

# The Bemidji Pioneer

Match play begins  
at Birchmont

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Today's forecast



High 85° Low 62°  
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## Three to be charged in double-homicide case

Bodies found in fire pit northwest of Bemidji in February

By Jordan Shearer

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BEMIDJI — Beltrami County Attorney David Hanson said Wednesday he will charge three people in the case of a double homicide half a year after the remains of two people were found

in a fire pit northwest of Bemidji.

Darren Stebe, 45 of Bemidji, will be charged with two counts of second-degree murder. Kristi Trisco and Daniel Linde will each be charged with two felony counts of aiding an offender after the fact, according to a

release from Hanson's office. The release did not list the ages or hometowns of Trisco or Linde.

Stebe has been in custody since Feb. 4 after the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office started investigating a missing person report. Although initially held

in the Beltrami County Jail, he was eventually transferred to the Minnesota Department of Corrections in Stillwater since a probation violation allowed officials to continue holding him without immediately pressing charges in the murder case.



Stebe



Trisco

A press release from Hanson's office said the extended time between when Stebe was arrested and the announcement of the charges allowed authorities "to complete a thorough investigation." The release also said the killing of Adam Thorpe, 39, Maple Grove, Minn., and Jason McDonough, 41, Superior, Wis.,

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## Broken trust

Players detail inappropriate behavior by softball coach, lack of action by BSU

By Austin Monteith  
and Micah Friez

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**Bemidji**

Former Bemidji State softball head coach Rick Supinski exhibited inappropriate behavior, including an unwanted pursuit of a romantic



Supinski

relationship with one of his players, the Pioneer has learned.

Eleven current and former softball players, all of whom

requested to remain anonymous for this story, provided details about Supinski's behavior. Many also voiced frustrations over what they believe was BSU's lack of an appropriate response during Supinski's tenure.

The player Supinski pursued said his romantic and sexual advances toward her began late in the 2016-17 school year. She said the advances, which she described as "verbal remarks, text messages and physical gestures," escalated in 2018-19. The player characterized the advances as harassment.

The player ultimately reported Supinski, 50, to the university on March 22 of this year, and he was placed on a leave of absence the same day.

Four softball players said a larger group of players previously met with Bemidji State Director of Athletics Tracy Dill in spring 2018. In that meeting, they said they voiced to Dill that they believed Supinski was neglecting his on-field coaching duties and that they believed he was engaging in inappropriate off-field behavior.

One player also said a group met with Dill in fall 2018 to bring forth similar concerns. BSU apparently took no formal disciplinary action against Supinski either time. He continued to coach the team until his 2019 leave.

Supinski's employment ended May 14, eight seasons after he was hired in November 2011. He also missed the 2014 season after



File photo

Former Bemidji State softball head coach Rick Supinski's eight-season tenure with BSU ended on May 14, nearly two months after he was placed on a leave of absence.

the university received a complaint against him, and Supinski was placed on paid administrative leave.

It is unclear whether Supinski resigned his position or was fired. BSU said the only public data concerning the end of Supinski's time with the university is that his last day of employment was May 14, according to an email the Pioneer received from Andy Bartlett, executive director of Communications and Marketing.

"There is no data on final disposition of disciplinary action or settlement agreements involving Mr. Supinski," the email said.

Dill declined comment for this story. Several other Bemidji State officials also declined to comment.

Supinski did not respond to the Pioneer's multiple phone call attempts for comment.

After Supinski's employment ended, BSU Vice President of Finance and Administration Karen Snorek

sent a letter dated May 22 to the player to inform her that "an investigation was conducted by Bemidji State University into your complaint against Rick Supinski alleging Sexual Harassment. Specifically, you stated you felt you were harassed by Rick Supinski when you received numerous text messages. Although the text messages started out as non-sexual in nature, they were still unwelcomed. Over the course of two years, the messages became more sexual in content. You were concerned about reporting these behaviors due to the fact that Rick Supinski had sole control over your playing time as an athlete and your financial scholarship."

Snorek continued, "I find that the information of record supports a finding against Rick Supinski; therefore, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken."

