**WISCONSIN MEN'S BASKETBALL** 

# Badgers need to make most of NIT



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Wisconsin's Chucky Hepburn steals the ball from Ohio State's Bruce Thornton during Wednesday's Big Ten Tournament opener at the United Center in Chicago.

Missing NCAA tourney disappointing, but different opportunity is still valuable

ADISON – The Wisconsin State Journal produced a 20-page special section in 1989 when



like overkill,

but the Badgers

**POLZIN** 

ending a 42-year postseason drought was a big deal at the

My, have times changed for this program. (And sadly for the newspaper business, too, but I digress.)

UW (17-14) is back in the NIT for the first time since 1996 and will host Bradley (25-9), the regular-season champion of the Missouri Valley Conference, on Tuesday night. I'll be curious to see what the turnout is like at the Kohl Center to mark this, umm, occasion.

It's one thing for fans to check out on a season before it's over. The bigger issue for me: Can UW coach Greg Gard get his team motivated to play in this event after it was left out rightfully so, by the way — of the NCAA Tournament?

That inevitability was something Gard began preparing the BRADLEY

**UP NEXT** 

WHAT: National Invitation Tournament, first round WHO: Wisconsin (17-14) vs. Bradley (25-9) WHEN: 8:30 p.m. Tuesday WHERE: Kohl Center, Madison

TV: ESPN

Badgers for Thursday after they returned home from Chicago, where their brief stay in the Big Ten tournament ended a day earlier with a 65-57 loss to Ohio State in the first round.

"It's another opportunity for us to play a really good team," Gard said late Sunday night, "and we have to prepare as

Please see **POLZIN.** Page B2

**NASCAR** 

# **Byron** emerging as star

Wins adding up for Hendrick's deep lineup

**DAVID BRANDT Associated Press** 

AVONDALE, Ariz. - Kyle Larson is widely considered to be the most naturally-gifted driver at Hendrick Motorsports and there's little doubt that Chase Elliott is the most popular.

But as of March 2023, William Byron might just be the team's best driver.

It's been a slow, steady rise for Byron, who has won two straight NASCAR Cup Series races after pushing past Larson in overtime on Sunday at Phoenix Raceway

Las Vegas.

Larson

during a pair of frantic restarts. The 25-year-old won in remarkably similar fashion last week at

"We have four capable teams and four capable

drivers of carrying the banner every weekend," Byron's crew chief Rudy Fugle said. "Pretty amazing."

Byron got a relatively late start in racing as a teenager, but has been a quick study. The North Carolina native won twice last season and now looks like a weekly threat while teaming with Fugle.

This is Byron's sixth season with Hendrick Motorsports and he received a contact extension last season after winning two races early in the year at Atlanta and Martinsville. He had a mid-season lull before closing with seven top 10s in his final 11 races and finished sixth in the Cup standings.

It's part of a progression that's slowly pushed him among NA-SCAR's elite drivers. He was 21st overall in his first full Cup season in 2018, before improving to 11th, 14th, 10th and then sixth in the ensuing years.

Now with two wins in the season's first four races, it's clear

Please see NASCAR, Page B2

## COMMENTARY



Aquinas girls basketball coach Dave Donarski talks to his daughter Macy during during a game at Central this season. With Dave coaching and Lexi and Macy playing on the team the past seven seasons, the Blugolds have won 178 of 189 games and qualified for six WIAA championship games.

## Donarskis teamed for incredible seven-year run at Aquinas

REEN BAY — Macy Donarski hugged her dad and told him not to break down, but they were both al-

ready sobbing. She knew the questions that Dave was about to answer because she just answered some

of them.

The Donar-

**SOMMERFELDT** skis expected tears at the Resch Center on Saturday, but they expected most of them to be of the happy variety. With the kind of season the Blugolds

had, that was realistic. A 64-51 loss to Laconia in the WIAA Division 4 championship game made what could have

been a day of mixed emotions much tougher.

