

How often is it said that defense wins championships?

Well, it definitely did for Cascade.

Cascade held Grundy Center without a field goal for 16 minutes in the middle of the game and beat the Spartans 41-37 to win the Class 2A state championship.

But it sure wasn't easy.

Despite its struggles against Cascade's tough zone, Grundy Center rallied from a 13-point deficit behind Hailey Wallis and tied the game at 37 when Wallis, the all-tournament captain, sank two free throws with 1:16 left.

Cascade's Abby Welter broke the tie with a pair of free throws -- her only points of the game -- and the sixth-ranked Cougars made a last defensive stand.

Grundy Center forced a jump ball after missing a shot with 4 seconds left and inbounded from under its own basket. Cascade's Anne Ryan, the only senior who started for either team, tipped the long inbounds pass, teammate Nicole McDermott grabbed it and was fouled. McDermott then sank two free throws to finish it off and the Cougars had their first title.

McDermott led Cascade with an impressive stat line -- 15 points, nine rebounds, eight steals, four assists and three blocks. Ryan scored 13 points and Jordan Simon added 11. Rachel Trummdid not score for the Cougars but grabbed 12 rebounds.

Wallis did almost everything for eighth-ranked Grundy Center, scoring all 24 of her team's points from the second quarter on. She finished with 29, including 18 free throws without a miss. She also grabbed eight rebounds and made five steals.

Only two other players scored for Grundy Center, Kylie Willis and Brooke Flater each getting four. Cascade held the Spartans to eight field goals and 16.3 percent shooting.

That's not a big surprise because defense has been Cascade's calling card for years. Only two teams scored more than 50 points on the Cougars this season and one of them needed three overtimes to get there. That was a 62-53 win over North Union in the state tournament semifinals.

Cascade, the state runner-up in 2009, finishes 25-3. Grundy Center played for the title on the day former Spartans star Kim Van Deest was inducted into the IGHS AU Hall of Fame. Grundy closes out a fine season with a 24-2 record.

Wallis was joined on the all-tournament team by McDermott, Simon, Grundy Center's Maddie McMartin, Kayla Chapman of Treynor and Chloe Lofstrom of North Union.

