

Today's smile of the day



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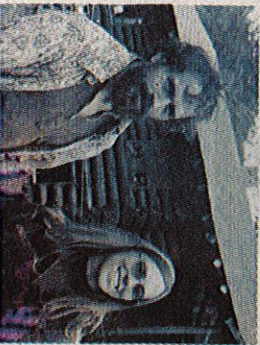
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Ashland Daily Press

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PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY TOBIN LAFRANCOIS
A diver finds an invasive zebra mussel attached to the shipwreck of the Sevona, a steel-hulled freighter that sank in 1905 off the coast of Sand Island. Zebra mussels pose threats to underwater structures, including shipwrecks, making their presence in the Apostle Islands a cause for concern for the National Park Service and tourism.

Invasive mussels threaten Apostle Islands ecology, economy

Print Exclusive

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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An invasive mussel that make huge waves in the ecosystems — and economies — of the waters they colonize has established a foothold in the Apostle Islands.

A scuba diving team spotted the first invasive zebra mussels in the Lake Superior archipelago near Sand Island in 2015. The National Park Service subsequently launched a survey on native and exotic zebra mussels, said Julie Van Stappen, chief of resource management for Apostle Is-

lands National Lakeshore.

The good news, Van Stappen said: The invasive mussels, native to the Black and Caspian seas, are not expanding their range quickly. The bad news: The mussels were found in more than one area.

That leaves experts beginning an expensive and time-consuming eradication effort, even as they try to teach boaters how to avoid aiding the invaders.

Mussels muscle in

Zebra mussels hide beneath the waves, causing damage that can't be seen but could definitely be felt by Bayfield Peninsula residents.

Apostle Island tourism depends in part on fishing and visits to shipwrecks, both activities that can be severely hampered if the invasive mussels spread their reach.

As zebra mussels filter water to feed — one adult mussel can filter a liter of water per day — it becomes clearer, enabling light to penetrate deeper into the lake's depths, said Andrew Teal, aquatic invasive species coordinator for Bayfield County.

The added light prompts plants to grow, sucking oxygen out of the water and aiding the growth of algae

SEE MUSSELS, 5A

Report: Resigned basketball coach bullied kids, violated WIAA rules

Print Exclusive

BY PETER J. WASSON
Ashland Daily Press

An Ashland High School basketball coach who resigned in January was found to have bullied his players, routinely used profanity and violated state rules by coaching kids before the season started, a district investigation found.



For m e r
Coach Robert Blaschke retained his job as a middle school gym teacher but resigned from the coach's position Jan. 28 after being suspended several games while the district investigated a rash of parent and student complaints about him that dated back to at least 2016.

The behavior that prompted the investigation into his conduct is documented in a 30-page report obtained by the Daily Press last week under state open records law.

In the report, High School Activities Director Pam Huson said she intended to recommend that Blaschke be fired as coach had he not resigned.

The investigation involved discussions with five parents and 15 students, the records said, and revealed a pattern

FROM PAGE 1A

Coach:

Olson said Blaschke's interaction with student-athletes was counter to everything he believes about the district's role in education.

"They should communicate, from my perspective, my expectation is they communicate with respect and integrity when working with impressionable youths," he said.

The report also documented reports from parents who said Blaschke was using social media to communicate privately with students and forming inappropriate bonds with some kids.

Olson said the district has its own app that educators are directed to use in messaging students. It allows par-

ents to track their children's activities, see incoming messages and respond to them as needed.

When asked why it took the district so long to take action after first receiving reports of Blaschke's behavior in 2016, Olson said he could not speak to events that took place before he was superintendent.

"Good question," he said. "I arrived here July 9 and at that time we had an activities director who shortly thereafter took a position in a different district. I didn't have knowledge of any of this. ... As the year progressed this information started to surface and we began to address those concerning behaviors."

Huston, the new activities director, immediately got involved, Olson said.

"Information came her way and she began to look into

and investigate it," he said. "As more information was known and confirmed, administration started to look into it and we arrived at the point that Coach Blaschke resigned his position."

