

THROUGH MY LENS

Another weekend, another wave of stupid on social media



Yes, I do enjoy watching a good train wreck as much as the next person.

This time year, we get treated to plenty of opinions regarding the longstanding public versus private school debate because of the WIAA state basketball tournaments.

However, after wading through tweet after tweet and comment after comment regarding private schools in the WIAA state tournaments, it's hard not to get fed up with people whining about why School X isn't at state and how Catholic School Y is. Even more sickening is watching adults hijack threads wishing Catholic School Y's success at state. Seriously? There are some folks that have nothing better to do than to seek out certain posts and throw shade at certain players, teams and schools?

I get it. The general public hates private schools and what some do to be more competitive in a sport. I know the playing field isn't entirely equal, but with open enrollment, kids have jumped from public school to public school multiple times to get a competitive edge. That's the way things are now.

At the end of the day, you still don't have to like what private schools are or what they stand for. However, they're not all created equally.

This weekend Onalaska Luther will undoubtedly receive plenty of nasty comments from the online trolls. However, it's just their second trip to state-ever.

Luther coach Brad Schaper is one of the classiest chaps you'll get to meet and, as this is his swan song (he announced his retirement earlier this season), I'm ecstatic he gets to go out this way.

The point I think I'm trying to make is this: Get to know someone from a private school before passing judgment. Their kids work hard. Their coaches hold teams accountable.

It's really no different than hating that one school team you can't beat. You hate them because they win and because they perform better than you. You hate the coach over there because he does things differently.

I'd argue that if you got to know that coach, you'd probably want to play for him also because you know he'd make you better.

No matter what, it's not worth anyone's time to browse the web just to troll someone's positive well wishes after winning a state title or even just qualifying for state.

We need to expect more of ourselves as humans, and possibly understand each other more also. Patience and understanding can go a long way to resolving our differences and improving our own lives.

GIRLS BASKETBALL SEASON REVIEW SPARTA

Optimism continues to run high for Sparta girls basketball

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

In a season like the one the Sparta girls' basketball team endured this winter, it's important to focus on the positive growth and foundations laid for the future when the wins aren't coming so easy.

The Spartans endured a 5-20 record during this 2022-23 campaign, as the relatively young, undersized squad often struggled with turnovers and maintaining a consistent level for 36 minutes. But as the season wore on, their commitment never wavered, and improvement showed.

"Definitely not the record we wanted," said Sparta head coach Sami Weaver. "But when it comes to growth and

just getting everything out of the girls that we could, definitely happy with that."

Given the team's lack of size, the Spartans resorted to turning juniors Corin Milne and Amelia Russ into post players. They found some success in those roles, averaging 4.3 and 3.7 rebounds, respectively.

Statistical leaders for Sparta included junior Evelyn Tripp (12.4 ppg, 4.0 rpg), senior Abby Schell (7.3 ppg, 3.7 rpg), freshman Tiana Leis (7.2 ppg, 6.8 rpg) and senior Josie Edwards (4.4 ppg, 4.3 rpg). In addition to Schell and Edwards, Macey Oswald and Ella Guns are the seniors departing the program this spring.

A serious knee injury to Tripp in the final game of the

year adds a question mark for the team heading into the 2023-24 season, but the Spartans will have to forge ahead with the hopes of having Tripp back at some point.

If Sparta needs a game to look to for inspiration, its 50-45 win over Onalaska in the penultimate game of the regular season is a great option.

"The girls could've walked on that court and said, 'here's another loss for us,'" Weaver said. "For us to get that win in our 23rd game against Luther — that's huge. That was big for us and for our girls just to see that they were able to still compete and get that W."

Now it's just a matter of trying to build on the positives from this season toward a brighter future for the program.



