Bucs take aim

By Bruce Strand

Waterville-Elysian-Morristown in girls basketball is one of those schools that’s never been to state but the Buccaneers have a good chance to cross their name off that list this year or next.

WEM’s junior-dominated lineup is 15-0 and ranked No. 5 in Class 1A, with perimeter shooting (almost eight three’s per game) and pressure defense (13 steals per game) among their strengths.

Their athletes are not unfamiliar with state tournaments as most of them played for the state runner-up volleyball team and a half-dozen went to state in softball last June. Those experiences could serve them well at playoff time.

“We are definitely aware that no GBB team has ever gone to state,” coach Tyler Kaus said, “but with this group, that would be the girls goal anyway.” He added, “They certainly would love to be the first group to do it, but we aren’t going to let that define whether or not our season is a success. This is a special group and we are just focused on competing, getting better every single day, and enjoying the ride.”

The Bucs graduated seven players from a 21-6 team last year but this year’s junior group is quite strong and the lineup has talent, experience and depth, said Kraus, who’s in his second year.

Spearheading the Bucs are 5-6 guard Brielle Bartelt, averaging 15.4 points, 3.5 assists and 3.3 steals, and 5-10 forward Toryn Richards, averaging 13.5 points and six rebounds. Richards had a great track season last spring, placing third in high jump and fourth in pole vault at state.

“Both Brielle and Toryn can score off the dribble, finish around the basket, hit mid-range shots, and shoot a good percentage from three,” said Kaus. They’re also good passers while penetrating. “Brielle commands so much attention on the offensive end that it opens things up for our other players … Her passing has really improved this year too.”

The next two scorers are 5-5 guard Ellie Ready and 5-9 forward Kylie Pittman (each with 8.5 ppg). The fifth starter is 6-0 center Trista Hering (4.3 ppg). Top backups are 5-7 Lindsay Condon (2.5 ppg) and 5-4 Allison Reints (2.5 ppg). All those are juniors.

Ready shoots 37 percent on three’s. “When she gets her feet set and has an open look, I’m always confident,” Kaus said. Pittman is “another very athletic player … At different times she has led us in scoring, rebounding, assists, and steals.” Hering (also the pitcher on the state softball team) has blocked 36 shots and is “making it difficult on teams to score in the paint.”
WEM girls are 15-0

The top four scorers are all threats outside the arc. Bartelt is 32-for-92, Richards 24-for-75, Ready 27-for-72 and Pittman 22-for-78. “We are definitely a team that likes to shoot the ball from the outside,” Kaus said.

Defensively, the Bucs have been able to create turnovers — averaging 13 steals per game — as well as force opponents to take difficult, guarded shots or resort to their secondary moves or shots.

They’ve had two close games, both in conference, beating Medford 59-58 in overtime with Ready hitting 19 points and Bartelt 18, and Blooming Prairie 59-51, led by Bartelt with 18 and Richard 15. In both, the Bucs were hitting three’s, 8-for-17 and 8-for-19, respectively. Bartelt sent the Medford game to overtime with a full-court drive for a layup at the buzzer. The Bucs have some tough games coming up, including re-matches with Blooming Prairie and Medford on their courts.

It’s been a great winter all-around for basketball at WEM with the Buccaneer boys 11-1 and also ranked No. 5. WEM has three state trips in boys hoop, most recently 2011.

Kaus, a fifth-grade teacher who played basketball and baseball at Gustavus Adolphus, has a 36-6 record in two seasons as girls coach, after assisting on the WEM boys team. “I couldn’t have asked for a better start for my first head coaching job,” he acknowledged. “I have been blessed with not only really good players and athletes but great kids. Our youth programs continue to do a great job.”

The Buccaneers section (2A) also includes No. 14 Buffalo Lake-Hector Stewart, No. 15 Sleepy Eye St. Mary’s, No. 17 Springfield and No. 19 BOLD.

**MN Region Playoff Schedule**

**ALL GRADES REFER TO THE 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR**

Teams may register for more than one region. See website for tournament details.

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**Boys & Girls Grades 4-9**

Register online @ www.pacesettersports.net

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List of unbeatens slashed

Minneota girls, toppled by Goodhue, among 10 to fall, leaving 12 teams unscathed

By Bruce Strand

The Minnetonka girls, top-ranked and defending state champion in Class 1A, were handed their first loss in 25 games Saturday.

The Goodhue Wildcats pummeled the Vikings 64-44, mainly by stealing the ball 24 times, at the Kasson-Manorville tournament. Tori Miller made nine of those steals for Goodhue. Arianna Thomforde scored 16 points, Joslyn Carlson 15 and Anika Schafer 12.

