

The Times SPORTS



AL HUSS
AUTO & TRUCK
SERVICE | REPAIR

NOW HIRING
NOW HIRING
NOW HIRING

3860 W. MASON
(920) 869-1060

FREE
TIRE ROTATION
WITH REGULAR
PRICED OIL CHANGE
*1 COUPON MAY BE USED PER VISIT

THE BIGGER BATTLE



Playing from her defense position, Abel helped the Ramblers record five shutouts in 2022 and allow less than a goal per game on average.

Steve Woltmann photo

BY RICH PALZEWIC
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

SUAMICO – There are bigger battles in life than playing sports. Perhaps no one knows that bet-

ter than former Bay Port basketball and soccer star Alaina Abel.

As a member of the Pirates, Abel helped her team win WIAA Division 1 state titles in soccer in 2018 and basketball in 2019.

During Abel's senior year in 2020, Bay Port never got the chance to defend its basketball state title or win another soccer championship because the COVID-19 pandemic shut the door on Wisconsin

high school sports.

"That was a tough time for us seniors," Abel said. "I was fortunate enough to win two state titles, but we left wondering what could have been."

The Pirates made the 2020 basketball state tournament, but the night before the team was scheduled to play its semifinal matchup against

See ABEL page 22



Polkowski

Polkowski steps down

BY RICH PALZEWIC
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

GREEN BAY – After 10 years as coach of the Green Bay Southwest boys' basketball team, John

See POLKOWSKI page 20

Four-time NCAA All-American cherishes memories while looking ahead

BY MALLORY ALLEN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

GREEN BAY – When Steven Hermesen joined his middle school's track and field team, he never imagined that 10 years later, he would be crowned a four-time NCAA All-American.

And yet that's exactly how it happened.

Now that the 22-year-old's collegiate indoor track-and-field days have come to an end, Hermesen is looking back fondly on all the memories he made and goals he achieved, while also looking ahead to what's still to come.

Early days

The origins of Hermesen's track and field career can be traced all



Steven Hermesen finished his indoor career at Carroll as a four-time United States Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association (USTFCCA) All-American, earning titles twice in the discus throw and twice in the weight throw.

Jimmy Naprstek photo

the way back to seventh grade, when he first joined De Pere Middle School's team.

"My older brother was involved in track at the high school, so I decided that I wanted to follow in his footsteps, as I did with almost everything growing up," Hermesen explained.

His passion for the sport continued to grow as the years passed, with Hermesen competing in throwing events throughout his time at De Pere High School, where he was a captain for both the football and track and field teams.

However, Hermesen said that he "didn't have too much success in high school as an athlete" because it wasn't until college that he "really grew into" his body.

See HERMSEN page 21



Real Rewards Checking

THOUSANDS HAVE EARNED \$20 MILLION

IN THE LAST 12 YEARS! READY TO BE ONE OF THEM?

Nicolet
NATIONAL BANK

NicoletBank.com | 800.369.0226

Real Rewards Checking (Real Rewards) is available for consumer deposits only. Annual Percentage Yield ("APY") is accurate as of 1/1/2023. Real Rewards is a variable rate account. Your APY may change at any time after your account is opened, at the discretion of Nicolet National Bank. Real Rewards is a tiered rate product. If qualifications are met for the qualification cycle, Tier 1: The portion of your balance that is equal to or less than \$15,000 will earn 3.00% APY. Tier 2: The portion of your balance that is over \$15,000 will earn 0.01% APY. The APY for Tier 2 will range from 0.40% to 3.00%, depending on the balance in your account. If qualifications are not met for the qualification cycle, your entire balance will earn 0.01% APY. You must enroll in online banking and e-statements in order to qualify. Transactions required each qualification cycle: At least ten posted and cleared debit card transactions (ATM-processed transactions do not count as qualifying debit card transactions), and at least one posted and cleared direct deposit of payroll or social security. Disclosed APY assumes all interest remains on deposit. Fees and withdrawals of interest will reduce earnings and APY. All Nicolet National Bank checking accounts are subject to credit approval. Additional terms and conditions apply. See Nicoletbank.com for details. Member FDIC.

Rohde is two-time coach of the year

BY JORDON LAWRENZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

GREEN BAY – For the second year in a row, Notre Dame girls basketball coach Sara Rohde has been named the Associated Press Wisconsin Coach of the Year.

This is Rohde's third time winning the award.

The Tritons are coming off three straight Division 2 state championships.

With a 29-1 record this season, Notre Dame's only loss was their first game of the year.

Pewaukee took down the Tritons, 68-67, but Notre Dame avenged that loss in the state championship game, 64-49.

In the past three seasons, coach Rohde has guided the Tritons to a combined 86-3 record.

Even after a three-peat, Sara Rohde knew winning the award wasn't a guarantee "I was surprised mainly because it's an award that's tough to win in consecutive years."

It was a record-breaking season for the Tritons, and they don't plan on slowing down anytime soon. Gracie Grzesk became the fifth player in Notre Dame history to score 1,000 career points, while Trista Fayta set the all-time assist record.

