



John Koskinen, chief economist for the Wisconsin Department of Revenue, presents figures indicating the state has rebounded from pandemic-era lows during the past two years.

Oconto County future seen as bright

Tourism and economic development organization unveils new name

By WARREN BLUHM
News Editor

The chief economist for the Wisconsin Department of Revenue told a gathering of Oconto County business and government leaders Feb. 5 that the state of Wisconsin has shown “remarkable resilience in a challenging economy.”

John Koskinen was the keynote speaker at the annual Economic Outlook Breakfast hosted by the newly rebranded Tourism and Economic Development Corp. of the Oconto Region (TEDCOR). The nonprofit formerly known as the Oconto County Economic Development Corp. held this year’s event at Oconto Falls High School.

“Oconto County is an active participant in the Wisconsin economy, showing the same strength and resilience that the Wisconsin economy does,” Koskinen said. He walked his audience through a flurry of PowerPoint slides full of statistics he said indicate the state and Oconto County have rebounded from the economic impact of pandemic-era lockdowns and restrictions.

Fueled in part by increases in federal aid to local and state municipalities and by the economic recovery, the state’s general fund balance was \$7.5 billion at the end of the last fiscal year, and its budget stabilization fund was at \$1.8 billion, both record numbers, Koskinen said.

It’s often overlooked that Wisconsin is a productive state full of hard-working, middle-class families, he said.

“We build things. We farm. We move things. We insure things,” Koskinen said. “We have a bigger private sector than the rest of the country and a smaller government sector.”

Among the positive signs are that



Local business and government leaders gather over breakfast Feb. 5 at Oconto Falls High School for the annual Oconto County Economic Outlook program.

Oconto County and the state of Wisconsin recorded record low unemployment rates in 2022 and 2023 and that more people are working in the state now than they were before the pandemic.

The challenges include a labor shortage that Koskinen said is easing somewhat, but the state still had 200,000-plus job openings in November and a shortage of about 100,000 workers.

“That’s if you think in terms of, if I had the right person, with the right skill set, in the right industry, in the right location, and still be short 100,000 people,” he said.

The good news is that more and more people are coming back into the job market all the time, Koskinen said.

He said Wisconsin’s positives include record highs in construction employ-

ment occurring month after month during 2023, the fourth-lowest poverty rate in the country, and a cost of living 8% below the U.S. average and even lower than in neighboring states.

“If you were thinking of relocating from Chicago or Minneapolis to the Green Bay area, you’re going to drop your housing costs by about 40%,” Koskinen said.

Oconto County has seen among the healthiest recoveries of all Wisconsin counties, including the largest increase in new local businesses in 20 years, he said.

After Koskinen’s presentation, Jayme Sellen, executive director of TEDCOR, gave an overview of the vision she and her organization have for Oconto County

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White Lake schools chief takes Gillett job

By WARREN BLUHM
News Editor

The new Gillett school superintendent is coming to town from White Lake, where Nathan Hanson has been superintendent for the past three school years.



NATHAN HANSON

The school board approved Hanson’s appointment at a special meeting Jan. 29 after interviewing candidates at two special meetings the previous week.

A statement released by the board Jan. 30 said Hanson has “a wealth of experience and a proven track record.”

“Dr. Hanson’s dedication to fostering a positive and engaging learning environment aligns seamlessly with the values of the Gillett community,” the statement said.

Hanson was hired for the White Lake position in 2021, his first superintendent job after serving as director of personalized learning in the Shawano School District. He previously held various positions in Plymouth, Tomahawk, Merrill and Antigo.

“The District is confident that Dr. Hanson’s vision and expertise will contribute significantly to Gillett’s educational programs’ ongoing success and positive development,” the board statement said.

Hanson’s predecessor, Todd Hencsik, took a leave of absence after he was diagnosed with myelofibrosis, a form of bone marrow cancer, and Wayne Johnson was hired as interim superintendent. Johnson stayed on as superintendent for the 2023-24 school year after Hencsik died last May.

Olson’s first day on the job is July 1, the start of the academic fiscal year.

Crash victim identified

The victim of a fatal Jan. 28 crash in the Town of Oconto Falls has been identified as Charitee McKenna, 76, of Cecil.

Oconto County Sheriff Todd Skarban said McKenna was traveling west on County Road CC when her car failed to stop at the intersection and was struck by a southbound truck operated by Jeffery T. Hintz, 39, of Krakow.

McKenna, who was the lone occupant of the passenger car, was taken by ambulance to a Green Bay hospital and later died as a result of injuries sustained in the crash. Hintz was airlifted to a hospital in Green Bay with what were described as serious injuries.

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DNR game warden ordered to be reinstated

Case stems from Suring man's firing in 2018

By **KEVIN MURPHY**
Correspondent

Andrew Dryja, of Suring, was a conservation warden in Langlade County for 19 years before the Department of Natural Resources fired him in 2018 for three work rule violations, including transporting his children in an agency vehicle.

Dryja contended he was wrongfully terminated and contested his dismissal before the Wisconsin Employee Relations Commission, in Oconto County Circuit Court and, finally, before the District IV

Court of Appeals.

Meanwhile, he was hired as a deputy by the Oconto County Sheriff's Office.

Dryja's case suffered some setbacks and victories along the way, before an appeals decision Feb. 1 upheld his reinstatement as a warden with back pay, interest and attorney fees.

Dryja was alleged to have violated work policies involving not reporting hours, transporting his children in a state vehicle and storing personal items at work. In 2018, the WERC initially upheld his termination but that was overturned by Oconto Circuit Judge Jay Conley.

The DNR appealed Conley's decision, which the District IV Court modified and returned the case to Conley.

Conley had previously agreed with the WERC

that there was only sufficient evidence to support a violation of unauthorized transportation policy, that a three-day suspension, not termination, was the appropriate penalty.

While Dryja's case was pending, the DNR continued to maintain two warden stations in Langlade County but only one was staffed. However, in June 2020, three months before Conley ordered Dryja's reinstatement, the DNR consolidated the two stations into one with only one warden.

Conley's order to reinstate Dryja to his position in Langlade County was grounds for further appeal by the DNR. Conley dismissed the DNR's assertion that a court order couldn't dislodge someone already in the warden's job stating, "that's the DNR's problem," according to

documents filed with the appeal.

The DNR had responded to the court's reinstatement order by offering Dryja a similar position some 140 miles away in Jackson County or about 100 miles away at High Cliff State Park in Calumet County.

The DNR requires wardens to live within 10 driving miles of their administrative area boundary, or 15 driving miles of their assigned city.

Dryja's attorney, Alan C. Olson, couldn't comment on the timing of the consolidation of the warden stations. The DNR explained in court documents that warden stations are consolidated due to limited resources, which occurred when Dryja was not an employee.

On appeal, the DNR asked that Conley be

reversed because it was "procedurally improper" to boot out someone in an office to comply with a court-ordered reinstatement of a former employee.

Instead, the District IV Court found that to comply with the reinstatement order, the DNR had to offer a job that Dryja could realistically accept.

"Here, the positions offered by the department would require that Dryja, a divorced father, uproot his life and relocate his residence across the state. Thus, those are not positions that Dryja could have realistically accepted," wrote Appellate Judge JoAnne Kloppenburg in the 29-page opinion.

Dryja must be offered a position that doesn't require him to relocate his residence, Kloppenburg added.

Olson said his client was processing the decision after the lengthy legal ordeal.

In a written statement, Olson credited his client for standing up to a powerful agency.

"The DNR cannot thumb its nose and abuse its governmental powers for purposes of crushing the employee's will to persist," Olson wrote. "In Mr. Dryja's case, he has shown the character and fortitude necessary to overcome any bullying or abusive tactics by the DNR."

Olson and Dryja have been discussing with the DNR and the state Department of Justice whether Dryja would return to the DNR or continue as a deputy.

The Attorney General's Office, which represented the DNR in the case, wasn't available Feb. 1 for immediate comment.

Offer made to county administrator candidate

By **WARREN BLUHM**
News Editor

Oconto County is apparently close to announcing its next county administrator, as Erik Pritzl marks his last day in office.

The county executive committee voted Feb. 1 to send an amended contract agreement to its recommended candidate, according to draft minutes posted online. The candidate had not yet been named publicly.

Pritzl's last scheduled day as the second Oconto County administrator was Feb. 7. He begins his job Feb. 18 as director of Brown County Human Services, the position he held before taking the Oconto County post in January 2022. Kevin Hamann served two decades as the county's administrative coordinator before the job was changed to county administrator in 2021.

The committee held three meetings Jan. 16-17 to

interview and consider the candidates. Minutes of the Jan. 17 session indicate the committee voted to have human resources director Shelly Schultz do a background check and make an offer to its recommended candidate.

The full county board likely will be asked to ratify the appointment when it meets Feb. 22. Finance director Lisa Sherman is serving as interim county administrator until the new person arrives.

Child sex assault trial postponed again

Motion hearing is scheduled for March 4

By **WARREN BLUHM**
News Editor

The trial of an Oconto man accused of sexually assaulting a young girl continuously has been postponed again, this time so attorneys can argue a defense motion to dismiss at least some of the charges.

David SanRoman, 48, is charged in Oconto County Circuit Court with two counts of first-degree sexual assault of a child under age 13, two counts of first-degree sexual assault of a child under age 12, and one count of second-degree sexual assault of a child, all charging him as a persistent repeater, in connection with incidents that allegedly occurred from 2016 to 2020. He also faces two felony bail jumping charges in connection with incidents that allegedly happened Jan. 17, 2020, and Aug. 24, 2020.

Defense attorney Michael Scholke opened a Feb. 1 court appearance by saying that his client had rejected the latest plea agreement offer from the state. He added that the two sides had resolved several pre-trial issues but would like a



DAVID SANROMAN

motion hearing to argue the remaining matters before Judge Michael Judge.

The hearing would be held March 4, meaning that a jury trial scheduled to begin Feb. 27 would be postponed.

District Attorney Hannah Schuchart told Judge she and Scholke "have been in very frequent contact" in an attempt to settle their issues.

"We're trying to resolve as many issues among the parties that we can," Schuchart said. "We still are on for trial posture, but I think this is just for clarity and keeping the record complete that we need to go through all the extra steps."

Judge agreed with the latest postponement but made it clear he wants the pre-trial business completed and a firm trial date set at the March 4 hearing.

"I would like to resolve any and all issues on that day and time, so that a

trial date not only can be secured but everyone can count on proceeding on that date and time. All right? Enough of the postponements," Judge said.

SanRoman has been in custody in lieu of \$250,000 cash bond since September 2020. The case went to trial in April 2020 but ended with a mistrial after a witness testified about a report that had never been shared with the defense.

His longtime live-in girlfriend, Sarah L. Alberts, was sentenced to 12 years in prison last year after pleading no contest to a charge of chronic neglect of a child with the consequence that a sexual offense was committed.

Oconto County authorities were alerted to the allegations when the girl's father reported text messages between the girl and Alberts about an incident in which SanRoman allegedly tried to have sex with her.

Investigators determined there had been several incidents dating back to 2017, when the girl was 12, and Alberts occasionally kicked him out of the house but kept letting him back in.

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in coming years.

One goal is to reduce the number of people who commute to work in Green Bay and neighboring counties.

"We have roughly 20,000 people in our labor force, and over half of them leave every morning to work," Sellen said. "How do we decrease our outbound commuters by 10% by 2026? We have 600 job openings. We have labor to spare."

Other goals include investing \$3 million in community assets to bring more people into the county, adding 3,500 new housing units by 2029, increasing health care access in northern Oconto County and increasing volunteerism by as much as 30% over the next three years.

Sellen acknowledged she doesn't have the answers as to how to achieve these goals.

"This is me starting the conversation," she said.



The former Oconto County Economic Development Corp. used the occasion of its annual economic outlook breakfast to unveil its new name and branding.

"I'm confident we can find a way together."

She concluded her remarks by unveiling the organization's new name and branding. The group hired a consultant to help come up with ways to clarify confusion over the organization and its services — a private, nonprofit agency that promotes the county's tourism industry and economic development.

"(The name) TEDCOR allows us to bring tourism and economic development all under the same pillar," Sellen said. "Before, tourism was lost. Nobody knew that we did tourism."

They had seen a 'Oconto County Tourism' logo-like thing, and they would assume it was a separate entity."

The new identity will be rolled out over the next year, but the name change happened "right now, at this instant," she said.

As the audience filed out, they were presented with a microfiber cloth for cleaning eyeglasses, with the new TEDCOR logo. Sellen said that particular bit of swag was chosen "so that we can see the vision a little bit clearer."

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I would like to resolve any and all issues on that day and time ... All right? Enough of the postponements.

JUDGE MICHAEL JUDGE

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Scott Paper series continues



The next meeting on the history of Scott Paper Mill is scheduled for 6 p.m. Feb. 15 at the Oconto Falls Community Library, 251 N. Main St., Oconto Falls. The group will be looking at aerial photos of Oconto Falls, miscellaneous pictures and a list of employees from 1951 to 1993.

CONTRIBUTED

Little Suamico residents turn down library plan

Fire station packed for town electors meeting

By WARREN BLUHM
News Editor

Residents of the Town of Little Suamico have said, “no, thanks” to having their own library.

Close to 350 people turned out for a special town meeting at the Little Suamico Fire Station on Jan. 30 to soundly reject a proposal to buy an abandoned bank building for use as a town library and county offices covering the populous southern corner of Oconto County.

The unofficial tally was 192-148 against authorizing the town board to purchase the former BMO Harris Bank at 1288 East Frontage Road.

Establishment of a southern library was seen as one way to rid local property taxpayers of the annual six-figure invoice from Brown County, charging Oconto County for the use of its libraries — mainly in Howard and Pulaski.

Some opponents argued that the idea had already been decided at a Nov. 7 town meeting in which the resolution was defeated 37-31. The Little Suamico Town Board scheduled the second meeting in hopes of getting a better representation of opinion from the town, which has the largest population of any municipality in Oconto County at more than 5,500.

As residents filed into the fire station garage, and the line of people waiting to get in wrapped around the building and toward County Road S, Town Chairman Dale Mohr was cheered by the turnout.

“This is democracy in action. Have you ever seen anything like this?” Mohr said, as the standing-room-only crowd filled the room.

“This is America at its finest. Only towns do this, electoral meetings — villages and cities don’t.”

The start of the meeting, scheduled for 7 p.m., was delayed more than 20 minutes as residents continued to file into the building and sign in.

Once it began, the meeting quickly got down to the business at hand. Former Town Supervisor David Pribyl and frequent critic Frank Nowak challenged the proceedings, arguing that the matter had been decided in November and challenging the official notice of the meeting, which did not mention that the resolution on the table was a reconsideration of the Nov. 7 issue.

Having anticipated the challenge, the board obtained an opinion from its town attorney, read by Supervisor Elizabeth Paape, which stated that “all statutory requirements have been met, and the meeting can proceed as scheduled.”

Pribyl read from a statute that stated the official notice must include that the meeting is about reconsideration of a previous decision, but Mohr said that statute specifically pertained to citizen challenges of a town electors’ vote, while the Jan. 30 meeting was initiated by the town board.

Shortly after that exchange, a motion was made to end discussion and move to the vote, which was done by paper ballot.

About 100 people stayed to witness the count by Town Clerk Lisa Glinski and Deputy Clerk Sharon VanDenHeuvel. Several people in the office kept a tally as the two women called out “yes” or “no,” and said the vote was 149 yeses to 192 nos, but the audi-

ence asked that the ballots — now separated into two piles — be counted anyway. That count reduced the yes tally by one.

Glinski said the sign-in sheets would be reviewed to ensure that only town residents voted, but that would not make a difference in the tally because the ballots could not be tied to any names.

In response to a question, Mohr said the board would not be holding a third town meeting about the bank purchase.

“We’re done. We’re not going to bring this up again,” Mohr said. “Thank you, though. This turnout is amazing. The people have spoken.”

The rejected plan would have authorized the town board to negotiate the purchase of the building, which has been closed for a decade, for almost \$500,000, and remodel the structure for \$370,000 for use as a public library, with offices leased to Oconto County for a sheriff’s substation and other county offices.

A combination of federal and county dollars and private donations would have funded most of the project, with the town responsible for \$15,673 of the purchase cost and up to \$159,630 of the remodeling.

A special Oconto County committee will continue its work on a library services plan for the years 2025-29. Town of Little Suamico residents pay an estimated \$183,000 in property taxes for library services annually, which is distributed to the six local libraries in the county and to Brown County. Supporters had argued that establishing a library in Little Suamico would keep those dollars in the town.

OBITUARIES

Dohn Ermis Sr.



Dohn Ermis Sr., 65, of Suring, passed away on Monday, Jan. 29, 2024, at his home surrounded by his family.

Dohn was born on Sept. 12, 1958, to the late Dennis and Phyllis (Firgens) Ermis. In Dohn’s younger years, he found joy and brotherhood in riding with the Highway-men MC. On May 20, 1978, Dohn married Roma Teller at the Teller family home.

He worked the family farm with his wife and children for 20 years, until 2000 when he became a truck driver. Dohn was proud to have worked for numerous companies including V/S Midwest Carriers, RDM, McDermid and WCS.

He greatly enjoyed the outdoors, especially bow hunting. Dohn was known to his family as a bow hunting extraordinaire. He will be remembered as a perpetual jokester who loved spending time with his children, grandchildren and family. Dohn loved living

at The Farm and having family around him all the time.

Dohn is survived by

his wife, Roma; children, Mike (Kellie) Berg, Devin (Jocelyn), Darren (Kassandra), Daniel (Melissa), Dohn Jr. (Jessica), Dana (Tyler), Dustin (Jordyn), and Darcie (Andrew); endless grandchildren and great-grandchildren; sister, Bonnie (Fred) Hedmark and children, Kim (Cory) Evraets and goddaughter, Shelly (Ted) Hayes; brothers, Jim (Renea) Krueger and Jeff Kempen; siblings-in-law, Nick (Cathy) Teller, Verna (Julio) DeLeon, Pam Waupekenay, Nate (Marge) Teller, Penny (Randy) Keon, Taylor (Beth) Teller, Luther (Carla) Teller, Marissa (Robert) Tucker, and Portia (Cal) Koebach.

He is further survived

Sandra L. Vann



Sandra L. Vann, 79, of Kelly Lake, passed away on Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, at Bellin Memorial Hospital with family by her side.

Sandy was born on March 31, 1944, to the late Herbert and Grace (Pecard) Hansen.

Sandy attended Oconto Falls High School and graduated in 1962. On Oct. 3, 1966, Sandy married Bernard “Vann” Vann, and the couple made their home in Milwaukee. There, Sandy worked for Wisconsin Liquor as a bookkeeper. They later moved back to the family home on Kelly Lake to help care for her mother, Grace. Sandy also worked for CESA 8 as a secretary until she retired. Sandy and Vann celebrated their 53rd wedding anniversary with cake at the nursing home before Vann passed away on Oct. 11, 2019.

Sandy is survived by many cousins and friends who loved her. Sandy was

known for her passion to find treasures at rummage sales, estate sales and

flea markets. She was also a great family historian who had a wonderful memory for the family genealogy. Many family stories were told with family members over coffee or enjoying a meal by the lake.

The family wishes to thank Dr. William Wittman for his years of caring for Sandy’s medical needs. We also want to acknowledge the nurses and staff at Bellin Memorial Hospital ICU for their kindness and care during Sandy’s final stay. Finally, the family wishes to recognize Sandy’s guardian angel, Kay Lucas, who helped Sandy remain in her home as her medical and

by many nieces, nephews, relatives and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents; infant sister, Judith Ann; granddaughter, Emersyn Nicola; brother-in-law, James “Sam” Greetan.

Visitation will be held on Sunday, Feb. 4, 2024, at Red Maple Country Club from 1 p.m. until the memorial service at 4 p.m. with Pastor Dominic Petit officiating. A meal will follow the service.

Gruetzmacher Funeral Home is assisting the family with arrangements. Online condolences can be expressed at www.gruetzmacherfuneralhome.com.



emotional needs increased.

Visitation will be held on Sunday, April 7, 2024, at Romy’s Holiday Inn at Kelly Lake from noon until the memorial service at 1 p.m. with Pastor Reggie Reinhold officiating. A celebration of Sandy’s life will follow, with a meal included. This was originally planned to be a party for Sandy’s 80th birthday, which she was so looking forward to.

Gruetzmacher Funeral Home in Suring is assisting the family with arrangements. Online condolences can be expressed at www.gruetzmacherfuneralhome.com.



Robert Hruska



Robert “Bob” Hruska, 87, Gillett, died peacefully Sunday afternoon, Jan. 28, 2024, at a Green Bay hospital surrounded by family and friends.

He was born May 19, 1936, in Menominee, Michigan, to Weniamen and Mildred (Salewski) Hruska. Bob grew up in Menominee where he graduated high school with the class of 1954. He went on to attend teacher’s college at Marinette, UW-Oshkosh, Northern Michigan and Superior, eventually receiving his master’s in education.

