

WIAA DIVISION 3 STATE FOOTBALL

The Big Cheese



Times photo: Adam Krebs

Monroe celebrates after its 35-14 win over West Salem in the WIAA Division 3 State Championship game on Friday, Nov. 18. The title is the first for the Cheesemakers in 26 years.

Gold ball returns to MHS halls

By Adam Krebs

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MADISON — For the first time since 1994, the Monroe Cheesemakers are back on top of the football landscape in Wisconsin. On Nov. 18, Monroe capped an undefeated season with a convincing 35-14 win over West Salem in the WIAA Division 3 state championship at Camp Randall Stadium.

“It’s crazy — I’m still waiting for it to set in, but it’s such a memory I’ll never forget, and such an experience playing here,” senior quarterback George Brukwicki said.

“This is probably the greatest feeling I’ve ever felt in my life — to hold that gold ball with all of your teammates that you worked so hard with for so long, there’s nothing better,” said Isaac Bunker, a 6-5, 288-pound lineman that will play for Navy next fall. “To look up there at the scoreboard and see ‘The Monroe Cheesemakers are your Division 3 state champions’ is crazy.”

Senior Tucker Markham had 170 yards and tied a Division 3 state championship record with four touchdowns to lead the way for Monroe. Alex Hernandez added another 122 yards, while Keatin Sweeney ripped off 50 yards and a score.

“When it was hot, we tried not to use guys both ways as much as possible, but we found out he (Markham) was able to do that after the (Ben) Gatdula injury,” Monroe coach Toby Golembiewski said. “It was nice having those three big backs, and it gave us an edge over people. (Markham) developed and picked it up.”

Leading up to the game was a hassle. Cold weather and snow filled the region, which messed with Monroe’s practice schedule and rhythm, though the Cheesemakers didn’t complain and found a way to forge ahead.

“This past week we had to practice in some cold weather, a lot of snow. Two of our days were half in the gym and half outside, so we had to battle through that, but we have a great group of guys and our scout team did a great job helping us battle through it,” Brukwicki said.

Monroe forced three West Salem turnovers in the first quarter and went up 14-0. West Salem answered in the second quarter with a score, but Monroe scored the next three touchdowns and led 35-7 with less than eight minutes to play in the fourth quarter.

In fact, the first three possessions of the game ended in a turnover. The Panthers got the ball to start, but on the second play from scrimmage, Charlie Wiegel forced Luke Noel to fumble, with Sean Rufenacht recovering at the West Salem 37. Monroe quickly drove into the red zone and pounded on the door of the end zone, only for Keatin Sweeney to lose his grip on the ball at the 1, with the Panthers regaining possession.

Two plays later, West Salem turned it over again, this time with Wiegel stepping in front of a receiver and intercepting a pass by Brett McConkey at the 10. Golembiewski went right back to Sweeney on the next snap, and he scored from

10-yards out to put Monroe ahead.

“It means so much to know that he trusts me,” Sweeney said. “We’ve been doing that all season — he trusts me and I trust him. I knew we’d turn it right back around.”

Monroe’s defense continued to be stout, forcing a 3-and-out on West Salem’s next possession. The Cheesemakers kept the punishing run game going, but perfectly timed a roll-out pass, where George Brukwicki hit Wiegel wide open on a deep corner route for a 42-yard gain. Three plays later, Markham took an option pitch into the end zone, and a Wes Saunders extra point made it 14-0.

The Panthers went nowhere on the next possession as well, and a deep heave on third-and-11 hung out long enough for Sweeney to pick off the pass. This time Monroe’s offense stalled, and gave the ball back to West Salem at the Panthers 25. Brennan Kennedy hauled in a slant pass on third down and ran 56 yards to inside the Monroe 10, and a play later, Noel took an option pitch to the pylon for a score, making it 14-7.

It was the last drive the game would be within a single possession. Markham capped the next drive with a 1-yard TD run, and on West Salem’s next snap trailing 21-7, Sweeney forced wideout Chris Calico to fumble, with Markham recovering at the Panthers’ 36 with 2:58 left in the half.

