

Sports

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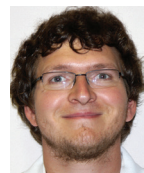


BRANDON BERG, CHIPPEWA HERALD

McDonell head coach Jerry Smith, right, walks off the field with Carter Stelter, left, as Pecatonica celebrates after a 7-6 defeat in Tuesday's Division 4 state semifinals at Fox Cities Stadium in Grand Chute.

McDonell baseball proves Smith's belief right in first — and only — season as head coach

GRAND CHUTE — Early on when first-year McDonell baseball coach Jerry Smith was just getting to know his team, he felt he had something special with its roster.



BRANDON BERG

It just took some time for others to see it. A 4-10 regular season gave way to a magical playoff run as the Macks rattled off five straight wins to advance to the Division 4 state tournament. The road ended Tuesday night as McDonell's late rally fell short to Pecatonica 7-6 at Fox Cities Stadium but the tough final result did little to dim Smith's outlook on the team and the season.

VIEW: A collection of photos from Tuesday's McDonell baseball game by pointing your smartphone at this QR code and tapping the link. [NEWSVU](#)

"Maybe we weren't supposed to be here but we sure did embrace it. We want to thank everything that was supporting," Smith said after the game. "I got a lot of text messages and emails from other coaches. I got some support obviously from our fans and the school. Honestly we had a great time. It hurts."

"It hurts real bad but we faced a team that was 23-1 and we took them all the way to the bottom of the seventh inning and we lost 7-6. That's a pretty great ballgame."

Smith was a late addition to the Macks program as head coach. Already a kindergarten through fifth grade teacher in the McDonell Area Catholic Schools district, Smith had coached before joining the system and said he'd like to again if a chance opened up.

The head coach role for the baseball team was that chance.

Smith inherited a team with some experienced veteran players and talented youngsters.

"At the beginning of the year we obviously didn't know who he was but I think every single day at practice and at games we saw the coach he was," senior Aidan Misfeldt said of Smith. "We wouldn't be

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BRANDON BERG, CHIPPEWA HERALD

McDonell senior Eddie Mittermeyer is out at first base during Tuesday's Division 4 state semifinal matchup against Pecatonica at Fox Cities Stadium in Grand Chute.

D 4 STATE SEMIFINALS | PECATONICA 7, MCDONELL 6

Vikings hold off Macks in wild semifinal

BRANDON BERG
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GRAND CHUTE — The clock finally struck midnight on the McDonell baseball team's Cinderella season.

But the Macks didn't go down without a fight, putting the tying run at second with two outs before top-seeded Pecatonica survived for a 7-6 victory in Thursday night's Division 4 state semifinal at Fox Cities Stadium.

Carter Stelter was hit by a pitch with two outs in the seventh inning to put the tying run on second base for the Macks (9-11). Stelter advanced to second on a wild pitch before Pecatonica relief pitcher got Keagan Galvez to ground out to second for the final out of a wild semifinal battle.

It was a tough end to an underdog post-

season run for McDonell in which the team entered the playoffs with four wins as a six seed in its sectional before rattling off five straight victories.

"It's a loss and it feels how you expect it to feel," senior Aidan Misfeldt said. "It hurts so much but I told everyone right when the final ball was tossed and the game was over I told people we shouldn't be here. Nobody expected us to be here. I mean we should be here but we have nothing to hang our heads about and we battled with this team."

"This is a great group of guys we got."

The Macks went back and forth with a Pecatonica squad ranked second in the final Wisconsin Baseball Coaches

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Berg

From C1

here without him. He's the reason we're here right now. He's always keeping us up, he's always been positive and I wouldn't want any other coach coaching me in baseball but him. He shouldn't be upset at all with what the outcome is. He's a great guy, without him I don't think we'd be here right now."

Through observing his players in other sports, Smith saw athletic ability and players who could excel in the clutch. McDonell lost five of its first six games but only one by more than five runs. Even though the team did have many wins to show for itself in a 4-10 regular season, Smith saw improvement and continued to be positive with the team.

"He's been really special. He's coming up with new drills all the time for us," senior Carter Stelter said of Smith. "Whatever we're struggling with, he's always hammering that into our systems. Those early games where we were losing by one run and lost 10 games in the regular season — we only lost (two) by double digits — and he would nick at those tiny little things that we struggled with during games and by the end of the season we were clicking."