Multiple players expressed to the Pioneer their frustrations over what they say was a lack of action from the BSU athletic department despite the red flags they brought forth in the meetings with Dill.

"We figured it would be handled, but when it wasn't, it was extremely frustrating," one player said, "especially when everything unfolded this year the way that it did."

**Pursuing his player**

The player who submitted the complaint in 2019 said Supinski, who is married, sent her text messages that ranged from longingly romantic to sexually explicit to abruptly aggressive.

"It progressed to being more advanced in nature, more sexual (as time went on)," the player said. "... He would text me more, which is kind of weird in

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## A pathway to success

BHS career academies touted at Greater MN Cities conference

By Matthew Liedke

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BEMIDJI — The Bemidji community was able to show off Bemidji High School's Career Academies program Wednesday to officials from cities across the state.

The presentation took place on the first day of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities' summer conference. The topic was introduced to coalition members by Career Academies Executive Director Brian Stefanich, Bemidji High School Principal Jason Stanoch and Academies Freshman Counselor Jenny Fraley.

The Career Academies program allows students in high school to experience coursework and internships in various trades. New academies added in the coming year for students are focused on agriculture, law enforcement, leadership, entrepreneurship, culinary arts and fire and rescue. They join several other academies, such as those related to mechatronics and health care.

"What we look at for our academies is not just how we can garner commitments from business partners," Stanoch said. "We're also trying to build a business community and culture through the high school. Our vision is to create a pathway for students to succeed and thrive in our community."

The academies will have 660 students enrolled for the 2019-20 school year. Fraley said students taking the coursework will leave with more options and opportunity.

"This is about exploration," Fraley said. "It boils down to those individual conversations we have with students, telling them they can take the class and they learn something either way. It's not meant to replace anything, this is to focus on what you want to do and what skills you want to get. If a student takes a forensic science class in high school, they may have to take another class on it in college, but the student will already have a foundation."

Wednesday's presentation is one of several scheduled for the coalition. Thursday, for

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# Minnesota woman who allegedly ran over skateboarder charged with attempted murder

**By Emily Cutts**  
Forum News Service

AUSTIN, Minn. — A Dodge Center woman wanted for allegedly running over a man while he was skateboarding was arrested Tuesday night, July 23, according to jail records.

Tori Jersusha-Ann Ward, 20, was arrested at about 8 p.m. without incident, Austin Police Chief David McKichan wrote in an email. Police in this southern Minnesota city located the suspect vehicle a short time later in Austin.

Ward is charged in Mower County District



Ward

assault with a dangerous weapon. All three charges are felonies.

Ward made her first appearance on the charges Wednesday morning, when Judge Kevin Siefken set conditional bail at \$125,000 and unconditional bail at \$250,000.

Ward’s next court appearance is set for Aug. 5.

A complaint warrant was filed with the court on Monday for an incident that is alleged to have occurred on Friday.

Austin officers were called at 11:50 a.m. on July 19 for a report of a hit-and-run crash where a car struck a pedestrian, according to the criminal complaint.

En route to the scene, a person flagged down an officer and brought him to a store, where the alleged victim ran after being struck.

The alleged victim, an

adult man, was lying on the store floor and bleeding “profusely,” according to court records. He was taken by ambulance to Mayo Clinic Health System-Austin for a fractured right wrist and several large lacerations, which are classified as “substantial bodily harm.”

The man told police that his relationship with Ward ended the previous night and she had been following him around for several hours before the incident while he was on his skateboard, according to court records. The man said he

was in the middle of the road and tried to avoid the oncoming car, but was not successful.

Police interviewed two men and a juvenile male who were with the alleged victim at the time of the incident. Two reported seeing the car speed up and hit the man. Both told police Ward was the driver.

One told police he did not see the incident but did see Ward pull the car to the side of the road, get out, dump water on the car’s hood, wipe it off and then leave, according to court records.

## BRIEFS

**Black bear hit, killed on I-94 in western Minn.**

ROTHSAY, Minn. — A bear was hit on Interstate 94, near Rothsay in western Minnesota Friday, July 19.