Monroe ran out the clock on the drive, and a bad snap on a 33-yard field goal try ended the half with a 16-yard loss. The Cheesemakers outgained the Panthers in yards 206-86 in the half, and had 11 first downs to West Salem’s two.

Monroe also returned the kick to start the second half, and capped the 9-play, 60-yard drive with a TD by Markham. West Salem’s next drive lasted 12 plays and 35 yards, but a deep pass toward the end zone to Kennedy was broken up by Drew Indergand, stunting the drive. A 10-play, 63-yard, 10-minute Cheesemaker drive culminated in Markham’s fourth score of the game on a 5-yard rush with 7:20 to play.

West Salem scored on its next drive with 5:07 remaining to bring it to 35-14, but the Cheesemakers recovered the onside kick and ran out the final 5:07 off the clock, kneeling down at the end. Senior linemen Clayton Waski and Casey Dean were able to come onto the field for the final snap, something Dean said he deeply appreciated.

“It feels great. I want to thank Taylor (Herbst) for letting me come out and step on the field at right tackle — he’s still got another year,” Dean said. “I’ve been dealing with a back injury all year, and I was finally able to come back today and play. It means a lot to me, and to the coaches, and to this team.”

Over the entirety of the game, the Cheesemakers out-paced the Panthers in every statistical category but one — passing (42-126):

- First Downs (23-8)
- Rushing yards (341-64)
- Offensive yards (383-190)
- Time of possession (42:51-17:09)
- Forced turnovers (4-1)

“They put the ball on the deck a couple of times, and that

See CHEESE, B3

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Tempo too much for Panthers

By Natalie Dillon

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JUDA — The Panthers dropped their home opener 30-56 to the Benton Zephyrs on Thursday, Nov. 17. Senior Ciarrh Davis scored nearly half of the team’s points.

“I’ve been around and watched her since my freshman year in high school, and I don’t think I’ve seen a point guard that can make half the passes that she does,” head coach Austin Pax said. “Her ability to take the ball to the hoop, no matter the size of the person guarding her is phenomenal.”

Benton jumped to a 9-0 lead, controlling the tempo and the aggressiveness of the game. Once Juda got into its offensive zone, Benton forced a number of turnovers or simply stole the ball away from the Panthers.

Juda recorded its first points four minutes into the half with a shot from Davis. She created another scoring opportunity, getting fouled by Halle Stluka in the process. At the line, Davis went 2-for-2 to make it 4-13, Benton.

Although she didn’t score, Davis assisted in the next four points, dishing passes to Katie Brooks and Jackie Nusbaum.

The Zephyrs closed out the half outscoring the Panthers 14-2. Ries Stluka made the last two buckets, giving Benton a 33-10 lead.

Juda turned it around in the second, largely due to Davis’ command of the offense. She scored the first points in the second — this time less than a minute in.

For Benton, Halle Stluka then took control, sinking two shots and converting from the free throw line. Her momentum was short-lived, though, as another shot from Davis sparked the Juda offense.

“C finally took some leadership and showed the team how to hustle,” Pax said. “Most good leaders are going to have followers, so I think they started following her afterward.”

Nusbaum then took it to the hoop and was fouled. She converted from the line, finishing a 3-point play. After a Benton bucket, Davis scored two of her own, including a steal on the defensive end. Alexis Metz made up for a foul by draining a three after, and Nusbaum scored her ninth point of the game.

The remainder of the game consisted of failed scoring opportunities from the charity stripe — Juda was 3-for-8 while Benton was 4-for-16 — and jump balls.

Brilley Swedlund and Chey Scheidegger got on the board in the closing minutes, but it wasn’t enough.

Davis was the leading scorer for Juda with 12 points, followed by Nusbaum with nine. Four other players combined for the nine remaining points. For Benton, Genna Langkamp totaled 13 points.



Times photo: Natalie Dillon

Ciarrh Davis led Juda in its home opening loss to Benton. Davis scored 12 of the team’s 30 points.

