

FREE



Greater La Crosse SPORTS CONNECTION

ISSUE NO. 8 - MAY/JUNE 2010

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FOOTBALL PLAYER AND HOMECOMING KING TEACHES ENTIRE SCHOOL *about respect*

By Christina Harris



Winter's breath blows gently on the cheeks of thousands of thrill-seekers, making them blush as they stand along Pettibone Beach's near-arctic waters. The sand is freckled with shivering bodies anxiously awaiting their turn to take the Special Olympics Coulee Region Polar Plunge® on March 6, 2010.

More than 40 Tomah High School (THS) students and teachers joined nearly 1,500 other Plungers for a healthy endorphin boost, to support an athlete close to their hearts, Ryan

Barta, and to assist in raising a whopping \$200,000 to ensure 10,000 athletes with cognitive disabilities can continue to compete in sports year-round.

Nineteen-year-old Ryan Barta, an athlete with Down Syndrome, has vocal abilities that limit him to speaking just a few words per sentence, but he hasn't let this hinder his zest for life. Like any other outgoing teenager, Barta is involved with organizations on campus. Proudly sporting the #4 on the back of his jersey, he serves as the water boy for the football team and bass drummer for the marching band.

Outside of school, he is a Special Olympics veteran, competing in athletics, basketball, and bowling competitions for more than ten years. Ryan qualified for the Special Olympics Summer State Games in Stevens Point in relay and shot put.

"[It] allowed him to be involved in sports just like this older brothers," said Linda Barta, Ryan's mother. "He always tries his hardest and loves those blue ribbons, but accepts any color with pride."

According to Tomah High School Principal, Marlon Mee, Ryan coaches his peers and teachers on more than sportsmanship. He teaches them about respect.

"Every morning, Ryan will stop by the attendance window to wish me a good day," Tomah High School Principal Marlon Mee explains with a smile. "My day doesn't start until Ryan shakes my hand."

"When Ryan was crowned King last October, the gym erupted. The students led a standing ovation for him"

So when Polar Plunge season rolls around, despite the fact that he can't swim and has a fear of water, Principal Mee is usually the first to pull on his blue swim shorts and makes a bee-line for the frigid waters with his students.

This year, the jumpers named themselves Jesse's Jumpers in honor of a student and former Plunger who recently died in a car accident. Mr. Mee had proclaimed last year would be his last time jumping into the sub-zero waters, but a heart-warming lesson taught by his students during the THS's homecoming festivities changed his mind.

Historically, football quarterbacks and cheerleading captains ruled the court, but last fall, students set cliques aside to vote for this very special water boy.

"When Ryan was crowned King last October, the gym erupted. The students led a standing ovation for him," said Principal Mee.

"Ryan immediately shot his hands in the air and then the most amazing thing happened he started signing 'thank you, friends' over and over," said Linda.

"The students became the teachers. They taught me they were accepting of others regardless of their physical, mental, or emotional capabilities," said Mee, reflecting on the seed that sprouted his fund raising efforts for the Polar Plunge. "Ryan has been an inspiration to me. I see what he has done for our school and what he has taught our students."



Christina Harris is a Special Olympics Wisconsin Development & Marketing Assistant.

STADIUM ETIQUETTE

By Ron Zingsheim

WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO A FOOTBALL GAME? WELL, I GO TO WATCH THE GAME. SOMETIMES, THE OVERZEALOUS FAN GETS A LITTLE WILD, BUT I UNDERSTAND THAT THE WORD "FAN" IS SHORT FOR "FANATIC", AND I COMPLETELY RESPECT AND LOVE THEIR ENTHUSIASM. HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT OTHERS GO FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. SOMETIMES THE "CASUAL" FAN DOESN'T REALIZE THE CORRECT WAY TO BEHAVE AT A FOOTBALL GAME SO THAT IT CAN BE ENJOYED BY EVERYONE. HERE ARE A FEW POINTERS THAT ARE SURE TO ENHANCE EVERYONE'S VIEWING PLEASURE:

