

WIAA DIVISION 3 STATE PREVIEW



**West Salem Panthers
(12-1)**

vs.



**Monroe Cheesemakers
(13-0)**

**10 a.m., Friday, Nov. 18, 2022
at Camp Randall Stadium, Madison**



Focus, preparation, determination

Cheesemakers return to state after 26 seasons

By Adam Krebs
editor@
themonroetimes.com

MADISON — The Monroe Cheesemakers entered the 2022 season with a chip on their shoulder. The prior season they

suffered a loss in Level 4 to eventual champion Pewaukee, letting a two-score halftime lead slip away.

While emotionally scarred and upset, instead of wallowing in despair, the returning players decided to quickly refocus and dedicate the off-season to regaining a second chance at the missed opportunity.

“This means so much. Losing in this round last year, coming back, getting our revenge on Pewaukee earlier in these playoffs — just keep on moving. All of the boys have been working for this — getting to Camp Randall. It’s our dream come true,” senior linebacker and running back Tucker Markham said.

Mission accomplished.

On Nov. 11, 2022, Monroe punched its first return to the WIAA state championship since 1996 with a dominating 48-6 win over New Berlin West. Monroe will face West Salem in the Division 3 title game at 10 a.m. Nov. 18 at Camp Randall Stadium, home of the Wisconsin Badgers.

“We’re going to do what we always do: We’re going to have film on Sunday and get to business,” said senior lineman Isaac Bunker, a Navy commit. “I’m sure by the time we even get there, the coaches will have broken down the film from this one and we’ll have our game plan and get going on Monday to get ready for Camp Randall.”

This is Monroe’s ninth trip to the WIAA state championship, with titles coming in 1986, ’90, ’91, ’92 and ’94; and runners-up finishes in 1987, ’95 and ’96.

The West Salem Panthers reached the championship with a 37-14 win over previously unbeaten Onalaska. This is the fourth trip to state for the Panthers, with their lone championship coming in 2007. A 10-point second quarter had West Salem enter halftime with a 10-6 lead. In fact, West Salem scored



Times file photo

The Cheesemakers have allowed just 89 points all season and have seven shutouts. Much of it has to do with the pressure caused by the defensive line up front.

37-straight points before Onalaska scored for a second time with just under 7 minutes to play.

West Salem led 17-6 after three quarters and scored on a run just 20 seconds into the fourth quarter. Moments later, the Panthers scored again on an interception returned for a score.

Luke Noel had 188 yards rushing and two scores for West Salem on 30 carries. Brett McConkey, the quarterback, had 140 yards passing with two scores, and another 59 yards on the ground.

West Salem held Onalaska to just 17 rushing yards on 14 attempts, and 155 yards on 12 of 26 passing, with two INTs in the process.

The Panthers (12-1) had previously lost to Onalaska 14-13 in the opening game of the season, and has since churned out 12 straight wins, with just one of those games

separated by just a single score — a 21-14 win over Green Bay Notre Dame in Level 3 of the playoffs. In the playoffs, West Salem has defeated Waupaca (49-0), Fox Valley Lutheran (35-14), Notre Dame (21-14) and Onalaska (37-14).

The Panthers were the Coulee Conference champions and have outscored opponents 499-117 this season. They have 1,801 passing yards this year, averaging 117 yards per game. On the ground, West Salem has gained 2,557 yards rushing and 46 scores, an average of 196.7 yards per game.

Noel is the team’s leading rusher, having gained 1,135 yards and 26 TDs this season, with a 6.2 yards per carry average. McConkey is second on the team with 693 yards and 11 TDs. In the pocket, McConkey has 1,753 yards passing with 15

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They said it: Players Edition

Players react to getting to play in the state championship at Camp Randall Stadium

“This means so much. Losing in this round last year, coming back, getting our revenge on Pewaukee earlier in these playoffs — just keep on moving. All of the boys have been working for this — getting to Camp Randall. It’s our dream come true. It means so much to make it there — all the work we’ve put in has meant so much. I can’t wait — it’s going to be a helluva time.”

— Tucker Markham, senior

“We are just doing our job. We knew this would happen if we just executed. We’ve worked so hard and put so much time into the weight room and practice, and then just came out and did our job.”

