

Midwest Championships Saturday

Written by Pat Clifton
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The Midwest has the most extensive qualification circuit of any territory, and it all culminates in a six-team Championship Saturday in Elkhart, Ind.

The field is split into two pools, where teams will play both of their pool partners, as well as a crossover game against a team in the other pool. The top four teams advance the semifinals, and the finalists advance to Nationals Aug. 6-7 in San Francisco, Calif.

The favorites to win, if you ask most of the teams competing, are probably the Chicago Lions.

“In my opinion, I think the Lions are still the best team in the Midwest,” 1823 coach Paul Holmes said, whose team enters the Championships as the top seed, having played in each tournament and out-pointed the rest of the field.

“If you take away our results in Cleveland and Cincinnati, the way the standings are is probably a fair reflection of where the teams are at.”

That hypothetical would tab the Chicago Griffins as the second-best team in the league.

“Right now it’s the Lions, Griffins, and then you’ve got probably us, the Youngbloodz and Milwaukee. Don’t get me wrong, my boys will be ready, but it’s going to be a tough Midwest, I think.”

Lions coach Aaron Manheimer says his team isn’t taking anything for granted and is on upset alert.

“We are heading to the Midwest, and there’s no assurance that we’ll be coming out and going to Nationals. It’s going to be a very tough tournament. With the way things are going, like with OPSB, I wouldn’t be surprised if we don’t make it,” referring to the defending National Champs who were eliminated from contention in the Pacific Coast tournament.

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Because the Midwest has so many qualifiers, a lot of the pool play games will be rematches from earlier in the season, so we've broken down how each team has done against its pool opponents for the Midwest Championships.

The Griffins are 1-4 against teams they're slated to play Saturday, having lost to Youngbloodz three times this summer and split with the Lions. However, the Griffins lone win against those opponents came Saturday in Grand Rapids, signaling they're ascending at the right time.

As for the other Windy City team, the only time the Lions played Milwaukee was at Lakefront, and the Chicago club won 33-0. The Lions have split with the Lions, losing the most recent matchup.

The Youngbloodz are 4-1-1 against Saturday pool play opponents, having gone 1-1-1 against 1823, 3-0 against the Griffins and not played Milwaukee.

The only team in the Championships Cincinnati has played all summer is 1823, against which the Wolfhounds are 0-2.

1823, as the top seed, gets a good draw and will play teams against which they've been moderately successful. The Columbus club went 1-1-1 against Youngbloodz, 2-2 against Milwaukee and 2-0 against the Wolfhounds.

Milwaukee has not played Youngbloodz, but split with 1823 and dropped its only game against the Lions.