The next time Dave coaches a basketball team, it won't have one of his daughters run-

ning the offense. The next time Macy suits up to play a basketball game, Dave

won't be her coach. That reality was difficult to

accept. "I don't like it," Macy said with those tears running down her face. "I'm definitely excited for the future, but it's going to be a really different dynamic

without my dad there. "The way he was able to challenge me, bring out different parts of my game and just teach me the love of basketball and how that works ... I wouldn't trade it for the world."

Dave joked that his "encouragement" might land Macy in



L. Donarski

sister Lexi dealt with it, too, but the sisters understood the source of the expectations he

therapy one day

because he was

so hard on her.

He was. Older

had for them.

That relationship makes sense. It might be difficult to navigate, but it makes sense. Despite the bond that he has created with all of his past and current players, there are none exactly like those he shares with his daughters.

Don't forget Pam Donarski in any of this, either. She coached the girls as much as Dave did, especially when they were younger.

When Lexi graduated and moved on to play at Iowa State University, Dave knew he still had Macy for three years and it softened the blow to an extent. He wasn't psyched about turning Lexi loose on the world, and he isn't ready for Macy to leave for the University of Montana yet, either.

Any parent can relate. But basketball has always meant so much to this family, and that was a side of them that the community was able to experience, too. Some didn't like it, and some didn't appreciate it. Winning so often can do that.

The only reason they were able to do that was through the work they did together and with friends over the course of nearly 20 years.

"When you've coached your kids since they were 2, and you know how much time you've spent working on the craft, becoming a great ball handler, making 10(,000) or 15,000 shots a summer, essentially brainwashing them into loving

Please see **SOMMERFELDT,** Page B2

**COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL** 

# Madness teams bring talent

Baggage also an issue for top qualifiers

**EDDIE PELLS Associated Press** 

Kansas and Alabama are no strangers to playing for national championships.

high-expectations trip to March Madness is a rite of spring. For Houston and UCLA, some unthe Crimson Tide, well, this path to glory travels through some unfamiliar ground — the bas-00 ketball court.

Alabama rolls in as the top

ment that feels both familiar and Nate Oats said of the top seeding foreign this season. Yes, there are that belongs to the Crimson Tide plenty of heartwarming stories for the first time. and unbelievable upsets to come when the action begins Tuesday distractions - namely, the inwith the first of four play-in evitable questions that will be

But this was also a season For the Jayhawks, another clouded with police blotters at Alabama and Texas, injuries at former member of the team – sightly losses at Kansas, and the Crimson Tide's chances as enough twists and turns at the anything. top of the field to make this as

unpredictable a bracket as ever. "I'm not sure we would've

overall seed in an NCAA Tourna- predicted this," Alabama coach

Alabama's ability to set aside directed at its star, Brandon Miller, and others about an o ngoing murder case against a could have as big an impact on



But all these teams, especially Alabama forward Brandon Miller (24) reacts as Texas A&M guard Dexter Dennis (0) looks on in the final minutes of Southeastern Conference Please see MADNESS, Page B2 Tournament game on Sunday.

### WHAT'S ON TAP

BASEBALL: Nonconference—UW-La Crosse vs. Southern Maine at Davenport, Fla., 3:30 p.m.

**SOFTBALL: Nonconference—Tucson Invitational:** UW-La Crosse vs. Dickinson (Pa.), 10 a.m.; UW-La Crosse vs. Webster (Mo.), noon; Viterbo vs. St. Clair, 1 p.m.; Viterbo vs. Friends (Kan.), 3:30 p.m.

MEN'S TENNIS: Nonconference—UW-La Crosse vs. Mary Hardin-Baylor (Texas) at Orlando, Fla., 7 a.m.

### BRIEFLY

## Vikings sign tight end Oliver

While the Minnesota Vikings continue to clear salary cap space in advance of the 2023 league year on Wednesday, they're working to improve their roster on the open market.

