

THROUGH MY LENS

How to assess our past spring

By NATE BEIER
Sports Editor

Today is as good a time as any to look back and assess what our spring sports season was like.



Maybe this isn't the time, however, as I'm still gliding on the success of the Bangor baseball team and its run to a second place finish at state. Even so, I think I can objectively talk about our spring today.

In terms of actual ability from our area conferences across all sports, I have to say the Coulee Region was as average as they come. We've had some stellar spring showings in the past, but this was not one of them.

Sure, Bangor baseball's run to the final game of the season was fun as all get out, but I think if we take a real look at what our area was, it's safe to say there's room to improve.

On the softball side, the Mississippi Valley Conference was average at best. Tomah was clearly the best team, but couldn't hang with opponents from outside of MVC action very well, which was proven in a near-no-hit loss in a regional final.

In the Scenic Bluffs, Bangor was solid, but didn't play enough non-conference games to actually get tested by decent teams, which was proven in a regional final loss to Luther.

The Coulee Conference had the best showing in the postseason as Luther qualified for state for the first time ever and Westby played in a sectional final, losing the eventual D3 state champs, Poynette.

Dairyland champ, Blair-Taylor and Ridge and Valley champ, Seneca both had good regular seasons, but playing sub-par competition for nearly all of their conference schedule only seemed to hold them back from actually reaching their full potential.

Baseball teams were tested, naturally, due to the pitching rules. One ace can carry a team far, but not the whole way as limitations prohibit teams from riding one arm the entire season.

That being said, baseball becomes a bit unpredictable due to its pitching issues. Unpredictable translates to more fun in my world, however.

Aquinas had a red hot start this spring, but ended with much to be desired, I think. The Blugolds, despite all their hitting power and depth in the field, couldn't get out of the sectional they hosted, instead losing to eventual D3 state runner-up St. Croix Falls.

We knew Aquinas was good, but who else did we think was a quality baseball club this year?

Were the likes of Central and Onalaska good? They had winning records, so by default they should be, but they both made quick exits from the

(BEIER) cont. pg 3B

TOMAH/SPARTA SPEEDWAY

Sellner wins Sportsman Feature at annual Tim Myer Shootout

By PAUL REICHERT
Sports Writer

Back in the late 1990s and the early 2000s the driver to beat and be aware of on the Sportsman racing scene in central Wisconsin was Tim Myer.

Myer racked up three track championships at Tomah-Sparta Speedway and was a driver on the rise when he left us too soon in 2001. Since 2015 we have honored the memory of Tim Myer with the annual Tim Myer Memorial Shootout. On Friday, June 17 the latest Tim Myer Memorial Shootout was held at the Tomah-Sparta Speedway.

While the Sportsmen take the spotlight, the

Dillon Sellner (top right) stays boxed in by the competition while heading into the back stretch of the track during the sportsman's heat races. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.



(TOMAH-SPARTA) cont. pg 5B

WIAA DIVISION 4 BASEBALL STATE RUNNER-UP: BANGOR

Tales of Redemption and Revenge

Cropp quiets ghosts of the past with game-winning catch

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Returning to the baseball diamond this spring wasn't easy for Samuel Cropp.

The memory of the way the 2021 season had ended still weighed heavily on Cropp's mind and continued to do so well into 2022.

In last year's sectional finals, Cropp and the Bangor Cardinals suffered a 4-2 loss to Southwestern to fall agonizingly short of a trip to state. A Southwestern rally in the bottom of the fifth proved to be the difference, featuring the pivotal play that Cropp replayed in his head countless times since.

With the bases loaded and two outs in a 1-1 game, Southwestern's Colson Splinter laced a ball toward right. Cropp raced in and managed to get a glove on it, but the ball popped free and the Wildcats scored three runs on the play en route to the eventual win.

Southwestern moved on to the state tournament, while Bangor was left to wonder what could have been. For Cropp, that missed opportunity in Blanchardville haunted him and lingered in his mind.

"I made a mistake last year in a big game and, for the last year, it's been in my head," Cropp said. "Halfway through this season, I put it behind me."

Bangor head coach Todd Grant stressed that what happened to Cropp last year was not an error, noting that he was the only kid on the team who could've closed in fast enough to make a play on the ball at all.

"He's the only kid on our team that would've even gotten to that ball," said Bangor head coach Todd Grant. "I know he's been holding

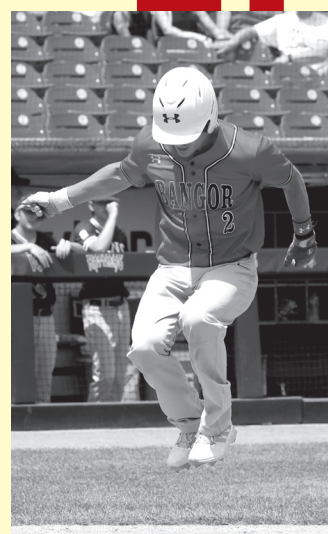
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Bangor's Sam Cropp (right) drifts back to earth after leaping into the arms of Will Reader (left) following the game-winning catch in last week's D4 state semifinal game. Cropp's diving catch in right field launched the Cardinal sluggers to the state finals appearance in program history. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.



