

TIGER TIMES

January Edition

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Big Brothers Big Sisters brought to Illini Bluffs

By Addy D.
Editor-in-Chief

This year, the Illini Bluffs Interact Club introduced Big Brothers Big Sisters--a mentorship program that pairs high school "Bigs" with elementary school "Littles"--to our school. This organization focuses on building positive, supportive relationships, with its main priority lying in the safety and satisfaction of the participating parties with their matches.

Though she didn't have the idea to bring the program to IB, Mrs. Katrina Craven, the elementary school principal, did the bulk of the work on pushing it into action.

"I worked with our school social worker to identify students who would benefit from an additional positive connection with an older peer," Mrs. Craven said. "Our goal was to create matches in which both elementary students and high school mentors could have meaningful, positive interactions."

These positive connections being cultivated are possible because of Mrs. Brianna Strantz, who heard of the

program from her husband's family and "felt their mission could benefit our students here at IB."

As the advisor of IB's Interact Club, she values putting her Interactors in a variety of situations so they can learn to adapt while serving.

"I believe this experience helps Interactors grow as leaders and community members because it places them in a situation that might not always be comfortable," Mrs. Strantz said. "This is a life skill that only comes from experiences like this."

Though the program just began at IB, initial feedback from administrators, advisors and participating "Bigs" has deemed it successful, and it is already making meaningful impacts.

"I have already seen students look forward to the upcoming mentor time and talk positively about their mentors," Mrs. Craven said. "I had several of the 'Littles' ask when would they meet their 'Bigs' before the first visit, and since the first meeting, the 'Littles' have asked when the next meeting will be."

Those "meetings" take



IBHS 'Big Sisters' pose in Mrs. Strantz's room

place during either lunch or advisory, and so far, there have been two, so the "Bigs" have a good idea of what support they want to be for their "Little."

"I hope to be the person that my 'Little' can look up to, and a person that she is comfortable with," senior Mya V. said. "I want her to tell me about her day, and be the person she can share secrets with and laugh about them. I want her to feel like I am truly her big sister."

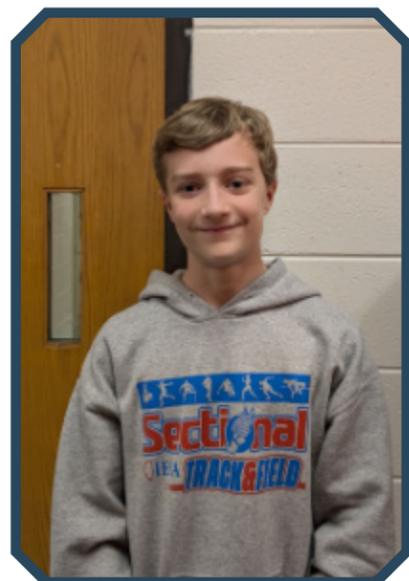
Administrators, advisors and "Bigs" alike all shared their contentment with the program thus far, and are anticipating

the positive effect this will have on the school as a whole.

"When students see older peers giving their time and energy to help younger students, it sends a powerful message about leadership, service and caring for others," Mrs. Craven said. "My hope is that many other students will observe these positive connections, and that these observations will encourage other 'Bigs' to become positive mentors, whether through this program or not."

Shining a light on the IB music department: Paul Munday

By Anna C.
News Editor



Paul Munday advances to state

The love of music has earned an Illini Bluffs eighth-grade student a spot among Illinois' top young musicians. Paul Munday, a talented bassoon player of the Middle school concert band, was selected to perform at the Illinois Music Education Association's Junior

High All-State Conference. Munday is the only student representing District 2 after finalizing a competitive audition process.

Before being chosen to play at All-State, Munday auditioned for ILMEA for the first time (a smaller conference that leads up to All-State). The audition consists of playing several scales and preparing the etudes that the Association sends out. Students from around the state are then judged and selected. After the performance at ILMEA, the same audition is used to determine who gets selected for All-State. In December, Munday found out that he had been chosen. Under the guidance of the school band director, Mr. Seymour, he started preparing a series of pieces. One of his favorites is "Bonsai Tree," a slower-paced song typically performed at the high school level. When asked what other kind of pieces the audience can expect, he said,

"Most of the music is faster, but there are some slower pieces in there."