PREP SPORTS

Hatleberg Capitol POY, Nommenson All-State HM



By Natalie Dillon

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NEW GLARUS — The Capitol Conference released its postseason All-Conference lists, and it’s no surprise that the girls’ volleyball team, boys’ soccer team and football team had multiple selections.

Sugar River boys’ soccer finished its season as Capitol Conference champions with an 8-0 conference record and 18-2-1 overall record. The Raiders fell to the McFarland Spartans in the WIAA Sectional 0-1.

Aiden Hatleberg (Belleville), who scored a conference-leading 30 goals and 10 assists, earned Player of the Year and First-Team All-Conference accolades. Joining him on the First-Team are Reid Nolden (Belleville), Jack Douma (New Glarus), Jack Leonard (New Glarus) and Clayton Streiff (New Glarus). The Raiders had two more players on the Second Team: Ben Johnson (Belleville) and Eli Leonard (New Glarus). Brady Mosseau (Belleville), Breckyn Thompson (New Glarus) and Mason Yaun (New Glarus) rounded out the selections on Honorable Mention.

New Glarus volleyball took second in the Capitol South (8-2) behind champion Waterloo

(10-0). The Knights finished with an 18-11 overall record, ending their season in the WIAA Regional Final with a three-set loss to Brodhead.

Grace Nommensen led the team as a First-Team All-Conference and WVCA D3 All-State Honorable Mention selection. In her final game in a New Glarus volleyball jersey, she recorded 11 kills, 23 assists and 23 digs. Lindsey Schadewalt and Amber Horn joined Nommensen on the First Team. Veronica Tollakson and Morgan Kleeman were recognized as Honorable Mention All-Conference selections.

New Glarus/Monticello football coop finished its season 2-8 overall and 1-6 in conference. The Knights defeated Big Foot 32-7 in Week 7 with a 249-passing-yard performance from quarterback Max Marty. NGM capped its season with a Week 10, 33-14 win against Southwestern. Marty threw for over 200 yards in that game, too.

Ethan Friedrich was the lone First-Team All-Conference selection as wide receiver. AC Strok earned Second-Team All-Conference at tight end and Honorable Mention at linebacker. Marty made the Honorable Mention squad at both quarterback and defensive back, while Sam Perkins received Honorable Mention honors for both offensive and defensive lineman.

Aiden Hatleberg (left) was named Player of the Year in the Capitol Conference after a 30-goal, 10-assist season. Grace Nommensen (right) earned First-Team All-Conference in the Capitol South and All-State Honorable Mention accolades in her final season with New Glarus.

Undefeated D3 State Champs



Times photos: Adam Krebs and Natalie Dillon

TOP LEFT: Monroe hoists the gold ball after defeating West Salem 35-14 in the WIAA Division 3 State Championship game on Friday, Nov. 18 at Camp Randall Stadium.

TOP RIGHT: Seniors Alex Hernandez (left) and Isaac Bunker (right) embrace after ending their final high school football game as State Champions.

UPPER LEFT: Head coach Toby Golembiewski hugs his father, WFOA Hall of Fame coach Jerry after the win.

UPPER MIDDLE: Alex Hernandez (31) and Charlie Wiegel (40) race to the student section to celebrate the championship with fans.

UPPER RIGHT: Alex Hernandez ran for 122 yards against West Salem. He ended the season as the Cheesemakers' leading rusher with 1,609 yards.

LOWER LEFT: Monroe's Mitchell Ferguson makes a TikTok from the student section.

LOWER RIGHT: George Brukwick kicks off to the Panthers to start the game.

BELOW LEFT: Lane Meier makes one of his five solo tackles of the game.

BELOW CENTER: Tucker Markham celebrates his second rushing touchdown of the game. He would go on to add two more, tying the Division 3 record for most rushing touchdowns and most touchdowns in a game.

BELOW RIGHT: Drew Indergand breaks up a pass intended for Brennan Kennedy. The incomplete pass on fourth-and-eight resulted in a turnover on downs, giving Monroe the ball at their own 37 in the third quarter.

