

# SPORTS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 2022 | kenoshanews.com | SECTION C

## COMMENTARY

# Hi, my name is...Mike Ramczyk

Kenosha News was there for new sports writer through cancer journey

Hello, Kenosha County. How in the heck are ya? Yup, it's me, Mike Ramczyk.

This is pretty much my personality.

I like to laugh, have a good time, talk to people and write funny. Or at least try.

I just turned 40 in June (Gem-

inis, stand up!), I am married to my lovely Twin Lakes sort-of native (Nippersink, ring a bell?) Erin for 11 years (together 19), and we have two beautiful, entertaining, intelligent and at-times annoying children, Coraline, 8, and Roman, 3.

It's not necessarily a full house, but there's enough chaos to go around here in Burlington.



MIKE RAMCZYK

As I sit and write this on a sunny summer morning at my "desk" at the dining room table, Coraline and Roman are in full-blown fort mode at 10 in the morning.

All four sectional cushions have formed a cozy, U-shaped fortress on the living room floor, in front of the TV, and Cora's already asked for a sucker twice, and I've said no twice.

It's 10:39 a.m.

My life right now is new sports guy replacing LEGENDARY Michael Johnson at the News, plus full-time stay-at-home dad

when my wife works her first-shift job at Rockwell Automation.

We often joke I'm not even the best writer in the household, as Erin crushes it as a marketing writer for her international company.

Then there's me talking about children's forts.

You catch the drift.

Well, at least others have said my work is good, sometimes.

I couldn't have gotten this job without the ringing endorsement of Johnson, a colleague and friend of mine over the past 15

years in journalism.

I wrote freelance for Mike the past 3 years since 2019.

Plus, Peter Jackel, our company's 'de-facto' sports editor, is a 40-year treasure over at the Racine Journal-Times. He's been working with me on KN stuff this past summer, and I had the privilege of covering Racine Raiders games with him this summer.

Peter and Mike are always positive, always had nice things to say about me, and loved

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## WISCONSIN FOOTBALL

# Mertz tunes in to a new message

Badgers' QB, Engram develop a comfort level

COLTEN BARTHOLOMEW  
Lee Newspapers

One of the most important relationships for the University of Wisconsin football team's offense has changed for a third time in three years.

The Badgers have a new play-caller, with Bobby Engram taking over as offensive coordinator this off-season. This comes after coach Paul Chryst assumed the role in 2021 and former offensive coordinator Joe Rudolph called plays in 2020.

Junior quarterback Graham Mertz is in line to start for the third consecutive season, meaning he's had a different voice in his helmet between plays each year he's been in charge of the huddle. A significant level of understanding between a play-caller and quarterback is needed for an offense to succeed. But Mertz's attempts to reach that symbiosis has required extra work due to the hot potato with the headset on the sideline.

"I think it's a fair question," Chryst said when asked if he thinks it's difficult for quarterbacks to adjust to new play-callers. "My answer would be I don't

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## FOOTBALL

# Banaszak named one of Wayne State's captains

KENOSHA NEWS SPORTS STAFF

DETROIT—Former Indian Trail football standout Sean Banaszak has been named one of Wayne State University's (Detroit) team captains for the upcoming 2022 season.

Head coach Paul Winters announced his 2022 captains during a special "Captains Presentation" prior to the Aug. 20 practice.

Banaszak, a redshirt senior, joins Cooper Kukal, Julius Wilkerson and Drake Reid.

While Wilkerson was a captain in 2021, Banaszak and the others are first-time captains.

Wayne State opens the 2022 campaign at 23rd-ranked Slippery Rock on Sept. 3.

## HIGH SCHOOLS



MIKE RAMCZYK, KENOSHA NEWS

Reymundo Solis (23) celebrates his goal with teammate Kane Bennage (5) Tuesday during Tremper's season-opening 5-0 victory at home over Central.

# An electric debut

Tremper boys soccer team in top form against Central

LEE NEWSPAPERS SPORTS STAFF

The Tremper High School boys soccer team started its season Tuesday with a performance worthy of its preseason ranking.

The Trojans, who are ranked sixth in Division 1 in the Wisconsin Soccer Coaches Association preseason poll, scored four goals in the first half and rolled to a 5-0 victory over Central in the Kenosha Clash Invitational at Ameche Field.