— Keatin Sweeney, senior

“It’s surreal. It’s truly an unbelievable feeling. It hasn’t processed yet in my mind. We have an opportunity that 99% of schools in Wisconsin don’t, and that’s something to be thankful for. For me, I’m especially thankful to be able to do it with these guys I am with.”

— Alex Hernandez, senior

“It feels surreal. I never thought in a million years that me and these guys would make it to Camp Randall. I just want to see everyone there supporting the Cheese at 10 a.m. on Friday.”

— Jordan Klocke, senior

“This means everything. We were all here exactly a year ago, and we were on the other side with the loss. Nothing drove us more. We worked hard all offseason;

we worked hard all summer. We worked hard to get better during this season, and I think it’s shown. It’s so cool that we get to do something, not just for us, but we get to do this for our coaches. They have put in so much time into us, and now they get to go to state. Most of these coaches haven’t gone to state since the ‘90s. The school is going to take whole buses up, and the whole town is going to be quiet because everyone will be at Camp Randall. It’s so cool that we got to do that for our city, for our coaches and we got to do it for themselves.”

— Isaac Bunker, senior

“It’s a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I’m glad I get to do it with my closest friends. It’s truly amazing, and I’m so excited I get to go to state just like (my dad, Gerry Herbst) did. I look up to my dad. I play the same position he did in high school. After watching his films, it definitely gives me motivation to work.”

— Taylor Herbst, junior

“I mean it’s just crazy making it there in the first place and now that it’s sinking in, it’s even cooler. The connection with my dad (assistant coach Shawn Paulson) and I is crazy. We will both have the jersey with the stamp, and being able to put them up by each other is even cooler. The biggest thing with following him there is that we both have worked so hard to be in the spots together.”

— Kade Paulson, sophomore

They said it: Coaches Edition

Of Monroe’s 8 coaches, 6 played or coached in a state championship for the Cheesemakers during the 1990s. Only head coach Toby Golembiewski and assistant Rob Schilt (Class of 2004) have never participated. Of the 6 coaches returning, 3 will have sons playing in the game, while 3 other children will be helping on the sidelines as ball boys and film staff.

“I’m happier for my kid to make it there. It’s one of the greatest experiences that you will ever have in your life. Its up there with getting married and having kids. It’s a long time coming. I was on that 1996 team, and its pretty cool that Taylor is on the team to make it now. They’ve all put in a lot of work to get back to this point — it’s not easy. We can relay experiences of what to expect feeling-wise. Its just another game in another atmosphere. It’s just for a gold ball this time. I work with Shawn pretty close. We’ve told the kids our experiences. Even making it there, the memories that you are going to take away from this is unreal. I was fortunate to make it three times. My sophomore we won it and took second my junior and senior years. There are two different feelings there. That was almost 30 years ago. Just to realize, hey you are one of the two best teams left in your division, that’s a great accomplishment. Every team’s goal is to make it there. Winning feels a whole lot better than losing. The loss would hurt at first but the feeling goes away — the experiences is unreal.”

— Gerry Herbst, assistant coach, MHS Class of 1997, Father to Taylor Herbst

“This experience brings back a lot of memories and also me realizing that as a 17-year-old at the time I probably didn’t soak it all in like I am doing right now. My senior year was the last state title we have won and so to get back there as a coach is pretty special. I couldn’t imagine experience this with any other group of guys. Getting to share this experience with my son Gehrig may just be the best part of it all. Being together every day and watching him form the bonds he has with his teammates during this ride as been pretty special.”

— Eric Losenegger, assistant coach, MHS Class of 1995, Father to Gehrig Losenegger

“(It’s) actually very much the same — the anticipation, attention to detail, and the thrill of making the Championship game are still the same. Both groups of adults, athletes, and their families are and were second to none. Even if (Kade is) currently rehabbing an injury, he’s been a part of Monroe Football in some way shape or form his entire life. It’s very rewarding. These are special memories we will have for a lifetime. It all equals a dream come true for all involved. Hopefully, as it did in me and my former teammate’s case, it teaches these guys to go on and be successful in all aspects of life.”

— Shawn Paulson, assistant coach, MHS Class of 1994, Father to Kade Paulson

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Preseason Camp



Head coach Toby Golembiewski

Preseason Scrimmage vs. New Glarus-Monticello



Alex Hernandez (31)

Week 2: Monroe 40, Mt. Horeb-Barneveld 17



George Brukwicki INT

Focus

From Page 2

TDs and 7 INTs. His two main targets are Brennan Kennedy (37 rec, 798 yds, 8 TDs) and Andy Johnson (29 rec, 407 yds, 4 INTs).

