

Plenty to touch on while waiting out long transition to spring

The wait for spring's arrival has finally allowed time to write a column for the first time in several months. As luck would have it, the timing might not be better with several hot-button sports topics intersecting at once.

From the local point of view, obviously this is one of those frustrating years where winter has the upper hand over spring. When spring does show up, so do the April showers.

The prep spring season of 2022 is going to be condensed, especially for those teams that need dry ground, temperatures above freezing and reasonable wind speeds to play in. The toughest part about years like this is the lack of practice time to really work on those game situations you can't truly work on in a gym. We're at the point now where once the weather allows games to be played, game days will outnumber practice days.

Not like this is the first time, nor will it be the last in these parts. This year is a little more frustrating because the snow has basically been gone for weeks. It's not like we're waiting for it to melt. All we need is normal and that's been impossible to get so far.

Maybe we're starting to turn the corner with some warmth predicted for late in the week, finally. While the forecast can't ever seem to eliminate the precipitation, it will be nice to see green grass and leaves around here before too long.

For me, this spring is going to be an interesting one juggling all of the local teams' condensed game-heavy schedules, a softball-playing daughter and her graduation, the start of youth baseball for her brother and whatever else will get in the way. It's going to be a whirlwind, sleep-and-rest deprived next six to seven weeks.

I didn't get a chance to write my annual Milwaukee Brewers prediction column, and doing something 12 games in is kind of like cheating. With the off-season lockout, I didn't really think too much about the Brewers until it was certain baseball was going to happen.

The concern for 2022 is the same as it's been the past couple of years. I'm not going for clickbait proclaiming some obscure reason why they might fail. You still wonder if this team will ever hit well enough to seriously contend in October. Twelve games isn't a huge sample size in a 162-game season. And it's not like they're doing miserably. They are 7-5.

But the untimely strikeouts, lack of key hits when runners do get on and the lack of overall power shown so far has to make fans nervous. If the Brewers are going to make a run, Christian Yelich and Keston Hiura have to figure it out. If Yelich turns out to be a two-year wonder, that's one heck of a contract the Brewers are stuck with for some time. Maybe Monday's grand slam



Matt's Bleacher Shots

Matt Frey

in a 6-1 win over Pittsburgh is a sign that better days are coming.

Pitching was perceived to be the strength of the club coming in and that seems to remain the case so far. The main problem cropping up has been walks. They've resulted in pitchers throwing too many pitches or facing a couple too many batters in an outing and the opposition getting a few more runs than they should.

One wonders if guys like Devon Williams and Freddy Peralta aren't as sharp just because spring training was a little shorter and this is just an early-season phase. It was good to see Corbin Burnes and Brandon Woodruff look much better in their second starts than they did in their first outings. Reliever Trevor Gott has been the team's most pleasant early-season surprise.

I have to think the National League Central Division race will still come down to Milwaukee and St. Louis. Yeah, the Cubs have shown some early spunk and I would think they're certainly capable of third place, maybe by default. Cincinnati has blown things up and will struggle and it's always hard to take Pittsburgh seriously over the 162-game long haul, even though they always play the Brewers tough, even if they don't beat Milwaukee all that often.

Yes, there are concerns but I still think 90-93 wins is a realistic prediction.

Moving downtown to Fiserv Forum, the Milwaukee Bucks tipped off defense of their 2021 NBA title Sunday with an ugly 93-86 win over Chicago in game one of that first-round series.

After a blistering start, the Bucks turned the ball over a ton, took some quick shots and had some rebounding lulls to fall behind by five. But the Bucks got it done when they needed to.

I liken it to game one of last year's opening series with Miami. The Bucks were lucky to win that game, but they did, they went on to sweep the series and we all know what happened from there.

I think the same thing will happen in this series. The Bucks should sweep Chicago or, at worst, win in five. From there, the road to a championship will be rockier than last year. Milwaukee may need to win each of the remaining three series in seven games. While 51-31 isn't an eye-popping regular season, a closer look shows the Bucks certainly coasted through parts of it and basically forfeited a few games to rest people. They tanked the last game to make sure they got Chicago in round one, which might be a good move. We'll see.

Can't say I watched the regular season games with great regularity, but it seems when the Bucks wanted to play ball, they showed they are still championship caliber. They won some big Eastern Conference games on the road. Turnovers seemed to be their biggest bugaboo when I did watch and they struggled.

Can't wait to see how this playoff run unfolds. Watching Giannis Antetokounmpo play when everything is on the line is always worth the price of admission. There simply is no player on Earth like him.

The end of April also means the NFL Draft is upon us and in Cheesehead Country, this year's selection process is of great interest as the Green Bay Packers try to lick their wounds from January's devastating playoff

loss to San Francisco and the unpopular but probably necessary trade of all-pro wide receiver Davante Adams.

With picks 22 and 28 in the first round and two more second-round picks, the Packers can go a lot of different ways. Everyone knows they need wide receivers — certainly a stud and some capable bodies for depth. Do they trade up to get that stud? Do they trade a pick or two to get a veteran? I still think that might happen. Do they surprise everyone and wait until the second round to get one? The signing of Sammy Watkins last week was kind of 'meh' to me. He might be a good piece. He also might not make the opening day roster.

This will be one of Green Bay's most fascinating drafts in a long time. No matter what they do at receiver, no one is going to replace Adams' skill set in my opinion. Heck the whole offensive philosophy might change and revolve around running backs Aaron Jones and AJ Dillon and the offensive line. I could see the Packers finally devoting more resources to defense and trying to win games that way. I can't wait to see what general manager Brian Gutekunst does.