A trio of seniors led the way in the first half for Tremper. Forward Conner Heath scored two goals and midfielder Alex Gotz and forward Reymundo Solis scored one goal each.

Senior forward Daniel Chi-

appetta had two assists and Gotz and sophomore midfielder Dylan Bezotte had one each.

"We put the game under control in the first half with the four goals," Tremper coach Rob Blascoe said.

Senior defender Isaiah Montero made "a great run out of the back," Blascoe said, to score the only goal of the second half for the Trojans. Heath had the assist.

Senior goalkeeper Ben Wajerski made three saves in 70 minutes for Tremper.

**INDIAN TRAIL 2, BURLINGTON 1:** The Hawks kicked off their season with a nonconference victory in the Kenosha Clash Invitational Tuesday at Ameche Field.

David Chon scored both goals for Indian Trail. In the 20th minute, Guilherme Santos sent in a perfect cross to Chon, who headed the ball in past Burling-

ton's goalkeeper.

About 10 minutes later, Chon was taken down inside the box and was awarded a penalty kick, which he converted.

Chon led the Hawks with 18 goals last season.

Indian Trail's defense, led by Ayden Reed and Adam Hatch, didn't allow a goal until the 67th minute, when Benjamin Graham scored on a long bender for Burlington.

After gaining the early advantage, the Hawks held on defensively and did not allow Burlington to score until the 67th minute in the second half.

Hawks coach Jeff Laurent also said Carlos Manjarrez "did a really nice job of controlling the middle."

**UNION GROVE 3, SHORELAND LUTHERAN 0:** The Broncos, ranked ninth in Division 2 in the Wis-

consin Soccer Coaches Association preseason poll, scored all of the goals in the first half of a nonconference season-opening match at Union Grove.

Union Grove scored its goals in the third, 10th and 25th minutes, but didn't score again.

A lot of that had to do with the play of Pacers sophomore goalkeeper Connor Hahm, who made 14 saves, including stops on a breakaway and a penalty kick in the second half.

Shoreland coach Dan Hahm, Connor's father, was pleased with the second-half effort.

"I appreciated our team's endurance in overcoming many difficulties they faced," Dan Hahm said. "For the boys to keep Union Grove scoreless in the second half is a testament to their strong mental fortitude to persevere."

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## FOOTBALL

# Watson dressed for success

Rookie wide receiver may play Thursday against Chiefs

JASON WILDE  
For Lee Newspapers

GREEN BAY — Christian Watson just couldn't do it. He looked too good, he felt too good.

The Green Bay Packers rookie wide receiver knew he wasn't playing in last week's preseason game against the New Orleans Saints at Lambeau Field. Just off the physically unable to perform

list, Watson hadn't even taken a full-speed 11-on-11 snap in practice yet.

The only reason head coach Matt LaFleur had him dress in full uniform and pads was so Watson could go through pregame warm-ups — another step in his comeback from the off-season knee surgery that had

Please see WATSON, Page C3

■ **More inside:** Coach Matt LaFleur plans to rest starts Thursday in final preseason game, Page C6.



MIKE ROEMER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Green Bay Packers wide receiver Christian Watson looks on during a preseason game against the New Orleans Saints Friday in Green Bay.



## Ramczyk

From C1

working with me. I loved working with them.

And now, hello, dream come true, I get to work directly with Peter.

Peter is one of those writers I've admired my entire life, and when you read something by him, you just can't fathom ever being able to write something that good.

I love that I get to pick his brain whenever I want now.

And I'm sure you News readers loved Michael Johnson, who was with the News about 14 years, I believe, and still lives in Kenosha with his wife and son.

Let me tell you about who Mike really is as a human being.

Back in December 2018, Michael and Dan Truttschel and others in the Kenosha News sports department were there for me in my darkest time of need.

My mom, Joni Ramczyk, had just passed away Dec. 27, 2018, and she was my best friend. My kids and I still visit her grave at St. Kilian in Lake Geneva a few times per month.

You never get over the loss of a mother. Nobody loves you more

than your mother, and no love feels deeper than that connection.