- 1:** Be sure not to arrive at the stadium prior to kickoff. After all, being in your seat too early limits party time before the game.
- 2:** If you do arrive in time for the National Anthem, be sure to keep your hat on. It's the best way to show your patriotism.
- 3:** When you do finally find your seat, immediately call someone on your cell phone and stand up and wave. It's a fabulous way for the people behind you to celebrate the opening kickoff.
- 4:** Once the game has started, you are now ready to make your move. Remember, this is not a just a football game; it's a social event! It's time to get some nachos and \$3 water. As you climb over everyone, be certain to bump the people in the row ahead of you in the back of the head. Those people should realize that they need to lean forward to let you through. Do they really need to lean back in their seats? As you exit into the aisle, be sure you stand there in front of everyone and watch the play. No need to get down and let others see...they'll see the next play while you're getting food.
- 5:** The key, of course, is to repeat all these actions as you re-enter your seat in the middle of the row. Do not, under any circumstances, let the game interfere with your trip to your seat. Do not wait until the end of a play or between quarters to do any of this; timing is the key to good etiquette. Remember this is only the first of many trips to the concession stand, so make the most of each one.
- 6:** If you need to stand and stretch, be sure to do it during a play, not between quarters. Those other fans who have no clue about etiquette will probably leave between quarters to get their food and take a bathroom break. You'll have all the leg room you need then.

Okay, if you still don't get it, the key to stadium etiquette is just common sense. Treat the other person with respect. If you can figure out that I'm at the game to watch it, then I'll try to figure out that you're at the game for....well, I'm not really sure, but you must have a good reason.

Fan is short for "fanatic." People shouldn't get upset by an overzealous fan, because that's what fans are. Hopefully, we can find a mutual respect and put the two together for a fun, exciting game day afternoon.



Ron Zingsheim is a former high school teacher and coach at Boscobel High School, and a sports "Fan".

MEET THE

Halfway Creek Trail Holmen, Wisconsin

TRAIL NAME AND DESCRIPTION:

Halfway Creek Trail features 3.4 miles of crushed limestone surface which winds its way from Halfway Creek Park, along the creek bed, to the Holmen Water Treatment Facility. From there, the trail runs along Highway XX, to Midway where it connects to the Great River Trail. The trail is equipped with 5 new bridges which allow bikers, runners, and walkers to cross the creek multiple times throughout the course of their trek. The trail also connects to the Town of Holland Bluffs Trail by Star Hill in Holmen and runs to the north along highway 53 north to Drugan's Castle Mound Golf Course.

Who manages the trails?

Village of Holmen Park and Recreation Department

HOW ARE THEY FUNDED?

The Halfway Creek Trail was funded by an \$8,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and thanks to a collaborative effort between Holmen Area Foundation, Village of Holmen, and Town of Onalaska, over \$250,000 was collected in contributions from area businesses, individuals and organizations.

How can people get involved?

Anyone can become involved through the Halfway Creek Trail and Holland Bluffs Trail Adopt a Trail Program. The program allows individuals, businesses, and community organizations to adopt ½ mile portion of the Highway Creek Trail or Holland Bluffs Trail. By adopting, the sponsors are agreeing to help keep their portion of the trail clean throughout the year," said Mike Brogan, Director of Parks and Recreation.



TRAILS



WHAT TYPES OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ARE AVAILABLE?

- Biking
- Walking
- Hiking
- Jogging
- Running
- Cross Country Skiing
- Snow Shoeing
- Bird Watching
- Photography

Disclosures:

Trail passes are not required for the Halfway Creek Trail or for Holland Bluffs Trails, but are required for the Great River Trail.

Wildlife:

Deer, turkey, squirrel, fox and several varieties of birds have all been spotted on the trail.

HOW DIFFICULT ARE THE TRAILS?

The trails consist of crushed limestone and paved walkways making it assessable for all users.

The trail includes a paved section 600 feet long, designed with a gentle slope to meet American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards.

NOTES ABOUT THE TRAIL:

Distance/Size/Length:

3.4 miles of crushed limestone and blacktop

Is there handicapped accessible parking?

Yes, although it may be difficult to access certain parts of the trail.

Directions to the Trail:

The trail head is located at:

300 W. Roberts Street, Holmen

GPS Location to Trail Head:

North 43 degrees, 57 feet, and 41.70 in.
West 91 degrees, 15 feet, and 30.64 in.

Is hunting or fishing allowed?

