

UW MEN'S HOCKEY

Analysts buying in on Wolverines' riches

Their record seven first-round picks are experienced

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There are some particulars that intrigue Big Ten hockey analysts as the conference schedule opens Thursday with the University of Wisconsin playing at No. 2 Michigan.

An influx of transfers has shifted expectations. The next-level tal-



Badgers vs. No. 2 Michigan

When, where: 6 p.m. Thursday and 6:30 p.m. Friday, Ann Arbor, Mich.

TV: Big Ten Network (Thursday).

ent across the league has elevated the game. The greatest perceived shortcoming for the defending champion Badgers hasn't been

addressed in non-conference play.

But no discussion about the league gets very far without a mention of the NCAA record in progress as a central storyline.

Michigan is the first college hockey team to have seven first-round NHL draft picks on its roster. Four of them were among the first five selections earlier this year.

Similar riches have produced varied results in the past. The Badgers know it well. They rolled out a lineup two years ago with three first-round NHL draft picks

and a player who was soon to become one.

That season ended with a thud. There have been successes — North Dakota made it to the Frozen Four in 2006 with a team that included six first-round picks — but it's no guarantee.

Three Big Ten Network hockey analysts offered insight this week into what has their attention at the start of the 84-game chase for the regular-season championship — and Michigan had a prominent role.

"You've seen all the conjecture

about, 'Can you win with that many first-rounders?'" said Fred Pletsch, who'll be the color analyst for Thursday's Badgers-Wolverines game on BTN.

What the Wolverines have that other teams with multiple first-round picks didn't, Pletsch said, is experience. No. 1 pick Owen Power, No. 2 Matty Beniers, No. 5 Kent Johnson and No. 29 Brendan Brisson are sophomores. Johnny Beecher, chosen 30th in 2019 but out with an injury at the start of

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BUCKS



JEFFREY PHELPS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Timberwolves guard D'Angelo Russell reacts to a call during the second half Wednesday night at Fiserv Forum. He scored a team-high 29 points.

Caught short-handed

Lopez, Holiday again scratched due to injury

JIM HOEHN
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — D'Angelo Russell scored 29 points, Karl-Anthony Towns and Anthony Edwards each added 25, and the Minnesota Timberwolves held off the depleted

Milwaukee Bucks 113-108 on Wednesday night at Fiserv Forum.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 40 points and 16 rebounds for the Bucks, who were without point guard Jrue Holiday and center Brook Lopez.

"We've got to figure it out, because obviously there's going to be times that we're going to play without them and this was one

of those times," Antetokounmpo said. "But we cannot use that as an excuse. We've got to do a better job of rebounding the ball."

The Bucks, who trailed 94-79 entering the final period, pulled within 110-108 on Antetokounmpo's layup with 9.4 seconds remaining. Edwards answered with two free throws.

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T'wolves 113, Bucks 108

Key: Three players score 25 or more points for Minnesota.

Next: 7 p.m. Saturday, vs. San Antonio, Fiserv Forum, BSW.

UW VOLLEYBALL

Smrek stands tall in sweep

Freshman helps to settle clash for first place in Big Ten

DENNIS PUNZEL
For the State Journal

Anna Smrek couldn't have picked a better time to come up with the best match of her young career.

Smrek, a 6-foot-9 freshman had a career-high 12 kills to lead the University of Wisconsin volleyball team to a 26-24, 25-19, 25-23 sweep of host Nebraska in a battle for first place in the Big Ten Conference at the Devaney Sports Center on Wednesday night in Lincoln.

Grad student Dana Rettke added 11 kills as the No. 3 Badgers (18-1, 10-1 Big Ten) outbattled the No. 6 Cornhuskers (16-4, 10-1) to extend their winning streak over Nebraska to six.

In addition to Smrek's impact on offense as she hit .647 with just one error in 17 swings, she also had a presence on defense with four blocks and helping

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No. 3 Badgers 3, No. 6 Nebraska 0

Key: Huskers are held to .148 hitting percentage.

Next: 11 a.m. Sunday, at Purdue, ESPN.

PACKERS | GAME 8

Impressive record, but just how good are they?

We should have a pretty good idea of where the Green Bay Packers stand in the NFL pecking order by now, seven games into the 2021 season. That's plenty of data as sample sizes go.

And yet it's not enough to get a true read on a team that could be overrated or

underrated depending on the vantage point or, as the case may be, level of cynicism in the eyes of the beholder.

Here's what we know for sure: At 6-1, the Packers are tied for the second-best record in the NFC and have a 2½-game lead in their division.

Here's what we can confidently say: The NFC is top-heavy, with a significant

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Numbers go up with Adams down

Rodgers gets more players involved when star receiver sits out

JASON WILDE
For the State Journal

GREEN BAY — There was a chance Randall Cobb hadn't heard.

After all, the Green Bay Packers veteran wide receiver wasn't with the team the past two years, spending one season with the Dallas Cowboys and the other with the Houston Texans. So

maybe the news of the Packers' logic-defying won-lost record when his good friend and fellow wideout, Davante Adams, had been sidelined by injuries, hadn't made it down to him in Texas.

"Yeah, yeah, we've heard. We've heard," Cobb said with a smile as the Packers prepared for — unfortunately for them — another game without Adams,



Cobb



Packers vs. Cardinals

When, where: 7:20 p.m. Thursday, Glendale, Ariz.

TV: Ch. 47, NFLN.

who won't play in Thursday's NFC showdown with the undefeated Arizona Cardinals after

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