A league source confirmed they've agreed to a threeyear deal with Ravens tight end Josh Oliver, who figures to give the Vikings a blocking complement to T.J. Hockenson. NFL teams could begin negotiating with unrestricted free agents on Monday, but cannot officially sign players until Wednesday.

According to Pro Football Focus, Oliver played 324 of his 513 snaps on run plays last year, and spent another 30 in pass protection. He caught a career-high 14 passes for 149 yards and two touchdowns, but the 6-foot-5, 249-pound Oliver stood out most in his blocking work, and he could play a similar role for the Vikings.

Hockenson is under contract for the 2023 season, but Irv Smith is set to hit free agency this week and Johnny Mundt (who worked primarily as a blocking tight end last year) has just \$100,000 of dead money on a deal set to count for \$1.23 million against the cap this season. Oliver's addition figures to come with a significant role in the Vikings' offense in 2023.

### ON TV

### **TUESDAY**

BASEBALL: World Baseball Classic Pool Play: Nicaragua vs. Venezuela, Pool D, Miami, FS2, 11 a.m.; World Baseball Classic Pool Play: Canada vs. Colombia, Pool C, Phoenix, FS2, 2 p.m.; World Baseball Classic Pool Play: Israel vs. Dominican Republic, Pool D, Miami, FS1, 6 p.m.; World Baseball Classic Pool Play: Great Britain vs. Mexico, Pool C, Phoenix, FS1, 9 p.m.

BASKETBALL AFRICA LEAGUE: Kwara vs. Stade Malien, Dakar, Senegal, NBATV, 11 a.m.

**COLLEGE BASEBALL:** Georgia Tech at Auburn, SECN, 6 p.m.

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL: NCAA Tournament: SE Missouri vs. Texas A&M-CC, First-Four, Dayton, Ohio, TRUTV, 5:40 p.m.; NIT Tournament: Toledo at Michigan, First Round, ESPN2, 6 p.m.; Hofstra at Rutgers, First Round, ESPNU, 6 p.m.; Villanova at Liberty, First Round, ESPN2, 8 p.m.; Yale at Vanderbilt, First Round, ESPNU, 8 p.m.; NCAA Tournament: Pittsburgh vs. Mississippi St., First-Four, Dayton, Ohio, TRUTV, 8:10 p.m.; NIT Tournament: Bradley at Wisconsin, First Round, ESPN, 8:30 p.m.; NIT Tournament: Seton Hall at Colorado, First Round, ESPN2, 10 p.m.; Eastern Washington at Washington St., First Round, ESPNU, 10 p.m.

**COLLEGE WOMEN'S LACROSSE:** Yale at Duke, ACCN, 6 p.m.

**COLLEGE SOFTBALL:** Syracuse at UCLA, PAC-12N, 9 p.m.

MLB: Spring Training: Seattle vs. LA Angels, Tempe, Ari. (Taped), MLBN, 5 a.m.; Washington vs. NY Mets, Port St. Lucie, Fla., MLBN, noon; LA Angels vs. Cleveland, Goodyear, Ari., MLBN, 3 p.m.; Cincinnati vs. Kansas City (Split Squad), Surprise, Ariz. (Taped), MLBN, 8 p.m.; Atlanta vs. Philadelphia, Clearwater, Fla. (Taped), MLBN, 11 p.m.

NBA: Denver at Toronto, NBATV, 6:30 p.m.; Milwaukee at Phoenix,

**NHL:** Washington at NY Rangers, ESPN, 6 p.m.

MEN'S SOCCER: CONCACAF Champions League: Violette AC at Austin FC, Round of 16, Leg 2, FS2, 6:55 p.m.; CONCACAF Champions League: CD Olimpia at Atlas, Round of 16, Leg 2, FS2, 9:05 p.m.

**TENNIS:** BNP Paribas Open-ATP/WTA Round of 16, TENNIS, noon

## **Sommerfeldt**

From B1

basketball ... " Dave said as his voice cracked. "This (the end) doesn't feel real.

"I can't believe that's done."

Lexi and Macy were the starting point guards for the Blugolds for seven seasons.