No hunting is allowed; fishing is allowed by access to Halfway Creek but access tends to be limited. You may see the occasional trout, smallmouth bass, or sucker.



A TURKEY TRADITION

By Laramie McClurg



My dad has been an avid outdoorsman since the day he was old enough to pick up a BB gun and chase after rabbits in the pasture of our family farm in rural Vernon County. His passion for the outdoors has taken him all over North America, hunting everything from black bear and elk to whitetails, and of course, the elusive wild turkey.

The first wild turkey season took place in Wisconsin in the spring of 1983. And, you can be sure that my dad was one of the first to get in line for a tag. However, he will admit that the first few seasons learning to hunt turkeys were a bit of an adventure. Knowing his skill as a turkey hunter today, I laugh when I hear the story of how he got his first bird. Sitting on one side of a draw, calling to a gobbling bird on the other, he decided he would just go to where the bird was, made sense right? Needless to say by the time he made it to the other side of the draw and set up to call, the gobbler had made its way over to where he had just been calling. Thinking now he should

be back on the hill he'd just come from, my dad made his way back just in time to hear the bird gobble right back where he just was. Lucky for him the first turkeys hunted in Vernon County weren't all that sharp. So, this time he just stayed put and sure enough, the bird made its way back....and bingo, he'd shot his first bird... And it happened to be 28lbs... the biggest turkey he's bagged to date!

Since that day my dad has become as skilled of a turkey hunter as you'll find. Dad hasn't missed a turkey season since 1983, and has shot a bird almost every year. He is an active member of the National Wild Turkey Federation and has won multiple turkey calling and hunting contests. He truly enjoys passing his passion down to younger generations and teaching them to appreciate the outdoors, first, by taking his own children and now by taking his grandchildren. Dad also enjoys volunteering his time with such programs as the 'Learn to hunt' program.

When I was 8 years old my dad started taking me turkey hunting. He didn't take bring me along all the time because my short little legs had a hard time climbing the steep hills, but when he knew it would be easy going and good weather, I was right by his side. I couldn't wait until I could finally hunt with him. I remember the first Turkey I shot and the first signature "turkey" hand shake that he gave me after the kill. After hunting with him for a few seasons, I had learning the techniques of locating, calling, stalking and probably the most important, staying put! I wanted more than anything to show what I had learned from him and prove that I could do it on my own. I wanted to shoot a bird without him.

It didn't happen as easy when I was on my own. Seemed he always knew the right positions to be in or places to set up. I was always going just a little too far to set up and bust the gobbler out. But, after many attempts and failures I learned to be successful on my own. It was a proud day when I was able to show him the turkey I had shot without his help.

Dad has taught me many valuable hunting and life lessons on our family farm. Today, there is no other person I would rather hunt with than my dad, Mike McClurg. The turkey hunting tradition has strengthened our relationship to more than just a father and son. I'm proud to call him one of my best friends.

Laramie McClurg is still a kid at heart and an avid outdoorsman

La Crosse Area Family YMCA

The La Crosse Area Family YMCA is a place for everyone. Regardless of your ability, age or financial status the YMCA is here for you. The YMCA offers a variety of activities to help all individuals in their pursuit of a healthy spirit, mind and body.



YMCA EVENTS:

Summer Registration.....	June 7-11
"Got Energy" Triathlon	June 13
Fishing Camp	June 16-19
Kids Triathlon	July 10
Kids Marathon	July 31
Fall Registration	Aug. 30-Sept. 3
Kids Maple Mile	Sept. 25
Maple Leaf Road Races	Sept. 25



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TONY MUELLER: *Living Every Kid's Dream*

By Ben Morgan

Times are good right now if you go by the name of Tony Mueller. The same can be said though if you are in the surrounding area of where Mr. Mueller is lacing up his cleats and putting on a show on the baseball diamond.

Tony, a La Crosse native, was a stand-out player for Logan High School before taking his talents to the collegiate level at Winona State. Following his freshman year where Tony became an instant hit in Winona, he received the opportunity to come back to La Crosse for the summer to play for the Loggers in the Northwoods League. Playing at Copeland Park was no new thing to Mueller as he has played in the stadium many times throughout his life, but having the opportunity to play in this caliber of a league, in front of people who have known him for years, is what made the experience all the more enjoyable.

