

## THROUGH MY LENS

Wrestling:  
Will we fix  
it before it's  
too late?By NATE BEIER  
Sports Editor

I hate to admit it, but wrestling is a dying sport.

Now, I could argue that most sports are dying sports. Girls basketball numbers have plummeted over the course of the past 3-5 years. Football numbers, well, if you think you can support a full 11-man team with one small school at this point, you're in for a rude awakening. Numbers for our local track and field teams are laughable. Kids just aren't going out for things.

Wrestling isn't immune to these shrinking participation numbers, either.

Every year I enter the wrestling season thinking something has changed, that our Scenic Bluffs schools will roll out full teams and a smattering of junior varsity-type kids. I get excited to see if we have a program deserving of earning a conference title the right way - by wrestling their 14 kids against some other team's 14 kids. Instead, the team with 9-10 healthy kids usually wins because the rest of the league has 5-7 healthy wrestlers the night of the dual.

I often wonder if our schools and coaches see how the landscape has changed - not just within our league, but elsewhere as well.

A couple of years ago I tracked each SBC dual and counted the number of forfeits at each. We averaged over seven. There are 14 weight classes, mind you. Last year I watched the livestream of the dual when New Lisbon came to Hillsboro. I think I counted just three contested weight classes and a total run time of 15 minutes for the event.

Is this what we really want wrestling to be?

Is this wrestling at its finest?

The answers should be no to both questions.

When I came into high school, I didn't know how good of a wrestling program we had at Royall. The 1990s were a high point for the program with five conference titles, two sectional championships and a state runner-up finish in 1994. How did we do it? Talent, yes, and numbers. You had to compete for a spot and you were only awarded a spot if you earned it by wrestling off some other bloke who was at your weight.

That competition is gone now as our wrestling rooms have emptied. Sure, the higher functioning wrestlers go find other outfits to get extra mat time in, but the average wrestler isn't. They need to develop at practice and they can only go so far with the same partner each day.

NUMBERS  
DON'T LIE

Look at these numbers. In the first tournament of the season, the Royall Invite, the Panthers only put fourth seven wrestlers - 11 if you count the junior varsity kids. Hillsboro had five and New Lisbon four. Last weekend Royall had 10 at Tomah and New Lisbon two. In fact, between the two meets, no team had a full varsity squad of wrestlers present. Iowa-Grant had 12 at Royall and Tomah had 13 at their own meet. At Royall, the average number of wrestlers per team was just over seven and at Tomah it was just over eight and a half.

So what's my point in all this number spewing? In order for wrestling to survive as anything more than an individual sport, we need to look at solutions. Many talk about cutting weight classes,

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## GIRLS BASKETBALL



Wonewoc-Center's Kelsey Justman leaps for a rebound of the Wolves' net in the first half of the home conference contest against New Lisbon. HSE photo by Logan Everson.

3 WINS FOR  
THE WOLVESHillsboro tops  
cross-county  
rivals Viroqua,  
Kickapoo toBy ZACH RASTALL  
HSE Sports Reporter

The Wonewoc-Center girls' basketball team is back above .500 on the season thanks to a week that saw them rattle off three consecutive victories.

The Wolves (4-3 overall, 2-1 Scenic Bluffs) began the season with a win over La Farge/Youth Initiative, then suffered three straight losses to Ithaca, Kickapoo and finally Bangor in their conference opener.

However, they answered that three-game skid with what's now a three-game winning streak that includes a pair of wins against Scenic Bluffs competition.

Wonewoc-Center netted its first league win by beating the New Lisbon Rockets (1-7, 1-2) 66-41 Thursday, December 8 in Wonewoc. The Wolves built up a 44-15 halftime lead and rode it to a comfortable victory.

Wonewoc-Center junior guard Kelsey Justman posted a double-double with 17 points and 13 rebounds to go along with five steals, sophomore guard Brooklynn Bolton scored 14 points, sophomore small forward Emma Mildbrand finished with 10 points and eight rebounds, sophomore guard Olivia Olson also scored 10 points and senior guard Stacie Koppenhafer recorded nine points, seven rebounds and six steals.

After the weekend, the Wolves blew past Coulee Christian/Providence 60-23 in a non-conference matchup Monday, December 12 in West Salem.

In that win, Justman and Bolton each scored 11 points, Koppenhafer and Olson both tallied 10 points apiece and junior guard Jaelyn Stowe chipped in nine points. Coulee Christian's Cameran Trissoni led her team with a game-high



Wonewoc-Center's 11 wrestles for the ball against New Lisbon's Eliza Curtis during the Thursday, December 8 game at Wonewoc. HSE photo by Logan Everson.