When I walked into the funeral home for the wake, trying to hold back tears as old video montages of our favorite times displayed, I saw an outpouring of support in the form of flowers from various family and friends.

At the time, I was the sports editor of the Southern Lakes Newspapers, and Johnson and I only knew each other sporadically through covering games or tournaments together every once in awhile for the previous 10 years.

We would always help each other with stories, if either needed information or someone's contact info.

So you can imagine how surprised I was when I saw a big, green, lovely pot of flowers from the "Kenosha News Sports Department" waiting for my family.

Wow, talk about condolences.

Then, I was laid off at SLN three months after my mom passed, and by June 19 (2 days after my birthday), 2019, I was diagnosed with Stage 3 colon cancer.

Long story short, I thought I was going to die. Who wouldn't?

I've written about my cancer journey so much, I don't want to go into crazy detail again, but

I will say I had to have surgery July 18 to remove the tumor, my wife's water broke 5 weeks early the NEXT DAY, and my son Roman was born the day after that.

With me at Froedtert in Milwaukee in a hospital bed recovering, still thinking I was going to die, Roman was born—not breathing, Apgar score of 1, and had to be rushed to the NICU.

So the night of July 20, 2019, Roman was incubated at the Women's Pavilion in West Allis, I was at Froedtert and mom was overnight at Lakeland in Elkhorn.

Roman was transferred to Children's Hospital a month later and stayed there 70 long, grueling, painful days.

He had a major surgery to repair a fistula.

When we finally got home, people showed more love and support with a benefit in October, and this paper, the Journal-Times and the Regional News ran the story of our journey to help support the benefit.

We raised \$20,000 in one night. So thank you to everyone. And it didn't end.

I began chemotherapy in August 2019, and Johnson gave me work. He started giving me games to cover for the News, and it really kept my spirit alive and

made me want to keep fighting.

By March 2020, I was done with chemo and there were no traces of evidence of cancer left in my body.

I can't "pop champagne" until June 2024, and I get blood check-ups every 3 months, and liquid biopsies, which are all still scary, but I'm good.

I'm alive, I'm healthy, and I'm lucky.

It's stuff like this that's made me SO HAPPY to be here with you guys now.

My very first freelance gig for a daily was with Sports Editor Dave Marran and the Kenosha News, the Pleasant Prairie Triathlon, back in 2005, and I've loved the paper and more importantly the people that have worked here since.

I had an opportunity to join the staff as a part-time sports guy back in 2015, but things just didn't work out.

I've at times kicked myself ever since wondering if I made the right choice.

Well, with me, I can promise passion, love and devotion to area sports.

I have a journalism degree from UW-Whitewater, and I've covered my passion for the past 20 years, and now the Kenosha

News and Racine Journal-Times are two more newsrooms I've written in, along with the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Burlington Standard Press, Lake Geneva Regional News and Southern Lakes Newspapers.

So when it comes to southeastern Wisconsin high school sports, it's safe to say I know just about everyone.

But I'm also excited about the new challenge of getting to know Kenosha, enjoying Lake Michigan, hitting up a Kingfish game one of these days and possibly going to some of my other favorite spots like the Boat House, the Spot and the Brat Stop.

Please don't hesitate to call me (262-210-3617) with a story idea, or just say hello. I really do love meeting new people and getting to know all of the families involved in sports and outside of sports.

Also, please email me at [mramczyk@kenoshanews.com](mailto:mramczyk@kenoshanews.com).

This really is the perfect fit, I feel, a place I've always wanted to be the sports guy at, and it actually happened.

Dreams come true. I'm living proof.

Mike Ramczyk is a sports reporter for the Kenosha News.

## Watson

From C1

sidelined him for the first half of training camp.



Rodgers



LaFleur

That's not unusual. After deciding not to risk quarterback Aaron Rodgers and the rest of his veteran starters in Thursday night's preseason finale at Kansas City, LaFleur is still having the entire team go through pregame warm-ups at Arrowhead Stadium — Rodgers included.

But once those warm-ups end, you won't be seeing No. 12 on the visitors' bench still in his pads and full uniform. Most players change out of their uniform and into normal sideline apparel once they're done with their workout.

Just not Watson.

