

Homecoming heroes

Badgers overcome fiery Union Grove to remain unbeaten

By David Michels
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The cream of the crop always rises to the top. Sometimes it just takes a little longer than usual.

Such was the case during the Badger football team's 50-35 homecoming win over the Union Grove Broncos, as an uncommonly distracted Badgers team (8-0) was stymied by the antics of a Broncos squad thirsting to play the role of spoiler.

"It was a good game, back and forth the whole time," Badger head coach Matt Hensler said of the school's celebratory contest.

And the scene was electric.

The bleachers brimmed with Badger pride, pre- and postgame fireworks lit the sky and cannon fire accompanied each and every Badger score.

Unfortunately, all of the festivities may have been just what threw off the Badgers during a first half that was knotted 21-21 as it came to a close.

"Sometimes all that energy can be a bad thing. I think sometimes it can cause a lapse in focus and I think we got caught up in that a little bit," Hensler said of his team's slow start.

"We were just a little bit scattered, not necessarily on Friday night, but our week of prep was not great. You know, homecoming, there's a lot going on, a lot of activities ... and a lot of excitement in school. Our week of prep was not what it should have been, so we had those blown coverages, so we had those mental errors during the game."

PLEASE SEE **BADGER** PAGE 3C



Junior running back Braden O'Laughlin scored two touchdowns and racked up 15 yards on just two carries during Badger's 50-31 homecoming win on Friday night. (Photo taken and graphic created by David Michels/Regional News)



Sophomore Hannah Gage (pictured) and senior Sophie Engerman took first place in the three-doubles flight at Wednesday's tennis sectional hosted at Badger High School. (Photo by David Michels/Regional News)

Badger tennis state bound

Gage and Engerman claim sectional three-doubles title

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Any given team is capable of winning on any given day.

That was Badger girls tennis coach Paul Lauterbach's sentiment entering Wednesday's sectional tournament hosted at Badger High School, as he highlighted four separate teams capable of winning it all.

The Badger coach predicted that the sectional championship would be decided by a mere point or two and, sure enough, he was right.

Unfortunately for the Badger faithful, Wednesday was not their day, however.

Badger finished in second place overall, netting 33 total points between sectional and subsectional play.

Sun Prairie won the sectional championship with 34 points, with Mukwonago and Stoughton tying for third with 30 apiece.

"We knew going into it the tournament was going to come down, I kind of thought somewhere between one and three points, and it obviously did," Lauterbach said.

"We lost by one point. So, it was disappointing that we lost, I'm always disappointed to lose ... but not disappointed in any other aspect of the tournament. We played well."

"We competed hard, everybody put it all out there throughout the tournament and we just came up one point short, but as a whole, we had a tremendous tournament."

PLEASE SEE **TENNIS** PAGE 4C

Chiefs still the team to beat

Big Foot volleyball repeats as Rock Valley Conference champs

By David Michels
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CLINTON — The Rock Valley Conference crown is staying put in Walworth.

The Big Foot volleyball team (27-7) successfully completed its title defense with a 3-0 road win over Clinton on Thursday night, Oct. 6, cruising to victory over the Cougars by a score of 25-10, 25-14, 25-13.

Offensively, Big Foot was led by senior Gloria Esarco with a team-high seven kills, but the Big Foot veteran was hardly the only contributor to the Chiefs' multifaceted attack.

Senior Jordan Bobek trailed closely with six kills for the Walworth squad, followed by junior Payton Courier with

five, junior Makenzie Trosclair and sophomore Abby Peterson with four and junior Courtney Schoenbeck with three.

Big Foot's floor general, sophomore Kampbell Hehr, recorded a team-best 23 assists while directing the flow of the offense and logged a team-high three aces and two kills to boot.

Esarco and Foster each collected two aces, with senior Katie Santeler and junior Lauren Paulsen each recording one.

Esarco also led the team in serves received with 13 and was second in digs with 10, behind only Foster who tallied 11.

Peterson recorded eight digs, Bobek had seven and Hehr had five.

Bobek, Hehr and Trosclair each logged a block at the net, as well.

But despite the Chiefs' dominant effort, they aren't slowing down now that they've secured their place atop the RVC throne for another year.

Yet to be bested in conference play, the Chiefs are just one win away from their goal of back-to-back undefeated seasons in the RVC.

All that stands in their way is a bout with the Beloit Turner Trojans on Tuesday night, Oct. 11, a game that occurs after Regional News press deadline.



Esarco

ATHLETES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

SOPHIE ENGERMAN & HANNAH GAGE

Badger senior Sophie Engerman and sophomore Hannah Gage emerged victorious at Wednesday's tennis sectional hosted at Badger High School. Engerman and Gage took first place in the three-doubles flight, defeating Milton 6-3, 7-5 and Sun Prairie 6-4, 6-3 in the championship match.

Williams Bay wraps up regular season

Bulldogs volleyball reaches semifinals of conference meet

By David Michels
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WISCONSIN DELLS — A strong start is nothing without an equally strong finish.

