

MONROE COUNTY HERALD

2022 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW



Cashton's

i n c r e d i b l e

H U L K

Mlsna looms large for Eagles as team looks towards another historic season

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

A player like Zack Mlsna doesn't come around very often for a school like Cashton.

The 6-foot-6, 285-pound lineman is unmistakable out on the football field, towering over almost any teammate or opponent the Eagles might come across during the season. His excellence on the gridiron exploded during his junior year, drawing the interest of college coaches and earning him a preferred walk-on offer from the Wisconsin Badgers earlier this summer.

Before Mlsna heads off for whatever the future holds for his playing career in college, he first has one final go-around with the Eagles as both he and the team look to build on a breakout 2021 with something even more

special in 2022.

"I remember when I was younger, I'd watch games and they'd win maybe one or two a year," Mlsna said. "Now, we've won a lot. It's just a great change. The community's happy, the coaches are happy, the whole team is excited and ready for a whole 'nother year of winning."

Mlsna's rise to becoming a bona fide star for Cashton has its roots in his sophomore year during the 2020 spring alternate season. Mlsna was a first-team All-Scenic Bluffs selection on the offensive line, setting the stage for his standout junior campaign to come.

He was named a team captain in 2021 and went on to solidify himself as one of the region's top high school football players. Defensively, Mlsna recorded 41 total tackles and seven tackles for loss. As the anchor of the offensive line, he helped set the tone for a Cashton

rushing attack that put up 3,085 yards, 47 touchdowns and averaged 6.6 yards per carry in 13 games.

The awards and accolades were quick to follow for Mlsna: the 2021 Scenic Bluffs Conference Lineman of the Year, all-conference first team and all-region on both sides of the line and an all-state honorable mention.

As the Eagles enjoyed a great deal of team success — going 10-3, winning a share of the Scenic Bluffs title and advancing to the Division 7 state semifinals — it also became evident that a college football career was in the cards for Mlsna.

"I truly believe these kids are rooting for Zack and (MLSNA) cont. pg 7

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SPARTA page 8

TOMAH page 10



**BANGOR FOOTBALL
2021 SEASON RESULTS**



Sam Crenshaw

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
Melrose-Mindoro	30-7	W
@ Alma/Pepin	CNCLD	
@ Hillsboro	48-6	W
@ Necedah	49-30	W
New Lisbon	35-20	W
Royall*	2-0	W
@ Spencer/Columbus Catholic	27-28	L
Luther	13-20	L
Brookwood	37-7	W
@ Cashton	17-13	W
D7 Playoffs		
Ithaca	35-14	W
@ Cashton	14-34	L

*Royall ftt bc COVID, replaced game with S/C/C

OVERALL: 8-3
SBC: 5-1 (1st, tie Cashton)

BANGOR CARDINALS



Bangor's Clayton Lyga is greeted by teammates Mason Buehler (left) and Sam Cropp (right) after a first-quarter interception during last year's playoff game with Ithaca. Lyga will be one of several players expected to step up in 2022 to help the Cardinals continue their dominance in the Scenic Bluffs Conference and beyond. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

KEY GAME

AT CASHTON
WEEK 7, Sept. 23

The most anticipated game on the entire Scenic Bluffs slate this fall will be the late September clash between 2021's conference co-champions.

Last season, the Cardinals clinched a share of their eighth consecutive Scenic Bluffs championship and denied their archrivals an outright conference title with a 17-13 Week 9 win in Cashton. Two weeks later, the Eagles got revenge with a 34-14 victory in Level 2 of the Division 7 playoffs that represented their first win over Bangor since 2013.

These two rivals enter 2022 as the favorites to reign supreme in the Scenic Bluffs once again, and their matchup naturally is the one for their fans to immediately circle on the calendar.

Just like both of last year's meetings, the latest chapter in this rivalry will be played in Cashton. Barring any upsets up to that point, a win in this Week 6 showdown would give Bangor the inside track to a ninth straight conference championship.

Cardinals DIG IN for ANOTHER title run

By **ZACH RASTALL**
Sports Writer

By almost any measure, the 2021 season was a successful one for Bangor football.

The Cardinals finished 8-3, secured a share of their eighth straight conference title and won in the opening round of the playoffs for a seventh consecutive season. But after years of Bangor ruthlessly running roughshod over the Scenic Bluffs, last fall represented a slight shift that put a dent in the Cardinals' previously impenetrable armor.

Onalaska Luther brought an end to Bangor's 46-game conference winning streak — the longest in the state at the time — and the Cardinals fell to archrival Cashton for the first time since 2013 in Level 2 of the Division 7 playoffs.

That by no means marked any sort of downfall of Bangor football, but they were a couple of setbacks the program hadn't experienced in nearly a decade — so the Cardinals are naturally hungry to reclaim their sole place atop the Scenic Bluffs.

"We've always had a target on our back, honestly, so we get people's best shots every single game and have been for however many years," said senior running back/linebacker Tanner Jones. "We've put the same amount of work in, if not more, this year."

A trio of players who were all-conference first-team picks a season ago — Mathieu Oesterle (running back, outside linebacker), Sam Horstman (offensive line) and Dawson Daines (inside linebacker) — are gone due to graduation, along with second-team all-conference offensive lineman Trevor Horstman.

However, senior Jonah Larson

(first-team defensive lineman, second-team offensive lineman), senior Dustin McDonald (second-team outside linebacker) and junior Sam Crenshaw (first-team kicker) bring back all-conference experience for the Cardinals.

"I could tell, especially in the weight room this summer,

and even in these first few days of the program — everybody's kinda playing with a chip on their shoulder," Larson said. "They're motivated to do better this season because we don't like to lose."

Bangor head coach Todd Grant pointed to the backfield and linebacker corps as two areas that figure to be strengths right away thanks to returning seniors Jones and Clayton Lyga and junior Samuel Cropp having logged plenty of varsity time last year.

Junior Cody Peterson is set to complement them as he assumes greater responsibilities at fullback and linebacker.

"He'll be a guy we're going to be

looking for to step up and do some pretty good things for us," Grant said of Peterson.

Bangor will open at home in Week 3 (September 1) against

Royall as both teams kick off Scenic Bluffs Conference play.

The Cardinals the season with a series of tough tests starting with a trip to Cashton in Week 7.

The Eagles, along with Ithaca, Luther and New Lisbon all reached the playoffs a year ago and two of those four teams notched wins against the Cardinals in the fall of 2021. However, Bangor has seen its share of tests in the past 15 seasons and most often have been able to rise to the occasion.

This year's players expect more of the same, despite the plethora of personnel changes.

"I hope we make it deep into the playoffs," Larson said. "The goal is a state championship, but I want to see us go as far as we can, obviously."

There might be a little extra chip on the Cardinals' shoulders this fall, but nothing else has changed. Bangor will reload, not rebuild, and once again be a formidable foe for everyone in the Scenic Bluffs.

"Our expectations aren't going to change from what they have been every season," Grant said. "We'll always have high expectations, and that's a good thing. Success for us — what that's going to look like is improving each week."

2022 SCHEDULE

- AUGUST**
- @ Melrose-Mindoro 18
- @ Turtle Lake 26
- SEPTEMBER**
- Royall 1
- Necedah 9
- @ Brookwood 16
- @ Cashton 23
- Ithaca 30
- OCTOBER**
- @ Luther 7
- New Lisbon 14



“

We've always had a target on our back, honestly, so we get people's best shots every single game and have been for however many years.

TANNER JONES
BANGOR SENIOR
RUNNING BACK

”

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Larson ready to usher in new-look line for Bangor

Bangor's Jonah Larson will be leaned on to anchor the offensive and defensive lines as the Cardinals try to replace a number of faces along the line of scrimmage this fall. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Just weeks before Bangor was set to begin practice for the spring alternate football season back in 2021, Jonah Larson suffered a broken collarbone that robbed him of his entire sophomore season.

Larson's chance to make an impact on the line on both sides of the ball for the Cardinals was delayed, leaving him as a mere spectator standing on the sidelines.

"I would say the pain of missing that season was worse than breaking my collarbone, if that puts it into perspective," Larson said. "It was really hard for me to sit and watch practice everyday knowing I couldn't play for the whole season."

By the time Larson — who said he'd often go to bed feeling "jittery" with excitement as the 2021 season drew nearer — finally returned to the gridiron for his junior year last fall, it had been nearly two years since he last played in a competitive football game.

Naturally, there was some rust to kick off at first from all that time away.

"I think it was a challenge for him last year just catching up for all that lost time," said Bangor head coach Todd Grant. "This year, we're expecting him to really take off and have a great year."

It didn't take all that long for Larson to round right into form, as he eventually earned himself all-conference first-team honors as a defensive lineman and second-team honors on the offensive line.

Now, he's hoping to take

another step forward during his senior swan song, while also helping Bangor develop the team's influx of young talent on both the offensive and defensive lines to set the Cardinals up for both current and future success in the trenches.

"Just getting the blocking in the right spots blocking the right guys. If that takes yelling at them a little



bit, then so be it," Larson said of his current leadership role. "As long as they're making the right blocks, I'm happy with them."

"He's a really good leader," Grant said. "He's our guy that everybody kinda looks to and he sets the tone for the guys up front with our linemen — offensively and defensively. He does a good job for us — great attitude and works hard. Great guy to set the example for everybody else."

SCENIC BLUFFS CONFERENCE 2021 REVIEW

Cashton emerges, Bangor adds to legacy

By NATE BEIER
Sports Editor

Bangor's reign atop the SBC was put in true jeopardy for the first time in nearly a decade when the Cardinals fell to Luther in Week 7 last year.

