

ROYALL MAKES A RETURN TO

STATE

DIVISION 5
WIAA STATE BASKETBALL
ROYALL

GREATER as the SUM of their PARTS

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

There is no single way to find success in basketball. You can build around a star player or a more team-oriented approach. You can rely heavily on your starting lineup or have a rotation that regularly delves deep into your bench. You can slow the pace on offense and operate with set plays in the half court or try to get out in transition. You can deploy a man-to-man defense or a 1-3-1 zone.

Success comes in many different packages that can yield deep playoff runs and create treasured memories. But if you're a player or a coach, basketball might be at its best when you are part of a team that's bought into being part of something bigger than themselves.

When that occurs, magic can happen. If you want an example, look no further than the 2022-23 Royall boys' basketball team.

This group of Panthers were not one that thrived through a transcendent star player shouldering most of the burden. Instead, it was a team in the most literal sense — one that needed all of their rotation to understand and accept their role that helped contribute to the greater good of the collective unit.

As rosy as it sounds, the willingness to sacrifice individual success and accolades for the good of the whole isn't always an easy thing to do. But this year's Royall team had the right mix of guys to make it happen. Their reward? The second state tournament berth in program history.

"It makes life and playing the game of basketball so much fun," Royall senior guard Brady Uppena said of playing on a selfless squad. "You know that this kid is going to work their butt off to get where they want. And, overall, if they do their job and they know what their job is, it makes that journey of going to state 10 times easier."

Each player seemed aware of what their role was and what they needed to do night in and night out, even if it didn't always mean pouring in the points. Senior guard Bryce Olson was going to guard the opponent's best ballhandler and make life hell for them for 36

(ROYALL) cont. pg R5

...giving them individual purpose on the floor collectively gives us team goals...

- Scott Uppena, Royall head coach



Bryce Olson takes to the air for a shot



Gabe Keenan prepares for a pass



Brady Uppena with a reverse layup

ROYALL AT STATE

2023

Royall qualified for the WIAA boys state basketball tournament for the second time in school history in 2023. The Panthers, which finished third in the Scenic Bluffs Conference, found their footing in the playoffs and made a historic postseason run which culminated in a 58-40 victory over Wauzeka-Steuben in the sectional final to qualify for state.

Herald photos by Nate Beier and Logan Everson.

THROUGH MY LENS

A feat to make any alumni proud

By **NATE BEIER**
Sports Editor/
2001 Royall graduate



I watch teams go to state each year. I get excited when those teams come from my GX3 Media coverage area. Covering those teams makes my time at the WIAA state basketball tournament so much more meaningful.

This year, however, was different. Watching your own school punch its ticket to state is something out of a storybook.

I was privileged to watch Royall knock out Chippewa Falls McDonell back in 2010 to qualify for state for the first time ever. Shoot, it was the first Scenic Bluffs Conference representative to play at state. All of that was big stuff to me, and big stuff for our conference.

Who knew that'd be the beginning of a trend of sorts?

Since then, we all have been able to enjoy Hillsboro (2015) take second place, Bangor win it all as well in 2018 before returning in 2019 and 2022 (finishing second in 2022).

Let's not forget that we also had more sectional finalist teams than ever before in the past 14 seasons. Royall played for a chance at state in both 2013 and 2021. Bangor was knocking on the door of a state berth in both 2016 and 17 before breaking through the next year.

Yes, I love watching our conference do well. I hold our league in high regard, but I also try not to see it through rose colored glasses. A case in point was my take on how this year's bracket would actually play out. As much as I thought Royall had a chance to get to state, I was not entirely convinced it would happen.

I fully expected Southwestern to make another postseason run and finally break through the sectional final round. After all, the Wildcats' greatest adversary, Bangor - a team that thwarted Southwestern in 2018, 19 and 22 in a sectional final - was pushed up to Division 4 because of enrollment.

Southwestern plays in the highly respected Southwest Wisconsin Activities League (SWAL) and gets to face-off against the likes of Darlington, Cuba City and Mineral Point twice a year. That's the type of in-conference schedule most quality teams would dream of.

I hear coaches every year talk about the keys to getting to state. Sure, talent is key, but the team has to buy into coach's concepts and they have to have some luck side with them along the way.

Royall had that. Wauzeka-Stauben blasted Potosi in the sectional semifinal round, and then had to turn around and play the next night. The schedule favored Royall's depth and balanced scoring and put their opponent in an unfavorable position.

The circumstances led to Royall making it to state. Yeah, that's cool. As an alum (2001), I will always take pride in my school doing good things and I'm very privileged to have the job I do which allows me to cover and document the history of the place that put me on the path to where I'm at today.

