Deja vu: Veteran broadcaster links special moments for father and son

By Bruce Strand

Thirty years ago, Jim Birkemeyer was at the microphone for KRJB Radio and had the pleasure of announcing Paul Mason’s 1,000th point for Ada-Borup. That was Feb. 24, 1989.

Well, talk about deja vu.

Birkemeyer, still announcing for KRJB (106.5 FM) in Ada, made the call this past Jan. 17 as Mason Miller, Paul’s son, scored his 1,000th point for undefeated Ada-Borup West, during an 83-75 win over Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton.

“I recall Paul’s 1,000th point in Mahnomen,” said Birkemeyer, who owns the Ada radio station and seven others. “Paul was also part of a very good basketball team with a good coach, Jim Hann … The team was focused to get Paul to the milestone before the tournament season started.”

Father and son both got to 1,000 on a free shot. For Mason it was 999 and 1,000. “I did mention about his dad scoring 1,000 — and, me on that call also,” Birkemeher said.

“I’ve been able to broadcast for many, many former players, who are now the parents, and am now doing play by play for their current sons/daughters.

“This was the first 1,000 point combination of parent/child I’ve broadcast.”

Mason Miller was 30 points from 1,000 going into the DGF game and scored 32 that night. He averages about half that, as the Cougars are blessed with several good scorers. Under coach Trevor Stewart, they have a 16-0 record.

Miller is a fine basketball prospect, but, at 6-7 and 232 pounds, even more so for football. North Dakota State has made an offer, his dad said, and visits to Minnesota, Iowa and Iowa State coming up.

Jim Birkemeyer has been a fixture in the area sports scene since he bought KRJB in 1987 when he was 24 years old. His company, R & J Broadcasting, also has stations that serve Mahnomen, Bagley/Fosston, Pillager/Baxter/Brainerd, Pequot Lakes, Crosby, Aitkin and International Falls.

The company’s broadcast schedule includes 30 to 35 schools.
Bueckers, Hopkins nip Wayzata in summit duel

By Bruce Strand

The two most talented girls basketball teams in the state clashed Friday evening, and even in that setting, Paige Bueckers played a couple of levels above everyone else.

Bueckers erupted for 43 points and the Hopkins Royals needed every basket to turn back the Wayzata Trojans 69-66 in a duel of undefeated teams.

The slippery 5-10 point guard, rated by ESPN as the top junior prospect in the nation, was averaging 25 points entering the big game, and delivered a career-high total in front 4,000-plus fans at Lindbergh Center in Hopkins. She also got her 2,000th point in the game.

Dlayla Chakolis was next with 10 points for Hopkins, which was averaging 86 points entering the game. The Royals’ previous closest game was 80-70 over St. Michael-Albertville.

Bueckers’ siege included a jump shot at the horn in the first half for a 33-32 lead, and a 3-pointer late in the game that opened a 65-61 lead, giving her team a bit of breathing room after the lead changed hands 11 times in the second half.

Wayzata stormed to an early 16-4 lead with Mara Braun scoring 11 quick points. The freshman guard got just one more point and finished with 12. Sophomore guard Jenna Johnson sank 21 points and senior forward Kallie Theisen 20.

Hopkins (19-0) and Wayzata (19-1) will meet again Feb. 22 in Wayzata in the conference finale, and likely a third time in the Section 6AAAAA finals.

Got a tip for Minnesota Basketball News? Send an e-mail to bruce.a.strand@gmail.com.
Waseca (19-0) best of Big 3 so far

By Bruce Strand

There is a Big Three in Section 2AAA boys basketball, year after year. So far this season, the Waseca Bluejays have moved to the front of that triumvirate.

Waseca, 19-0 and ranked No. 2, with three sophomores starting, has beaten No. 3 Mankato East 73-57 and No. 11 Marshall 72-57. The 15-point margins against Marshall and No. 14 Waconia (79-64) are as close as anyone has come against Waseca.

“This has been an incredibly good section the last few years,” Bluejay coach Seth Anderson said. “We were able to get wins against them early in the season, but both of them have improved so much since then, I don’t think that will be a factor come March, if or when we play them again.”

Last year, Waseca was 26-4 and lost to Mankato East in the section finals. The year before, they were 25-4 and lost to Marshall in the finals. Their last state trip came in 2016 with a four-overtime upset of Marshall.

