



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Brainerd Warrior gymnasts Josie Harguth (left) and Brenna Deason leap on the balance beam Tuesday, March 23, 2021, in the Brainerd High School gymnastics room.

## GYMNASTICS

# WARRIOR SOPHOMORES HOPE TO MAKE A SPLASH AT STATE

By Jeremy Millsop  
Sports Editor

**B**renna Deason is no stranger to state meets.

The Class 2A state gymnastics tournament Saturday, March 27, at Champlin Park

High School, will be slightly different, however, as Deason won't be accompanied by classmate and teammate Izzy Olson.

The two have shared the state spotlight three times between gymnastics and diving.

Not this time, though, as an injury sidelined Olson for the season.

Deason won't be going to her third state gymnastics meet alone. With her will be fellow sophomore Josie Harguth.

The Section 8-2A

co-champion beamer will be making her state debut. Harguth posted a first-place tying score of 9.45 on beam Saturday, March 20, to qualify.

"She just needs to go

**STATE:** Page B4

### CLASS 2A STATE GYMNASTICS

**Who:** Brainerd Warriors Brenna Deason and Josie Harguth

**When:** 6 p.m., Saturday, March 27

**Where:** Champlin Park High School

**Pods:** Brainerd will compete in a pod with athletes from Section 1, 2, 3 and 8.

## CLASS 2A WRESTLING

# Tulenchik finishes runner-up for a 2nd year in a row

ST. MICHAEL — For the second year in the row, Connor Tulenchik finishes second.

The Pequot Lakes/Pine River-Backus Road Crew junior entered the state championships Friday, March 26, the top-seed at 170 pounds in Class 2A.

After knocking off his quarterfinals opponent Keegan Lemke in a 15-5 major decision, he beat Blaine Henderson in a 6-4 sudden death deci-

sion in the semifinals to advance to his second-straight state finals.

In the finals, Tulenchik faced second-seeded Adam Sylvester, who was undefeated 27-0 headed in.

Tulenchik lost in an 11-3 major decision to be back-to-back runners-up. He finishes the season 40-2.

"We got to where we wanted to be," Road Crew head coach Travis Hoffarth said. "His goal



SmugMug

Road Crew wrestler Connor Tulenchik competes in the Class 2A state finals at 170 pounds Friday, March 26, 2021, at St. Michael Alberville High School.

all year has been to be a state champion and to do that you need to reach the state finals.

"The semifinals were a little more nerve-wracking than we would've

liked them to be. We went to overtime with an opponent he's familiar with. Sometimes those matches can be a little closer than you want, but

**WRESTLING:** Page B4

## COLLEGE SOFTBALL

# Raiders drop 3 in Rosemount

ROSEMOUNT — Simone Mortel and Haley Youngbauer tallied the lone Central Lakes College Raiders extra-base hit as they dropped three games Friday, March 26, in Rosemount.

The Raiders fell 7-1 to Bay College in the first game with Jenna Gratz getting hit with the loss. CLC tallied five hits against Bay College.

In the second game, the Raiders dropped a 8-2 game to St. Cloud. The Raiders again tallied five hits with Youngbauer's double being one of them.

Simone Mortel and Molly Carnell each tallied an RBI in Game Two.

Game Three the Raiders were blanked by Dakota County 8-0 and tallied give hits again.

Gratz suffered her second loss of the day.

**Game One**  
Bay College 7  
Central Lakes 1 5 2  
LP: Jenna Gratz

**Game Two**  
St. Cloud 8 9 2  
Central Lakes 2 5 2  
LP: Kaija Ludewig, 2B: CLC-Haley Youngbauer

**Game Three**  
Dakota County 8  
Central Lakes 0 5 3  
LP: Jenna Gratz, 2B: CLC-Sarah Kossan. Overall: CLC 1-4. Next: plays Dakota County and Anoka-Ramsey at the RCTC Dome noon Saturday, April 3.

## COLLEGE BASEBALL

# Raiders split in opening doubleheader

ROCHESTER — The Central Lake College Raiders belted three home runs in their opening doubleheader of Rochester Friday, March 26.

In the first game, Jake Kappahn and Phillip Zynda each went deep as the Raiders knocked off Rochester 9-6.

Jonathan Lerma picked up the win for the Raiders and pitched seven



Wicklund



Lerma

innings and allowed five hits with three unearned runs and seven strikeouts.

Zynda added two more hits to his home run

including a double to go 3-for-4 with three RBIs. Kappahn also recorded three RBIs.

In the second game, Gunnar Wicklund went yard for a two-run home run as the Raiders fell 8-3.

Eric Martin was tagged with the loss for the Raiders going 5 1/3 innings and allowing seven runs, five earned. He struck out four and

walked five.

Jake Suska was the only Raider to tally two hits in the second game.

**Game One**  
Rochester 6 5 1  
Central Lakes 9 11 2  
WP: Jonathan Lerma. LP: Drew Simmons. 2B: CLC-Phillip Zynda, Gunnar Wicklund, Jaime Werne; R-Steven Shallcross (2). HR: CLC-Jake Kappahn, Phillip Zynda.

**Game Two**  
Rochester 8 7 0  
Central Lakes 3 6 4  
WP: Landon Stoppelmoor. LP: Eric Martin. 2B: CLC-Eli Roberts; R-Shota Sowamura. 3B: R-Drew Yochim. HR: CLC-Gunnar Wicklund. Overall: CLC 1-1. Next: hosts Rochester (2) 2 p.m. Sunday, March 28.

# Rays RHP and Brainerd grad Nick Anderson has partial elbow tear

By Field Level Media  
Tampa Bay Rays right-handed reliever and former Brainerd graduate Nick Anderson sustained a partial tear of his elbow ligament and will likely be sidelined until after the All-Star break, according to a report from Marc



Anderson

Topkin of the Tampa Bay Times on Thursday.

At this point, surgery has not been

**ANDERSON:** Page B4

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FEMALE AREA ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

# Pierz point guard gets Pioneers into section semis

By Conrad Engstrom  
Sports Writer

Kiara Olesch is the floor general for the Pierz Pioneers.

Last week, the junior point guard used her scoring — not passing — to send the Pioneers to the Section 7-2A semifinals.