McDonell hardly had the look of a state team when it opened the postseason as a six seed but the Macks survived the regionals before stunning defending Division 4 state champion Eau Claire Regis in the sectional semis before besting Washburn to advance to state.

It took some time, but the confident Smith had in his team from the first practices was ultimately realized when it mattered most.

"It was a little bit late notice but I'm so grateful I got a chance to take it and I'm so grateful I was able to take these boys as far as I possibly could," Smith said.

But it will only be a one-year gig for Smith, who has accepted a principal position in another district.

So this season was a walk-off of sorts for Smith.

But despite a coach and a strong five-player senior class walking out the door, Smith was optimistic about McDonell's future. He complimented assistant coaches Tim Riemenschneider and Dillon Keller and said either could excel in an expanded role and also was confident the team's younger players could take bigger steps in the coming years.

And for someone that has coached many different sports, this spring may represent a walk-off in another way for Smith.

This year would be a hard act for anyone to follow.

"I might hang up my bat. I might hang it up and I might be done coaching," Smith said. "I don't know if I ever want to coach another team. This was truly a blessing and I'm so grateful."

NBA FINALS



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Commissioner Adam Silver, left, hands the MVP award to Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, center, after the team won the NBA Championship with a victory over the Miami Heat in Game 5 of basketball's NBA Finals, Monday in Denver.

Completing his resume

Jokic adds missing piece to accolades with NBA title

ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

DENVER — There are no more holes in Nikola Jokic's impressive resume.

Denver's do-it-all center commandeered these playoffs, smashing a 56-year-old playoff record with 10 triple-doubles, and he completed a transcendent two-month stretch by leading the Nuggets past the Miami Heat 94-89 on Monday night in a hard-fought Game 5 to secure the old ABA franchise's first basketball championship.

Jokic had 28 points, 16 rebounds and four assists in the clincher that came 55 years, seven months and 28 days after the Nuggets won the first game in franchise history. Denver struggled shooting the ball against the pesky Heat, missing 23 of 28 shots from 3-point range and 10 of 23 free throws.

"It was ugly and we couldn't make shots. But at the end we figured it out," Jokic said after hugging all of his jubilant teammates and coaches and almost all of his dejected opponents, chasing down some of them as they walked off the court. "I am just happy we won the game."

The stoic Jokic finally let loose when he greeted his two older

brothers, Nemanja and Strahinja — who tossed Nuggets coach Michael Malone in the air — and his wife and toddler daughter in the stands.

Jokic acquiesced the Michael Jordan Trophy to Joel Embiid as the league's MVP this season despite being even more dominant than he was in the two previous seasons when he easily won the award.

He instead walked away with the Bill Russell NBA Finals Most Valuable Player trophy after becoming the first player in league history to lead the playoffs in total points (600), rebounds (269) and assists (190).

Jokic smiled sheepishly as he held the MVP trophy in his right hand and daughter Ognjena in the other as confetti danced around him.

As the 41st pick in the 2014 draft — which occurred during a Taco Bell commercial, no less — Jokic is the lowest-drafted player to be chosen finals MVP.

"I think it's a great journey. Like you said, 41st pick," Jokic said, "but that doesn't matter. When you're here, you're a player. The (Heat) have a couple guys that weren't even drafted."

Throughout the playoffs, Jokic dominated opponents with his array of finger-roll finishes, pull-up jump shots, long-range buzzer-beaters, amazing assists and rebounding prowess at both baskets.

When he wasn't on the court,

he was his teammates' biggest supporter, jumping in jubilation as they kept the Heat at bay when he was in foul trouble in Game 4. On Monday night, he let his emotions show during a third-quarter timeout when he got on his teammates for settling for 3s instead of layups, lapses that led to a 64-60 deficit.

"I didn't slam the chairs, but I like how you make it bigger," Jokic said. "Yes, I yell at them because we were just shooting 3s, and I think it was like 4-on-3, we could just get an easy layup or score the ball. In that situation, it means a lot. ... Especially it's a low-scoring game, we didn't make shots, they didn't make shots."

"In that situation, emotions, yes, I yell at them, but I think they're used to it," Jokic added.

"Sometimes I yell at them, sometimes I cheer them, but that's part of the family, part of the team."