Watching Royall dig itself out of an early-game hole in its state game against the top-ranked team; watching the team challenge an opponent that, by all means, should have blown them out of the water, was satisfying. Despite the loss, I still felt a sense of pride for what that team accomplished. They didn't roll over and the moment wasn't too big for them.

That's a good way to sum up Royall's season, because it had its trials and tribulations, but in the end, the team overcame those obstacles to do something special and add to a storied history in a way few ever will.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS **THE COACH:**
PERSPECTIVE ON THE SEASON

COMPLETE BUY IN

By **SCOTT UPPENA**
Royall basketball head coach

We met as a team on the first day of practice to talk about team goals for the year. By far and away the most consistent thing we heard was that they wanted to go to state and play at the Kohl Center. Not one of the goals mentioned were anything about individual goals. Everything was about team accomplishments.

I asked them at that point to do two things. First, trust the coaches, but most importantly trust each other in this journey. Secondly, put your egos aside and start to believe in something bigger than yourselves. This was the groundwork for us to attain this goal.

One of the things I try to do is teach young men life lessons through the game of basketball. Dealing with adversity is one of those life lessons. I was at the WBCA coach's clinic this fall where Bill Self was Zooming with the entire group. In his talk, he addressed dealing with adversity. One of the things that resonated with me that day was that he feels that every team needs to deal with some sort of adversity during the year in order to become a stronger team. Every team deals with adversity throughout the year (like we all do in life), but the life lesson to be taught is how you deal with these adversities.

We started the season winning nine out of our first ten games and things were going well. Maybe too well in hindsight. Our first conference loss came soon against a well-coached Hillsboro team. We went to their place and they beat us badly. They played harder and were more prepared for this game than we were. This was the start of stretch of games where we lost three out of four games.

Questions and maybe some doubt had started to creep in everyone minds. Adversity had landed on our doorstep, but I was reminded of the words Coach Self had prior to the season. My only question was, how do we approach this adversity in a way that allows us to move forward in a positive way that would still allow the kids to have a possibility of reaching their goals.

In the times of great struggle, true leadership has a way of showing its face. I was approached by a few players on the team asking if they could have a player only meeting to talk through a few things and then try to refocus on our team goals. One of the things that I have learned over the years is that kids are more resilient than we give them credit for. After almost a two-hour meeting, the boys came into the gym. I did not ask them what was talked about, I simply asked "are we all good"? They all gave me a thumbs up and we got back to work.

We ended the regular season with a 17-7 record finishing 3rd place in the conference standings. This was not where we wanted to finish, but the best part about basketball is that everyone gets an opportunity to have a second season. This second season is usually the one that people not only talk about more, but also remember the most.

This second season brought a renewed energy and focus back to what we first talked about way back in November - a chance to finish our season at the Kohl Center.

Every coach wants to be playing their best at the start of



Royall head coach Scott Uppena is cheered on by his Panthers after winning a Division 5 sectional title. Uppena credits his team for 'putting their egos aside and believing in something bigger than themselves' on their run back to the state tournament.
Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

(COMPLETE) cont. pg R3

THE ROAD TO STATE: **ROYALL'S REGIONAL ROMP**

D5 REGIONAL QUARTERFINAL
ROYALL 72 WONEWOC-CENTER 14



Brady Uppena led Royall with 13 points in its regional opener against Wonewoc-Center. The win was the second in a six-game win streak for the Panthers.

D5 REGIONAL SEMIFINAL
ROYALL 80 GILMANTON 39



Tyrus Wildes helped RHS scamper past Gilmanton in the second round of the postseason with 9 points and 4 steals.

D5 REGIONAL FINAL
ROYALL 85 C-FC 58



Jacob Dragan shoots for two underneath the basket against Cochrane-Fountain City in the regional final in Elroy.

As the No. 1 seed in their Division 5 sectional, Royall entered the postseason with their eyes on a deep run and kicked things off against a familiar conference foe.

The Panthers began their historic playoff run by hammering No. 16 seed Wonewoc-Center 72-14 in their regional quarterfinal matchup Tuesday, February 28 in Elroy. It was a matchup pitting the two Scenic Bluffs rivals whose schools are separated by just eight miles.

Royall had previously breezed past the winless Wolves by an identical score of 72-14 on January 5 in Wonewoc and then again 67-12 on February 7 in Elroy. The Panthers naturally entered their third meeting against Wonewoc-Center as heavy favorites and did not disappoint.

A well-rounded effort spurred Royall to the lopsided victory, featuring senior guard Brady Uppena with 13 points, six rebounds and six steals, sophomore small forward Carter Uppena with 12 points and five assists, junior forward Tucker Wildes with 11 points and both junior guard Jacob Cezyk and sophomore power forward Landon Lipke with nine points apiece.

