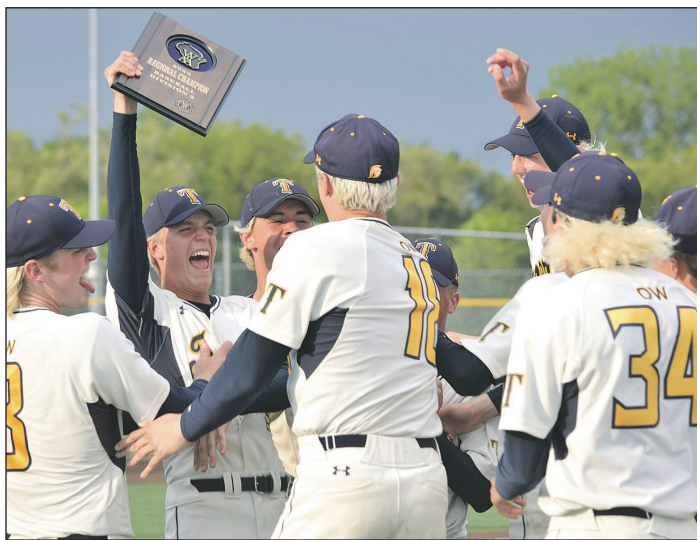


The Gazette
SPORTS

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JIMMY OSWALD/ADAMS PUBLISHING GROUP

Winning pitcher Konner Giddley holds up Beloit Turner's regional championship plaque and celebrates with Will Lauterbach (8), Mason Hoenig (18), Fernando Tillery (34) and others Wednesday night after the team beat Madison Edgewood 3-0 in Beloit.

**WIAA DIVISION 2 BASEBALL REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP:
TROJANS 3, CRUSADERS 0**

Giddley goes the distance

Turner advances to sectional semifinals

JIMMY OSWALD
Adams Publishing Group

BELOIT — It is an old baseball coaching mantra that good things tend to happen when you put the ball in play.

Beloit Turner has lived by that motto this season, and it especially held true Wednesday evening with Konner

Giddley absolutely dealing on the mound.

The Trojans' offense put the barrel on the ball just enough to support Giddley's dominant performance as they defeated fourth-seeded Madison Edgewood 3-0 in a WIAA Division 2 regional championship game at the YMCA Youth Sports Complex. It was their 11th straight victory.

"A big emphasis for us is being able to create offense in different ways," top-seeded

Turner head coach Jeff Clowes said. "We're trying to find those productive outs. You love the night where it's misfires, but the mayhem is fun, too."

The mayhem came in the form of testing the Crusaders' infielders again and again. Turner lasered the ball often, and it caused some issues for Edgewood.

Eric Halon ripped a

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NEXT LEVEL

Parker graduates in national track spotlight

Shelton broke UW-W 100-meter record; Porter in D-I triple jump field

TOM MILLER
Special to The Gazette

Tina Shelton continues to be on the move after she earned her NCAA Division III All-America honors in women's track and field again this season.

Ryann Porter is waiting for her chance at the national meet in NCAA Division I while also earning academic accolades.

The two 2020 Janesville Parker High graduates both had successful outdoor and indoor track and field seasons in their junior years at college.

Shelton, who will be a senior this fall at UW-Whitewater, completed her season at the NCAA Division III Outdoor Championships in Rochester, New York, last Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Shelton finished fifth in the 100 with a time of 11.85 seconds and seventh in the 200 with a time of 24.41. Both finishes earned her NCAA Division III All-America honors.

Shelton entered the national meet with the fastest individual time of the outdoor season in the 100 with an 11.54. She recorded that time in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Championships held at Whitewater on May 6-7.

She won both the 100 and the 200 at the WIAC meet. Her 11.54 time in the 100 broke the school record. Shelton won the conference title in 200 with a time of 24.45.

Shelton, who is in the process of moving from one apartment to another in Whitewater, is satisfied with the way the indoor and outdoor seasons went. She said a preseason meeting with her short sprints coach Josh Ireland gave her a

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Sawyer Punzel, left, tries to evade Owen Schattschneider during a lacrosse practice at Optimist Park in Janesville on May 24. In the midst of assessing its education-based athletics offerings, the Janesville School District has opted not to sponsor lacrosse as a varsity sport for boys and girls in spring 2024, the district's athletic director said.