On Aug. 20, 1960, he married Barbara Bonji at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Iron Mountain, Michigan. Shortly after their first anniversary, Bob entered the U.S.

Army where he was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington.

The couple eventually settled in Gillett, where Bob was employed at CESA and the Gillett public schools for 35 years, serving as elementary school principal for 26 of those years. Following retirement, he continued to supervise student teachers for the state of Wisconsin for 10 years.

He was a member of St. John’s Catholic Church and the Gillett Civic Club. As an avid outdoorsman, he authored eight books under the pen name The UP Rabbit, about humorous hunting and fishing stories.

Survivors are his two sons, Randy (Donna) Hruska, Harpursville, New York, and Wayne Hruska, Gillett; four grandchildren, Melaya, Athena, Cal (Natasha) and Garrett; one brother, Bill (Dawn) Hruska, Menominee, Michigan; one sister-in-law, Donna (John) Dickman, Kingsford, Michigan.

He was preceded in death by his parents and wife, Barbara, in 2011.

Visitation was held after 9 a.m. Monday, Feb. 5, 2024, at St. John’s Catholic Church, 127 Garden Ave., Gillett, until the time of services. Mass of Christian burial will be held 11 a.m. Monday at the church with his nephew, the Rev. Tim Hruska, and the Rev. Francis Dusi concelebrating. Burial with military honors will take place later in the day at Riverside Cemetery, Menominee, Michigan.

OBITUARIES

Kenneth W. Dequaine

Kenneth W. Dequaine, 85, Abrams, died surrounded by his family Saturday morning, Jan. 27, 2024, at Good Shepherd Meadow Wood.

He was born May 2, 1938, to Raymond and Florence (Delfosse) Dequaine. Ken grew up in Green

Bay, where he graduated from East High School with the class of 1957. Following graduation, he served in the U.S. Army Reserves.

On June 21, 1958, he married his high school sweetheart, Barbara VanBeynen, in Green Bay, and together they had nine children. Following their



marriage, they lived in Denmark and Allouez before moving

to Abrams in 1979 where they owned and operated a farm.

Ken enjoyed racing pigeons, beekeeping and cabinet making over the years. He was a member of St. Maximilian Catholic Kolbe Parish and the Knights of Columbus. Ken will be lovingly remembered as a good father who was very proud of his family, the good times at the

family cottage at Lee Lake, great sense of humor and being a good friend to all who knew him.

Survivors are his wife of 65 years, Barb Dequaine; their eight children, Ken “Butch” (Chris), Pam (Jim) Manders, Todd (Stacey), Tom (Billie), Paul (Jody), Kathy (Mark) Schreiber, Andy (Stacy) and Dean (Sarah); 20 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren; two brothers, Darrel and Dale (Colleen) Dequaine; two brothers-in-law, John (Ayleen) and Tom (Dorothy) VanBeynen.

He was preceded in death by his parents; daughter, Jackie; grandson, Justin Dequaine; in-laws, George and Agnes VanBeynen; and nephews, Reese Dequaine and Tommy VanBeynen.

Visitation was held after 9 a.m. Friday, Feb. 2, 2024, at St. Maximilian Catholic Church Kolbe until the time of services. Mass of Christian Burial was held noon at the church with the Rev. Francis Nusi officiating. Burial will follow later in the day in St. Patrick Catholic Cemetery, Stiles.

Jones Funeral Service in Oconto Falls is serving the Dequaine family.

The Dequaine family would like to thank Good Shepherd Meadow Wood and Moments Hospice for the care and concern shown Ken during their time together.

Roger W. Beaber Jr.

Roger William Beaber Jr., of Mountain, passed away on Feb. 1, 2024, after a 2½-year courageous battle with skin cancer. He was under the care of his family and Unity Hospice.

Roger was born Sept. 17, 1949, in Marinette, to the late Roger Sr. and Hildegaard (Odorfer) Beaber. He was united in marriage to Linda (Sells) on July 15, 1972, in New London.

Roger was a graduate of Gillett High School in Gillett. When it came time to choose a career, he followed in his father’s footsteps as a contractor. He had a successful building career, owning and operating first Tricraft Construction and then Beaber Construction. Beaber Construction is still in operation under the ownership of his eldest son, Ryan. His middle son, Troy, works alongside his brother, continuing to build the family



business. Roger and Linda spent several years in South Dakota where he

could enjoy all his favorite hobbies. He loved hunting, fishing and being outdoors. He was also a talented woodworker. He treasured time spent with his children and grandchildren doing the things they enjoyed, even gaming on Xbox.

Roger attended Rose Hill Evangelical Free Church in South Dakota and several churches in the surrounding Mountain area. He lived out his Christian faith by serving others. He was a member of The Oconto River Kids Program, which provides critically ill children hunting and fishing op-

portunities. He was also very active with Faith in Action where he used his building talents on many mission trips, building for missionaries around the world. Roger also served on the WRVM radio board and worked with Gideons International.

In addition to his wife, Linda, Roger is survived by sons, Ryan Beaber (significant other Sarah Tarlton) and Troy (Jana) Beaber, of Lily; daughter, Kelly Beaber (Ethan Smith); grandchildren, Tate, Seth, Wyatt, Kelsey, Kiana, Kyra and Kashton; brother, Christopher (Missy) Beaber; sisters, Heidi (Virgil) Rakowski, Joan Moses, Darlene (Scott) Schmeckpeper, Rita Beaber, Amanda “Mandy” (Bill) Bohn; and stepmother, Theresa Beaber.

A memorial service for Roger will be held at a later date.

Charitee B. McKenna

Charitee B. McKenna, 76, of Cecil, passed away unexpectedly on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024, at St. Vincent Hospital, Green Bay, with her family by her side.

She was born on March 7, 1947, in Gillett, daughter of the late Walter and Nora (Dumke) Braun. Charitee was a graduate of Gillett High School with the class of 1965. On March 11, 1999, she married Joseph McKenna. Charitee enjoyed going to the casino and being outdoors, especially

collecting rocks. She was a friend and confidant to everybody she met.

Survivors include her husband, Joseph McKenna, Cecil; six children, Kory (Mitch) Severson, Sussex, Douglas (fiancée Stephanie) Trapp, New Berlin, Jack McKenna, Milwaukee, Scott (Heidi) McKenna, Germantown, Kent (fiancée Alison) McKenna, Richfield, and Matt (fiancée Mandy) McKenna, Germantown; 10 grandchildren, Nikki (fiancé Mitch) Severson,

Mike (Nicole) Severson, Kaylen (Zach) Mathe, Elaina Trapp, Tyler Trapp, Dane, Tanner, Brynn McKenna, Tyler and Hayley McKenna; one great-grandson, James Mathe; one sister, Muriel Wilke, Underhill; three brothers-in-law, Tom (Carol) McKenna, Jim (Sandra) McKenna and Dennis McKenna; nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Walter and Nora Braun; brothers and sisters, Harold (Eleanor) Braun, Virginia (Ed) Patzer, Lulabelle (Leon) Drath, Buddy Braun and Charmaine (Dave) Stewart.

Visitation was held from 11 a.m. until the time of services at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 3, 2024, at Hillside Assembly of God, 5890 State Highway 22, Gillett, with burial of her cremated remains to follow at Wanderers Rest Cemetery, Gillett.

Expressions of sympathy, memories and photos may be shared with Charitee’s family on her tribute page at www.legacycarepartners.com.

The Kuehl Funeral Home, 108 E. Main St., Gillett, is assisting the family with funeral arrangements.

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Matchmaker's comical meddling hits SCHS

'Hello, Dolly!' provides hilarious romp into helping people find their forever love

By LEE PULASKI
City Editor

Today, people use a variety of methods to look for a mate, including advice from friends and dating apps.

Back at the turn of the 20th century, seekers of love sometimes turned to matchmakers like Dolly Gallagher Levi.

Audiences will be able to see that story come to life as Shawano Community High School's theater program presents the musical "Hello, Dolly!" just in time for the weekend before Valentine's Day. The show follows Dolly as she travels to Yonkers, New York, to help the miserly Horace Vandergelder, described as an unmarried half-a-millionaire.

Dolly helps prospective lovers to find each other in a variety of ways, whether it be dance instruction or mandolin lessons. However, she meets her match with trying to help Horace, who tries to put the kibosh on his niece's forever after when she wants to marry an artist, a vocation that Horace feels does not guarantee a consistent cash flow needed to live on. What makes things even harder is that Dolly ultimately wants to be Horace's betrothed herself.

It's been a while since SCHS has done a period piece for a musical, with "The Sound of Music" in 2018, according to co-director Alex Konen. Working with Matthew Pfantz, the pair decided to bring the good old days back again.

"Hello, Dolly!" is a comedy that's ultimately meant to exemplify the challenges we might face when we're looking at the idea of love or the growth we have to go through as we get older with the concept of love," Konen said. "Both Dolly and Horace have been madly in love in the past, and what happened in their lives has shifted what they want, but it's comical in nature."

Among the comical pieces in the musical is when Horace's store clerks, Cornelius and Barnaby, decide to get out



Ensemble members, from left, Emma Nielsen, Sonya Pozorski and Emma White touch their noses during a dance number from the first act of "Hello, Dolly!"

LEE PULASKI | NEW MEDIA

of Yonkers for a time and seek their own adventures in love and excitement, Konen added.

Pfantz feels that even though the musical is deemed a comedy, there is a serious side, as well.

"At its heart, 'Hello, Dolly!' is a comedy, an exaggerated portrayal of the difficulties surrounding love," Pfantz said. "In this show you see characters falling in love, for both good and bad reasons, characters falling out of love, and characters redefining their perceptions of love. However, this show is not only a comedy. There are moments of true emotional nuance within this show as well."

With a lengthy period since the last period piece, Konen said he and Pfantz wanted to give the high school students that exposure again, as many of them had not performed in something historical, unless they served as the children in "The Sound of Music."

"I think, as the costumes come on, they get more and more into character," Konen said. "It's just been a process of getting everything lined up here. I think they were hesitant at first, because many of them had not heard of the musical, but as they've gotten familiar with the script, gotten familiar with the characters, they've had a lot of fun."

Konen and Pfantz have conversed and noted that, even if they come into the rehearsals downtrodden from the day's events, they leave with smiles on their faces.

"Amid the perfectly timed puns and situational humor, the actors are required to convince the audience of their loneliness, their fear and their anguish," Pfantz said. "Students are expected to perform in many acting styles including, comedic, dramatic, slapstick and absurdist all while weaving a coherent plot. This is no small task, and the students are rising to the

MATCHMAKER, CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

Overheard conversations in a clinic's waiting room

Due to my husband's recent medical testing, I've put in some long hours in clinic and hospital waiting rooms. I usually spend this time on my smartphone, but lately I've been trying to get away from the tiny screen to take a more global view of what's happening around me.

Truth be told, I've always been a people-watcher. Observing humans behaving in various settings is downright fascinating, and watching makes waiting far less tedious. When my children were young, we made a game of it, surreptitiously choosing a "subject" and guessing their occupation. That made for some highly entertaining moments as my kids shared their vivid imaginings until we all got the giggles. Luckily, not one of the "chosen" ever seemed to catch on to what was happening.

Now that I've rediscovered this amusement, I've



Kathleen Marsh
Columnist

found that observing others is not just a good way to pass the time. It's a path to greater appreciation for those in the working world, particularly the helping professions. Case in point. Jon recently went in for some tests at Bellin in Green Bay. I plunked myself down in the best chair available in the waiting room. I was scrolling through my email when two men, whom my mother would have politely called heavy set, struck up a conversation. Fortunately, I was sitting at an angle where I could see them without drawing their attention.

One was wearing a coordinated hat and T-shirt espousing his political views.

The other was dressed in camouflage, sucking on a toothpick which he alternately used to clean his fingernails. As so often happens in waiting rooms, the men bonded quickly, sharing personal information, including that were both in their 70s. They also had in common noticeable hearing loss and some serious health issues, including diabetes and coronary heart disease.

Suddenly, one pointed angrily at the television mounted on the wall. I couldn't tell what set him off because the TV was set on mute. As he read the subtitles aloud, they both grew increasingly animated, expressing fierce disapproval of the younger generation. They're rude, lazy, shiftless, selfish, spoiled — blah, blah, blah. Like my other wait-mates, I concentrated on my phone so they wouldn't notice I was eavesdropping, although I doubted they cared.

What surprised me was that I found myself getting defensive. I've always been partial to young people, having been one myself long ago and spending my entire teaching career trying to nudge them toward self-sufficiency. Quite honestly, I still enjoy hanging out with young people. I like to say I'm 77 going on 17, a comment that always draws a chuckle.

When that subject was exhausted, they moved on to Social Security benefits, Medicare co-pays and the new cap on insulin prices. I had a number of comments to offer but thought it best to keep them to myself. My reasoning is that, when in tight quarters with strangers expressing strong opinions with which I might disagree, discretion is definitely the better part of valor. I wisely bit my tongue but couldn't help thinking of things I would say if I could.

What I chiefly wanted

to share was that we seniors might want to cut the people who are or will be providing for us in our declining years a little slack. These men would correctly point out that they paid into the system all their working lives. Due to advances in modern medicine, we have made huge strides in prevention and treatment of chronic diseases such as those these men are dealing with. This means most of us are living longer and probably get more out than we put in, even if you figure in inflation and the interest we might have earned on our forced savings investment.

I also wanted to urge them to look around at the people employed there, all working to provide the best possible care to help people like them live better longer. In my experience, these unsung heroes work faithfully to meet the mission, despite the fact that many patients make it harder for them

to succeed by not taking care of themselves as they should in order to live a healthier life without needing medical intervention.

I would finish by saying I never cease to marvel at health care professionals who listen sympathetically all day long to the laments of the sick. They surely leave work mentally drained and bone-tired but must put on a happy face and head home to work a second shift caring for their families. They are often young, primarily female. Most have small children that they trust to the care of others so they can care for strangers. Am I the only one who thinks they warrant less griping and more gratitude, not to mention a generous pay raise?

Kathleen Marsh is a lifelong educator, writer, and community advocate. She has published eight books, four on the history of Townsend, where she and husband Jon are happily retired on the beautiful Townsend Flowage.

MATCHMAKER, FROM PAGE 8

occasion. They make me proud each and every day.”

That’s not to say that there haven’t been challenges with the show, though.

“The singing requirements, and then there’s the dance ballet in these older shows,” Konen said. “I think we do the best we can. We have some students who have taken zero years of dance that go out and learn as much as they can, and then sometimes we have some students who have done years of dance.”

Konen said he’s heard of schools that have the dance numbers done by students in professional dance schools, and even though there are a couple of those schools in Shawano, he thinks the high school students get more by learning the moves themselves.

“We pull from our own ensemble,” Konen said. “I believe we have been fortunate to find choreographers who meet our students at their skill level and push them to grow as students. I don’t know how we stack up against other schools, but I do know our students internalize the choreography and enjoy it.”

“Hello, Dolly!” is a musical based on playwright Thornton Wilder’s farce “The Merchant of Yonkers,” written in 1938. Wilder later revised the play and retitled it “The

AT A GLANCE

WHAT: “Hello, Dolly!”
WHEN: 7 p.m. Feb. 9-10, 2 p.m. Feb. 11
WHERE: Auditorium, Shawano Community High School, 220 County Road B, Shawano
TICKETS: \$12 adults, \$9 seniors, \$6 children. Tickets are available at the high school office or at the door, or they can be purchased online at www.shawanotheater.ludus.com.

Matchmaker.” The musical by Jerry Herman and Michael Stewart hit Broadway in 1964, where it made history by winning 10 Tony Awards and, once upon a time, was the longest-running musical with 2,844 performances. In 1969, the

film version was released and earned awards for Best Picture and Best Score of a Musical Picture.

“I hope they take away the concept of this idea that love is going to shift and grow, and that we’re going to develop as people,” Konen said when describing the message he wants audiences to get. “Just the simple growth and arc our characters go through, and the shift that Horace makes from ‘I want a wife who is basically going to be a housekeeper’ to ‘I want a wife that actually cares about me and makes my life interesting and adventurous.’”

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Sister Mary Clarence, Deloris' secret identity played by Marilyn Koehler, standing at left, provides a rather unorthodox meal prayer, leaving Mother Superior, played by Maddi Wirtz, flummoxed in a scene from "Sister Act."

LEE PULASKI | NEW MEDIA

Bad habits dealt with in 'Sister Act' musical

Show looks at people's differences and makes them hilarious

By **LEE PULASKI**
City Editor

Folks going to the Ripley Performing Arts Center at Pulaski High School this weekend better say their prayers before sitting down as students bring "Sister Act" to life.

The popular film has been turned into a musical, and singing nuns will be popping up throughout the show, which runs for the next two weekends at the high school, 1040 S. St. Augustine St., Pulaski. The musical debuted in October 2006 in Pasadena, California, and has continued through Broadway and the West End in London, but now the students of PHS have the chance to turn nuns and religion into a laughing matter.

The show follows nightclub singer Deloris Van Cartier as she discovers that plans to talk to a record producer were fabricated. When she goes to confront her gangster boyfriend about the matter, she witnesses him shooting a suspected squealer and makes a beeline for the police station. The desk chief is an old friend from high school, and he decides that there's only one place where Deloris can hide until it's time to testify in court — the Holy Order of the Little Sisters of Our Mother of Perpetual Faith.

Putting a free-spirited woman in a place where order reigns supreme pits Deloris against the stern Mother Superior. After some initial difficulties figuring out a way for Deloris to fit in with the nuns, Mother Superior decides she'll do best as the new choir director. However, it doesn't take Deloris long to turn the traditional choir into something a little more hip that soon attracts a lot of attention — unwanted attention — to the church, putting Deloris in danger.

Director Amy Tubbs said "Sister Act" seemed like the perfect show for PHS to do this year because it allowed the school to tap into a large trove of



Deloris Van Cartier, played by Marilyn Koehler, left, is horrified to learn that the witness protection program she's in requires her to don a nun's habit and curb her loud and boisterous ways, as Mother Superior, played by Maddi Wirtz, lays down the law in a scene from the first act of "Sister Act."

LEE PULASKI | NEW MEDIA

AT A GLANCE

WHAT: "Sister Act"

WHEN: 7 p.m. Feb. 9, Feb. 10, Feb. 16 and Feb. 17, 2 p.m. Feb. 11 and Feb. 18

WHERE: Ripley Performing Arts Center, Pulaski High School, 1040 S. St. Augustine St., Pulaski

TICKETS: \$9

talented female singers to bring the show alive. All told, there are about 85 students involved with the show from the cast to the orchestra pit to the stage crew.

"We have a lot of girls who can sing really well," Tubbs said. "It just seemed like the right year to feature them, but we're not leaving the guys out. There are some awesome roles for the guys, and they still get to sing and dance and be featured, too, but we really had a lot of strong singer girls."

There are two versions of the musical, according to Tubbs, with one version designed for schools that don't have a person of color to play the lead, like Pulaski.

"As we didn't have a Deloris of color, we're using that version so that everything's culturally appropriate," Tubbs said. "We're being sensitive, and the licensing company tells you what lines to change and what's ap-

propriate for a white performer. We don't have a Whoopi Goldberg (who starred in the films). Some of the lines don't make sense if you don't have a person of color performing."

Tubbs likes the musical's message about having people from different backgrounds coming together and learning to appreciate what makes them different, as well as what makes them the same.

"They both have something to offer the other, and I think that's an important message for today," Tubbs said. "People can still work together and become friends. That's important."

With a lot of music and choreography required to bring the show together, PHS has tapped its choir and band to help make the show happen, according to Tubbs. She noted that many of those students were part of the group that performed at the Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year's Day in Pasadena, California, so getting them back into the swing of things in Wisconsin was a challenge at first.

"It wasn't a major challenge, certainly, but they did miss some rehearsal time," Tubbs said.

lpulaski@newmedia-wi.com

WHAT'S HAPPENING

FRIDAY, FEB. 9

KESHENA: Winter Farmers Market, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., College of Menominee Nation Cultural Learning Center, N188 State Highway 47-55, biweekly through April 19. Artisan Native crafts, hot food, baked goods and more. Sponsored by the college's Sustainable Development Institute.

OCONTO FALLS: Special Education Awareness Night, 7 p.m., Oconto Falls High School Fieldhouse, 210 N. Farm Road. Presented by OFHS Student Council and girls basketball team.

SHAWANO: "Hello Dolly," 7 p.m., Shawano Community High School, 220 County Road B. \$12 adults, \$9 seniors, \$6 children. Tickets at www.shawanotheater.ludus.com. For more information, 715-526-2175.

OCONTO: Machickanee Players Theatre presents "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein," 7 p.m., Park Avenue Playhouse, 408 Park Ave. Tickets at www.MachickaneePlayers.com.