Minnetonka — which was missing Morgan Hennen, a 1,000-pointer, with an ankle injury — won its first 13 games this year and its last 12 last season. The Vikings’ last loss came against Brandon Valley (SD) last Feb. 5. The last Minnesota team to beat them was 2018 state champion Lyle-Pacelli the state semifinals that year.

Ten teams fell from the unbeaten ranks in the past week, leaving 12 unbeaten between boys and girls teams.

Other girls teams absorbing their first loss in the past week were Red Wing against Austin 42-34 and Holdingford against Royalton 56-43.

Boys teams falling for the first time were Lakeville South to Prior Lake 71-64 and Shakopee 72-60, Mounds View to East Ridge 78-41, Marshall to Mankato East 64-57, Blooming Prairie to Waterville-Elysian-Morristown 64-40, Clearbrook-Gonvick to Stephen-Argyle 72-68 and Walker-Hackensack-Akeley 70-62, Annandale to Litchfield 45-35 and Mound-Westonka 57-45, and Minnesota Valley Lutheran to Springfield 94-85.

Minneota girls, toppled by Goodhue, among 10 to fall, leaving 12 teams unscathed

Oturu boosting Gophers, nabs 2nd Big Ten honor

While all but one of the state’s four- and five-star prospects have spurned the U of M in recent years, the exception is making a huge impact for the Gophers.

Daniel Oturu, sophomore from Cretin-Derham Hall, has been named Big Ten Player of the Week twice this season.

The 6-foot-8 sophomore forward got his second award this week after leading the Gophers past No. 19 Michigan 75-67 on Sunday at Williams Arena, scoring 30 points and 13-for-18 shooting, along with seven rebounds and a steal, despite missing seven minutes with an injury. He also notched 22 points, 10 rebounds and two blocks in a 74-58 loss to No. 8 Michigan State on Thursday.

Oturu, who shared the award with Purdue’s Trevion Williams, was also honored on Dec. 30.

For the season, Oturu is averaging 20.3 points (second in the Big Ten) and 12.1 rebounds (leading the Big Ten and fifth in the nation) while shooting 62.3 percent (13th in the nation). The Gophers are 10-7 over, 4-3 in conference.
5-year hot streak for C-I’s Abraham

By Bruce Strand

When Henry Abraham was an eighth-grader at Cambridge-Isanti, the varsity coach saw his exciting potential but was determined to bring him along slowly. “Our plan was for him to play JV and also get some varsity minutes,” coach Mike McDonald said.

But injuries to teammates forced the coach to start the eighth-grader in the fifth game of the season. All Abraham did in his debut as a starter was to pour in 33 points and help the Bluejackets beat North Branch 86-48 for their first win. “He never left the starting lineup after that,” McDonald said, wryly.

Abraham averaged 15.1 points that year, 16.9 as a freshman, 20.0 as a sophomore, and 22.8 as a senior. This year, the 5-foot-11 senior guard is burning the nets for 33.5 points per game, second-high in the state. That includes bursts of 50 (the school record) against Chanhassen in an 85-70 win, and 47 against St. Cloud Apollo in a 99-82 loss, their only setback of the season.

Abraham has 2,408 career points. He’s made 451 three’s, which ranks fourth all-time, and he’ll likely wind up second. He sank 13 in one game. This year, he is hitting 55 percent on two’s, 40 percent on three’s, and 86 percent at the line. He’s also averaging seven assists, 3.5 steals and 4.7 rebounds.

“He has always been a great shooter,” McDonald said. “This season, he has become a scorer. Besides leading the state in three-pointers made, he also is getting to the foul line where he is shooting over 85 percent.”

Abraham acknowledged that three’s was his main mode earlier but with the help of an AAU coach, Jake Sullivan, former Iowa State star, he’s transitioned into “a more balanced game of the three, long, mid and short.”

Abraham follows two older brothers, Charles and Ray, who played for McDonald. Ray was a senior captain when Henry became his teammate in eighth grade.

Undersized for a college guard, Abraham is as yet unsigned, but “attracting more and more college interest” with his production this year. “In my opinion, Henry is special,” McDonald said. “Some people look at this size, but don’t realize that this young man is the epitome of a player who plays much taller and can do so many things that others can’t. I always tell our players that ‘heart beats height’ and Henry is that type of player.”

The Bluejackets have another potent scorer in senior guard Micah Ladd, who’s averaging 17.7 points. Connor Braaten adds 8.6 per game, Hunter Melander 7.6, Ryan Cox 7.5 and Paul Swanson 4.5. It’s a lineup of mostly guards.