The conference newcomer, Luther, managed to end the Cardinals' 46-game Scenic Bluffs win streak with a seven-point win, much to the surprise of the Bangor faithful. What that meant, however, was the door was opened for an upstart squad to possibly take control of the SBC. However, would there be a challenger to the league throne?

Cashton took care of business in Week 8 by dispatching Royall on a Thursday night and locked up a share of the team's first football title since 1998. The Eagles then looked to win the SBC outright in Week 9 when they welcomed Bangor to town for a pivotal match.

With their backs against the wall, Bangor dug deep and managed to surprise Cashton in Week 9, earning a 17-13 win. The two teams traded blows in the first half, with BHS taking a 14-13 lead by halftime. The Cardinals kicked a field goal in the second half to extend the lead and turned back a number of Eagle drives to secure a piece of the team's eighth straight SBC crown.

Although Bangor secured its place in history by becoming the first team in the SBC to win eight straight football titles, Cashton also added to its own historical program by winning a piece of a title — its first since before any player on this year's team was born. The Eagles got their revenge in the second round of the playoffs with a dominant win over the Cardinals.

From there, Cashton ascended, playing all the way to a state semifinal game before losing to eventual state runner-up, Reedsville at Ripon.

Cashton's surprise run to a Level 4 playoff game was the first appearance in a state semifinal game for any SBC team not named Bangor since Hillsboro advanced to one in 2007.

The Eagles won three straight home playoff games to extend their season and was one of just two Coulee Region teams to play for a chance at state. Aquinas also made it to a Level 4 game and went on to win the D5 state title.

AROUND THE LEAGUE

The Scenic Bluffs Conference opened 2021 in a big way as the league nearly went undefeated in the first two non-conference weeks of play. Luther's loss to eventual Division 5 state champion, Aquinas was the only non-league defeat prior to the official start to SBC action.

Other notes to consider from play inside the SBC this year included a mired mess in the standings for third place. Newcomer Luther, and arch-rivals Necedah and New Lisbon all traded wins and losses between each other. In the end, all three teams made the playoffs, though each made a quick exit from the postseason.

Luther topped New Lisbon in the SBC opener, but fell to Necedah later in the year. Necedah's win over Luther propelled them into the playoffs, but the Cardinals couldn't close in on sole possession of third place in the league in Week 9 as New Lisbon won the annual meeting between the two neighboring districts.

New Lisbon boasted the SBC's Player, Coach and Assistant Coach of the Year. Nikita Shankle, Brad Bever and Jarod Ulrich were honored with those three conference awards, respectively.

In total, five SBC teams made the playoffs and four hosted opening round games.

Brookwood and Royall both trailed in league standings with the aforementioned Brookwood team securing its only conference win of the year via a forfeit from Royall. The Panthers canceled two league games due to COVID concerns in 2021.



2021 SBC Player of the Year
Nikita Shankle, New Lisbon

New Lisbon's Nikita Shankle rushed for just over 1,400 yards in 2021 and scored 15 rushing touchdowns as well as one receiving TD. Shankle helped the Rockets upend Necedah in the last week of the season to force a three-way tie for third place.

New Lisbon head coach Brad Bever was named the league's Coach of the Year and Jarod Ulrich was named the Assistant Coach of the Year as well for the Rockets.

Cashton's Zach Mlsna received the Lineman of the Year award after his efforts in helping the Eagles to a share of the SBC title.

Necedah's Landen Murphy was named 1st Team All-Conference quarterback and the stable of 1st team running backs included Mattieu Oesterle (Bangor), Colin O'Neil (Cashton), Mekhi Baradji (Necedah) and Nikita Shankle (New Lisbon).

SCENIC BLUFFS FOOTBALL 2021 SEASON RESULTS

SCHOOL	OVERALL	SBC
BANGOR	8-3	5-1
CASHTON	10-3	5-1
NECEDAH	6-4	3-3
NEW LISBON	6-4	3-3
LUTHER	5-5	3-3
BROOKWOOD	3-6	1-5
ROYALL	2-7	0-6

SBC CHAMPION BANGOR, CASHTON

BANGOR

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
Melrose-Mindoro	30-7	W
@ Alma/Pepin	CNCLD	
@ Hillsboro	48-6	W
@ Necedah	49-30	W
New Lisbon	35-20	W
Royall*	2-0	W
@ Spencer/Columbus Catholic	27-28	L
Luther	13-20	L
Brookwood	37-7	W
@ Cashton	17-13	W

D7 Playoffs

Ithaca	35-14	W
@ Cashton	14-34	L

*Royall fff bc COVID, replaced game with S/CC

OVERALL: 8-3 SBC: 5-1 (1st, tie Cashton)

BROOKWOOD

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ C-FC	34-14	W
@ Viroqua	14-7	W
Cashton	6-43	L
Wauzeka-Steuben/Seneca	6-23	L
@ Necedah	16-20	L
@ New Lisbon	6-28	L
Royall*	2-0	W
@ Bangor	7-37	L
Luther	6-35	L

*homecoming; Royall fff bc COVID

OVERALL: 3-6 SBC: 1-5 (6th)

CASHTON

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Ithaca	19-14	W
Hillsboro	53-8	W
@ Brookwood	43-6	W
@ Luther	35-18	W
Highland	20-27	L
@ Necedah	37-16	W
New Lisbon*	42-0	W
Royall	47-8	W
Bangor	13-17	L

D7 Playoffs

De Soto	46-0	W
Bangor	34-14	W
Potosi/Cassville	15-6	W
Reedsville	8-47	L

*homecoming

OVERALL: 10-3 SBC: 5-1 (1st, tie Bangor)

LUTHER

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
Blair-Taylor	40-7	W
@ Aquinas	8-41	L
@ New Lisbon	28-20	W
Cashton	18-35	L
Royall	22-6	W
@ Ithaca	18-36	L
@ Bangor	20-13	W
Necedah*	20-34	L
@ Brookwood	35-6	W
Lancaster	16-26	L

*homecoming

OVERALL: 5-5 SBC: 3-3 (3rd, tie Necedah, New Lisbon)

NECEDAH

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Wild Rose	56-15	W
C-FC	66-36	W
@ Royall	20-0	W
Bangor	30-49	L
Brookwood*	20-16	W
Cashton	16-37	L
@ Boscobel	40-22	W
@ Luther	34-20	W
@ New Lisbon	38-42	L

D6 Playoffs

Auburndale	32-63	L
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*homecoming

OVERALL: 6-4 SBC: 3-3 (3rd, tie Luther, New Lisbon)

NEW LISBON

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Hillsboro	28-6	W
De Soto	40-0	W
Luther	20-28	L
@ Royall	31-6	W
@ Bangor	20-35	L
Brookwood	28-6	W
@ Cashton	0-42	L
Riverdale*	44-18	W
Necedah	42-38	W

D6 Playoffs

@ Coleman	6-44	L
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*homecoming

OVERALL: 6-4 SBC: 3-3 (3rd, tie Luther, Necedah)

ROYALL

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Boscobel	30-6	W
@ Fall River/Rio	6-0	W
Necedah	0-20	L
New Lisbon	6-31	L
@ Luther	6-22	L
Brookwood*	0-2	L
@ Brookwood*	0-2	L
@ Cashton	8-47	L
De Soto	6-12	L

**ff due to COVID

OVERALL: 6-4 SBC: 3-3 (3rd, tie Luther, Necedah)

**BROOKWOOD FOOTBALL
2021 SEASON RESULTS**



Brady Hansen

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ C-FC	34-14	W
@ Viroqua	14-7	W
Cashton	6-43	L
Wauzeka-Stauben/Seneca	6-23	L
@ Necedah	16-20	L
@ New Lisbon	6-28	L
Royall*	2-0	W
@ Bangor	7-37	L
Luther	6-35	L

*homecoming; Royall ffr bc COVID

**OVERALL: 3-6
SBC: 1-5 (6th)**

KEY GAME

**AT ROYALL
WEEK 8, Sept. 30**

On the gridiron last fall, neither Brookwood nor Royall were able to pick up a win in Scenic Bluffs play. The Falcons dropped all five games they played on the field in conference play, with their lone SBC victory coming against Royall via forfeit. Meanwhile, the Panthers forfeited their games against both Brookwood and Bangor due to a school COVID pause and lost the four league games they played on the field.

Both Brookwood and Royall are hoping to reverse their fortunes this fall and can point to success in recent years as something to aspire to.

The Falcons enjoyed a run of six playoff appearances in seven years from 2013 to 2019, which included a run of five in a row from 2015 to 2019. The Panthers ended a 14-year postseason drought in 2016 and added playoff berths in both 2017 and 2018.

The Week 7 meeting holds a huge opportunity for a pivotal win for a pair of teams seeking a rebound campaign.

The Brookwood-Royall series has had its share of close games since BHS returned to the Scenic Bluffs in 2001, but the Falcons have posted a 13-8 mark against the Panthers in that time.

comforts
of
home
KEY
for
Young
FALCONS



By **ZACH RASTALL**
Sports Writer

This fall, a youth movement is sweeping through the Brookwood football program.

Nine of the Falcons' 26 players from last year's varsity roster are gone due to graduation, including all-conference selections Dan Peterson and Austin Frye. The program's turnout is up to 31 players for the upcoming season, though 23 of those are either freshmen or sophomores.

That means a small but pivotal group of eight upperclassmen are set to lead the way for Brookwood, helping the team's young nucleus develop into the foundation of tomorrow.