PULASKI: "Sister Act," 7 p.m., Pulaski High School, Ripley Performing Arts Center, 1040 S. St. Augustine St. Tickets \$9, available at www.pulaskihs.ludus.com.

B. \$12 adults, \$9 seniors, \$6 children. Tickets at www.shawanotheater.ludus.com. For more information, 715-526-2175.

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SUNDAY, FEB. 11

SHAWANO: "Hello Dolly," 2 p.m., Shawano Community High School, 220 County Road B. \$12 adults, \$9 seniors, \$6 children. Tickets at www.shawanotheater.ludus.com. For more information, 715-526-2175.

OCONTO: Machickanee Players Theatre presents "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein," 2 p.m., Park Avenue Playhouse, 408 Park Ave. Tickets at www.MachickaneePlayers.com.

PULASKI: "Sister Act," 2 p.m., Pulaski High School, Ripley Performing Arts Center, 1040 S. St. Augustine St. Tickets \$9, available at www.pulaskihs.ludus.com.

MONDAY, FEB. 12

KESHENA: Running and walking program, 4:40 to 6:30 p.m., Omaeqnomenewak Wetohkatikamek Center, 2700 Mianaceqtawak Road, Keshena. Infused water provided during the week, and a family snack-making station is provided on Saturdays. Information: Chelsey Latender, 715-799-5431 or chelseyl@mtclinic.net.

TUESDAY, FEB. 13

OCONTO FALLS: To God's Glory Free Luncheon/Social, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Grace Lutheran Church, 501 S. Main St.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 14

GILLET: Ash Wednesday service, 4:30 p.m., Tabor United Methodist Church, 120 W. Main St.

BONDUEL: Ash Wednesday service, 6 p.m. Zion United Methodist Church, 134 E. Green Bay St.

THURSDAY, FEB. 15

KESHENA: Running and walking program, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Omaeqnomenewak Wetohkatikamek Center, 2700 Mianaceqtawak Road, Keshena. Infused water provided during the week, and a family snack-making station is provided on Saturdays. Information: Chelsey Latender, 715-799-5431 or chelseyl@mtclinic.net.

FRIDAY, FEB. 16

NAVARINO: Light Up the Night Torchlight Ski/Snowshoe, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Navarino Nature Center, W5646 Lindsten Road. Free admission with nonperishable food donation. Does not include rentals. NNC members \$5, non-members \$10, families \$20. 715-758-6999

OCONTO: Machickanee Players Theatre presents "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein," 7 p.m., Park Avenue Playhouse, 408 Park Ave. Tickets at www.MachickaneePlayers.com.

PULASKI: "Sister Act," 7 p.m., Pulaski High School, Ripley Performing Arts Center, 1040 S. St. Augustine St. Tickets \$9, available at www.pulaskihs.ludus.com.

Conservation easement to bring recreation mecca

The largest conservation easement in Wisconsin history will bring a 67,000-acre timber and wetlands playground for the state's ATV riders, hunters, anglers, trappers, hikers and other recreational users.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources finalized the conservation easement purchase of the Pelican Acre Forest on Jan. 26 from the Virginia-based Conservation Fund, the property's current owner, said Jim Lemke, the DNR's real estate section manager.

Centered around the tiny unincorporated town of Monico in Oneida County at the intersection of highways 45 and 8, the forest gem was one of the last remaining tracts of continuous forest in the state, Lemke said.

While the total \$15.3 million purchase — including a previous purchase in April 2022 of 12,419 acres for \$4.6 million — permanently protects and gives public access to the land, it will also allow timber harvesting there to continue and the land to remain on tax rolls, he noted. The remaining 54,898-acre easement finalized Jan. 26 for \$10.7 million brings the total protected site to 67,317 acres.

Clint Miller, central Midwest director of the conservation fund, a major player in the land protection coup, called it "public land benefits without the burden of public ownership."

Most of the land is in Oneida County, with about 1,000 acres in Langlade County and 600 in



Ross Bielema
Columnist

Forest County.

Roughly 10 miles by six miles, the vast forest includes 58 miles of rivers and streams and 20,000 acres of wetlands, Lemke said.

Among the Pelican River Forest's impacts on sportsmen and sports-women are:

- Opening 70 miles of gravel and dirt logging roads to all vehicles starting June 1, giving access for hunters, hikers and other users. Previous owner The Forestland Group only allowed those roads to be open during the gun deer season, Miller noted. Under the agreement, the DNR will maintain those roads under the supervision of Ron Gropp of the DNR Forestry Division. Interest from a \$1.5 million community foundation set up by the Conservation Fund at a Wausau bank will pay for future road maintenance when the property is sold in the future, probably to a timber interest, Miller said.

- Development of at least seven miles of ATV/UTV and snowmobile trails on the property. This will also link existing trails from Forest and Langlade counties. "They don't have a north-south route," Lemke said.

- Virtually any activity typically allowed on many public lands — hiking, foraging, hunting, fishing, trapping, kayaking

— will be legal there immediately, Lemke noted. Because the roads are not paved, and currently not open, much of the land may be difficult to access right now.

Signage detailing the various activities offered will be installed in the coming months, Lemke said. The property will be added to the DNR website's public access land maps in a few months, too.

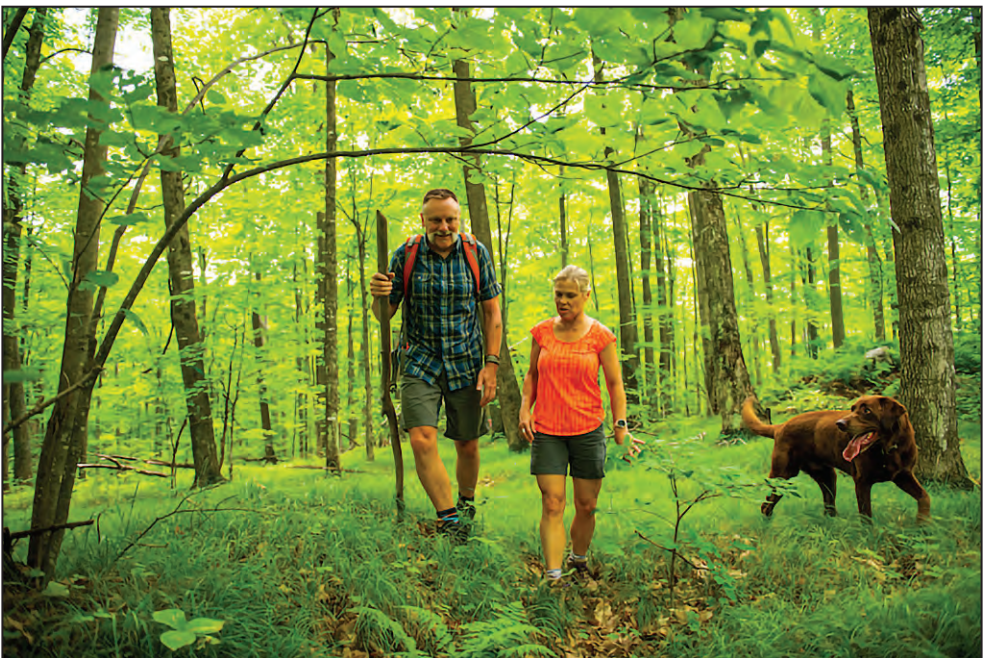
Lemke described the land as "industrial recreational forest land," noting it's been used for logging over the past 50-60 years. That will continue, as the parcel remains in the state's MFL (Managed Forest Law) program, which gives property owners significant tax breaks in return for granting public access.

Despite some misunderstandings with a few legislators and the general public, the new owner (likely a timber interest) will continue to pay taxes on the property at the MFL rate, Miller noted.

"The easement has zero effect on taxes," Miller said.

The current annual property tax payment is about \$73,000. It prevents splintering and development of one of the state's last remaining continuous forests.

Although the DNR has been eyeing the property since 2018, the state legislature put the brakes on the easement purchase in April when the Joint Finance Committee balked on spending \$4 million from the state's Knowles-Nelson Steward-



Clint and Patty Miller and their dog, Zeke, hike the trails of the Pelican River Forest.

JAY BRITTAIN

ship Program, despite the DNR's Natural Resources Board approval.

A few Republican legislators cited some local opposition to the plan and restrictions on private development.

The Conservation Fund accepted a \$10.7 million offer, over \$3 million less than originally requested, Lemke said. Most of the purchase was funded through the federal Forest Legacy Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is derived from offshore gas and oil leases, not taxpayer dol-

lars, Miller explained.

"You always have to compromise with projects like this," Miller said. "The public doesn't get everything they want. Conservation has never been a partisan issue."

Businesses like Mountain Springs Motel in Mountain likely will see a boost in business. Owner Bob Lepkowski, who also happens to be president of the 400-member Dusty Trails ATV Club in Oconto County, said he was excited to hear about the project.

"That would be very appealing," he said. "That's an advantage to these riders."

His club helps maintain about 100 miles of trails from Suring to Townsend, and he said many members would likely use trails on the Pelican River Forest.

The Pelican River Forest includes the headwaters of the Wolf River, and protection of the land and water will support clean water and air on a large scale, he added. The project had "100% tribal support" from the area's Indian tribes as well, he said.

Ross Bielema is a freelance writer from New London and owner of Wolf River Concealed Carry LLC. Readers can contact him at Ross@wolfriverccw.com.

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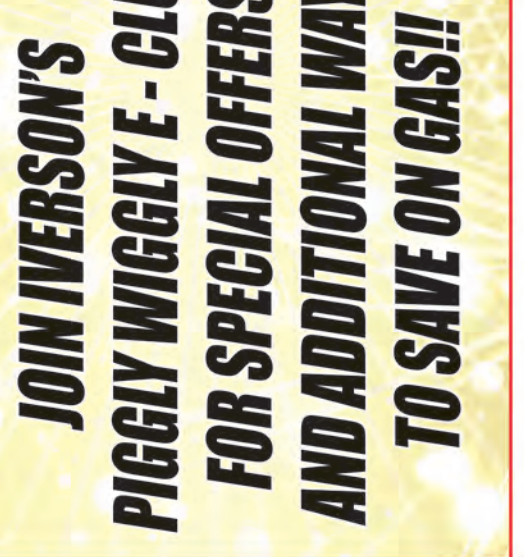
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Northland Pines no match for Witt-Birn

By **DUSTIN RIESE**
Correspondent

At this point in the basketball season, most teams have two goals in mind.

First, you want to be as healthy as possible leading into the stretch run. Second, you want to be playing your best basketball heading into the playoffs.

When it comes to Wittenberg-Birnamwood, not only are they healthy, but at 16-2 overall, they have been playing great basketball all season and that didn't stop Jan. 29.

Facing off against Northland Pines (7-11) for one of their final non-conference games of the season, it was the Chargers who continued their winning ways as they dominated the Eagles in every facet 72-34.

"We handled ourselves well tonight," head coach Nick Mechelke said. "We really focused on playing smart, and we pretty much did that tonight."

You couldn't have asked for a much better start for the Chargers than how they opened the game; they could do no wrong on either end of the floor. Whether it be the ability of Rory Salvesen to get to the rim or knock down shots, she nearly outscored the Eagles roster by herself as she finished the night with a game-high 21 points.

Throw in the 16 points from Harper Rogowski and

14 points from Faith Resch and the Chargers had three players land in double figures as they controlled the offense most of the first half. Anytime you can get that much production from three players, you have to love your chances as a group, and with a 44-13 lead at the half, Mechelke was extremely proud of how his team came out and set the tone early.

"I was really pleased with how we played in that first half," he said. "Offensively, we had tremendous balance from top to bottom, and we just played well from the start."

Had the Chargers not scored a single point the rest of the night, they still would've done enough to win as their defense was equally as good as the offense.

Vienna Klemett and Aubrey Beyer took a while to get things going, but they continued to play well for the Eagles. Most of their production came in the second half, but when you face such a large deficit it becomes more about finding some positive takeaways as opposed to winning the actual game.

One of the takeaways the Eagles have from this game was having their offense play much better in the second half, but a lot of that can be attributed to the Chargers not being as aggressive on the defensive end.

Through the midway point in the second half, the Eagles managed to keep pace with the Chargers as Wittenberg-Birnamwood outscored them 17-16 to push their lead to 61-29. That was until Rogowski came through with five quick points to push their lead to 66-29 as the running clock was approaching.

Even with Emma Weber connecting on a contested three late in the game for Northland Pines, their sluggish first half loomed large as Rogowski and Kit Stewart closed out the scoring for the Chargers in what was another impressive showing.

Although it will be the offense that gets most of the talk in this one, don't discredit the defense as that side of the ball played equally as well.

"Our defense has been our calling card all season," Mechelke said. "Tonight was one of those nights where our defense helped lead to our offense. We were intense defensively and were far more consistent than we have been in recent weeks."

In the Central Wisconsin East Conference, the Chargers are within striking distance of a conference title, but with two losses and both coming to Bonduel, it will be an uphill climb for the Chargers to achieve a conference crown.



Wittenberg-Birnamwood's Rory Salvesen pulls up and shoots in the team's 74-32 win over Northland Pines on Jan. 29. The sophomore guard led the Chargers with 21 points, including a 3-pointer and a pair of free throws. She also had three rebounds, three assists and three steals.

DUSTIN RIESE

Bonduel, Lena, Shawano all notch huge wins

Gresham beats Bowler to take sole possession of first place in conference

By **NEW MEDIA STAFF**

Friday, Feb. 2
Bonduel

Bonduel girls dispensed of Shiocton with ease, downing their hosts 67-18 to improve to 11-0 in the Central Wisconsin East Conference.

Lena crushes Gillett

Eva Brooks sank 20 points and Madilyn Thomson scored 17 to lead Lena past Gillett 59-24 in Marinette & Oconto Conference action.

Thomson also led her team with seven boards, while Brooks and Whitney Potter each had four assists, and Potter had five steals.

Gillett was led by Hope Soper's 10 points.

Lena, 13-0 in the conference, outscored Gillett, 7-6 in the conference, by scores of 31-8 in the first half and 28-16 in the second half.

Marion

Marion only managed to score in single digits in each half as the Mustangs lost 59-13 to Valley Chris-



Senior guard Amelia Bessert (11) chases a loose ball Jan. 29 against Northland Pines.

DUSTIN RIESE

tian in non-conference action.

Valley Christian led 41-6 at halftime, and also won the second half 18-7.

Marion is 3-15 overall.

Oconto Falls

Oconto Falls trounced Clintonville 58-10 in their latest North Eastern Conference matchup.

The Panthers scored 30

points in the first half and 28 in the second half, while the Truckers only managed five points in each half.

Oconto Falls had a balanced attack as all nine

players scored, but none hit double digits. Maddy Maloney led the way with nine points, followed by Rylie Shallow and Amber Otto, each with eight, and Kati Raddatz and Bailee Gorman, each with seven. Maddy Przybylski and Hannah Ludemann each scored six points, Morgan Moynihan scored four, and Brynn Hodkiewicz had three.

The Panthers improved to 8-7 in conference play and 12-8 overall.

Pulaski

A dismal first half left Pulaski in such a large hole, there was no way out. The 53-41 loss to Manitowoc Lincoln put both teams at 8-7 in the Fox River Classic Conference.

Trailing 27-8 at the break, Pulaski's 33-26 second-half rally wasn't enough to claim the game.

All eight Red Raiders scored, as they were led by Olivia Sprangers with 12 points.

Shawano

Shawano pounded Green Bay East 75-28 to

improve to 4-6 in the Bay Conference.

Suring

Bunny Cramer scored 20 points, and Emily Peterson scored 10 points, but Suring fell 56-45 to Niagara in a Marinette & Oconto Conference game.

Suring, 2-9 in their conference, trailed 27-13 at the break but won the second half 32-29.

Thursday, Feb. 1

Gresham tops Bowler

Bowler's chance to move into a tie for first place in the Central Wisconsin North Conference failed as the Panthers lost to first-place Gresham 67-51.

The Panthers' 4-2 mark puts them in second place, with the Wildcats' 6-0 record keeping them in first by themselves.

Menominee Indian

Menominee Indian edged out Amherst 64-62 for its third straight Central Wisconsin East Conference win. The Eagles are now 5-5 in league play and 8-10 overall.

GIRLS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

Chargers shut down Northland Pines for DH sweep

By **DUSTIN RIESE**
Correspondent

After watching the girls take care of business earlier in the night, it was the boys turn to take the court as Wittenberg-Birnamwood played host to the Northland Pines Eagles on Jan. 29. After weathering a barrage of 3-point baskets in the first half, the Chargers got things rolling using a 16-4 run to open the second half to pull away for the 57-34 victory.

“Great effort by our kids tonight to finish,” head coach Garrett Rogowski said. “Our defense was outstanding, and we had a very balanced attack from the start. That is something we haven’t had a ton of this season so to get that was very promising.”

Known for their 3-point shooting ability, the Eagles came out on fire early as 18 of their 20 first half points came from beyond the arc. Two of them came from Jack Albrecht with Cody Vojta, Jonathan Miller, Anthony Halada and AJ Muench all getting in on the act.

Thankfully the Chargers offense was able to respond, but with the Eagles going to work on the outside, Marshall Fraaza went to work on the inside to put the Chargers in front 7-6.

Trailing by five after a pair of Northland Pines’ triples, the Chargers continued to battle back as a Hayden Miller triple made things a one possession game. That was followed by a pair of Jett Rogowski baskets to put the Chargers back in front 19-18.

It took nearly the entire first half for the Eagles to score on something other than a 3-point shot, but after taking a 20-19 lead late in the first half, it was the Chargers finishing strong. Sparked by Rogowski and Oliver Fraaza, the Chargers ended the first half on a 9-0 run and took a 28-20 lead into the break.

Things only got worse from there for the Eagles as an early Keegan Schmid bucket extended the lead by 10 before reaching 14 on the Oliver Fraaza triple. After not scoring on a single 2-point attempt in the first half, it seems ironic that the first bucket of the second half by the Eagles came on a 2-pointer, with Mylo Albrecht getting one to fall.

That was followed by a flurry of buckets from Rogowski and Boone Schairer as the Chargers busted the game open with a 16-2 run to open the second half and take a 44-22 lead. Add that to the end of the first half and the Chargers used a 25-2 run to take what was a one-point deficit and open up a massive lead.

From there, it was all about getting everyone involved as the Chargers’ offense was starting to find their rhythm.

That allowed Jaden Clark to get on the scoresheet late, as did Miller and Connor Groshek. Even with Aiden Minx and Vojta starting to get inside to draw fouls, the 3-point shot wasn’t there for the Eagles.

Not only was this a great win for the Chargers, but to do it in front of some very important people is what made Rogowski happy.

“It was really nice to celebrate the



Wittenberg-Birnamwood junior Jett Rogowski goes up for what would be part of his 17 points scored against Northland Pines on Jan. 29.

TINA BACON

Birnamwood 1953 team and their state qualifying berth tonight,” he said. “Six of the guys who played on that team were here tonight, which is very cool to see. That alone seemed to give us some extra motivation as the kids wanted to put on a good show.”

Rogowski led all scorers with 17 points, with Oliver Fraaza adding 11 as the Chargers improved to 8-7 with the win.

The Eagles were led by Vojta and his eight points, with Halada adding six to bring their record to 6-13 on for the season.

GIRLS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Oconto Falls

All 13 players from Oconto Falls and Freedom scored, but it was the visiting Freedom team that finished on top, 45-29.

Oconto Falls was led by Rylie Shallow and Bailee Gorman with eight points each. Maddy Maloney added six, Ryan Hodkiewicz added three, and Kati Raddatz and Amber Otto each had two.

Freedom doubled up on the Panthers with a 28-14 first half.

Pulaski

Pulaski and Ashwaubenon are now tied at 8-6 in the Fox River Valley Conference following the Red Raiders’ 44-39 win.

Maggie Lardinois led Pulaski with 12 points, and Olivia Sprangers scored another 11.

Trailing 29-21 at the break, the Red Raiders turned the game around with a solid 23-10 second half that gave them the five-point win.

Tuesday, Jan. 30

Bonduel

Hailey Zernicke scored 13 points and Elisa Hischke added 12 as Bonduel defeated Stratford 42-32 in a non-conference matchup.

The Bears, 18-2 overall, held a comfortable 32-14 lead at the break. Even though Stratford outscored Bonduel 18-10 in the second half, the deficit was too much for them to reverse.

Bowler

Valley Christian held an eight-point lead at halftime, but their 44-25 second half sealed the win over Bowler 75-48 in non-conference action. Bowler dropped to 9-8 overall.

Lena

Lena controlled the game throughout as the Wildcats dominated Oneida Nation 67-45 in Marinette & Oconto Conference action.

Lena was led by Madilyn Thomson’s 29 points, with Eva Brooks adding 13 and Whitney Potter chipping in 10 more. Kali Fischer scored nine, and Hannah Thomson added another six.

Lena, 12-0 in conference play, led 32-17 after the first half and outscored their hosts 35-28 in the second half.