BOTTOM LEFT: Kaden Kuester tackles Andy Johnson in the end zone. Brett McConkey's touchdown pass to Johnson in the fourth quarter was West Salem's second and final score of the game.

BOTTOM CENTER: Keatin Sweeney forces a fumble after McConkey's successful pass to Chris Colico in the second quarter. Tucker Markham recovered, setting Monroe up at West Salem's 36.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Seth Schmidt tackles Kennedy on a kick return.



CONGRATULATIONS
 DIVISION 3 STATE CHAMPIONS!
 MONROE CHEESEMAKERS

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A Community Celebration



Times photos: Adam Krebs and Natalie Dillon
LEFT: Keeping with tradition, the football team gathers in front of the student section after its win to sing the school song. **BELOW FAR LEFT:** Future Monroe football players cheer on their idols. **BELOW LEFT:** The student section erupts after a big play, showing their support with signs. **BELOW RIGHT:** The high school cheer team performs at half under the direction of head coach BreAnna Kapp. **BELOW FAR RIGHT:** Lilly Cherney performs the National Anthem as the team's lucky charm. Cherney had sung the National Anthem at the Cheesemaker's last four playoff games. **BOTTOM FAR LEFT:** The Monroe dance team performed at half time under the direction of head coach Kathryn Zastrow. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Students in the front row get hyped. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The pep band set the tone with its pregame performance under the direction of Erin Hanke. **BOTTOM FAR RIGHT:** The cheerleaders kept the student section energetic.

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Cheese

From B1

helped us out. We were able to absorb the ebb and flow of the game, and then capitalize on our stuff," Golembiewski said.

When the final whistle blew and his players celebrated at midfield, Golembiewski turned to the south side of his sideline, where his father Jerry Golembiewski — a Wisconsin Football Coaches Association Hall of Famer — stood taking pictures, just as he has for years. The father and son embraced in a prideful hug, with smiles ear-to-ear.

"It was so cool to have him along for it. He's from a different era of coaching, and he was with teams that didn't always have great success — there were a couple of conference championships and playoffs, but this had to be really something for him, too, to be on this ride," Toby Golembiewski said.

Monroe also finished the regular season 15 yards from the all-time state single-season rushing record held by Owen-Withee (5,519), set in 2007.

"That would have really been something, but I don't know that I could have lived with myself if we didn't make sure we got all those guys in the game and onto the field. It wouldn't have been the right thing to do," Golembiewski said. "Now it's something to go for next year, too."

Throughout the season, the team had ample opportunities to tack on more rushing yards, but didn't need to, as 10 of Monroe's 14 games were decided by more than 35 points, which triggers the mercy-rule running clock, and the Cheesemakers typically filled that time by putting in the second and third string players.

The gold ball is the sixth in program history, joining the teams in 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1995.

The entire school district got in on the fun as well. Players paraded the middle and elementary school halls the day before the big game, high fiving younger fans. Signs of encouragement temporarily clung to highway posts north of town for fans to view on the way to the game. A firetruck parade back into town after the win welcomed the players and coaches back, and a pep rally at the high school gym kept the energy alive.

In fact, the energy was electric at Camp Randall itself. While the temperatures for the state championship were cold — with wind chills in the single digits — the sun still came out and some snowflakes flew around the bowl, adding to the ambiance. Monroe junior Lilly Cherney wowed the crowd with a stunning rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner in pregame. Monroe's pep band was able to play, and both Monroe dance and cheer squads were able to perform at halftime. The student section even got in on the act, posting chants

to social media during the game.

"The energy from everyone who showed out across the town — how we all banded together and support our teams fueled us out there," Markham said.

A LONG TIME COMING

As a program, Monroe reached the state title game eight times in an 11-year stretch from 1986-1996 under former coach Pat Martin. A dry spell during the late 2000s and early 2010s under a pair of head coaches had seen the Cheesemakers go from a once-feared program to cellar dweller.