Key to Brookwood's growth as a team may be the fact that the Falcons will play six of their nine games at home, including two non-conference games against opponents they topped on the road a year ago in Cochrane-Fountain City and Viroqua. Brookwood ends the year with a two-game home stand against Necedah and Iowa-Grant — both games that count for playoff qualification.

But regardless of the wins or losses, playing two-thirds of their games before a friendly crowd could be a welcome sight for the inexperienced players taking the dive into varsity waters.

"The upperclassmen that we have are really outstanding leaders," said Brookwood head coach Jeremy Mack. "I really think it's been like almost an extension of the coaching staff — having them be very sharp and focused so the younger guys can get a couple visual reps in before it's their turn to go through anything we've been doing. Even though it's a small group of upperclassmen, having such a good group has helped keep things on pace."

There will obviously be a smattering of younger guys who will need to fill significant varsity roles ahead of schedule given the sizable underclassmen makeup in the program. That's nothing new to sophomore running back/linebacker Marshall Doll, who was thrown into the fire right away last season.

"As a freshman, Marshall filled a lot of roles for us. He spot started Week 1 when we had an injury that kept a kid out, he started at tight end," Mack said. "He's a natural running back. He played all over the place for us on defense. He was kinda the first guy in, regardless of what position it was that needed to get filled."

On offense last year, the Falcons kept it almost exclusively on the ground, with carries split fairly evenly between four seniors: Peterson with 400 yards and five touchdowns on 77 carries, Frank Wildes with 387 yards and one touchdown on

81 carries, Frye with 385 yards and four touchdowns on 103 carries and Jaydon Koltermann with 272 yards and one touchdown on 71 carries.

With all of the team's rushing production from 2021 gone due to graduation, Doll is expected to become a centerpiece of the Brookwood offense out of the backfield. He'll have a familiar face for the Falcons blocking the way for him — albeit, in a different role.

Senior Evan Klinkner was a first-team all-conference selection on both sides of the line last fall, but he'll be moving to fullback on offense in 2022. He figures that lineman

experience will suit him well for his new position.

"I think it's going to help me block for Marshall and our running backs," Klinkner said. "I think it's going to work out pretty well."

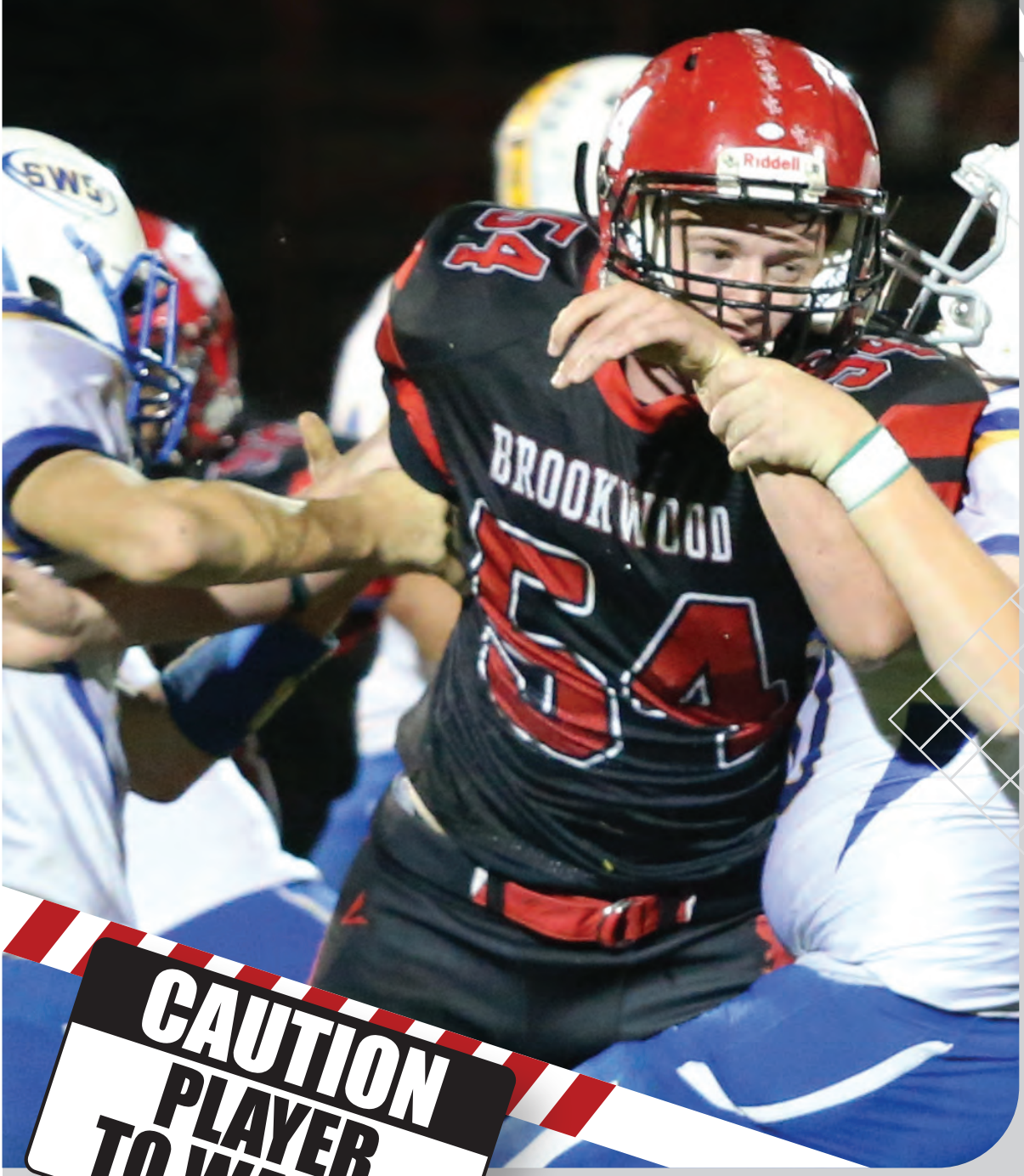
Coming off a 3-6 campaign where their only conference win came via forfeit against Royall due to COVID issues, the Falcons have

plenty of work to do to get back to the playoffs after having qualified in six out of seven seasons from 2013 to 2019.

But no matter what, this year can help lay the foundation for bright days ahead for Brookwood football — whether it's in the present or the future.

"We've had some really good leaders the last several years," Mack said. "(The players) got to see the way last year's departing seniors carried themselves. They were really immersed in the culture we're trying to build, and I think they've really embraced that."

Falcons' jack-of-all-trades finds home on the line



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The Brookwood Football Team is will need quick growth from a number of underclassmen if the team hopes to find success on the field in 2022. There are only 9 juniors and seniors on this year's roster. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



I think it's going to help me block for Marshall (Doll) and our running backs. I think it's going to work out pretty well.

EVAN KLINKNER
BROOKWOOD SENIOR
FULLBACK



2022 SCHEDULE

AUGUST

19 C-FC

26 Viroqua

SEPTEMBER

1 @ Cashton

9 @ New Lisbon

16 Bangor

23 Luther

30 @ Royall

OCTOBER

7 Necedah

14 Iowa-Grant

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

In the early stages of his high school career, Rian Mulvaney appeared to potentially be on track to follow in the footsteps of his older brother Jack, a 2019 Brookwood High School graduate, as a starting quarterback for the Falcons varsity football team.

The younger Mulvaney spent some time playing at quarterback and tight end for the Brookwood junior varsity squad as a freshman and sophomore as his coaches tried to determine what position would suit him best, but he was thrust into an emergency offensive line role on a thin varsity roster during the 2020 spring alternate season.

"We finished that spring alternate season suiting up 14 guys in our last game," said Brookwood head coach Jeremy Mack. "It was just sort of a trial by fire. (Mulvaney) ended up having to play offensive line for us. We finished the Necedah game that year and he had two jerseys on. He had his position player jersey on underneath his offensive line jersey because we couldn't peel it off in time to get him back on the field."

Injuries and COVID-19 quarantines during that

Brookwood's Rian Mulvaney has bounced back and forth between positions throughout his high school career, but settled in on the line during last year. This year Mulvaney will look to bring along a new crop of linemen as the Falcons look to make a return to the playoffs. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

spring alternate season in his sophomore season helped turn Mulvaney into what Mack described as a "jack of all trades." His versatility and willingness to learn allowed him find a home in the trenches on both sides of the line.

"I was looking at the playbook, looking at when the guards pull, when to block," Mulvaney said. "I was definitely focusing way more on the line."

Mulvaney was plenty willing to dive right into whatever position he was asked to play and fully embraced his newfound role up front.

"The line is where it starts. That's where every play starts," Mulvaney said. "I didn't mind, I just wanted to play."

Now, as he enters his senior season, Mulvaney has assumed the role of a veteran leader who will try to help a crop of young linemen that will anchor the future of Brookwood football learn the ropes.

"Everything he does, he does at 100 percent," Mack said. "He does it accurately, he does it right the first time, he listens to directions — he just does a great job setting the bar and leading by example for our younger guys."

"I'm definitely helping the freshmen out," Mulvaney added. "Teaching them the skills and everything they need to know."

Brookwood's Marshall Doll (35) is expected to take on a larger role on both sides of the ball this year. Doll stepped in last year and played a big role in the Falcons season opener at C-FC a year ago. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



West Salem's Cole Everson intercepts a pass intended for Onalaska's Matty Burnette during last week's season opening game. West Salem returns to the Coulee Conference this year, while Onalaska stays in the Mississippi Valley Conference to welcome newcomers Baraboo and Reedsburg to the league. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

Football's changing landscape

By NATE BEIER
Sports Editor

The notion of traditional conference alignments and longtime rivalries has been challenged in recent years as schools find ways to react to the dwindling number of participants for high school football.

