

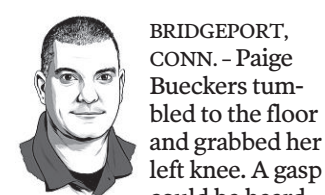
# SPORTS



**WOMEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT**  
UCONN 75, N.C. STATE 58

## Knee, UConn hold up just fine

CHIP SCOGGINS



BRIDGEPORT, CONN. — Paige Bueckers tumbled to the floor and grabbed her left knee. A gasp could be heard inside a boisterous Total Mortgage Arena packed with UConn fans.

Bueckers got up quickly, jogged off the court with a slight limp and went directly to the end of the bench to be evaluated by an athletic trainer.

Luckily, it was only a scare, nothing serious, and UConn's superstar later in the first quarter of the second-seeded Huskies' 75-58 victory over third-seeded Indiana in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament.

"I knew I was going to take some hits," she said later. "I'm fine."

Fine and gradually improving but still not back to her normal self after undergoing major knee surgery in December. Despite noticeable limitations in her game, Bueckers showed Saturday that she's still pretty darn good as she moved to the brink of a special homecoming.

UConn (28-5) plays No. 1 seed North Carolina State in the regional final here Monday for a trip to Minneapolis for the Final Four next weekend.

For Bueckers, the former Hopkins star, a chance to play on her sport's biggest stage in her hometown would be a delightful finish to a challenging season.

A perfectly scripted ending was thrust into jeopardy when she suffered a knee injury on Dec. 5. She missed 19 games after having surgery to repair an anterior tibial plateau fracture and a lateral meniscus tear.

Saturday marked her eighth game back and it's been a slow process trying to regain the form that made her the first freshman in women's history to be named National Player of the Year.

See **SCOGGINS** on C11 ▶

**Inside:** Michigan, Louisville, North Carolina State advance to the Elite Eight **C11**

**MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT**

**Today's best bet:** Can St. Peter's run continue to the Final Four? The 15-seeded Peacocks take on North Carolina at 4 p.m. (Ch. 4) **C12**

# Growing pains but still a thrilling experience

By MEGAN RYAN  
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Kim Mulkey remembers playing in the very first NCAA women's basketball tournament, when she made the all-tournament team after winning the title with Louisiana Tech. The now-LSU coach remembers celebrating at center court, hugging her teammates, all clad in the same baby-blue uniforms with collars and sleeves.

That feeling of elation existed before in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women's national championship. But

**40 YEARS OF CHANGE**  
The event coming to Target Center has evolved since the first women's Final Four in 1982, but the biggest change has been in media coverage.

Photos by Associated Press, Louisiana Tech athletics

**THE FINAL FOUR**  
**Target Center**  
National semifinals, Friday  
National championship, April 3

1982 was the first time the NCAA supported both a men's and women's March Madness.

Well, actually, it was only March Madness for the men. The women weren't allowed to use that branding until this year's tournament, which culminates in Minneapolis' Final Four from Friday through next Sunday at Target Center.

A year out from 2021's COVID bubble tournaments that revealed a plethora of inequities between the men's and women's events, the NCAA has made some changes to rectify those problems, thanks to a

See **FINAL FOUR** on C10 ▶

**WILD 3, COLUMBUS 2 (OT)**  
Sunday: 5 p.m. vs. Colorado • Xcel Energy Center (BSN Extra)

## New goalie, familiar rally

The Wild replayed its clutch comeback script to win in Fleury's debut.

By SARAH McLELLAN  
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Marc-Andre Fleury has played more than 900 games in the NHL and another 150-plus in the playoffs.

He's a future Hall of Famer with three Stanley Cups and a Vezina Trophy as the league's best goaltender.

But on the first night he

starred in the Wild's crease after a splashy trade from rival Chicago, he experienced a first.

The goalie nicknamed "Flower" scooped a bouquet off the ice as he did a celebratory twirl after the Wild's thrilling 3-2 overtime comeback victory over the Blue Jackets on Saturday in front of 19,089 at Xcel Energy Center, an outcome that commemorated Fleury's debut with the Wild's fifth straight win.

"I felt like a figure skater," he said.

See **WILD** on C7 ▶



**Pirates finish year with 4A title**

Park Center's Ayoub Berthe defends Wayzata's Hayden Tibbitts during a 58-53 victory Saturday. **C4-5**

Photo by ANTHONY SOUFFLÉ • Star Tribune

**BOYS' BASKETBALL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS**

## Polars dealt with a lot

PATRICK REUSSE



This was the seventh time that Skip Dolan has brought an Annandale team to the boys' basketball state tournament. The first was in 2004, and then there were five in a row from 2013 to 2017.

The best result was being a runner-up after a decisive 60-41 loss to Esko in the 2014 Class 2A final.

The Cardinals were back there on Saturday to face Min-

neapolis North, a school with six previous state titles, ranging from four in the largest class to two in the smallest.

The easy angle was to declare Annandale as an underdog, although that wouldn't have taken into account the Cardinals' riding a 28-game winning streak, and with the last victory coming in Friday's semifinals against Caledonia and Iowa State recruit Eli King.

As it turned out, North's attempt to use pressure defense to play at a fast pace

See **REUSSE** on C5 ▶