Malik Willingham is the senior leader, averaging 19 points, seven assists and 3.4 steals, after scoring 21.6 ppg as a junior. The 6-2 guard is a defensive ball hawk, “fantastic” shooter, and excellent facilitator as he knifes into the lane and hits open teammates. “His energy is what gets our team going,” said Anderson.

Matt Olsem, 6-3 forward, is the other senior starter, averaging 6.7 points and 5.3 rebounds, bringing excellent physicality, effort and defense every night, the coach said. Ryan Dufault, 6-0 sophomore guard, is the No. 2 scorer and top 3-point shooter, delivering 18.3 points and 4.5 assists per game, and makes “smart play after smart play.” Andrew Morgan, 6-8 soph center, averages 15.5 points and nine rebounds. “He has been a fantastic force on the inside, offensively and defensively,” Anderson said. Kyreeese Willingham, long-limbed 6-4 soph forward, chips in 5.3 ppg and “we don’t miss a beat” when he goes in, the coach said.

One hallmark of this squad is turning defensive stops and turnovers into instant offense, Anderson said. He adds: “The best part of our team is how our guys continue to share the ball and hit the open player. It has made everyone on the team better with the way the ball moves.”

Anderson, a fourth-grade teacher, in just his third year at the helm, has a very experienced assistant: his father, Tim, who had a long career as head coach, mostly at Maple River, where Seth played for him. Wanting to scale back a little, the elder joined the younger’s staff. Meanwhile, former Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton head coach Ted Hammond coaches the freshmen. “It’s been a great staff,” Anderson said.

Broadcasters crosses generations, including the Millers

Continued from Page 1

“We’ve been fortunate — with good teams, good athletes, good kids and good coaches with supportive communities — to do many state tournament broadcasts,” Birkemeyer said, “from KRJB and all stations throughout the years since 1987.”

Birkemeyer has called nine girls tournaments with Ada-Borup. None so far for the boys. Last year’s boys team was 23-5 and lost in the section finals to Cass Lake-Bena 66-53. Cass Lake-Bena remains the team to beat.

Paul Miller stayed in his home town. He sells farm equipment for Titan Machinery.

As asked about his 1,000th point three decades ago, he said it was against Gary, a tiny town 15 miles from Ada, now a part of Norman County East High School.

“We were about 30 points ahead of the Gary Bulldogs, and they wanted me to get it out of the way that night, so they left me in with the junior varsity, and I had to work with guys I wasn’t used to. They still laugh about that — the guys on my team, and on Gary’s, too. I know them all well. I’ve sold equipment to some of them.”

Paul’s teammate and lifelong friend Darrin Everson reached 1,000 points two games earlier. “Darrin was the first person I texted when Mason got his,” Paul said.
Thunderbirds turn tables, clout CLB

By Bruce Strand

Five weeks ago, Mahnomen-Waubun got thrashed by Cass Lake-Bena 84-51. The Thunderbirds returned the favor Tuesday night, handing CLB its first loss of the season, with a similar touching, 64-36, at Cass Lake, led by Buster Walker with 29 points and 17 rebounds.

“We finally played defense! And we finally made some shots! We’ve had a goofy year,” stated John Clark, Thunderbird coach.

Mahnomen-Waubun, coming off a state championship season in football, is just 11-5, modest for a squad that humbled the No. 3 ranked team. “We had a late start with our football team in the state title game,” said Clark. “We’ve had injuries, illness, academic issues all year. I believe we’ve only played three games all year with our starting five all playing. To be honest, we’ve been playing terrible.” Clark said the team had “a very humbling film session” Monday night that got them more focused.

“Cass Lake didn’t make anything (shots) but I believe our defense had a lot to do with that,” Clark said. “We contested most every shot. We also dominated the boards which was huge. And we only had a few careless turnovers so they weren’t able to get out and run.”

The Thunderbirds shot 52 percent (27-for-51) while the Panthers went ice cold at 23 percent (15-for-63) and could not buy a 3-point shot (3-for-30). Along with Walker, who shot 13-for-20, Mahnomen-Waubun had Jayden Heisler with 16 points, and Jon Starkey with eight points, eight rebounds and six assists.

CLB was averaging 79 points and its previous low was a 56-40 win over Fosston. They were close to full strength but missing one starter and their eighth man due to grades, coach John Wind said.