Olesch

Olesch scored a game-high 21 points against Royalton in the quarterfinals to help Pierz come away with a 59-33 win.

“I was really going out to leave everything out on the floor,” Olesch said. “I really didn’t want to leave the game knowing that I didn’t do everything I could to win. And I think that was our whole team’s mindset going in.”

For the season, Olesch averaged 10 points a game which is third-best on the team behind Courtney Strohmeier and Emily Dehler.

“She’s been attacking really well all year,” Pierz head coach Matt Poepping said of Olesch. “She ended up finishing everything. She shot free throws really well. Plus, she does all the ball-handling for us. She had a great game and is a great kid.”

The balanced scoring attack was a luxury for the Pioneers all season with Olesch distributing them the ball.

“It’s nice for the other team not to know who to take away because we have multiple girls who can score 10 to 15 points,” Poepping said.

Olesch did lead the Pioneers in assists with 33 of them in 19 games tying her with Emily Sadlovsky with the team lead.

Even as a guard, Olesch finished sec-

## KIARA OLESCH

**Year:** Junior  
**School:** Pierz  
**Sport:** Basketball  
**Position:** guard  
**Highlights:** Scored 21 points against Royalton in Section 7-2A Quarterfinals.

ond-best on the team with rebounds with 5.8 a game and 111 total.

“I’ve improved on every aspect of my game,” Olesch said. “I’ve been growing consistently in all of my skills, not just one. I’ve grown in my ability to see the court. I think my connection with my teammates is one of my strongest abilities.”

Most important for Olesch was handling the ball and setting up the Pioneers’ offense.

“You never know who the girl is that is going to step up each time,” Olesch said. “That makes us that much harder to defend. All of the girls are able to step up in every aspect of the game. We have a good balance which makes us hard to compete against.”

What impressed Poepping was Olesch stepping up big in the section playoffs.

“It was big for her,” Poepping said. “I know the coaching staff believes she has the ability to do that on a night in and night out basis. To bring it out on a big stage was special.”

Olesch left the gym after the Royalton win and was very satisfied with her performance.

“Playing that well made me feel like all my hard work paid off,” Olesch said. “I feel like in the end, it was a great overall feeling for our team.”

As a sophomore, Olesch didn’t get many varsity minutes. This year taking over as one of the primary ball handlers was a big jump.

“She was inserted in the starting lineup this year and we have seen a lot of growth,” Poepping said. “She’s really taken on that leadership role on the court and been our floor general. Sometimes when you are a junior you take a seat to those seniors, but she’s done a good job of getting everyone organized on offense.”

Poepping said Olesch is someone he sees shooting outside in her driveway during the offseason.

“That stuff we need to continue to build upon to keep producing good basketball players,” Poepping said.

Pierz’s playoff run ended in the section semifinals with a 60-37 loss to top-seeded Albany, but Olesch said prior to the game that it was a successful season.

“I’m proud of the girls in this program for really stepping up and proving that girls at this school can be successful,” Olesch said. “I think it’s kudos to the seniors for putting in all that work and time and effort since the start of their career at the high school. I think this program is going in a good direction.”

Olesch is a four-sport athlete. This fall she participated in both cross-country and volleyball. In the spring, she’ll play softball.

“I value all my sports,” she said. “I don’t think I could go without one of them.”

**Other notable performances:**  
**Basketball:** Tori Oehrlein, Crosby-Ironton, scored 26 points and tallied 10 rebounds against Detroit Lakes and scored 26 points against Two Harbors.  
**Maci Martini,** Pequot Lakes, scored 23 points against Walker-Hackensack-Akeley and scored 23 points against Virginia.

**Rylie Hirschev,** Pine River-Backus, scored 34 points against Sebeka.

**Hockey:** Savannah Abear, Northern Lakes, scored five goals against Prairie Centre.

**CONRAD ENGSTROM** may be reached at 218-855-5861 or [conrad.engstrom@brainerddispatch.com](mailto:conrad.engstrom@brainerddispatch.com). Follow on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/the\\_rad34](https://www.twitter.com/the_rad34).

MALE AREA ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

# John Paul Fitzpatrick looks to claim a state title as top seed

By Conrad Engstrom  
Sports Writer

Wrestling runs in the Fitzpatrick family.

Crosby-Ironton sophomore John Paul Fitzpatrick is adding to the family legacy after he went 3-0 without allowing a point in the state prelims of Sections 7-2A and 8-2A to earn the top seed in the state championships at 138 pounds.

Fitzpatrick

Fitzpatrick started the state prelims with a one minute and 18 second pin of Crookston’s Braxton Volker. He followed it up with a 4-0 decision of Foonston-Bagley’s Keegan Senger.

He then narrowly defeated Sawyer Simmons of Royalton/Upsala in the finals with a 2-0 decision to get into the state championships.

“It was a mental game as well as a physical one,” Fitzpatrick said. “I just didn’t let anything get to my head and focus on one match.”

What stood out to Rangers head coach Brian Wood on Fitzpatrick’s state prelim performance was he didn’t let his opponents get points.

“He’s going to control the match and do what it takes to win,” Wood said. “Whether it’s on his feet, on top, getting that initial takedown. He’s really focused on what it takes to be excellent at wrestling.”

Fitzpatrick’s performance at the state prelims vaulted his record to 38-1. He opens the state championships against Tucker Wills of Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial.

Although Fitzpatrick is the top-seeded wrestler for the state championships, he is the second-ranked wrestler for his weight class.

With the help of Wood, Fitzpatrick doesn’t focus on where he is in the rankings.

## JOHN PAUL FITZPATRICK

**Year:** Sophomore  
**School:** Crosby-Ironton  
**Sport:** Wrestling  
**Position:** 138 pounds  
**Highlights:** Finished 3-0 in state prelims to earn top seed in state championships.

“Having people around you that help support you and that environment helps,” Fitzpatrick said. “It helps me stay at that level.”

In the state finals, he could face top-ranked Kad Sammons of Windom/Mountain Lake who is a senior and 31-2.

“I’m just taking it one match at a time and not looking at any of my opponents,” Fitzpatrick said. “It should be a lot of fun and give it everything I got. I’ve trained for this all year.”