Their tenure included a record of 178-11 for a winning percentage of .942. They won 95.4% of games played against teams from Wisconsin with a 167-8 mark.

They won all 79 MVC games they played and seven championships. They won seven regional championships and six sectional titles. They won eight state games and lost three.

They were denied a chance to three-peat when the 2020 title game against Melrose-Mindoro — the team they had beaten in championship games the two previous seasons was called off due to the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

They played the biggest roles in adding two gold balls and three silver ones for basketball to the Aquinas trophy case.

They traveled together to play against current national collegiate stars Caitlin Clark (Iowa) and Paige Bueckers (UConn) when they played for Dowling Catholic (Iowa) and Hopkins (Minn.), respectively.

Lexi scored 2,106 points and had 560 assists, 388



**PETER THOMSON, LA CROSSE TRIBUNE** 

Aquinas' Macy Donarski, left, helped the Blugolds to a 96-9 record, three state championship games and two second-place finishes during her four-year career.

steals, 374 rebounds and 153 3-pointers. Macy scored 1,734 points to go with 698 assists, 471 steals, 413 rebounds and made 106 3-pointers.

Those chapters for this family – as pieces of the bigger story of father coaching daughter(s) — are now closed.

As Macy walked off the court for the last time, Dave met her as she reached the bench area, and the two shared a long embrace as reality set in.

"When she came off the court and said, 'I'm sorry I played so bad,' it hurt," Dave said of Macy, who scored 18 points on 7-for-14 shooting and added 11 assists, five rebounds and four steals against the Spartans. "When you look at her stats and what she did in that

game, anyone would say that she played pretty well." Macy clearly appreciated

the response that followed. "He just said, 'I'm proud of you," she said, struggling a bit to get the words out as the emotion engulfed her. "We both knew at that

moment that it was really

the end. Neither of us were

ready to give that up yet." But they have to because everyone has a new path to take.

Dave will now start putting together plans for a new team built around Sammy Davis, whose freshman season showed plenty of promise. Her impact will be much different for an inexperienced team that will take the court in November.

Macy will begin preparation for her career with Montana, and Lexi is about to turn her focus to a third NCAA Tournament with the Cyclones after they won the Big 12 championship on Sunday.

The Donarskis, by the way, were there to watch Iowa State beat Texas 61-51 in Kansas City less than 24 hours after the conclusion of the Aquinas title game. That's commitment.

Macy's will be the most significant with a move and completely new situation surrounding her.

But she can leave knowing that she helped put the finishing touch on a seven-year run that will be hard for any family to duplicate.

Todd Sommerfeldt can be reached at todd.sommerfeldt@lee.net or via Twitter @ SommerfeldtLAX

## Polzin

From B1

that happens the rest of this month — whether the Badgers' NIT stay lasts one, two, three, four or five games — will erase that sour taste. Those what-ifs will linger.

UW could have elected to say thanks, but no thanks, and end its season. It could have pulled a North Carolina, which decided not to play in the NIT, and taken its ball and went home.

Gard had to decide early last week, before the Big Ten tournament even had begun, whether the Badgers wanted to be in consideration for the NIT if it came to that. He said

he didn't bring it up with his players, consulting instead with his staff.

I think this is the right move. The NCAA Tournament is the standard around here, but turning down the chance at a consolation prize would have reeked of arrogance. You can't bring up the team's relative youth at key positions, as Gard did earlier this season, and limit its postseason experience to one game without looking like a hypocrite.

Look around and it's hard not to notice other prominent programs in the 32-team field. Villanova and Oregon are in the same eight-team pod as the Badgers, and the other side of the bracket includes Michigan.

Tony Bennett and Virginia, a program three years removed from winning an NCAA title, accepted an NIT bid last year.