Additionally, junior guard Ty Wildes hauled in six rebounds and senior forward Gabe Keenan doled out six assists in the win.

A total of 11 different Royall players scored on a night where the Panthers shot 31 of 55 (56.4 percent) from the field, 6 of 13 (46.2 percent) from 3-point range and dished out 27 assists compared to only 11 turnovers.

The Royall romp through regionals continued with a one-sided beatdown in an all-Panthers postseason battle.

Royall easily turned aside No. 9 seed Gilmanton for an 80-39 blowout victory in their regional semifinal matchup Friday, March 3 in Elroy. The home Panthers held a 32-16 halftime advantage and then outscored the visiting Panthers 48-23 in the second half.

It was another well-rounded effort from Royall that was spearheaded by sophomore small forward Carter Uppena, who finished with 16 points, five rebounds and three assists. Other leading contributors in the win included senior guard Brady Uppena with 14 points, five rebounds and three assists, junior guard Ty Wildes with nine points, five rebounds and four steals, sophomore power forward Landon Lipke with seven points and five rebounds and junior forward Tucker Wildes with six points and six rebounds.

Gilmanton senior point guard Hunter Guenther posted a double-double with a game-high 23 points and 10 rebounds, but none of his teammates managed to score more than five points.

Royall had another strong night shooting from deep, splashing 7 of 18 (38.9 percent) 3-pointers. On top of that, the victorious Panthers held a decisive 47-23 edge in the rebounding battle, assisted on 21 of their 33 made field goals and only turned the ball over six times.

At the time, their 80 points set a new season high, but that watermark only stood for one day.

Despite some early intrigue, Royall added the next chapter to its dominating postseason run to secure some hardware.

The Panthers scored a season high in points and turned aside No. 5 seed Cochrane-Fountain City for an 85-58 regional final victory Saturday, March 4 in Elroy. In its final home game of the season, Royall led 37-28 at halftime before pulling away after outscoring the Pirates 48-30 in the second half.

Cochrane-Fountain City tried to stymie the Royall offensive attack by deploying both a 2-1-2 and a 1-3-1 zone defense at times, but the Panthers utilized their size advantage and made patient decision to build a lead. The Pirates' pivot to man-to-man defense and a full-court press didn't slow them down either.

Royall junior guard Ty Wildes finished with 20 points and eight rebounds, junior forward Tucker Wildes posted a double-double with 18 points on 9-of-12 shooting, 12 rebounds, five blocks and four assists, sophomore small forward Carter Uppena scored 16 points and senior guard Brady Uppena added 12 points, five rebounds and four assists.

Cochrane-Fountain City had a trio of scorers finish in double figures: senior guard Andrew Bissen and junior guard Drew Wicka with 13 points each and sophomore guard Cameron Lipinski with 11 points.

As a team, the Panthers shot 33 of 59 (55.9 percent) from the field, 9 of 20 (45 percent) from beyond the arc and boasted a sparkling 20 to 8 assist-to-turnover ratio.

The West Salem girls basketball team celebrated two sectional wins last week en route to the program's first state berth since 1997. The Panthers topped Elk Mound Thursday and Somerset Saturday to advance to this week's state tournament. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



Every team deals with adversity throughout the year (like we all do in life), but the life lesson to be taught is how you deal with these adversities

- Scott Uppena, Royall head coach

(COMPLETE)
cont. from pg R2

tournament play. I was happy with how we were playing but not satisfied. We received the number one seed in our half sectional which meant that we would be able to host home games throughout regionals. We started post-season play with a first-round win over Wonewoc-Center followed by a regional semi-final win over Gilmanton. Our regional play ended with a convincing win over Cochran-Fountain City resulting in a regional final championship. I could feel it in the locker room after the game, that the team did not feel satisfied with this. They wanted more.

In the sectional semi-final game, we played Hillsboro, who we split with during the regular season. I knew Hillsboro would be ready to challenge us. They are a talented and well coached team. The practices leading up to that game were nothing short of intense and laser focused. Film sessions were silent and heavily studied. The boys came out early in the game with the same focus they practiced with all week and earned a tough fought win.

Next up was the sectional final game and a chance to go to state against a familiar foe in Wauzeka-Steuben. We lost to Wauzeka-Steuben two years ago in the sectional final game. However, this year felt different. It was on a neutral floor and we were defending at an extremely high level. We had an hour practice that morning where we changed how we were going to defend them. They executed the game plan to perfection which resulted in a convincing win to go to state. The emotions and celebration that followed this win is something that I will remember forever.