John Paul isn’t the only Fitzpatrick headed to the state championships as his older brother and senior Michael Fitzpatrick also made it at 182 pounds.

Michael Fitzpatrick got second at state prelims after pinning Aidan Olson in 3:54 to reach the championships.

“It’s good to see that the more success the younger brother has the more success Michael has,” Wood said. “They tend to push each other to stay on top.”

Both Fitzpatricks went to state in 2020 as well. John Paul Fitzpatrick notched a third-place finish at 126 pounds and finished with a 40-13 record. Michael Fitzpatrick lost both of his state matches at 170 pounds.

“It’s been cool,” John Paul Fitzpatrick said. “This is the second time we are both going to state now and it’s pretty exciting. I look up to him every day.”

Wood has noticed John Paul Fitzpatrick becoming more and more serious about wrestling this year.

“He’s a farm kid so he’s always working

when wrestling is done with his dad,” Wood said. “This year he told me he’s going to hit up Freestyle and Greco and that will help him take the next step.”

Wood also mentioned that John Paul Fitzpatrick has added more moves to his arsenal this season.

“As the year’s gone on we’ve tried to open up his range of moves,” Wood said. “Even though he is good at a few things, we want him to be good at everything. You know he’s doubling his workout time, coming in early and understands that he has to put in more work in competition to stay on top.”

Fitzpatrick felt like he’s been on top of his game all season in practice. He’s been able to stick with his coaches in practice most challenges that get thrown his way.

His favorite thing about wrestling is the environment.

When John Paul Fitzpatrick is on top, he loves to use the cradle to pin his opponent.

“That’s my go-to move,” he said.

John Paul Fitzpatrick is a three-sport athlete. He’s in track and field as well as boys soccer for Lake Region Christian School. His favorite by far is wrestling.

“Wrestling has been in my family for a while,” John Paul Fitzpatrick said. “My dad used to wrestle, my dad’s dad, and I grew up with them talking about it. I just grew into it which has always made it fun.”

**Other notable performances:**  
**Wrestling:** 11 area wrestling qualify for the state championships.

**Basketball:** Max Strickland, Staples-Motley, scored 22 points against Menahga.

Jonah Prokott, Pierz, scored 25 points against Virginia.

Griffin Decker, Pillager, scored 27 points against Two Harbors.

Hunter Nissen, Aitkin, scored 25 points against Crosby-Ironton.

Dietrich Winegarner, Crosby-Ironton, scored 21 points against Aitkin.

Brandon Greenwaldt, Verndale, scored 21 points against Sebeka.

Sivert Kieffsaas, Staples-Motley, scored 23 points against Fergus Falls.

Carsen Turk, Crosby-Ironton, scored 23 points against Duluth Marshall.

**Hockey:** Nicholas Stevenson, Little Falls, collected six points against Prairie Centre.

**CONRAD ENGSTROM** may be reached at 218-855-5861 or [conrad.engstrom@brainerddispatch.com](mailto:conrad.engstrom@brainerddispatch.com). Follow on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/the\\_rad34](https://www.twitter.com/the_rad34).

# Sertoma Liftathon scheduled to begin next week

Eight-one lifters will participate in the 31st annual Sertoma Sunrise Warrior Liftathon fundraiser March 29-April 1 at 2:15 p.m. each day at the Brainerd High School strength room.

Participants include 56 boys and 25 girls from the Brainerd school district in grades 8-12. There are nine fundraising teams with nine lifters on each

team. The teams are captained by Sertoma Sunrise Club members.

The Liftathon raises funds for charitable organizations in the Brainerd area and funds for improvements in the school district weight room.

Due to social distancing guidelines, the event will not be open to the public.

# No tickets to the general public for state hockey quarterfinals

Both the Little Falls Flyers and the Northern Lakes Lightning boys hockey team are headed to the Xcel Energy Center Tuesday, March 30, for the Class 1A boys state hockey tournament.

Little Falls was seeded fourth and will play the fifth-seeded Delano Tigers 8 p.m. Tuesday. Northern Lakes plays No. 2 seed Gentry Academy 11 a.m. Tuesday.

Department of Health requirements limit attendance to the games to a total of 250 spectators and all allotted tickets are distributed to the team and their families.

If either, the Flyers of Lightning win Tuesday, a limited number of tickets will be available for the semifinals and finals. More information will come Wednesday, March 31, pending the outcomes.

# Bemidji State stuns Wisconsin, advances to NCAA East Regional final

By Austin Monteith  
Forum News Service

BRIDGEPORT, Conn. — Bemidji State is one win away from the Frozen Four.

The fourth-seeded Beavers stormed out to a 2-0 first-period lead and knocked off top-seeded Wisconsin in a 6-3 victory in the NCAA men’s hockey East Regional semifinals Friday afternoon at Bridgeport, Conn.

Ethan Somoza bucketed two goals and an assist in the first-round upset in a tenacious performance by BSU (16-9-3).

“Our word all week was attack,” BSU head coach Tom Serratore said. “That’s how we play. We’re a puck-pressure team and we wanted to make sure that we played our game.”

The Badgers (20-10-1) fell behind early and trailed 2-0 at the first intermission. Bemidji State outshot UW 16-7 in the opening frame and were in control out of the gate, keeping Wisconsin’s high-powered scorers in check.

“I don’t know. Maybe they weren’t prepared for it, but we’ve been doing the whole year,” Somoza said. “Our focus is being really aggressive on the forecheck and causing turnovers, keeping things really simple in the defensive zone.”

BSU took the lead on



Greg Vasil / Special to Forum News Service

Bemidji State celebrates at the final horn following a 6-3 victory over Wisconsin in the NCAA East Regional semifinals at Bridgeport, Conn., on Friday, March 26, 2021.

a fortuitous bounce off a Badger defender.

The bouncing puck arrived at the stick of Ross Armour who backhanded it for the opening goal 6:33 into the contest.

A turnover gave the Beavers a boost heading into the intermission.

Elias Rosén scored an unassisted tally from the point with 15 seconds to go in the period.

“We kept the momentum going there,” Rosén said. “Taking a 2-0 lead coming into the second period is always huge.”