The All-State Conference gives students a chance to play at the Peoria Civic Center with other talented student musicians. The concert will feature performances from the band, choir, orchestra, and jazz ensembles. There's a lot of work and focus that goes into performing at All-State. Munday misses school on Feb. 29 to go and practice with the Junior band. He spends the entirety of the day playing and revising the concert pieces. On the following day, he'll be met with another rehearsal, but this time to polish what the band worked on the day prior. He then performs that night at 6 p.m., with general admission priced at about \$6.40. Although the event can be considered intense, Munday said he is most excited about "playing music and just having fun."

This marks his first time

participating in a statewide music conference, an achievement that is earned only by a small number of students. Even at the junior high level, getting accepted into All-State requires students to perform advanced materials while showing technical and musical accuracy. When asked what encouraged him to audition, he expressed how his band director played a key role in the decision. "Mr. Seymour told me about it, and I thought it was cool, so I decided to do it," Munday said.

His selection places him amongst the top junior high musicians in Illinois. It's an achievement that his school and band director are proud of. The level of work required to play at All-State does not go unseen. His performance at the Peoria Civic Center offers community members an opportunity to hear the results of that effort while experiencing a statewide representation of young musical talent.

New year, new trends: what's 'hot' and what's 'not'

By **Lillian K.**
Managing Editor

Each year, certain items are the “hot item” of the year, while items from years prior slowly lose their appeal. Looking into the fresh start of 2026, there are definitely new trends and items that are rising to the surface, while others are dying off.

In 2023, the Stanley Quencher hit store shelves and was the cup that everyone wanted of the year, but towards the end of last year and the start of this year, they have most definitely lost their appeal. The



Stanley appears to have been replaced with the brands such as Owala and HydroJug.

Moving over to the fashion side, I believe that slick backs are going to slowly fade away this season, and bangs are going to become a hot-

trend, along with the haircut of a bob.

Western fashion is already a hot trend this year: Kimes jeans and the brand 7's are hard to keep on the shelves. On the more comfortable side of clothing, there is not much discussion

anymore on the brands of White Fox, Alo and Lululemon. I personally think that Lululemon will be around for decades, but not as popular as it was when it was first released. As for the other brands, we will start to see fewer of

them.

For shoes, Converse, UGGs and AirMax 270s are seen now as just a shoe: I think this is due to the fact that they became popular so fast that everyone already owns them. In 2026, we will see more Ariat



Guide to a better New Year

By **Eric P.**
Sports Editor

The phrase, “New year, new me,” is often repeated this time of year. And while New Year’s resolutions are always made with good intentions, they are rarely followed through on. Here are some common bad habits and how to fix them while staying committed long term.

Sleep is something that we will always have to do. It’s one of the most important things for a high school student, especially something that often gets overlooked. A study from the CDC shows that 70% of high school students don’t meet the requirement for the recommended amount of sleep. That is drastic. It is proven that 7/10 people don’t receive enough sleep at night. Sleep can improve your physical and mental health, such as improvements in cognitive thinking, neural repair, cellular repair, metabolism and weight. Sleep affects nearly every part of our body; it is critical to improve on this, as it’s proven that sleep can help us academically, mentally and physically. Some ways we can help fix our sleep are to stay disciplined about when you should be in your beds. Say if you wake up at 7 a.m., you should be in your bed at 10:30 p.m., putting away your phone at 10:45, and avoiding those midnight snack temptations.

Speaking of snacking, another thing that can greatly improve the body/mental well-being is eating. Nutrition is an area that requires a better awareness that will help us on our path to adulthood. Teens need to make sure to intake all the required nutrients being fiber, protein, carbohydrates and vitamins. It’s uncommon for someone to know what they eat throughout the day. Instead, students just find whatever is convenient. Say you come home from a long day of school, you need something quick to get you by, so you grab the half-finished bag of family-sized Doritos. In that small span, you consumed about 600 calories, 32g of fat, 72 carbs, 8g of protein and about 840mg of sodium. You already wiped out a ¼ of the calorie intake you need for the day. With such an imbalance of nutrients, the snack is just not worth it. Although teenagers need more food than adults, food quality is essential. One simple way to eliminate unhealthy snacking is meal-planning. Making a nice, easy home-cooked meal you can bring to school or to work. By doing this, you are taking the steps of a responsible adult while promoting better health for yourself.

