

# Willowbrook will host the IHSA state tournament in girls flag football

Warriors will host the event for the next three seasons; inaugural IHSA tournament will take place in October

The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Board of Directors announced last week that Willowbrook High School will serve as the host of the inaugural IHSA Girls Flag Football State Finals in the fall of 2024.

According to the IHSA, Willowbrook entered a three-year contract to host the state finals of the sport. Earlier this year, the IHSA announced that girls flag football would become the 32<sup>nd</sup> sport to contest an IHSA state series.

The 2024 IHSA state finals in girls flag football, which will feature eight teams, will take place at Willowbrook on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 18-19. The state finals will return to Willowbrook in 2025 and 2026.

"The Willowbrook High School team, coaching staff, and administration have been a model program in girls flag football in the state, so it seems fitting that they will serve as the host of the inaugural state finals," said IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson. "We appreciate their passion for the sport and are excited to work together to create life-long memories for our participating schools."

Willowbrook launched its girls flag football program in 2022. During that year, the Chicago Bears hosted a girls flag football state tournament.

The Warriors won the state championship at that tournament in October 2022.

In 2023, Willowbrook won the West Suburban Gold-Plus Conference Tournament to advance to the Bears' state tournament at Halas Hall in Lake Forest.

After losing in the semifinal round, the Warriors completed the



CHRIS FOX FILE PHOTOS Rock Valley Publishing

Willowbrook High School will host the Inaugural IHSA Girls Flag Football State Finals. The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Board of Directors announced last week that Willowbrook would be the host of the first three IHSA state tournaments in girls flag football. The 2024 state finals, which will feature eight teams, will take place Oct. 18-19 at Willowbrook. Led by head coach Rachel Karos, the Warriors started their own girls flag football program in 2022. Willowbrook's 2022 team won the championship at the Chicago Bears' state tournament at Halas Hall in Lake Forest. The Warriors' 2023 team won the third-place trophy at the Bears' state tournament. One photo from the 2023 season shows (bottom right - left to right) Kendall Medinger, Loralai McIntyre, Marli Smrz and Lilli Macias after the Warriors' 32-0 home victory over Addison Trail on Oct. 7. Another photo (above) shows the Willowbrook team after it defeated the Blazers 20-6 in the championship game of the West Suburban Gold-Plus Conference Tournament in Villa Park on Oct. 21. The Warriors advanced to the Bears' state event with their Oct. 21 victory over Addison Trail in the conference tournament's title contest.

2023 tournament by winning the third-place contest.

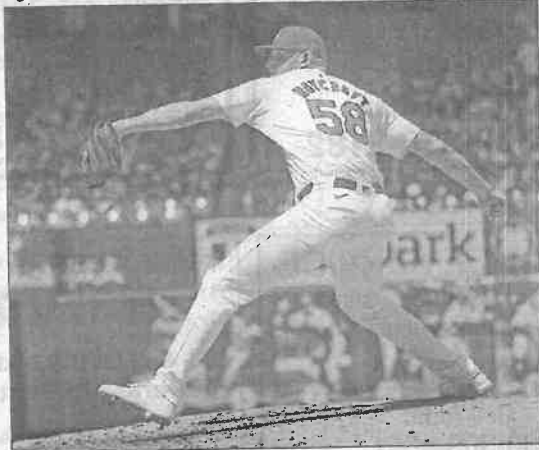
"As one of the pioneers of girls flag football in Illinois, we are thrilled to host the first IHSA State Championship at Willowbrook High

School," said Rachel Karos, the head coach of the Warriors' program. "We are proud to be part of growing girls flag football in Illinois, throughout the U.S. and internationally. Through the support of the IHSA and the Chicago Bears, girls flag football creates tremendous opportunities for a diverse group of students—including engaging them with athletics, providing once-in-a-lifetime experiences and connecting them to scholarships. The inaugural IHSA State Championship will be a historic event to continue to drive the sport forward and inspire the next generation. We are excited to provide an experience that promotes inclusion, access, diversity and equity for female athletes in Illinois."

## Willowbrook graduate earns his first MLB win

Willowbrook High School graduate Chris Roycroft, who is now pitching for the St. Louis Cardinals, earned his first Major League Baseball win last week. Roycroft, who graduated from Willowbrook in 2015, was called up from the Cardinals' Triple-A team—the Memphis Redbirds—in May, and made his big-league debut on May 7. Roycroft is pictured while pitching two-thirds of an inning in relief in the Cardinals' 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates at Busch Stadium in St. Louis on June 13. Roycroft, who didn't allow any runs in that appearance, was the contest's winning pitcher. A member of the Cardinals' bullpen, Roycroft pitched one and one-third scoreless innings in relief during his team's 5-1 loss to the Chicago Cubs on Saturday at Wrigley Field.

Through Saturday, Roycroft made 10 appearances for the Cardinals, pitching a total of 12 and two-third innings. He had a 1-0 record with an earned-run average of 2.84. He allowed four runs while recording 12 strikeouts during his first 10 appearances with the Cardinals. Roycroft, who turns 27 this Friday, June 21, is 6 feet 8 inches tall. He played baseball and basketball at Willowbrook. He went on to play baseball and basketball at Aurora University.



SUBMITTED PHOTO/ST. LOUIS CARDINALS Rock Valley Publishing