Oconto Falls

Waupaca, 3-11 in the North Eastern Conference, hosted Oconto Falls and sent the Panthers home a 61-46 loss. Oconto Falls dropped to 7-6 in the conference and 11-7 overall.

Pulaski

In a surprising loss, Pulaski pulled up short against Bay Port, dropping a 45-42 Fox River Classic Conference game.

Bay Port jumped out to an 18-10 lead at the half, and even though Pulaski won the second half 32-27, it wasn’t enough for the win.

Suring

Suring’s 2-9 record in the Marinette & Oconto Conference worsened to 2-10 when they played second-place Coleman. Suring lost 55-39, and Coleman improved to 12-1 in conference action.

Birdee Cramer led Suring with 11 points, and Bunny Cramer scored nine.

Coleman controlled the game with a 38-17 first half, while Suring outscored them 22-17 after the break.

Wittenberg-Birnamwood

Strong play by the Chargers paved the way for a 52-25 non-conference win over Crandon.

Wittenberg-Birnamwood, 17-2 overall, dominated the first half 38-18, and even won the slower tempo of the second half 14-8.

Monday, Jan. 29

Gillett

Gillett improved to 11-8 overall with a 58-49 non-conference win over Green Bay New Lutheran/Providence Academy.

Shawano

Leah Nordin led the way with 18 points as Shawano downed New London 52-38 in non-conference action.

“Great team defense led to a team victory,” coach Ryan Koenig said.

Suring

Suring dropped to 2-9 in the Marinette & Oconto Conference after losing 59-42 to Crivitz. The Eagles are 4-14 overall.

Residents invited to participate in WCC resolution process

By **NEW MEDIA STAFF**

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) invites all Wisconsinites to take part in its annual spring hearing process.

The WCC is an independent organization of residents that advises the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on how to responsibly manage Wisconsin’s natural resources.

Wisconsinites can submit proposed resolutions via the online process now

through Feb. 26. Resolutions must meet the following criteria:

- The concern must be of statewide impact.
- The concern must be practical, achievable and reasonable.
- The concern must be within the mission and vision of the WCC.

An individual may submit no more than two resolutions per year. Those interested in submitting a resolution are encouraged to reach out to the resolution review committee or their WCC county

chair for guidance in drafting a resolution.

Additional tips on preparing a resolution are available on the WCC and DNR’s spring hearings webpage.

At the close of the submission process, the resolutions will be reviewed by a committee of WCC delegates to ensure they meet the criteria for inclusion and will be prepared for the online input, which kicks off April 10, and will close April 13.

For further information or questions, contact Terri Roehrig, executive committee member of the WCC, at 920-540-2775.

Shawano wrestlers clinch conference title

A 72-12 win over Xavier on Feb. 1 clinched the conference title for Shawano with a 6-0 mark.

“I’m most proud of this group for stepping up and wrestling as a team,” coach Mike Homan said. “As we finished our conference season 6-0, I think back to all of the hard work that has been put into the practice room this season. This entire team of boys and girls have worked hard and earned this conference

title.”

The dual meet started off at 132 pounds with Owen Montour earning a fall over Dante Vargas of Xavier in 2:16. Drake Herm and Kody Popelka both earned forfeits at 138 and 144 pounds, respectively.

At 150, John Faulkner of Xavier earned a fall over Marcus Cicero in 2:54. At 157, Carsen Herm earned a fall over Jerome Erimas in 58 seconds, and at 165, Drew Chelberg earned a

fall over Alexander Marg in 3:44.

At 175, Mason Theis earned a fall over Aaron Vanden Heuvel in 1:36, and at 190 and 215, respectively, Connor Chelberg and Jack Dietz each received forfeits. At 285, Eddie Heuring of Xavier earned a fall over Brayen Boivin in 2:50.

At 106, Dylan Gartner received a forfeit. At 113, Dane Hodkiewicz earned a fall over Adrian Morales in 2:33. At 120 and 126, re-

spectively, Alex Montour and Austin Stickney both received forfeits.

Shawano also used the evening to honor its youth wrestlers and seniors.

“Carsen Herm at 157 has been a solid varsity wrestler for the last three years,” Homan said. “He always battles hard and in most cases earns a pin. He is a great kid to have in your varsity lineup and will always be remembered for his pinning

capability.”

Drew Chelberg has been improving all year long, Homan said.

“He is really starting to wrestle well at the right time,” the coach said.

Mason Theis wrestled a lot of tough matches for the Hawks.

“He has sacrificed a lot this year by dropping down to 175,” Homan said. “Last year, he wrestled at 182 and 190. He never complains. He just gets back

to work and works hard in the practice room.”

Homan said all the seniors left a great impact on the team.

“Kids like Drake Herm, Connor Chelberg and Dylan Hodkiewicz always battled and fought hard for team victories,” he said. “Alex Montour filled many vacancies where we needed him to be.”

At 12-4 overall, Shawano prepares for regional action Feb. 10.

Shawano girls take first at conference meet

Onna Hermann took first place at 120 pounds and several other Shawano wrestlers finished in the top five at the NEC/Bay Conference conference tournament on Feb. 3.

All told, Shawano sacred 93 points while giving up 86, which placed them in first at the event in Waupaca.

“The girls had a good day of wrestling, earning enough team points to take first,” coach Mike Homan said. “Onna Herman wrestled very well on the way to pinning all of her opponents and taking first place. She was our leading points scorer today. She has been working on more offense, and the change has really helped her score more points.”

Earning second-place finishes were Jenna Moede at 114 and Caitlyn Moede at 126. Third-place finishes were recorded by Courtney Schenk at 152 and Lily Tomas at 235. Adalyn Barkley placed fourth at 138, as

did Maddie Moesch at 120. Lauren Harkey finished in fifth place at 120.

Breleigh Thornock took sixth place at 126 pounds.

“Caitlyn had a nice tournament today and ran into some tough competition in her finals match. All of her other victories today were falls,” Homan said. “She also scored a lot of team points. Maddie Moesch and Lauren Harkey both did a great job also in the 120 bracket. I really like how both of them keep competing and never give up. They wrestled some tough matches today were very competitive.”

Homan also had positive words about Schenk and Tomas.

“They both showed good improvement over the last few weeks,” he said. “I can see them getting better in every match that they wrestle.”

The sectional tournament in Kimberly is another week away.



Gillett/Suring’s boys wrestling team hosted a quad invite Feb. 3 with teams from Lena, Elcho and Menominee, Michigan, joining them on the mat. It was also Senior Night, during which Gillett/Suring honored Parker Zahn, Carter Whisman and Mason Micooley.

KEVIN PASSON | NEW MEDIA

Shawano hockey hits three-game losing skid

Spooner 4, Shawano 1

Shawano was knocked off by the Spooner Rails 5-1 on Feb. 3.

A scoreless first period gave way to three goals by Spooner in the second period.

The Hawks’ only goal came at 7:46 in the third period when Tyson Lyons scored. Spooner added its fourth and final goal at 12:24.

Shawano/Bonduel made 15 shots on goal, while

the Rails had 24. Lyons notched 20 saves.

Penalties for Shawano totaled three for six minutes. Spooner was called six times for 12 minutes.

Escanaba 8 Shawano 0

Shawano had a long drive home Feb. 2 after losing 8-0 to Escanaba, Michigan.

Escanaba scored five times in the first period and three times in the second for the shutout. The

host team was not called for a single penalty, while Shawano was called twice for four minutes.

Escanaba notched 33 shots on goal, as Kaiden Thornborrow had 25 saves. Shawano players managed only three shots on goal.

Antigo 3, Spooner 1

Owen Dickman scored once with two assists and Eli Kassler had a goal and an assist as Antigo topped Spooner 3-1 on Feb. 2.

Scoring opened in the

first period when Dickman scored with a Kassler assist at 13:57. Exactly one minute later, Liam Burt scored with assists from Dickman and Ian Brittenham.

Kassler scored with a Dickman assist at 3:57 in the second period to put the Red Robins up 3-0. Spooner scored at 7:06 in the second period, and there was no scoring in the third period.

HOCKEY, CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

Bonduel stays perfect in boys basketball

Tigerton has first place in its conference; Shawano beats Green Bay West

Lena’s losing skid stretched to nine with a 62-27 loss to Florence in non-conference action Feb. 3. Lena is 4-13 overall.

Friday, Feb. 2 Bonduel

The Bears sit at 11-0 in the Central Wisconsin East Conference after an 81-59 victory at Shiocton.

Race Anvelink led the Bears with 34 points including nine 3-pointers. Noah Weier scored another 14 including a pair of triples. Quinn Wesenberg’s six points came from two 3-pointers.

Ryan Westrich led Bonduel with nine rebounds, Colin Margelofsky had 11 assists, and Cade Johnson,

Margelofsky, Weier and Anvelink each had three steals.

The Bears led 40-26 before the break and outscored their hosts 41-33 after the break.

Menominee Indian

The Eagles played a close game but lost 70-65 to Amherst in a Central Wisconsin East Conference game.

Menominee Indian is 2-9 in the conference and 3-14 overall.

Pulaski

The Red Raiders suffered the first in a pair of back-to-back losses with a 77-62 defeat at the hands of Manitowoc Lincoln.

Pulaski trailed 34-31 at

halftime and was outscored 43-31 in the second half.

Pulaski is now 7-7 in the Fox River Classic Conference.

Tigerton

James Brady connected on 24 points, and Maverick Maas scored 15 to lead Tigerton to a 51-38 win over Northland Lutheran in Central Wisconsin North Conference action.

Brady also led the Tigers with nine rebounds, while Maas and Joey Zimdars each had four assists, and Zimdars had five steals.

Tigerton, at 7-2, is in first place in the conference.

Wittenberg-Birnamiwood

Wittenberg-Birnamiwood’s three-game winning streak came to end with a 61-51 loss to Manawa in a Central Wisconsin East Conference matchup.

Jett Rogowski led the Chargers with 23 points, and Jaden Clark added another 10.

Oliver Fraaza had eight rebounds and three assists, while Clark had a pair of steals.

Manawa outscored Wittenberg-Birnamiwood, 6-5 in the conference, by five points in each half.

Thursday, Feb. 1 Bonduel

Ryan Westrich scored 16 points and Race Anvelink connected on 14 to lead Bonduel to a 74-43 triumph over Manitowoc Lincoln in non-conference

action.

The Bears, 17-1 overall, had little trouble with their hosts, leading 37-14 at halftime and adding another eight points to their margin of victory with a 37-29 second half.

Gillett

Aydin Franti led Gillett with 18 points in a 59-41 Marinette & Oconto Conference win over Wausaukee.

Ben Matczak scored 14 points, and Tyler Frank added 11. The other five players also scored: Brandon DeBauch with five, Bradin Bjelland and Thomas Carmody each with four, Ryan Pensis with two and Nathan Rowell with one.

Gillett’s 29-25 first-half lead was extended with a big 30-16 second half.

Gillett improved to 10-2

in conference action.

Lena

Lena was no match for Marinette and Oconto Conference leader Crivitz in the Wildcats’ 75-26 loss.

While all eight members of Lena’s team scored, the top scorer was Mason Belongia with seven.

Lena, 1-10 in conference action, scored 13 points in each half while Crivitz had 50 in the first half and another 25 after the break.

Oconto Falls

Oconto Falls saw its North Eastern Conference record drop to 1-12 after a 60-35 defeat at the hands of Waupaca.

Jameson Beaman and JJ Pytleski each scored seven points. Pytleski also led the team with five rebounds, while Easton Engel led with two assists, and

BOYS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

Schultz' 24 points not enough as Appleton East takes down Pulaski

By **DUSTIN RIESE**
Correspondent

It's never easy to go on the road and win in high school basketball, and the Pulaski Red Raiders (10-9) found that out the hard way Feb. 3.

Facing off against Appleton East (4-13) in a non-conference tilt, it was a story of two players going head to head in an epic player vs. player matchup.

It was the Joey LaChapell vs. Colin Schultz as both of these players put their teams on their back, especially during the second half. Schultz paced the way for the Red Raiders with 24 points, but that wasn't enough to take the spotlight from LaChapell, who was honored pregame for becoming the Patriots' all-time leading scorer. He responded by dropping 36 points for the Patriots, including 17 straight at one point to lift the Patriots to the 79-70 victory.

Judging by how the start of things went, you would've never guessed

that nearly 150 points would be scored as neither team was able to find the bucket in the first three minutes.

The back-and-forth affair continued from there,

Ethan and Bohdan Schmidt managed to keep things close at 21-18, but it was LaChapell coming through with another triple to push the lead to 24-18.

LaChapell was just getting started as he combined with Prestigiacomo to push the lead to 28-21 with Jacob Weisbach stretching things out to 34-26 late in the first half. Fortunately for the Red Raiders, they managed to chip away at things late as the corner triple from Bryce Wotruba pulled Pulaski within five while Jossie and Schultz closed out the first half to make things 36-32.

Expecting more of the same in the second half, both teams exchanged buckets to open things up before the LaChapell show got going as his four points pushed the Patriots lead to

43-34.

It was time for Schultz to take over as he not only scored seven of his team's next nine points to pull the Red Raiders to within 49-47, but he went toe-to-toe with LaChapell for a good portion of the second half. Once Schultz got rolling, it opened things up for the rest of the Pulaski offense as Dylan Dorn tied things up before Dixon Holewinski gave the Red Raiders a 52-51 lead.

That was when LaChapell began to take over as he went on to score 17 straight points for the Patriots helping them not only stay close, but giving them the lead on several occasions.

The same can be said for Schultz throughout the second half as he was able to match LaChapell with several buckets of his own as the Red Raiders were within 65-64 in the final few minutes.

It came down to the free throw line to determine the game.

HOCKEY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

Spooner had 43 shots on goal, with only one finding the back of the net. Antigo had 19 shots. Goalie Nolan Bunnell had 42 saves for Antigo.

As for penalties, Antigo was called for seven infractions and served 14 minutes. The Rails were called on five penalties and served 10 minutes.

Rhinelander 10 Shawano 4

Rhinelander's 39 shots on goal included 10 goals as the Hodags controlled the game from the beginning, defeating Shawano/Bonduel 10-4 on Feb. 1.

The Hodags led 3-0 in the first period before Karson Stoss first put Shawano on the board at 14:50.

The two teams traded the first four goals in the second period, but then Rhinelander added four unanswered goals to take a 9-3 lead. Second-period goals for Shawano came from Michael Dillenberg at 5:18 with assists from Cam Schroeder and Stoss, and then from Bryce Lammers at 6:59 with a Hunter Jones assist.

Blake Knope scored at 1:31 in the third period with

a Stoss assist. Rhinelander hit the back of the goal once more at 14:50 to end the scoring.

Shawano had 21 shots on goal.

Tyson Lyons had 15 saves on 20 shots on goal, while Kaiden Thornborrow had 14 saves on against 19 shots.

The Hawks were penalized six times for 12 minutes. The Hodags were penalized eight times for 16 minutes.

After the non-conference loss, Shawano's record stands at 7-11 overall. **Shawano 5, Pacelli 1**

Shawano's hockey players didn't have as many shots on goal as Stevens Point Pacelli, but the ones they did they made count.

The Cardinals led the Hawks 22-16 on shots on goal, but the scoreboard showed Shawano on top with a 5-1 final score on Jan. 30.

Karson Stoss started out the Hawks' scoring with a goal at 15:52 in the first period. With an assist from Blake Knope, the Hawks led 1-0 at the end of the period.

Knope, who had a hat

trick on the night, scored his first goal at 1:45 in the second period with an assist from Wyatt Schroeder. Shawano took a 3-0 lead thanks to a Cam Schroeder goal with an assist from Wyatt Schroeder.

Knope's second goal came at 2:44 in the third period with Stoss assisting. Pacelli scored their only goal at 8:07, with Knope getting his third at 15:06 with another Wyatt Schroeder assist.

Mosinee 8, Antigo 1

Owen Dickman scored Antigo's only goal in its 6-1 loss to Mosinee on Jan. 30.

The Indians scored twice in the first period, three times in the second and had two goals in the third period before Dickman scored at 8:23 with an assist by Liam Burt. Mosinee scored once after that.

The Red Robins were called for two penalties for four minutes, while the Indians were called on three infractions for six minutes.

Antigo only managed 11 shots on goals compared to Mosinee's 63. Nolan Bunnell had 55 saves for the Red Robins.

BOYS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

Grayson Clark had a pair of steals.

Waupaca controlled the game with a commanding 33-15 first half and a 27-20 second half.

Suring

Suring's 34-30 first-half lead slowly fell away as St. Thomas Aquinas Academy outscored their hosts 38-27 in the second half to grab a 68-61 victory.

The Eagles, 2-10 in conference play, are 4-14 overall.

Tuesday, Jan. 30 Bonduel

Ryan Westrich scored 22 points to lead Bonduel to its 10th consecutive Central Wisconsin East Conference win this season. At 10-0 in the conference and 16-1 overall, the Bears were too much for Weyauwega-Fremont, winning 63-56.

Cade Johnson scored 12 points, and Noah Weier added another 10 for the Bears.

With a 34-21 lead at the half, Bonduel could afford Weyauwega-Fremont's six-point advantage in the second half as the Bears held the advantage at the final buzzer.

Bowler

A 61-31 loss at the hands of White Lake dropped Bowler to 0-6 in the Central Wisconsin North Conference and 1-16 overall.

White Lake jumped out to a 31-13 lead at the half and padded the final score with a 30-18 second half.

Gillett

All eight Gillett players scored when the Tigers defeated Wabeno/Laona 71-58 in a non-conference game.

Jesse DeBauch led the way with 23 points, followed by Aydin Franti with 20 and Ben Matczak

with 12. Also contributing were Thomas Carmody with six, Tyler Frank with four, and Bradin Bjelland, Brandon DeBauch and Ryan Pensis with two each. Gillett, 12-5 overall, maintained its lead with a 31-25 first half and 40-33 second half.

Tigerton defeats Gresham

The winless Gresham Wildcats were going to have a hard time getting a victory against Tigerton, which is tied for first place in the Central Wisconsin North Conference.

Tigerton led from the onset in its 76-41 triumph.

Joey Zimdars and Sam Anheuser each scored 18 points to lead Tigerton. James Brady scored another 17, while Maverick Maas added 13.

The Tigers, 6-2 in the conference, led 41-18 at halftime and added another 12 points to their margin of victory during the second half.

Gresham fell to 0-6 in the conference.

Marion

The Mustangs kept the pressure on Tigerton in the Central Wisconsin North Conference as Marion downed Northland Lutheran 69-60.

The win leaves Marion and Tigerton tied at 6-2 in the conference.

Chargers edge Eagles

Wittenberg-Birnhamwood edged out Menominee Indian 55-53 in a Central Wisconsin East Conference game.

The Chargers improved to 6-4 in conference action and 9-7 overall. Menominee Indian fell to 2-8 and 3-13, respectively.

Pulaski

Pulaski routed Bay Port 11-2 in overtime to capture

a 74-65 non-conference win.

Colin Schultz led the Red Raiders with 23 points, while Bryce Wotruba scored 14, Dixon Holewinski added 12 and Dylan Dorn contributed 10. All of Holewinski's points came from four 3-pointers, and Wotruba scored three triples.

Schultz pulled down 11 boards, while Bryan Schmidt had four assists, and Wotruba had seven steals.

Pulaski led 33-32 at the half, but Bay Port came back with its own one-point advantage, 31-30, in the second half to send the game into overtime with a 63-63 score.

Shawano

Logan Sipple's 34 points set the pace for Shawano as the Hawks handily beat Green Bay West 81-58 in Bay Conference play.

Crew Weisnicht scored another 16 points for Shawano, and Will Verkuilen contributed another 13.

Shawano, now 4-6 in the conference and 6-12 overall, topped Green Bay West 34-26 before the break and 47-32 after the intermission.

Monday, Jan. 29 Marion

Marion and Iola-Scandinavia played to an even 17-17 first half, but then the visiting Thunderbirds outperformed in the 42-30 second half to hand the Mustangs their eighth overall loss of the season.

Marion lost the non-conference matchup 59-47 and is now 11-8 overall.

Oconto Falls

The Panthers came out ready to fight in their 19-point victory over Coleman in non-conference action.

In particular, Jameson Beaman was on point, as he led the way with 37 points — including five 3-pointers. Alex Haines had a pair of triples as he scored 17 points, and Em-erich Skarban scored 12.

Skarban was busy at the boards as he pulled down 16 rebounds. Haines and Chase Cariveau each had four assists, and Haines also led with three steals.

Oconto Falls held a comfortable 37-21 lead at

the half and added three points to their margin of victory with a 39-36 second-half performance.

Suring

Goodman/Pembinewon a non-conference game over Suring 56-47.