Our season came up a little short of our ultimate goal of winning a state championship by losing to a very good Newman Catholic in the state semi-final game. However, what these boys accomplished this was nothing short of special. They did not care about who lead us in scoring or rebounds. They did not care about stats. They just wanted to win. They trusted the coaches, but more importantly they trusted each other. They put their egos aside and believed in something bigger than themselves. That is why something special happened.

THE ROAD TO STATE: **TIME TO AVENGE**

**D5 SECTIONAL SEMIFINAL
ROYALL 63 HILLSBORO 45**



Tucker Wildes lays up a field goal during the sectional semifinal showdown opposite Hillsboro at Richland Center.

**D5 SECTIONAL FINAL
ROYALL 58 WAUZKA-STEUBEN 40**



Royall's Bryce Olson pulls up for a jumper in the Panthers' sectional final game against Wauzeka-Steuben.

In a battle between two schools separated by only 11 miles, Royall and Hillsboro played one of the most high-stakes entries in the history of their longtime rivalry. The Panthers moved themselves one step closer to an elusive state bid by defeating No. 2 seed Hillsboro 63-45 in a sectional semifinal rubber match between the two Scenic Bluffs' rivals Friday, March 10 in Richland Center.

In conference play during the regular season, the home team won both meetings between the two. The Tigers won 53-38 in Hillsboro on January 19 and Royall took the rematch 74-68 on February 20 in Elroy.

The Panthers led right from the outset with an 11-4 run to begin the game and never trailed. A 7-0 Royall run to end the half left them ahead 29-21 at the break. Though the Tigers were within six early in the second half, Royall pushed its advantage out to as much as 23 en route to a comfortable victory.

Royall junior forward Tucker Wildes matched the career high he set one game earlier by scoring 18 points while also grabbing nine rebounds, senior forward Gabe Keenan and senior guard Bryce Olson each added 12 points apiece, senior guard Brady Uppena finished with eight points and six rebounds and junior Ty Wildes had seven points, six rebounds and three assists.

Hillsboro was led by junior guard/forward Isaiah Stokes with a game-high 19 points and five rebounds.

After a 13-year wait, the Royall Panthers finally booked their return trip to the state tournament.

In a battle of two teams that found their success this season in vastly different ways, the Panthers continued their playoff trend of resounding wins by beating No. 4 seed Wauzeka-Steuben 58-40 in a sectional final showdown Saturday, March 11 in Wisconsin Dells.

It was a rematch of a sectional final meeting from 2021, where the Hornets got the better of Royall in a 46-41 win to advance to state. It also pitted a pair of head coaches against one another who are Cassville natives: Royall's Scott Uppena and Wauzeka-Steuben's Isaiah Okey.

And whereas the Panthers boasted a deep eight-man rotation where seemingly any of them could be the leading scorer on a given night, the focal point of the Hornets was senior guard and UW-Platteville commit Seth Bunders, who averaged 25.3 points per game going into the sectional final.

After each team traded runs in the first half that resulted in a 27-19 halftime lead for Royall, the Panthers pulled away in the second half.

Royall's leaders included junior guard Ty Wildes with 16 points and five rebounds off the bench, senior guard Bryce Olson with 12 points and senior guard Brady Uppena with 11 points and 10 rebounds for a double-double.

Bunders scored a game-high 26 points for Wauzeka-Steuben, but wasn't able to do so with good efficiency against Olson and Royall's aggressive defense against him.

ROYALL REWIND 2010



Royall assistant coach Riley Brown watches on as head coach Scott Uppena instructs the team in a timeout. Brown was part of Royall's first trip to state in 2010, albeit as a player. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

Then and now: Royall's Brown makes return to state-this time in new role

By **ZACH RASTALL**
Sports Writer

Being a part of either of the two Royall boys' basketball teams to make a run all the way to the state tournament grants you a special spot in the history of the program.

To be part of both of them? That's something that puts you in rarified air.

Royall assistant coach Randy Board was on staff when the Panthers made it to state both in 2010 and now in 2023. But it's Riley Brown who owns the wholly unique distinction of being the only person to make it to state at Royall as both a player and a coach.

Brown played for the Panthers under former head coach Mark Gustafson and was a senior back during the 2009-10 season when Royall made it to the state tournament for the first time in program history.

That team got off to an uneven 6-4 start that included a pair of disappointing conference losses before winning nine of their next 12 to end the regular season. They only wound up in a tie for third in Scenic Bluffs' standings but caught fire at the right time to book their spot at the Kohl Center in Madison.