Those participation numbers, have forced the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association to step in and take measures to ensure a certain number of teams in a conference or to provide better equity among schools in those conferences.

What has that meant for our area teams? That means that the traditional concept of a conference membership may only apply to certain sports, i.e. a school may be part of Conference A for all sports except for football, soccer, etc., whereas they then become part of Conference B for one sport.

This has played out locally in recent history when the WIAA made its decision to put River Falls in the Mississippi Valley Conference due to matching enrollment numbers.

The same happened to Onalaska Luther, which has played as part of the Dairyland Conference in the past, but typically is part of the Coulee Conference. From 2011-2018, Luther played in the Coulee Conference, then played in the Southwest Wisconsin Activities League in 2019 before being moved into the Scenic Bluffs in 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the traditional SBC schools to move its season to the alternative fall (spring 2021) while Luther played in the fall of 2020.

Luther joined the SBC officially and finished 3-3 in league play to qualify for the playoffs in 2021. The Knights' claim to fame was ending the league win streak of perennial power, Bangor at 46 games.

The point is, it's hard to keep track of which team is in which conference in this day and age.

The MVC will welcome Baraboo and Reedsburg this fall, replacing both River Falls and West Salem.

The move to bring Baraboo and Reedsburg from the Badger Conference isn't without controversy, however. The two schools didn't switch leagues willingly, but instead with a push from the MVC in order to bring the league to a membership of 8 schools for football only.

Conference realignment by the WIAA will take place every two years moving forward and has been further affected by a host of smaller school teams switching to play 8-player football or opting for more co-ops.

With teams moving to 8-player football or co-oping, there are less programs across the state.

One of the local leagues most affected by these types of changes is the Ridge and Valley Conference. For most sports, the RVC has eight member schools. However, for 11-player football there are now just two regular RVC schools left in the league — Ithaca and the Seneca/Wauzeka-Steuben.

Joining those two teams are Hillsboro, from the Scenic Bluffs Conference, Boscobel, Iowa-Grant and Riverdale of the Southwest Wisconsin Activities League and Highland of the Six Rivers Conference. De Soto, which competed in the RVC last year, has moved to 8-player football this year.

There is talk of eliminating Division 7 in traditional 11-player football as many of those sized schools have moved or will be moving to the 8-player model in the near future.

However, as numbers continue to dwindle in certain programs, the notion that every school fielding its own football team may change as well. As schools continue to co-op in order to fill their rosters, traditional conference groupings will probably go by the wayside also.

The Coulee Conference welcomes back West Salem this fall after a nine-year visit to the Mississippi Valley Conference. However, the Coulee looks very different now than it did then.

Altoona and Aquinas have moved in while Luther moved out. Former powers such as Black River Falls and G-E-T struggled to notch multiple wins in the past two seasons. Teams like Arcadia and Westby continue to find success, but have each seen significant declines in participation over the past 10-20 years.

Again, it's a sign of the times as football continues to evolve. Realignment conferences may be a short term solution, but it's one that continues to confuse fan bases who may struggle to figure out what conference they're following or eager to see longtime rivalries continue forward.

LOCAL MOVES

COULEE WHO'S OUT:
None
WHO'S IN:
West Salem

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY WHO'S OUT:
River Falls, West Salem
WHO'S IN:
Baraboo, Reedsburg

RIDGE AND VALLEY WHO'S OUT:
De Soto
WHO'S IN:
Iowa-Grant

**CASHTON FOOTBALL
2021 SEASON RESULTS**



Jacob Huntzicker

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Ithaca	19-14	W
Hillsboro	53-8	W
@ Brookwood	43-6	W
@ Luther	35-18	W
Highland	20-27	L
@ Necedah	37-16	W
New Lisbon*	42-0	W
Royall	47-8	W
Bangor	13-17	L
D7 Playoffs		
De Soto	46-0	W
Bangor	34-14	W
Potosi/Cassville	15-6	W
Reedsville	8-47	L

*homecoming

OVERALL: 8-3
SBC: 5-1 (1st, tie Cashton)

KEY GAME

AT CASHTON
WEEK 7, Sept. 30

There is no question that the most anticipated game on Cashton's schedule is their titanic Week 6 clash against archrival Bangor. Depending on how things shake up to that point, the winner of that contest will be the favorites to win the Scenic Bluffs title.

However, a road test the following week could give the Eagles trouble if they aren't careful.

After the Bangor game, Cashton is bound to be either riding high off the wave of emotion following a monumental win or trying to shake off the bitter taste of defeat. If the Eagles are unable to quickly put whatever those emotions are in the rearview mirror, they'll have a New Lisbon team ready to pounce in an upset bid.

Though the Rockets were handily beaten 42-0 by Cashton last fall, they bring back almost all their starters from a playoff squad and will be looking to make a statement when they welcome in the Eagles at the end of September.

Foundation for BETTER SEQUEL

CASHTON EAGLES

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

The 2021 season was one that no Cashton football fan who followed it will ever forget.

The Eagles finished the season 10-3, secured a share of their first Scenic Bluffs championship since 1998, notched their first playoff win since 1999, beat rival Bangor for the first time since 2013 in a postseason rematch and made their first state semifinal appearance since 1994.

After improving from 0-9 in 2018 to 5-5 and a playoff bid in 2019 to 6-1 during the 2020 spring alternate season, expectations were as high for Cashton going into last fall as they had been in a couple of decades.

The Eagles lived up to their potential in 2021 with the sort of season that could have easily served as the crescendo in this program's resurgence. But they have their sights set higher than that, with hopes of maintaining that new level and perhaps even eclipsing that dream season in 2022.

If they are to do that, Cashton head coach Jered Hemmersbach says the focus must remain on the same things that got them here to begin with.

"You stay grounded, you stay humble, you stay with a '1-0' type mentality each week. That's what we've done in the past," Hemmersbach said. "There's some unfinished business. I think the kids — being as close (to state) as we were last year and then with everybody coming back — they feel like they have a chance. And that's all you can really ask for."

The Eagles are positioned well to contend for another conference championship and a deep postseason run thanks to a boatload of returning experience and high turnout.

Cashton did lose eight seniors from last year's roster, including several all-conference selections: Lincoln Klinge (first team — defensive end), Lunde team — tight end), Dylan Bayer (first team — split end), Gabe Peterson (second team — offensive lineman), Bryan Rivera (second team — defensive lineman) and James Hundt (second team — inside linebacker).

And yet, the Eagles bring back an abundance of returning production, including 2021 Scenic Bluffs Lineman of the Year Zack Mlsna, senior Colin O'Neil (first team — running back), junior Ethan Klinkner (second team — running back/defensive back) and junior Brady Hemmersbach (second team — defensive back).

Senior quarterback Jacob Huntzicker is back as a veteran signal caller and all of Cashton's major contributors out of the backfield have returned as well.

On top of the returnees, long-term prospects for the program look promising with a group of 14 freshmen joining the fold this year. If turnout remains high on the heels of this recent run of success, the Eagles are angling to reach a point where they can reload rather than go through rebuilding phases.

"Hopefully that kinda the new era for Cashton," Hemmersbach said. "Hopefully we're able to, with decent numbers, sprinkle in underclassmen enough varsity time so it's not a big shock and you can blend that."

The pieces are once again all in place for a special season for Cashton football. Now it's just a matter of seeing if they can craft a sequel worthy of the original.

"We want to kind of put last year in the past," O'Neil said. "That happened, we're a new team this year. We have our own goals. We're going to take everything one game at a time and see where it takes it from there."



Cashton's Jack Kleba stays focused while bobbling a pass before hauling it in for a touchdown during the Week 1 matchup with Ithaca. The Eagles posted a 37-0 win, defeating the Bulldogs for the second-straight season. Herald photo by Logan Everson



2022 SCHEDULE

AUGUST

- 18 Ithaca
- 26 Independence

SEPTEMBER

- 1 Brookwood
- 9 @ Riverdale
- 16 @ Necedah
- 23 Bangor
- 30 @ New Lisbon

OCTOBER

- 7 @ Royall
- 14 Luther

“

We want to kind of put last year in the past. That happened, we're a new team this year. We have our own goals.

COLIN O'NEIL
CASHTON SENIOR
RUNNING BACK

”

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Under the radar

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

When a program experiences the sort of rise that the Cashton Eagles have gone through in the last few years, it's never the result of just a couple players. Even still, there are naturally some individuals who jump to mind when thinking of the current Cashton football renaissance.

Zack Mlsna is a hulking presence in the trenches on both sides of the ball whose dominance has earned him the attention of college coaches. Colin O'Neil is the workhorse running back who piled up 1,323 yards and 18 touchdowns while averaging 6.4 yards per carry last year.

Though his name may not be the first that pops to mind when it comes to the Eagles, Cashton junior Brett Hemmersbach has carved himself out an indispensable role on the team.

Hemmersbach brings to the table an intensity and aggression that makes him a natural leader on the gridiron, allowing him to serve as something akin to the heart and soul for Cashton out on the field.

"He's our heartbeat and our leader," Cashton head coach and Brett's father Jered Hemmersbach said. "He helps those guys — they can just rely on him."

Brett established himself as a formidable player at both linebacker and running back during his sophomore campaign.

Defensively, he was second on the team with 70 total tackles while also recording three interceptions, two fumble recoveries and a forced fumble. On the offensive side of the ball, he was third in the Cashton running back pecking order and accrued 503 yards and six touchdowns while averaging 7.1 yards per carry.

For his efforts, he was named an all-conference honorable mention last season.