Defensively, the Panthers have allowed just 2,333 yards total, and 16 touchdowns.

Monroe, meanwhile, is threatening the state's single-season team rushing record. Monroe needs 353 yards to break Owen-Withee's mark of 5,519 yards set in 2007. Currently, the Cheesemakers are third all-time at 5,166 yards and have averaged 397.4 yards per game. In the win over New Berlin West in Level 4, the Cheesemakers had 440 yards. Oak Creek (1999) is currently second all-time at 5,195 yards. Monroe has gained 385 or more yards rushing eight times in 13 games, and 400 or more six times.

Senior fullback Alex Hernandez leads Monroe in rushing with 1,487 yards, with Keatin Sweeney second at 1,322. Kaden Kuester has 828 yards on just 68 carries (12.2 ypc), and with 172 more yards would give the Cheesemakers a second-straight season with three 1,000-yard rushers, a feat not done since Darlington did it three straight years from 2013-2015. The Redbirds also accomplished the feat in 1995 and 1996.

Monroe, Rock Valley champions and ranked No. 1 in the state at the end of the regular season, has five players with 20 or more attempts rushing this year, and all five average 8.6 yards or more per carry. Sweeney leads the team with 23 TDs, while Hernandez and Kuester each have 16. Tucker Markham (586 yards) has 12 scores this fall.

As a team, the Cheesemakers have out-scored opponents 571-89. Monroe is third in the state in scoring — one point behind Sun Prairie East. Columbus (13-0), a Division 4 state qualifier, leads the state with 633 points, which is already 16th all-time.

How they got here

Monroe opened the season with a 39-0 win at Beaver Dam, then dominated the second half in a 40-19 Week 2 game against Mount Horeb-Barneveld in the home opener. It was one of just

Week 4: Monroe 41, Evansville 0



Kaden Kuester (34)

Week 5: Monroe 53, Jefferson 15



Keatin Sweeney (20), Isaac Bunker

Week 7: Monroe 52, Edgerton 0



Kaden Kuester (34)

Week 9: Monroe 47, Whitewater 0



George Brukwicki (12)

Level 1: Monroe 49, Portage 20



Lane Meier (22)

Level 2: Monroe 22, Pewaukee 21



Charlie Wiegel (40)

Level 3: Monroe 35, West Bend East 0



Defense

Level 4: Monroe 48, New Berlin West 6



Austin Fuchs (62), Tucker Markham (23)

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two games Monroe would trail in all season.

In Week 3, Monroe opened the Rock Valley schedule with a 36-0 win at McFarland, and followed it up with a 41-0 thumping of Evansville. In Week 5, Monroe walloped Jefferson 53-15, then pummeled Delavan-Darien 55-0 and Edgerton 52-0 in Weeks 6-7. In the final two weeks of the year, Monroe scored 101 points, beating East Troy 54-8 and Whitewater 47-0.

In every game of the regular season but the Mount Horeb game, Monroe had triggered the mercy-rule running clock and played its second team for much of the second half.

Earning a No. 1 seed in the play-offs, Monroe battled injuries en route to a 49-20 win over Portage in Level 1, led by backup fullback Lane Meier, who filled in for Hernandez and gained 210 yards. Sweeney added 97 yards and four TDs.

The ultimate test came in Level 2: Pewaukee. Monroe led 14-0 in the first half, but gave up 21 straight points and trailed with just over a minute to play in the game, with the season on the line. With 12 seconds left, senior QB George Brukwicki connected with senior WR Drew Indergand on a sideline catch in the end zone to bring the score to within a point. Brukwicki then ran in the 2-point conversion to win the game.

In Level 3, the Cheesemakers hosted West Bend East in a game that will forever be remembered for the muddy, rainy conditions. Kuester had 158 yards rushing and three scores. Monroe won 35-0, marking the seventh shutout of the season for the team, and extending the winning streak at home to 17 games in a row, a feat not matched in decades.

In the Level 4 win over New Berlin West, the Cheesemakers went up 21-6 by halftime, then pounded the rock in the second half, winning 48-6. Monroe passed the ball just one time in the contest, which fell incomplete in the end zone. Hernandez led the way with 198 yards and three TDs.

A school-wide celebration



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