“M-W did play a pretty close to flawless game. Give them a lot of credit,” said Wind. About his own team, Wind said they lost sight of needing to be prepared night-in and night-out. “I advised this could happen … Hopefully this taught our boys a lesson, and they come out on fire rest of season and playoffs.”
Two Harbors ace in 50’s 3 times

By Bruce Strand

How about this for a hat trick — three times in one season, scoring more than 50 points in a game. That’s the logbook (so far) for Jayden Ruberg of Two Harbors, who’s pumped in 51, 57 and 58 points.

Two Harbors had an unusually high single-game of record of 54 points which stood for 48 years — until Ruberg blistered the nets for 57 points on Jan. 11 in an 89-80 win over Carleton at home. Twenty days later, the 5-11 senior guard raised it by one point with a 58-point effort in an 80-79 win over Silver Bay.

“He has been on quite a little run,” understated coach William Anderson. Ruberg also had a 51-point game on Dec. 12 in an 84-80 overtime win over Duluth Marshall. He is averaging 33 points for the Agates (6-10).

The record of 54 was set by Scott McDonald, Class of 1971, who went on to play for West Virginia.

Ruberg picked up another school record on Jan. 25 when he replaced his father as the boys career leader.

Three’s are the keys as Melrose trips BOLD

By Bruce Strand

The BOLD boys were dislodged from the unbeaten ranks by hot-shooting Melrose 73-65 on Thursday, Jan. 31.

Senior guard Preston Keavney led with 25 points, with sophomore forward Rowan Nelson adding 19 and sophomore guard Grant Moscho 16.

Melrose (14-4) had gotten throttled by BOLD 66-37 on the Warriors court Dec. 18 but shored up a lot of things in the rematch — most notably, shooting 10-for-20 on three-pointers while holding BOLD to 5-for-14.

“We did a good job covering the three-point line, as they are so dangerous from the perimeter,” Melrose coach Ryan Dusha said. “We got out to a nice early lead, which was important, because no lead is ever safe against them. You have to keep scoring, because it is so difficult contain their offense.”

Record-setters

Alyssa Ustby broke the Rochester Lourdes girls single-game scoring record with 41 points on Monday, leading a 77-61 win over Kasson-Mantorville. The junior guard shot 19-for-31 on field goals as she eclipsed the record of 39 by Stacy Sievers set in the 1989-90 season. Ustby is averaging 25.9 points for the Eagles (14-5), and has over 1,500 career points.

Hayfield senior guard Emma Holst scored 44 points, sinking 11 of 23 three-pointers, in an 88-38 win over Randolph on Saturday, breaking the team record of 34 held since 1990 by Shanna Behrens, and the record of nine three’s set by Johanna Bungum in 2013.
Six players in state reach 2,000-point mark

Six players, including two cousins, and two of the nation’s top recruits, notched their 2,000th during the past week.

Carter Cook, Bigfork senior guard, got there while scoring 33 points in a 72-45 win over Littlefork-Big Falls on Friday.

Kia Tower, senior guard at Bigfork and Cook’s first cousin, joined him in the 2,000-point club Monday while netting 35 points in a 63-27 win over Nashwauk-Keewatin.

Paige Bueckers, Hopkins point guard who’s ESPN’s top-ranked junior prospect, reached 2,000 in grand style, scoring 43 points to lead the Royals in a 69-66 win over Hopkins in a duel of unbeatens at home.

Jalen Suggs, Minnehaha Academy point guard ranked second at his position by rivals.com, reached the milestone while scoring 31 points in an 81-61 win over Austin at home Saturday.

Lydia Sussner, senior post for unbeaten Minneota, got her 2,000th while scoring 31 in a 63-31 win over Tracy-Milroy-Balaton on Monday.

Jenson Beachy, Perham senior guard, tallied 14 points in a 95-35 win over Park Rapids Area and passed 2,000 on Tuesday evening.

Right: Kia Tower and Carter Cook, Bigfork cousins

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Medford girls success carries over

By Bruce Strand

On the heels of the school’s best-ever volleyball season, the Medford girls are doing even better in basketball, at least in the regular season.

The Tigers, who had 13 losing seasons before pushing above .500 last year, have reeled off 17 straight wins. Ranked No. 9 in Class 2A, they are one of just eight unbeatens in the state.

Six of the top nine on the basketball team also powered the volleyball squad into the school’s first-ever state tournament for a girls team in any sport -- and all the way to the Class 1A finals, where they lost to Minneota.

