

THROUGH MY LENS

Let's enjoy the fun of playoff football

By NATE BEIER
Sports Editor

As dour as I was about the quality of teams we'd have in football this year, I have to say I'm rather impressed by what the



Coulee Region has produced some playoff time.

This weekend's slate of WIAA playoff football games includes a quartet of area games and one team that will be on the road with a chance to win and make it to next week's state semifinal round.

Cashton, West Salem and Onalaska are all top seeds and get to host due to that fact. Each has a tough task at hand, but our Division 3 teams, West Salem and Onalaska, may have the toughest path ahead.

That also makes what they do something to behold and something to enjoy - perhaps even a little more.

Onalaska's in a tough spot facing Rice Lake - a team they've struggled to play competitively against in the playoffs in the past. Sure, it's a home game, but Rice Lake is used to playing against tough competition as a former member of the Big Rivers, the Warriors found success despite being the smallest school in the league. Now they're part of the Middle Border which typically produces more than one team capable of playing at state. Yeah, that's tough.

West Salem's match with Green Bay Notre Dame is exciting since GBNB is a seven seed and has caused consternation for anyone trying to predict a perfect bracket.

Cashton gets another shot at a Six Rivers Conference team, though as much as I'd overlook Black Hawk/Warren, you needn't look farther than that program's history. The Warriors have always been gritty, scrappy and able to win in a big spot.

Aquinas is also at home, surprisingly after a pair of upsets in D5.

Bangor is our area's lone road team and does stand a real chance against Pepin/Alma in my opinion, which gives the Coulee Region potentially five teams in next week's state semifinal round.

Again, let's appreciate this bounty. I've watched our area get knocked off in the first round alone in years past. This is way more fun, although I really do miss and wish we still had teams willing to play on Saturday afternoons for the playoffs. That was the best. It's a shame that everyone is playing at the same time. I truly think that's one of the biggest flaws of the playoff football system. We have all these fun matchups, but you have to pick one. If you can make extra money on the ticket sales, wouldn't you think you'd find a way to spread out the start times? Either way, here's to an exciting Level 3 round of the playoffs.

D7 LEVEL 3 FOOTBALL BANGOR @ PEPIN/ALMA

Bangor's road warriors to face undefeated Eagles

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

After two years away, the Bangor Cardinals are back in a familiar place: Level 3 of the high school football playoffs.

The Cardinals are into the quarterfinals for the ninth time since 2010, a stretch that saw them make the semifinals five straight years from 2015 to 2019 and win state titles in 2015 and 2017.

There was no opportunity for them to play in a postseason setting during the fall alternate season in the spring of 2021, and Bangor lost to Cashton in a Level 2 meeting last year. But here the Cardinals are back playing November football for the first time under second-year head coach Todd Grant.

After being the only road team in its division last week to win thanks to a 20-0 blanking of No. 2 seed Potosi/Cassville (9-2), No. 3 seed Bangor (10-1) is back on the road to face unbeaten No. 1 seed Pepin/Alma (11-0) in a Level 3 clash Friday, November 4 at 7 p.m. in Durand.

Mike Olson's Eagles won the Dairyland Conference and are led out of the backfield by junior running back Demetrius Bergmann with 1,377 yards and 32 touchdowns on 6.9 yards per carry. Senior quarterback Drew Seifert has completed 63.3 percent of his passes for 1,580 yards, 19 touchdowns and three interceptions, while junior running back Evan Olson has reeled in 42 catches for 908 yards and 13 touchdowns.

"They definitely have the ability to go run-pass on you and make you defend both, which always makes things difficult for a defense," Grant said. "On defense, we'll have

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Bangor's Mason Buehler and the Cardinal defense have allowed just a single score in the postseason this year.

