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## Four River Falls swimmers, divers qualify for State Championship

*Senior Ellery Ottem continues shattering school records*

By Reagan Hoverman

The River Falls High School girls swim and dive team continues to significantly outperform expectations.

The Wildcats had a successful Division 1 Sectional swim and dive meet at Hudson High School on Saturday, Nov. 5. River Falls had four individuals, three divers and one swimmer, qualify for the State Swim and Dive Championship, which is slated to be held on Saturday, Nov. 12, at the Waukesha South High School.

River Falls senior Ellery Ottem, who continues to add to her already flawless high school swimming resume, won both the girls 100-yard and 200-yard Freestyle events with times of 50.68 seconds and 1:48.88 respectively.

Despite not being fully tapered, a training process designed to methodically shave time off of her swims leading up to the state meet, Ottem swam exceptionally well and re-broke her school records in the 100 and 200-yard Freestyle events with the aforementioned times at the Sectional Championship in Hudson.

Ottem finished fourth at the 2021 State Championship meet in both of those events and according to River Falls head coach Caitlin Brudzinski, she was expected to win both

events at the Hudson Sectional – just not in the dominant fashion that she did.

“Winning was expected, but what wasn’t expected was for her to go out and break her school records in those events this weekend,” Brudzinski said. “She’s not fully tapered or rested as she will be for Saturday (State Championship). The fact that she already broke those school records is hopefully a really good sign for next weekend.”

While Ottem was busy shattering school records in the swimming events, the River Falls divers were qualifying for state in their respective events. Junior Rachel Everson won the Sectional diving event with a score of 474.60. Freshman Avery Singel finished runner-up with a 430.05 and senior Kayleigh Volkman rounded out the podium with a 425.10. All three scores qualified for the State Championship this weekend.

“They are crushing it,” Brudzinski said. “They are performing very well this year. Rachel (Everson) had a 9.5 and two 9s out of the seven scores. She’s hitting her stride at the right point of the season.”

While only four River Falls athletes qualified for state, the rest of the roster also performed well at the Sectional Championship and helped earn the Wildcats a fifth-place



River Falls senior swimmer Ellery Ottem wears her Sectional Champion medal at Hudson High School on Saturday, Nov. 5, after winning both the 100 and 200-yard Freestyle events. Her championship-caliber times also re-broke both of her previous school records in those events. Ottem will compete in the Division 1 State Championship on Saturday, Nov. 12, in Waukesha. Photo courtesy of River Falls Swim and Dive

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Prescott senior Ava Salay hits a tee shot during the WIAA Division 2 Regional Championship earlier this season. Salay earned Wisconsin Co-Player of the Year honors for her outstanding success in her senior season, which included both individual and team state championships. Photo by Reagan Hoverman

## Prescott’s Ava Salay named Wisconsin Co-Player of the Year

*Entire varsity roster earns Academic All-State honors*

By Reagan Hoverman

In addition to a third consecutive WIAA Division 2 Girls Golf State Championship, the Prescott Cardinals are adding even more individual accolades to their already stacked resumes.

Outgoing Prescott senior Ava Salay, who claimed her second individual state championship this season at University Ridge, earned Wisconsin Co-Player of the Year honors. Salay joined senior teammates Rhi Stutz and Maddie Reiter and sophomores Jeanne Rohl and Gabbi Matzek in earning Academic All-State honors for the 2022 season.

Of course, the aforementioned Salay headlines the honors with her first Wisconsin Co-Player of the Year distinction. She shares the award with Kylie Walker of Westosha Central. Salay’s 2022 campaign was easily the best of her high school career.

Her nine-hole scoring average for the 2022 season



Prescott senior Rhi Stutz hits a wedge during the 2022 Division 2 Girls Golf State Championship at University Ridge in Madison earlier this season. Stutz was one of five Prescott players to receive Academic All-State honors. Photo by Reagan Hoverman

was 35.8, marking the first time in Prescott history that a season average was under par. Salay’s season average

of 37.4 in 2021, 39.1 in 2020, and 39.7 in 2019 give

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River Falls head coach Ryan Scherz gave a speech to his players about how proud he is and how much he loves them after the 38-6 loss at home against West De Pere in Level 3 of the playoffs on Friday, Nov. 4. Photo by Reagan Hoverman



River Falls senior linebacker Gavin Kohel (#29) and junior defensive back Bryce Bevan (#13) combine for a tackle on West De Pere senior running back Najeh Mitchell. Photo by Reagan Hoverman

## Horror at the opera: Phantoms rout Wildcats 38-6

By Reagan Hoverman

River Falls head coach Ryan Scherz called the West De Pere Phantoms’ defense the best defense he’s ever had to deal with at the high school level.