A pair of penalties on the Sillinger brothers, Lukas and Owen, gave UW 1:46 on a 5-on-3 opportunity early in the second.

A 5-on-3 power-play goal by Linus Weissbach 2:38 into the period cut the deficit in half for the

Badgers. BSU killed the remainder of the second penalty to limit the damage.

“We sure as heck didn’t get rattled,” Serratore said. “We stuck with it and that’s a testament to the players.”

Bemidji State has played well with a lead all season, and extended the advantage to 3-1 with 5:18 remaining in the stanza. Somoza fired a one-timer past goalie Robbie Beydoun to restore the two-goal cushion off of a dish from Aaron Miller.

The Beavers continued to pressure and forced another Wisconsin miscue.

Owen Sillinger took advantage of a misplayed puck by Beydoun and caught the netminder out of his crease, scoring on a wraparound. The short-

handed goal with only 1:21 to go in the frame proved to be a backbreaker.

Beydoun was pulled following the second period and replaced in net by Cameron Rowe.

Somoza netted his second goal of the day with 13:55 to go in the third, handing BSU a 5-1 lead.

But Cole Caufield wasn’t going to be held scoreless. The Hobey Baker Award favorite went down swinging, potting two goals for the Badgers in the final 12 minutes to raise tensions in the game’s final moments.

Caufield first converted on the power play with 11:41 to play. He then notched a goal at even strength with 5:04 remaining.

Wisconsin’s comeback attempt, however, came up short.

Brendan Harris added an empty-net goal with 1.2 seconds to play and the celebrations were on for the upstart Beavers.

The win was the third all-time in NCAA Division I tournament play for Bemidji State.

**Bemidji State 6, Wisconsin 3**

BSU 2 2 2 — 6

UW 0 1 2 — 3

First period — 1, BSU, Armour (Rosén), 6:33; 2, BSU, Rosén (unassisted), 19:45.

Second period — 3, UW, Weissbach (Caufield, Pelton-Byce), 2:38, 5v3 PP; 4, BSU, Somoza (Miller), 14:42; 5, BSU, O. Sillinger (unassisted), 18:39, SH.

Third period — 6, BSU, Somoza (Harris), 6:08; 7, UW, Caufield (Holloway, Pelton-Byce), 8:19, PP; 8, UW, Caufield (Ahean, Vorlicky), 14:56; 9, BSU, Harris (Somoza), 19:59, EN, SH.

Goalies (saves-shots) — BSU, Driscoll (30-33); UW, Beydoun (24-28), Rowe (10-11).





Mike Miller / Big Ten Conference

Minnesota defenseman Mike Koster scored his third collegiate goal on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, as the Gophers beat Wisconsin 6-4 to win the Big Ten tournament at Compton Family Ice Arena on the Notre Dame campus.

# Koster uses pandemic downtime wisely

## Blueliner added speed to make a splash for the Gophers

By Jess Myers  
The Rink Live

LOVELAND, Colo. — The pandemic has been a challenge for everyone, worldwide, but in crisis there is often opportunity.

For Minnesota Gophers freshman defenseman Mike Koster, the sudden cancellation of his USHL season a year ago was a challenge. But as his body healed, and as Minnesota rinks slowly opened back up, it became an opportunity.

By this point in any hockey season, it has been said that nobody is fully healthy. But Koster admits that by the time hockey shut down due to COVID-19 in March 2020, he was dealing with multiple ailments — most notably a high ankle sprain — as the Tri-City Storm trudged toward what they hoped would be a long playoff run.

Back home in Chaska, Minn., with nothing but time on his hands, Koster was able to truly rest and recuperate. And in June when there was ice time available at the arena adjacent to Mystic Lake Casino, which is tribal property and was able to re-open with fewer restrictions in place, Koster got back on the ice with a familiar face guiding him to the next stage of his hockey career.

“He’s one of the more focused athletes I’ve worked with, and I’ve worked with some pretty darn good athletes that worked hard,” said Jack Blatherwick, the legendary Minnesota hockey trainer. “I think he’s a really good example of how important it is to be 100% focused on what you’re doing and not just mindlessly doing it hard. I’ve worked with him for years, and he always worked hard, but this last summer was so focused that he improved more than at any other time.”

### Destined for Dinkytown

When Koster chose the Gophers as his college hockey destination, it was the fulfillment of a dream he had harbored since he first learned to skate. But it was also the natural next step when his primary trainers on the way up were Blatherwick and former Gophers star Lance Pitlick. His coach at Chaska High School was another former Gopher, Dave Snuggerud. But before he ever met that trio, Koster’s goal was to wear a particular shade of maroon and gold.

“At two or three, he told us he was going to play high school hockey for the Marshall Tigers, which was where we lived at the time, he was going to play college hockey for the Gophers and he was going to play for the Wild,” recalled Joan Koster, Mike’s mother. “He had the vision all the way back then.”

In Marshall, Mike had a group of “rink rat” friends typical of so many Minnesota childhoods, and one of them had a father who managed the local arena. This meant abundant free time, and a trip to the rink whenever school was cancelled due to the blizzards

so common to the southwestern Minnesota prairie.

Mike was a forward when the Koster moved to Chaska a decade ago, but training with Pitlick for a summer team, he got an interesting offer.

“Lance Pitlick turned me into a defenseman,” Koster said. “He said I could be a practice player and get into about half the tournaments as a forward, or I could play full time on defense. He saw that in me when I was about 11.”

### High-quality quartet

Nearly nine years later, Koster is part of one of the more renowned young defensive groups in college hockey, alongside Brock Faber, Ryan Johnson and Jackson LaCombe. Much was made about the Gophers playing without three of the four in December, as Faber, Johnson and LaCombe made Team USA for the World Junior Championships, and returned to Minneapolis with gold medals. Gophers coach Bob Motzko said he honestly expected to lose four defensemen instead of three to the red, white and blue.

“When you look at our team and the accolades the three World Junior guys have gotten, Mike is maybe under the radar a little bit. He very well could’ve been on that team as well,” Motzko said. “Spending that year in the USHL was tremendous and he really worked hard on his skating in the off-season. That really shows.”