Wonewoc-Center's Stacie Koppenhafer takes a step to get around New Lisbon's Klarissa Earhart in last Thursday's game in Wonewoc against New Lisbon. HSE photo by Logan Everson.

14 points.

The following night, Wonewoc-Center picked up another lopsided victory by defeating the Necedah Cardinals (2-5, 0-3) 54-14 in conference play Tuesday, December 13 in Necedah.

Stowe led the charge with 12 points, Justman and Mildbrand both scored 11 points and Koppenhafer added 10 points.

Necedah senior forward Katelyn Freitag finished with six points for the Cardinals.

The Wolves next get a tough road test when they face Royall (7-0, 2-0) — the sixth-ranked team in Division 5 in the latest WisSports.net coaches' poll — in a Scenic Bluffs clash Friday, December 16 at 7 p.m. in Elroy.



Hillsboro's Lily Von Falkenstein fires a pass across the lane during Tuesday's game with Bangor. HSE photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

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since a 59-52 victory in the 2016 sectional semifinals. The Tigers hadn't scored a win over the Cardinals in conference play since February 2014.

"It's been seven years — we beat them in a sectional game. That's the last time we beat them," said Hillsboro head coach Scott Egan. "It's been a lot of losses, and some of them not pretty. So, that feels good."

The win was also pivotal for Hillsboro in this season's race for the Scenic Bluffs title.

The Tigers previously suffered a 57-52 home loss to Royall back on December 2. Another defeat this early would've left them in a tough spot in the conference standings with very little margin for error moving forward in the battle for league supremacy.

After trying not to place too much significance on the Royall game in terms of its importance to the season going into it, Egan noted the team took a different approach while preparing for Bangor.

"We came in like 'we need to have this. We need to go in and impose our will on this

team.' Because if we drop two, we're not really in good shape in conference play," Egan said. "We really pushed the girls to give everything they have if they want to continue to compete in the conference. Tonight, they showed up to play. It was awesome to see."

In their previous game prior to the Bangor win, the Tigers defeated the Brookwood Falcons (2-6, 0-3) 66-28 Thursday, December 8 in Ontario.

Morren recorded a double-double with 15 points on 7-of-9 shooting and 10 rebounds to go along with four blocks, von Falkenstein racked up 15 points, nine steals, eight rebounds and five assists, Bisarek posted 11 points and six assists, senior guard Camryn Hanson also scored 11 points and junior guard Lexie Thorson tacked on 10 points.

Brookwood junior guard Vanessa Anderson led her team with 17 points in the loss.

Another key conference matchup awaits Hillsboro later this week. The Tigers will hit the road to take on the Cashton Eagles (4-2, 2-1) Friday, December 16 at 7 p.m. in Cashton.

## GIRLS HOCKEY



Baraboo's Mallory Ruland (Royall) skates into Black River Falls territory with the puck during Tuesday's game with the Tigers. HSE photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

Badger Lightning  
keeps strikingBy LOGAN EVERSON  
HSE Sports Reporter

The Baraboo-area girls hockey co-op team is seeing success after only dropping one game so far this season.

The Badger Lightning, which consists of students from Baraboo, Wisconsin Dells, Sauk Prairie, Reedsburg, and Royall, opened up their 2022-23 campaign with a 1-6 loss at home against Arrowhead on Saturday, November 19. The following week, they eked out a 1-0 win against Beaver Dam, with Royall's own Mallory Ruland scoring the lone goal, with help from Badger's Kyrin Merrill and Katelyn Allen.

On Tuesday, November 29, The Lightning traveled to Wisconsin Rapids to take on the Wisconsin Valley Union Eagles in what ended up being a too-close-for-comfort 4-3 win. The first period saw two goals from the Eagles, but the Lightning would answer back in the next period with two goals of their own. In the third, Wisconsin Valley Union tacked on another goal,

but it wouldn't be enough as Badger Lightning tacked on two more, with one being from Ruland unassisted.

Later that week, the Lightning was back on the road to Stoughton to take on the Icebergs, which ended in a 4-0 lopsided rout in the Lightning's favor. The Lightning had a remarkable 63 shots on goal, while their own goalie only took on 13.

Two days later, Badger Lightning was on the road again, this time to Sun Prairie to challenge the Cap City Cougars. The Lightning scored the only two goals of the game, both in the second period, ending the match-up 2-0.

The Lightning hosted Black River Falls on Tuesday, December 13. Score and stats were not available by press time.

Up next for the Badger Lightning is a home contest in Baraboo on Friday, December 16th at 7pm against the Rock City Fury from Beloit. The Fury are on a winning streak of their own, with an overall record of 4-1 after a 2-1 win over the Cap City Cougars on Monday, December 12.