"Being a leader out on the field, getting more guys to come out for football and then playing my role during the game — it just feels great to be that person," Brett said of his growing responsibilities on the team.

Though his 2021 season yielded strong results, Brett didn't rest on his laurels over the offseason. Instead, he doubled down and committed harder than ever to preparing for his continually increasing role with the Eagles.

"What I was most impressed with this year is what he did to prepare himself for the season," Jered said. "He's a kid that wakes up in the morning and goes to the weight room, comes home from practice and goes to the weight room and is just serious about getting better. What more can you ask for, not only as your son, but as a football player?"



Cashton's Brett Hemmersbach hasn't nabbed headlines with his play, but has been a steady force for the Eagles in the team's recent succes. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media

**CAUTION
PLAYER
TO WATCH**

(MLSNA)
cont. from pg 12

want to see that success and see what happens post-high school," said Cashton head coach Jered Hemmersbach. "He's such a good kid, a good leader and well liked on the team. Couldn't ask for anything more."

Mlsna has drawn both interest and offers from a handful of Minnesota Division II schools so far, including Minnesota State in Mankato, Southwest Minnesota State in Marshall and Bemidji State.

He's also attended several camps where he's brought along friends and teammates Brett and Brady Hemmersbach, affording them unique opportunities they wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

"You get so many different opportunities. You can go on camps with him," Brett Hemmersbach said. "Playing with a guy with college potential, it's just nice to be around."

In early June of this year, Mlsna attended a camp hosted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and shined in that opportunity. He took part in an event called Overtime where the top guys at the camp compete in a smaller group, and soon after got a call informing him that he was one of four players from the class of 2023 who would receive a preferred walk-on offer with the Wisconsin Badgers.

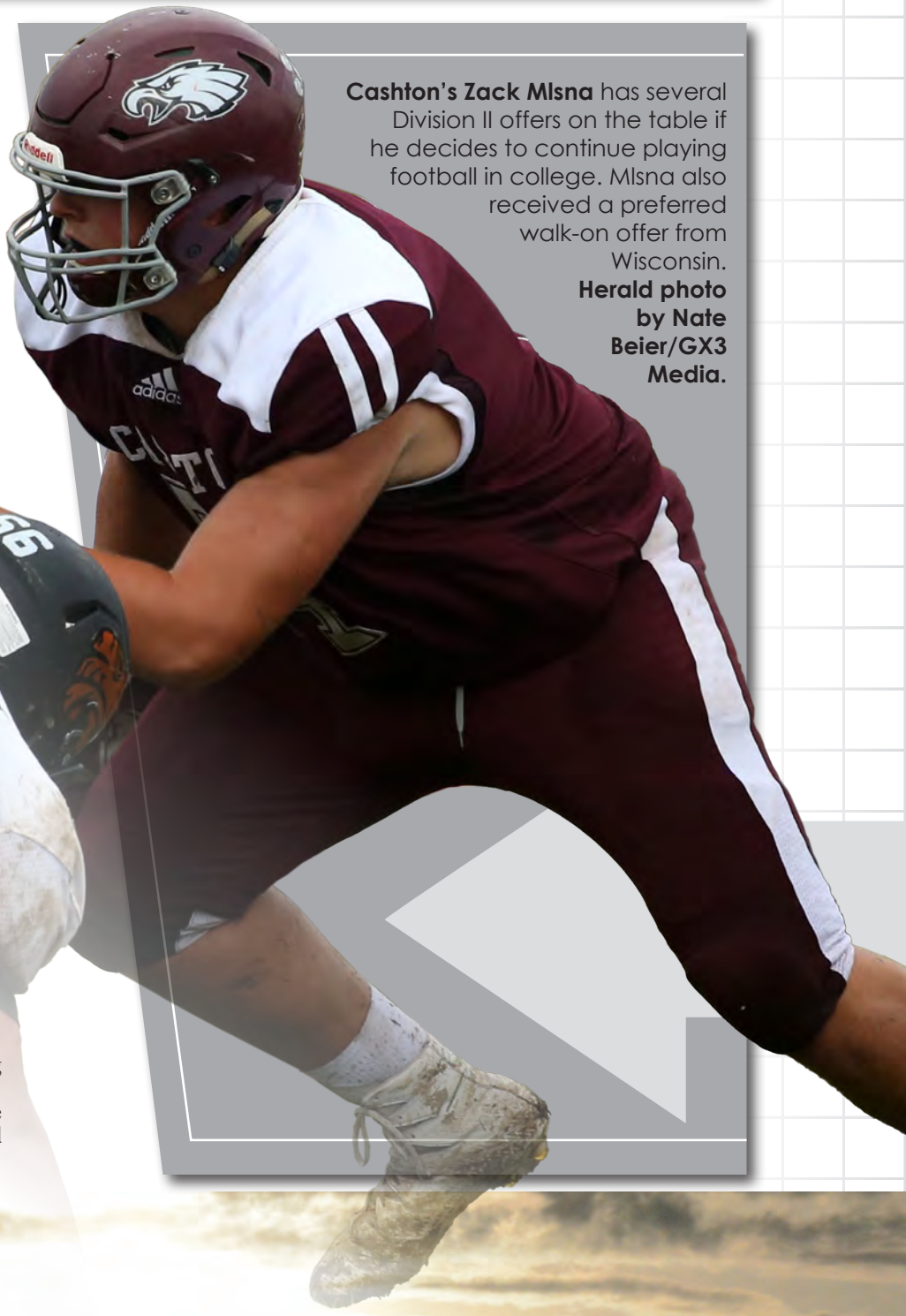
"I went there just trying to get some show for my D2 offers," Mlsna said of the camp. "It was an amazing phone call when I got the call. I wasn't honestly expecting it. I thought I performed well, but when I got the call, I was really excited. I was sitting there in the car with my mom."

Mlsna has a chance to raise his stock even further during his senior season, but all this newfound attention isn't going to his head. Teammate, friend and fellow senior Colin O'Neil — Cashton's first-team all-conference running back — notes that the success and attention that's come with it hasn't changed Mlsna, and it's not something he's quick to boast about.

"He doesn't like to talk about it," O'Neil said. "He's been a day one friend of mine, so it's been pretty cool to see him have that success. It's fun to run behind him. It makes everything so much easier. He's a great guy. He does what he's supposed to do and helps everyone out. He's a great teammate."

Mlsna's football future is bright and full of promise, but that's a bridge he's not concerned about crossing until later. His full focus is on making the most of his time left with the Eagles — maximizing their potential in the present while also setting the stage for future success by helping along the program's younger players.

"I just make sure to lead the team the way I'd like it to be if I was younger," Mlsna said. "Gotta be supportive of them, but yet teach them to become good players. Because when we leave, we'll need new guys to fill in and we hope Cashton becomes a tradition of winning."



Cashton's Zack Mlsna has several Division II offers on the table if he decides to continue playing football in college. Mlsna also received a preferred walk-on offer from Wisconsin. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.



Cashton's Zack Mlsna (second from left), despite all the attention he's received from his work on the football field, continues to work at being an optimal teammate says head coach Jered Hemmersbach. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

SPARTA FOOTBALL
2021 SEASON RESULTS



Noah Herflet

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Baldwin-Woodville	6-17	L
Mauston	39-14	W
La Crosse Logan	56-42	W
@ Tomah	55-7	W
West Salem	7-33	L
@ Holmen	20-42	L
@ Onalaska	0-28	L
La Crosse Central	7-39	L
River Falls	14-43	L

OVERALL: 3-6
MVC: 2-5 (5th, tie Holmen, La Crosse Logan)

KEY GAME

AT REEDSBURG, BARABOO
WEEK 5, Sept. 16;
WEEK 9, Oct. 14

In its first two years under current head coach Adam Dow, Sparta found itself as part of the Division 3 playoff field in both 2018 and 2019.

After going 2-4 during the 2020 spring alternate season that didn't feature a postseason, the Spartans went 3-6 overall and 2-5 in Mississippi Valley play to miss out on the playoffs last fall. The conference gets a different look for the upcoming football season, with Baraboo and Reedsburg replacing River Falls and West Salem — the latter two of which finished first and second, respectively, in the MVC in 2021.

Sparta faces both conference newcomers on the road: Week 5 in Reedsburg and in Baraboo for the final week of the regular season a month later. Passing both those road tests would go a long way in helping the Spartans navigate a path back to the postseason.

However, Reedsburg was the last team Sparta saw in the playoffs. The Beavers bested Sparta 37-7 in a Level 1 game in 2019.

Sparta, Tomah, Baraboo and Reedsburg all played as part of the South Central Conference through the 1988-89 school year.

SPARTA FOOTBALL

building BACK BIGGER and BETTER



2022 SCHEDULE

AUGUST

- 18 @ Baldwin-Woodville
- 26 @ Mauston

SEPTEMBER

- 2 @ La Crosse Logan
- 9 Tomah
- 16 @ Reedsburg
- 23 Holmen
- 30 Onalaska

OCTOBER

- 7 @ La Crosse Central
- 14 @ Baraboo

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Following a decade-long playoff drought, Sparta made it to the postseason three times in four years from 2016 to 2019. That included the program's first two playoff wins ever in 2018 — current head coach Adam Dow's first season at the helm.

Coming off a 2021 campaign that saw them go 3-6 overall and 2-5 in Mississippi Valley Conference play, the Spartans are aiming to build themselves back to that postseason contender level of recent years.

As they work their way back, the program is buoyed this season by an increase in overall turnout numbers, which is up from the mid-70s in 2021 to about 90 players this year. Though they lost a key group of seniors from a season ago — including second-team all-conference picks Nick Kent, Ty Lietzau, Chris Jacobs and Tye Klass — the Spartans do bring back five starters and the increased roster size will allow them to rely less heavily on two-way players.

