

Sports

Thursday, June 8, 2023

CHIPPEWA.COM

SECTION C

McDonell onto state for first time since 2014.

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McDonell/Regis' Bauer, Biskupski tie for tenth.

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PREP SOFTBALL DIVISION 5 STATE PREVIEW

THE THREE PILLARS



BRANDON BERG, CHIPPEWA HERALD

The McDonell softball team celebrates after beating Northwood/Solon Springs on Thursday in Athens.

Focus on defense, pitching and early runs pushes Macks back to state

BRANDON BERG
brandon.berg@lee.net

McDonell softball coach Rick Baier called it a "winning concept."

The team's focus on strong pitching, defense and early runs down the stretch of the season has carried the Macks back to Madison, and entering Thursday evening's Division 5 state semifinal contest against Stevens Point Pacelli at Goodman Diamond, Baier's McDonell squad is unquestionably playing its best ball of the year.

The gloves

The game is called "21 Outs."

A simple yet pressure-packed activity where the McDonell

softball team simulates a game on defense with the goal of having 21 error-free outs collected. If someone makes an error, the game starts over.

"They get up to 18, 19 (outs and) the pressure's on them to get 20 and 21 otherwise we're going to do this over," Baier said. "They've been running it to perfection."

Junior catcher Morgan Wirtz said the exercise does a good job of simulating a game not just because of the pressure involved, but also because of how the team approaches it.

"They get intense because we make them intense," Wirtz said. "We know that they serve a purpose and that in games when the pressure's on we can handle

it because we're intense during practice."

Thus far in the playoffs the Macks have made just one error and it came in the team's first game of the postseason. The team has veterans in key places such as shortstop and center field with seniors Josie Witkowski and Rebecca Baier, respectively. Juniors Wirtz (catcher), Aubrey Dorn (first base) and Abby Bresina (second base) are multi-year players while junior Kylee Jenson (right field), sophomore Kendall Hepfler (left field) and freshman Keagan Winger (third base) are making the most of their first significant playing time.

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 **VIEW:** a collection of local state softball qualifiers from over the years pointing your smartphone at this QR code and tapping the link. **NEWSVU**

Up Next

Division 5 State Semifinals

(1) Pacelli (26-1) vs (4) McDonell (19-6)

When: Thursday, 8:30 p.m.

Where: Goodman Diamond, Madison

COMMENTARY

Sandvig's impact runs deeper than her dominance

To summarize the impact outgoing Chi-Hi senior Brooklyn Sandvig had on the track and field program based solely on her success would not be doing Sandvig justice.

There has been plenty of success as the five-time Division 1 state champion wrapped up her stellar career this past weekend at the state track and field championships.

But this year it's been easy to see Sandvig's impact on the program extends to more than her numerous victories.

And that's how she wanted it.

Sandvig took more of a leadership role with the Cardinals in her senior season, taking extra effort to foster an environment of fun and enjoyment on the team. It was on her mind even on one of the biggest days of her young life last November when she signed her letter of

intent to run for Iowa State University. It was also on her mind Saturday as she closed out her career by three-peat-ing as Division 1 state champion in the 400-meter run.

"This team means a lot to me," Sandvig said Saturday. "They're basically my whole family. I love them all to death. Watching from a small group that went my sophomore year with us four only going to having about 15 kids go, this year is just a huge accomplishment I feel like we have together and I feel like we created a more family environment to the team and it's bringing a lot more people."

Sandvig lived at the front of the pack from the moment she started competing for Chi-Hi. Making her debut as a sophomore after her freshman year was wiped out because of the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sandvig immediately opened eyes when she set two school records in her first-ever meet.



BRANDON BERG, CHIPPEWA HERALD

Chi-Hi senior Brooklyn Sandvig stands atop the podium after winning Saturday's Division 1 state championship in the 400-meter dash at Veterans Memorial Stadium in La Crosse.

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PREP SOFTBALL STATE

A look at the field

Four defending champs return to state

MARK MCMULLEN
mmcmullen@wiscnews.com

Twenty prep softball teams remain and will vie for state championships this weekend beginning Thursday at Goodman Diamond in Madison.

On the air

The quarterfinals and semifinals will be streamed on WIAA.TV portal of the NFHS Network on a subscription basis. The championship game for Division 1 will air on Bally Sports Wisconsin, while Divisions 2-5 will air on Bally Sports Wisconsin Extra.