The crash occurred between Rothsay and Fergus Falls near mile marker 44. The car had minimal damage and the driver was not injured, but the black bear was killed.

The Minnesota DNR said black bears are common in northern Minnesota, but usually not in heavily populated areas.

The bear may have been searching for corn or other crops in the area when it was hit, the DNR said.

**Over \$1M in counterfeit electronics seized at Canadian border**

INTERNATIONAL FALLS, Minn. — U.S. Customs and Border Protection seized over \$1 million in counterfeit electronics throughout the last month at the International Falls port of entry, according to a press release from the agency.

Last week, border protection seized counterfeit earphones and Apple and Samsung chargers, which had a total suggested retail price of over \$55,000 if the products were originals. Officers found these electronics and others on rail cars that passed through the International Falls port of entry. They were heading to Ranier, a press release from border protection said.

In the second week of July, officers seized gas-price display boards from another rail car, which have an estimated retail value of nearly \$600,000. And in late June, they found over 1,400 counterfeit LED televisions in a rail car, with an estimated retail value of over \$400,000.

The border patrol seized the products after determining whether they were genuine or counterfeit, which takes varying amounts of time depending on the product, said Kristi Lakefield, chief public affairs liaison for border protection.

Trading of “illicit” goods can damage the nation’s economy, as well as threaten health and safety, according to the news release.

— Forum News Service

## SOFTBALL

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itself, about things unrelated to softball. And then it became obviously more inappropriate.”

Screenshots obtained by the Pioneer include dozens of texts Supinski sent in his prolonged attempt to develop a relationship with the player.



Dill

In one message, he texted the player, “I wanna make love to you in the mornings... just wondering if you would be into it. Good way to start our days off.” Several messages later, he confessed, “I honestly cant hide the fact that I adore you any longer.”

The player frequently denied or ignored Supinski’s advances that came through text. Her responses included remarks like, “So inappropriate,” “Yeah okay you should know better than to do that,” and, in part, “Youre my coach and you should have never let yourself feel the way you do. I did nothing wrong.”

The player and five others also said that Supinski’s advances went beyond a screen.

They told the Pioneer that Supinski devoted a disproportionate amount of his time in practice to the player, that he isolated her from teammates and that he once grabbed her buttocks as she exited the team bus.

“He made me feel like I was an outcast, almost,” the player told the Pioneer. “So I didn’t feel like I had someone to go and tell on the team because they were like, ‘Oh, (she) is Coach’s favorite.’ When, really, I was like, ‘I wish I wasn’t.’”

At first, the player withheld the situation from her teammates, citing that she didn’t think they would understand and that she feared possible repercussions from Supinski.

“He was in charge of my playing time, scholarship, all that stuff. So I wasn’t sure what would even happen, if anything,” she said. “... It was tough for me to think that (those privileges) maybe could get messed up.”

After the team’s 2019 spring break trip to Florida in mid-March, though, the player said she did tell one teammate, and then three more about a week later. She said their support helped put into motion the complaint she submitted against Supinski on March 22.

“We told her that it was absolutely terrible and that it can’t go on any longer,” one teammate said. “None of us knew the extent to what it actually was until she showed us. We told her that she needed to talk to someone as soon as possible.”

On March 24, two days after she submitted the complaint, players said Dill met with the team to inform them that Supinski was placed on a

leave of absence.

“Tracy had met us there and said (Supinski) wasn’t going to be coaching,” a second teammate said, “but he couldn’t say anything about why because there was an investigation.”

However, the player who made the complaint soon after shared everything with the rest of the team because she felt they deserved to know.

“It scared a lot of people,” the second teammate said of the messages. “His manipulative ways had a huge effect on (the player), and it was extremely sad to see that we put our trust in someone like that when we chose BSU.”

**On leave in 2014**

Supinski was placed on paid administrative leave in February 2014.

The university still has not provided an explanation for his leave of absence. In 2014, Scott Faust, BSU’s then-director of Communications and Marketing, told the Pioneer that it was due to a “personnel matter” but couldn’t comment further on the specific reason.

