totino-Grace 50 DeLaSalle 46	<p>This is the actual Class AAA final between these 2 teams. DLS lost to Benilde in the regular season 55-49. But Benilde lost to Orono in Section 6AAA 66-62, then DeLaSalle beat Orono in the state SF 67-61. This (we think) raised DLS to #2 among the Catholics such that their head-to-head game with Totino-Grace became the final and decisive game. TG finished 22-8, DLS 26-5, Benilde 24-5. Cretin lost to DLS just 43-41 but finished 14-14. St.Thomas was 23-6 but lost to Cretin and DLS. Holy Family finished 29-3. They were seeded #1 in AA but settled for 3rd place, and did not play any of the other top Catholic teams.</p>
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Composite Records for Catholic Finals, both real and mythical

School	Years	Real Tournament 1923-1930, 1941-1970	Mythical Tournaments 1930-1940, 1971-2022	Total
DeLaSalle	1927-2021	9-4 + national title 1931	17-15	27-19
Cretin (-Derham Hall)	1930-2020	3-7	23-8	26-15
St. Thomas	1924-2007	8-5	5-11	13-16
Winona Cotter	1943-1989	1-7	6-4	7-11
Benilde (-St. Margaret's)	1962-2016	2-2	2-6	4-8
Austin St. Augustine/Pacelli	1929-1978	2-2	0-5	2-7
Duluth Cathedral	1923-1961	3-3	2-0	5-3
St. Cloud Cathedral	1925-1969	4-4		4-4
Rochester Lourdes	1966-2000	3-0	1-2	4-2
Totino-Grace	1972-2022		3-2	3-2
Holy Angels	1987-2004		0-4	0-4
Mankato Loyola	1945-2003	1-0	1-1	2-1
St. John's Prep	1923-1984	1-1	0-1	1-2
St. Agnes	1994-1995		1-1	1-1
Faribault Bethlehem	1993-1994		0-2	0-2
Cold Spring St. Boniface	1939		1-0	1-0
St. Bernard's	2007-2009		1-0	1-0
Bird Island St. Mary's	1926	0-1		0-1