"Obviously it's something that's been very rare with the Royall program since it started. It was just kinda surreal. Sometimes I look back on it and it's still kind of a shock at times," Brown said of that 2010 state run. "It's something every kid growing up really dreams of or hopes to be there to make it happen. It's cool to be able to look back and realize I got to enjoy it with a lot of my teammates that I'm still friends with today and hold relationships with."

After the conclusion of his playing career, Brown was still keeping tabs with the Panthers since Dalton Zmolek — the brother of Brown's now-wife Kalli — played for Royall through his graduation in 2016.

During that time, current Royall head coach Scott Uppena persuaded Brown to join the coaching staff and he's been with the team ever since.

"I think the biggest thing with Riley is the kids relate to him. They listen to him. He's not a yeller, he's not a screamer — but when Riley talks, all eyes are on him. That's the presence that he has," Uppena said. "To have him be part of this journey with us being an assistant coach for the past few years, I know it means a lot to him and it means a lot to me."

The current players got a peek at what Brown looked like during his playing days prior to Royall's sectional semifinal game against Hillsboro. With Royall off from school the day of that game, Uppena had the players over to watch the Panthers' 2010 sectional final win over McDonell Central Catholic.



Royall's Riley Brown dribbles across mid-court in the Panther's state debut in 2010. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

Brown scored a game-high 12 points to lead the charge in Royall's 47-42 victory. It gave the players a renewed appreciation for Brown's playing career — as well as some ammo for a few lighthearted jabs.

"My jump shot wasn't the prettiest of things, yet effective," Brown joked. "So, I was getting a little bit harassment from the guys on that. But it was all in good fun."

But beyond the good-natured jokes, his coaching and his experience in 2010 proved valuable for the current roster during this memorable run of their own.

"It's like having a good mentor around. He's been there, he knows everything," Royall junior guard Jacob Ceizyk said of Brown. "It's just cool to have someone who's been through (a state run) to coach you through that."

After 13 years, it was special for Brown to go back to the Kohl Center representing his alma mater from a different perspective. He's solidified himself a unique spot in Royall basketball history, and it's something he doesn't take for granted.

"It is something you take in and cherish how special it is. It's been rare — two times in school history," Brown said. "I just feel fortunate to be part of two really talented and team-friendly groups of players and coaches."



The Royall boys basketball team and its fans celebrate the team's first state berth in 2010. Royall topped Chippewa Falls McDonell at Onalaska to qualify for the Division 4 state tournament. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

AN INSIDE LOOK DEFENSE

Mr. Shutdown

Royall's Olson revels in role as defensive workhorse

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

If you were a star player facing Royall this year, the last thing you would want to see was senior guard Bryce Olson matchup up against you.

On a team where everyone in a deep rotation played their crucial role to fuel the success of the Panthers, it was Olson who was regularly tasked with the toughest defensive assignment on a given night.

It's a responsibility that Olson relished and thrived in, though also a role that he readily acknowledged requires a full team effort to make work.

"Most of the time I have to lock down their best ballhandler/shooter. That's basically what I do," Olson said. "It takes a lot. You gotta have a lot of trust in your teammates too to help on ball screens and stuff."

As the pressure ramped up the further the Panthers advanced into the postseason, the better Olson seemed to get. That was never more apparent than Royall's sectional final clash with Wauzeka-Steuben and its star senior guard Seth Bunders.

The night before that game, Bunders had gone off for 53 points on 18-of-24 shooting (while also going 13 of 13 from the free-throw line) as the Hornets downed Potosi 84-54 in the sectional semifinals.

Royall head coach Scott Uppena and his staff planned to try and contain Bunders the best they could with an approach that would involve them aggressively going after him well beyond the arc and also regularly double teaming him.

Olson was the linchpin in their defensive gameplan. Uppena could tell he was up for the challenge during the team's morning shootaround, and it translated on the court later in the day.

Bunders scored 26 points, but it came on an inefficient 8-of-24 shooting as he was made to work for everything he got. That effort helped propel the Panthers to a 58-40 win to punch their state ticket.

"He came this morning and I said, 'how do you feel?' And he said, 'I feel like I'm going to get the job done.' That's all I needed to hear," Uppena said after the win over Wauzeka-Steuben. "I don't know if he came out tonight. At one point, (assistant coach) Randy Board looked at me and said, 'I think you could maybe



Royall's Bryce Olson took on opponent's top scorers throughout the season, ending with two pivotal performances at season's end. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

He came this morning and I said, 'how do you feel?' And he said, 'I feel like I'm going to get the job done.' That's all I needed to hear.

- Scott Uppena, Royall head coach on his discussion with Olson prior to the sectional final

get him 30 seconds.' I said, 'absolutely not, he's good.' I called timeout shortly after that to get him his break. He's a hardworking kid and left everything on the floor. I'm very proud of him."

