



## Rivals Carroll, Kapaun try to stay atop Class 5A

By Scott Paske  
KSHSAA Covered

As a graduate of Wichita Southeast High School, Kathy Schulte fondly remembers the Golden Buffaloes' highly competitive rivalry of years past with Kapaun Mount Carmel.

Now, as Kapaun's girls tennis coach, her focus frequently turns across town to Bishop Carroll, the Crusaders' natural adversary as a fellow Catholic school.

"Those kinds of rivalries are fantastic," Schulte said. "And for us it's a very positive rivalry, at least in the tennis world. It's game on when we're competing, but we support each other in other events."

In recent seasons, Carroll and Kapaun have taken their battle to the top of Class 5A. While Kapaun featured the brightest star in Clara Whitaker, a four-time state singles champion from 2017-20, Carroll managed to win its second team title in three years last October, edging the Crusaders by two points.

"Honestly, with Kapaun and Carroll, there's going to be intensity no matter what it is, and that's how it's been in tennis," Carroll coach Darren Huslig said. "Everyone is dialed in. But I've known Kathy for years and it's been a good relationship. We have a lot of respect for their program."

Both teams enter the 2021 season with talented singles players capable of carrying the torch passed on by Whitaker, who is now playing at Wichita State. While Whitaker dominated in high school with a 125-5 record and became the fourth player in Kansas history to win four girls singles titles, her closest competitor was teammate Reagan Boleski, who finished third in 5A as a freshman and second to Whitaker each of the last two seasons.



*Kapaun Mt. Carmel's Reagan Boleski*

“Reagan is an amazing player,” Schulte said of her senior leader, who was 74-14 in singles her first three seasons. “I hate to put pressure on her, but I know this is her year to be in the spotlight, and she deserves that.”

“Clara was maybe a once-in-a-lifetime player for Wichita. She and Reagan were incredible sparring partners. Many teams have No. 1 singles and No. 2 singles players with a clear division. I had two No. 1 singles players. Reagan could never be considered a No. 2.”

Like Boleski, Carroll sophomore Brynn Steven inherits a greater role – and loftier expectations – due to a teammate’s graduation. While Whitaker and Boleski played in the last two 5A finals, Steven finished fourth in singles last season, just behind departed senior Paige Stranghoner of Carroll. Steven finished with a 22-9 record, with all of her losses to the top three finishers in 5A.



*Bishop Carroll's Brynn Steven*

“Brynn is going to lead the way for us,” said Huslig, who also must replace the 5A doubles runner-up tandem of Heidi and Hope Lubbers. “She still has plenty of room to improve. That’s one of the more impressive things about her. She’s an athletic girl, she’s a competitor and she’s got that desire.”

Steven did not participate in the season-opening Wichita Collegiate Classic on Aug. 21. But Boleski did, winning all five of her matches to earn the singles title in the 16-team tournament. Kapaun also played sophomore Jackie Ackerman at singles, and the doubles teams of seniors Emma Bezdek and Elizabeth Orme, and senior Gabriella Do and junior Leila Bartlett. Each entry won multiple matches as the Crusaders finished third.

“We had four seniors on our varsity last year, and we’re going through and figuring out who’s going to take up those spots,” said Schulte, whose Crusaders won the 2019 5A

team title in between Carroll's 2018 and 2020 championships. "We do have some big spots to fill. I'm not sure we can totally fill someone's shoes like Clara's, but we can come pretty close."

Andover finished third in 5A last season and returns half of the state-winning doubles pair in senior Sarah Sinclair. Sinclair returns to singles, where she finished sixth in 5A as a sophomore.

At Salina South, senior Iliana Armbrust returns after finishing third in doubles with graduate Alexxa Nunemaker. They capped their 2020 season with a victory over Seaman's Grace Unruh and Lauren Sweeney, who are back after posting a 32-3 doubles record and leading the Vikings to a sixth-place team finish.