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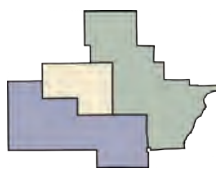
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Timer broken on Swift's 15 minutes of fame

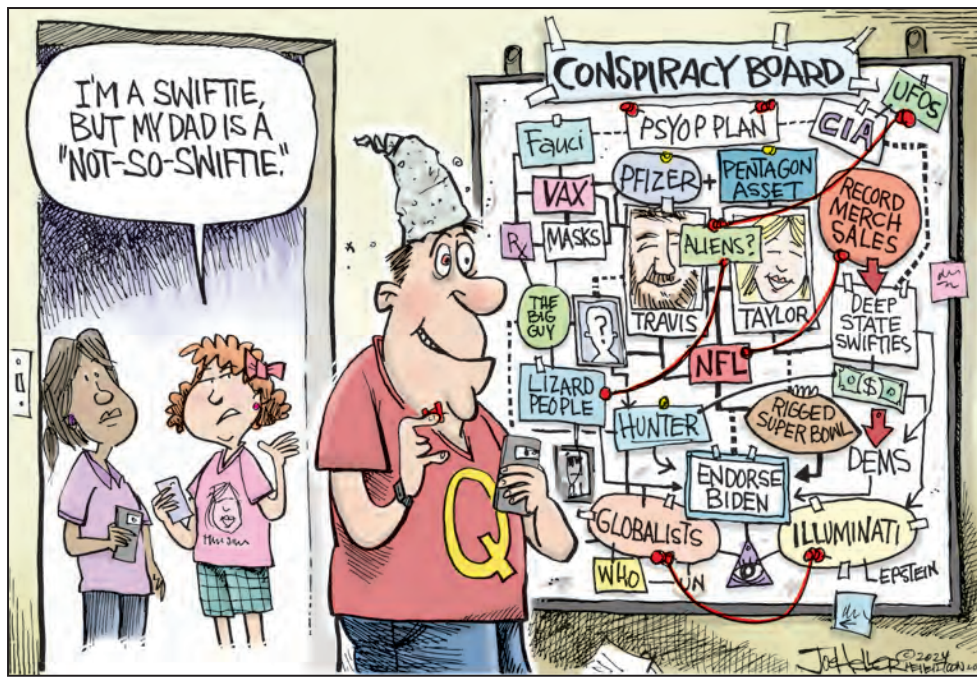
Have you ever had a neighbor or friend who shared way too much about themselves to the point you feel the need to avoid them so your brain doesn't push out relevant information about life in general in exchange for stuff you don't really want to know?

I feel like that whenever a news media snippet about Taylor Swift appears. Every time I turn on the television or jump onto Facebook, there's something about Swift, usually several things. It seems like since 2023 started — and it has spilled into 2024 — the singer has permeated all aspects of life.

Swift has always been a fixture when it comes to the world of music, but now she's busted out into sports commentary ever since she started dating Travis Kelce with the Kansas City Chiefs. Now with her efforts to get younger generations out to vote in elections, political commentators are losing their marbles, as well.

To prove my case, I present Exhibit A, the Google search this morning when I punched in "Taylor Swift" for news headlines:

- USA Today: Some Republicans fear Taylor Swift could influence the election for Biden.
- HuffPost: Wall Street Journal shreds 'Trumpy internet trolls' with blunt question about Taylor Swift.
- NBC: Jeweler behind Taylor Swift's 'TNT' bracelet reveals Travis Kelce purchased matching bangles for the couple.
- Yahoo News: Pentagon to MAGA world: You need to calm down over Taylor Swift.
- The Washington Post: Why Taylor Swift's globe-trotting in private jets is



Lee Pulaski
City editor

getting scrutinized.

• New York Times: Taylor Swift is a 'treasure,' says Liz Cheney, a prime Trump critic.

• The Guardian: Grammys set to celebrate female musicians as Taylor Swift eyes a record-breaking win.

I will stop here, as there's only so much readers can take in, but suffice to say there's more topics that have made headlines in the last day or two about Swift. The only topic that's probably not on the internet, as far as I've seen, is having a nutrition expert go into detail about what the woman had for breakfast today.

It's gotten to the point where Gannett hired a reporter to exclusively report on Swift. As other newspapers are figuring out how to report the news with smaller staffs, the news company is having a

reporter chase after Swift and report on aspects of her. He might very well be the one who finally talks to the nutrition expert about Swift's breakfast.

Thankfully, Swift isn't leading off every television program to the point where the need-to-know info about government and the wars in Israel and Ukraine are being pushed aside. Still, it feels like we're heading in that direction, and as a journalist, that bothers me. Becoming numb to the horrors of the world because we're addicted to Swift like a bunch of junkies is not the way to build a civilized society.

There are billions of people in the world, and everyone has a story to tell. As a reporter, I've told hundreds of stories of ordinary people doing interesting things — book authors, musicians, comedians, even teddy bear collectors — because everyone deserves some time in the spotlight. However, Swift's 15 minutes of fame has been extended to the point where I say: "Stop the ride. I want to get off."

I'm pretty sure the timer is broken.

I get that people are curious about celebrities, and there have been other instances where information overload has been reached on the talented people we adore. Where does it end, though? A British princess was killed because the media was desperate to chase her down for photos and tidbits of information to turn into stories. Is it going to take a tragedy for the Taylor mania to subside?

We stop at freeway off-ramps to rest on long car trips. We turn off the television when the news is getting too depressing. We take mental health days when the stresses of work and family get to be too much. Even carnival rides that are fun must come to an end at some point. I think we need a "Swift stop" on information about Taylor Swift. There are other people in the world. Let's pay attention to some of them for a while.

Lee Pulaski is the city editor for NEW Media. Readers can contact him at lpulaski@newmedia-wi.com.

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

Don't charge records requesters for redactions

You've already paid for them. They're yours, but if you want to see the public records that show what your government is doing, some state lawmakers want you to pay again — this time, for redactions.

That's right. They want you to pay more to get less.

Currently, the state's Open Records Law allows public officials to charge only for the "actual, necessary, and direct cost" of copying, mailing and in some cases locating public records. Senate Bill 789, which the Wisconsin Senate recently passed, barely more than a month after it was introduced, would allow law enforcement and corrections agencies to add another fee, for the cost of redacting audio and video.

At a Jan. 3 hearing, proponents of the bill complained about the increasing number of requests and the complex and time-consuming process of redacting body camera and dash camera recordings. State Sen. Jesse James, R-Altoona, the bill's lead Senate sponsor, testified it takes an average of an hour and a half to review and redact each hour of video. This, he said, can take up "valuable agency time, especially for departments that are already understaffed."

James, a former cop and chief of police, said he knows "firsthand how our law enforcement departments and agencies can be scrutinized, especially in the last few years. They face open records requests constantly, and while they are happy to fulfill them to keep our government open and transparent, they would appreciate an opportunity to be properly compensated" for the time it takes.

Others also argued the bill, now awaiting action in the state Assembly, is a way to help law enforcement "recoup" their time and resources.

Such reasoning runs counter to the spirit and letter of the Open Records Law, which holds that providing people with public records is "an integral part of the routine duties of officers and employees whose responsibility it is to provide such information."

Get that? "Routine."

Fulfilling records requests is already supposed to be part of what these public officials are paid to do, not something extra for which they should be paid again. Imagine police



Amanda St. Hilaire
Guest columnist

sending a crime victim a bill for the time detectives spend ruling out suspects. After all, these investigations are time-consuming and complex. Why should everyone else have to foot the bill for an investigation into a crime that only affected one person?

It is disingenuous to claim this fee is recuperation of resources because your tax dollars are already supposed to have purchased the work of making public records public. Allowing charges for redactions might even incentivize some records custodians to take more time processing requests.

Worse, imposing what can easily run to hundreds and even thousands of dollars of redaction costs will make obtaining certain records unaffordable to some requesters, including media outlets that obtain videos as a vital check on law enforcement and corrections workers.

The bill has drawn opposition from the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin, which has this to say: "Lack of transparency and police accountability creates further distrust in law enforcement, making community engagement with law enforcement more fraught and less effective. Ultimately, proposals like SB-789 could allow law enforcement to shirk their obligation to be publicly accountable, and further erode the belief that police protect communities rather than only their own."

Transparency serves a public good. The law says there is a presumption these records are public, regardless of who requests them or why they're making the request.

Charging individual requesters instead of reallocating resources and taking a closer look at budget priorities sends a dangerous message. The public deserves a system that treats an essential function of government as, well, part of the job.

Amanda St. Hilaire is the news content manager at FOX6 in Milwaukee. Your Right to Know is a monthly column distributed by the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council (wisfoic.org), a nonprofit, nonpartisan group dedicated to open government.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Biden committed to moving forward

To the editor:

President Joe Biden lifts up hardworking Americans who are bringing us back from the pandemic.

The U.S. economy is rebounding more quickly than any other country. The unemployment rate has dropped to 3.9%. He has created policies that have led to better paying jobs.

Bidenomics is working, reducing inflation and lowering health/child care and gas prices. Some prices continue to be high, but Biden has stood up to corporate greed.

Biden is committed to keep all of us moving

forward — leaving no one behind.

Shirley Hinze, Shawano

Samaritan's Purse thanks volunteers

To the editor:

Generosity throughout Shawano contributed to a successful shoebox gift collection season at drop-off locations for the Samaritan's Purse project Operation Christmas Child.

Across the U.S., the project collected 10 million shoebox gifts in 2023. Combined with those collected from partnering countries in 2023, the ministry is now sending over 11.3 million shoebox gifts to children worldwide, including many who are suf-

fering from war, poverty, disease and disaster.

Through shoeboxes — packed with fun toys, school supplies, and personal care items — Shawano area volunteers brought joy to children in need around the world.

Each gift-filled shoebox is a tangible expression of God's love, and it is often the first gift these children have ever received. Through the continued generosity of donors since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 220 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 170 countries and territories.

Across Wisconsin, shoebox packers often shop for deals on shoebox items throughout the

year, and many serve at a deeper level by becoming a year-round volunteer. Information about ways area participants can get involved year-round can also be found at samaritanaspurse.org/occ or by calling 630-474-9478.

Although local drop-off locations for shoebox gifts are closed until Nov. 18-25, anyone can still be a part of this life-changing project by conveniently packing a shoebox gift online in just a few simple clicks at samaritanaspurse.org/buildonline.

These simple gifts, packed with love, send a message to children worldwide that they are loved and not forgotten.

Luke Switzer, Boone, North Carolina

THE NEWSDAY CROSSWORD

Edited by Stanley Newman (www.StanXwords.com)

ONE-SYLLABLE SAWS: Polysyllables prohibited

by S.N.

- ACROSS
- 1 What vegans avoid

5 Comfy-cozy

9 Marvel superheroes

13 Plant firmly

18 Stop it

19 Hawaiian figurine

20 Vatican's surroundings

21 Great courage

22 Single-syllable saw

25 Dreamland visit

26 Poker pot starter

27 Genesis construction

28 Bar bottles

29 Camper's stove fuel

30 Intensely competitive

32 Inbox filler

35 Road fork shape

36 Reunion gathering

37 Spooky

38 Dreamland visit

39 Stew tidbit

40 Benevolent

41 Recital performance

43 With 82 Across, single-syllable saw

46 Canine comment

49 What passwords provide

51 Apple tracking device

52 GPS calculations

53 Cheney predecessor

54 Gullible person

56 Mist or steam

60 Qty.

61 Hunter's garb

62 Penne __ vodka

63 Puma or panther

64 Single-syllable saw

69 Western stock character

70 Israeli diplomat Abba

71 Name meaning "lion"

72 Despotic Amin

73 Handle efficiently

74 Converges on

76 USN rank

77 Yuletide beverages

78 Neighbors of A's

80 *Return of the Jedi* robot

81 Singles

82 See 43 Across

87 Employs

89 Expressed aloud

90 Top performer

91 *Green Eggs and Ham* starter

93 Farm enclosures

97 Poetic sphere

98 Venomous snake

99 Be a volunteer

100 Be in charge of

101 Kid-lit spoilsport

103 Get ready, for short

104 Electrical measure

106 Former Milan money

107 Aircraft tracking device

108 Single-syllable saw

112 Be penitent

113 Animal pouches

114 Groundhog Day nickname

115 Walks unsteadily

116 Tablelands

117 Miniaturizing ending

118 Fabric footwear

119 Juror's assignment

DOWN

1 101 Across, notably

2 Lent follower

3 More than a single

5 Down

4 PGA peg

5 Cellphone symbol

6 Japan's __ Stock Average

7 Banjo cousin

8 Martial arts uniforms

9 Radiography room

10 Biblical law man

11 FD squad

12 Formerly named

13 Happen next

14 Defrost

15 Enter unlawfully

16 Dinner time

17 Hinges (on)

18 Rub roughly

23 Fannie __ (mortgage agency)

24 Jot down

29 British novelist A.S.

31 Big biz bigwig

33 London length

34 Very pale

35 Group's modest acknowledgment

38 County next to Napa

39 Pitchfork-shaped letters

40 Capital of Rwanda

42 Inheritance

44 Annoy a lot

45 Be dressed in

46 Pigtailed

47 Cost to get cash

48 Input again

50 Suffix with cyclo-

54 Court hearings?

55 Astronaut Shepard

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59 Not paying attention

61 Truncate

62 Etc., for instance

63 Norwegian topography

65 Top at an auction

66 Toy with

67 Red Muppet

68 Communication channel

74 Civil rights org.

75 *Raison d'*__

76 Tangy salad green

77 Longing for long ago

79 Rover's restraint

80 Actress Moore

82 Word with no repeated letters

83 Tell, as tales

84 Instinctual energies

85 Graceful skill

86 Novelist Ellison

88 Compass reading

92 Extremely small

94 Nonliteral phraseology

95 Latvia's locale

96 Time periods

98 Lots of land

99 Standing straight

100 Royal Navy designation

102 Granny

103 Neato, in the '90s

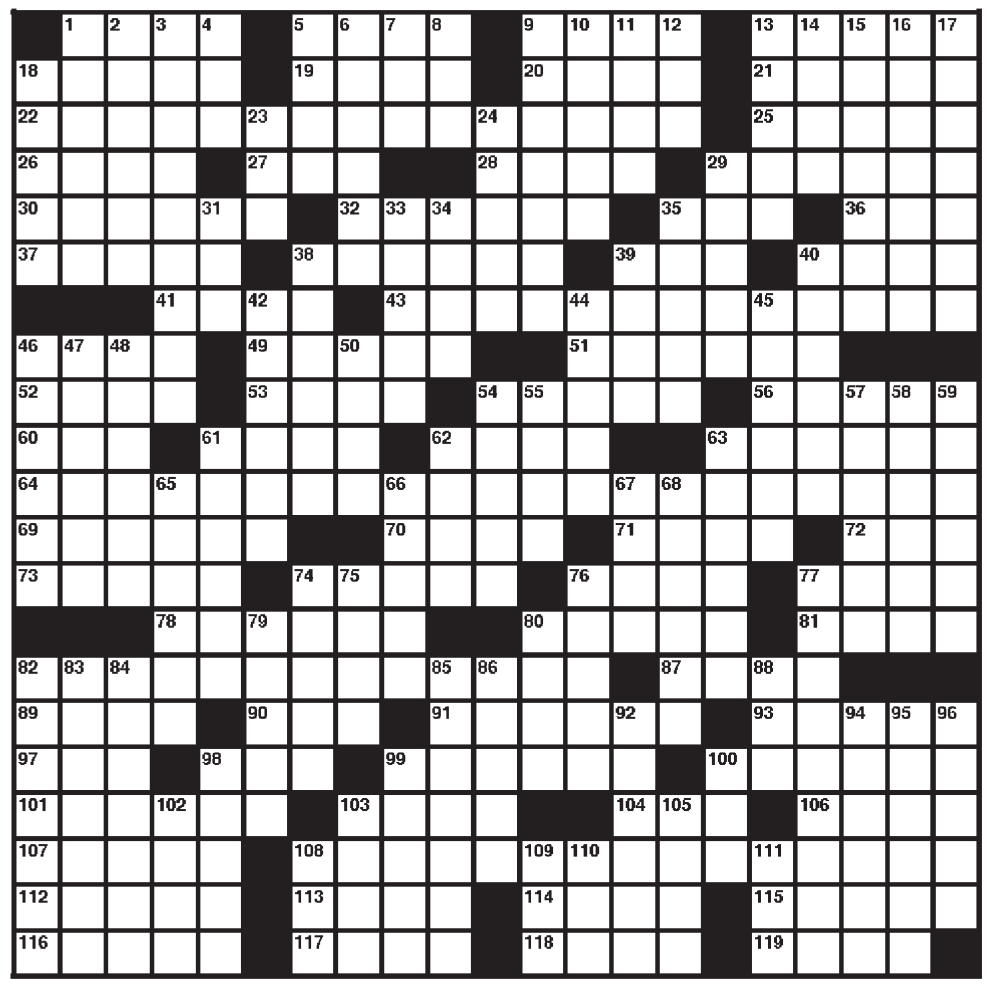
105 Clumsy boat

108 Cats guy's monogram

109 Spy missions

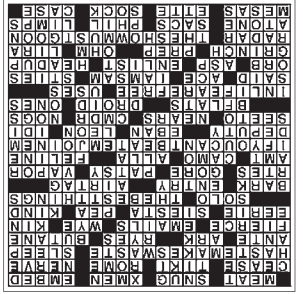
110 UN immunization agency

111 Gentle handling, initially



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Gillett mayor resigns, council has vacancies

By WARREN BLUHM
News Editor

The city of Gillett is limping into the April election with two vacancies on the six-member city council and no mayor.

Mayor Josh McCarthy filed a notice of noncandidacy in December, and City Clerk Chelsea Anderson announced during the Feb. 1 council meeting that McCarthy had resigned because he has moved out of the city.

“His father passed away, and he inherited the house,” Anderson said. “He wanted to thank everyone who served on the council, city employees and the people who trusted him to be their mayor. He wanted to apologize for not being here tonight, and he will write a formal letter of resignation and hand it in soon.”

City Council President Nanette Mohr ran the Feb. 1 meeting and plans to do the same for the next two sessions March 2 and April 4. The new mayor and council will be chosen in the April 2 election.

Mohr emphasized that she is not serving as interim mayor.

“I’m just going to sit in my regular chair here,” she said.

Jonathan Blaskowski, who was in the audience for the meeting, is the only candidate on the ballot running for mayor. He is a lieutenant in the Shawano County Sheriff’s Department. He and his wife, Nicole, and their children have lived in the city since 2021.

“I’ve always had an interest in the politics and decided to jump in the mayor candidate pool,” Laskowski said.

Currently Mohr and Alderpersons Irene Drake and Jerry Luther are the only elected council members. Alderperson Ashley VanStraten was appointed in November to fill an unexpired term in the city’s Ward 1. In recent months, Alderpersons Marie Blaser in Ward 1 and Jon Gildemeister in Ward 2 have resigned. Jacob Ketchem served for several months last year before resigning to further his education.

Mohr, who represents Ward 3 with Drake, is the only person on the April ballot, so write-ins will determine who fills open slots in the first and second wards. Mohr said former Alderperson Sandra Hubbard has registered as an official write-in candidate in Ward 1 and that Blaser has also expressed an interest in coming back.

A longtime member of both the city council and the Gillett School Board, Mohr said the past year has been frustrating as council members come and go.

“Two meetings in 2023, we didn’t even have a quorum to have a council meeting,” she said. “In all the years I’ve been here — I’m not talking like from the dinosaur age or Mayflower age — I’ve never been part of a council that was not here. It’s been a struggle.”

People interested in registering as write-in candidates can contact Anderson at the city clerk’s office for more information at 920-855-2255 or chelsea.anderson@ci.gillett.wi.us.

Oconto police chief gives emotional last call

By NEW MEDIA STAFF

The Oconto Police Department gave an emotional farewell to Chief Mike Rehberg on Jan. 31, his last day before retiring.

In a video posted on social media, Rehberg is seen reporting in for “my last 10-42,” police code for end of shift. He thanked his wife and children and friends during his 34 years with the department, and the citizens of Oconto for their support.

“To the past and present members of the Oconto Police Department, I have worked and continue to work with some of the most dedicated, compassionate, intelligent department I could ever hope for,” Rehberg said. “You are my second family, and I will miss you.”

In the Oconto County Dispatch Center, Rehberg’s daughter, Abby, responded with a tribute before acknowledging his 10-42 call.

“You have been an inspiration to us as a father, mentor and leader. We will miss you. Your brothers and sisters in blue will take it from here,” she said. “It is my honor as your daughter to wish you a happy, healthy and bright new adventure with your retirement.”

As the search continues for a new chief, Capt. Kassie Dufek has been named interim chief and Officer Dave Pusick is interim captain.



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January 26, 2024

The Oconto Falls Public School District is seeking proposals from qualified real estate brokers/firms to assist the District with the sale of real estate located at 102 S. Washington Street, Oconto Falls, WI 54154.

The request for proposals is geared toward real estate brokers with experience advising school districts or other public bodies with the sale of real property. The full RFP is available on the District’s website at: <https://ocontofalls.referendumfacts.org/>.