Then in 2016, Golembiewski came up from Orangeville to take over the fledgling program. In his first season, the Cheesemakers went from worst to first in the Badger South and reached Level 3 of the playoffs. Monroe made it back to Level 3 in 2019, and in 2021 had its hopes of state dashed in Level 4 against eventual champion Pewaukee.

"They were able to complete a big process, and it was about four years coming," Golembiewski said. "They were smart enough to learn from all of those experiences through those years and put them together. And also work hard enough on their bodies to prevent injury, and lucky enough to not get injured. ... What a great bunch of guys. This will not be forgotten."

This year, Monroe returned a strong senior class — including its entire offensive line, top two running backs, quarterback and linebacker. Playing in Golembiewski's offensive Wing system since before middle school, the class knew what it was doing on the field, had the experience playing against the state's best, and had a chip on their shoulder. They were

also expected by several other programs to make a deep run

"We had that target on our back all year, but with two-a-days and everything before — the summer programs working our butts off — just to make it up to the state championship is what counts," Dean said.

"We've been working so hard our entire career — we never gave up, never let up. We were so close last year, and we knew we needed to get here and win it all," Sweeney said.

The entire offseason of focused and dedicated training and conditioning paid off in the long run. The Cheesemakers plowed through the regular season with workmanlike ease — never getting too elated at a big play, but also never getting too down on themselves after a bad play.

"We knew last year when we fell short that it wouldn't happen again, and we made sure of it — and it showed," Bunker said.

The starting offensive line was made up of four seniors and Herbst, a junior. They played together for all of 2021 as well.

"Starting last year with me being a sophomore, I wasn't having the best game, but they picked me up. We really all came together and really put the beat down moving forward. It really means a lot to us," Herbst said.

Herbst joins his father, assistant coach Gerry Herbst, with a state championship as a Cheesemaker. In fact, several players on the team share the same feat now with their fathers.

"It's pretty cool. Dad also has two runner-ups, and mom has some in basketball. It feels awesome," Taylor Herbst said.

"It feels awesome to bring the town back to this football spirit," said Markham, whose

father Ron also played at state for Monroe decades prior. "To win the gold ball and bringing everyone together like this ... it's really awesome and a great feeling to know everyone is behind you and supports you."

Ten of Monroe's 14 wins were by more than 35 points, with seven ending in shutouts. The closest battle of the season came in Level 2 with a revenge game against Pewaukee, the only game of the season decided by less than 21 points. Monroe had let a two-score lead disappear in the second half, and Pewaukee took a touchdown lead with a scoop-and-score fumble recovery with just over a minute left. The Cheesemakers quickly drove downfield, scored, and successfully completed a two-point conversion for a 22-21 win. It was the only game of the season Monroe was challenged in the fourth quarter.

After the win, Monroe went back to business, tearing apart West Bend East in a rain-soaked game, then ousting New Berlin West in a Level 4 game played in freezing temperatures.

That allowed the Cheesemakers to have one final week of practice together, and for those seniors to soak in the final days of strapping on the pads.

"It's the best possible way to end a football career. It's sad it's the end, but I wouldn't want it any other way," Brukwicki said.

"It couldn't have ended a better way. The guys worked so hard for so long, and it's a great team win for sure," Markham said. "We've had this same group of guys for so long, and this same goal. Now we achieved our goal together, and that's the best feeling you can ever have."

D3 State Records

Most Rushing Touchdowns
4- Tucker Markham, Monroe, 2022
 Cornelius Whiteside, Wisconsin Lutheran, 2005
 Rodee Schneider, Slinger, 1998
 Nick Isaacson, Milton, 1989

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4- Tucker Markham, Monroe, 2022
 Cornelius Whiteside, Wisconsin Lutheran, 2005
 Matt Kimmler, Sheboygan Falls, 2000
 Rodee Schneider, Slinger, 1998
 Nick Isaacson, Milton, 1989
 Jim Pieper, Plymouth, 1976



Times photo: Natalie Dillon
 Tucker Markham ran for 170 yards with four touchdowns. Entering the game, Markham was averaging 45.1 rushing yards per game.