"We had a large group of seniors that played both ways last year. With our numbers that we have right now,

we don't have to do that," said Sparta head coach Adam Dow. "Granted, we need to find out who wants to strap up on a Friday night and step up and own a role."

Among those returning starters is junior quarterback/linebacker Thomas Laufenberg, who was tabbed as the team's starter under center as a sophomore. In 2021, Laufenberg completed 60.8 percent of his passes for 881 yards, 11 touchdowns and five interceptions while also rushing for 297 yards and four touchdowns.

With valuable varsity experience already under his belt, Laufenberg



Tackling the mantle of leadership

Sparta's Michael O'Rourke has taken steps to become what he wanted as a freshman - a leader to help provide guidance and show younger players the ropes. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Sparta senior linebacker Michael O'Rourke isn't necessarily going to be the guy who will rally his teammates with a rousing speech or get in their face when they make a mistake.

But that doesn't make him any less effective as a leader or less valuable to the Spartans in a season where they have their fair share of new starters to break in.

"Everybody thinks leadership is the guy who's yelling the most when often — when times get tough in the fourth quarter — it's the guy who you can depend on to do their job all the time," said Sparta head coach Adam Dow. "Everybody on defense knows (O'Rourke) is going to be where he needs to be, and he's going to put forth extreme effort 100 percent of the time."

After just getting his feet wet to varsity play

during the 2020 spring alternate season, O'Rourke emerged as a key piece for the Sparta defense last fall. As a junior, he tallied 55 total tackles, six tackles for loss, 1.5 sacks and two fumble recoveries.

O'Rourke recalls the early days of his high school career and how much he leaned on the veterans to show him the ropes, so he's trying to be that same guy for the new blood joining Sparta football.

"When I first started out, I was like these guys just coming into the program," O'Rourke said. "I needed someone to be a leader when I was their age. That's what I'm trying to do for them."

When it comes to his leadership approach, O'Rourke prefers to mostly let his actions do the talking for him.

"I try to lead by example and pick guys up when they're not having the best day," O'Rourke said. "Just teach them."



O'Rourke's willingness to accept that sort of leadership role is vital for the Spartans, who will need him to thrive if the team is to reach its full potential.

"He's always been very dependable, but at the same time I think he finally started to realize as a sophomore into his junior year that he can be the man. He can be a guy that steps up and leads a defense," Dow said. "It's really nice to see that maturity and that development and that growth out of Michael, because that confidence piece means everything for a kid like that. That sweats off of him. He molds that defense with that confidence."

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VOTED BEST SPECIAL SECTION

MONROE COUNTY HERALD

2021 FOOTBALL PREVIEW SECTION
Nate Beier and Zach Rastall
Wisconsin Newspaper Association

The Sparta football team is aiming for a return to the playoffs in 2022. The Spartans last playoff appearance was in 2019. A spike in numbers, bolstered by a large senior class, may be enough to achieve the feat. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONFERENCE

Old rivalries revisited



Sparta's Layden Ott will help the Spartans find a way past former South Central Conference foes, Baraboo and Reedsburg as the two schools move into the MVC for the next two seasons. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media**

Spike in numbers helps depth for Spartan team eager to return to the WIAA postseason

is a welcome veteran presence and gives the team one less position to worry about.

"I feel like I've grown the most in my passing — my decision making and my reading," Laufenberg said. "Being able to take short dump-off throws instead of throwing the deep ball all the time and throwing a bad ball into a double team."

Laufenberg is afforded the luxury of two of his top-three receivers from

last season — seniors Layden Ott and Carson Kelsey — coming back to provide dependable targets who he already has a rapport with.

Additionally, Dow pointed to guys like seniors Ryne Brueggeman and Dain Pitsenbarger at defensive back and wide receiver, along with senior Tyler Schendel and junior Westin Blazek on both sides of the line as guys who he expects to assume bigger roles this fall.

As far as expectations

go, Dow isn't shying away from his goal of the Spartans qualifying for the postseason year in and year out.

"Success for us every single year is making the playoffs," Dow said. "I walked into a program that didn't see a whole lot of success. Our players make goals for themselves, but I want to win, I want to compete and I want to make the playoffs. When you do that on a consistent basis, then you can start talking about conference champions and anything like that."

By NATE BEIER
Sports Editor

earlier that season for homecoming.

Sparta's historic campaign of 2019 was ended early by Reedsburg in a 37-7 loss in the opening round of the postseason.

The last time these four teams were together in the same conference, Sparta managed to post the best mark.

The Spartans were 6-2 and tied Adams-Friendship for second place in the league. Nekoosa won the league with a mark of 7-1.

Reedsburg marked Sparta with a 20-19 overtime win that ultimately cost SHS a share of the SCC title. The Beavers were 1-7 in the SCC and tied Tomah (also 1-7) for last place in the league.

**Special thanks to Alton Ask for Sparta/South Central Conference history. Ask's records of Sparta football are invaluable to historic stories and insights such as this.*

After 35 years, Sparta and Tomah will be reunited with longtime conference foes, Baraboo and Reedsburg.

The four teams were part of the South Central Conference at its inception in the fall of 1952. All four members remained part of the league until the 1989-90 school year, when the current incarnation of the Mississippi Valley Conference was started.

Baraboo and Reedsburg remained in the SCC for another 10-15 years before moving into the Badger Conference that included teams such as DeForest, Sauk Prairie and Waunakee.

Both Sparta and Tomah's last trip to the playoffs resulted in losses to their former SCC companions.

Tomah fell to Baraboo 43-6 in 2020 in a first-round game. The playoffs only lasted two rounds that season due to COVID-19 concerns. The Timberwolves did defeat Reedsburg

Sparta's Dain Pitsenbarger picks off a pass during the 2021 meeting with Mauston. Pitsenbarger is one of a large number of seniors eager to put Sparta back in the postseason this fall. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



I feel like I've grown the most in my passing — my decision making and my reading
THOMAS LAUFENBERG
SPARTA JUNIOR QUARTERBACK

Sparta's Thomas Laufenberg played a big role in the Spartans' offense a year ago, nearly passing for 900 yards and only throwing 5 interceptions. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



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**TOMAH FOOTBALL
2021 SEASON RESULTS**



Eli Brown

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Mauston	30-46	L
Prairie du Chien	7-12	L
@ River Falls	8-47	L
Sparta	7-55	L
Holmen	20-56	L
@ La Crosse Central	0-52	L
La Crosse Logan	8-36	L
@ West Salem	6-53	L
Onalaska	13-51	L

**OVERALL: 0-9
MVC: 0-7 (8th)**

KEY GAME

**AT SPARTA
WEEK 4, Sept. 9**

Tomah is looking to hit the reset button following a winless 2021 campaign that saw the Timberwolves on the wrong end of several blowouts. That included one at the hands of chief Mississippi Valley Conference rival Sparta — a defeat where Tomah scored the game's first touchdown before seeing the Spartans rattle off 55 unanswered points.

As the Timberwolves look to turn the page on last season and pave a better path forward in 2022, one of their best tests will come early in their conference slate in a Week 4 battle with those same rival Spartans.

It's early enough in the schedule where a team's fate for the season is far from decided, but also not so early that they will still be kicking off rust and trying to simply gel together. A win or even just a much stronger showing would go a long way in helping Tomah build positive momentum for the remainder of the fall.



step 1 (find a way to)
WIN
STEP 2
learn and repeat

Tomah's Jacob Bullard is expected to play a larger role in the backfield this season as the Timberwolves try to put the ghosts of a winless season behind them. Bullard ran for 364 yards and a pair of scores last year. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



By **ZACH RASTALL**
Sports Writer

A challenging 2021 season yielded no wins for the Tomah Timberwolves, with numerous young, inexperienced players getting tossed straight into the varsity deep end.

The Timberwolves took their lumps last year, though they're hopeful those growing pains result in stronger showings this fall. Despite a decent-sized class of seniors departing due to graduation, Tomah returns no shortage of players who saw varsity action in 2021.

For some of those younger players, last season meant

“Our hard work can push us to the next level. We were in games early (last year), but just fell back.”

DREW BROOKMAN
TOMAH SENIOR
WIDE RECEIVER

2022 SCHEDULE

- AUGUST**
19 Mauston
26 @ West Salem
- SEPTEMBER**
1 Baraboo
9 @ Sparta
16 @ Holmen
23 La Crosse Central
30 @ La Crosse Logan
- OCTOBER**
7 Reedsburg
14 @ Onalaska

pulling double duty on both junior varsity and varsity in a given week.

“They played a lot of football as a young team last year,” said Tomah head coach Joe Protz. “A lot of them had to play JV Monday night and then fall in on Friday night. I think the last couple weeks of the season we had four offensive linemen play Monday night and Friday night.”

Despite the team's overall struggles during the previous season, it was a fruitful fall on the individual level for standout wide receiver Drew Brookman, an all-conference honorable mention who hauled in a total of 29 catches for 652 yards and nine touchdowns.

“Our hard work can push us to the next level,” Brookman said. “We were in games early, but just fell back.”

Failing to finish isn't something Brookman's used to, either. The receiver was a key component for THS's 4-3 campaign in the fall of 2020. That season Tomah rattled off three-straight wins to finish the regular season 4-2 before bowing out in the first round of the playoffs to

Baraboo. Brookman caught 13 passes that year, averaging 65 yards a game and scored a trio of touchdowns.

Mixing in a few new faces this year, however, will only serve to make Tomah more versatile and less predictable on offense.