Oconto Falls School District

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\$2⁴⁹
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\$3⁹⁹
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\$2⁹⁹
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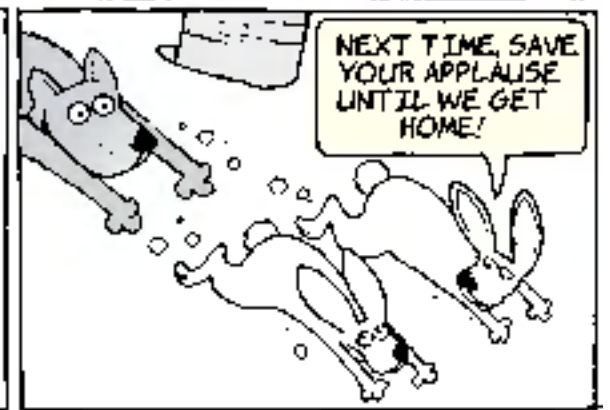
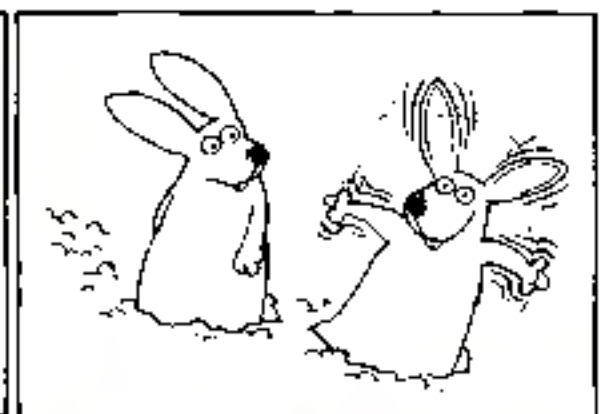


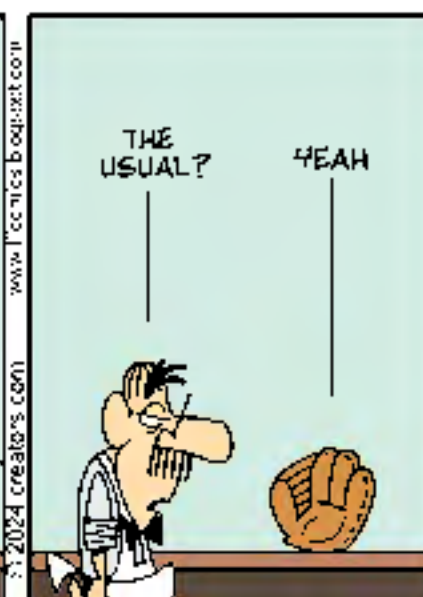
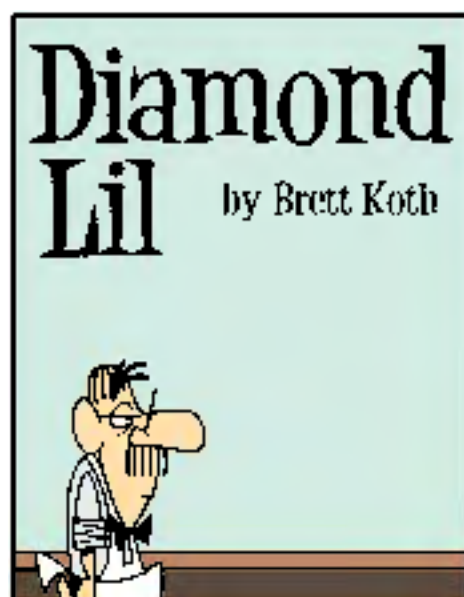
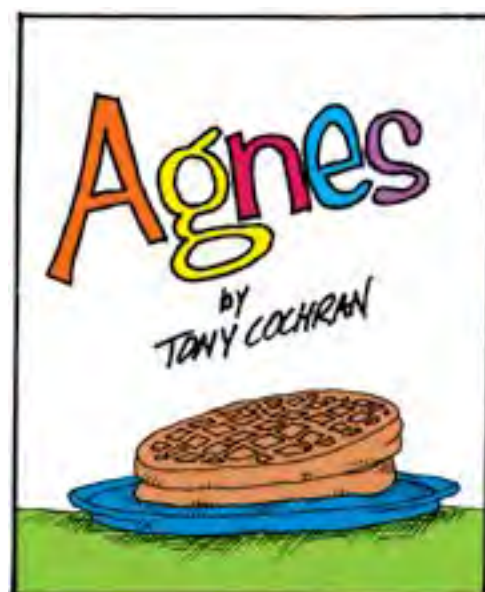
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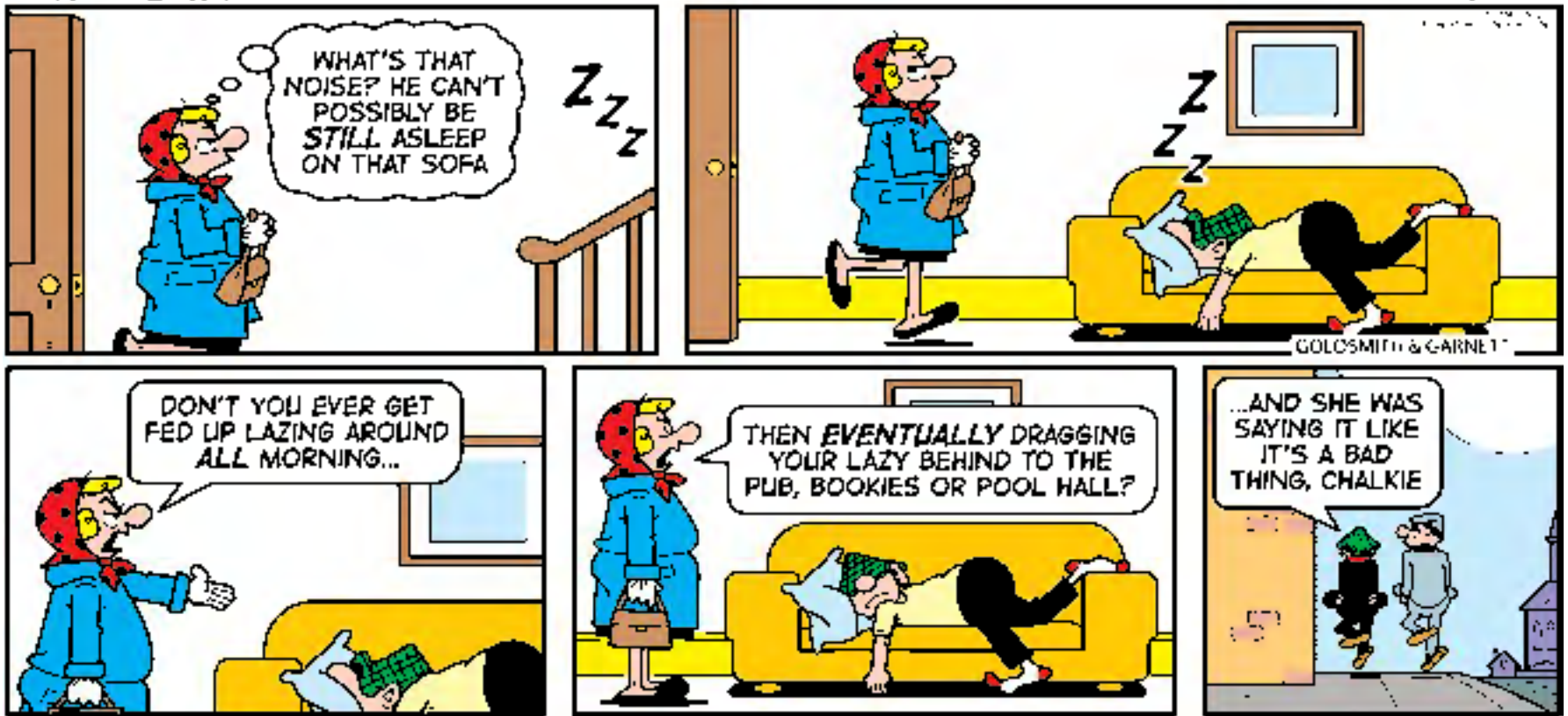
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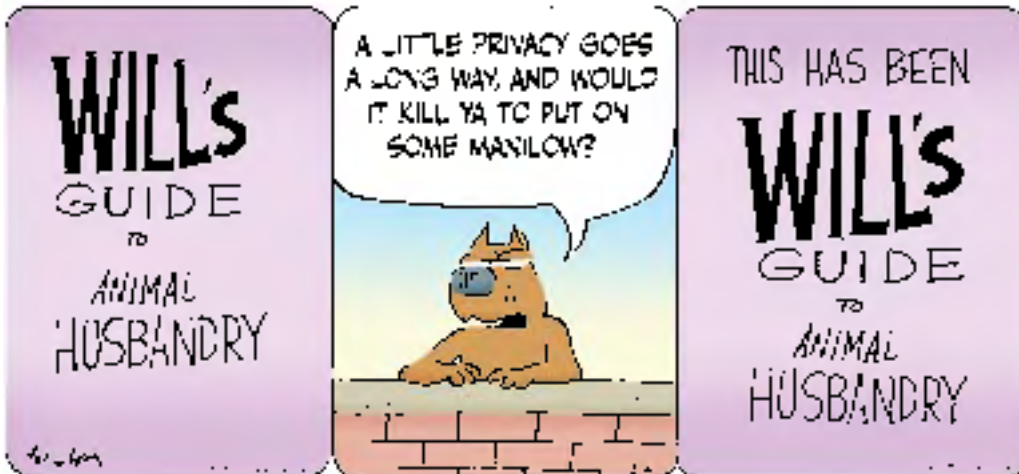
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by Smythe



DOGS OF C-KENNEL

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REPEAT MATCHUP RETURNS



San Francisco 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy, above, and Kanas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, right, will face off in Super Bowl LVIII on Feb. 11.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

49ers looking for a better outcome in Super Bowl LVIII

By ROB MAADDI
AP Pro Football Writer

Patrick Mahomes, Travis Kelce and the Kansas City Chiefs are heading to Las Vegas with a chance for a rare repeat while facing the San Francisco 49ers in a Super Bowl rematch from four years ago.

The Chiefs beat Lamar Jackson and the No. 1-seeded Baltimore Ravens 17-10 in the AFC championship game Jan. 28 to advance to the Super Bowl for the fourth time in five years. A few hours later, Brock Purdy rallied the No. 1-seeded 49ers to a 34-31 victory over the Detroit Lions in the NFC title game.

The Chiefs (14-6) are aiming to become the first back-to-back champions since Tom Brady and the New England Patriots did it following the 2003-04 seasons.

Purdy — who was still two years away from being the last pick of the 2022 NFL draft the last time the teams played in the Super Bowl — will try to lead the 49ers (14-5) to a record-tying sixth title in their eighth appearance.

The teams meet at Allegiant Stadium on Feb. 11. Mahomes and the Chiefs overcame a 20-10 fourth-quarter deficit and beat the 49ers 31-20 to give coach Andy Reid his first Super Bowl victory on Feb. 2, 2020. Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers spoiled Kansas City's repeat bid the following year.

The Chiefs will become just the third team to play in four Super Bowls over a five-year span. Only the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s, the Dallas Cowboys in the 1990s and the Patriots in the 2000s



REMATCH, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Love leads the Packers to playoffs

Strong first season as starting QB ends with disappointing loss to 49ers

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

For all that went well in Jordan Love's first season as the starting quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, the end proved disappointing.

The Packers went home after a crushing playoff loss.

Love threw his second interception of the game with Green Bay trying to mount a late-game drive to prolong its season, and the Packers blew a fourth-quarter lead, falling 24-21 to the San Francisco 49ers in the divisional round on Jan. 27.

"I think it'll sting for a while," Love said. "Watching all the games going forward it will sting just knowing that we had an opportunity to win, and we dropped the ball on that one. It'll sting for a while, but we'll be able to look back on it and see some good things we did."

Love accomplished plenty in his first season in place of Aaron Rodgers. He helped the Packers (10-9) overcome a 2-5 start to the season to make the playoffs. He followed that up with a three-touchdown performance in a wild-card win at Dallas land had Green Bay in position to knock off the top-seeded 49ers.

Love threw TD passes on back-to-back drives to open the second half to put the Packers in the lead.

That gave Love 23 touchdown passes and only one interception in nine-plus games, but his run of protecting the ball ended at the worst possible time.

He threw his first interception since Dec. 11 to set up a field goal by the 49ers.

Green Bay's defense then let the Niners drive for the go-ahead score with 1:07 left, and Love was unable to lead the comeback, ending any chance with his second interception.



Quarterback Jordan Love, running back Aaron Jones and teammates celebrate a touchdown during the 2023 season. Unfortunately, the season ended in the NFC Divisional Round with loss to the San Francisco 49ers.

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SUPER BOWL LVIII MATCHUP

REMATCH, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and 2010s won three Super Bowls in a five-year span.

Mahomes rallied the Chiefs for a 38-35 comeback win over the Philadelphia Eagles in the Super Bowl last year. They beat Miami 26-7 in the wild-card round and defeated the Bills 27-24 in Buffalo the next week in Mahomes' first career play-off game on the road besides Super Bowls.

The 49ers were dominated by the Eagles in the NFC title game last year in a game that saw Purdy suffer a significant elbow injury that required surgery. He returned for the season opener and helped them earn a first-round bye. Purdy led a 24-21 comeback win over Green Bay in January and brought the Niners back from a 17-point deficit against the Lions.

Only New England and Pittsburgh have more Super Bowl wins than San Fran-

cisco, which last won it following the 1994 season.

Reid will lead a team in the Super Bowl for the fifth time, moving into a tie with Tom Landry for third most behind Bill Belichick's nine and Don Shula's six. Reid coached the Eagles when the Patriots beat them to repeat 19 years ago.

Niners coach Kyle Shanahan returns to the Super Bowl after losing to Reid in his first crack at it. Shanahan was Atlanta's offensive coordinator when the Falcons blew a 28-3 lead against Brady and the Patriots in Super Bowl LI.

Mahomes, a two-time NFL and Super Bowl MVP, will start in his fourth Super Bowl, tied with Joe Montana, Terry Bradshaw, Peyton Manning, Roger Staubach and Jim Kelly for third-most behind Brady's 10 and John Elway's five.



San Francisco running back Christian McCaffrey (23), left, and Kansas City tight end Travis Kelce (87), above, do their best to outrun Green Bay's defense. The Chiefs are aiming to become the first back-to-back champions since Tom Brady and the New England Patriots did it following the 2003-04 seasons. They will meet the 49ers at Allegiant Stadium on Feb. 11.

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Love grows to become undisputed leader of the Pack

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

The Green Bay Packers' 2024 season was always going to be defined pretty simply.

Do they have a long-term quarterback? If they don't, are they in a position in the draft to grab a guy like USC's Caleb Williams or North Carolina's Drake Maye?

After Aaron Rodgers was traded to the New York Jets in April 2023, all eyes were focused on Jordan Love.

Love was drafted following Green Bay's 37-20 loss to the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC Championship game in January 2020.

Instead of a receiver or something to help the team get over the hump and into the Super Bowl, Brian Gutekunst infamously looked toward the future.

After two MVP seasons, and a disappointing finale, Aaron Rodgers was gone, and Gutekunst was going to get a chance to see his legacy pick in action for the first time.

Love's security beyond 2023 was far from a guarantee. Gutekunst said himself they envisioned the contract extension they gave Rodgers after the 2021 season to be a multi-year commitment.

Had Rodgers returned for 2023, Love would have never taken a snap as the preferred starter in Green Bay. That's something that Gutekunst had presumably made peace with.

If he was willing to punt entirely on the pick, surely he'd be willing to move on if Love were to struggle badly enough to put the Packers in the top five of April's draft.

After a clunky stretch in October saw the Packers drop to 2-5, it looked like the Packers were headed down the path of a full scale rebuild, including at the quarterback position, rather than a quick reset and launching back into playoff contention.

Love's season, which started off hot, leading the league in touchdown passes after his first two starts of the season, had fizzled.

Love was now at the top of the league in another category, interceptions.

That wasn't all on Love. The Packers fielded the youngest team in the league. His oldest receivers were in their second year in the league.

The offensive line, which was built around All-Pro left tackle David Bakhtiari, was in shambles with Bakhtiari being placed on injured reserve before a Week 4 tilt against the Detroit Lions.

Love saw the calendar turn to November with a lot at stake. Gutekunst gave a lukewarm, at best, endorsement of Love after seven games.

"We've got 10 games left," Gutekunst said during his midseason availability. "These are going to be very important 10 games. I think he's done a lot of really good things."

He said he liked the way Love responded to the adversity, how he led the team.

"Again, we've got to be better as a unit, and I expect that to happen over the next 10 games," Gutekunst said. "And I think that we're going through some things that we knew we would go through. We haven't had the results that we want, but I do like the way guys are responding to things."

Love and the offense had a simple choice from there. Shape up, or ship out.

The offense, and Love specifically, dazzled from there.

The turning point in the season was after the Packers split two games to the Los Angeles Rams and Pittsburgh Steelers to get to 3-6. They were facing a talented



The turning point in the season was after the Packers split two games to the Los Angeles Rams and Pittsburgh Steelers to get to 3-6. They were facing a talented Los Angeles Chargers team at Lambeau Field and trailing when Jordan Love and the offense took flight. Love led a game-winning drive where he hit Romeo Doubs for a go-ahead touchdown that would hold up in a 23-20 victory. Love was just getting warmed up. His best two-game stretch of the season came in two nationally televised games, Detroit on Thanksgiving Day and at home against Kansas City. Matt LaFleur allowed his growing quarterback to throw the ball all over the lot. Love responded with six touchdown passes, zero interceptions, and most importantly, two wins over teams that ended up playing on championship Sunday.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Los Angeles Chargers team at Lambeau Field and trailing when Love and the offense took flight.

Love led a game-winning drive where he hit Romeo Doubs for a go-ahead touchdown that would hold up in a 23-20 victory.

Love threw for more than 300 yards, which made him the team's first 300-yard passer since Rodgers carved up the Baltimore Ravens in December 2021.

Love was just getting warmed up. His best two-game stretch of the season came in two nationally televised games, Detroit on Thanksgiving Day and at home against Kansas City.

Matt LaFleur allowed his growing quarterback to throw the ball all over the lot. Love responded with six touchdown passes, zero interceptions, and most importantly, two wins over teams that ended up playing on championship Sunday.

The Packers and their offense were rolling.

That was not the end of the adversity for the season. Back-to-back poor performances by Green Bay's defense led to disappointing losses to the New York Giants and Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

The Packers were faced with a pretty simple scenario. Win their last three games, or sit at home and watch the playoffs that felt like destiny after their two wins against Detroit and Kansas City.

Love turned in three great performances against Carolina, Minnesota and Chicago.

Love did not turn the ball over in these three games, and was dynamite late in the game when the team needed a big play.

Romeo Doubs made a big play down the sideline against Carolina to set up a game-winning field goal in the Packers' 33-30 victory against the Panthers.

Love would hit Jayden Reed and Tucker Kraft for two big completions against Chicago to seal the season finale and catapult the Packers into the playoffs.

Getting into the postseason earned Love an extra \$500,000 from a contract extension he signed in May in lieu of the Packers exercising his fifth-year option.

He'd earn more money a week later as he carved up Dan Quinn's stingy Dallas Cowboys defense.

Love threw three touchdown passes from three different arm angles, and the Packers piled up 48 points en route to a

48-32 victory that earned them another trip to San Francisco.

The clock would strike midnight on Green Bay's Cinderella season in San Francisco. Love threw two interceptions in the fourth quarter that will serve as a learning experience for him moving forward.

Unfortunately, those learning experiences came at the expense of winning a playoff game and having a chance to play for the conference title.

The Packers lost 24-21. While the season came to a bitter end, there is no way to categorize the 2023 season other than a massive success.

Love grew from someone who could have been one-and-done as the team's starting quarterback to the unquestioned leader and quarterback of the future for the Green Bay Packers.

In the NFL, you either have a quarterback or you have nothing. The Packers have rarely known the situation of not having a quarterback in their illustrious existence.

That is a trend that will continue moving forward thanks to Love's MVP-level play to end the 2023 season.



Green Bay's offense as a whole took its biggest failure of the season in the Denver game. Just four games prior, Denver had given up 70 points to the Miami Dolphins. This really felt like a get-right game for the Packers offense, but it once again was unable to score in the first half and found itself down 16-3 midway through the third quarter. Green Bay was able to make somewhat of a comeback, as the final score landed at 19-17, but the problem with the lack of offense still existed.

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Packers open with a 3-6 record

Early season struggles created many questions in Green Bay

By **LUKE REIMER**
GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Coming into the 2023-24 season, no one really knew what to expect out of the Green Bay Packers. Jordan Love took the reins from Aaron Rodgers, Matt LaFleur was finally getting an opportunity to display his full offensive game plan, and no wide receiver on the offense had more than one year of experience.