West De Pere’s size, speed and overall physicality helped the Phantoms force four River Falls turnovers, which put the Wildcats behind the 8-ball early in the D2 Level 3 playoff game on Friday night at Ramer Field in River Falls.

“That’s a very good team,” Scherz said. “They’re probably the best defense that we’ve ever had to deal with. If we didn’t have the turnovers, it would have been helpful, but at the end of the day, they had some really good players and a really good plan.”

Throughout the 2022 season, River Falls hung its hat offensively on junior running back Jonah Severson, who entered the Level 3 playoff game averaging 143 rushing yards and nearly two touchdowns per game. The Phantoms’ defense held Severson to 67 yards from scrimmage and zero scores.

River Falls’ offense never got into a rhythm against West De Pere, in large part because of the four fumbles that regularly derailed the Wildcats’ offensive possessions. Those turnovers put a significantly larger burden on the River Falls defense, which already had its hands full with a dynamic West De Pere offense that went into the game averaging more than 37 points per game.

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## SHOTS from the Hip

BY CRIFE OLSON

Head Coach Owen Hamilton and the Prescott girls basketball team started practice this week ready to defend their Middle Border Conference title from one year ago. Hamilton, a 2017 Prescott alumnus, is in his first year as head coach of the Cardinals who along with Atloona and Ellsworth have been picked as the teams to beat in the conference this year. Prescott has won the last three conference titles. Joining Hamilton's coaching staff will be Prescott alumni Payton Bartsch and Georgia Bowen.

At Wisconsin Baseball Coaches Association District meetings two weeks ago, coaches around the state expressed concerns about both the WIAA competitive balance proposal and the computerized tournament seeding process. One coach remarked that "In order to figure out the competitive balance proposal, you need all your fingers and toes, a slide rule, an abacus, and a calculator to understand it." And, when it comes to seeding the WIAA tournament, another coach said "There needs to be some way to add a human element to the process and not just let the modern-day version of Hal The Computer from Space Odyssey make all the decisions." Hopefully the WIAA leadership will make some adjustments after what happened in both the post season for both volleyball and football.

North Dakota State senior shortstop Peter Brookshaw breathed a sigh of relief recently after a right ankle x-ray came back negative. Brookshaw and his Bison teammates are coming off a conference championship season and are picked as one of the Summit League favorites, along with Oral Roberts, in the spring of 2023.

Michigan Tech sophomore guard and Prescott alumnus Isabella Lenz had 14 points, five rebounds, and three assists in the Huskies 68-64 exhibition loss to Division I UW-Green Bay.

"I thought for our first time out we play really well," said Lenz, Prescott's all time leading scorer. "Hopefully we can stay injury free and healthy this season and just continue to get better throughout the year."

Michigan Tech will open the season this Friday as they travel to Liberty, Mo. to take on William Jewel on Friday and Lewis College of Illinois on Saturday.

The last of the Middle Border Conference football teams were eliminated last Friday from the WIAA tournament. The Panthers, ranked in the top 10 all season, were ridiculously forced to travel four hours by bus to take on the #2 ranked Columbus Cardinals. Why not choose a neutral site rather than have the #4 ranked Panthers figuratively travel to another time zone to play a Friday night football game?

Junior Parker Nielsen and the #5 West Texas A&M Buffalo basketball team opened their season with a 78-62 loss to #1 ranked

Northwest Missouri State, the NCAA Division II defending champion. The two teams played to a 36-36 tie at the half. It was a five-point game midway through the second half, before the Bearcats pulled away late. The following day the Buffaloes lost a heartbreaker to Florida Southern College by a score of 92-90.