"What means a lot to me is the fact that the people who have watched me since little league and have seen me grow up still get the opportunity to watch me in La Crosse and see how far I have come as a player," Mueller said. "I feel very fortunate to be able to play in such a great league in my home town; it's sort of every kid's dream."

So how did Mueller do in his first season as a Logger?

In one word: **Impressive.**

Mueller flourished as a utility player in a league filled with highly touted NCAA Division I players of which many have been drafted in to the majors or will be drafted within the next few years. Mueller's all-out effort on every play also made him a fan

favorite of those who weren't already fans of him from his previous playing days in La Crosse.

"Having Tony involved is a tremendous addition to the Loggers and the entire La Crosse community," Loggers Coach Andy McKay said. "Being a home town kid has shown everyone that he can compete with the big boys and that provides unlimited inspiration to every kid who comes out to the Lumberyard."

The same can be said just a few miles west as Tony is carrying over his talents and his personality to Winona State University.

"Tony has had a significant impact to our program as he has become our team's showcase player," Winona State Baseball Coach Kyle Pooch said. "Everyone who meets him mentions what a nice young man he is, including the opponents coaches. I have also had the opportunity to see him interact with kids and he does an incredible job with them. Young kids just seem to gravitate to him."

While Mueller's baseball talents alone are enough to be impressed with, you can't help but appreciate the way he has handled the success he's come across on both sides of the Mississippi River. It's a rarity to get a local athlete to play so close to home at the collegiate level and also in a summer baseball league as competitive as the Northwoods League. Luckily we are in an area which appreciates baseball and is fortunate enough to have a team in the Loggers to showcase talents such as Mueller's. But it's people like Mueller who bring the baseball atmosphere to the people and keeps them coming back for more.

"It's been pretty funny because people who saw me play for the Loggers have made trips up to watch me play in Winona and vice versa," said Mueller. "Not many people get to play for two great teams which are so close to each other. I feel that I am very fortunate to be able to do what I do in both La Crosse and Winona."

Ben Morgan is the Media Relations Director for the La Crosse Loggers.

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THE TRI-STATE TOEPICKS FIGURE SKATING CLUB:

Bringing Figure Skating to the Coulee Region

By Jessica Horner

The Winter Olympic Games has sparked interest to the many sports showcased. For the Coulee Region it is an opportunity too good to pass up.

The Tri-State Toepicks Figure Skating Club is located in Onalaska, WI and is a brand new figure skating club to the Coulee Region. The club is a member of United States Figure Skating Association and its membership is growing. The club motto is “growing and sharing our passion for figure skating” and they look to continue to grow the popularity of skating for recreation.

Figure skating is a life-long sport and skaters can start at any age. It's a balance between technique and artistry, with emphasis on becoming a well-rounded skater both on and off the ice. Skating is ranked 5th in America for largest fan base, behind only the NFL, MLB, NCAA Football and the NBA according to an ESPN Sports Poll. The interest behind figure skating is growing. As in any sport, it takes time to develop their skills to attain the level of Olympic or professional sport and the dedication these local skaters have is admirable.

SOME LOCAL SKATERS EXPLAIN WHY THEY LOVE TO SKATE AND WHY THEY CHOSE THE SPORT.

Allie Flatten, a 7th grader at Onalaska Middle School, started skating at an open skate session with her parents and has been quickly improving since she started the sport at age 4. She competed at several competitions this past year and enjoys the “jumps, spins and footwork”, even performing a duet with Neely Theisen at the Holiday on Ice show this past December. Theisen is a 7th grader at Holmen Middle School.

Katie Mormann, a sophomore at Central High School, started skating at age 12. She likes skating because “there is nothing like it” and enjoys the technical side of the sport.

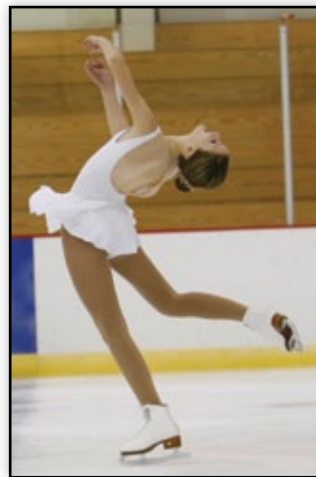
Christina Bloomquist, a freshman at Onalaska High School, enjoys the success of the past season. “My favorite accomplishment was in the Eau Claire competition where I skated a good program and made it to the finals where I placed 2nd out of 27 total entries.”