Self-development is something that is going to have to be learned as you grow older. New Year’s resolutions is a great way to start better self-development. I hope this article can help you understand the importance of it and ways to improve to better yourself.

How the tigers keep their stride: IBHS' resolutions

By **Addy D.**
Editor-in-Chief

With the start of every new year comes the long-anticipated question: “What is going to be my New Year’s resolution?” It is a daunting inquiry, one that sets goals for yourself for the year ahead. So, if you’re struggling to think of a worthy objective for 2026, look no further—your fellow peers have shared theirs here.

Junior Harper G.

“New Year’s resolutions are an interesting thing that many people partake in; however, I am not one of them. While yes, they can be fun, I have never had something that I wanted to do for one. It’s not that I don’t believe in them; I just don’t have a reason to do one at this point. Who knows, maybe I’ll do one one day.”

Junior Whitnee L.

“After last year, I realized I have spent way too much money on random things. I was constantly wanting to buy expensive things without the money. This year, I am going to work on saving money so I can do the things I want to do more. Such as traveling. I love to travel, but I always seem to not have money to do so.”

Senior Carson B.

“I want my relationship with God to be closer. Especially because a lot in life is going to change with graduating, going to college and becoming a legal adult. I know times are going to be more complicated and difficult, and I know God will be there for me always, but I also need to start carrying my weight, too.”

Junior Ronee R.

“I want to try and read more. I have always liked the idea of reading, but I haven’t found a book I really liked to read. After I watched “The Housemaid” movie, I saw they had a book, and I decided to read it, and it has really helped me start my year with reading.”

Junior Brody M.

“My New Year’s resolution is to try to better maintain all my grades, but especially math. My GPA is what motivated me to do this because it had been better the past two years, and now this year it has went down, and I would like to bring it back up.”

Junior Chloe H.

“To begin with, my New Year’s resolution was to get my life together and start getting ready for being an adult. I am determined to get out of a hole. I had realized that I’m gonna be an adult and can’t be miserable my whole life. I’m determined to change and make my sister proud.”

Prom dress store review: Which store did it best?

By Mallory S.
Copy Editor

Prom is essentially the Super Bowl of stress, encompassing everything from hair and makeup to photos and dates, not to mention the dress. While online shopping might seem tempting, nothing beats walking into a dress store and being able to actually see how a dress feels and looks on you. But not all prom dress stores are the same. Some are the best experiences ever, as well as memorable, while others are on the pricier end. A shopper needs to make sure that it is a dress that they love.

I visited several small prom dress stores in the area and rated them based on price, size inclusivity, customer service and the overall vibe. Prom dress shopping should feel exciting and be memorable, not a punishment.

3.5/5 LA Formals Main Store & Clearance Store

With a wide selection of sizes, LA Formals has a great selection located in Springfield, IL, in White Oaks Mall. Two stores down from the main store is their clearance store. Upon entering the main store, the owner gave me a tour of the prom side and introduced me to the staff. I began to look through the racks, and each time I picked up a dress, someone was there to grab it from me and put it into a fitting room. When trying on the dresses, the staff helped me get into them. The same goes for their clearance store. The main store obviously had higher prices than the clearance, but I feel they were pretty average for the normal prom dress price market. The only difference between the two stores is the variety and seating for guests. There was less of both in the understandable clearance store. Overall, I would recommend going here if you are looking to snag a deal on a designer dress.



4.5/5 Simply Elegant

If prom dress shopping had a VIP section, Simply Elegant in Lincoln, IL, would be it. They offer a prom line with a wide variety of dresses ranging in size from 00 to 32. The store alone is absolutely stunning, and I was surprised to see a whole other room of dresses after seeing the first. Dresses ranged in style from tight to flowy to mermaid styles, especially in different price points, so you can definitely snag a deal. I pulled dresses ranging from \$100 to \$1,000. This store is definitely the place to find a statement dress that only you have, and the customer service was amazing. I was surprised to have the owner take me as her walk-in. She helped me get zipped into each dress and led me to find more that I liked even better. My overall experience felt very personalized and special.