The skating skills, using what Blatherwick calls “defenseman agility” which means the ability to change directions and use edges rather than the end-to-end speed that forwards favor, is what catches your eye. It’s reminiscent of the way Cale Makar was able to get around the rink en route to winning the Hobey Baker Award for UMass in 2019, and what Makar does today for the Colorado Avalanche.

“He’s got great edges and can corner and change directions in an instant,” Motzko said of Koster. “That’s what he does.”

For his part, Koster credits the coaches he has had along the way, along with being able to take advantage of special situations to get more ice time. As a youth in Marshall, that would mean a blizzard, when school was closed and the rink was open to only a select few. Last summer, that meant the pandemic, which allowed extra time to follow Blatherwick’s lead and get ready to make an immediate splash in college.

“With my size, being able to get around the rink is a huge advantage,” said Koster, who entered his first NCAA tournament with three goals and nine assists in 29 games. “Thinking the game and putting yourself in the right spots, and having a skill set where I can get pucks on and off my stick quickly so I can get up in the rush.”

Jess Myers (@JessRMyers) can be reached at jmyers@forumcomm.com.

# Wolves close with 22-0 run, rally past Rockets

### Field Level Media

Karl-Anthony Towns finished two assists shy of a triple-double and was the linchpin of a remarkable closing stretch for the Minnesota Timberwolves, who erased a 19-point, second-half deficit in their 107-101 victory over the Houston Rockets on Friday in Minneapolis.

Towns finished with 29 points, 16 rebounds and eight assists, tallying 14 points and two assists while the Timberwolves closed the game on a 22-0 run. They ended a three-game losing skid.

Houston led 101-85 on a 20-footer by D.J. Augustin with 7:31 left in the game. The Rockets then missed their final 14 shots and committed five turnovers. Augustin gave the Rockets their biggest lead at 91-72 on a 3-pointer with 1:50 left in the third.

Juan Hernangomez scored 19 points with nine rebounds and Naz Reid scored 16, with both coming off the Minnesota bench.

Christian Wood had 24 points and nine rebounds to lead the Rockets. Ben McLemore tied his season high with 21 points.

John Wall paired 14 points with a season-high 15 assists, but he made only 6 of 25 from the floor and committed seven turnovers. The Rockets’ 21 turnovers yielded 18 points for the Timberwolves.



Jesse Johnson / USA TODAY Sports

Minnesota Timberwolves forward Jaden McDaniels (3) jumps up and attempts to block a shot from Houston Rockets guard John Wall (1) in the first half Friday, March 26, 2021, at Target Center in Minneapolis.

Turnovers undermined the Rockets’ strong shooting start, with five in the first quarter leading to four Minnesota points and offsetting 11-of-20 shooting by Houston.

The Timberwolves did not commit a turnover in the opening period and carried a 33-29 lead into the second, although their ball security turned lackadaisical.

Houston ran its turnover total to 11 by the intermission, but the Timberwolves had five in the second quarter, including four from Towns.

McLemore, meanwhile,

caught fire with his 6 for 6 start from behind the arc and had 18 points by the break. Wall had 10 assists in the first half, and the Rockets closed the second with a 9-0 run to take a 63-54 halftime lead.

The Rockets hit 11 of 22 3-pointers in the first half, with Minnesota staying close through the combination of six offensive rebounds and 11 Houston turnovers yielding a plus-15 advantage in field goal attempts.

The Timberwolves, however, missed 7 of 8 3-pointers in the second quarter.

# Twins’ Willians Astudillo hopes versatility earns him a roster spot

### By Betsy Helfand

St. Paul Pioneer Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — It’s been a few years since Willians Astudillo first burst onto the scene, quickly achieving cult hero status among Twins fans.

Days after belting a walk-off home run in September 2018, the utility man endeared himself to fans by sprinting from first to home to score on a Max Kepler double, losing his helmet to reveal flowing, curly locks along the way and saying after the game that he just wanted to “show that chubby people also run,” a comment that found its way onto T-shirts.

Some of the novelty of “La Tortuga” has worn off, to be sure, but Astudillo doesn’t seem to mind. What’s most important to him is going out there and taking care of his job, for himself and for his teammates. And right now, that means using his versatility to earn a spot on the Twins’ bench.

“I’m not expecting the crowd and T-shirts and all that stuff that happened when I first came up,” Astudillo said. “All that is cool, but it’s more important for me to go out there and help my teammates.”

Astudillo’s versatility can

help him do that. On top of Astudillo being a third catching option behind Mitch Garver and Ryan Jeffers, the Twins can slot him in at a corner infield position or even at a corner outfield spot.

Best part is, he says he feels comfortable at all of those places.

“My mind-set is really simple: I just try to prepare myself for whatever the day brings, whatever position (manager) Rocco (Baldelli) needs me,” he said. “I’m going to try to do my best to be 100 percent and give my 100 percent to help the Twins win. That’s my mentality, and that’s what I’ve been doing this spring training, and that’s what I’m going to do moving forward.”

Astudillo, also known for his contact ability at the plate, has had a nice spring offensively, entering Friday with a .355 batting average, .394 on-base percentage and .677 slugging percentage and two home runs in 11 games. And he would appear to have a leg up on a roster spot.

The Twins still have not made their final roster decisions public. They clarified the left field picture this week by optioning top prospect Alex Kirilloff. One of Brent Rooker or Kyle Garlick seem likely to make the team,

joining Jake Cave as options for left field, as well as potentially Luis Arraez from time to time.

Arraez will slot into the Marwin Gonzalez-type multi-positional everyday player role, and one spot will go to a catcher — the Twins have said Garver and Jeffers will be “two regular catchers.”

Should they go with a four-man bench, that would leave one spot. The Twins already have optioned two other infielders on the 40-man roster, Nick Gordon and Travis Blankenhorn, to the minors, though they have a handful of non-roster invitees still in camp, among them JT Riddle and Tzu-Wei Lin, both of whom they would need to clear space for on the 40-man roster.

While they could go with five outfielders or add another pitcher, Astudillo hopes his skillset makes him indispensable.

