



Grand Island captain Trevor Samplinski celebrates a 3-2 victory over West Seneca West for the Division 2 school Championship at Harborcenter on Monday, Feb. 25, 2019. (Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News)

# Grand Island, St. Joe's, Orchard Park capture boys hockey titles

By [Dave Ricci](#) Published February 25, 2019

Grand Island's band of brothers mentality has paid off. Mitchell Fusillo scored the game-winning with 23.1 seconds left in regulation as the Vikings topped West Seneca West, 3-2, in the Section VI Small School championship game at Harborcenter on Monday night. The win gives the Vikings their first sectional hockey title and vaults them into Saturday's regionals against Section III Skaneateles at 2:30 p.m.

"We are extremely united. We are quite literally a band of brothers on the ice and off the ice," Fusillo said. "And I think everyone wants to play for each other and I think that's the real difference maker from this year and last year's teams." Fusillo certainly knows about making a difference as he netted the game-winner that gave Grand Island's junior varsity team the 2018 state title.



*Grand Island goaltender Nathan Stroh makes a save against West Seneca West during the third period of the Division 2 school Championship at Harborcenter on Monday, Feb. 25, 2019. (Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News)*

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Winning the Section VI title Monday was satisfying for long-time Grand Island coach Don Pray, who has seen his brother Kyle Pray coach Kenmore East to a pair of state titles. Don Pray's daughter, Lauren Pray, has won four sectional titles with the Kenmore girls Fed team.

But for Don Pray, the real joy was seeing his team come together, wanting to succeed more for each other than for their personal goals. "I think they started playing for each other and they started believing in each other," Pray said. "I noticed they started doing things a little more outside the rink together. There were dinners and get-togethers and going to movies. And it was all the guys. It was really, really nice to see."

West Seneca West struck first when Griffin Finnegan gave the Indians a 1-0 lead 1:57 into the game. But Tyler Hunt gave his team the lift it needed when he scored a short-handed goal off a turnover in the West Seneca West end.



*Grand Island player Tyler Hunt celebrates his goal against West Seneca West during the first period of the Division 2 school Championship at Harborcenter on Monday, Feb. 25, 2019. (Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News)*

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Brian O'Neill gave GI the lead, but the Indians, who were the NYSPHSAA D2 runners-up last year, didn't fold. They had better puck pursuit in the second period and kept GI goalie Nathan Stuhr on his toes. Stuhr made 23 saves in the game and earned MVP honors.

"I think our relationships throughout the team and our closeness (helped)," Hunt said. "We mesh very well and it helped us out on the ice."

Section VI small schools again has the wild card bid, which means West Seneca West still can possibly win a state title. The Indians will face Section I champion John Jay this weekend at the Brewster Ice Arena.