Abraham has played with Ladd since their freshman year and Cox since last year. “Other than that, this is the first time since middle school we all have been playing with each other,” he said.

“We have a special group of players that care about each other and want each other and our team to be successful,” McDonald said.

Asked if this 10-1 team is the best he’s played on at C-I, Abraham said it’s not necessarily the most talented but “ends up being the best because of the chemistry we have. Our strengths are chemistry, shooting, and working together.”

Abraham and his cohorts played in the state tournament last year, just the second in school history, after winning a Section 7AAAA field with no powerhouses. They lost to Eastview and Hopkins at state to finish 17-14. Thirty-nine of his career points came at state. The Bluejackets record in his five years is currently 61-64 but the potential is there for a memorable finish.

He is also distance runner of moderate success (33rd in the section meet this fall) but mainly for the conditioning.

Asked about senior year goals, he said, “Team goal is to win conference, win sections and win state. And as an individual I guess my goal is to get to 3,000 points, but winning is more important for me.”
Resurgent South St. Paul posts significant 10th win

The South St. Paul boys notched their 10th win Tuesday — no small achievement for the Packers and their new coaching staff headed by Matt McCollister. “This is the first time in 18 years a South St. Paul team has amassed 10 wins, and this is the fastest it’s been done in 49 years,” said McCollister, who coached at Brooklyn Center to a state trip two years ago. The Packers, 8-17 last season, are 10-4 overall and 3-1 in conference. Their 10th win came against Mahtomedi, 71-69, with sophomore Alonzo Dodd sinking a floater with two seconds left, after freshman Max Wilson sank four 3-pointers down the stretch to spark a rally from a 14-point deficit. Dodd is averaging 25 points, junior Marquise Gileb 14.2, Wilson 13.8 and senior Marcus Brown 10.2.
Pacesetter’s youth state tourneys, leading to Great Five-State, coming up

Pacesetter Sports will conduct its 28th annual Minnesota Youth Basketball Championships for teams in grades 4-9, starting with region playoffs from February through April.

This one-class, statewide competition involving 600 to 800 teams will start with eight regional qualifiers.

The regionals are as follows. Region 1 in Rochester and Stewartville, Region 2 in Mankato, Region 3 in Redwood Falls, Region 4 in Mora and Willow River, Region 5 in Paynesville, Region 6 in Alexandria, Region 7 in Grand Rapids and Mountan Iron-Buhl, and Region 8 in Bemidji.

The region champions are invited to the Minnesota Youth Basketball State Championships in Maple Grove in June. The champion and runner-up at the state tournament are invited to the Pacesetter Great Five-State Championships in Minneapolis along with top teams from Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota.

All teams in that tournament will have at least one game on the main Target Center floor.

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Boys & Girls teams grades 4-8
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### STATE BOYS TOP 20 RANKINGS

#### CLASS 4A

1. Eden Prairie (2) 12-0  
2. Eastview (3) 12-1  
3. Cretin-Derham Hall (4) 11-2  
4. Shakopee (2) 10-2  
5. Hopkins (6) 9-3  
6. Robbinsdale Armstrong (6) 10-1  
7. Park Center (5) 8-3  
8. Chaska (2) 10-3  
9. East Ridge (4) 9-4  
10. Prior Lake (2) 7-4  
11. Lakeville South (1) 10-2  
12. Tartan (4) 11-1  
13. Champlin Park (5) 7-5  
14. Lakeville North (3) 7-5  
15. Spring Lake Park (5) 11-2  
16. Minnetonka (2) 7-5  
17. Mounds View (5) 11-1  
18. Rosemount (3) 6-5  
19. Rochester Century (1) 9-4  
20. Cambridge-Isanti (7) 10-1

#### CLASS 3A

1. Minnehaha Academy (4) 10-2  
2. Mankato East (2) 12-1  
3. DeLaSalle (6) 8-2  
4. Totino-Grace (4) 8-4  
5. Marshall (2) 13-1  
6. Austin (1) 11-1  
7. Waconia (6) 9-3  
8. Delano (5) 10-2  
9. St. Cloud Apollo (8) 11-1  
10. St. Peter (2) 9-5  
11. Mound Westonka (6) 8-4  
12. Columbia Heights (4) 6-3  
13. Minneapolis Henry 9-3  
14. St. Croix Lutheran (3) 7-4  
15. Bloomington Kennedy (3) 9-3  
16. Holy Angels (3) 9-3  
17. Grand Rapids (7) 11-4  
18. Bemidji 7-4  
19. Hibbing 9-4  
20. Princeton (7) 10-3