"I left mine on," Watson said, proudly. "I felt really good. I came in (to the locker room) and I talked to Coach LaFleur. I was like, 'Should I take it off?' He was like, 'Nah, you look good. Just leave it on.' (I said), 'Yeah, I feel good too'

"Obviously, it was my first time putting it on and getting to go out there. Even if he didn't tell me to leave it on. I probably would've left it on anyways. It felt really good. It's better than street clothes."

Well, except for the cleats.

"The shoes were a little tough. I just got some new ones. I was breaking them in. So, my feet were hurting a little bit," Watson said, still beaming. "Aside from that, I felt good."

LaFleur wouldn't commit to Watson playing against the Chiefs. He was a full-fledged participant in practice all week, though, and even if he's lining up with backup quarterback Jordan Love instead of Rodgers, it'd be beneficial.

"We'll see where he's at," LaFleur said Tuesday. "But if he's able to go, he will go."

Even if he doesn't, Watson has been doing everything in his power to get up to speed. And the most important thing the 6-foot-5, 208-pound Watson has been doing is following Rodgers around every chance he gets — coming off the field after an offensive series, heading back from practice, in the locker room, anywhere he can track the four-time NFL MVP down.

"He asks a lot of questions. He cares about it," Rodgers said. "He comes over and tries to be on the same page if anything happened — whether it was good, bad or indifferent. So I enjoy his approach.

"He's got a different skill set. He's a big body who can run. (We've) just got to get him a little more consistent tracking the ball down the field, but the thing that I've seen with him is just mentally, the improvement from day to day."

Rodgers said during Sunday's practice, he made an adjustment to the play in the huddle — one of his patented not-on-the-paper-version-of-the-offense changes — to test him.

"It's something he's never done before, and he went out and did it perfect," Rodgers recounted. "It's those little things like that that start to gain that trust and that confidence — and gets you excited about (him)."

The next day, however, Rodgers gave him another adjustment at the line of scrimmage with a hand signal, and Watson missed it.

Rodgers also has clearly been testing Watson in other ways. There have been a number of 11-on-11 snaps where Watson probably wasn't the primary read in the progression, but Rodgers threw to him anyway. Whether it's Watson's route-running or pass-catching, Rodgers wants to make up for lost time by seeing what the kid's got.

"I feel like I can lean on him and rely on him for a lot," Watson said of his relationship with Rodgers. "Obviously being a rook, I have a lot to learn. Even (with) knowing the offense and knowing the installs, there's a lot more outside of that.

"I've been able to lean on him and ask him questions and he's been open, talking and getting the nuances down. I'm excited to continue to go back in there. Obviously getting the live reps with him helps."

Watson admitted that despite his dedication to taking mental reps while reduced to spectator earlier in camp, he's definitely in catch-up mode. While fellow rookie Romeo Doubs has been one of the stars of camp, he has had his own struggles with drops and mental errors — the mistakes that come with being in your first NFL season.

"With Christian, it's just staying on him. He was out for so long, that's tough mentally," Rodgers said. "Regardless of whether he's behind or not from a preparation standpoint, it's just hard to not be able to practice out there. So it's (about) being intentional with those guys about conversations, (on a) friendship level, and getting those guys to feel comfortable here.

"Because as much as we're going to hold them accountable, this still is a tight-knit group and we want everybody to feel great about their role here, to feel great about their spot on the team — and those two as much as anybody."

What's realistic to expect from Watson this season, starting with the Sept. 11 opener at Minnesota, is hard to say.

The Packers need a down-the-field threat to take the top off op-

posing defenses the way Marquez Valdes-Scantling did the past four years. With a 4.36-second 40-yard dash time coming out of North Dakota State, Watson fits the bill.

For his part, Watson wants to do as much as the coaches will give him. He did struggle early in the week with his conditioning despite his cardio work while rehabbing his knee — "If I'm feeling 100% with the knee, it's not going to help if I'm only able to do three plays and I'm gassed," he admitted — but believes there's plenty of time for getting into football shape.

While running extra sprints after practice will help with that, running after Rodgers after mistakes or after practices will be even more helpful.