Division 1

Thursday will begin with Division 1 quarterfinals when second-seeded Superior (25-0) meets seventh-seeded Menomonee Falls (22-7) at 8 a.m. Thursday. Each team seeks its first state title — Superior is in its second straight appearance and sixth overall while Menomonee Falls makes its seventh appearance.

Oshkosh West qualified for its ninth state tournament, but its best finish is a runner-up in 1989. Top-seeded Kaukauna (27-0) brings in a 55-game winning streak and back-to-back Division 1 state titles when the Galloping Ghosts play eighth-seeded Waterford (19-6) at noon. Kaukauna is appearing its fifth state tournament and also won titles in 2010 and 2017. Waterford is making its first state appearance.

The final quarterfinal will follow at 2 p.m. when fourth-seeded Hartland Arrowhead (24-4) plays fifth-seeded Oak Creek (23-6). Arrowhead, making its seventh trip to state, won the 1982 Class A title. Oak Creek makes a repeat appearance, 11th overall, and was runner-up in 2005.

The Division 1 semifinals begin at 7 p.m. Friday with Saturday's championship game scheduled for 6:30 p.m.

Division 2

Top-seeded New Berlin Eisenhower (25-4) will experience the state tournament for first time since 2014, and seventh overall, when it takes on fourth-seeded



McDonnell's Keagan Winger (14) and Katie Ruf (20) smile after Winger made a diving catch against Athens during a Division 5 sectional semifinal on May 30 at Casper Park.

State Schedule	
State Tournament Schedule	Friday's Semifinals
Division 1	No. 1 New Berlin Eisenhower (25-4) vs No. 4 New London (18-6), 2:30 p.m.
Thursday's Quarterfinals	No. 2 Freedom (25-2) vs No. 3 Turner (22-2), 4:30 p.m.
No. 2 Superior (25-0) vs No. 7 Menomonee Falls (22-7), 8 a.m.	Saturday's Championship
No. 3 Oshkosh West (25-4) vs No. 6 Sun Prairie East (24-4), 10 a.m.	Friday's winners
No. 1 Kaukauna (27-0) vs No. 8 Waterford (19-6), noon	Division 3
No. 4 Arrowhead (24-4) vs No. 5 Oak Creek (23-6), 2 p.m.	Friday's Semifinals
Friday's Semifinals	No. 1 Brodhead (25-2) vs No. 4 Somerset (11-12), 10 a.m.
Winners of Game 1 vs 2, 7 p.m.	No. 2 Mishicot (21-5) vs No. 3 Mayville (19-4), noon
Winners of Game 3 vs 4, 9 p.m.	Saturday's Championship
Saturday's Championship	Friday's winners, 1 p.m.
Friday's winners	Division 4
Division 2	

New London (18-6) at 2:30 p.m. Friday. Eisenhower won a state title in 2008. New London had a five-year run of state appearances (2013-17) with a state title in 2013 and runner-up finish in 2014.

The defending champion in second-seeded Freedom (25-2) is back for a fourth state trip and will play third-seeded Beloit Turner (22-2) at 4:30 p.m. Friday. Turner is in its fifth state appearance and

for first time since 2017. The championship game is scheduled for 4 p.m. Saturday.

Division 3

Top-seeded Brodhead (25-2) re-

turns to state for first time since 2004, when it won a state title, and will play fourth-seeded Somerset (11-12) at 10 a.m. Friday. It is Somerset's first state appearance.

Second-seeded Mishicot (21-5) is making its fifth state appearance and won a Division 4 title in 2021. It will play third-seeded Mayville (19-4) at noon. Mayville made its way back to state first time in 21 years and fifth overall. The Cardinals won a state title in 1999.

The championship game is scheduled for 1 p.m. Saturday.

Division 4

Top-seeded Grantsburg (26-3) gets to defend its 2022 state title when it plays fourth-seeded Iola-Scandinavia (21-9) at 4:30 p.m. Thursday. Grantsburg qualified for state for 10th time and also won titles in 2006 and 2009. It is also a repeat appearance for Iola-Scandinavia.

Second-seeded Stratford (18-9) and third-seeded Waterloo (15-5) will make their first state appearances in a semifinal against one another at 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

The championship game is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Saturday.

