Return of the ‘Cats
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Northwest football sits atop MIAA with key win
NW women’s basketball ends preseason with exhibition
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Northwest men’s basketball was 2 minutes and 7 seconds away from having last season’s title run put to an end in the Central Region Tournament championship game. Coach Ben McCollum had just called the first of his final two timeouts, and the Bearcats were staring into the face of a 77-70 deficit to top-seeded and host school Northern State. “If there was a camera in that huddle with about two minutes to go — when at that point, as a coach, you’re sitting there like, ‘That’s probably all she wrote. Good season.’ You don’t actually do that, but it’s a natural human instinct,” McCollum said Nov. 2. “Our natural human instinct was to fight and to find a way to do it.” That’s exactly what they did, rallying from an 11-point deficit with three minutes to go in order to force overtime, where the ‘Cats punched their ticket to the Division II Elite Eight with a 91-86 win over the Wolves. But that was nearly eight months ago, and none of it will matter when the No. 1 Bearcats start their back-to-back title defense against No. 15 Northern at the Small College Basketball Hall of Fame Classic Oct. 6 in St. Joseph. “That event is awesome. If anybody saw the Northern State game last season, when we were down 11 or 12, it’ll be a rematch of that,” McCollum said Oct. 12 at the 2021 MIAA Basketball Media Day. “We’re excited to be able to play in (the Hall of Fame Classic).” “First game is always a good game,” said Northwest junior guard Trevor Hudgins, the reigning NABC Division II Player of the Year. Should history repeat itself, Hudgins will be exactly right. Including the meeting in March, the previous two matchups have gone into overtime, needing an extra five minutes of basketball to declare a winner in a game where neither of the nationally-ranked teams expects to lose. This weekend will provide a similar feel to the first weekend of the 2018 season, when the Bearcats used overtime to beat the Wolves 72-70 at the Hall of Fame Classic in St. Joseph. McCollum doesn’t expect anything less than another nail-biting thriller. “These kinds of games are always close; it’s always gonna be a close game,” McCollum said Tuesday afternoon. “It’s always going to come down to who wants to win more, essentially. They’re good, well-coached and we’ll have our hands full, for sure.” Both teams will look a lot different than they did last season, but more so Northern than Northwest. The Wolves were led by forward Parker Fox, who gouged the Bearcats for 34 points and 12 rebounds in the regional championship before fouling out in overtime. He transferred to the University of Minnesota after last school year. Fox was accompanied by Mason Stark, a sharpshooting guard who hit on 45% of his shots from beyond the arc while averaging 17 points per game. He transferred to play basketball at Northern Arizona University. The Bearcats will be without forward Ryan Hawkins, who transferred to the University of Creighton after a four-year tenure in Maryville that led to him becoming only the second player in Northwest history to score 2,000 points. He also became the program’s all-time leader in rebounds (948). “I mean, we’ve got Wes Drouen and Luke Waters, who have both stepped up,” Hudgins said. “The whole team is stepping up right now. Me and Diego (Bernard) are just maturing, growing more into leadership roles every day. … I don’t think anything’s gonna change, for real. (Hawkins) was a great player, but I feel like our program’s in good hands.”

UP NEXT
Northwest vs. Northern State
5:30 p.m. Nov. 6
St. Joseph, Missouri
Northwest vs. Seattle Pacific
5:30 p.m. Nov. 7
St. Joseph, Missouri

JON WALKER
Sports Editor | @ByJonWalker

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