Sparta's Evie Tripp led the Spartans with 12.4 points a game this year. The next leading scorers that are expected to return next year are Tiana Leis (7.2 ppg) and Alexa Jones (4.1 ppg). Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

BOYS BASKETBALL SEASON REVIEW WEST SALEM



West Salem's Peter Lattos has been a large part of his team's success this year. Lattos, a 6'8 forward/wing, has been the team's second leading scorer (14.6 ppg) and rebounder (8.6 rpg). Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

Unfinished Business

West Salem returns to state with sights set on improving on last year's second place finish

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Ever since the final buzzer sounded in their state championship game loss a year ago, the West Salem boys' basketball has pursued one goal above all other: to get back to Madison so they can try to finish what they started last winter.

The Panthers did not crumble under the weight of their lofty expectations, as they've earned themselves a second straight state tournament appearance. Just like last year, they are the No. 1 seed in Division 5. But unlike last time around, they will enter the Kohl Center with state experience under their belt.

Going into last season, Mark Wagner took over as West Salem's head coach. He inherited a team loaded with talent and coming off a shared Coulee Conference title the year prior. Wagner had previously posted a 252-102 record with state appearances in 2012 and 2016 in 15 seasons as the head coach at Gale-Ettrick-Trempealeau.

He was tasked with trying to guide the Panthers to the first state tournament in program history, and the team made that dream a reality in 2022.

"Anytime you can advance to a state

tournament, it's a very special feeling — whether it's the first time or 10th time," Wagner said. "But the first time is always something unique."

Though they earned the No. 1 seed at state, West Salem fell short of the ultimate prize with a 67-56 loss to Lake Country Lutheran in the Division 3 state championship game. With most of their rotation returning for this season, that defeat served as inspiration in their run to another sectional title.

Leaders for this experienced West Salem squad include senior guard Carson Koepnick (15.3 ppg, 4.2 rpg, 1.9 spg), senior forward/wing Peter Lattos (14.6 ppg, 8.6 rpg, 3.3 spg, 1.7 spg, 1.5 bpg), sophomore guard Kyle Hehli (10.8 ppg, 3.0 apg), junior guard Tamarrein Henderson (10.2 ppg, 3.6 rpg, 2.2 apg, 1.5 spg) and senior forward Brett McConkey (8.0 ppg, 10.9 rpg, 3.1 apg, 2.0 spg).

Up to this point, the Panthers have passed all their postseason tests this year with flying colors. Now it's just a matter of seeing if they can get those final two victories down in Madison to upgrade their trophy from silver to gold.

"I certainly think we've had really high expectations from our school and from our community and among ourselves," Wagner said. "Sometimes that can create extra pressure, sometimes you don't play with the comfort level you need to play basketball with, but I think (the players) have handled that really well."

"We're excited to be back at the state tournament and really looking for an opportunity to make amends for last year."



West Salem's Carson Koepnick has been the leader of the Panthers' offense, scoring 15.3 points a game this year, but finished outside the top five scorers in the Coulee Conference. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

GIRLS BASKETBALL STATE FINALS

Only one top seeded team wins state title



Aquinas' Shea Bahr helped the Blugolds finish second at this year's state tournament. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

By ZACH RASTALL
Sports Writer

Only one of the top-seeded girls basketball teams held on to lay claim to a state title in last weekend's final tournament of the year in Green Bay.

Division 1

Top-seeded Brookfield East upended Germantown and 2023 Miss Basketball, KK Arnold 65-60 in the state semis, then fell to third-seeded Kettle Moraine 47-40.

Division 2

Green Bay Notre Dame, the second-seeded team, blew past top-seeded Pewaukee 64-49 in the final.

Division 3

Third-seeded Kewaskum topped fourth-seeded Milwaukee Academy of Science 55-51.

Division 4

Second-seeded Laconia surprised top-seed Aquinas for a 64-51 win and their first state championship ever.

Division 5

The Chippewa Falls McDonell girls bested Blair-Taylor 61-46 for their first state title ever.

You're Going To Love This Place

16 BEERS ON TAP **FOOD SPECIALS** **WINE SELECTION**

The Cotter Pin LLC
 OPEN AT 11AM EVERY DAY
 20671 HWY 27 • LEON, WI 54656
 (608) 487-8118