“He’s always ready and he does not lack confidence,” Baldelli said earlier this spring. “And there’s a reason why — it’s not false bravado, it’s legitimate. He can go out there and he has good hands and he can make plays wherever we put him. We could see him all over the field, so I feel very comfortable regardless of where we start him.”

# ‘Get the heck away from the rink’ Wild have clear message for rare 3-day break

### By Dane Mizutani

St. Paul Pioneer Press

Listen to the Minnesota Wild talk about their current three-game winning streak and it is clear this team is different.

In the past, this type of stretch would have been cause for some kind of celebration for the Wild, anecdotal proof that things were trending in the right direction.

That isn’t the case this season because this team seems more concerned with the process.

They understand that even though they swept two games from the Arizona Coyotes earlier this week, and followed it up with a 2-0 victory over the St. Louis Blues on Thursday night, they lacked energy in all three games. That less-than-perfect effort won’t get it done against a legitimate Stanley Cup contender like, say, the Colorado Avalanche.

Which is why the Wild (21-10-1, 43 points) are looking forward to a rare three-day break over the weekend. While they won’t make excuses for their uninspired play this week,

the recent stretch of 10 games in 18 days has clearly taken its toll.

“It’s been a lot of games,” winger Kevin Fiala said. “It’s a tough schedule, so it’s going to be nice to have some days off, for sure.”

As much as coach Dean Evason has tried to manage the physical workload this season — he rarely has the Wild take the ice for practice — he understands there’s also a mental aspect to fatigue.

With the way this season’s condensed 56-game schedule has shaken out, the Wild have played almost every other night for the past couple of months. Most players would agree that the grind wears on the mind more than the body.

What’s the best way to combat that moving forward?

“Just get the heck away from the rink and come back fresh and ready to go,” Evason said. “We’ve been battling here for a while. Our group has been competing their butts off. We just haven’t had the energy or the game that we had a month ago.”

The good news for the Wild is they have been able to find ways to win games regardless. Whether it’s grinding out a couple of ugly wins like they did against the Coyotes, or stealing a win thanks to impeccable goaltending like they did against the Blues, the results have remained fairly consistent.

That has put the Wild in good position moving forward. Though they will sit idle over the weekend — they don’t play again until Monday against the Sharks in San Jose — they have built themselves a nice cushion in the West division standings. They are third place and currently 10 points clear of the next closest team in the race for the fourth and final playoff spot in the division.

That’s something the Wild can feel good about during the three-day break.

“We didn’t have our three best games here at home and we still found a way to win all three games,” goaltender Cam Talbot said. “We know six points is huge in the standings right now.”



STATE

From Page B1

out and do Josie's thing," Warrior head coach Tessa Poorker said. "She has mental toughness on beam. We think it's the hardest event mentally.

"We are competing on beam in the third rotation so we'll be well into the meet so she'll get a feel for (the atmosphere) since it's her first time. That's good that we're not starting out on beam and having those nerves. She is just calm and confident and that's what you need in a beamer."

Poorker attributed a late-season switch in the Warriors' beam order to Harguth's poise during the section meet. For the last few meets, Harguth was the team's anchor on beam.

"It is a different set of nerves," Poorker said. "You get nervous just competing on beam in general. Then to move to the anchor spot and just knowing your team is relying on you to finish out strong adds to the pressure.

She has that mental toughness to do that. Either way, no matter if she has a fall or not, she finishes strong and doesn't give anything else away. Her attitude doesn't really change. Her demeanor is so

good that it doesn't affect herself or the team."

Harguth opens with a 10.0 start value which is the highest an athlete can start with.

"Josie comes in with high difficulty between her jumps and her skills and it's a very balanced out routine between front and back skills and things like that, which the judges really like," Poorker said.

Deason battled back from late-season injuries to qualify in both the vault and floor. At the section meet, Deason posted a 9.35 on vault and scored a 9.325 on floor.

"We talked about possibly working some upgrades this week, but with her just coming back fully in all four events, it's probably wasn't the best choice to work those upgrades," Poorker said. "Plus, she competes on Saturday and goes right to track practice on Monday. I wanted to make sure that her track season is up to par and where she wants it to be so we didn't want to risk anything.

"She's excited to represent and go. She did not think she was going to make it and so to make it on the vault and floor is really exciting."

Deason was 22nd on vault last year landing a 9.4. She placed 40th

on floor with a 9.175. As an eighth grader she qualified in the all-around.

Poorker said Deason's goal on floor is to not get whiplash.

"Last year she did a funky, I guess you call it whiplash because she got too high on a flip and came down and jolted her neck," Poorker said. "She did the same thing at the section meet so I think she just gets too excited and the adrenaline overtakes a little bit. So literally our goal is to not get whiplash this year and just hit all of her passes and show off her great routine."

Deason did pump up her start value on floor to a 10.0 as well.

On vault, with shin splints still bothering her, Deason just wants to land on her feet.

"It's kind of hard to have a score in mind when you get to the state meet," Poorker said. "There are four judges and you're not exactly sure what they are looking for and there is a lot of great competition. We're just thrilled that she is there and hoping to land on her feet and hoping to show off a layout suk for the first time and see what we can get from that."

**JEREMY MILLSOP may be reached at 218-855-5856 or jeremy.millsop@brainerddispatch.com. Follow on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jeremymillsop.**