Division 5

Entering its fifth state appearance in last six years and 11th overall, top-seeded Pacelli (26-1) will play fourth-seeded Chipewewa Falls McDonnell Catholic (19-6) at 8:30 p.m. Thursday. Pacelli won Division 4 titles in 2003 and 2015 and a Division 3 title in 2012. McDonnell, which earned its first trip to state since 2018 and seventh overall, won a Division 5 title in 2017 and 2018 and a Division 4 title in 2008.

Second-seeded Wisconsin Rapids Assumption (19-2) will get a chance to defend its 2022 state title. In its six attempts, Assumption has won a Division 3 title in 2001 and a Division 4 title in 2005. It will play third-seeded Oakfield (24-3) at 8 p.m. Friday. Oakfield has won six state championships, including a Division 5 title in 2021, Division 4 titles in 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2014, and a Division 3 title in 1997 in their previous 15 appearances.

The championship game is scheduled for 8 a.m. Saturday.

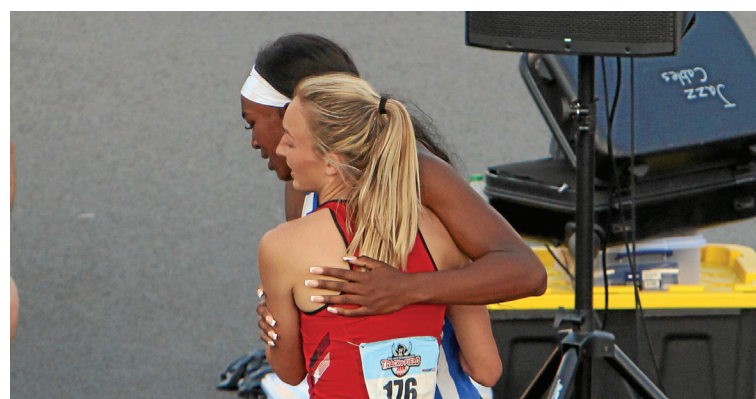
Berg

From C1

Ultimately, Sandvig set four individual records and was a part of two relay records.

"When Brooklyn joined the team, I didn't know what she was capable of doing," Chi-Hi coach Becky Nette said of Sandvig. "To accomplish what she did doesn't happen to very many people. Over the course of three years, she had to grow as an athlete and as a person. She knew she had a target on her back when she placed in all four events at state, broke multiple records and was the fastest in the conference and state. Even with being the fastest, she still had her struggles she had to work through."

"She knew she had to have good starts, trust her training, run her own race and manage the stress of doing multiple events at a high level, along with the expectation from herself to win."



Chi-Hi's Brooklyn Sandvig shares a hug with Whitefish Bay's Lola Kolawole after the 200-meter run last Saturday in La Crosse.

Sandvig won the first of her five overall state championships in 2021, tumbling across the finish line to start her run of three straight 400 wins. As a junior, Sandvig swept the sprints with wins in the 100, 200 and 400 that weren't particularly close.

Colleges around the country took notice, and Sandvig toured

many of the best before deciding the staff and small-town feel of Ames, Iowa, made the fit with the Cyclones the right one. Sandvig finished on the podium in 11 of her 12 events she advanced to state for in those three years. The one miss came this year in the long jump, in which Sandvig entered Friday's competition seeded sec-

ond overall but scratched on all three of her jumps. In the moment following her third missed jump, a frustrated Sandvig took a few moments to collect her thoughts before exiting the pit.

After the fact, Sandvig said she had some struggles throughout the weekend. In addition to Friday's long jump, Sandvig did not repeat as state champion in the 100 and 200 as longtime competitor and AAU teammate Lola Kolawole of Whitefish Bay bested the Chi-Hi senior at the front in both events. But in the moments following those races, Sandvig showed the poise and perspective of a true champion in choosing to recognize what her opponent had done.

"Me and Lola have definitely been friendly competitors for each other throughout our high school career and even AAU track," Sandvig said. "She definitely put in the work a lot this summer, and you could tell on the track tonight

she deserved everything she got. Super proud of her and knowing we're on the same AAU, it's incredible to see her grow throughout the winter and summer."

It's a true example that others have noticed.

Chi-Hi sophomore Ava Krista broke her own school triple jump record on the way to taking fourth at state on Saturday. Sandvig was one of the many there to cheer Krista on, even though Sandvig didn't have to as she wasn't running until much later in the day because of an altered schedule.

That support speaks volumes. "Brooklyn is great. She's just an amazing idol to look up to and a huge role model on our team," Krista said of Sandvig. "She's always working hard on practice, and she's also just the best teammate. She's here and supporting me even though she doesn't have to run until 4 (p.m.)."