Fortunately, the Williams Bay volleyball had both this year as they kicked off the regular season with 11-straight victories and ended it among the semifinalists during Saturday's Trailways Conference Tournament at the Just-A-Game Fieldhouse in the Wisconsin Dells.

The Bulldogs finished the regular season tied for first place in the Trailways-South Conference with Hustisford with a conference record of 8-1, and were among the elite competitors during last weekend's competition.

"I think that we played great," Williams Bay head coach Bill Nevoraski said in a phone interview Monday, citing the team's 5-1 record on the day.

Williams Bay went undefeated in pool play, besting Pardeeville, Abundant Life and Central Wisconsin Christian, before advancing to the semifinal round of the championship bracket, where the Bulldogs were dealt their only loss of the day, a 2-0 drubbing at the hands of the Lourdes Knights, the eventual tournament champions.

Pool play

Williams Bay opened the tournament bright and early at 9:30 a.m., Nevoraski said, kicking things off with a 2-0 victory over their mascot doppelgangers, the Pardeeville Bulldogs.

The Williams Bay girls had to overcome a lackluster first set to snare the victory however, as they just managed to eke out a 25-23 win in the first set.

"We had our typical slow start," Nevoraski said, a trend that has plagued the orange-and-black Bulldogs all season.

But while Williams Bay has been known to begin matches at a glacial pace throughout the course of the year, the Bulldogs have also shown an affinity for finishing strong.

And so they did in the match versus Pardeeville, besting their canine compatriots 25-18 in the second set to seal the triumph.

Junior Becca Blakely led Williams Bay's offense with seven kills and 10 assists, while also recording a block.

Freshman Annika Pfeil followed with six kills and seniors Lauren Higgins and Rosemarie Sanchez each recorded four.

Higgins also led the team in aces with three, and logged six digs and six serve receives.

Defensively, junior Heidi VanderMeer led the effort at the net with two blocks, while freshman Hanna Fredrickson boasted team-highs in serve receives and digs with 16 and 12, respectively.

tively.

The Bulldogs notched a 2-1 win over the Abundant Life Challengers in their second match of pool play, but, again, started off by hitting the snooze button in the first set.

"Again, we decided to start slow and came back," Nevoraski said, and in decisive fashion at that.

After falling 26-24 in the opening frame, the Bulldogs rallied, dismantling the Challengers 25-14 in the second set and 15-11 in the third-set tiebreaker.

Once more, Blakely paced the offense with a team-high 11 kills, followed by Higgins with 10.

Sophomore Kloe Kiekhafer led the team in assists and aces with 15 and seven, respectively, followed by Blakely with 13 assists.

Fredrickson again led the team in digs with 18, while Pfeil recorded at team-high 11 serve receives.

Revenge

Sweeter than any other win on Saturday was Williams Bay's third and final triumph in pool play, Nevoraski said, a 2-1 win over the Central Wisconsin Christian Crusaders.

Over the past few years the Crusaders have made a habit of ousting the Bulldogs from the conference tournament, the Williams Bay head coach explained, and this year the Crusaders got their comeuppance in the form of a three-set loss at the hands of the Bulldogs.

"Again, we lost the first set," Nevoraski said, but not because the team didn't come out firing.

Williams Bay dropped the first frame 25-22, largely because the team hadn't seen the Crusaders yet this season.

"[We] made some adjustments after the first set and pretty much controlled the rest of the match," Nevoraski said, with the Bulldogs winning 25-17 in the second and 15-10 in the tiebreaker.

Offensively, Higgins set the tone for the Bulldogs with a game-high 12 kills, followed by nine from Blakely.

Kiekhafer loosed three aces on the Crusaders, while Blakely and Pfeil each recorded two.

Fredrickson logged team-highs in digs and serve receives with 15 and 16, respectively, and Kiekhafer led the team with 10 assists.



Higgins

Bracket play

After emerging from pool play unscathed, Williams Bay embarked on the championship bracket with a 2-0 quarterfinal win over the Valley Christian Warriors.

Another unfamiliar team, Nevoraski said that he spoke to another coach from the Trailways-North Conference and received a bit of insight.

"He said 'if you take them lightly, you're going to lose, they're a scrappy



Sophomore Kloe Kiekhafer led the Williams Bay volleyball team in assists during its win over Central Wisconsin Christian on Saturday at the Trailways Conference Tournament. (File photo by David Michels/Regional News)

team," the Bulldogs coach said.

So, in turn, Nevoraski told his squad that this is a team that they should beat, based on the seedings, and not to mess around.

As a result, "we went out there and handled business right from the start," he said, defeating Valley Christian 25-15, 25-22.

Higgins led a balanced Williams Bay attack with seven kills, followed by Blakely and Pfeil with five and senior Rachel Myers and Sanchez with three.

Blakely recorded a team-high 12 assists, with Kiekhafer trailing close behind with eight, as well as a pair of aces.

Sanchez logged a team-high three blocks and freshman Taelyn Smith and Myers each had two.

Fredrickson logged a game-high 19 digs and 14 serve receives.



Blakely

Semifinal stumble

Things didn't go so well for the Bulldogs in the semifinal round, however.

