

COMMENTARY

Bay-Area jewel must be preserved

Like many other permanent South Shore and Bay-Area residents, I have been following with great interest the conversations regarding the future of the Bayfield Recreation Center — an invaluable regional gem that the Bayfield School District is considering closing or selling.

What matters right now is that decisions for what happens next must be based upon facts, not on beliefs, not on hearsay, not on clumsy musings of dusty Adam Smith economic models. Which brings me to Bayfield senior Aiden Mckuen, and the powerful impact, in his own words, this wonderful facility has had on his life:



PAUL BARNES

“The Bayfield Recreation Center has been a huge part of my life for as long as I can remember,” Mckuen said. “I went from being a junior varsity benchwarmer scoring zero points as a junior, to a varsity starter the next year averaging about 20 points per game — thanks to the recreation center. I’d go to there every day after work last summer to work out and practice because I didn’t want to ride the bench my senior year. It was also a huge outlet for me during COVID, when the outside basketball court gave my friends and I a place to go and something to do when nothing else was available. The results spoke for themselves this season, which led to a lot of opportunities for me that would have never come had the Recreation Center not been around. I met my closest friends there, and we continue to use the center as our normal hangout spot almost every day. Losing it will greatly affect the younger athletes, like I was, who don’t have a car to train in Washburn or Ashland.”

Mckuen will be carrying his well-developed work ethic into a two-year welding program at Northwood Technical College in Superior in August.

As long as I’m at it, here are the thoughts of Melissa Martinez, director of the Washburn Area Chamber of Commerce and recognized as a Bay-Area powerhouse in economic development who has demonstrated tremendous success in grant-writing and fundraising for Washburn businesses:

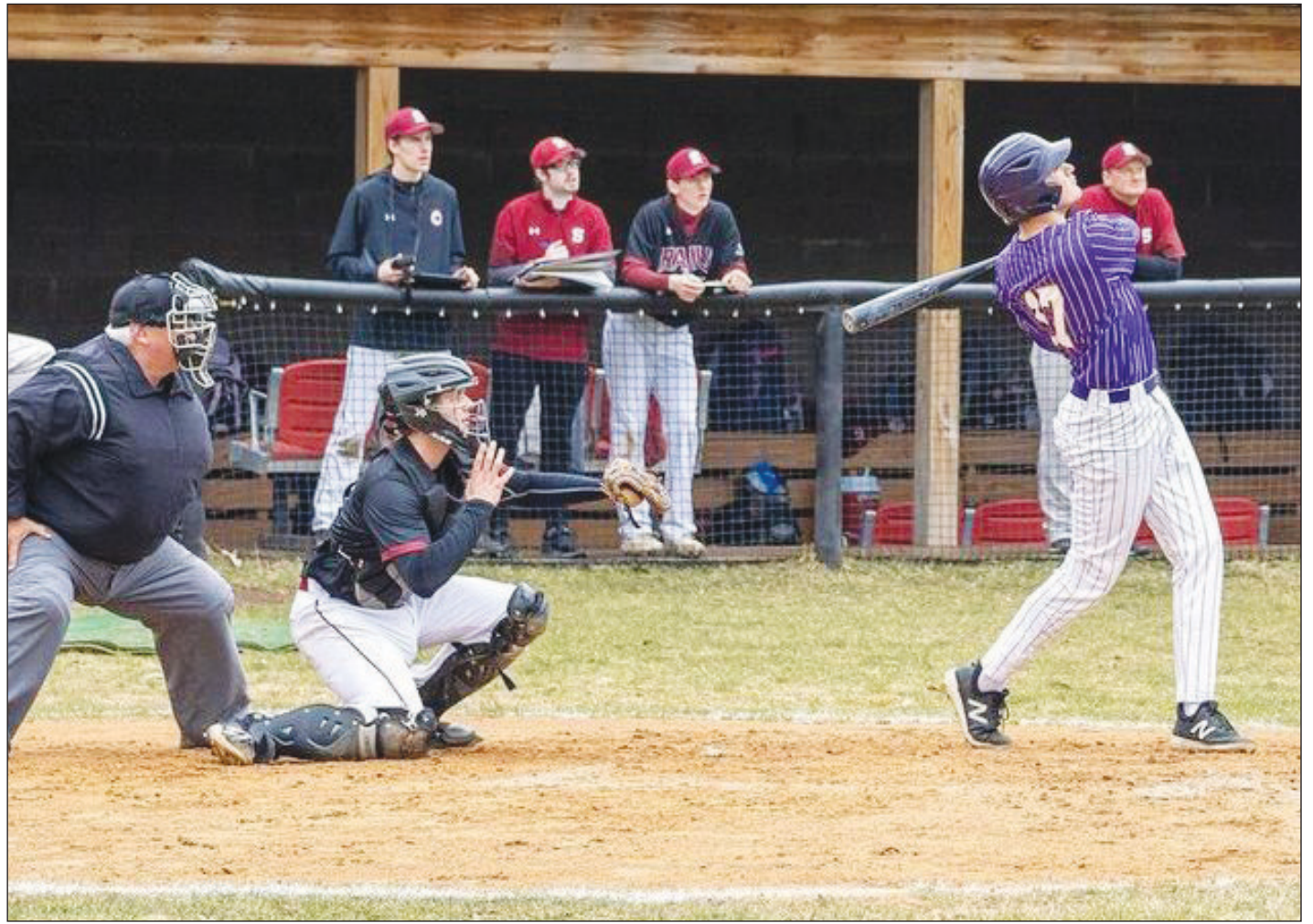
“The Bayfield Recreation Center is an important asset in our area,” said Martinez. “It contributes to the high quality of life that we enjoy here in the Bay Area. Just like Ashwabay, the center’s influence far exceeds that of its original intent. A solution can be found, but not if decisions and votes are rushed. I hope that any final decision is withheld until all sides can sit down to brainstorm ideas. That would give everyone time to pull together and create a plan of action.”