SCOREBOARD

AREA EVENTS

Saturday, March 27

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Sunday, March 28

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TV AND RADIO

Saturday, March 27

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Viktor Hovland NOR, def. Abraham Ancer USA, 1 up
Max Homr USA, def. J.T. Poston USA, 3&2
Billy Horschel USA, def. Collin Morikawa USA, 3&2
Will Zalatoris USA, def. Dylan Frittelli SAF, 2 up
Tony Finau USA, def. Jason Kokrak CAN, 2 up
Jason Day AUS, def. Andy Sullivan ENG, 2&1
Erik Van Rooyen SAF, def. Brendon Todd USA, 2&1
Daniel Berger USA, def. Harris English USA, 4&2
Shane Lowry IRL, def. Sebastian Munoz COL, 3&2
Brian Harman USA, def. Carlos Ortiz MEX, 3&2
Hideki Matsuyama JPN, def. Patrick Cantlay USA, 4&2
Matt Wallace ENG, def. Sergio Garcia ESP, 3&2
Lee Westwood ENG, def. Tyrrell Hatton ENG, 4&3
Victor Perez FRA, def. Sung-jae Im KOR, 2&1
Kevin Na KOR, def. Dustin Johnson USA, 1 up
Ian Poulter ENG, def. Lanto Griffin USA, 2&1
Bubba Watson USA, def. Christiaan Bezuidenhout SAF, 5&3
Joquim Niemann CHL, def. Patrick Reed USA, 5&4
Jordan Spieth USA, def. Corey Conners CAN, 3&2
Matthew Fitzpatrick ENG, def. Matthew Wolff USA, 3&2
Matt Kuchar USA, def. Kevin Kisner USA, 2&1
Justin Thomas USA, def. Louis Oosthuizen SAF, 3&2
Talon Gooch USA, vs. Mackenzie Hughes CAN, AS thru 18
Paul Casey ENG, vs. Webb Simpson USA, AS thru 18
Scottie Scheffler USA, vs. Xander Schauffele USA, AS thru 18
Ryan Palmer USA, vs. Jon Rahm ESP, AS thru 18
Russell Henley USA, vs. Marc Leishman AUS, AS thru 18
Adam Long USA, vs. Robert MacIntyre SCO, AS thru 18
Cameron Smith AUS, vs. Rory McIlroy NIR, AS thru 18

TRANSACTIONS

Friday

Baseball
American League
Baltimore Orioles - Optioned RP Keegan Akin to Norfolk (AAA-East), Optioned 2B Jahmir Jones and SS Richie Martin to Norfolk (AAA-East), Placed 1B Chris Davis on the 60-day IL. Signed LHP Wade LeBlanc to a one-year, \$700,000 contract.
Boston Red Sox - Optioned SS Jonathan Arauz to Red Sox alternate training site. Detroit Tigers - Optioned C Jake Rogers and 3B Isaac Paredes to Toledo (AAA-East).
Houston Astros - Signed RHP Lance McCullers Jr. to a five-year, \$85 million contract extension.
Los Angeles Angels - Optioned LF Taylor Ward, C Anthony Bemboom, 2B Luis Rengifo, and 2B Jack Mayfield to Salt Lake (AAA-West). Released RHP Jesse Chavez.
Minnesota Twins - Released SS Andrew Romine.
New York Yankees - Optioned RHP Deivi Garcia to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (AAA-East).
Seattle Mariners - Released LHP Roenis Elias.
Tampa Bay Rays - Placed RHP Nick Anderson on the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Andrew Kittredge from Durham (AAA-East).
National League
Atlanta Braves - Released RHP Carl Edwards Jr.
Los Angeles Dodgers - Optioned 3B Shelton Neuse to Dodgers alternate training site. Placed RHP Tommy Kahnle on the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Jimmy Nelson from Oklahoma City (AAA-West).
Milwaukee Brewers - Released LHP Jordan Zimmermann.
Philadelphia Phillies - Released C Jeff Mathis, RHP Ivan Nova, and RHP Hector Rondon.
San Diego Padres - Optioned SP Anderson Espinoza to San Antonio (AA-Central).
St. Louis Cardinals - Optioned RHP Johan Oviedo to Cardinals alternate training site.

Hockey
National Hockey League
Anaheim Ducks - Assigned D Andy Welinski to the taxi squad, recalled him from the taxi squad. Activated G John Gibson from injured reserve. Assigned G Lukas Dostal to the taxi squad.
Arizona Coyotes - Assigned C Frederick Gauthier to Tucson (AHL), Assigned C Lane Pederson to the taxi squad. Placed C Tyler Pitlick on IR.
Boston Bruins - Assigned C Oskar Steen to the taxi squad, assigned him to Providence (AHL), Assigned D Urho Vaakanainen, G Jeremy Swayman to Providence (AHL), Assigned G Dan Vladar, G Gallum Booth, LW Anton Blidh to the taxi squad.
Buffalo Sabres - Assigned C Jean-Sebastien Des and LW Brett Murray to the taxi squad.
Calgary Flames - Assigned D Alex Petrovic, G Louis Domingue, D Michael Stone, and G Artyom Zagidulin to the taxi squad.
Chicago Blackhawks - Assigned RW Mackenzie Entwistle to the taxi squad.
Colorado Avalanche - Assigned RW T.J. Lynnard and C Sheldon Dries to the taxi squad.
Columbus Blue Jackets - Recalled LW Mikhail Grigorenko from the taxi squad.
Dallas Stars - Assigned LW Tanner Kero to the taxi squad, Assigned RW Ty Dellandrea to the taxi squad.
Edmonton Oilers - Assigned LW Joakim Nygard to the taxi squad.
Florida Panthers - Assigned D Noah Juulsen to Syracuse (AHL) on a conditioning assignment. Assigned RW Brett Connolly to the taxi squad.
Los Angeles Kings - Assigned D Austin Strand and D Tobias Bjornfot to the taxi squad.
Minnesota Wild - Assigned RW Will Bitten to the taxi squad.
Montreal Canadiens - Acquired C Eric Staal from the Buffalo Sabres for a 2021 third-round draft pick and a 2021 fifth-round draft pick. Assigned C Jake Evans and C Laurent Dauphin to the taxi squad.
New Jersey Devils - Assigned D Colton White to the taxi squad. Recalled LW Jesper Boqvist from the taxi squad.
Ottawa Senators - Assigned LW Jack Kopacka to Belleville (AHL), Assigned C Mark Kastelec to the taxi squad. Waived D Christian Wolanin.
Philadelphia Flyers - Assigned LW Samuel Morin to the taxi squad, nHL fined him \$3,017.24 for sportsmanlike conduct. Assigned G Felix Sandstrom to Lehigh Valley (AHL), Assigned G Alex Lyon to the taxi squad.
Pittsburgh Penguins - Assigned LW Sam Llewellyn to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL), Assigned LW Drew O'Connor to the taxi squad.
San Jose Sharks - Assigned C Zach Gallant to San Jose (AHL), Assigned C Antti Suomela, D Christian Jaros, and LW Jeffrey Viel to the taxi squad.
Toronto Maple Leafs - Assigned D Kristian Rubins to the taxi squad.
Vancouver Canucks - Assigned C Tyler Graovac to the taxi squad, Recalled LW Marc Michaelis from the taxi squad.
Vegas Golden Knights - Assigned D Carl Dahlstrom to the taxi squad. Recalled C Patrick Brown from the taxi squad.
Washington Capitals - Assigned G Brad Braden to the taxi squad. Recalled LW Drake Bell to the taxi squad.
Washington Capitals - Assigned G Brad Braden to the taxi squad. Recalled LW Drake Bell to the taxi squad.

