

## Zmolek brothers back under one roof

Former Century standouts reunited ... for now

BY JASON FELDMAN  
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Three Division I hockey players in one house, and there haven't been any scuffles or trash talking. At least not yet. So say brothers Riese, Will and Bennett Zmolek. "It's awesome being home together," said Bennett, the youngest of Doug and Jenny Zmolek's three boys. "I'm not able to see any of their games during the season ... now we

### ALL IN THE FAMILY

Former Century boys hockey standouts Riese, Will and Bennett Zmolek all had strong seasons cut short. They're all back in Rochester now, working out and training at their family's home. A look at their 2019-20 seasons:

• **RIESE ZMOLEK:** The 23-year-old recently finished his junior season at Minnesota State University, where he helped the Mavericks hold the No. 1 ranking in the country for stretches this season as well as a WCHA regular-season title. The standout

defenseman has six goals and 27 points in his MSU career.

• **WILL ZMOLEK:** The 2017 Century grad turns 21 on Thursday. He was a freshman for Bemidji State this season, helping the Beavers to a second-place finish in the WCHA. He had seven assists in 37 games.

• **BENNETT ZMOLEK:** The 6-foot-2, 180-pounder recently finished his first full season with the USHL's Cedar Rapids Roughriders. He'll play there again next season before heading to Minnesota State in 2021-22 or 2022-23.

scatter again.

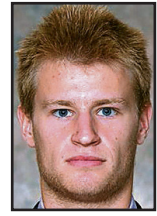
Riese will be a senior at Minnesota State University in the fall, Will will be a sophomore at Bemidji State, and Bennett will head back to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for his second full season of junior hockey with the USHL's Cedar Rapids Roughriders.

"We've all been back home for (more than) a week," Will said earlier this week. "It doesn't happen a lot anymore. We can't really go anywhere right now, but the next few months will be fun. Our parents seem pretty happy to have us all back."

The brothers haven't been all together for such a stretch of time since Century's 2014-15 season — the only time Riese and Will played together on a team; Riese as a senior; Will a sophomore — ended. Riese left to



R. Zmolek



W. Zmolek



B. Zmolek

play for the Austin Bruins that spring, then moved on to Cedar Rapids in the fall.

"It's still going to take some time to process this all," Riese said of MSU's season coming to an abrupt halt, with the Mavericks holding a legitimate belief they could win a national championship. "Even when I pulled up to our house (on March 17), it felt weird. I was hoping every day when I'd wake up that it was a bad dream."

While Bennett was unable to watch most of his brothers games this season, Riese and Will were reunited on the ice

See **ZMOLEK**, Page B2

## Time to vote for Play of Year

Voting on 32-play bracket opens Monday

BY ISAAC TROTTER  
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With no March Madness, we're all in need of a bracket of some kind.

The Post Bulletin sports team has you covered.

We have created the ultimate bracket to decide the 2019-20 Play of the Year from schools in southeastern Minnesota. Thirty-two plays made the cut. But only one can be the winner, and it's up to you to decide.

There are four quadrants: boys' basketball, girls' basketball, hockey and football/wrestling.

The voting for the Round of 32 will begin on Monday, March 30, at 9 a.m. You'll have three days to vote to see who advances to the Sweet 16.

It won't be easy to decide.

The No. 1 seeds are Caledonia boys basketball player Eli King, Kasson-Mantorville girls basketball player Mya Suess, Blooming Prairie football player Gabe Hagen and Dodge County boys hockey player Brody Lamb.

King, a sophomore, and his brother Noah, a senior at Caledonia, also appear in the football/wrestling region for a couple of outstanding plays that helped the Warriors win the Class AA state championship.

The voting will go quickly, with the champion determined by April 10.

Let's get the fun started.

### VOTING SCHEDULE

Round of 32: 9 a.m. March 30 - 10 a.m. April 2.

Sweet 16: 2 p.m. April 2 - 10 a.m. April 4.

Elite Eight: 2 p.m. April 4 - 10 a.m. April 6.

Final Four: 2 p.m. April 6 - 10 a.m. April 8.

Championship: 2 p.m. April 8 - Noon April 10.



## 'Do what it takes to win'

Pine Island's Finstuen found his way at Pacific

BY PAT RUFF  
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Damon Stoudamire has reeled in two prestigious coaching awards this month.