#### CLASS 2A

1. Caledonia (1) 14-0  
2. Waseca (2) 10-3  
3. Lake City (1) 12-1  
4. Minneapolis North (5) 8-5  
5. St. Croix Prep (4) 12-0  
6. Perham (8) 11-0  
7. East Grand Forks (8) 10-0  
8. Stewartville (1) 11-2  
9. Minnesota Valley Lutheran (2) 12-1  
10. Rockford (5) 11-2  
11. Eden Valley-Watkins (6) 10-1  
12. Osakis (6) 12-1  
13. Melrose (6) 10-3  
14. Albany (6) 9-3  
15. Fergus Falls (8) 9-3  
16. Litchfield (5) 11-2  
17. Annandale (6) 8-2  
18. Virginia (7) 11-1  
19. Pine City (6) 12-1  
20. Esko (7) 8-4

#### CLASS 1A

1. BOLD (2) 13-0  
2. Henning (6) 12-1  
3. Ada-Borup (8) 9-1  
4. Southwest MN Christian (3) 13-0  
5. Waterville-Elysian-Morristown (2) 11-1  
6. West Central Area (6) 10-2  
7. New Ulm Cathedral (2) 12-1  
8. Springfield (2) 11-1  
9. Fertile-Beltrami (8) 14-0  
10. North Woods (7) 10-2  
11. Blooming Prairie (1) 8-1  
12. Cromwell-Wright (5) 10-1  
13. Hayfield (1) 10-3  
14. Mountain Lake-Comfrey (2) 10-1  
15. Parkers Prairie (6) 10-2  
16. Nashwauk-Keewatin (7) 9-3  
17. Ely (7) 10-2  
18. Norman County East/Ulen-Hitterdal (6) 9-3  
19. Martin County West (2) 12-1  
20. Nevis (5) 11-1
The Centennial girls trailed Park Center the whole game, until Hannah Herzig sank a 3-pointer with three seconds left to win it 73-71, in a top-ten duel of conference and section rivals on Tuesday evening.

“I wasn’t sure if that was the shot we wanted,” coach Jaime Sobolik said, “but our sophomore had ice water in her veins.”

The Cougars had an inbounds play with about 10 seconds left. They wanted 6-2 post Jenna Guyer, who had 28 points and 19 rebounds, to take the shot, but she was covered. Guyer flipped the ball to guard Jodi Anderson, who had 18 points, in the lane, but Anderson was quickly covered also. She spotted Herzig, who was wide open, Herzig hit nothing but net, finishing with 15 points.

For Park Center, senior guard Aaliyah Ragulen tallied 25 points and junior forward Adalia McKenzie (who’s averaging 31 points) had 21 for the Pirates.

---

Caledonia, top-ranked in Class 2A boys, has now beaten the 2-3-4 teams in the rankings. The Warriors fended off No. 4 Minneapolis 87-83 at home Saturday.

The Warriors previously turned back Waseca 81-73 and Lake City 69-64.

Against North, Noah King scored 25 points, including a 3-pointer that tied the score 83-83, and Eli King had 22 points, including two free shots for an 85-83 lead after stealing an inbounds pass. Sam Pivet added 14 points.

Willie Wilson hit 26, Devon Townley 19, Quientrail Jamison-Travis 14 and Jacob Butler 13 for North.

“Fun game. Both teams played exceptionally hard … neither deserved to lose,” Caledonia coach Brad King said. “North will be a team to be concerned with in the playoffs, no doubt.”

---

Jackson Loge of Morris Area/Chokio-Alberta and Austin Bonn of Lac qui Parle Valley each scored his 1,000th point during a game Saturday, Jan. 11, won by Loge’s team 75-74. Loge, a sophomore center, tallied 32 points and 15 rebounds. Bonn, a senior guard, scored 37 points. Loge was 17 points short of 1,000, and Bonn 27 points short, entering the game. Tiger coach Marc Torgerson reports that Loge is averaging 24 points and 15 rebounds for the Tigers, now 6-5 after an 0-4 start.

Brake nabs 2 Hastings career records

Mallory Brake of Hastings broke a pair of lofty school career records during a the Raiders’ 55-31 win over Park of Cottage Grove on Jan. 4 at Park. The 6-1 senior forward scored 27 points while breaking her former teammate Krystal Carlson’s records of 2,251 points and 1,413 rebounds. Carlson, a 2018 graduate, plays for University of Sioux Falls. Brake is also Hastings career leader for assists, steals and blocks, according to River Towns, the local paper. The Creighton University recruit is averaging 27.7 points and 15 rebounds for the Raiders (6-9).