Junior Elijah Brown showed flashes of promise in his first year as a receiver, recording 19 catches for 129 yards and a touchdown. Brown has breakout potential and could provide the Timberwolves with a reliable complement to Brookman in the passing game.

Elsewhere on offense, senior running back and team leading rusher Jacob Bullard is back after posting 364 yards and two touchdowns on 99 carries in 2021. Senior quarterback Tom Hesse provides Tomah with an experienced signal caller under center. As a junior, Hesse completed 66 of 169 passes for 910 yards, 10 touchdowns and 14 interceptions.

It's a similar story of returning production on the defensive side of the ball, where four of the six players to record at least 30 total tackles — senior linebacker Cody Quist (57 total tackles), junior defensive lineman Jayden Brieske (37) and linebacker Kolen Madison (32) and linebacker Bullard (31) — return for Tomah.

The Timberwolves aren't shying away from the difficult task in front of them, but they're not getting hung up on anything that happened last season. Their focus is on charting a better course in 2022.

“I told the players we're not looking in the rearview mirror. It's a new season with new players, new games and new teams we're going to play against,” Protz said. “Put the team first in whatever we do on and off the field, and that will bring us success.”

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Quist: A true underdog story



Tomah's Cody Quist may not be oversized or overpowering at first sight, but the senior linebacker will leave his mark in 2022. Quist led Tomah in tackles last year and has stepped up to lead a defense that is eager to show improvement after allowing 36 points or more in eight of its nine games last year. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

By **ZACH RASTALL**
Sports Writer

At first glance, Tomah senior linebacker Cody Quist might not catch your eye on a football field.

He's not physically overpowering, and his size won't stand out. But to underestimate Quist is to fashion himself into an indispensable defensive leader for the Timberwolves.

Quist's tenacity has served him well as he's developed into the centerpiece of Tomah's linebacker corps at middle linebacker, and his mentality makes him the perfect type of leader for a team hungry to improve from a rough 2021 season.

"He's kinda like us this year: the underdog. He's a little undersized for being a linebacker," said Tomah head coach Joe Protz. "But he's a tough cookie, tough as they come. He works hard every day in practice."

Earlier in his high school career, Quist, who is the team's long snapper as well, also



played on the offensive line. But he eventually dedicated his focus to playing linebacker, slimming down and putting on muscle in the process.

"It's hit or be hit," Quist said. "I don't like being on offense too much being hit. I like being the one to hit people."

Quist's hard work paid off, as he became the Timberwolves' leading tackler as a junior. He's also assumed greater and greater leadership responsibilities and credits former teammate Tanner Matthias, who graduated last spring, for his influence on him.

Now, it's Quist's job to pass on the lessons he's learned to the next generation of Tomah players.

"If you make a mistake, own it. Keep your head up," Quist said. "If someone does something wrong, don't yell at them — point it out and tell them what they did and what else they should be doing on it."

That being said, Quist is ready for his final go around with the Timberwolves this fall. Time will only tell what he and his team are able to accomplish, but Quist's dedication to his team and the sport of football is one thing that his teammates and coaches can count on no matter what.

"He's going to give you everything he's got at practice, everything he has at the games on Friday. He cares about the team. He cares about the sport of football," Protz said. "The old saying is 'it's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.' You look at Cody Quist, he's that type of player."

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONFERENCE 2021 REVIEW

One and done: River Falls runs free in MVC

By **NATE BEIER**
Sports Editor

The Mississippi Valley Conference made a return to form in 2021 after 2020's split season.

Half of the MVC played in the fall of 2020, with the other half playing in the alternative fall (spring). That meant that the MVC would forego crowning a league champion for a year.

However, that wasn't the case last fall when the MVC came back together, albeit with a new look as the league welcomed in River Falls who was put in the MVC by the WIAA to help make the league a group of eight.

The newcomer Wildcats cruised to the MVC title in 2021, posting a 7-0 record.

River Falls swept the major awards in the All-Conference voting a year ago with quarterback Vitto Massa claiming the Offensive Player of the Year award and Eddie Loesch taking the Defensive Player of the Year award. The Wildcats' Tanner Zepczyk was the Lineman of the Year and Ryan Scherz was the Coach of the Year. River Falls returns to the Big Rivers Conference in the fall of 2022. The league is typically home to the Wildcats, but the team had been moved into the MVC for 2020 and 2021 as part of the WIAA's realignment plan.

Onalaska gave RFHS its best game in league play, as the Hilltoppers were turned back 36-27 - a mere 10 points away from a win.

West Salem finished as the league runner-up after going 6-1 in the MVC. The Panthers' only loss was to River Falls 41-7 in Week 8. The season was the last for the Panthers in the MVC since being moved into the league in the 2014 season. West Salem qualified for the playoffs in six of the eight years in the MVC.

AROUND THE LEAGUE

La Crosse Central and Onalaska duked it out in Week 4 in a game that would have serious consequences going forward.

Central was coming off the wrong end of a 10-0 shutout at West Salem and couldn't afford another loss if they hoped to stay relevant in the league race.

The Riverhawks pulled ahead 22-7 with just under six minutes to go in the first half, but Onalaska scored twice in the last 5:43 to close the gap to 22-20 by halftime.

Central fell behind early in the third quarter, but scored two-straight TDs and held Ona back just enough for a 36-33 win.

The Hilltoppers settled for fourth place in the league and made a surprise run in the playoffs with a road win over Mt. Horeb 28-21 in the opening round.

River Falls and West Salem both bowed out in the second round of the playoffs.

For West Salem, 2021 was kind to the Panthers, which were coming off of a short 2021 season in which they only played four games due to COVID concerns.

The season would mark the end of West Salem's run in the MVC as the Panthers elected to go back to the Coulee Conference starting in 2022.

The rest of the MVC, however, played a rather unremarkable season, with no other team winning more than three games overall last fall.

Holmen, La Crosse Logan and Sparta all finished 2-5 in conference and missed the playoffs by two games.

For Holmen, missing out on the playoffs ended an 11-year playoff run in a non-COVID year. Since 2000, the Vikings have only missed the playoffs six times (2000, 01, 07, 08), including the 2020 fall when HHS elected to play in the alt-fall season.

Logan pulled off a 25-22 victory over Holmen in Week 8 which ultimately helped force the three-way tie for fifth place.

Sparta was 3-1 on the year before suffering a 33-7 homecoming loss to West Salem in Week 5. The Spartans didn't win again in 2021, and in fact, were outscored by at least 22 points in each of their last five games.

Tomah struggled offensively throughout the season, scoring multiple touchdowns in just 3 games. Their losing streak reached 10 games after going 0-9 in 2021, with losses dating back to a first-round playoff defeat at Baraboo in the fall of 2020.



West Salem's Brett McConkey, 2nd Team All-MVC selection

West Salem's Brett McConkey was one of four senior quarterbacks named to the All-MVC team last season. McConkey and Central's Mason Herlitzke were both on the second team. Onalaska's Ayden Larson and River Falls's Vitto Massa were on the first team. Larson led the league with 1959 passing yards.

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FOOTBALL 2021 SEASON RESULTS

SCHOOL	OVERALL MVC	
RIVER FALLS	8-4	7-0
WEST SALEM	8-2	6-1
LA CROSSE CENTRAL	7-3	5-2
ONALASKA	6-5	4-3
HOLMEN	2-7	2-5
LA CROSSE LOGAN	3-6	2-5
SPARTA	3-6	2-5
TOMAH	0-9	0-7

MVC CHAMPION RIVER FALLS

HOLMEN

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Chippewa Falls	0-40	L
Menomonie	9-29	L
@ Onalaska	23-37	L
River Falls	20-35	L
@ Tomah	56-20	W
Sparta	42-20	W
La Crosse Central	28-42	L
@ La Crosse Logan	22-25	L
West Salem	21-28	L

OVERALL: 2-7
MVC: 2-5 (5th, tie Logan, Sparta)

LA CROSSE CENTRAL

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
Eau Claire North	46-0	W
@ Eau Claire Memorial	48-21	W
@ West Salem	0-10	L
Onalaska	36-33	W
@ River Falls	14-42	L
Tomah	52-0	W
@ Holmen	42-28	W
@ Sparta	39-7	W
La Crosse Logan	42-20	W
D2 Playoffs		
@ River Falls	6-29	L

OVERALL: 7-3
MVC: 5-2 (3rd)

LA CROSSE LOGAN

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
Eau Claire Memorial	13-0	W
@ Eau Claire North	14-20	L
@ Sparta	42-56	L
West Salem	7-21	L
@ Onalaska	13-41	L
River Falls	0-2	L
@ Tomah	36-8	W
Holmen	25-22	W
@ La Crosse Central	20-42	L

OVERALL: 3-6
MVC: 2-5 (5th, tie Holmen, Sparta)

ONALASKA

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
Baraboo	21-28	L
@ McFarland	34-14	W
Holmen	37-23	W
@ La Crosse Central	33-36	L
La Crosse Logan	41-13	W
@ West Salem	28-32	L
Sparta	28-0	W
River Falls	27-36	L
Tomah	51-13	W
D2 Playoffs		
@ Mt. Horeb/Barneveld	28-21	W
@ Rice Lake	7-42	L

OVERALL: 6-5
MVC: 4-3 (4th)

RIVER FALLS

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Menomonie	6-28	L
Hudson	28-29	L
Tomah	47-8	W
@ Holmen	35-20	W
La Crosse Central	42-14	W
@ La Crosse Logan*	2-0	W
@ Sun Prairie	6-21	L
West Salem	41-7	W
@ Onalaska	36-27	W
@ Sparta	43-14	W
D2 Playoffs		
La Crosse Central	29-6	W
@ Waunakee	24-27 OT	L