These skaters learn many valuable lessons through their skating, such as setting goals and working hard to reach their goals. Membership Director Colleen Flatten explains that skating is a lot like life. “With skating, you expect to fall down, but in order to succeed you must get up and try again.” The local skaters come away with not only athletic accomplishments but also skills that they can fall back on through the rest of their life.

The club was started by a group of parents that had children interested in skating at higher levels of competitions. To fill a niche in the Coulee Region they decided to organize a US Figure Skating sanctioned club to give their kids the chance to learn how to skate, compete and attain a higher level of skating. President of the Toepicks, Tina Theisen explains that many of the skaters had started and progressed through local Park and Recreation programs and were looking for more opportunities.

The club also is host to many talented and experienced coaches. All are certified by United States Figure Skating and have a passion for the sport. Joanna Conrath started skating at age 7 and began coaching in 2002. “Each year I've seen this club expand and exceed many expectations. I anticipate this expansion will continue”.

The club has year-round opportunities for anyone who is interested in skating, recreationally or competitively. If you are interested in learning more about becoming a member or about figure skating, you can contact Colleen Flatten at cflatten@yahoo.com, or visit their web site at :: www.thetoepicks.org



Pictured above :: Christina Bloomquist



Pictured above :: Allie Flatten

Jessica Horner is a Toepicks coach and a lifelong figure skater.

ONALASKA'S FREDDIE HILLTOPPER

By Len Schley

Harrison Mulrine participated in 3 sports in 4 years at Onalaska High School. He was never a star athlete, but he enjoyed participating in athletics. This year, Harrison was the recipient of the Freddie Hilltopper Awards, given out by faculty to the senior who displays outstanding school spirit, leadership, academic achievement, strong character, and outstanding fellowship with his classmates. Harrison represents a majority of the high school athletes who aren't stars in their sports, but they love to participate in athletics.

I recently spoke with Harrison about his high school career and his future plans.

Q You were the varsity long snapper for the football team for 3 years. That is a very important position that mostly goes unrecognized. Did your coaches appreciate your effort?

A Yes they did. I learned that position my sophomore year and they had confidence in me that I could do the job for the team. I have a real passion for football and I enjoyed my role.

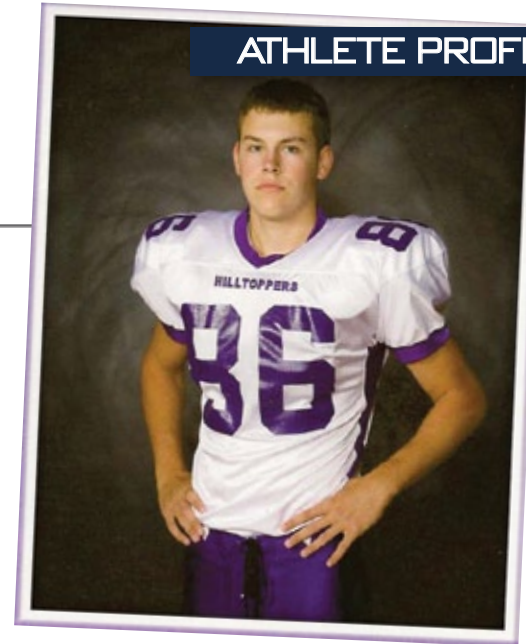
Q You made the varsity team in basketball this year. It's hard to keep motivated knowing you will have limited playing time. How did you deal with that fact?

A I knew going into the season that my game time would be limited. I struggled at first, but I found joy in my teammates and the friendships I developed.

Q Do you have any words of wisdom for young athletes who won't be a star, but enjoy playing sports?

A Don't let the fact that you're not a star athlete affect your judgment if you want to play a sport. You can always find a way to make a positive contribution to your team and have fun doing it if you have the right perspective.

Len Schley is an avid local sports fan and enjoys volunteering his time as a volunteer and mentor to young athletes.



Q Besides athletics, what other activities are you involved in?

A I am involved in the Art Club and I love to hunt and fish.

Q What are your favorite foods?