Uppena noted that he heard a seemingly endless stream of compliments about Olson's defending after that win. Olson's excellence continued in Madison, where — despite Royall's 52-42 loss to eventual Division 5 state champion Newman Catholic — he helped hold senior guard Mason Prey to eight points on 4-of-10 shooting. Prey averaged 22.8 points per game this season.

These performances helped introduce Royall's defensive motor to a wider audience. But for his teammates and coaches, this was the Olson they saw on a daily basis.

"The stage was a little bit bigger, the lights were a little bit brighter, so he got a little bit more attention," Uppena said. "We saw that every night with him. He was a key component to us getting here."

NO SCORING HERE

Bryce Olson shone bright in his final two games by creating defensive pressure on two prolific scorers

VS BUNDERS

Wauzeka-Steuben's leading scorer, Seth Bunders, poured in 24 points, but was 8-24 from the field less than 24 hours after posting a 53-point game against Potosi

VS PREY

Newman Catholic's Mason Prey averaged 22.8 points a game coming into the state semis, but Royall's Olson limited him to just 8 points on a 4-10 performance from the field

ROYALL REWIND THE PLAYOFFS



In 2011, Royall's Nate Scheeter hit a shot at the end of regulation to lift the Panthers to a 47-46 win over Hillsboro for a regional title. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

By NATE BEIER
Sports Writer

Royall's latest run to state added another significant chapter to the school's boys basketball history.

Up until the past 13 years or so, the Panthers' postseason success was relatively limited, however, despite having a number of very successful teams.

Royall won its first regional title in 1981 and then followed it up with another in 1982. The two postseason trophies were highlights among what was one of Royall basketball's best eras. The Panthers, led by Hall of Fame coach Marty Splitgerber, won at least a share of the first five Scenic Bluffs Conference titles starting in 1980.

It would be nearly two decades before the team would see the sectional round of play again, though.

Coach Randy Board's underdog squad of 1999 wiggled through its regional to bring home the school's first regional title in the sport in 17 seasons and finished 12-12 overall on the season.

The next year Royall's team won a share of the Scenic Bluffs Conference title and then went on to defeat Westby in Elroy to make a return trip to the sectional round.

Despite four sectional trips, none yielded a win.

It would be the unassuming team of 2010 to win the program's first sectional game. In a whirlwind weekend of sorts, the Panthers - coached by Mark Gustafson - topped Potosi on Friday evening, then came back the next day to play Chippewa Falls McDonell for a chance at a

state berth.

As luck would have it, the Panthers would advance to the state tournament, becoming the first Scenic Bluffs Conference team to play in the big dance.

Royall earned its sixth regional title the following year by upending rival and conference champion, Hillsboro, with a last second shot by Nate Scheeter.

In 2013, Royall would play to a sectional final again, but would be stopped by a hot-shooting Elmwood squad.

The 2018 team ran into the eventual state champions, Bangor, in the sectional round after capturing an eighth regional title - the first under current head coach Scott Uppena.

The COVID season of 2021 yielded a surprising postseason run that included a regional title and sectional final appearance, in which the Panthers fell to Wauzeka-Steuben by just five points.

Fast forward to 2023. Royall rolled through its regional and then cruised past rival Hillsboro for a highly anticipated rematch with Wauzeka-Steuben. This time, RHS emerged as the victors and a second state berth.

Royall's first state berth of 2010 ushered in an exciting era for the Scenic Bluffs Conference. Hillsboro qualified for state in 2015, finishing second. Bangor won the Division 5 title in 2018, the made it back in 2019 and again in 2022, finishing second in the latter before Royall became the league's sixth team in 14 years to play at the WIAA state tournament.



RIGHT Royall's Malory Knudtson sings the National Anthem for the D5 state semifinal game.



Royall's Tucker Wildes pivots and take a shot.



Gabe Keenan races across the Wisconsin 'W' after forcing a steal against Newman in a Division 5 state semifinal



Tyrus Wildes drives ahead into the Panthers' front court in the second half



RIGHT Royall's Carter Uppena makes a move towards the basket as the Newman defense moves to attempt a stop



The Royall basketball team spills out onto the court as the final buzzer sounds during the Division 5 sectional final. Royall defeated Wauzeka-Steuben 58-40 to advance to this year's WIAA state tournament. Royall's success in the postseason was a product of team-style play that utilized a deeper rotation than most opponents.

(ROYALL)
cont. from pg R1

minutes. Senior forward Gabe Keenan was going to do the dirty work in the post to keep opposing players off the boards. To help coax this out of them, the coaching staff would give players individual goals and things to strive for each night that would then be conducive to team success as a byproduct of what they did individually.