So, there you have it. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion but, if one is inclined to dismiss or, worse, oppose the words of Mckuen and Martinez? Please sit this one out. Pull for the team that can and will keep this trophy right here.

Paul Barnes is a freelance sportswriter who covers sports for the Ashland Daily Press.



Bayfield High School senior Aiden Mckuen, in white, says access to the Bayfield Recreation Center has helped him to develop close friendships, sports skills and a work ethic he will apply as a student this fall at Northwood Technical College. (Contributed photo)



The Ashland Oredockers baseball team has squeezed in enough games to secure a 3-1 record as it and other teams across the region have struggled to find playing time with this year’s late spring. (Contributed photo by Kevin Scott)

Waiting to play ball

Spring weather is teams’ toughest opponent

BY PAUL BARNES
For the Ashland Daily Press

For fans, players, athletic directors and coaches, this spring’s weather has been no ally. Rescheduling games has been, for some sports, the only activity thus far in the season. While track teams with indoor facilities have largely been unaffected, getting soccer games in has been patchy while many baseball and softball teams have been waiting on deck for their first games. Local coaches are trying to work around the late spring, knowing that this is Wisconsin and weather is always a challenge.

Ryan Tiberg, athletic director for South Shore High School in Port Wing, a school of just 56 students, this spring is fielding teams in track and field, golf and baseball — or trying to, anyway.

“We do not have the facilities of Ashland or other bigger schools,” said Tiberg, who also coaches the track team. “So we have baseball practice in the gym,

hitting limited-flight balls, and working on pitching. High school track had been using the halls to run, and the parking lot, but we are able to use our track now and most of the field events can be performed there as well. Golf uses our sand volleyball court to putt and chip, although the sand is still hard. We have driving nets the golfers can hit into. Practices are challenging, but we make it work the best we can.”

Washburn baseball coach David Barningham agreed that preparing for the season indoors is tricky, but it still can be productive.

“You definitely have to be flexible,” he said. “I actually like being in the gym for the first two weeks. It’s a good opportunity to work on fundamentals. But after that you really need to get a feel for the field — especially the distances between bases and spacing in the outfield. Those are things that can’t be replicated in a gym setting. When you play your first few games without having an outfield practice, it’s tough.”

Making up for games missed is no easy task, Barningham said, although considerable travel to

neutral sites with favorable conditions can be an inconvenient option.

“We have traveled to Minong (over 75 miles south of Washburn) twice this year just to get games in and will be going to Park Falls (55 miles south) to play our next game,” he said. “We do what it takes to make the scheduling work. We will have to play lots of double-headers three or four games a week in May ... so pitching depth will be crucial.”

All WIAA regionals, sectionals and state tournament schedules are set and will not be altered, according to officials, so high school sports and teams are on their own to make things work. At the collegiate level, Northland College head baseball coach Jeremy Snow is finding the going no easier.

“This has been one of the most difficult seasons I have ever experienced in terms of weather,” Snow said. “We have had a hard time knowing what we are doing on a day-to-day basis. Games have been cancelled/postponed, the day of, many times. Field availability and umpire availability have hindered the ability to even get make-up

games in when the weather has been good. Practice has been segmented a lot. We have been running small groups for bullpens, small groups for hitting in indoor cages, and impromptu defensive sessions when we can get outside on the turf. It has been extremely difficult to schedule more than a few in advance.”

Despite the setbacks, Snow does offer words of hope.

“We have preached a message of growth and adaptability,” the coach said. “We will do everything in our power to get our games in. Playing a full schedule is a player’s right The message to fans is to be patient. Although Mother Nature has provided a hurdle this year, I am proud of our guys, and I believe the process is working.”

Tiberg agrees. “This has become an expectation in northern Wisconsin, so the message to the players is try to stay positive and when the time comes take full advantage of every opportunity,” he said. “Fans ... have patience. We may get a few things in this spring and when they do happen, enjoy them.”

Four straight



Ashland midfielder Sofia Brandis advances the ball against two Washburn/Bayfield defenders. (Contributed photo by Kevin Scott)

The Ashland Oredockers girls soccer team appears to have shaken off its early-season, 3-0 away loss to

still-undefeated Rice Lake (6-0) on March 29. Since that game, the ‘Dockers first of the season, the team has

rattled off four straight wins including a 5-0 neutral-field victory at Northland College’s Ponzio Stadium over

the rising and then-unbeaten Washburn/Bayfield cop on Thursday, April 21.