In volleyball, they had five regular-season losses, flying below the radar until playoffs. They’re a little more high-profile in hoops with the unbeaten record and notoriety from volleyball.

“I have a great group of ladies who are working their tails off every day,” said coach Mark Kubat. “Our team slogan this year is ‘REST LATER.’ It carries several different meanings to the girls and staff, but it truly depicts the attitude of this team.”

Leading the scoring are Emma Kniefel, 5-10 junior wing, averaging 21 points, six rebounds, six steals and three assists; and Kiley Nihart, 5-2 junior guard, averaging 20 points, five steals and five assists. Kniefel is the school career points record holder with around 1,400 and Nihart just went over 1,000 points.

The other starters are Izzy Reuvers, 5-6 junior wing, averaging eight points, four steals and four assists; Kinsey Cronin, 6-0 sophomore post, averaging eight points and rebounds; and Bailey Purrier, 5-8 senior wing, averaging six rebounds and four steals.

Top subs are junior Alorah Wiese and sophomores Jenna Berg, Brooke Purrier and Isabella Steffen. All but Purrier, Steffen and Wiese are also volleyball players.

“Our strengths are team speed, aggressive defense, and improved shooting. Our bench is also very deep with young players that can play multiple positions,” assessed Kubat, in his 10th year at Medford, after 28 years coaching girls basketball and track in Owatonna.

He said this group has “bought into the idea of being the best they can be” and understands that hard work is essential to succeed, adding that the roster has a team record 3.7 composite grade-point-average.

‘Great Five-State’ playoffs get under way soon

The Minnesota Timberwolves and Minnesota Lynx are sponsoring a five-state NCAA-style fantasy playoff, “The Road to Target Center,” for all youth teams in grades 4-9, leading to an eight-team championship on the main Target Center floor.

Teams from Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin will play off February through April in their own state for a chance to reach the “Great Five-State Championship” final eight teams in Minneapolis. All teams will play 3-4 games in one day in the playoffs. Sites are Sioux Falls and Huron in South Dakota, Jamestown in North Dakota, Des Moines in Iowa, Ripon in Wisconsin, and eight regions in Minnesota: Rochester, Mankato, Redwood Falls, Moose Lake/Willow River, Hutchinson, Alexandria, Grand Rapids/Mountain Iron-Buhl, and Bemidji.

The “Great Five-State Championships” will be held at the Target Center in June and July in conjunction with Minnesota Lynx games. All players are being offered special prices for both Timberwolves and Lynx games. Registration and further information are available now online at www.pacesettersports.net.
## MBBN BOYS BASKETBALL TOP 20

### CLASS 4A

1. Hopkins 18-2  
2. Prior Lake 15-2  
3. Park Center 18-1  
4. East Ridge 15–2  
5. Lakeville North 14-4  
6. Shakopee 14-4  
7. Eden Prairie 13-5  
8. Chaska 13-5  
9. Champlin Park 12-4  
10. Wayzata 14-6  
11. Edina 11-7  
12. Cretin-Derham Hall 13-4  
13. White Bear Lake 15-4  
14. Tartan 15-2  
15. Minnetonka 11-7  
16. Maple Grove 13-4  
17. Robbinsdale Armstrong 12-5  
18. Moorhead 15-3  
19. Osseo 10-7  

### CLASS 3A

1. DeLaSalle 13-4  
2. Waseca 19-0  
3. Mankato East 15-1  
4. Princeton 16-2  
5. Austin 12-4  
7. Northfield 12-4  
8. Delano 13-5  
9. Holy Angels 16-2  
10. Sartell-St. Stephen 14-3  
12. Bemidji 14-2  
13. St. Thomas Academy 9-8  
14. Waconia 10-8  
15. Totino-Grace 9-9  
16. Winona 8-8  
17. Hibbing 11-5  
18. Robbinsdale Cooper 10-6  
19. Mound-Westonka 13-6  
20. Hermantown 14-6

### CLASS 2A

1. Minnehaha Academy 14-2  
2. Minneapolis North 13-5  
3. Perham 17-1  
5. Jordan 15-2  
6. Breck 16-3  
7. Lake City 16-2  
8. Spectrum 15-2  
9. St. Croix Prep 13-4  
10. Caledonia 15-4  
11. Holy Family Catholic 11-7  
12. Osakis 18-0  
13. Melrose 14-4  
14. Litchfield 15-3  
15. Hawley 13-3  
17. Breckenridge 10-7  
18. Providence Academy 12-6  
19. Albany 13-5  
20. Crosby-Ironton 15-3