Tiny Regis High School has advanced to the semi-finals in the WIAA Division 7 Football Tournament with a 53-8 victory over perennial football power Edgar. Champions of the Cloverbelt Conference, Regis enters the state semi-finals as the #1 ranked team in Division 7. Local fans remember the Ramblers sneaking past the Cardinals by a score of 13-6 in the season opener for both teams. This week Regis will play Bangor, a school with larger enrollment for the right to advance to the Division 7 title game. In fact, Regis is the second smallest Division 7 school remaining in the tournament. Wisconsin High School football fans recall last year Regis lost in the championship by a score of 28-22 to Coleman High School, another school with a larger enrollment than the Ramblers.

From the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources: The DNR is seeking public comment on the future management of department properties in the Western Coulees and Ridges Region. A regional master plan establishes the levels and types of resource management and public use permitted on department-managed properties. The Western Coulees and Ridges Region includes all or portions of 22 counties, including Pierce and St. Croix. Members of the public are invited to engage in the DNR's planning process and share their thoughts on the future use and management of DNR properties in the region by visiting the DNR's Western Coulees and Ridges Regional Master Plan webpage or by attending one of three public open house meetings. The nearest meeting will be held at the UW-Eau Claire Davies Center on Wednesday, Nov. 16 beginning at 5 p.m. in the Council Oak Room.

Headshaker of the week. Since 1976, the New York Yankees have maintained a strict appearance policy, specifying that players' hair must not touch their collars and that they may have mustaches but no other facial hair. The policy came from then-franchise owner George Steinbrenner, who believed that regulating his players' appearance would instill a sense of discipline. Obviously no such rule is in place for the Philadelphia Phillies players Jayson Merth, Alec Bohm, and Brandon Marsh. The Grizzly Adams - Rasputin the Wild Monk look looks so dumb. Sporting a look resembling that of a deserted Tom Hanks in the movie Castaway or Leonardo DiCaprio playing Hugh Glass in the Revenant? It's a headshaker.

## RF FB

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On the first play from scrimmage, River Falls senior linebacker Reece Jahnke stripped West De Pere senior running back Najeh Mitchell during a routine tackle. The Wildcats dove on the ball and gained possession at the Phantoms' 27-yard line just 14 seconds into the game.

However, River Falls turned it over on downs after a couple of fruitless rushing attempts and a bobbled pass down the sideline by senior wide receiver Jordan Karras. Coach Scherz spoke about how not getting points and capitalizing on that early West De Pere turnover changed the feel early in the game.

"That (turnover) was exactly what we needed," Scherz said of the opening drive. "We had a negative play on third down and then we had a nice play setup on the corner, but it didn't go our way and that might have changed things a little. Everything feels different (if we score there)."

River Falls forced a punt on the ensuing drive and got the ball back at their 36-yard line. That's when senior wide receiver Wyatt Bell fumbled on a third-and-six, which gave the Phantoms a prime scoring opportunity by starting a drive in River Falls territory.

West De Pere put together a two-minute, 48-yard touchdown drive that culminated in a seven-yard touchdown run by the aforementioned Mitchell. A successful PAT gave the Phantoms a 7-0 lead with four minutes remaining in the opening quarter.

West De Pere continued to create additional possessions on the ensuing kickoff when the Phantoms executed a flawless onside kick that they recovered at the River Falls 40-yard line. Coach Scherz spoke about the Phantoms' early onside kick recovery.

"We practiced that all week, he just hit a really, really good kick," Scherz said. "You can't put your hands team out there every time. I mean, you could, but you'd be starting inside the 10. They just executed it really well."

The Phantoms capitalized on the onside kick with a 23-yard field goal to make it 10-0 in favor of West De Pere going to the second quarter. A couple of possessions later, the Phantoms struck again. This time it was junior quarterback Duke Shovald who connected with junior running back Kaleb Cameron on a 17-yard touchdown pass to make it 17-0 with four minutes to go in the second quarter.

West De Pere forced another River Falls three-and-out on the ensuing drive and got

the ball back at the River Falls 38-yard line after a short punt. The Phantoms capped off another scoring drive when Shovald connected with Mitchell on a screen pass that went 22 yards to the house late in the first half. With the score, the Phantoms took a 24-0 lead over River Falls into the halftime intermission.