Sticking points

Varsity lacrosse unlikely in Janesville in sport's WIAA debut season

TIM SEEMAN
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Since 2007, the Janesville Lacrosse Club has offered youth athletes from Janesville and

beyond the opportunity to try the once-niche sport, which has enjoyed a surge of popularity over the last couple of decades.

The club fielded teams for boys and girls from the under-8 level all the way up through players' high school years, and those players have competed against other clubs in a manner that would be familiar to anybody who has ever

participated in youth and high school sports.

Lacrosse had never been a sport sanctioned by the WIAA, but that is changing in the spring 2024 season.

The WIAA voted in December to add boys and girls lacrosse to its roster of sanctioned sports.

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Lacrosse/

from A28

It seemed to Janesville's club leaders that getting sponsored by the Janesville School District to form a lacrosse co-op, like the city high schools' joint hockey team, would be a slam dunk.

But as the days passed and the June 1 deadline for schools to file with the WIAA arrives, what had once seemed a sure thing transformed into a source of consternation for club leaders and the players in it.

Now it appears Janesville's will be one of just three club lacrosse programs of 40 in the state that didn't get sponsored by a school district after the WIAA's decision.

WIAA SANCTIONS LACROSSE

The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association's Board of Control approved the addition of boys and girls lacrosse for the spring 2024 season at the board's Dec. 2, 2022, meeting.

After that vote went through, Matt Combs, the coach of the club's high school boys team, said the club approached the district to discuss the possibility of having lacrosse added to the district's athletic offerings. Combs said district representatives told the club what to prepare for a meeting, and they had one on March 10 at Franklin Middle School.

"That meeting went really well, actually," Combs said. "I was really excited for the direction this could have gone."

He said the club went over its history, participation numbers, fundraising capabilities, equipment and logistical matters such as booking game officials.

Jim McClowry, the school district's central athletic director, said he saw the meeting as a chance to meet club leaders and learn more about the club. He also characterized the meeting as positive but said he didn't leave it with the expectation that there would be follow-up from either side.

Combs said the club got the impression the district representatives in the meeting would be discussing lacrosse with administrators from other schools.

As more time passed and the lacrosse season ramped up in April, club



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Helen Gorman takes a shot at the goal during a practice drill at Optimist Park in Janesville on May 24. In the midst of assessing its education-based athletics offerings, the Janesville School District has opted not to sponsor lacrosse as a varsity sport for boys and girls in spring 2024, the district's athletic director said.

leaders had grown concerned that they hadn't heard anything from the district in regard to being the home district for a high school lacrosse co-op.

Shane Punzel, an assistant to Combs on the boys' team's coaching staff, said in an email that he sent to many district officials and later shared with *The Gazette* that McClowry met with him at Franklin Middle School, where Punzel is the student resource officer, to tell him the school district would not be sanctioning lacrosse for the 2023-24 school year.

"It was kind of a shock judging by how the meeting went on the 10th," Combs said. With the deadline less than a month away at that point, the level of urgency to find a home district spiked within the club.

"It was like everything was on fire — tip over the filing cabinets, everything," Combs said. "It was like, 'We got to get something going because we only have a month and I've got to coach, we've still got to coach and they still have to play.'"

DIFFICULT TIMING

In an interview with *The Gazette*, McClowry said the WIAA's decision to sanction lacrosse came at a time when the district is assessing its education-based athletics programs in order to devise a strategic plan for athletics districtwide.

"We have 24 existing

sports at the varsity level and 13 at the middle schools," McClowry said. "We're evaluating our mission and resources and trying to create a strategic plan to move everything forward."

McClowry said questions the school district is trying to answer as it studies its athletic offerings include whether the district is being a good steward of its resources; whether current programming aligns with the district's mission; whether the district can provide the infrastructure, leadership and accountability it takes to run its programs successfully; and whether the district has been effectively using its facilities on and off its school campuses.

"We want to be intentional about our education-based athletic offerings," McClowry said. "We haven't really had a strategic plan for our athletic programs, and we want to make sure our current offerings are giving kids the best possible experience."

Lacrosse club leaders have said they wouldn't need any resources or other administrative help because they have been operating independently for many years already.