### CLASS 1A

1. Minneota 18-0  
2. BOLD 17-1  
3. Minnesota Valley Lutheran 18-1  
4. Springfield 17-2  
5. Cass Lake-Bena 19-1  
7. Henning 19-0  
8. Randolph 18-1  
9. Ada-Borup West 16-0  
10. Waterville-Elysian-Morristown 16-1  
11. Spring Grove 14-2  
12. Mountain Lake/Comfrey 16-2  
13. New Ulm Cathedral 14-4  
14. Rushford-Peterson 13-6  
15. Hayfield 16-5  
16. Ortonville 12-2  
17. Mahnomen-Waubun 11-5  
18. Blooming Prairie 13-4  
19. Christ’s Household of Faith 11-4  
20. Blooming Prairie 13-4
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The Pacesetter “College Prep” program is designed for male and female players entering grades 9-12 through college freshman seeking to play basketball in college. Players will be taught high-level skills by college coaches in an intensive one-day, 7-hour format.

Paul McDonald will return as camp director. Paul is the head men’s coach at Vermillion Community College in Ely, MN, where he has guided teams to 23 straight state tournaments. He is the son of Bob McDonald, who finished his coaching career with over 1,000 wins - the most in Minnesota history. Paul played on two high school state championship teams. Other coaches on staff include college coaches from the MCAC.

Online Registration:
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SCHEDULE:
Monday: 10:00 am-5:00 pm

Camp Fee: $80
(College prep camp fee includes lunch on Monday)

Questions? Email info@pacesetternet.com or call 320-243-7460
MBBN GIRLS BASKETBALL TOP 20

CLASS 4A

1. Hopkins 19-0
2. Wayzata 19-1
3. Stillwater 17-2
4. St. Michael-Albertville 17-3
5. Park Center 18-2
6. Farmington 18-2
7. Chaska 17-3
8. Eden Prairie 15-3
9. Roseville 17-4
10. Centennial 15-4
11. Forest Lake 17-4
12. Eastview 14-5
14. Robbinsdale Armstrong 16-4
15. Maple Grove 15-5
16. Elk River 14-5
17. Shakopee 14-6
19. Lakeville North 12-8
20. Rosemount 12-9

CLASS 3A

1. Red Wing 17-2
2. Waseca 20-1
3. Hill-Murray 18-2
4. St. Paul Como Park 18-1
5. Willmar 15-2
6. Alexandria 16-3
7. Robbinsdale Cooper 12-7
8. DeLaSalle 11-5
10. Simley 15-5
11. Waconia 15-5
12. Benilde-St. Margaret’s 14-5
13. New Ulm 18-3
14. Holy Angels 14-5
15. Mankato West 14-5
16. Grand Rapids 14-6
17. Hibbing 18-2
18. Fergus Falls 17-3
19. Northfield 10-8
20. Austin 12-6

CLASS 2A

1. Sauk Centre 17-2
2. Roseau 18-2
3. Eden Valley-Watkins 19-0
4. Minnehaha Academy 15-5
5. Holy Family 16-4
6. Rochester Lourdes 14-5
7. Rush City 15-1
8. Norwood-Young America 16-2
9. Medford 17-0
10. Annandale 15-3
11. Maranatha Christian 13-6
12. Caledonia 16-4
14. Hawley 13-4
15. Esko 16-6
16. Winona Cotter 14-5
17. Lake City 15-4
18. Stewartville 13-6
20. Minneapolis North 11-5

CLASS 1A

1. Minneota 18-0
2. Menahga 19-0
3. Grand Meadow 21-0
4. Goodhue 17-4
5. Pelican Rapids 19-1
6. Ada-Borup/Norman County West 16-2
7. Hills-Beaver Creek 20-0
8. Stephen-Argyle 19-0
10. Cromwell-Wright 16-1
12. Mountain Iron-Buhl 18-4
13. Parkers Prairie 16-1
14. Lac qui Parle Valley 18-2
15. BOLD 15-4
16. SW MN Christian 16-2
17. Cherry 17-3
18. Wabasso 15-3
19. Red Lake 11-4
20. Pine River-Backus 14-4