But, I also haven't lost the gut feeling that hit the moment Robbie Gould kicked that game-winning field goal for the 49ers. The Packers blew their best chances to get to the Super Bowl with Aaron Rodgers the past two seasons. I don't want to say the window is closed, but one week before the draft it certainly doesn't feel as open as it was in 2020 and 2021.

Lastly, back to high school sports for a moment. In a school year that has seen its share of local head coaching changes, especially in Medford, there are two more new ones to report looking forward to next year.

First, Morgan Wilson, the assistant the past three falls under Medford girls swim coach Betsy Meinel, has taken over the head position. Meinel, an optometrist in her day job, gave birth to her first child recently and stepped down in February after a job well done over seven seasons for the program she once starred for.

Medford is also looking for a new girls head basketball coach after the resignation of Greg Klapatauskas, who is also stepping away from his longtime post on the football coaching staff. In two years, his Raider teams went 21-25 overall and 13-9 in the GNC. Last year's team was a Division 2 WIAA regional champion.

The new head basketball coach will be the girls program's fifth in an eight-year span.

Matt Frey is the Sports Editor at The Star News.

NRB approves 2022 migratory bird season framework, regulations

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources announced last week the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board (NRB) voted unanimously during its April board meeting to approve the 2022 migratory bird season framework and regulations.

Thanks to input from hunters and new scientific research, changes are coming to the 2022 migratory bird hunting season. Highlights from the approved season structure include:

- ★ An update to the definition of the Open Water Duck Zone boundary. The updated definition incorporates adjacent rooted vegetation, floating cattail mats and Long Tail and Little Tail points as part of the mainland shore.

- ★ Simplified regulations for the open water restrictions on approved inland open water hunting lakes by decreasing the distance from shore to 500 feet.

- ★ The North and Open Water Zone scaup season will be structured as two scaup per day for the first 45 days of the season and one scaup per day for the final 15 days of the season. The South Zone scaup season will remain one scaup for the first 15 days and two scaup for the final 45 days.

"The 2022 season frameworks are based on the most current scientific data, as well as on input from the public, conservation and hunting groups and results from a waterfowl hunter survey," said Taylor Finger, DNR migratory bird ecologist. "We used all the tools in our toolbox to collect public input. We used virtual meetings and expanded online outreach to ensure engagement with our customers. In total, we received more than

See **DUCK** on page 9

Bowling

The Sports Page

Businessman's League

Men			
Casey Nernberger	270	Casey Nernberger	764
Todd Metz	269	Lane Ruch	737

Women

Kim Virnig	258	Lori Zenner	636
Cheryl Wibben	237	Kim Virnig	634

April 14: Melvin Companies 28, Werner Sales and Service 12; Medford Motors 30, Rural Insurance 10; Sierra Pacific 29, Rocky's Cozy Kitchen 11; Jensen Chip and Seal 26, Sports Page 14.

Tuesday Night Mixed

Josh Dassow	267	Josh Dassow	749
Roger Smith	261	Roger Smith	677
Rick Acker	259	Rick Acker	675

April 12: Medford Co-op 26, Schmidtfranz Auto 9; Riemer Builders 21, High View I 14; High View II 27, Stetsonville Lumber 8.

Classy Ladies

Julie Smith	227	Julie Smith	594
Laina Stendahl	211	Lisa Bub	561
Jackie Rhyner	203	Trudy Gunn	552
Trudy Gunn	203	Laina Stendahl	541

April 14: Klinner Insurance 7, P&E 0; Moosie's Ice Cream 5, Rand's Trucking 2; Loos Machine 5, Pauline's Hair Fashions 2; Abby Bank 7, J&B Custom Carpentry 0.

Blue Mondays

Jean Egle	192	Anna Goessl	522
Anna Goessl	191	Margie Guziak	496
Margie Guziak	188	Lisa Bub	495

April 11: Misfits 4, Holy Rollers 3; Bakers 5, Medford Motors 2; Sports Page 5, Alley Oops 2; Werner Sales 5, Strikes R Us 2.

EASTERN CLOVERBELT CONFERENCE

SOFTBALL STANDINGS

	Conf.		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
Colby-Abbotsford	2	0	2	0
Loyal-Greenwood	0	0	2	1
Columbus Catholic	0	0	1	1
Neillsville	0	0	0	1
Owen-Withee	0	0	0	1
Gilman	0	1	0	2
Spencer	0	1	0	3

April 19: Colby-Abbotsford 6, Gilman 0; Loyal-Greenwood 18, Pittsville 3; Almond-Bancroft 9, Columbus Catholic 5; Amherst 17, Spencer 0.

April 21: Colby-Abbotsford at Gilman, Columbus Catholic at Neillsville, Owen-Withee at Stratford.

April 22: Gilman at Flambeau, Neillsville at Spencer, Loyal-Greenwood at Colby-Abbotsford, Owen-Withee at Columbus Catholic.

April 23: Auburndale and Rib Lake at Spencer.

April 25: Loyal-Greenwood at Blair-Taylor, Auburndale at Neillsville, Columbus Catholic at W.R. Assumption, Stratford at Spencer.

April 26: Gilman at Spencer DH, Neillsville at Colby-Abbotsford DH, Loyal-Greenwood at Owen-Withee DH, Columbus Catholic at Athens.

April 28: Gilman at Loyal-Greenwood, Columbus Catholic at Spencer, Owen-Withee at Colby-Abbotsford.