"Giving them individual goals — even though it's a team thing — giving them individual purpose on the floor collectively gives us team goals," said Royall head coach Scott Uppena. "That's how we've learned to challenge this group, and they respond."

The depth and well-rounded nature of these Panthers is reflected when you look at their leading scorers. Royall sophomore small forward Carter Uppena and Brady Uppena led the charge with 12.0 and 11.3 points per game, respectively. But beyond that you had junior guard Ty Wildes at 7.4 ppg, junior forward Tucker Wildes at 7.2 ppg, Olson at 6.8 ppg and Keenan at 4.8 ppg.

A total of six different Royall players had at least one game where they were the leading scorer this year: Olson, both Uppena brothers, both Wildes brothers and sophomore power forward Landon Lipke. There was even a good chunk of games down the stretch of the season where the Panthers' leading scorer on average was



THE JERSEY
Royall qualified for state in 2022 in these jerseys which were new this year

Ty Wildes, who was coming off the bench. There was even a different leading scorer in each of Royall's first four playoff games. "Normally when you have a bunch of role players on your team, there's some adversity going on around who's going to have the ball the most," Keenan said. "But we all come together, we all know what we've gotta do to win." Royall assistant coach Riley Brown had

the unique perspective of both playing for the Panthers when they first made state in 2010 and then making the return trip back to Madison this year as a coach. The selfless team-oriented approach is something he thinks was at the heart of both Panthers teams to make it to state.

"It takes a full team effort and playing your best basketball at the right time," Brown said. "I was fortunate — to be around, when I played, a good group of guys that was able to piece together their roles and to be part of a team now coaching that came into a great understanding of their roles and bought into us as well as coaches to kinda make it all happen."

When the team's magical run finally ended at the Kohl Center with a loss to Newman Catholic in the state semifinals, their head coach reflected on what it took to get there in the first place in the postgame press conference. It should be no surprise what Scott Uppena's focus was on in his opening statement.

"The kids bought into something a little bit bigger than themselves. I asked them to do that at the start of the season," Uppena said. "And that's what you saw today: a young group of guys who have no egos. We don't have superstars. They got here collectively."



Assistant coach Randy Board cheers the team on as they head to the locker room for halftime.



Brady Uppena plunges into the lane while the Newman defense comes crashing in



Royall's Landon Lipke launches a three



LEFT The Royall basketball team lines up for the National Anthem prior to their Division 5 state semifinal game with Wausau Newman.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS THE PLAYERS: WHAT'S YOUR ROLE?

I try to be that floor general and making sure everyone's on the right track, making sure they're doing the right thing. Bringing the ball up the floor, playing good defense — I don't need to be the leading scorer every night. That's not my role. My role is to make sure if someone needs to set a screen or a back screen or something like that, that they're doing the right thing.
Brady Uppena, #44

We've all got our roles, and I'd say mine is playing good, solid defense and distributing the ball. I'm fine with that. We're all pretty comfortable with our roles. We all know our roles. And you can't just look at one of us because it'll be someone different every night
Gabe Keenan, #40

I'd say my role is to do all the inside work. Kick it into me and if I can score one on one, I'll go one on one. If it's doubled down, I'll kick it out and hope for a three. And get in there and rebound.
Tucker Wildes, #25

Most definitely defense. Most of the time I have to lock down their best ballhandler/shooter. That's basically what I do.
Bryce Olson, #15

Whatever I can do in that game to make our team win. Sometimes it's assists, sometimes it's points, sometimes it's rebounds, sometimes it's guarding good players — I just do whatever I can to win and help the team whichever way I can.
Carter Uppena, #34

Come off the bench and give anything the energy spark that they need. Like if we're not focused, I come out and focus it up and help the team anyway I can help.
Ty Wildes, #32

Just being that backup man there when (Gabe Keenan and Tucker Wildes) need a break or when they get in trouble with something like fouls. Stepping up and being there for them, giving them a break or whatever they need.
Jacob Dragan, #33

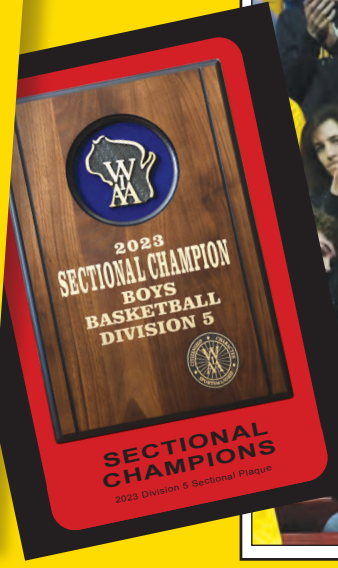
Just come in every now and then, hit a couple shots, get the momentum going if they need to my spot, shoot the ball, get my teammates the ball, just help everyone out.
Jacob Ceizyk, #5

LEFT The Royall basketball team lines up for the National Anthem prior to their Division 5 state semifinal game with Wausau Newman.