Grzesk and Fayta are both juniors who will be returning for their final sea-



For the second year in a row, Notre Dame girls basketball coach Sara Rohde has been named the Associated Press Wisconsin Coach of the Year.

Cormac McInnis photo

son next winter.

"All of our players and coaches are competitive and want to do well, so with that being said, they are always hungry. Keeping players engaged and excited about improvement with new drills, workouts, etc... is the main challenge as a coach," Rohde commented.

With the 2022-23 season behind her, Rohde is able to take some time to regroup. "I definitely feel like I'm able to take a slight break once the season ends until summer rolls around. There are always odds and ends to wrap up and dates to plan

for heading into the summer, which keeps me busy."

She continued, "Many of our players are multi-sport athletes and move onto their next sport, so I try to support them in their respective sport."

When it comes down to it, Sara Rohde will forever be synonymous with Notre Dame Academy.

Coach Rohde left a bit of advice for aspiring coaches out there, "The best advice I can give to aspiring coaches is to be really good at teaching the fundamentals and building relationships."

Tritons blank Spartans in non-conference clash

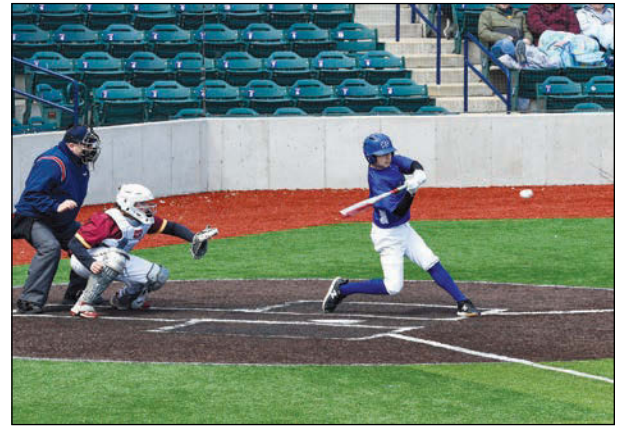
BY PRESS TIMES SPORTS

ASHWAUBENON – The Notre Dame Academy baseball team took on Luxemburg-Casco at Capital Credit Union Park on April 8 and came away with a 7-0 shutout victory behind pitchers Landen Lozier and Bryson Koehne.

The Tritons came alive in the fourth inning to open the scoring with three runs, followed by another three in the sixth as they cruised to victory. Lozier had four hits, an RBI and scored a run while teammate Owen Wery had three hits, good for two RBI, along with two runs scored. Brady LaViolette cranked a homer on his way to three RBI for Notre Dame.

Lozier went five innings while giving up one hit and one walk while striking out five. Koehne pitched two innings and gave up a run while striking out two Luxemburg-Casco batters.

Notre Dame's Micah Marzec makes a nice catch at the warning track during the Tritons' 7-0 victory over Luxemburg-Casco at Capital Credit Union Park on April 8.



Aaron Heyroth takes a cut at a pitch as the Tritons defeated the Spartans 7-0 on April 8 at Capital Credit Union Park.

Josh Staloch photos

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E	
LC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	2	0
ND	0	0	0	3	0	4	x	-	7	14	1
W: Landen Lozier											
L: Drew Badow											



ABEL
from page 24

Divine Savior Holy Angels, the WIAA canceled the tournament.

Spring high school sports also never got going that season — thus robbing Bay Port of the opportunity to win another soccer state title.

Pales in comparison

Although disappointment ended Abel's senior season at Bay Port, it pales in comparison to what the Loyola-Chicago standout is currently going through.

When Abel was in middle school, she was diagnosed with alopecia areata — an autoimmune disease where one's body mistakenly attacks your hair follicles.

Its cause is unknown, but it's an uncontrollable process that affects each individual differently.

"In middle school, I found my first hair loss patch," Abel said. "I went to the dermatologist, and they diagnosed me with alopecia areata. Throughout middle school, it always grew back. Even in high school, it was only a quarter-sized patch here and there, but it always grew back."

Abel said things changed a bit when she got to Loyola — a Division I school north of the downtown area — in the fall of 2020.

"The thing with autoimmune diseases, there's usually not only one specific reason why it happens," she said. "In my case, there's probably a lot of different explanations — maybe being away from home, the stress of college and an injury that

occurred in December of last year."

Abel hasn't been able to do much regarding soccer activities because she tore the posterior cruciate ligament in her knee.

"I'm feeling much better (with my knee)," she said. "I'd say I'm about 95% — I started non-contact work again."

Add the stresses up, and Abel said late last year, she noticed a big change in her hair.

"About four months ago, I went to a dermatologist again," she said. "I got put back on a cream, and I was doing that once or twice a day — rubbing it on the (bare) spots. Typically, when I'd do that in the past, I saw regrowth in about eight weeks. With my latest episode, I haven't seen any regrowth — that's when I knew something was up."