Jokic teamed with Jamal Murray to set the new pick-and-roll standard this season, Murray's first since tearing an ACL in 2021. They produced the first dual triple-double in NBA history in Game 3 and accomplished something Karl Malone and John Stockton never did in hoisting the gold ball in the finals.

Jokic and Murray became the first duo in league history to each average at least 25 points, five rebounds and five assists in a single postseason.

Jokic has been recognized in

basketball circles as the game's most versatile center for several years, but it took Denver's championship run to cement his standing as basketball royalty — and introduce himself to much of the nation.

Malone played the disrespect card earlier in the playoffs, while understanding his team needed to do more than dominate the regular season. Denver was on a mission, led by Jokic.

Denver's big man always shrugged his broad shoulders, even less bothered by criticism than the lack of laurels. So doggedly determined to win a title and with the No. 1 seed in the West secured, Jokic sat out several games toward the end of the regular season to get his body right for the playoffs.

That all but sealed his exclusion to the club of players who've won three consecutive NBA MVP awards, one that includes just Russell, Larry Bird and Wilt Chamberlain — who set the standard with seven triple-doubles in 1967, a record that stood until this year.

But sitting out to rehab his sore calf apparently did wonders for Jokic and the Nuggets in the playoffs.

Asked how he felt to finally be a champion, Jokic said, "It's good. It's good. The job is done. We can go home now."

Not until after he leads the Nuggets' championship parade on Thursday, though.

Baseball

From C1

Association Division 4 state coaches poll of the regular season.

The Vikings (24-1) took the lead in the top of the sixth when Elijah Knutson scored on a McDonell error, taking an aggressive turn around third before breaking for home when Galvez was ruled to have stepped off first base on a throw and barely beat a throw and tag at the plate.

McDonell loaded the bases in the bottom of the sixth with nobody out as Cooper Mittermeyer singles up the middle, Eli Stepp singled to right field and Grant Smiskey walked. But the Macks came away with no runs as Mittermeyer was picked off third base on what McDonell coach Jerry Smith called a gamble of a squeeze play attempt.

But aggressive play helped get the Macks to state and compete with one of the top Division 4 teams. Eddie Mittermeyer and David Andersen each had a steal and the Macks came out strong with zero runs allowed in the top of the inning before plating two runs in the bottom of the first with an RBI single by Carter Stelter and booming triple to the left-center field gap by Galvez.

"That just calmed us down," Smith said of the first inning. "That truly was everything for us. I knew they were going to hit



BRANDON BERG, CHIPPEWA HERALD

McDonell freshman Cael Holm hits against Pecatonica in Tuesday's Division 4 state semifinal at Fox Cities Stadium in Grand Chute.

the ball. We were not going to stop their offense. But that (good start) was huge."

Pecatonica scored five runs in the third inning as a combination of hard hit balls and a McDonell error opened the door for the

slugging Vikings. But McDonell came back with an RBI single from Stelter in the third before Pecatonica added a run in the fifth.

McDonell turned the tables and utilized some help as the Vikings committed four errors to allow the

Macks to score three runs and tie the game at sixth through five innings.

Stelter was 2-for-3 with two runs batted in while Cael Holm and Galvez added RBIs. Misfeldt pitched 5.2 innings allowing seven

runs (one earned) and striking out five.

Tyler McKeon was 3-for-5 and Jameson Johnson added two hits for the Vikings. Johnson pitched the first five innings and allowed six runs (two earned) with five strikeouts before McKeon tossed two scoreless innings to lock down the save and advance Pecatonica to Thursday's state championship game against Ithaca after the Bulldogs edged Edgar 4-3 in nine innings prior to the second semifinal of the day.

McDonell won more playoff games than regular season games to make it to state for the first time since 2014, including a 3-2 walk-off win over defending state champion Eau Claire Regis in the sectional semifinals.

"We just tried to play loose," Stelter said. "We knew we had nothing to lose being underdogs starting in the regional semis. We were never expected to win but we just clicked at the right time and started good at the right time."

McDonell graduates five seniors with Jakob Burrier, Stelter, Eddie Mittermeyer, Galvez and Misfeldt.

"It means the world to end up here at state," Stelter said. "This group of seniors guys just let this young core extremely well all throughout the season and I feel like to cap it off here and we gave the best team in the state a run for its money and we saw their closer and we tried to make things work and it just didn't go our way."