With general manager Brian Gutekunst

assembling the youngest roster in NFL history, hard times were to be expected. While that turbulence did hit, it really didn't come until the end of Week 2. Green Bay opened its season against its storied and longest rival, the Chicago Bears. The Bears were once again in a spot where media members and fans hyped up the Justin Fields offense, and many had predicted them to win this game. Instead, Love put together an incred-

ible first start this season, as he finished with 245 yards and three touchdowns. With Romeo Doubs and Aaron Jones scoring offensive touchdowns, it looked like this season was going to be relied on by players who have experience in the system. More than just offense though, Green Bay's defense did its part in this game, holding Fields to 216 yards passing and one touchdown. Quay Walker also returned an interception for a touch-down.

"I couldn't be more proud of (Love's) performance, his poise," said Packers coach Matt LaFleur. "There's a big time belief in that locker room for Jordan Love, and I think the guys are going to rally around him. They're excited for him. They love him. They respect him." While the offense and specifically the quarterback were the big story in the offseason, the defense was quietly talked about as being one of the best units in the

QUESTIONS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 5





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QUESTIONS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

NFL. Those projections looked true, as it held the up-and-coming Bears offense to 20 points in a Week 1 win.

Both the offense and defense carried that momentum into the Week 2 matchup against the Atlanta Falcons. Green Bay opened the game with a 24-12 lead through three quarters. The only difference in this game, though, was that rookies Jayden Reed and Dontayvion Wicks were at the forefront of the offense, scoring three combined touchdowns.

That is when the vaunted defense took a step back, however. Green Bay gave up 13 points in the final 15 minutes of the game and took its first loss of the season. On top of that, it looked like the defense had some vulnerabilities, as Falcons rookie running back Bijan Robinson gashed the Packers' defense for 124 yards on 19 carries.

While it was easy to chalk that loss up to a few mistakes from a young team that could be easily fixed, it showed two major problems for the Packers moving forward – the run defense and the offensive play calling. Now knowing what we do about Love and the offense, it seems kind of silly that he completed only 14 passes in this game.

Luckily for Green Bay, its next game was against a New Orleans Saints team that seemed to be in limbo all season long. With a mix of rookies and vets and no real identity, the Saints majorly underperformed this season.

In this game though, the Saints ripped off 17 straight points to shut Green Bay out in the first half. In what was almost a reverse of the previous game against Atlanta, Green Bay shut out the Saints in the second half, scoring 18 points (with Saints kicker Blake Grupe missing the game-winning field goal) to go up 2-1 on the season.

In the face of adversity, Green Bay was able to respond and take down a team that, at the time, appeared to have a better shot at making the playoffs than the Packers.

The underperforming play calling and first-half struggles then persisted through the next month, as Green Bay dropped four straight games.

Through the four-game losing streak, Green Bay was only able to muster nine first-half points. Instead of utilizing the middle of the field, Love's first looks were more often than not behind the line of scrimmage, as it became obvious that LaFleur wanted to get the screen game going. With Jones being hurt and A.J. Dillon's inconsistent play, those screens seemed to be a substitute for the run game. The only problem was, without exposing the middle of the field, it became really easy for opposing defenses to key on the boundaries.

"It's frustrating, man," said Love. "I'm frustrated. Everybody in that locker room is frustrated. Plain and simple, we're not winning. We're losing games, and it's games we should be winning, I think that we are right there."

A loss to the Lions during that losing streak was to be expected, but after losing to the Broncos and the Raiders in back-to-back games, it became very evident that if Green Bay wanted a shot at the playoffs, something drastic was going to need to change.

Along with the inconsistencies on offense, Green Bay was also suffering numerous back-breaking penalties. With such a young team, those penalties were to be expected and more often than not hurt Green Bay in big spots.

The offense as a whole took its biggest failure of the season in that Denver game. Just four games prior, Denver had given up 70 points to the Miami Dolphins. This really felt like a get-right game for the Packers offense, but it once again was unable to score in the first half and found itself down 16-3 midway through the third quarter. Green Bay was able to make somewhat of a comeback, as the final score landed at 19-17, but the problem with the lack of offense still existed.

While Reed and Doubs both caught touchdown passes, it was actually Dillon

who led the team in receiving the game with 34 yards on two receptions.

At this point in the season, many were questioning LaFleur's ability to call a game and Love's ability to win games. Rightfully so, whether it was inexperience, injuries or poor coaching, Green Bay was underperforming and after the past few offseasons of drama surrounding Aaron Rodgers and Gutekunst, many were calling for the jobs of multiple coaches.

Now sitting at 2-5, Green Bay hosted the Minnesota Vikings with Kirk Cousins playing the best season of his career. Even though Cousins went out with an injury in this game, Green Bay as a whole continued to struggle.

Scoring its only touchdown late in the third quarter, the Packers' offense once again underperformed. While the defense had played better in previous games, it was still obvious that it was far from what the expectations were at the beginning of the year.

This game though exposed another big problem for Green Bay that reared its head in the playoffs. The Packers' last three drives of the game ended with turnovers on downs, and two of those came in the red zone. Not converting in the red zone kills teams, especially teams that are struggling on offense and looking for points in any capacity. With Love leading the team in rushing, picking up 34 yards and four carries, the noise surrounding Green Bay became louder and louder.

Green Bay was finally able to break that losing streak as the Los Angeles Rams came to town, down Matthew Stafford.

After a scoreless first quarter, Green Bay finally broke out of its slump of touchdown-less first halves and scored a three-yard Jones rushing touchdown early in the second quarter. After a Rams field goal late in the half, the Packers defense pitched a shutout the rest of the way to come away with a 20-3 victory.

Along with the win, what was encouraging about this victory was that the offense finally looked like it clicked. Love completed 20-of-26 for 228 yards and one touchdown, while Jones rushed for 73 yards and touchdown on 20 carries. What also was encouraging was that the veterans and the best players on this Packers team seemed to step up and take the game into their own hands.

Keisean Nixon had a 51-yard kick return, Jones carried the offense, and Jaire Alexander finished with seven tackles and two pass deflections. He also consistently shut down two of the best wide receivers in the game in Cooper Kupp and Puka Nacua.

As is usually the case with such young teams though, Green Bay almost immediately gave up the momentum that it had against the Steelers the next week. Pittsburgh's offense was struggling just as much as Green Bay's through the first half of the season, so it seemed like the Packers could steal a victory on the road. Once again, it was the run defense that struggled in this game, as Steelers running backs Jaylen Warren and Najee Harris combined for 183 yards and two touchdowns.

Love put together another good game, as he finished with 289 yards and two touchdowns but added two interceptions. With this loss, it pushed the team to 3-6. Despite the poor record, many in the clubhouse knew that the Packers were on the edge of winning, if only they could fix those costly mistakes.

"You can see how close we are, a play here or a play there," said Jones after the game. "I feel like we just keep pushing at it. If we keep putting in the work, it'll go in our favor."

The story of the first half for the Packers' season was inexperienced play, costly penalties and play calling from LaFleur. Instead of opening the middle of the field, LaFleur opted to try and get the outside pass game going, oftentimes electing to run bubble screens and tosses. That severely limited Love's strengths of finding open receivers between the numbers and put a stronger reliance on the rookie receivers to make the plays.



Above, Matt LaFleur's underperforming play calling and the team's first half struggles persisted through the first half of the season, as Green Bay dropped four straight games. Through the four-game losing streak, Green Bay was only able to muster nine first half points. Wide receiver Christian Watson, below, suffered injuries and dropped balls as Green Bay couldn't maintain a strong offense or defense for an entire game.

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Strong second half propels Green Bay to unlikely playoff push

Love, LaFleur, Jones, provide strong answers to critics

By LUKE REIMER
GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

While it looked like the season was going to be a wash and fans could expect to come away with a top-10 draft pick, Jordan Love, Matt LaFleur and company had different plans.

After the 3-6 start to the season, it appeared that it was only going to get more difficult for Green Bay moving forward. With the Los Angeles Chargers, Detroit Lions and Kansas City Chiefs in each of the next three games, Green Bay was going to need to find a way to subdue some of the best offenses in the NFL. That all started against the Chargers.

The Packers once again got off to a slow start, as the team was unable to put up any points in the first quarter. Following that though, Jayden Reed, who was in the midst of his breakout, sparked the offense early in the second quarter with a 32-yard rushing touchdown. With Aaron Jones injured, Reed's emergence was really a spark plug for the Green Bay offense, as he brought another rushing threat and helped to take some pressure off A.J. Dillon.

After the Chargers went up 13-10, Love connected with Christian Watson to take a lead. From there, Chargers superstar quarterback Justin Herbert connected with superstar receiver Keenan Allen to regain the lead, before Romeo Doubs found the end zone in what turned out to be the game-clinching touchdown.

While Doubs' touchdown late in the fourth quarter put Green Bay up three, it

was actually a drop from Chargers rookie receiver Quinton Johnston, which would have been a walk-in touchdown, that actually won the game. With hindsight, Johnston's dropping that sure touchdown, much like Saints kicker Blake Grupe missing a game-winning field goal, proved to be the biggest play for Green Bay all season, as the Packers barely snuck into the playoffs.

From there, though, it looked like something changed in the offense. Not only was there an emergence of Reed, but other players whom the average fan may have never heard of started to stake their claim as household names.

Green Bay's next matchup came on Thanksgiving Day in Detroit, as the Packers took on the new and improved Detroit Lions. Led by Jared Goff, David Montgomery, Amon-Ra St. Brown and Sam LaPorta, the Lions were one of the highest scoring teams in the NFL. With the inconsistent play of the Green Bay Packers' defense, many Packers fans thought that this game could get out of hand quickly.

Not only did the game not get out of hand, but it was dominated by Green Bay. On the back of the newly found weapon in Reed, Green Bay scored immediately on a 10-yard pass from Love. While the Lions matched with a LaPorta touchdown, Green Bay finished the first quarter off with a nine-yard touchdown reception from Tucker Kraft and a 27-yard fumble return for a touchdown by safety Jonathan Owens. Before anyone knew it, Green Bay was up 20-6.

The defense then continued its masterclass of a game, as it held Detroit scoreless for the rest of the first half to take a 23-6 lead into halftime. Both teams added a touchdown in the third quarter and entered the fourth quarter with a 29-14 Green Bay lead. Detroit made the game close, but it came in garbage time, as Josh Reynolds found the end zone and, after



After a roller coaster of a season to begin the 2023 campaign, running back Aaron Jones would top the century mark in each of the Packers' final five games, including the postseason. In his final game of the season, he became the first 100-yard rusher against the San Francisco 49ers in 51 games. Jones is the heart and soul of this team, even in his advanced age.

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a two-point conversion, put the score at 29-22.

If you had to point to one game that turned the season around for Green Bay, it might be this victory over the Detroit

ANSWERS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



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ANSWERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Detroit Lions. The questions surrounding Love and LaFleur seemed to finally be somewhat answered, as Love tied his career high in touchdown passes with three, adding 268 yards through the air. As had been the story all season long, there wasn't just one dominant receiver, though. At this point in the season, Reed, Watson, Doubs, Luke Musgrave and Kraft all had been on the receiving ends of touchdowns.

What added to the emergence of the offense was a spark from the defense. In the two team's previous matchup, Montgomery gashed the Green Bay defense for three rushing touchdowns. In this matchup, the Iowa State alum was held to just 71 yards, and with the lack of production in the run game, Goff was under constant pressure. That started to become a theme for the defense moving forward.

Working off the momentum of upsetting both the Chargers and the Lions, the Packers faced its toughest test of the season, as the Kansas City Chiefs came to Lambeau Field. While the Chiefs were dealing with a decline on the offensive side of the ball, its defense was quietly performing as one of the best units in the NFL.

With Taylor Swift in the building, all eyes were on how Love could improve upon his previous career performance. He did not disappoint. Love finished the game with 267 passing yards and three touchdowns. Two of those touchdowns went to Watson. To continue the trend of getting everyone on the offense involved, rookie tight end Ben Sims found the end zone.

While Love continued to display his ability to be the franchise quarterback for the Packers, what was more impressive was that Green Bay never trailed in this game. Patrick Mahomes was held to just 210 yards and one touchdown, with the defense also forcing an interception. For the most part, too, Travis Kelce was held in check, as the future first ballot Hall of Famer was held to 81 yards on four receptions.

For the second game in a row, it looked like the Green Bay Packers played a full game. With the exception of a few plays here and there, all three phases of the team seemed to be at the tops of their games.

Dillon also registered a great game with 73 yards on 18 rushes, which really helped to compliment the passing attack. As for the defense, it was certainly a group effort, as Rashan Gary, Devonte Wyatt, Kenny Clark and Preston Smith all recorded half a sack, while Quay Walker and Carrington Valentine racked up 10 or more tackles, and Keisean Nixon came away with an interception.

"They're coming together," said LaFleur, after this win. "They're working. They're getting better. They're playing faster, more confident."

The play of the defense against Mahomes was kind of a microcosm of the Packers on this three-game winning streak. Everybody was playing together, while nobody was trying to do too much. It became very obvious that if Green Bay actually wanted to make a run at the playoffs that this would have to be the way to attack games. There was no Aaron Rodgers or Davante Adams to bail the team out. If it wanted to move on and build success, it would have to be as one complete unit.

While the three-game win streak was certainly fun for Packers fans, things quickly turned dark, as Green Bay dropped its next two games to the New York Giants and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. In those losses, it looked like for whatever reason the defense took a major step back.

As a whole, the Packer gave up a total of 58 points in the losses. This brought into question if defensive coordinator Joe Barry was the right man to lead this defense. Especially against the Buccaneers, there seemed to be a shift. The Packers' pass defense, which had been playing extraordinarily all year, seemed to take a step back. Now the injury to Jaire Alexander may have been a factor, but

the coverage from linebackers De'Vondre Campbell and Walker had obviously been diminished.

"Now's not the time for that," said LaFleur, after being asked if the team was going to move on from Barry, showing that even through struggles, LaFleur still had faith in the team's defensive coordinator.

Sitting at 6-8 on the season, all of the momentum that Green Bay garnered over the past three weeks was all but lost. It looked like the team was heading for a top-10 pick in the draft, and much of the fan base was asking that the Packers tank the remainder of the season.

The Packers now faced a scenario where it basically needed to win the rest of its games if it even wanted a chance at making the postseason. Luckily for the team, that meant just beating the Carolina Panthers, Minnesota Vikings and Chicago Bears. With the Panthers and Bears playing as two of the worst teams in the league and Minnesota playing without Kirk Cousins, it seemed likely that Green Bay could turn its season around together.

Over the next two games, the offense got back to the form of what it was during that three-game win streak. Love and company scored 66 points and, as a whole, outscored the Panthers and Vikings by 26 points. From mediocrity to overachieving, the Packers all of a sudden found themselves in a win-and-you-are-in game, similar to the previous season. Green Bay was able to pull out the victory and reach the playoffs as the seventh seed in the NFC.

"At the beginning of the season, everybody tried counting us out," said Jones. "In the middle of the season, everybody tried to count us out. I think that speaks to a lot of the guys in this locker room, tuning out the noise and just getting to work."

With a first-round matchup against the Dallas Cowboys — who employed one of the best, if not the very best, offenses in the NFL all season long — almost nobody thought Green Bay had a fighting chance.

That didn't deter the Packers, though. In the best game of the season for the team, Green Bay came out of the gates hot and smacked Dallas in the face. Scoring early and playing fast, the Packers raced out to a 27-0 lead. At this point in the season, it really seemed like the Packers should not have been there. But because they were, they were basically playing with house money. The team was fast and loose and became the first No. 7 seed in NFL history to win a playoff game.

After beating the Cowboys in the first round of the playoffs, the Packers built upon that momentum and gave the San Francisco 49ers everything it could handle. Green Bay hung around with the best team in the NFC for the majority of the game, playing close to 58 minutes of winning football. It eventually ran out of steam though, and the Green Bay Packers' season was once again ended by the 49ers. While the loss was certainly painful, as the team was playing with as much confidence as it had all season, the season was not a disappointment by any means.

"For us to lose this game certainly stings, and I'm sure it's going to sting for a long time," said LaFleur. "But I was proud of the effort of our guys, our ability to weather some real adversity throughout the course of the season and stick together."

If anything at all, Green Bay learned that it likely had its next franchise quarterback in Love. Outside of that, it looked like there was an influx of young talent to surround Love. On top of all of that, Jones continued to come up in big moments like he has done his whole career.

The theme of the second half of the season for Green Bay was resiliency. After getting punched in the mouth to open the season, it seemed likely that a team as young as the Packers could just lay down and die. That certainly wasn't the case, though. For a team full of twenty-somethings, the fight was never lost. Everyone on the team believed in each other, and that's all LaFleur was asking for.



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Second-year linebacker Kingsley Enagbare (55) and rookie linebacker Lukas Van Ness (90) celebrate a turnover during Week 15 vs. Tampa Bay. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

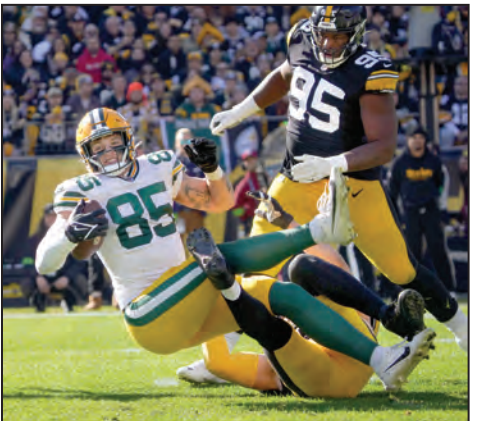
Young players show their stuff



Jayden Reed (11) and Dontayvion Wicks (13) celebrate a Week 15 touchdown by Reed. Wicks led the receivers with six receptions and 97 yards against Tampa Bay. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



Rookie tight end Luke Musgrave (88) pulled down two catches for 64 yards in Week 10 in Pittsburgh. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



Rookie tight end Tucker Kraft is tackled vs. Pittsburgh in Week 10. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



Above, rookie Jayden Reed snags a diving catch, during his Lambeau Field debut against the Saints in Week 3. The catch was part of the fourth-quarter winning drive during the Packers' 17-point, fourth-quarter come-from-behind victory. At left, rookie kicker Anders Carlson eyes the task prior to his fourth-quarter missed kick during the Divisional Round playoff game at San Francisco. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



At far left, rookie Malik Heath celebrates a first down catch on Thanksgiving Day against the Lions. At left, rookie cornerback Carrington Valentine chases down running back Dalvin Cook during the Vikings game in October.
GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



Second-year receiver Romeo Doubs celebrates with teammates during the Packers Week 1 victory over the Chicago Bears.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Packers fielded youngest roster in NFL



At left, second-year linebacker Quay Walker scored a defensive touchdown against the Chicago Bears in the season opener in Chicago. At right, first-year player Bo Melton led receivers with six catches for 105 yards in Week 17 at Minnesota. The victory helped position the Packers to earn the seventh seed in the NFC Playoffs.
GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



Christian Watson, left, Romeo Doubs, center, and Jayden Reed each had their moments in 2023. The array of first- and second-year reviving corps members allowed Jordan Love to throw the ball to any of them with expectations they would make the play. With no dominant playmaker week in and week out, the receivers and tight ends were more elusive to guard against.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Receivers, tight ends prove their worth

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

The Green Bay Packers' receiving corps might be the most scrutinized position in the NFL.

Since the Packers drafted Jordan Love in the first round of the 2020 NFL Draft, one tidbit of information seems to surface.

The last time the Green Bay Packers took a wide receiver in the first round, it was Javon Walker in the 2002 iteration of the NFL Draft.

Of course, they famously passed on several receivers to take Love after playing for the NFC championship following the 2019 regular season.

Instead, the Packers have done what they usually do.

In their last two draft classes, all of their second and third round picks have been used on offense.

Christian Watson, Sean Rhyan, Luke Musgrave, Jayden Reed and Tucker Kraft all were selected each of the last two

years.

All of them contributed as well.

The discourse surrounding what round each receiver was picked in was always silly to begin with. The infamous Sports Illustrated cover with Aaron Rodgers and all of his weapons from the 2011 Packers included one first round pick. That was Rodgers.

Despite that, the discourse remained this offseason, and chaos ensued when the Packers selected Lukas Van Ness in the first round instead of Ohio State's Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

More discourse emerged when the Packers did not bring in a single veteran receiver to help guide what turned out to be a historically young receiving corps.

Sammy Watkins, Allen Lazard and Randall Cobb were all on the 2022 team. None of them returned for 2023. Instead, the oldest receiver on the Packers' roster were second year guys.

Watson and Romeo Doubs were being asked to lead a receiver room full of rook-

ies.

There was optimism surrounding both of those players. Doubs spent his offseason working out with Love and helping build chemistry that at times rivaled that of Rodgers and Jordy Nelson.