On March 3, the former NBA star point guard was named the West Coast Conference Coach of the Year. Then Tuesday, another biggie came his way, Stoudamire prized with the Ben Jobe National Coach of the Year Award, given annually to the top minority Division I coach.

A former NBA Rookie of the year (1996), the 46-year-old Stoudamire draws special interest in southeastern Minnesota.

That's especially true in Pine Island, where one of its own is playing for Stoudamire at the University of Pacific. That guy — 2017 Pine Island graduate Broc Finstuen — relishes the hands he's in.

"It's easy to listen to (Stoudamire)," said Finstuen, a 6-foot-4, 200-pound junior guard who spent his first two years out of high school playing junior college basketball, first at Central Wyoming College and then Casper (Wyoming) College. "This is a coach who played at the highest level and had to guard guys like Jason Kidd and Steve Nash. We can't compare anything we've done to what he did. When he talks about your game, you just say, 'OK.'"

When Stoudamire evaluates Finstuen's just-completed season, helping Pacific to a 23-10 record, he's much more than "OK" with what he provided.

Finstuen wasn't a lavish scorer, averaging 5.1 points per game. But he was a frequent starter who excelled at so many of the things that Stoudamire covets.

Among them is thefts. Finstuen had 20 steals this season, good for second on the team despite averaging just fewer than 15 minutes per game.

"Broc has great instincts with the way he can get steals," Stoudamire said. "It's crazy how he can anticipate and get them."

Finstuen wasn't sure what to anticipate when he first arrived at Pacific. It's located in Stockton, Calif., population

Photo courtesy of University of Pacific  
University of Pacific junior guard Broc Finstuen, left, helped the Tigers to a 23-10 record this season. Finstuen is a 2017 Pine Island graduate.



Stoudamire

311,000 and situated 80 minutes east of San Francisco.

While he was intrigued at being coached by a former NBA star like Stoudamire, the team he was joining was below average in 2018-19, finishing 14-18 overall and 4-12 in the West Coast Conference. The Tigers

owned the same 14-18 record the year before (9-9 in the WCC.)

But after a 2-2 start this season, Pacific took off. It won 10 of its next 11 games en route to its 23-10 record, including 11-5 in the WCC.

It was that jump that earned Stoudamire a pair of prestigious post-season coaching awards.

But he considered the recognition misplaced.

"Those awards don't mean a thing to me," Stoudamire said. "I wish they were team awards, not coach of the year awards. You can't do it without players. I tell everyone, we were a team that got better and better each and every game. That's because guys bought in. You have to have guys who play as hard as our guys did, that's the No. 1 thing."

Stoudamire points to Finstuen as one of those workers.

See **FINSTUEN**, Page B3

## Activities directors faced with unique challenge

BY GUY N. LIMBECK  
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This year's spring is a different kind of crazy for high school activities directors in Rochester and the entire state.

Usually the activities directors are gearing up for the sports season, which was set to begin next week. But because of COVID-19, the spring season is on hold until at least May and there is a chance it could be



Ihrke

wiped out entirely. "We're used to scrambling in the spring because of weather, but now it's something else," John Marshall activities director Brian Ihrke said. "We're just going to hope that we have a nice sunny spring and then when we start playing games we won't have to worry about the

weather."

Two years ago, approximately 75 percent of the scheduled spring sporting events had to be rescheduled due to the weather.

"It's usually one of your most hectic, crazy, unpredictable seasons and then you go here, where you might end up postponing an entire season," Mayo activities director Jeff Whitney said. "Totally different scenarios, but the same results. You do this long enough, all these



Whitney

years of athletics, and you can't predict something like this." The activities directors are looking at a number of scenarios that could play out, and trying to stay positive in the process.

"I'm still going at it as if we're having a season, unless I hear



Strickland

different," Lourdes activities director Steve Strickland said. "I'm going into work every day and continue to do my work as if things were still going. I haven't changed anything."

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# Sports

## Zmolek

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five times in the past three months. Riese's MSU team won three of those five games, including the last game of the regular season, when the Mavericks topped Bemidji State 4-1 at Bemidji on Feb. 29 to clinch the WCHA regular season championship.

"I'm pretty sure Will (and BSU) was in the same boat as we were," Riese said. "Everyone was so heartbroken. I'm pretty sure (BSU) would've gotten into the NCAA tournament. It's not easy to get there, to put in a whole year, then this happens. It's a lot to handle in a short period of time."