* Logan ffb bc COVID, played Sun Prairie instead

OVERALL: 8-4
MVC: 7-0 (1st)

SPARTA

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Baldwin-Woodville	6-17	L
Mauston	39-14	W
La Crosse Logan	56-42	W
@ Tomah	55-7	W
West Salem*	7-33	L
@ Holmen	20-42	L
@ Onalaska	0-28	L
La Crosse Central	7-39	L
River Falls	14-43	L

* homecoming

TOMAH

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ Mauston	30-46	L
Prairie du Chien	7-12	L
@ River Falls	8-47	L
Sparta	7-55	L
Holmen	20-56	L
@ La Crosse Central	0-52	L
La Crosse Logan	8-36	L
@ West Salem	6-53	L
Onalaska	13-51	L

OVERALL: 0-9
MVC: 0-7 (8th)

WEST SALEM

OPPONENT	WE	THEY
@ G-E-T	48-0	W
Ellsworth*		
La Crosse Central	10-0	W
@ La Crosse Logan	21-7	W
@ Sparta	33-7	W
Onalaska	32-28	W
@ River Falls	7-41	L
Tomah	53-6	W
@ Holmen	28-21	W
D2 Playoffs		
Prescott	17-14	W
@ Northwestern	20-42	L

* did not finish due to weather

COULEE CONFERENCE NOTES

Panthers set for return to Coulee



West Salem's Luke Noel will lead the Panthers from the backfield as they head back into the Coulee Conference this year. West Salem is expected to be a title contender along with Aquinas, last year's CC winner. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

By NATE BEIER Sports Editor

After eight seasons in the Mississippi Valley Conference, the West Salem football team is ready to come home to the Coulee Conference this fall.

In that time, West Salem managed to put together a solid showing despite being the smallest school, in terms of enrollment, in the MVC.

The last time West Salem was in the Coulee, they posted a rather tepid season with a 3-7 mark overall and 3-3 finish in league play to just barely make the playoffs.

The following year, the Panthers went 6-3 overall and were 5-2 in league play - good enough for third place.

West Salem climbed the ladder in the MVC, tying for second in 2016 and then played into a three-way tie for first in 2017.

The 2019 season went sideways as the team finished off a rare winless season. Players would have to wait nearly two years to really get back on track. In 2020, West Salem played just three games as the COVID-19 pandemic kept the team off the field.

Last year West Salem would have won another league title, but the inclusion River Falls as a conference opponent ensured that no traditional MVC power would have a chance. Again, coach Justin Jehn and company would have to settle for second place and

then went on to finish 1-1 in the post season.

The Coulee has changed hands over the past near-decade with Arcadia and G-E-T, Westby and Aquinas all winning at least one conference title.

In 2019 the Coulee didn't sponsor football as teams were split between the Southwest Wisconsin Conference, South Central and Southwest Wisconsin Activities League.

Longtime coaches have departed as well with veteran coach Jim Bible stepping down at Black River Falls and Jon Stepenhagen moving on at G-E-T after several decades of service.

Technically the Coulee can boast about producing the Division 5 state champion from a year ago. Aquinas turned back Mayville 28-26 at Camp Randall Stadium in Madison in the Division 5 state championship.

The storybook script has been set up for West Salem when they take on Aquinas this year, however. The meeting is set to happen the final week of the regular season at Aquinas. The two teams met during the 2020 season with WSHS taking a 22-6 win.

Expect traditional powers such as Westby and G-E-T to give West Salem different challenges this fall. G-E-T looks to be coming back around after a 1-8 season a year ago and Westby has qualified for playoffs in 10 of the last 11 seasons.



West Salem's Trae Athnos will try to help the Panthers challenge for a Coulee Conference title this fall. West Salem left the Coulee for the Mississippi Valley Conference in the fall of 2014. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

2022 Monroe County Herald High School Football Preview

This is Nate Beier, Sports Editor at the Monroe County Herald. I hope you enjoyed this special publication. It took love and madness to make this, and in the end, we think we did pretty okay.

I need to recognize the immense effort of my writer, Zach Rastall for writing all the features you read here. I also need to thank designer Logan Everson for helping with some layouts to get this done on time and owner Greg Evans in believing in doing fancy print products in our growing digital world. Let's do it again in '23. Game on!

ALL AREA 2021 PREVIEW/REVIEW

Repeat Champs Reign In 2022

By NATE BEIER Sports Editor

Realistically, most area conference title races will be limited to just 1-2 teams and the teams that should compete for their respective titles have very familiar names.

There are two headliners in terms of conference title matchups. The first being the Week 9 Coulee Conference bout between the defending D5 state champ, Aquinas and West Salem. The second is a Week 6 meeting between Bangor and Cashton in the Scenic Bluffs.

Now, just because it sounds like most of our championship races are a bit on the predictable side, the battle for playoff position is quite intriguing.

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

If you take Onalaska out of the equation, the MVC seems to be quite balanced. It's hard to say where an upstart team like Tomah can land, but they have already proven they're better than an 0-9 season.

Newcomers Baraboo and Reedsburg have had some playoff success recently, but have also shown struggles to get past the regular season as well.

Dark Horse: Sparta

Game to Watch: Tomah @ Sparta

SCENIC BLUFFS

Bangor proved they still had something in the tank last year, despite losing to league newcomer, Luther. Can they do it again?

Cashton is the team to beat, however. The Eagles' defense will squash most SBC opponents and leave them searching for solutions well after they play each other.

Royall, New Lisbon, and Luther may challenge each other for third place.

Dark Horse: Royall

Game to Watch: New Lisbon @ Royall

COULEE

Aquinas and West Salem should have little problem getting through to Week 9 undefeated in Coulee play, making for a gigantic matchup at UW La Crosse in mid-October.

G-E-T showed signs of life in Week 1 and may be back on track after a 1-8 season a year ago. Black River Falls' Evan Voss has proven he can throw the ball proficiently making the Tigers a good playoff contender also. However, Westby has been one of the steadiest programs



Westby's Rheit Stenslien rushed for 84 yards and 2 scores in his 41-0 win over Richland Center and will continue to be a big part of the Norsemen's success. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

in the Coulee and should be to stay the course again, holding off all challengers save for the big two.

Dark Horse: G-E-T

Game to Watch: G-E-T @ Westby

RIDGE AND VALLEY

The RVC is young this year. Highland and Ithaca, the league's best two teams, both unloaded a pack of seniors.

That means the door could be open for a new squad to take control and win a trophy. The trouble is, the rest of the RVC struggled last year. Seneca/Wauzeka-Stauben barely made the playoffs and the other four teams currently in the league combined for just 7 wins last year.

Don't be surprised if there are a number of 3-3 teams in the league.

Dark Horse: Hillsboro

Game to Watch: Ithaca @ Seneca/Wauzeka-Stauben

DAIRYLAND

Expect a repeat of last year.

2022 PREDICTIONS

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL MVC. Rows include Onalaska, La Crosse Central, Baraboo, Holmen, Sparta, Tomah, Reedsburg, La Crosse Logan.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL SBC. Rows include Cashton, Bangor, New Lisbon, Royall, Luther, Brookwood, Necedah.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL CC. Rows include Aquinas, West Salem, Westby, G-E-T, Altoona, Black River Falls, Arcadia, Viroqua.

MVC CHAMPION ONALASKA

SBC CHAMPION BANGOR, CASHTON

CC CHAMPION AQUINAS

RIDGE AND VALLEY CONFERENCE

DAIRYLAND CONFERENCE

SOUTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL RVC. Rows include Highland, Ithaca, Seneca/Wauzeka-Stauben, Iowa-Grant, Hillsboro, Boscobel, Riverdale.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL DC. Rows include Pepin/Alma, Augusta, Melrose-Mindoro, Independence/Gilmanton, Blair-Taylor, Eleva-Strum, C-FC, Whitehall.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL SCC. Rows include Wisconsin Dells, Adams-Friendship, Poynette, Mauston, Wautoma, Westfield, Montello/Princeton/Green Lake.

RVC CHAMPION HIGHLAND

DC CHAMPION PEPIN/ALMA

SCC CHAMPION WISCONSIN DELLS

2021 STANDINGS

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL MVC. Rows include River Falls, West Salem, La Crosse Central, Onalaska, Holmen, La Crosse Logan, Sparta, Tomah.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL SBC. Rows include Bangor, Cashton, Necedah, New Lisbon, Luther, Brookwood, Royall.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL SBC. Rows include Aquinas, Arcadia, Westby, Altoona, Black River Falls, G-E-T, Viroqua.

MVC CHAMPION RIVER FALLS

SBC CHAMPION BANGOR, CASHTON

CC CHAMPION AQUINAS

RIDGE AND VALLEY CONFERENCE

DAIRYLAND CONFERENCE

SOUTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL RVC. Rows include Highland, Ithaca, Desoto, Seneca/Wauzeka-Stauben, Boscobel, Riverdale, Hillsboro.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL DC. Rows include Augusta, Pepin/Alma, Melrose-Mindoro, Whitehall, Blair-Taylor, C-FC, Eleva-Strum, Independence/Gilmanton.

Table with columns: SCHOOL, OVERALL SCC. Rows include Wisconsin Dells, Mauston, Poynette, Adams-Friendship, Wautoma, Westfield, Montello/Princeton/Green Lake.

RVC CHAMPION HIGHLAND

DC CHAMPION AUGUSTA

SCC CHAMPION WISCONSIN DELLS