Bangor will be tested this week by a Pepin/Alma team that's averaged just over 30 points a game in 2022. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

FOOTBALL BANGOR



Bangor's Rick Muellenberg will be inducted into the WFCAs Hall of Fame next spring. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

FOOTBALL CASHTON

Bill Hundt is enjoying a life sentence on Cashton's

CHAIN GANG



Cashton's Bill Hundt has followed in his family's footsteps by being part of the football chain gang since the mid-70s. Hundt has been part of the crew full time for the past two decades and has watched Cashton football go through several changes, including the recent return to glory as the current team has qualified for a Division 7 Level 3 playoff game for the second-straight season. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Throughout the 70-year history of Cashton football, there has been one constant along the home sidelines serving as a through line over the years: members of the Hundt family working on the chain gang.

The Eagles have fielded a football team every season since 1952, and Don "Rocky" Hundt was there to help with the down markers right from those earliest days.

The elder Hundt remained part of the Cashton chain gang for 57 years. His son Bill would eventually join him as part of that crew after graduating high school in the mid-1970s. Bill started out by only helping out on the chain gang here and there during football games, but has been a full-time member of it for the last two decades.

"I always say that, we don't get paid, but you get into the games for free and you get front row seats," Bill said, joking that "when the ball's around where the football team is, I like to call the plays also."

Joining Bill on the chain gang at Cashton football games these days as part of the four-man crew are Steve Hundt (Bill's cousin), Al Kanable and Kevin Kirking. Bill and Steve both help run Hundt Implement, the family's long-time business in Cashton.

"We have a lot of fun and look forward to it every season,"

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Bangor's Muellenberg inducted into WFCAs Hall of Fame

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Bangor fans are preparing themselves for yet another November that will feature playoff football.

This is nothing new for the Cardinals, who have become a postseason mainstay over the last couple of decades. And while there are a ton of people who have contributed to this sustained success over so many years, there is one man who remained a consistent presence through almost all of it: former head coach Rick Muellenberg.

For his role in helping build Bangor into one of state's top high school programs in his 20 seasons as head coach, Muellenberg was announced back in July as part of the Wisconsin Football Coaches Association (WFCAs) Hall of Fame's 2023 class.

Muellenberg will officially be inducted into the WFCAs Hall of Fame during a ceremony to be held Saturday, April 1, 2023 at the Marriott West in Madison. That evening will mark a culmination of a coaching career that began as a student assistant at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse — where he won an NCAA Division III national championship with the Eagles in 1992 — following his playing career there under College Football Hall of Famer Roger Harring.

That ceremony is also set to bring Muellenberg back to the city where the Cardinals achieved their greatest triumphs as the crown jewels of his tenure.

"It's definitely humbling when you look at the names that are in there," Muellenberg said of his Hall of Fame election. "I don't know, I guess it will become more real once the ceremony is done."

Muellenberg first came aboard in Bangor as an assistant in 1998, and the Cardinals won a single game in each of the next two seasons before Muellenberg assumed head coaching duties in 2000. Up to that point, the history of Bangor football had featured a 101-233-9 record, one

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D7 LEVEL 3 FOOTBALL **BLACK HAWK/WARREN AT CASHTON**

Cashton ready for collision with Black Hawk/Warren in state quarterfinal contest

By **ZACH RASTALL**
Sports Writer

For a second straight fall, postseason football will be played at Cashton Village Park into November. Coming off a memorable run to the semifinals a year ago, the undefeated and top-seeded Cashton Eagles (11-0) have got themselves back knocking at the door of the final four. It's on this now familiar Level 3 stage that they will host No. 2 seed Black Hawk/Warren (IL) (8-3) for a WIAA Division 7 quarterfinal clash

Friday, November 4 at 7 p.m. in Cashton. For this coming matchup, the Eagles draw a Black Hawk/Warren team that rolled past No. 7 seed Highland (6-4) 56-20 in Level 1 and No. 3 seed Wisconsin Rapids Assumption (10-2) 26-9 in Level 2. During the regular season, they finished third in the Six Rivers Conference behind co-champions Potosi/Cassville and River Ridge. Black Hawk/Warren is led on offense by a three-headed monster in the running game: senior running back Lucas Milz with 1,212 yards and 13

touchdowns on 8.1 yards per carry, senior running back Landen Mahoney with 1,129 yards and 17 touchdowns on 9.0 yards per carry and senior quarterback Reed McNutt with 980 yards and 14 touchdowns on 9.5 yards per carry. Head coach Desie Bredon's team hasn't thrown all that often, but on the occasions they do McNutt has completed 35 of 68 passes (51.5 percent) for 556 yards, seven touchdowns and one interception. "All season our defense has played exceptionally well against the run," said Cashton head coach Jered