Both teams were likely to make the NCAA tournament field. MSU, still looking for its first-ever win in the national tournament, would have likely been a No. 1 seed in one of the four regionals with its 31-5-2 record and two Hobey Baker Award finalists in forward Marc Michaelis and goalie Dryden McKay.

"It was really tough to sit in that team meeting," Riese said of the Mavericks' final get-together as a team. "I have a frog in my throat just talking about it. The stuff we've been through together, grinding every day. We grew so close ... not getting a last chance to try for a championship with that group. It was hard to look around the locker room."

While Riese and Will were on the ice with their teams, preparing for practices when the news of the canceled postseason broke, Bennett was home in Rochester, recovering from mononucleosis. He didn't get the chance for a face-to-face goodbye with his teammates.

"We faced a lot of injury and illness this year," Bennett said of the Roughriders' season. "I felt like, just all the practices and everything, those were always competitive and helped me improve my all-around game."

The silver lining for the Zmoleks has been some unexpected time together at home. Even the youngest sibling, Ella, a middle-schooler who bucked the family trend and excels at basketball, seems happy to have her brothers back.

"I think she really likes it when we're home," Bennett said. "She said it was too quiet with us gone."

## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# Swanson named head coach at K-M

## Former assistant will take over KoMets program

BY ISAAC TROTTER  
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When Joel Swanson was 24 years old, he was a bright-eyed football coach at Luverne High School. He had a star quarterback on his roster who's name was Terry Van Engelenhoven.

Van Engelenhoven had a rocket for an arm. He was a star pitcher on the diamond who threw 90 miles per hour and went on to play baseball for South Dakota State University.

Swanson was enamored of his star quarterback. He came to training camp with 125 different plays that utilized Van Engelenhoven's bazooka-like arm.

But Van Engelenhoven blew out his knee early in the season, and Swanson was stuck. All of his offensive plays were useless.

"We had to scrap the whole thing," Swanson remembers.

"We had no one who can do this." Swanson learned a valuable lesson that season that has stuck with him throughout his three decades as a football coach.

"I resorted back to the plays that were easiest for everyone to understand," Swanson said. "My goal was always by the end of the year, I want them to have ideas. I want to teach the kids to make calls. I want the kids to feel comfortable out there so they're not looking to me right before the snap. I want them to know what to watch for so they can switch things around if needed."

That's exactly what Swanson will bring to the field in the fall. Last week, Swanson accepted the head football coaching job at Kasson-Mantorville.

It was an easy choice. Swanson has been coaching football at K-M for almost a decade. He was the defensive coordinator last year before taking over as the interim head coach during the middle of the season.

"I don't get wrapped up in titles and stuff," Swanson said. "It's an honor and a privilege to work with the young men and have a chance to lead and guide them as they try and chase their dreams for the future."

K-M went 6-4 last season with two of its losses coming to state semifinalist Winona. The KoMets have finished with a winning record in three of the last four years, and Swanson's plan is to keep it that way.

His plan is to tailor his offensive and defensive schemes so they fit the KoMets' personnel. Swanson won't fit a square peg into a round hole.

"I want to keep things simple for the guys, but I also don't want to run the same thing that everyone else is running," Swanson said. "I like being different. I purposely put things in on both sides of the ball that no one else is doing. Then opponents don't have anything to refer back to."

The coronavirus outbreak has thrown a wrench into Swanson's plans. Off-season workouts have come to a halt. Spring sports are

canceled until early May, and there's no established date for sports to return.

"You hope that we can get back soon, but we have to be safe," Swanson said. "It's not just football but they want to stay in contact with their teammates and classmates. If this extends into the summer, we're going to have to figure out some other ways. Usually, I have everything mapped out. Now, there's a lot of adjustments because of what's going on in our country."

When sports come back, Swanson will undoubtedly have a plan ready to roll for his KoMets squad. But the lesson he learned with Van Engelenhoven at Luverne will loom large in 2020.

"The hardest thing is not being around the kids and hearing their ideas and inputs," Swanson said. "It's their season. I've done it for over 30 years. There's always another season for me. That's not the case for all of my guys. So I want them to have some ownership of their season."

## AMATEUR SOCCER

# Season ends before it starts for Med City

## 2020 NPSL season canceled

BY PAT RUFF  
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The National Premier Soccer League has cancelled its 2020 season over concerns of COVID-19, the fast-spreading world-wide disease.

Included in the NPSL is Rochester's fourth-year amateur soccer team, Med City FC.