Got a tip for the MN Basketball News? Send a note to bruce.a.strand@gmail.com
By Terry Kunze

The NBA game has some problems which could be improved upon with minor adjustments of the rules.

This is a fast game and officials have too many judgement calls to make. I would propose the following changes to make their jobs easier and to reduce stoppages of the clock.

1) Eliminate the defensive three-second rule, which would help the official who already have enough to watch for.

2) Allow all zone defenses. This will not affect the game as much as people may think, because the offenses will generally beat the zone down the court. And zone defenses will create more offensive rebounds.

(3) Make goal-tending legal. I like the European rule which allows players to touch the ball after it hits the rim. It’s tough for officials to make goal-tending calls when out of position. This will not affect the game as much as people may think. It’s widely accepted in Europe.

(4) Make the court bigger — six inches on each side — to accommodate how much bigger the players have gotten. How many times does a player step on the sideline? This has become a major cause of turnovers. There’s not enough room in the corners now with the new three-point line. No expensive re-arrangement of seating would be needed.

Terry Kunze, former Gopher player and assistant coach, leader of Duluth Central 1961 state champs, and recent Minnesota Basketball Hall of Fame selection, comments on the NBA and college basketball for MBBN.
STATE GIRLS TOP 20 RANKINGS

**CLASS 4A**

1. Hopkins (6) 14-0
2. Wayzata (6) 14-1
3. Rosemount (3) 13-1
4. Farmington (1) 13-2
5. St. Michael-Albertville (8) 10-3
6. Centennial (5) 13-2
7. Park Center (5) 12-3
8. Stillwater (4) 10-4
9. Maple Grove (8) 12-3
10. Chaska (2) 10-4
11. Elk River (8) 10-4
12. Burnsville (3) 10-4
13. Eden Prairie (2) 8-6
14. Blaine (7) 11-3
15. Shakopee (2) 8-5
16. Minnetonka (2) 9-5
17. Lakeville North (3) 7-7
18. Cooper (6) 11-3
19. Moorhead (8) 9-4
20. Minneapolis South (6) 14-2

**CLASS 2A**

1. Sauk Centre (6) 13-1
2. Fergus Falls (8) 13-1
3. Rochester Lourdes (1) 12-2
4. New London-Spicer (3) 13-1
5. Minnehaha (4) 11-3
6. Duluth Marshall (7) 11-1
7. Proctor (7) 13-1
8. Goodhue (1) 15-1
9. Providence (5) 13-4
10. Pelican Rapids (8) 14-0
11. Waseca (2) 11-3
12. Belle Plaine (2) 12-1
13. Pine City (6) 11-1
15. Mesabi East (7) 13-1
16. Stewartville (1) 11-5
17. Lake City (1) 13-4
18. Winona Cotter (1) 14-3
20. Royalton (6) 11-2

**CLASS 3A**

1. DeLaSalle (4) 8-3
2. Holy Angels (6) 8-4
4. Simley (3) 10-2
5. Marshall (2) 15-0
6. Red Wing (1) 14-1
7. Austin (1) 12-3
8. Waconia (2) 9-5
9. St. Paul Como Park (3) 8-4
11. Mahtomedi (4) 11-3
12. Mankato West (2) 10-4
13. Alexandria (8) 12-4
14. Hutchinson (2) 10-3
15. Hermantown (7) 13-1
16. Richfield (6) 13-1
17. St. Croix Lutheran (3) 10-3
18. St. Peter (2) 11-4
19. Willmar (5) 10-5
20. Bemidji (8) 10-4

**CLASS 1A**

1. Minneota (3) 15-1
2. Cromwell-Wright (7) 13-1
3. Mountain Iron-Buhl (7) 8-4
4. Walker-Hackensack-Akeley (5) 12-1
5. Waterville-Elysian-Morristown (2) 15-0
6. Henning (6) 13-1
7. Blooming Prairie (1) 11-2
8. Mayer Lutheran (4) 11-2
9. Cherry (7) 10-3
10. Hills-Beaver Creek (3) 11-1
11. Southwest MN Christian (3) 11-2
12. Heritage Christian (4) 9-4
13. Ada-Borup (6) 9-1
14. Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart (2) 10-2
15. Sleepy Eye St. Mary’s (2) 12-2
16. EGF Sacred Heart (8) 13-2
17. Springfield (2) 11-2
18. Red Lake County Central (8) 11-1
19. BOLD (2) 9-5
20. Southland (1) 9-4