Hemmersbach. "We've got to continue to really close those gaps. We can't give up big plays. Make them earn their scores if they do score and make them work the drive." The Eagles are only two wins away from earning the opportunity to play at Camp Randall Stadium for a state championship. Regardless of what happens Friday and beyond, they get one more chance to treat their home fans to high stakes football in 2022. "It's just an awesome feeling," Hemmersbach said. "I so happy for the seniors and the program."

Cashton's Brady Hemmersbach and the Eagle defense will try to turn back a potent opponent in Black Hawk/Warren. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



Bangor's Caleb Hemmersbach helped the Cardinals to a 20-0 shutout win last week. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

(**BANGOR**)
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our work cut out for us this week, but I'm confident in our guys too." Pepin/Alma — who beat No. 8 seed Iowa-Grant 41-6 in Level 1 and No. 4 seed River Ridge 45-34 in Level 2 — is looking to advance to the semifinals for the first time since finishing as Division 7 runner-up in both 2014 and 2015. In the latter of those two championship game losses, Bangor defeated the Eagles 20-14 at Camp Randall Stadium to win the program's first state title. The year prior, the Eagles emerged victorious 42-13 in their Level 3 meeting. The Cardinals have since beaten Pepin/Alma twice more in the playoffs: 54-21 in Level 3 in 2016 and 28-0 in Level 2 in 2019. The two schools were scheduled to play in Week 2 of the 2021 season, but that non-conference matchup was mixed due to COVID-19.

(**WFOCA**)

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conference title and a single playoff berth in 1996 over the course of the program's 42-year history. In 1999, Muellenberg noted that they only played a single junior varsity game because the entire high school football roster consisted of just 17 kids. That all would soon change, one incremental step at a time. "I never forgot about those days. I still haven't," Muellenberg said. "The contributions that kids put in then to lay the groundwork to get more and more kids working out in the offseason and things like that — turning the tide, the momentum and the culture of the program into one that we felt could be successful."

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- **Rick Muellenberg**, former Bangor football head coach on changing the culture after the 1999 season when Bangor had just 17 players on the roster

First came a winning record in Scenic Bluffs play in 2001. Then a playoff berth in 2002. Then four more postseason appearances in a row after. Then both a conference championship and a playoff win during a 2008 season that marked a true turning point for the Cardinals. Since 2008, Bangor has won 12 Scenic Bluffs titles — including eight in a row from 2014 to 2021 — and hasn't missed the playoffs once. The Cardinals reached the state semifinals for the first time in 2010 and broke through to win the Division 7 state championship in 2015 by beating Pepin/Alma 20-14 at Camp Randall Stadium. Two years later, they returned to Madison and defeated Black Hawk 37-14 to capture a second state title. Muellenberg stepped down as head coach after the second state triumph, but returned in 2019 to coach two more seasons before leaving the head coach post for good following the 2020 spring alternate season to focus on the responsibilities of his role as principal at Bangor Middle/High School. All told, the Cardinals posted a 162-55 record with two state titles, 10 conference championships, five state semifinal appearances and 16 playoff berths in Muellenberg's 20 years

at the helm. But just because Muellenberg stepped down as head coach doesn't mean he's totally gone from the program. He served as a volunteer assistant last year and, despite initially planning on not returning to that role in 2022, agreed to stay on at the behest of current Bangor head coach Todd Grant. In fact, Muellenberg has been helping out at practices three days a week this year compared to two days a week in 2021. "I don't take over at practice, I don't do those things. I assist as needed," Muellenberg said. "My favorite part, and it always has been, is practice. I love the interaction with the kids. ... That's the part that, when I step away for good, I'll miss the most." As for the Hall of Fame honor and his upcoming induction next spring, Muellenberg