The Wildcats' three-score halftime deficit proved to be too much to overcome, as West De Pere cruised to a 38-6 victory. River Falls' lone score came via special teams late in the third quarter when senior wide receiver Jacob Gilbertson returned a kickoff 93 yards for a touchdown to make it 31-6.

River Falls ends its season with a 10-2 overall record and as co-champions of the Big Rivers Conference with the Hudson Raiders - both programs finished 6-1 in league play. Coach Scherz spoke about reaching double-digit wins in a season and raising the bar of the program.

"I guarantee if you polled the crowd about what they thought we would be this year, it wouldn't be 10-2 and Level 3 (in the play-offs)," Scherz said. "It's not that they didn't believe in us, but we lost a lot of good players. We're trying to build a program, not just have a good year or a good class."

River Falls has unquestionably raised the bar of the program. This season's 10-win team marked only the second time in program history the Wildcats have reached double-digit wins. The senior class is a large part of the reason why River Falls made a jump this year. Scherz spoke about his seniors.

"They were relentless in the weight room in the offseason. We're not loaded with scholarship guys, but they refused to lower the standard and in fact, they raised it almost on the sheer power of will and leadership," Scherz said. "They're extremely competitive guys over there and I'm going to miss them."

Coaching also certainly impacted River Falls this season. Scherz earned a head coaching distinction last week when he was named the Packers High School Coach of the Week. Throughout the season, the Green Bay Packers select one outstanding high school football coach each week to receive the honor.

While the distinction certainly is a great honor for Scherz and his staff, it also includes tangible benefits. As part of the selection, the Packers, Buffalo Wild Wings and NFL Foundation will band together to make a \$2,000 donation to the River Falls High School football program.

"It's an honor, but it doesn't happen without an outstanding coaching staff," Scherz said. "I share it with all of them. It's humbling, but it's a collective effort."



## OUTDOOR Tales and Trails

BY DAVE BECK



My old friend Jay convinced me to trade my tree stand for the boat one fine fall afternoon. Photo by Dave Beck

## Guilty trip to the river

During this time of year, I usually get a somewhat severe case of tunnel vision in that it is all about bow hunting. However, last Monday I was on the Mississippi River near Red Wing fishing for saugers and walleyes. The reason for trading my bow for a pole was an old friend Jay. The last time we saw each other was trout fishing and it was so many years ago that neither one of us could remember exactly when. Jay happened to be in Red Wing for a few days and he was more than happy to jump in my boat and spend a few hours casting for supper.

The details of one of the times I fished with Jay have faded a little because it was so long ago, or maybe the details are a little sketchy because I cracked myself in the back of my head with my own lure. Regardless, neither of us could remember how many fish we caught, but both of us remembered that it was a good thing that I was wearing a hat that day.

When we hit the water recently it was no surprise that there were so many boats on the river. I wondered out loud how many other anglers besides myself were feeling guilty about fishing and not being in a tree stand. When Indian Summer comes so late in the year, all forms of recreation see an uptick and that is especially true for Red Wing walleye anglers. What was surprising was the lack of fish. The first couple of hours on the water were pretty slow with only a few strippers being caught.

When some cloud cover and the afternoon arrived, that all changed. Jay and I moved back upriver and fished within sight of the dam and in between stories we alternated catching saugers. Saugers are the smaller cousin of the walleye but just as tasty. It's always a treat reconnecting with old friends but to do it on the river on a glorious fall afternoon while catching fish makes it a Top 10 day for sure.

The signature moment of the outing happened just before we caught our last fish of the day. It brought our reunion full circle and created laughter almost to the point of tears. I had turned to look just in time to see Jay reaching around the back of his neck and when he asked me for help, I busted out laughing. His own lure was hooked onto the back collar of his shirt. We both recognized the irony and the humor in the moment.

I know that Jay and I will remain friends no matter how much time passes between our visits but it's a good thing that we were fishing for walleyes, not muskies.

*Didn't get enough Dave this week? Visit "Outdoor Trails and Tales with Dave Beck" on Facebook for photos and video of Dave's adventures. You can share your own photos and video with him there as well, or by emailing him at dave@piercecounytjournal.news Also, check out OTT content on Instagram @thepiercecounytjournal*

## Salay

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her the four lowest averages in school history.

