

THROUGH MY LENS

Oh, that sunset

By NATE BEIER
Sports Reporter

I think it was a sign. At least, that's what I'm going to go with. I paid special attention to Friday's sunset. I took note of it because we hadn't seen a true sunset in what felt like three weeks or more.

I was driving home from Eau Claire, from one of the few sporting events I could find Friday night - a girls soccer game with Wautoma at Regis/McDonell.

I remarked to myself about this sunset as I watched the purple hues paint the gnarly branches of the naked trees that line the sides of the interstate corridor. I made it a point to just take in what I was enjoying. It was a Friday night that I ended work and could travel before it was dark out.

Let's face it, I don't get to enjoy that often. As much as I love my late nights and frantic schedule, it's important for me to recognize some of the special, quiet moments I get to enjoy.

Do you do that ever? Have you wanted to? Well, maybe you should.

I'll tie this so sport a bit better to justify its existence as a column in this edition of the Monroe County Herald.

Sunsets are a result of a sunny day.

The sun broke through Friday afternoon and it felt like a sign, for some reason, that our spring sports can now finally begin. That we can actually believe our schedules won't be chaos, that you can sit with your grilled meat of choice and be entertained by the sound of ball on a leather mitt, or the crack of a bat for a rousing double.

In my case, I watched the sun break through and add warmth to an otherwise chilly afternoon soccer game.

It was a unique opportunity for me to watch an entire soccer game (well, a 60 minute affair as the R/M co-op bested Wautoma 11-0).

This week we may get rain, we could still get snow. However, the sun broke. The fever of the changing seasons is snapped for all of us, so it's probably time we all get used to getting outside to rake, to dig, to garden...wait... this is a sports column... get outside and throw a ball, mash a maul, or jump a haul of something.

I tried rhyming and it was only mediocre success, I get it.

Let's get outside. I probably need to find those flip flop things I'm known for. I can soak up more vitamin D if I get more skin out in the sun. This time of year - it's great. I hope you enjoy it, too.



BANGOR BOYS BASKETBALL

READER



Reader's four-of-a-kind leave indelible mark on Bangor boys' basketball

Bangor's family Reader boys helped usher in the Golden Age of Bangor boys basketball over the course of the past decade. From the oldest, Jack, to the youngest, Will, and two Scenic Bluffs Players of the Year in between - Luke and Hank - the quartet has left a legacy few will rival. Herald Photos/Design/ Illustration by Nate Beier and Logan Everson.

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

There is no question that we're currently living in the golden age of Bangor boys' basketball.

Over a span that's now nearing a decade, the Cardinals have asserted themselves as the undisputed kings of the Scenic Bluffs Conference while also staking their claim as one of the best Division 5 programs in all of Wisconsin.

A sustained run like Bangor's is a product of a whole host of contributors over the years, but there has been one particular constant that has served as a thread line woven through each team during this incredible run: the presence of the Reader brothers.

At any given time in the last nine seasons, at least one of the four Reader brothers — Jack, Luke, Hank and Will — have been on the varsity roster for the Cardinals. They've all played indispensable roles in this Bangor dynasty, providing all-conference levels of play and invaluable leadership.

"Quite a legacy that Reader family leaves behind," said Bangor head coach Jacob Pederson, who has been the head coach for the last four years and was an assistant for three years before that. "I think the coolest thing is just the way they embrace each other as brothers. Never really saw them bickering or upset with somebody else when they were doing something. It's just the way they were as teammates. They're just great people."

Their collective contributions over this past decade were all borne out of a lifelong love of basketball, forged from their time growing up competing with one another and their friends. The cohesiveness on so many of those successful Bangor teams is something Hank credited at least in part to all the time so many of them spent together throughout the years.

"We live really close to an outdoor court and we live right around the school area, so all the kids would gather here," Hank said. "All summer long we'd play pickup games — after 10 a.m. everyone's there and play until dark."

Hank also recalled the ample time spent between the brothers playing on their family's basketball hoop in the garage in helping shape them as players.

"It was always war when you stepped in there.



Will Reader (second from left) holds the 2022 WIAA Division 5 state runner-up trophy along side his three brothers (from left to right): Jack, Luke and Hank. Herald photo contributed.

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Jacob Pederson
BANGOR BOYS BASKETBALL
HEAD COACH

It's one-on-one with your brothers — someone's going to be bleeding or crying or Mom and Dad are coming outside to break up the fight or something," he said. "That was always a great time. I really think the garage is what made all four of us boys so tough — just always beating up on each other and getting after it in the garage."

This stretch for the Readers began with the 2013-14 season, when Jack broke into the rotation as a sophomore for a Cardinals team that went a perfect 14-0 in Scenic Bluffs play on their way to a conference title. They would repeat that feat the following year, when freshman Luke entered the program.

In both those seasons, Bangor bowed out at home in the regional finals: a 50-48 loss to conference counterpart Hillsboro in 2014 and a 52-51 surprise defeat at the hands of Gilmanton

in 2015.

It was during the 2015-16 season — Jack's senior year — that the Cardinals cleared a major postseason hurdle.

In those playoffs, Bangor won itself a regional title by besting Blair-Taylor 87-85 in the regional finals. The Cardinals then were able to go on the road and pick up a dramatic 63-60 sectional semifinal win over a Hillsboro team that had beaten them twice in the regular season en route to a 14-0 record in Scenic Bluffs play.

Bangor fell heartbreakingly short of a state berth with a 57-55 sectional final loss to Barneveld, but the program still felt like it had made a huge stride in the right direction with their deep postseason run.

"Coming off those two losses, we definitely had a chip on our shoulder and it definitely kinda set the tone for the next few years going forward for how Bangor was going to look basketball-wise," Jack said.

The Cardinals reclaimed the top spot in the Scenic Bluffs with the 2016-17 campaign — the start of their current streak of six consecutive conference championships — and navigated their way back to the sectional finals for a second straight year. Unfortunately for them, they once again fell just shy of a trip to state with a 60-58 loss to Shullsburg.

The 2017-18 season — Luke's senior and Hank's freshman years — saw

Bangor clear its next playoff hurdle and go a couple steps further. The senior-laden Cardinals were the most dominant force in Division 5, reaching state for the first time since 1936 and continuing on to capture the program's first state title.

"To have it all come together in our last season and go out with a win — it's a nice memory to have as the last memory of high school basketball," Luke said. "Our whole team — there

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