admitted that he feels a bit "awkward" to personally be receiving this honor that's the product of success featuring so many people. He points to long-time assistants such as Kevin Kravik, Josh Chaplin and Jordan Laufenberg — who all were on Muellenberg's staff together starting in 2007 and throughout the peak of his tenure as head coach — as being equally responsible and credits the players that were willing to be pushed the distance by the coaching staff. Despite some initial reservations over accepting his Hall of Fame nomination, Muellenberg decided to accept it because he believes it's a chance to honor and celebrate everyone who helped bring Bangor football to where it is today. "It shows the community backing, the students, the players we had go through. So, when I look at it in those terms, it's a great honor for our community, and not just for myself," Muellenberg said. "I was fortunate enough to head that up — and I feel very fortunate that I was — but I was fortunate because I had good people around me and a lot of support from our administration and community."



Former Bangor football coach Rick Muellenberg helped turn the Cardinals' program from a struggling team to a perennial playoff power, culminating in two state titles (2015, 17) and a series of five state semifinal appearances. **Herald photos by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



(**GANG**)

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Bill said. "(Steve) also works with me at Hundt Implement, so it's easy to know who can make it and who can't. It's a lot of fun." There has been a lot of consistency in the members of the chain gang over the years, so they have seen generations of players pass through. Current Cashton head football coach Jered Hemmersbach noted that some of the chain gang was there during his playing days with the Eagles and now continue to do it all the way into his coaching career. "Some of those guys were doing it when I was playing. They've seen you as a kid and now they see you as an adult," Hemmersbach said. "It is unique to have that group of guys do it for that long and stay together and connected."

Cashton's Steve Hundt stands as a sideline sentry as the Eagles close in on a touchdown in a game earlier this year. Steve has joined cousin Bill as a mainstay on the CHS sideline for many years and the duo has enjoyed watching the Eagles' recent return to success. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**



Cashton's Bill Hundt will enjoy one final home game in 2022 as the Eagles host this Friday's playoff game against Black Hawk/Warren. **Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.**

"Every game is so much fun. They've tried to build (the football program) back up and they've had a lot of luck. We're just hoping we can go week by week and go farther."

- **Bill Hundt**, Cashton football chain gaing

Hemmersbach also pointed out the unique nature of the football field at Cashton Village Park presents a chance to communicate with them more easily. Whereas at most fields the chain gang is located along the away sideline, the press box at Village Park is behind the visitors so the chain gang sets up shop across the field along the home

sideline. "It is fun to sit down and talk to them, even after the game, to get their perspective," Hemmersbach said. "They're literally almost part of your coaching staff, to a point, on Friday nights." Having guys like Bill Hundt — who also worked the clock at Cashton basketball games for 30 years — willing to lend a hand in these types of volunteer capacities are a crucial component to the lifeblood of high school athletics in any community. It's even more special when that is passed on from one generation to the next, much like the generational family ties one can find on the sports team rosters themselves. "It's a big community thing. We've got a lot of the same names on the football team also," said former Cashton athletic director Dave Milne, who served in that role from 1973 to 2003. "Volunteering — especially today — it's great to have that happen." Given his many years on the chain gang, Bill Hundt has seen Cashton football go through its peaks and valleys. The Eagles enjoyed their heyday in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a span that included a state championship in 1981 after a state runner-up finish in 1979. The football program is currently enjoying another boom period, and Cashton is into the quarterfinals and hosting playoff football into November for a second straight season. This Friday's Level 3 contest between the Eagles and Black Hawk/Warren (IL) will bring one final game at Village Park in 2022, so Hundt and the chain gang will be there on the sidelines with the best seats in the house for what they hope is another signature Cashton win. "Every game is so much fun. They've tried to build (the football program) back up and they've had a lot of luck," Hundt said. "We're just hoping we can go week by week and go farther."