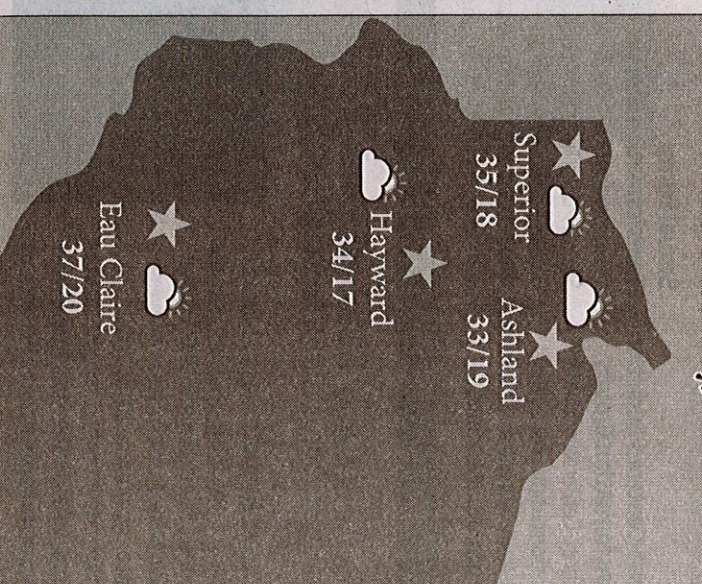
Blaschke was physical education instructor at Ashland Middle School when he was hired to take over as high school coach for the 2016-17 season. He served as an assistant football coach and G-team boys basketball coach during the 2015-16 school year.

Blaschke is a graduate of Wisconsin Dells Senior High School and the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point. He was a three-sport athlete at the Dells, played football for UWSP and served as a volunteer basketball coach at Stevens Point Area High School.

Complaints outlined

Among the comments from parents and students, according to records obtained by the Daily Press:

- "Coach Blaschke is quickly losing all control and perspective. He is becoming more and more verbally and emotionally abusive to his players. In this day and age of increased awareness of mental health issues, I find it completely unacceptable that he is treating kids the way he is," a parent wrote to Activities Director Pam Huston in January.
- One witness "does not like the way the coach treats kids. He is very confrontational. He should not degrade people in front of everyone."
- Blaschke "can't control his emotions. Coach will get fired up and get about 12 inches in a kid's face and yell and yell," a student reported.
- One parent said her son "was in great turmoil as he watched others on the team be treated in ways he felt to be not right, especially when Coach Blaschke would lose his temper. ... While meeting with (Blaschke) and expressing their concerns, Coach Blaschke said that he did not see anything wrong with his actions, things he said or how he was coaching and that he was not going to change his approach." The son then resigned from the team.
- Several students said Blaschke singled out players and punitively benched them if they ever questioned his methods. "You showed no mercy, no grace, no care for the guys who work so hard for you on the team," one student wrote. "Your words are cutting and can be perceived as verbally abusive at times."
- A referee of 18 years wrote in a report to the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association that he elected Blaschke from a game for repeatedly swearing at him, and called it "the worst officiating experience I have had in five years."

NORTHLAND WEATHER**Forecast for Saturday, March 30****Northwest Wisconsin Weather**

SATURDAY: Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 30s. North wind 10 to 15 mph with gusts to around 25 mph.

SATURDAY NIGHT: Partly cloudy. Lows 10 to 16. Northwest wind 5 to 10 mph.

SUNDAY: Sunny in the morning, then partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of light rain, possibly mixed with snow in the afternoon. Highs in the upper 30s. West wind around 10 mph.

SUNDAY NIGHT: Decreasing clouds. A 20 percent chance of light rain, freezing rain and snow. Lows 19 to 23.

MONDAY: Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower to mid

FROM PAGE 1A

Mussels:

blooms, both of which stifle native animals.

Zebra mussels also attach themselves to any stable surface, Teal said—plants, shipwrecks, docks, rocks and each other. In sufficient numbers, they can smother shipwrecks and suffocate Lake Superior's native mussels as they proliferate.

Fighting back

Teal works with citizen volunteers and lake associations concerned over zebra mussels' ever-expanding reach in northern Wisconsin waters. Even if their numbers are being held in check in Lake Superior, the invaders thrive in inland lakes and could quickly proliferate.

But boaters can do their part in stopping zebra mussels before they can set up new homes.

Teal advised boaters to inspect their watercraft and any equipment that touched water for animals and plants that might be attached. Those plants not only may be aquatic invaders in their own right, but zebra mussels could be hiding within.



Daily Press archive photo: Zebra mussels smother a native mussel. The invasive species poses a threat to underwater structures, including shipwrecks, making their presence in the Apostle Islands a cause for concern for the National Park Service and tourists.

MDNR PHOTO

Invaders can move from lake to lake within the murk of mud as well. Teal said nothing should be moved between water bodies, even bait or fish, as young zebra mussels are microscopic and therefore can't be detected even if present.

Changing lake

The spread of zebra mussels to areas of Lake Superior outside of Duluth, Minn., and Thunder Bay, Ontario, may be an indication of climate change.

The mollusks don't like

Leaving the invaders to their own devices is not an option. If zebra mussels find the Apostle Islands to their liking and proliferate, the damage they could wreak on the National Lakeshore, shipwrecks and marinas could very well throw a monkey wrench into tourism.

Anyone interested in helping curtail the spread of invasive species, such as by becoming a watercraft inspector, may contact Teal at 715-373-6167.