McClowry said if the district were to add lacrosse, it would "want it to become a part of what we do, which means utilizing our resources to make it happen."

The athletic director

also said the district is interested in adding boys and girls lacrosse when the time is right but that he doesn't see a path to the school district sponsoring lacrosse in the 2023-24 school year.

"For the district, the timing for this opportunity doesn't fit in with where we are right now" as it develops its strategic plan, he said. "What we need to do is keep moving forward and finding a way to support each other."

The club also approached the school districts in Milton and Fort Atkinson, but those districts were not in a position to add a varsity lacrosse program because they need to cut costs after recent failed operational referendums.

McClowry had high praise for the club and what it has been able to provide to its member families and athletes.

"It's an outstanding group operating at a high level and doing a great job for kids," McClowry said. "So many have benefited from what the organization has done."

PLAYER WORRIES

Those compliments are likely a cold comfort to the coaches and players in the lacrosse club, especially those high school-aged players who might not have a team to play for next season.

Players who spoke with *The Gazette* after a recent practice were not looking forward to a season off.

Most said they would not be interested in a different spring sport if lacrosse is off the table, and it might be because nobody knows how many games a club-affiliated team might be able to schedule against newly WIAA-sanctioned programs.

"As a mom and a coach, the idea of kids not having something to do doesn't sit well with me," girls and youth coach Rachel Dunn said.

Joining a team elsewhere didn't seem attractive to Janesville Craig freshman Sawyer Punzel, Shane Punzel's son who has been in the Janesville club since he was in grade school.

"It wouldn't feel the same to me having to play somewhere else and not be able to try and give my club a championship where I've been playing my entire life," Sawyer Punzel said.

Punzel also aspires to play lacrosse in college and worries he might fall off the recruiting radar if forced to take a year off from the game.

Mitchel Stephens, a graduating senior from Milton High School, expressed sympathy for his teammates.

"I'd love to see Janesville have a home next year even though I won't be here to play," he said. "But it still matters because I want to see former teammates letter, play in the playoffs, hopefully win a championship, hang their senior banners up and have all those fun things to do senior year. To have that taken away from them would suck."

Other club players see participation as a social opportunity — a place to spend time with friends and make new ones. Two girls from Roscoe, Illinois, Melanie Widmar and Elizabeth Brown, would make the trip to Janesville for practice and made friends on the team they otherwise would not have met.

Others who just got into the game, like Craig sophomore Helen Gorman and junior Elise Welsh, are disappointed to lose an activity they just had gotten into.

"I was really looking forward to playing next season, and if I wasn't able to, I feel like I would be losing something I really grew to enjoy," Gorman said.

For rising seniors like Caleb Wier of Craig, a career of dedication will

likely be ending in anti-climactic fashion.

"We've been working at this program since we were freshmen, learning and growing from all the seniors and upperclassmen for all these years, and now it's our turn to have that moment where we get our final year, our last hoorah, and try to make a final push for all of us, and to have that almost taken away, it almost feels like that COVID year where everything just got taken. And this year it's a scenario where it's not COVID, it's everyone else gets to play, but there's us," he said.

STUNTED GROWTH

Like many organizations, the club faced tough times in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to pull the plug on its season amid a period of growth at the turn of the decade.

In the years since, Combs, club President Jeff Reuter and other club leaders rebuilt. The boys team was ranked ninth in the state last season, and the club was able to field a varsity-level girls team for the first time since 2019, girls coach Jake Dunn said.

"The growth is there in the youth and girls programs, and the future looks really bright," Dunn said. "Not having the WIAA-sanctioned team is going to stunt the growth of the club across the board."

"We've all worked hard to get the ball back rolling again, and it's finally rolling in a direction, and this is kind of a wall and a tough one to jump over," Combs said.

In the face of this adversity, the club has rallied for its own cause, sending emails and making phone calls to district officials. Leaders say other clubs have also stepped up and offered their support of Janesville's organization, but it might not be enough to help Janesville field a WIAA-sanctioned team in 2024.

Despite the setback, Reuter, the club president, said the organization will continue to field teams below the high school level.

"It'd be devastating and a disappointment if we weren't able to field teams next year on the high school level, but from a club standpoint, we don't have any plan of folding up or shutting doors," he said.