"There's going to be a lot of trial and error obviously with the young guys because we haven't been here — '12' has a lot of experience; we don't," Watson said. "I know we're rookies, but he's not going to treat us like rookies. When he's disappointed in what you're doing, you really learn from those things, when you can see it immediately after a play.

"I feel like I'm here for a reason. I feel like I have the capabilities to go out there and play really well in the NFL. I think getting those live reps in practice will be more than enough to be on the same page with '12.' I think when the time comes for me to play, I'll be ready."

## High schools

From C1

### Girls volleyball

**INDIAN TRAIL 3, ST. JOSEPH 0:** Hawks junior setter Alyssa Ray earned her 1,000th career assist as Indian Trail swept a nonconference season-opening match 25-11, 25-10, 25-15 Tuesday against the Lancers.

Ray had 28 assists and is fourth all-time at Indian Trail with half of her prep career yet to go, Hawks coach Ashley Kuehl said.

Other leaders were Lanie Hawley with 13 kills, Callesta Styles with four blocks, Hawley and Ray with five aces each and Mia Johnson with 14 digs.

"The girls played aggressive and confident, and came to win," Kuehl said.

### Girls golf

**CENTRAL:** The Falcons, ranked No. 1 in the Golf Coaches Association of Wisconsin Division I preseason poll, continued to dominate teams in southeast Wisconsin Tuesday, winning their third major tournament in the last two weeks by

edging Brookfield East by four shots in the Mukwonago Varsity Invitational at Morningstar Golfers Club in Waukesha.

Led by junior twins Katelyn and Kylie Walker, Central totaled 304, four ahead of the Spartans (school-record 308), who are tied for fifth in the rankings. Katelyn finished second with a 1-under-par 71 and Kylie shot an even-par 72 to take fourth.

The Walkers had a battle for the top spots with another pair of sisters, junior Madison Haugen and freshman Payton Haugen of Brookfield East. Madison was the tournament medalist with a 3-under 69 and Payton took third in the WIAA tiebreaker after she and Katelyn Walker tied at 71.

The other scores for the Falcons' top four were a 79 by senior Elle O'Reilly and an 82 by junior



MIKE RAMCZYK KENOSHA NEWS

Connor Heath (9) cocks back his right leg seconds before scoring his second goal of Tuesday's 5-0 victory over Central.

Chloe Brown.

The top four teams in the tournament were ranked in the top 10 in Division 1. No. 9 Oconomowoc was third (319) and No. 7 Arrowhead was fourth (329).

### Girls tennis

**CENTRAL 7, DELAVAN-DARIEN 0:** The Falcons swept the Comets in a Southern Lakes Conference dual

meet Tuesday at Delavan.

Central lost just five games in singles and five in doubles.

Gwen Hammond won 6-0, 6-0 over Delavan-Darien's Rylee Crull at No. 1, Lauren Werlinger won 6-0, 6-1 over McKenna O'Grady at No. 2, Ella Alcalde won 6-4, 6-0 over Sophia Szcrap at No. 3 and Ava Phillips won 6-0, 6-0 over Emily Lock at No. 4.

The No. 1 doubles team of Grace Hanke and Gianna Mandli beat Janelle Simons and Delany Thone 6-2, 6-0; Mary Kinzler and Ani Minic won 6-0, 6-2 at No. 2 over McKenzie Mohr and Reagan Pelnar; and Morgan Chyla and Nina Pelli beat Grace Johnson and Megan Markley 6-1, 6-0 at No. 3.

At a quadrangular Monday at Mukwonago, the Falcons beat both Mukwonago and Port Washington 5-2, and lost to Eau Claire Memorial 4-3.

Central swept singles against Mukwonago and Port Washington, all in straight sets. Hammond won all three of her matches while losing just three games, and Phillips also won three matches.

In doubles, Chyla and Pelli won two of their three matches at No. 3. They lost the first set to Lucia Crawford and Olivia Cooper of Eau Claire Memorial, but came back to win the match 3-6, 6-2, 10-5.

Hanke and Mandli lost two tough three-set matches, to Memorial's Kimberly Harvey and Katelyn Anderson (6-4, 3-6, 13-11) and to Grace Neitzke and Gaby Ortiz of Port Washington (6-1, 2-6, 10-8).

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