A I love Mom's beef stroganoff.

Q What are your future plans?

A I plan to attend the University of Wisconsin-Stout and walk on in football. My dream job would be a graphic artist and have my own studio.

Author's Note:

Harrison was a lot of fun to interview. His parents, friends and teachers can be proud of his achievements in the classroom and on the athletic fields. He is a very positive role model for young athletes in the area.

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FISH IN PEACE

By Brian Meeter

Growing up in Northeast Iowa there weren't many lakes nearby, but we did have some great small rivers, including the Cedar and the Shellrock. These rivers were not crowded, so they made for a great way to get out of the hustle and bustle of everyday life, and fish in peace. Growing up we had a flat bottom boat with a small trolling motor, and we would spend the day floating a section of the river, catching a bass or walleye along the way. For me, it evolved into just getting out and getting away from all the people. This is something I have always sought and there are a growing number of people that share my sentiment.



My older brother began fishing from his 9ft kayak about 5 years ago. I tried it, and have literally been hooked ever since. They are lightweight, easy to handle, and allow you access to bodies of water that large boats just can't reach. In high water conditions, kayaks can be used to fish streams and rivers that normally can't be accessed by a watercraft.

A smaller kayak can fit in the back of most vehicles and typically weighs about 50 pounds. Fishing kayaks are rigged a little different than the average touring kayak. A good fishing kayak has rod holders, a place for a cold beverage, an anchor for stabilizing yourself over a great fishing hole, gear cubbies, and some dry and wet storage areas. Most are sit-on-top style kayaks. I have seen them outfitted with trolling rigs, fish finders and even motors, but that's not my style, too much hassle. I like to keep it simple because that's exactly why I am out on the water in the first place. If you already own a kayak, you don't have to buy a new one to go fishing. Most kayaks can be outfitted with aftermarket fishing equipment, such as anchors and rod holders, to make fishing from your touring kayak more enjoyable. If you don't own a kayak, I would suggest renting one from a local outfitter, such as Schafer's Boat and Bait on Lake Onalaska.

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Brian Meeter is the Executive Director of the La Crosse Area Sports Commission and a kayak fishing enthusiast.

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UPCOMING 2010 EVENTS

MAY	EVENT
1	~ La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway Opening Night ~ La Crosse Fitness Festival
4,11,18	~ Spring Morning Bird Walks- Hixon Forest Marsh
6,13,20	~ Spring Morning Bird Walks- Hixon Forest
6-7	~ Environmental Education Days- Norskedalen
8	~ La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway- NASCAR Night ~ Hershey Youth Track Meet (Ages 6-14)- UW-La Crosse Track
14-16	~ Westby Syttende Mai Festival
15	~ River to Ridge Run/Walk- Myrick Hixon Eco Park
16	~ Riverside Family Fun Fair
19-20	~ Environmental Education Days- Norskedalen
21	~ La Crosse Spartans Home Game
22	~ Linked to the Land Hike, 10:00-12:00pm Medary Quarry Tract (put on by MVC) ~ La Crosse Sirens Roller Derby vs River Valley Rollergirls La Crosse Center 7:00pm ~ La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway- NASCAR Night
23	~ "Deke's Run" in memory of Derek Kroll, Boys and Girls Club of Greater La Crosse.
27	~ Spring Stroll Historic Character Walk at Skumsrud Heritage Farm Norskedalen
28	~ Norskedalen Spring Stroll
29	~ La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway- NASCAR Night
JUNE	EVENT
4-5	~ WIAA State Track Meet- UW-L
4-6	~ June Dairy Days- West Salem
4-6	~ Shelby Youth Baseball "Battle for the Bluffs" Fastpitch Tournament Shelby Hillview Baseball Complex
5	~ La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway- NASCAR Night
11,18,25	~ Coulee Region USTA Team Tennis League, 2:00pm- UW-La Crosse Tennis Courts
12	~ La Crosse Skating Sirens VS Skee Town Skirtz- La Crosse Center 7:00pm
12	~ NASCAR Racing- La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway
13	~ YMCA Touchstone Got Energy Triathlon - West Salem
16	~ River City Water Show
19	~ La Crosse Spartans Home Game
19	~ Minds in Motion Bicycle Tour - Onalaska Middle School

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