Med City FC General Manager Frank Spaeth considered it the right decision.

"It is understandable given the current climate and uncertainty that we are in that they cancel it," Spaeth said. "This (COVID-19) isn't something that's going to go away in two or three weeks. It's not just going to magically disappear by then. Making sure we are putting the health of our players, fans and staff first is the right idea."

It's not an easy time for Spaeth to take a break. Not only has he put in countless hours preparing for the season, including recruiting players who annually come from

around the globe, but Med City FC had built momentum.

The Mayhem were coming off their best season yet. They finished 8-1-3 last year and for the first time reached the NPSL playoffs.

In recognition of that strong campaign, the Mayhem had been invited to participate in the prestigious Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup. But their opening game of that massive tournament, which had been scheduled for March 25, was put on hold due to COVID-19 worries. As of last week, Spaeth wasn't sure whether that game would be made up.

Med City FC was set to open its NPSL season on May 2. The league had already made adjustments in recent weeks, having delayed its normally early starting West Coast schedule to April 4. That was also in response to COVID-19. Now, the entire season is gone for NPSL teams.

Spaeth said that conference calls have happened between a number of teams in the NPSL the last two weeks, discussing how to proceed with the season. Having taken part in those, he had a strong hunch that things were going to get canceled.

On Thursday, that cancellation became

official. Spaeth was willing to see the big picture.

"If we do our part in a small way here, we want to do that," Spaeth said. "I love soccer, but it's not worth dying for."

There still is a chance that Med City FC will have a bit of a season. But it would likely be one where just a handful of teams participated, with mini-tournaments. Spaeth said that he has already been reached out to about that.

What Spaeth says he will put most of his concentration into now, though, is the 2021 season. There is a silver lining in that.

"For the first time in our history, we'll have more than a year to prepare for a season," he said.

### NO WORD ON UPSL, WPSL

There has been no word yet of Rochester's two other amateur soccer teams, Rochester FC and women's team Rochester United FC, having had their seasons cancelled due to COVID-19. Both are in their second year.

Rochester FC plays in the United Premier Soccer League, while Rochester United FC plays in the Women's Premier Soccer League.

## Directors

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"We're not totally scrapping everything, but we're hanging tight," Century activities director Mark Kuisle said. "As I talk with ADs across Minnesota, everyone's kind of in the same boat, only taking care of the short term rather than looking at the long term."

Kuisle is also the current president of the Athletic Directors Association in Minnesota. The association was supposed to have a three-day conference this week with the 325 members and 90 administrative assistants, but that had



Kuisle

the Big Nine Conference had a conference call on Thursday.

"We're just trying to get our staff up to speed with some technology and some options for themselves so they can be able to communicate with kids while we're in this down time," Kuisle said.

### WORKING AHEAD

The activities directors usually have schedules

to be called off. A lot of conference calls are currently being held. Activities directors of the 12 schools in

the Big Nine Conference had a conference call on Thursday.

"We're just trying to get our staff up to speed with some technology and some options for themselves so they can be able to communicate with kids while we're in this down time," Kuisle said.

in place about a year in advance. So while games this year are waiting to happen, the ADs are working on next year's schedules.

"We've already built the fall and winter schedules for the conference and we're working on non-conference schedules," Whitney said. "We were just starting to build next year's spring schedule in the conference, so the Big Nine ADs are still doing that."

The mad scramble could come later this spring if the season does get under way. Schedules might need to be redone to reflect the shorter season. And with spring, there is also the constant threat of

unpleasant weather.

"You can't even start making up a legit schedule until you really get some direction one way or another," Whitney said. "You don't want to waste a lot of time building things when you don't know what's going to happen, but you want to be prepared if it does happen."

It's unlikely the spring season can be pushed back to finish later than normal, however. There are other factors in place, and the fact that sporting venues may not be available.

"When we start looking at those state tournament dates, we don't have a great deal of flexibility

in moving things later or starting to move things around because you still have graduations, you still have proms and all those things that might take place or might not take place based on the circumstances," Kuisle said.

The activities directors are used to dealing with

situations that pop up due to poor weather. Right now they would probably cherish the thought at only having to worry about the weather.

"Sports are a real big deal to people," Thrke said, "not only for exercise, but for recreation and for fans. Hopefully we'll be back to normal before too long."

*Mildred*  
(O'Byrne)

*Fuchs*  
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