



Writing sports recaps on deadline

The web allows scholastic media staffs to cover game previews and recaps in a much more timely fashion than its print counterpart. Quickly turning stories is a tough chore to many high school sports reporters. Sports Editor John Bohnenkamp of the Burlington (Iowa) Hawk Eye offers some tips to high school sports reporters and shows how stories can be turned quickly on a deadline. Here, Bohnenkamp breaks down a story he wrote and gives some insight to how he put it together.

Bears shatter WIU’s hopes

by John Bohnenkamp

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MACOMB, Ill. - Jimmie Strong raced to the south end zone, carrying the game-sealing interception and Western Illinois University’s football postseason hopes.

Strong’s 91-yard interception return for a touchdown clinched Missouri State’s 31-17 win over the Leathernecks on Saturday night at Hanson Field.

It was the first victory of the season for the Bears, and the fifth loss of the season for Western Illinois, which will likely deny the Leathernecks any chance of repeating last season’s run to the Football Championship Subdivision playoffs.

“Everybody’s hurting after this loss,” linebacker Kevin Palermo said. “That’s a given.”

“It’s a hard loss,” said running back Larry Patterson, who returned the opening kickoff for a touchdown and later took a short pass 38 yards for another touchdown. “That’s for sure.”

The loss snapped Western Illinois’ eight-game home winning streak.

“We had a great streak at home,” said Palermo, who tied a career high with 14 tackles. “So that hurts.”

Western Illinois had five turnovers - three fumbles and two interceptions - that were converted into 14 points by the Bears.

The last interception hurt the most.

The Leathernecks, trailing 24-17, had first-and-goal at the Missouri State 9-yard line with 2 1/2 minutes to play after a 54-yard pass from Josh Hudson to Charles Chestnut that had an additional 15 yards tacked on after a sideline interference call on the Bears.

But on the next play, Hudson tried a short pass to running back Bryce Flowers. The pass was behind Flowers, and Strong picked it off and weaved his way through a couple of tackle attempts before sprinting the rest of the way.

The Bears then completed a win by sacking Hudson and forcing a fumble at midfield with 1:26 to play.

“It’s difficult to win a game with one turnover, that’s how we always look at it,” Western Illinois coach Mark Hendrickson said. “Any time you have four or five, it’s impossible to win.”

The Leathernecks (2-5 overall, 1-3 Missouri Valley Football Conference) took control immediately against the Bears (1-7, 1-4). Patterson took the opening kickoff and raced

(The game ended 90 minutes before deadline, so there was time to get a few post-game quotes. You’re not always going to have that luxury.)

(This was a key stat to the game.)

(Once you deal with the reaction and the key play, that’s when you write about some of the other pivotal moments of the game.)

(An early key play to the game, and it set the tone.)



90 yards for a touchdown. Twelve seconds into the game, Western Illinois led 7-0.

But Missouri State would immediately answer. The Bears went on a 9-play, 74-yard drive that was capped by a 14-yard run by quarterback Trevor Wooden.

The Bears had ample opportunities to get more points in the half. Austin Witmer missed field goals on their next two possessions, sandwiched around a miss by Western Illinois kicker Pat Smith, then Missouri State took a 14-7 lead on a 20-yard pass from Wooden to Jermaine Saffold.

Western Illinois got a short field goal from Smith right before halftime to cut the lead to 14-10.

The Bears had a chance for more points on their second possession. They had first-and-goal from the 2, but a Leatherneck stand forced Missouri State to settle for a 19-yard field goal by Witmer.

The Leathernecks tied the game 2 1/2 minutes later on Patterson’s second score.

Missouri State’s final touchdown was not without some controversy. The Bears tried a halfback pass, with Stephen Johnston throwing back to Wooden. Wooden was stopped for a two-yard loss on the third-down play, but the Leathernecks were called for roughing the passer, then additional yardage was tacked on for an unsportsmanlike conduct call on the Leathernecks’ sideline.

(These could have been the key plays of the game, and are worth mentioning)

On third-and-goal from the 10, Wooden’s pass toward the back corner of the end zone landed out of bounds, but the Leathernecks were called for pass interference. Two plays later, Johnston scored from two yards out for the go-ahead touchdown.

“We gave a great effort today,” Hendrickson said. “Unfortunately, that effort couldn’t overcome the mistakes.”

“The leaders on this team, we have to keep everyone together, and just move forward,” Palermo said.

(Most of the story was written during the game. Just filled in the quotes, and wrote a lead)



John Bohnenkamp

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Sports writing tips

By: John Bohnenkamp - Burlington Hawk Eye Sports Editor

Sports writers are tested more and more on deadline these days.

Late starts because of television, combined with earlier press starts, provide more of a challenge for writers to get a story in done in time for the next day’s newspaper.

And with sports websites wanting stories as soon as possible in a get-it-done-now world on the Internet, the challenge grows. You’re writing for two audiences, one on the Web and one for the newspaper, and you have to tell a complete story.

Oh, and don’t even mention “overtime” or “extra innings,” because they can be deadline killers.

Surviving the deadline crunch can be easy, and it gets easier the more you do it.

Here are some tips:

- **Make sure you’re in a place where you can write during the game.**

Sounds simple enough, especially at the college and pro level. When covering a high school game, though, there may not be much, if any room, in a press box or at the press table. At the very least, make sure there’s somewhere to write after the game.

- **Do your homework.**

Have plenty of pre-game information and stats, because those can become useful in filling out a story. Get to know the teams your covering. Learn the trends. Is a team on a winning streak? What is the record in the series between the two teams? Is there a player or two who has had success recently, or against the other team? In some cases, you can get pre-game quotes. Something a coach or player says a day or two before the game can be used in a story, especially if you’re rushed on deadline and won’t have time to get post-game interviews.

- **Keep a play-by-play.**

Take notes throughout the game. Keep track of plays on the field or on the court, but also keep an eye on things that happen on the sidelines — coach’s reaction, players’ reaction, any activity. You’re there to tell a story, and sometimes the best stories are off the field.

- **Write your story during breaks in the action.**

This is where games on TV, or where there are media timeouts, play into your favor. By writing as soon as possible, things are fresh in your mind.

- **Edit your copy every chance you get.**

If you’re not writing during the breaks, read through whatever work you’ve done. You want to get



the cleanest copy possible out as soon as you can, because it helps the editors who will be looking at the story won't have much time, either.

- **Send your story as soon as you can after the game.**

If you've been able to work throughout the game, all you have to do at this point is write a lead, fill in the final result, and you might have time to throw a quote or two in if you can get access to the players and coaches. Take the time to edit your copy one more time.

- **Writethrus.**

After you've sent the story, go and get quotes. If you have time on deadline, add them to your story. You can also send writethrus (your original story with additional details) that just have a few paragraphs added. If you're done for the night, take some extra time to get more quotes. Those can be used for a day-after recap when you can do more analysis.



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