The Player of the Year award is not based on Division 1 or Division 2. Instead, it goes to the best golfer or two golfers in the entire state that season - whether they play for a small school like Prescott or a large school like Waunakee. Prescott head coach Chad Salay spoke about Ava's recognition.

"It's quite the honor. That was one of her big goals for the year was to win Player of the Year," Chad Salay said. "You've got to be consistent the whole year. You can't have any hang-ups. It's always close because there is such a battle with the top players."

Ava Salay leaves Prescott as easily the most decorated golfer in school history and as one of the most accomplished athletes in Cardinals history. She was also named the 2022 Middle Border Conference Player of the Year, won a second individual state championship, and set three course records and four event records in her senior campaign.

Ava Salay was part of an original crop of athletes that helped transform Prescott from a middling golf program into a three-time state championship team that resides at the pinnacle of high school golf in Wisconsin. She will continue her athletic and academic career at the University of Wisconsin in Madison where she will play women's golf for the Badgers.

While Salay had unprecedented success individually, her teammates were right there too. In addition to Salay, the aforementioned Stutz earned MBC First-Team All-Conference honors and so did Rohl. Matzek and Reiter both earned Second-Team All-Conference accolades. All five of the varsity starters also earned that Academic All-State distinction.

To receive Academic All-State honors, the player must have at least a 3.25 GPA and have competed in 75% of the varsity matches throughout the 2022 golf season. Coach Chad Salay spoke about his roster's success on the course and in the classroom.

"It just shows that they're just really well-rounded kids," Prescott head coach Chad Salay said of the academic honors. "They take pride in pretty much everything they do. Just being around them it's easy to see they're going to work hard at whatever they do. It's another feather in their cap."

The roster's success on the course propelled Prescott to its third consecutive Division 2 State Championship, making it the fifth high school in Wisconsin golf history to win three titles in a row. Coach Salay spoke about the 2022 and how it ended with a sudden-death victory against the Prairie School

for the state title.

"It was exciting the way it finished. We rolled through the year as we anticipated, but to have that finish, that's something I'll always reflect on," Chad Salay said. "I think about the dinners I'll have with this championship team. There will be so many fun stories to tell. It was a great year and another good bunch of kids."

While the years have started to blend together for Chad Salay, the importance of his core group of girls that started it all doesn't fade away. Former players Liz Rohl and Jessica Heinsch, as well as current players and soon-to-be graduates Ava Salay, Rhi Stutz, and Maddie Reiter, who served as the building blocks for what has become a top program in the state.

While great golf talent was certainly required for the success that Prescott sustained, coach Salay stated that camaraderie among the players - who grew up as best friends - was the secret ingredient that put the program over the top.

"I never really knew how important team cohesivity was in golf until I saw it with this group," Chad Salay said. "I just don't know if it will ever be matched. They just have a connection and push each other to get better. They have certain aspects that most teams don't have the advantage of having."

Salay spoke about how the chemistry between his coaching staff and the entire roster was organic, it was happenstance based on friendships the girls made when they were still in elementary school. That's something that can't be faked and has to develop naturally among players and friends.

"We've naturally had that since the time they were eight years old," Chad Salay said. "Darren (Reiter) and I just had two daughters (Ava Salay and Maddie Reiter) that knew all these girls that were great athletes that turned into great golfers. It was a meant-to-be kind of thing that we fell into this awesome group."

After losing Liz Rohl and Heinsch to graduation last season, and now Ava Salay, Stutz and Maddie Reiter this May, all of the original building blocks of the first state championship team are gone.

While there are unquestionably young bright spots to take the reins and lead the program in Jeanne Rohl and Gabbi Matzek, it's the end of an era - the original era - of Prescott girls' golf. Coach Salay spoke about that feeling and moving forward.

"I think it definitely feels like the end of an era. It's the end of this three-in-a-row run," Chad Salay said. "We're going to be defending champs next year, but the three core pieces of three state championship teams are all gone. It's a fresh start. It's exciting for me as a coach now to have that challenge too. It's going to be emotional to see those players move on."