A reason was never given to players either, according to five members of the 2014 softball team who spoke to the Pioneer.

The five 2014 players all told the Pioneer that they believe Supinski engaged in inappropriate behavior that involved other athletes.

Two softball players said a BSU women’s hockey player told them she had received inappropriate messages via text or email from Supinski. One of the two softball players said she was told Supinski messaged multiple women’s hockey players.

The 2014 softball team learned Supinski was placed on leave in a meeting with Dill before the season began. Dill never gave the team a specific reason for the leave of absence, four players said.

“I completely understand that there is information that cannot be disclosed while an investigation is going on,” one player said. “However, there was absolutely no communication with us other than the day that Tracy sat us all down, told us all Rick was being put on leave and would be under investigation. At that time, we all thought it must have been some sort of recruiting violation or something along those lines. That was until we hear from all of the other athletes.... The administration let us down immensely.”

Supinski did not coach any games during the 2014 season. His biography on the

“‘They told us absolutely nothing when they needed to be transparent,’ said one player. ‘... It was the school’s responsibility to protect us. ... What they did was ... make us think everything was fine and safe.’”

Beavers’ website makes no mention of the 2014 season. Graduate assistant coach D.J. Guinn served as interim head coach during his absence.

Wanting an explanation for their coach’s leave, four players said team members went to Dill. They never received an explanation. Two players said team members asked Dill to hire a new coach.

Supinski was back as the active head coach before the 2015 season. Four players said BSU gave no explanation why Supinski was allowed to return. Players from the 2014 team expressed a desire for more transparency from the university.

“They told us absolutely nothing when they needed to be transparent,” said one player. “... It was the school’s responsibility to protect us.... What they did was... make us think everything was fine and safe.”

One player said some parents got involved and began looking for answers after hearing about what was happening from team members.

“His behavior was demeaning, inappropriate and unfair for his players,” she said. “And the fact that he was brought back I know pissed off a lot of people and we couldn’t believe it.”

No answers came from Supinski himself, either.

“Rick never once spoke on his leave of absence and made it seem to the incoming (freshmen) that absolutely nothing happened,” another player said. She also said they were not only let down by Supinski, but that “our athletic director wasn’t going to do anything about it. I remember each and every time going to his office and being shut down.”

**Other actions cross the line**

Multiple players also said Supinski made inappropriate comments that crossed a line for some players and made them uncomfortable.

Players from 2014 and 2019 said Supinski directed insensitive jokes about drug use and addiction toward them. One 2019 player said he would “constantly ask people if they were late to their Special Olympics practice.”

Before Supinski was placed on leave in 2014, a group of players went to Dill asking him to put a stop to the inappropriate comments, one player said. The comments continued.

of Supinski’s employment and 18 days after the season ended.

“Britt has already started to and will continue to positively change Bemidji State softball for the better,” one 2019 player said. “Britt is the best thing that could have happened to the program in a time of such darkness.”

In Bemidji State’s press release announcing the coaching change, the lone acknowledgement of Supinski was in the last sentence of the six-paragraph release: “(Gomez) succeeds Rick Supinski, who had been BSU’s head softball coach since November 2011.”

On the same day of the announcement, after the Pioneer followed up via email to request additional information about Supinski and the coaching transition, BSU told the Pioneer that there would be a search for a permanent head coach replacement but they could not say more about Supinski.

The player who submitted this year’s complaint said Supinski has not attempted to contact her since the day she reported him to the university, nor has she sought legal action against him.

The consensus among the 2019 players who spoke to the Pioneer is the program’s future is in good hands with Gomez, but its post-Supinski future should have begun much sooner.

“It’s important to me that others who experience the same situation feel they can come forward and see a change,” the player said. “The university... failed to provide a safe environment for their student-athletes.”

**Moving on from ‘a time of such darkness’**

Once Supinski’s 2019 leave of absence began, first-year assistant coach Brittany Gomez took over head coaching duties for the remaining 32 games of the season. The Beavers finished 24-30 overall.

Bemidji State announced Gomez as the interim head coach May 15, one day after the end

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