Bangor's Reader Makes Good In Rematch With Columbus Catholic
2B



Wolfe Makes Impact After Missing Time in 2021 Postseason With Injury
2B

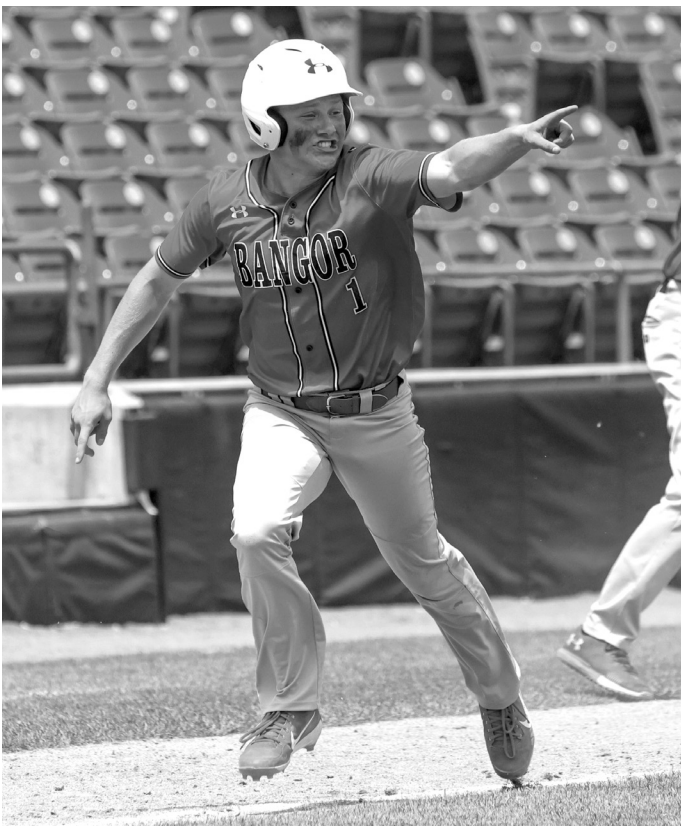
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Bangor's Sam Cropp took nearly half of the 2022 season to shake off a missed catch in the 2021 sectional final game with Southwestern that proved to be the deciding factor in keeping the Cardinals from a state berth that year. The sophomore outfielder bounced back in a big way this year, culminating in a game-winning snag to send BHS to the D4 title game. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

(CROPP)
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onto that.”
Nevertheless, the memory was a difficult burden for Cropp to carry as he turned the page to his sophomore season. He leaned on his faith to help him finally move past it and waited for a potential shot at redemption.

On an even grander stage, life presented him with that chance. In the bottom of the seventh of its state semifinal game against Columbus Catholic, Bangor was holding on for dear life.

The Cardinals had just scored seven runs in the top half of the inning to turn a 3-2 deficit into a 9-3 advantage, only to then see the Dons score five runs to trim that lead to 9-8. Runners sat at the corners with two outs and Columbus Catholic's Xane Adler up to bat.

Adler smacked a liner into right that was dropping quick. Cropp got a good jump on it and went into a slide to try and make a play on it. If he failed to haul it in, the tying run is in and odds are the winning run scores for the Dons if the ball squirts away from Cropp.

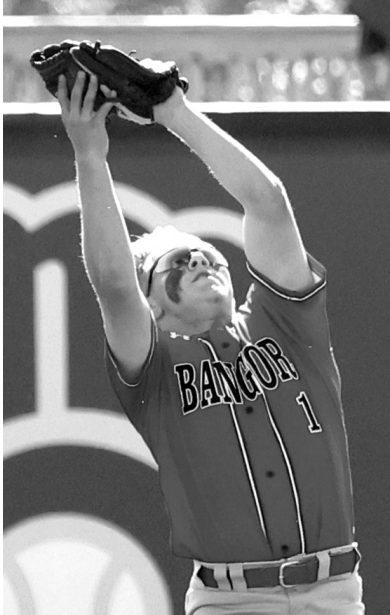
But when presented with this cosmic mulligan of sorts, Cropp wasn't about to let the opportunity go to waste. He successfully made that sliding catch for the final out of a 9-8 win that sent the Cardinals to the Division 4 state championship game.

“I got put on a bigger stage this year and I made the play,” Cropp said. “Made up for it.”