That 2022 event also showed programs can use a deep run as a springboard into the next season. Xavier, the reigning NIT champion, returned a significant chunk of its roster and is a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament (albeit with a new coach). Texas A&M, which lost to the Musketeers in the final, finished second in both the SEC regular-season standings and confer-

"We're in this thing to try to win," Gard said. "I'll play the lineups that give us the best chance to

ence tournament.

have success on the court. We wouldn't be in it if we didn't think we could try to go win it. We're not doing this as a recreational activity."

There will be no hoopla and certainly no special section to commemorate this appearance, but this is a chance to learn and grow, and UW should view it as such.

It's far from ideal for a program with goals far bigger than the NIT, but the only thing the Badgers can do now is try to make the most of it. There have been far too many wasted opportunities this season. Don't add another one to the list.

Contact Jim Polzin at jpolzin@madison.com.

## **NASCAR**

From B1

Byron is aiming for the No. 1 spot.

Took a lot of homework, a ful drivers who is now vice lot of details," Byron said. "I think the fact that I started later than most driving was

time to bridge that gap at this level.

"Now that gap is bridged obviously."

Jeff Gordon – one of "This level is so different. NASCAR's most successchairman of Hendrick Motorsports – knows a little

the most in team history.

Gordon sees Byron as a growing driver just now re- Hendrick, the instant conalizing his potential.

to Hendrick," Jeff Gordon whole team up to another said. "Got to remember notch. I think now they're how young he was coming into the Cup Series, so much

a little bit - it took some drick. His 93 victories are to learn. Young in racing in so many ways.

> "When Rudy came to nection and chemistry "I see a progression with between these two was so William ever since he came obvious. It just took the just building on that. It's a lot of fun to watch and see."

## **Madness**

From B1

at the top, have their is-

It starts with Houston, the 1 seed in the Midwest, which was cruising along until Saturday, when its star guard, Marcus Sasser.

fell awkwardly and left the game with a groin injury.

Sasser didn't play in his team's conference title game and Houston lost. How quickly he gets back to form could dictate whether the Cougars make the Final Four, which will take place at NRG Stadium, not far from their home arena.

## BASKETBALL NBA **EASTERN CONFERENCE** .716 .691

Milwaukee 19 21 22 27 29 30 33 34 36 37 40 48 53 11/2 Philadelphia .672 .614 6½ 9½ 9½ 13 14½ 16½ 17 17½ 17½ Cleveland 39 40 36 34 32 31 31 28 22 15 .574 .571 .522 .500 .471 .463 .456 Toronto Chicago Washington Indiana .412 .314 .221 Charlotte **WESTERN CONFERENCE** 

Pct .676 .606 22 26 26 30 33 33 34 34 Denver 46 40 40 37 Memphis Sacramento .606 .552 Phoenix L.A. Clippers Golden State Minnesota Dallas .522 .515 .500 .500 10½ 11 12 12 36 35 34 34

about winning for Hen-L.A. Lakers New Orleans 33 33 35 35 .485 .485 New Orleans 53 35 .485
Oklahoma city 33 35 .485
Portland 31 37 .456
San Antonio 17 50 .254
Houston 15 52 .224
Positions 1-6: Qualify for playoffs
7-10: Play-in tournament
Sunday's results

**Sunday's results** Cleveland 114, Charlotte 108 Cleveland 114, Charlotte 108
Philadelphia 112, Washington 93
Oklahoma City 102, San Antonio 90
Brooklyn 122, Denver 120
New Orleans 127, Portland 110
New York 112, L.A. Lakers 108
Monday's results
Indiana at Detroit, (n)
Memphis at Dallas, (n)
Minnesota at Atlanta (n)

Minnesota at Atlanta. (n) Utah at Miami, (n)
Boston at Houston, (n)
Milwaukee at Sacramento, (n)
Phoenix at Golden State, (n)

**Tuesday's games** Cleveland at Charlotte, 6 p.m. Detroit at Washington, 6 p.m. Denver at Toronto, 6:30 p.m. Brooklyn at Oklahoma City, 7 p.m. L.A. Lakers at New Orleans, 7 p.m. Orlando at San Antonio, 7 p.m. Milwaukee at Phoenix, 9 p.m. New York at Portland, 9 p.m.