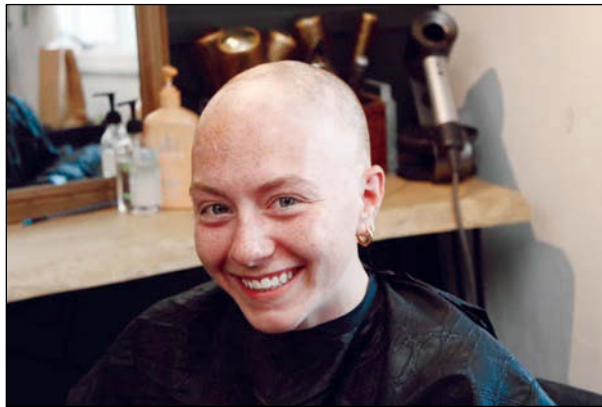
Emotionally, Abel said that was "extremely hard."

"For sure," she said. "It was an emotional rollercoaster getting past those first two months when I knew it was a reality."

Abel said the next step in her journey — shaving her head — was a long time coming.

"It was a difficult decision," she said. "I went on vacation for spring break — which was fun — but it was also hard. I wore my hair up the entire time and wore a thick headband — it emotionally got to be too much. I had been hiding my hair loss for years, and that was exhausting mentally."

When Abel got back to campus after her trip, she made her decision.



Although disappointment ended Alaina Abel's senior season at Bay Port, it pales in comparison to what the Loyola-Chicago standout is currently going through.

Submitted photo

"I said to myself, 'I need to take a stand and not let this autoimmune disease control me, and I need to take control of what's going on,'" she said. "The stress took me to a deep dark valley. I ended up going back on my anti-depressants because it took such an emotional toll on me."

March 31 will be a day Abel said she'll long remember.

"That day, the population lost a ginger," she said. "It's emotional losing your hair, especially when society puts so much pressure and reward on what you look like. During it, I was confident and had no regrets. I had thought about it so much prior that I was ready to get it off at that point."

Abel said the ride back home to her parent's house after the appointment was "liberating."

"It was so freeing," she said. "I thought I'd be emotional during the appointment and after, but it was a relief — it was a happy ride home. Since I've shaved my head, I've been much happier and have more internal

peace. I think autoimmune diseases correlate a lot with mental illnesses because they are invisible to those outside your immediate circle. It was quite a shock to my team telling them how much hair I'd lost because I hid it so well."

In a recent Facebook post, Abel said "It's not out of the ordinary to see a female athlete with a ponytail and a headband every day."

"After I got my head shaved, I returned to campus the next day because we had soccer practice," she said. "My teammates have been nothing short of amazing and have been showering me with love and attention the past few weeks. (Loyola) Coach Barry (Bimbi) was wearing his hat at practice, and at the end of practice, he took his hat off, and he had gone bald as well."

To help with the loss of her hair, Abel said her teammates went a step further.

"They set up a GoFundMe page and helped me purchase a wig," she said. "I showed up to practice with it on and everyone was commenting how

amazing it looked."

Abel said she's taking everything in stride.

"I'm hoping one day I will have a full head of hair again, but if not, then that's something I have accepted, too," Abel said on Facebook.

Wigs for Kids

Lying in bed one night, an emotional Abel said she thought of another idea.

"My motto in life has been, 'If you can't control or change what's going on, how can you use it to change the world or better your position in terms of helping others?,'" she said.

That led Abel to look at how she could help those in need.

"After doing some research, I thought, 'How cool would it be to use my story to give back to kids going through something similar?'" she said. "Wigs are expensive — I didn't think they'd cost that much."

Abel then set up a fundraiser through Venmo for donations to "Wigs for Kids," with 100% of the monies raised going directly to the organization.

"So far, we're up to about \$5,000 raised — let's keep going," she said.

If interested in donating, please visit Venmo and search Wigs4Kids-Alaina.

Let's talk soccer

Abel's stellar soccer career hasn't stopped since she left Bay Port.

After being named the Missouri Valley Conference Freshman of the Year and second-team all-conference her first season at Loyola, Abel followed that up with another second-team all-

conference selection her sophomore year — where she started 18 games and played in all but 50 minutes of game action.

"We're excited," Abel said. "After playing in the MVC during my first two years, we stepped into the Atlantic 10 Conference. It was a big adjustment because most of the teams are on the East Coast, so we had to fly instead of bussing to games. It's been a learning curve, but because we have this first season under our belt, we're excited to do some damage. We have a lot of talented freshmen coming in."

Playing from her defense position, Abel helped the Ramblers record five shutouts in 2022 and allow less than a goal per game on average.

During her three-year career, Abel has started 49 of the 50 games she's appeared in and has one assist to her name.

"That's my one college stat," she laughed.

Bay Port days

Abel said she still reminisces about her days in a Pirate uniform — maybe a little too much.

"We probably reminisce too much because we missed out on our senior soccer season," she said. "I have a group chat with (former Bay Port players) Emma (Nagel), McKenzie (Johnson) and Raegan (McIntyre) — there are some good memories. We'd like to think we could have won two more state championships if it wasn't for COVID, but we are thankful for what we have."