Watson shook off early season struggles as a rookie to become the team's best receiver by the end of the year.

He had a 100-yard receiving game in the team's 20-16 loss to the Detroit Lions but looked to have finally earned the trust of Rodgers as the season ended.

Watson was a touchdown machine to finish 2022 and was trying to carry that over into 2023.

Unfortunately for Watson, his body betrayed him at two specific points during the year.

Watson would miss the first three games of the season with a hamstring injury that he suffered after the preseason ended.

It took him awhile to get back on track but looked to finally start resembling the player that took the league by storm in the second half of the 2022 season.

Watson had big games against Detroit and Kansas City, including a statement 53-yard reception to open their game against the Lions on Thanksgiving Day.

He scored two touchdowns on Sunday Night Football against the Kansas City Chiefs in the team's signature victory of the 2023 season.

Unfortunately, Watson's hamstring gave out on him again, and he'd miss the rest of the regular season.

He returned for both postseason games but was limited in snaps and production.

Doubs had an up-and-down season as well. He finished tied for the team lead in touchdowns but would occasionally struggle with drops and overall ineffectiveness.

When the playoffs started, however, Doubs was Love's go-to guy.

He had more than 150 yards receiving in the team's 48-32 win over the Dallas Cowboys.

Doubs didn't have as big of a game against the San Francisco 49ers, but he was the team's leading receiver with 83 yards on the night.

Doubs and Watson both will be looking for big seasons as they enter their third year in 2024.

The biggest story from the 2023 season were the two rookies that emerged as arguably the team's two best receivers by the time the regular season ended.

Reed was the team's highest draft choice at receiver when he was picked 50th overall.

Reed was the team's best slot receiver since the days of Cobb roaming the middle of the field in his prime.

Reed had an instant connection with Love and had a speed and shiftiness that was evident from the day he stepped foot on the field.

Reed battled injuries throughout the year, but he displayed a toughness and game-breaking ability with the ball in his hands.

He led the team in receiving yards

and tied with Doubs for touchdowns. In addition, he helped rewrite a record book that held the name of Sterling Sharpe in it before he got to Green Bay.

Reed is a versatile offensive chess piece that should be a big part of the offense in 2024.

The same is true for Dontayvion Wicks. Wicks and Reed are connected in that the Packers initially traded out of the 45th spot twice to get to pick 50 where they chose Reed. In the process, they acquired a draft choice that would help them select Wicks.

Wicks missed most of training camp with an injury, but it was clear he was someone the Packers liked immediately.

In the second game of the season, the Packers ran a flea-flicker to start the game. The target on the play was Wicks. They could have drawn that up for any receiver on the team but they chose Wicks.

Wicks would reward their faith down the stretch. He was always open.

He made what was perhaps play of the year in Green Bay's Wild Card win over the Cowboys. His finger tip grab after shaking Stephon Gilmore was one where his diverse skillset was on full display.

Wicks and Reed were the top two rookies, but they also got contributions from Malik Heath and Bo Melton. Melton was the team's first 100-yard receiver on the season.

The receiving corps creates a diverse set of skills. It'd be foolish to compare them to the group from 2011, but it's hard not to dream of what this group could accomplish together.

That's before we even get to the tight ends.

Musgrave and Kraft both represent the biggest investment the Packers have made at the tight end position since the picking Bubba Franks in the first round more than 20 years ago.

Musgrave and Kraft both had high moments of the season. Musgrave started immediately. He looked to be a focal point of the offense from the day he came into camp.

It took a little more time for Kraft, but by the end of the season, both guys were playing regularly.

Musgrave and Kraft's skillsets complement each other well. Musgrave can run like a deer and helps stretch the seam. He challenges defenses vertically.

Kraft is a violent blocker that can make plays after the ball is in his hands.

The Packers used a ton of two tight end sets in their dominant 48-32 win over the Dallas Cowboys in the postseason.

Matt LaFleur has never had a tight end group that did not give away their preference on offense. When Marcedes Lewis was in the game, they were predominantly a running team. When Robert Tonyan was on the field, they tended to throw more.

The truth now is, both tight ends are good enough blockers to keep the defense guessing.

Expect a lot of two tight end sets to be part of Green Bay's offense in 2024.



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Despite issues, offensive line pulled together in 2023

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

Green Bay's offensive line was supposed to finally have some stability. After two seasons of battling a knee injury, David Bakhtiari was supposed to be back and better than ever. In fact, the team even had a plan in place to ensure that he'd be ready on Sundays.

Maybe the team wouldn't see him on the practice field a bunch during the year, but when the lights were on, Bakhtiari would be good to go.

"And then, like I've said, finally having an offseason of not having surgeries, the ability to let everything kind of calm down, settle in, train, put on muscle, protect the knee," Bakhtiari said. "I'm very grateful and thankful for where I'm at, and I'm just kind of excited to see what happens. Football is football. It's not the healthiest thing in the world, so we'll see when we get out there."

Bakhtiari felt good about where he was. The team felt good about everything.

They probably felt emboldened when Bakhtiari played his first game in the season opener against Chicago.

Bakhtiari looked like his usual All-Pro self.

Any defensive lineman that lined up across from Bakhtiari was shut out.

Unfortunately, that was the final game Bakhtiari would play in 2023.

Bakhtiari missed the next two games, leading to speculation that the team would not have him play on turf.

As it turned out, that speculation was erroneous. Bakhtiari was placed on injured reserve before the team's 34-20 loss to Detroit in late September.

Bakhtiari's renaissance lasted all of one game.

He gave way to a former seventh-round pick. Rasheed Walker won the job as the team's swing tackle out of training camp, where he usurped Yosh Njiman.

Of all the players on the offensive line, it's hard to imagine a player that had a tougher season than Njiman.

Yes, he was given the second-round tender in the offseason, which would ensure he was paid more than \$4 million.

Njiman was likely the favorite to at least be the swing tackle, if not the right tackle.

He was in a battle with Zach Tom to be the starter at right tackle, but that was not much of a battle at all.

Tom spent one day with the starters at center, giving way for Njiman to play right tackle, but that was the only indication throughout training camp that Tom would not play right tackle.

He won that training camp battle in knockout fashion.

From there, Njiman would lose his swing tackle job to Walker and never really gained any footing as a starter. He would rotate with Walker in the middle of the season as Walker began to struggle but lost that competition as well.

By the end of the season, Njiman was no longer rotating with Walker and was relegated to spot duty.

The rest of the offensive line was a work in progress.

Early in the year, you could tell they were going through growing pains. Walker struggled. Elton Jenkins had some rust to knock off.

Josh Myers and Jon Runyan Jr. were inconsistent. Tom was brilliant but struggled with injuries early in the season.

The Packers' renaissance offensively can almost be directly attributed to the improvement of the players up front.

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Green Bay's special teams squad leaves much to be desired in 2023-24

Rookie kicker at the front of criticism

By LUKE REIMER
GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

After moving on from Maurice Drayton in 2021, the Green Bay Packers made a splash by hiring Las Vegas Raiders interim head coach Rich Bisaccia to lead special teams.

That hiring immediately paid off, as after Green Bay lost in the 2022 NFC Divisional Round to the San Francisco 49ers due in part to major special teams mistakes, the Packers' special teams unit took a major step forward.

Keisean Nixon was awarded with a First-Team All-Pro selection in 2022-23 as a kick returner after leading the NFL in return yards. Green Bay improved on blocking mistakes and coverage mistakes.

Something changed this season though. Through the first four games of the 2023-24 season, the Packers' special teams unit had racked up 10 penalties, which was by far the most in the NFL through four games. Those 10 penalties accounted for a loss of 96 yards.

Penalties at any level hurt teams, but when a team is able to start with the ball 10-15 yards ahead of where the play ends, it becomes a major problem for a defense looking to make a stop. On the other hand, giving your offense the ball backed up into your own red zone severely limits the team's ability to score points as a whole.

That comes with the philosophy of Bisaccia, though. The former Raiders coach is known for his hard, old-fashioned



Kicker Anders Carlson, above, made 27 of 33 field goals with a 53-yarder against the Carolina Panthers on Dec. 24 his longest. He connected on 34 of 39 extra points. Punter Daniel Whelan, left, averaged 46.2 yards per punt in the regular season, which ranked him 25th out of 39 punters in 2023.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

style, which can account for the over-aggressiveness and penalties as a result. The penalties could also be a result of the inexperience and youth of the team. Green Bay often struggles to put players on the team who specialize in special teams. With Bisaccia on the coaching staff, that seemed to change as players like Nixon, Dallin Leavitt and Zayne Anderson became household names through special

teams. Another major change that Green Bay featured this season was moving on from the franchise's all-time leading scorer in Mason Crosby.

Crosby, who had made numerous huge kicks in his tenure, was losing power in his kicks, and the team as whole decided it was best to move on. That in turn led the team to draft Auburn kicker Anders Carlson, with whom Bisaccia had familiarity after coaching his brother Daniel in Las Vegas. Even though Anders Carlson was just a 71.8% kicker in college, Gutekunst and his staff saw enough out of him to make him the next guy in Green Bay.

"He was a kicker that Rich has extensive experience with. You know, he had his brother and knew him for quite a while," said Gutekunst, after Carlson was drafted. "We felt really good about where he was headed, and again, I think the relationship there that Rich has with him is a positive factor for us picking him."

As has been the philosophy since Gutekunst and LaFleur took over in Green Bay, personal relationships seem to trump prior experience, and that appears to be the case with Carlson. In Carlson's rookie year, he converted 34 of 39 extra points and 27 field goals on 33 attempts. While those numbers aren't terrible from a rookie kicker, the inconsistency from Carlson is what was the most troubling this season. Through Green Bay's last

11 games of the season, Carlson missed a field goal or an extra point in nine of them. The most troubling came in Green Bay's divisional round matchup against the San Francisco 49ers.

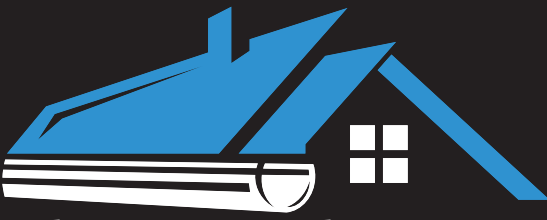
With Green Bay up 21-17, Carlson was asked to enter the game on fourth down and convert a field goal to put the team up seven points. The kick missed, and the 49ers took advantage of the situation, scoring on their next drive. While it is easy to say that missing the kick was the reason that Green Bay lost, it really never comes down to one play. With that being said though, kicking is a part of the game, and teams need to take advantage of every opportunity to put points on the board.

"I don't think the kicks have been the same miss every time. So each kick is different, and as coach has talked about, each kick is its own story," said Carlson, regarding his inconsistency in games. "I think that there is a lot to learn, and as for me, it's tough to see these guys, because I know how much work they put in, and I just want to put them in the best position possible."

Due to Carlson's inconsistencies and missing in big spots, Green Bay signed Georgia free agent Jake Podlesny after the season.

That signals that even though the team spent draft capital on Carlson, it needs to see more out of him come next season. With Podlesny in town, that should be a kick in the butt for Carlson.





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LaFleur finally gets a chance to showcase his offense

By LUKE REIMER
GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

In his first season without Aaron Rodgers, Packers head coach Matt LaFleur was finally able to showcase his skills as a coach and an offensive developer.

With Jordan Love, Green Bay finally had a quarterback who seemed to use the play that was called. Not that it was the fault of Rodgers — who is considered to be one of the smartest players in the history of the league — but to have a quarterback run the called play gives the head coach a little more stability and predictability to better understand the game.

LaFleur is by no means a veteran head coach and still has a lot to learn, but now that he has a player like Love to work with, it almost seems like the two can grow and learn the game together. That should only benefit them both.

One would have to imagine that this will be a season that LaFleur is going to remember for the rest of his life. Caught in the power struggle between Rodgers and Brian Gutekunst throughout the last few seasons, LaFleur finally rid himself of the drama and was able to call the game he wanted to see.

That was a struggle to start the season, though. After a great first showing against the Chicago Bears, things quickly soured, as it seemed that LaFleur's offense was seriously limiting Love's ability on the field.

That wasn't all the fault of the coach. With an injury to Aaron Jones, LaFleur was forced to get creative. That creativity included working the boundaries of the field with slip screens and bubbles screens and not exposing the middle of the field. Once again, that severely limited Green Bay's offense and resulted in a long streak of games where the team was unable to score points in the first half.

Later, LaFleur changed and seemed to let Love and the offense off a leash. Love



Green Bay Packers coach Matt LaFleur's 2023 season was the epitome of how he described each year in the NFL — a long journey, a lot of ups and downs, trials and tribulations, a lot of adversity. But, he believed the team at the beginning of the year was not the team as at the end of the year.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

hit his stride, and with LaFleur including players like Jayden Reed, Bo Melton and Tucker Kraft, Green Bay's offense started to click. In what was supposed to be a rebuilding season, LaFleur's continued growth with Love and the offense should be a positive sign for Packer fans for years to come.

"Every year is such a long journey, and there are a lot of ups and downs, trials and tribulations throughout it, a lot of adversity," said LaFleur, in his season recap press conference. "But, I was so proud of how these guys hung and continued to fight and battle. I thought the team that we were at the beginning of the year was certainly not the team that we were at the end of the year."

To have a strong opinion on whether LaFleur is a good coach probably cannot be had yet. Rodgers did so much for the offense, so to base LaFleur's coaching prowess off basically one season would

be foolish. What can be seen about LaFleur though is his leadership ability.

Throughout the season when the Packers underperformed, LaFleur was the first person to take responsibility, saying that everything starts with him. He is not one who will ever throw a player under the bus, which, as a coach, is the right move.

"What we are calling, what we are asking guys to do, you are always going to look at yourself first and be critical of yourself and make sure that you have the right plays dialed up for the guys," said LaFleur. "Making sure you have that communication where everybody is on the same page."

That is something that is very interesting about LaFleur. As what seems to be the common theme with young coaches in the NFL, there is a level of respect between the coach and the media. Unlike Bill Belichick, who more often

than not is blunt with reporters and gives one-word answers, LaFleur often talks each reporter through each question to fully explain what he is thinking.

Now as any coach in the NFL, LaFleur has his moments where emotions get the best of him, and that is fair. Football is an emotional game, and after a team goes on a four-game losing streak, nobody wants to talk to the media. LaFleur is the same way, but he still faces the media to fulfill his job requirements, and as a media member, that is all you can really ask for.

A major downfall for LaFleur through his tenure has been his strong commitment to his friends.

That was most obvious with the hiring of Joe Barry for the defensive coordinator position a few years back. LaFleur has been on record saying that he struggles to coach against other coaches with whom he is friends.

Going back to his time in Washington, many of his counterparts have now found themselves in head coaching positions in the league today. Sean McVay, Kyle Shanahan, Mike McDaniels and Bobby Slowik are just a few of the names that LaFleur was with in 2013 in Washington. With those names now holding high positions in this league, LaFleur will need to figure out a way to get over his struggles coaching against his friends to continue to succeed.

To put a bow on the 2023-24 season, LaFleur talked all season about the strong resiliency that this team had. From first-half blunders to a strong push to the playoffs to a victory over the Dallas Cowboys in the Wild Card round, it seems that that message of resiliency wore off on his team.

"I was just really proud about the resiliency of the group; I have said that many times," said LaFleur. "The willingness to work and come together and continue to fight for one another — I think that is absolutely imperative."

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The inconsistencies on the defensive side of the ball quickly shifted to fans blaming Joe Barry, above. When Barry was hired, many raised eyebrows, as his career stops were less than ideal. His inconsistencies were a major reason that Green Bay eventually relieved him of his duties, later hiring Boston College head coach Jeff Hafley, below. ASSOCIATED PRESS



Barry's last stand with Pack provides mixed results

Green Bay hires Boston College's Hafley after defensive coordinator's dismissal

By **LUKE REIMER**
GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Coming into the season, the story surrounding the Green Bay Packers was whether Jordan Love could be the next franchise quarterback. While that was the biggest topic of discussion, what flew under the radar was that Green Bay had put together one of the most intriguing groups of defensive players in the NFL.

A good mix of young talent with Quay Walker, Lukas Van Ness and Devonte Wyatt partnered with a strong veteran core of De'Vondre Campbell, Jaire Alexander and Kenny Clark gave many fans and writers optimism that this Packers' defense could be one of the best units in the entire league.

The most exciting player out of the bunch though had to have been Van Ness. The Packers spent major draft capital on Van Ness, making the Iowa alum a first-round pick in the 2023 NFL Draft. While a pass rusher was probably not the number one need in the draft last season, it was hard for Brian Gutekunst to pass up on such raw talent. Adding Van Ness to a passing rushing core of Rashan Gary, Preston Smith and Kingsley Enagbare had the opportunity to vault the Packers defensive line into a very formidable unit. With Gary coming off his ACL tear in the year prior, it was expected that Van Ness was going to play big minutes early.

"Big man. Powerful. Fast. Explosive," said Gutekunst, after drafting Van Ness. "Really big upside, and we were really excited to get him." As a whole in his rookie season, Van Ness finished with 32 combined tackles and four sacks. With Green Bay's approach to consistently rotate its outside linebackers, those numbers are not bad by any means, and it is certainly a bright sight for Packers fans.

As for Gary, in limited action this season, he still proved to be one of the most impactful players on the defense. Registering 44 combined tackles and leading the Packers in sacks with nine, Green Bay rewarded the Michigan product with a four-year, \$107 million contract in the middle of the season.

"It is great to see somebody get paid, especially somebody that you have seen from their rookie year to now," said Smith, about his reaction to Gary's contract extension. "Seeing the progression he has made and the leaps and jumps he had, even coming back from injury and with the attitude and mindset he has, I am just always proud. I feel like I am a proud big brother. It is like watching your little brother walk across the stage and graduating to a payday."

While Clark continued his prolific career in green and gold, it was actually Wyatt who was the breakout star for the Packers' defensive line and team as a whole. Wyatt upped his stats from the 2022-23 season from 15 to 36 total tackles. His sack numbers also increased from 1.5 to 5.5.

While the defensive line and pass rushers proved to be the strongest part of the Packers' defense this season, the secondary also had quite a showing. Starting the season with Jaire Alexander, Rasul Douglas and Keisean Nixon slotted in, Joe Barry and the rest of the coaching staff was very

confident about the secondary's ability to limit opposing offenses. Rightfully so, as throughout the first six games of the season, the defense did not allow more than 230 passing yards to any quarterback.

That all changed though right before the trade deadline. After starting 2-5,

Green Bay looked like it was going to be sellers at the deadline. That rang true, as when the Buffalo Bills came calling about Rasul Douglas, Gutekunst orchestrated a trade that involved moving Douglas and a 2024 fifth-round pick for a 2024 third-round pick.

Things drastically changed in the Packers secondary, as with an injury to Alexander and a continued injury to Eric Stokes, Green Bay was all of a sudden reliant on Carrington Valentine and Corey Ballentine to anchor the secondary.

More than a loss in play on the field, losing

Douglas also caused Green Bay to lose a leader in the locker room. That loss proved to play a major factor for a defense that was quickly unraveling. Even though Green Bay went on a three-game win streak, by taking down the Los Angeles Chargers, Detroit Lions and Kansas City Chiefs, there was a problem arising with Barry and the linebackers.

Even though Walker seemed to improve, there were still obvious areas for growth. While the Packers drafted Walker for his speed and ability to fly around the field, he had still yet to fully diagnose plays on the run, which certainly can and probably will improve. Adding to that, there was an obvious drop in play from Campbell. Campbell still continues to be one of the better linebackers in the NFL, but this season was a far cry from his All-Pro season in 2021. Something that surprised many though from Campbell was a cryptic tweet late in the season.

In the midst of Green Bay's playoff run, Campbell was battling injuries and sent a tweet saying, "Not going out of my way anymore and I'm not playing through injuries anymore cause when (expletive) goes wrong they always use it against you. I'm treating everyone accordingly and giving them the same energy they giving me. Focus on yourself and your mental 59 you owe it to yourself."

Whether this comment was directed at players, fans or coaches, it was obvious that Campbell was upset about how he was being treated or how he was being viewed. For a Packers fan, to see someone who was perceived as a leader say this was certainly worrisome. Even more worrisome, when asked about the tweet, Campbell refused to talk about the situation.

"I'm not talking about nothing that happened on the internet," said Campbell. "If y'all want to talk about the Panthers, we can, but I ain't answering no questions about nothing on no internet."

While these comments were alarming, Campbell did come back when needed and helped Green Bay to make the final push for its playoff run.

The inconsistencies on the defensive side of the ball quickly shifted to fans blaming Barry. When Barry was hired, many raised eyebrows, as his career stops were less than ideal. His inconsistencies were a major reason that Green Bay eventually relieved him of his duties, later hiring Boston College head coach Jeff Hafley.



Packers GM Brian Gutekunst talks about the 2023 team at hi season-ending press conference. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS



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