"She's just always around and hyping me up. She's great."

Softball

From C1

"(Assistant coach) Rick (Ruf) and I, we've played enough ball all our lives to know that defense wins and that's what it takes," coach Baier said.

The arm

Last year, Katie Ruf shared time in the circle with now-graduated senior Kait Ortmann and has taken on the lion's share of the pitching duties this spring.

Coach Baier credited Ruf for her work in the offseason, working with a pitching coach to improve her game. The results have been easy to see as Ruf enters state with an 18-5 overall record in 24 appearances. Ruf has a 1.18 earned run average in 148 innings pitched with 202 strikeouts against just 47 walks.

Ruf has allowed just one earned run in the postseason and overall has thrown 21 consecutive shut-out innings.

"I've seen her make her biggest improvement on her mental game in the circle," Wirtz said of

her battery mate. "This year she really stepped up and said, 'Hey, I'm going to do better.' And I think that's what's really important is she allows herself to have a few missed pitches, but on that next pitch she attacks it just like she would a first one."

Ruf's mental toughness was on full display in last Thursday's 8-0 win over Northwood/Solon Springs, a game in which the junior pitcher battled a tough Evergreens lineup and the heat. The rightly walked six batters and hit another but allowed just one hit and teamed up with her defense to work through some jams to keep a formidable foe off the scoreboard.

"I think she's a good leader," Dorn said of Ruf. "She split time with Kait, and now she's doing it all on her own. I think she's done a good job especially pushing through tough times when she's getting tired in games."

The bats

McDonnell understands the value of early runs.

Even one run on the board can settle in a pitcher and help the

defense to know it won't have to dominate in order to win. The Macks aren't afraid to play small ball to scratch a run across, knowing small things can often lead to big ones.

"That's what we strive for playing for one, but you know how that rolls," coach Baier said. "You play for one then all of a sudden you get two, you get three and boom you're up four, you're up five. You don't want to coast, it's more comfortable being up."

Dorn said the lineup is solid top to bottom but added it starts at the top, where Hepfler has done a good job setting the table out of the leadoff spot. Hepfler is third on the team in batting average (.404) and on-base percentage (.465) with 29 of the team's 60 stolen bases.

Behind Hepfler are the team's top two bats with Baier (team-high .446 average, four home runs and 29 RBIs) and Wirtz (leader in OBP (.522), second in average (.442) and third in RBIs (23)). Witkowski bats cleanup with an on-base plus slugging percentage over .800. Dorn is

second on the team in home runs (2) and RBIs (24), and Ruf helps her own cause with a .338 average and .392 OBP.

Sophomore designated hitter Kiara Leinenkugel has found her niche as a hitter, hitting .291 with a .391 OBP, while Winger and Bresina (.338) have shown the ability to turn the lineup over.

"I think it's all about confidence for us," Wirtz said. "We get that run early and then we know we can play with whoever we're playing with. That run early allows us to build confidence throughout the game."

The matchup

The Macks are familiar with their semifinal foe.

Stevens Point Pacelli defeated McDonnell 13-3 in five innings at the Thorp/Gilman Slamfest on May 13. The Cardinals were ranked No. 1 in the final Wisconsin Fastpitch Softball Coaches Association Division 5 state coaches poll of the regular season. Like the Macks, Pacelli has been dominant in the postseason by outscoring foes a combined 47-2, including a 3-0 sectional

title win over Wausau Newman.

Pacelli is hitting .409 as a team entering state led by sophomore Kaylin Yenter (.529 with 35 runs batted in). In the circle, the Cardinals have split innings between four pitchers with sophomore Peyton Mancl shouldering the majority of the workload with a 12-0 record and 1.71 earned run average in 77 innings.

When the Macks and Cardinals faced off nearly a month ago, neither team pitched its top pitcher. The Macks opted to sit Ruf, and Pacelli threw junior Hannah Trzinski, who has an 8-1 record and 2.91 ERA in 33 innings.

Thursday's winner will face either defending state champion Wisconsin Rapids Assumption or Oakfield on Saturday morning for a state championship. The Macks' run prevention unit will have its hands full, but coach Baier believes his team is up to the task in all phases — just as it has been throughout the playoffs.

"I'm hoping (for) four runs," coach Baier said. "I think if we can put four runs across, we've got ourselves a good chance."