## Wednesday's games

13 13

13 15

Memphis at Miami, 6:30 p.m. Philadelphia at Cleveland, 6:30 p.m. Printagelphia at Cleveland, 6:30 p.m. Boston at Minnesota, 7 p.m. L.A. Lakers at Houston, 7 p.m. Sacramento at Chicago, 7 p.m. Dallas at San Antonio, 7:30 p.m. Golden State at L.A. Clippers, 9 p.m.

NHL **EASTERN CONFERENCE** 

x-Boston 65 50 10 5 1
Toronto 65 40 17 8
Tampa Bay 67 39 22 6
Florida 67 33 27 7
Ottawa 66 33 29 4
Buffalo 65 32 28 5
Detroit 66 30 27 9
217 Detroit 217 69 199 66 26 34 6 58 180

GA Carolina

GP W L OT pts GF

# HOCKEY

**Atlantic Division pts GF GA** 105 245 142 88 223 175 84 233 206 73 229 226 70 207 212 69 238 236

**Metropolitan Division** 65 43 14 8 94 217

# Dallas Winnipeg Colorado Nashville St. Louis Arizona

Chicago **Pacific Division** 

New Jersey 66 44 16 6 94 235 177 N.Y. Rangers 66 37 19 10 84 217 186 Pittsburgh 66 34 22 10 78 217 210 N.Y. Islanders 68 34 26 8 76 196 187 Washington 67 32 28 7 71 208 200 Philadelphia 66 24 31 11 59 169 217 Columbus 65 20 38 7 47 169 244 WESTERN CONFERENCE Central Division

GP W L OT pts GF GA 66 36 17 13 85 229 178 67 38 21 8 84 195 178 67 38 26 3 79 210 189 64 36 22 6 78 206 181 64 33 24 7 73 186 189 66 29 32 7 5 63 205 242 67 24 32 11 59 188 237 66 22 38 6 50 165 236

**GP W L OT pts GF GA** 67 41 20 6 88 217 185

6 67 38 20 9 85 228 221 66 37 22 7 81 232 211 67 36 23 8 80 258 228 67 30 24 13 73 209 205 65 28 32 5 61 222 253 67 22 35 10 54 172 271 67 19 36 12 50 193 257 points for a win, one point for Calgary 67 30 24 13 73 209 205
Vancouver 65 28 32 5 61 222 253
Anaheim 67 22 35 10 54 172 271
San Jose 67 19 36 12 50 193 257
NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for evertime for Text throat beauty in each advance to playoffs. x-clinched playoff spot Sunday's results Detroit 5, Boston 3 Pittsburgh 3, N.Y. Rangers 2, OT New Jersey 3, Carolina 0 Vegas 5, St. Louis 3

Winnipeg 3, Tampa Bay 2 Calgary 5, Ottawa 1 Nashville 5, Anaheim 4, OT Arizona 5. Minnesota 4. 01 Buffalo at Toronto, (n)

Los Angeles 67 38 20 Seattle 66 37 22 Edmonton 67 36 23

overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference

Tampa Bay at New Jersey, 6 p.m. Vegas at Philadelphia, 6 p.m. Washington at N.Y. Rangers, 6 p.m. Winnipeg at Carolina, 6 p.m. Detroit at Nashville 7 n m Boston at Chicago, 7:30 p.m.

Ottawa at Edmonton, 8 p.m.

Colorado at Montreal, (n)

Montreal at Pittsburgh, 6 p.m

Dallas at Seattle, (n)

Tuesday's games

Calgary at Arizona, 9 p.m. Dallas at Vancouver, 9 p.m. Columbus at San Jose, 9:30 p.m. N.Y. Islanders at Los Angeles, 9:30 p.m Buffalo at Washington, 6 p.m. Colorado at Toronto, 6 p.m. Minnesota at St. Louis, 8:30 p.m.

N.Y. Islanders at Anaheim, 9 p.m.



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