In a stroke of bad luck, Williams Bay found itself paired with the Lourdes Knights in the penultimate match, the consensus number-one team of the tourney, and was subsequently dealt an 0-2 loss by a score of 25-5, 25-15.

"That was the team that I was hoping we wouldn't meet until the finals, but the way things were bracketed we were lucky enough to get them in the semifinals," Nevoraski said with a laugh.

"They are one of the top teams in division three and they played like it."

It didn't help that the Bulldogs played scared, either, Nevoraski said, noting that his team appeared to be intimidated by the opposition.

PLEASE SEE DOGS PAGE 4C

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Badger/Too much energy

"Our energy level and our fight and our willingness to play hard is real evident, that's something that has been good for weeks now, but I think, in our case, the distractions of homecoming week really affected our week of prep and that showed on Friday night."

It takes more than just a bad week of practice to keep down the league-leading Badgers, however, and it showed as a playoff-hungry Union Grove utilized every weapon in its arsenal to try and gain an edge.

The Broncos wasted no time either, calling an inside kick on the opening play, as well as a myriad of other trick plays throughout the first half, utilizing end-around sweeps, laterals and the like.

"Union Grove is a good football team and they were fighting for their playoff lives, so we knew they would be extra motivated and we knew they would pull out all the stops," Hensler said of the opposition.

"So we got a couple inside kicks from them, we got a couple trick plays that worked well."

But while those deceptive plays kept the game on an even keel in the first half, no number of duplicitous plays could keep the Badgers off balance indefinitely, nor could they dissuade Badger's exotic smash mouth offense.

The Lake Geneva squad racked up a combined 460 rushing yards on the night, plowing through the Union Grove defense behind the sheer strength of its offensive line.

"That's what we want to do and those are our goals, to move the ball on the ground, and we were able to do that for the most part," Hensler said of his offense's production.

"I think we just got back to running a lot of option football, which is what we want to do. That was critical for us, to get back to our roots and run some option, and we were able to find some creases and find some running lanes and a lot of that has to do with the guys up front maturing and just getting better week by week."

Badger's back-to-basics philosophy paid immediate dividends, too, as the Badgers outscored the Broncos 29-14 in the second half, with 22 of those coming in the fourth quarter.

"Our offensive and defensive lines kind of took over the game and started winning in the trenches and I think that's what led to a good fourth quarter for us," Hensler said, and the players toting the rock behind them were no slouches either.

Senior quarterback Mason DuMez led all Badger ball carriers with a surreal total of 198 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 20 attempts, followed by senior tailback Patrick Watrous who amassed 136 yards and a pair of scores on 20 touches.

DuMez also completed 2 of 10 passes for 21 yards and a successful 2-point conversion, but the pass of the night belonged to junior running back Will Keller III, who received a pitch, rolled into the flat and baited the

defense to play the run.

Then, when the Broncos defenders bit, Keller loosed a 53-yard bomb over the top of the Union Grove safeties, directly into the hands of Badger wideout Dawson Vance.

Keller recorded 40 yards on the ground as well, and on just five carries, but he was only the second-most efficient Badger tailback of the night.

Junior Braden O'Laughlin had just two touches during Badger's bout with Union Grove, but truly made the most of

both of them, shrugging off defenders to find the end zone both times as he finished the game with 15 yards and two touchdowns.

Junior Wesley Sontag also churned out 51 yards and a score on seven touches, followed by Austin Flowers, who tallied 20 yards on six touches and one reception for 10 yards.

Senior Ryan Sproul also hauled in a catch, good for 11 yards.

And while the Badger offense thrived on Friday night, it was the defense that was responsible for bottling up a Union Grove attack that had given them fits throughout the first half.

Hensler credited his defensive line for controlling the tempo of the game, noting that after allowing a few decent runs early the unit settled in and truly dictated the pace of play.

Despite a few blown coverages in the secondary, the Badger coach said he thought his defensive backfield performed admirably as well.

Junior cornerback Colin Jackson led the team with six tackles and also corralled an interception.

Senior linebacker John Bowen racked up five tackles, while junior Nick Bladel had four and seniors Jose Garcia, Matt Szeszol and Flower each had three.

"Overall, we really weren't that bad," Hensler said of the defense's performance.

"We gave up two blown coverages and [Union Grove quarterback Matt] Nelson's so good, you give him wide open guys, he's not going to miss them and we did that. That's been our thing all year, we're getting more guys in the right spots and challenging balls and challenging throws, but we're consistently being inconsistent for a couple plays a game and the better teams, the better quarterbacks and the better receivers, are going to continue to make us pay, so that's one of our bigger focuses as we move forward and it has been all year."

And with one game left in the regular season, the Badgers hope to shore up those inconsistencies in a hurry.

At 6-0 in Southern Lakes Conference play, the Badgers have already secured at least a portion of the conference championship, but with a win at second-place Waterford (5-1) on Friday the Lake Geneva boys can win the title outright.

The Badgers and Wolverines will kick off their regular-season finale at 7 p.m. on Friday night, Oct. 14.



DuMez