So often in sports, the redemption for a storybook moment never comes. It did for Cropp, and he took full advantage to ensure the team would head back to Bangor with a trophy — and provided himself some closure to boot.

“I was so happy for him,” an emotional Grant said. “I know he's been holding onto that, and he shouldn't be.”

BEYOND REDEMPTION



Bangor's Sam Cropp followed up his game-winning catch in the state semifinals with plenty of activity in the D4 championship contest

Cropp made the first three outs of this year's D4 title game and went on to finish with five catches for outs in the final game of the season

**One year later:
Bangor's Wolfe savors postseason; state journey after being sidelined with hip injury**



Bangor's Evan Wolfe emphatically stomps on home plate during the Cardinals' 7-run seventh inning rally against Marshfield Columbus Catholic. Wolfe, who anchored Bangor as its lead-off man as well as starting centerfielder, was injured in last year's regional final and made an early exit from the postseason. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

When Bangor bowed out in a 4-2 sectional final loss to Southwestern last year, Evan Wolfe could do nothing but sit by and watch everything unfold as a spectator.

Wolfe had previously suffered a hip fracture in the Cardinals' 8-5 regional final win over De Soto, leaving him sidelined for sectionals. Bangor eked out a 1-0 win over Scenic Bluffs' rival Royall in the sectional semifinals but fell a win short of state with that loss to the Wildcats.

“It really sucked sitting in the dugout watching them work hard in the sectional games, but there was nothing I could've done about it,” Wolfe said. “I just tried to regroup and come into this year working harder.”

Luckily for Wolfe, he still had one year of high school left and got to play a pivotal role for this Bangor team that wound up as the Division 4 state runner-up.

Once the Cardinals got to state, Wolfe did not let the opportunity go to waste and gave the team strong production out of the leadoff spot.

Wolfe went 2 for 4 with a walk, two RBIs and a run scored in Bangor's 9-8 state semifinal win over Columbus Catholic. He also finished 1 for 4 in the Cardinals' 12-3 state championship game defeat at the hands of Eau Claire Regis.

Though Bangor fell a win short of its ultimate goal, it was still a hell of a run for the program as it made its first state appearance in 26 years. Given the way the previous season ended for him, the whole experience was an understandably cathartic way for Wolfe to cap off his Bangor baseball career.

“This year at sectionals, we definitely had a goal and a grudge on our shoulders to get (to state),” Wolfe said. “It just means a lot being here with the team.”



Bangor's Evan Wolfe fist bumps teammate Ashton Michek in the dugout during the Division 4 state semifinal game against Columbus Catholic. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

Bangor's Reader enjoys measure of revenge in win over Columbus

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Bangor senior Will Reader's first taste of a state tournament came back in 2019 when he was a freshman riding the bench with the Bangor boys' basketball team.

The Cardinals were defending Division 5 state champions and had made it back to the Kohl Center for a second straight state trip.

In those 2019 state semifinals, Bangor suffered a brutal 69-66 loss after Columbus Catholic's Tom Nystrom buried the game-winning three — his first points of the game — at the buzzer to send the Dons on to the state championship game.

“Anytime we go up against Columbus Catholic, I think about that shot,” Reader said. “That just really brings out a different level of energy and drive — not wanting them to get another win like that on us.”

In an odd bit of coincidence, it was once again the familiar Dons from Marshfield who awaited the Cardinals when they punched their ticket to their first state baseball tournament since 1996.

In a fitting sequel of sorts to that 2019 boys' basketball state semifinal, the Bangor-Columbus Catholic state semifinal in baseball this year came right down to the wire with a final play making all the difference.

It took a sliding catch from Samuel Cropp with the tying run at third and the winning run at first for Columbus Catholic in the bottom of the seventh to put the finishing touches on a 9-8 win for the Cardinals — delivering a heartbreak to the Dons similar to what Bangor felt three years ago in Madison. “Just to get back at them and do what they



LEFT Bangor's Will Reader lays a hit on the ground during last week's Division 4 state championship game.

did to us,” Reader said. “It felt really good to be able to do that.”
Hank Reader, a 2021 Bangor graduate, was a key member of that 2018-19 Bangor boys' basketball team and happened to be on hand in Grand Chute for the state baseball tournament to cheer his brother and the Cardinals on.

While the Columbus Catholic connection didn't immediately jump out to him, Will

pointed it out to his older brother, adding a fun wrinkle to what was already a joyous occasion.

“(Will) said ‘that one kind of made it feel a bit better. After losing to them in basketball, now we get this one back in baseball in the semifinals,’” Hank said. “I wish I could've been out there playing with him, but proud of him.”

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RIGHT Bangor's Will Reader silently reacts after the Cardinals get out of a bases loaded jam against Columbus Catholic in the WIAA state tournament. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**