Page and graphics design influenced by Topps 1977 series 3 Star Wars trading cards - 'because cards are cool.' - Nate Beier/GX3 Media



Peppy the Panther leads the fans in celebrating their basketball team at the WIAA state basketball tournament



ROYALL AT STATE 2023

ROYALL PANTHERS

OVERALL: 22-8 Scenic Bluffs Conference: 9-5 (3rd)

HEAD COACH: Scott Uppena (10th season)

ASSISTANT COACHES: Randy Board, Riley Brown, Jon Murray

STATISTICIAN: Malory Knudtson

MANAGERS: Braxton Board, Colby Schroeder

NO.	NAME	YR.	OPPONENT	US	THEM	
03	Seth Brandau	SO	Kickapoo	58	48	W
05	Jacob Ceizyk	JR	@ Westby	68	54	W
12	Ben Crneckiy	SO	Riverdale	53	42	W
15	Bryce Olson	SR	Mauston	56	54	W
20	Trey Wildes	FR	New Lisbon	75	40	W
22	Karter Olson	SO	@ Necedah	48	34	W
23	John Muehlenkamp	FR	Lancaster try			
25	Tucker Wildes	JR	Lancaster	54	46	W
32	Tyrus Wildes	JR	Darlington	49	61	L
33	Jacob Dragan	JR	Cashton	46	32	W
34	Carter Uppena	SO	@ Wonewoc-Center	72	14	W
40	Gabe Keenan	SR	Brookwood	72	30	W
43	Landon Lipke	SO	Bangor	41	52	L
44	Brady Uppena	SR	@ Hillsboro	38	53	L
50	Cole Eberhardt	SO	@ Cashton	37	47	L
54	Dylan Velazquez	FR	@ New Lisbon	61	27	W
			Ithaca	59	44	W
			Necedah	33	43	W
			Blair-Taylor	61	54	W
			Wonewoc-Center	67	12	W
			@ Brookwood	63	36	W
			La Farge	71	34	W
			@ Bangor	43	54	L
			@ Seneca	56	61	L
			Hillsboro	74	68	W
			D5 Regional			
			Wonewoc-Center	72	14	W
			Gilmanton	80	39	W
			Cochrane-Fountain	85	58	W
			City			
			D5 Sectional	63	45	W
			Hillsboro	58	40	W
			Wauzeka-Steuben			
			D5 State	42	52	L
			Wausau Newman			

Elroy Movie Theatre
122 Main Street
Elroy, WI
ElroyTheatre.com

WAY TO GO, ROYALL BOYS!
Hillsboro
Sentry-Enterprise

Tax Preparation & Advisory Services
JAMES L. STOTT, INC.
102 Main Street
Elroy, WI 53929
Ph: (608) 462-8438
Fax: (608) 462-8971
E-Mail: jameslstottinc@gmail.com

ELROY HEALTH SERVICES
307 Royall Ave.
Elroy, WI 53929
608-462-8491

NTM INC.
THE TOTAL MANUFACTURING SOLUTION
113 Railroad Street
Elroy, WI 53929
462-5066

M Midor Ltd.
WE ARE HIRING
N3503 County Road P
Elroy, WI 53929
(608) 462-8275

GUNDERSEN ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL AND CLINICS
Phone
(608) 489-8000

ELROY AUTO SUPPLY & HOME STORE
Mattress & Appliance Delivery, Removal & Repair
DNR License Sales • Make Hydraulic Hoses • Cut Keys
263 Main St., Elroy • (608) 462-5192
Hours: Mon.-Thurs., 8-5; Fri., 8-5:30; Sat., 8:30-1

THE CHILDREN'S COTTAGE
5:30am-5:30pm
Licensed Childcare Center
Elroy, WI
462-8356

Elroy Chamber of Commerce
Elroy, WI
elroyareachamber.org

Elroy Eatery
213 Main St., Elroy
Wed, Thurs., Sat., Sun. 7am-2pm
Friday 7am-8pm
462-4320

Bubba's Little Squirr CAR WASH
Elroy, WI 462-4994
2 Self Wash Bays and 1 Touchless Automatic Bay
Tokens Available (Discounts given when purchased in large quantities.)

CONGRATULATIONS FROM THESE SPONSORS



Royall's gold sea of supporters