WRESTLING

From Page B1

we got it done and reached the finals and just ran into a better kid.

"Runner-up for the second year in a row, next year we are hoping the third year is the charm. We wouldn't change anything as far as our approach goes. Unfortunately we fell on the wrong side this time."

At 126 pounds, Road Crew teammate Owen Carlson lost both of his state championships matches.

In the quarterfinals, Carlson fell to Big Lake's

Nolan Reiter in an 8-5 decision.

In the consolation round he was pinned in 5:49 by Zach Pribyl.

"You get to this point and it's difficult to continue to climb that ladder," Hoffarth said. "He started a little slow, but gained some confidence as the first match went on, but just fell short. His second match, honestly, I think if we wrestle 10 times we win eight of them, but we just let it slip away."

At 132 pounds, Pierz's Trevor Radunz was pinned in the quarterfinals in 1:20 by Princeton's Landen Parent.

Radunz battled back in the consolation round to win by pin in 40 seconds and win by a 10-7 deci-

sion to claim fifth place in his second-straight year at state.

"Our goal was to go down there and get a state medal," Pierz head coach Skip Troop said. "He was really focused and we knew we had a tough match in the first round because we lost to that guy in the prelims. He wrestled well in the wrestlebacks though."

Quarterfinals

126: Nolan Reiter (Big Lake) dec. Owen Carlson (PL/PRB) 8-5

132: Landen Parent (Princeton) pinned Trevor Radunz (Priz) 1:20

170: Connor Tulenchik (PL/PRB) maj. dec. Keegan Lemke 15-5

Consolation Round

126: Zach Pribyl pinned Owen Carlson 5:49

132: Trevor Radunz pinned Luke Skifton 0:40

Semifinals

170: Conner Tulenchik dec. Blaine Henderson 6-4 SV-1

5th-place match

132: Trevor Radunz dec. Luke Schumacher (DL) 10-7

Championship

170: Adam Sylvester maj. dec. Connor Tulenchik 11-3

ANDERSON

From Page B1

recommended for Anderson, one of the Rays' top bullpen weapons.

Anderson appeared in 19 games last season for

Tampa Bay and posted a 2-1 record with a 0.55 ERA and 26 strikeouts in 16 1/3 innings pitched. He recorded six saves and had a microscopic 0.49 WHIP.

He was also dominant in 2019 when he joined the Rays midseason in a trade from the Miami

Marlins, posting a 3-0 record with a 2.11 ERA and 41 strikeouts in 21 1/3 innings with Tampa.

With Anderson out, the Rays will turn to Diego Castillo, Pete Fairbanks, Chaz Roe and Ryan Thompson in the late innings.

Twins bench coach Mike Bell passes away at 46

By Betsy Helfand

St. Paul Pioneer Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Twins bench coach Mike Bell passed away on Friday after being diagnosed with kidney cancer in January. He was 46.

Bell is survived by his wife, Kelly, and three children, Luke, Mikayla and Madeline.

"The Minnesota Twins are devastated by the loss of Mike Bell. In his short time with our club, Mike had an indelibly positive impact — not only on the quality of our team on the field, but most importantly upon everyone whom he met," the club said in a statement. "Widely respected in our game, all who knew Mike, on and off the field, are better for the experience. The Twins join the base-



ball world in mourning Mike's untimely passing; our thoughts and best wishes are with his wife, Kelly, his three children, Luke, Mikayla and Madeline, and the entire Bell family during this difficult time."

Bell, who comes from a three-generation Major League Baseball family, was the grandson of Cincinnati Reds hall of famer Gus Bell; the son of longtime player, coach, manager and current Reds executive Buddy Bell, and the brother of David Bell, the current manager of the Reds. Bell had expressed managerial aspirations of his own.

As a player, he played for parts of 13 seasons with seven organizations, reaching the major leagues in 2000 with the Reds.

"Our Reds family is overwhelmed with sadness for the Bells as they mourn the loss of Mike. This great baseball family blessed thou-

sands of people over the 70 years it has devoted to our game," Reds Chief Executive Officer Bob Castellini said in a statement. "We are honored that Mike, like his grandfather Gus, his father Buddy, and brother David, wore a Reds uniform. Our hearts and support go out to Buddy, David and their families."

Bell joined manager Rocco Baldelli's staff as the Twins' bench coach in 2020 after spending 13 years with the Arizona Diamondbacks. The 2021 season would have been his 29th in professional baseball.

"No words can adequately express the sadness regarding Mike Bell's passing. While Mike's Twins tenure was relatively brief, his impact was significant," Twins president and CEO Dave St. Peter tweeted. "We will miss his vast baseball IQ, his character and friendship."

BASEBALL

Professional MLB Preseason

American League
Friday's Results

Tampa Bay 7, Boston 3
Baltimore 4, NY Yankees 1
Kansas City (Kowar 2-1) at Texas, 9:05 p.m.

National League
Friday's Results

San Francisco 5, Chi. Cubs 5
Cincinnati 7, Arizona 3
Washington 7, NY Mets 3

Interleague
Friday's Results

Detroit 5, Pittsburgh 2
Cleveland 5, Colorado 4
Chi. White Sox 7, Milwaukee 5
Atlanta 7, Minnesota 6

Miami 9, Houston 0
Toronto 6, Philadelphia 5
Oakland (Bassitt 2-0) at LA Dodgers (Kershaw 0-1), 9:05 p.m.

Seattle (Gonzales 1-0) at San Diego (Weathers 1-0), 9:40 p.m.

BASKETBALL

Professional NBA Eastern Conference Atlantic

Philadelphia 32 13 .711 —