4.5/5 Cloud Nine Prom

At Cloud Nine Prom, located in Peoria, IL, the sizing ranges from 000 to 26. Upon entering, I was immediately greeted by staff and asked to scan a QR code to complete a walk-in appointment form. I was then assigned to a staff member who was my "personal stylist," and I was able to start with three dresses that my stylist took to my fitting room. She then stayed with me the entire time and helped with all the zipping and corsets. She also asked me questions to help find something I liked more than the one I already had on. One downfall is that their prices are a bit higher than those of other stores, although their customer service is amazing. I would definitely recommend them to anyone social and outgoing. However, this whole experience could be overwhelming for someone more introverted.



3.5/5 Ducky's Formal Wear

Prom line recently changed to Hello Mode, located in Galesburg, IL, and has dresses ranging in size from 0 to 24. Walking in, I was greeted and told how everything is organized, and I was handed four tags to put on the dresses I would like to try on. The dress racks were slightly crowded to walk around and look through, making it a little overstimulating. When placing a tag on a dress, a staff member would come grab it and put it in your fitting room. The fitting room space was very cute, and they also had a clothing boutique area connected. The staff helped with zippers and corsets on the dresses and asked your thoughts on dresses, but they weren't as attentive as in other stores. I believe prices were pretty average there, but I would say most dresses would need another good steam. All things considered, this store is a good option to buy your prom attire.



4/5 Sabrina's

Another prom store located in Galesburg, IL, is Sabrina's, with sizes ranging from 000 to 32. This store was slightly run down, but the amazing staff members made up for it. My sales associate guided me to the dresses and was attentive in grabbing them for me, also asking what I was looking for and if I had a vision, even asking about my past dresses. Once I was in the fitting room, she helped me zip each dress and also helped take photos of me to send to my mom while in the dress. After finding a dress I would see myself wearing, she mentioned that I could put it on hold for any amount down. I mentioned visiting other stores, and she kindly encouraged me to give her a call if I ended up wanting to do a hold. I would totally recommend Sabrina's for great customer service and average prices for the prom market.



1/5 Gowns Prom

Gowns has a prom line located in Springfield, IL, with sizes ranging from 00 to 24. Upon entering, it was crowded. A staff member quickly told me where to look for dresses and said I would have to wait for a fitting room, which were full because they were having a photoshoot with their "reps." I started with three dresses and went into a fitting room when it became available. For my first and second dresses, nobody helped me, so my guest zipped me into it. The owner came over soon and asked me what my thoughts were. I shared that it wasn't my favorite and she recommended other stores. I put another dress on and multiple things were broken on it. Again, nobody talked to me or helped. I asked a staff member to clip the dress so I could see what it would look like, and she clipped my skin. After removing the clip and taking a pic, we left with no goodbye from them. I'm hoping that this customer service was only because of the crowd and not always the same.



3.5/5 M2

M2 located in Urbana, IL, has prom dresses in sizes ranging from 000 to 28. My experience here was quite average. Their building was a modern, trendy open concept, and I was immediately greeted by the staff. I was told where my size could be located, and the business also had an option of a \$300 rack. There were about 100 different styles in each size that I'm sure most girls would love to try. When pulling a dress out, a staff member would take it to the fitting room. When trying on the dress, they would help me zip it. They offered for me to look at the rack and try on more, but I didn't see any I loved in my size. M2 had good customer service and a good variety of dresses in a good space, so it is worth a try when looking for your dream dress.





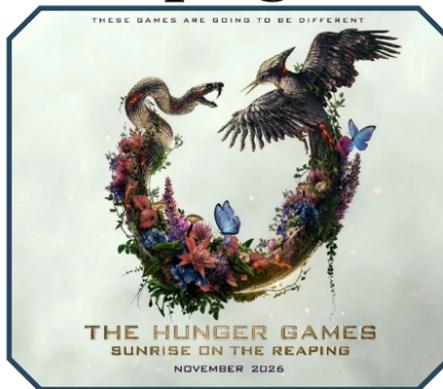
The most anticipated movies

By **Carson B.**
Voice Reporter

While a New Year brings us new beginnings, it also brings new movies! Every year, the movie clock resets, and we have a whole set of new movies to look forward to. The real question is, though, what movie will be the best of 2026? While many movies are being released this year, I will be going over the ones that could be the biggest box office hits of 2026. So, you might as well grab your popcorn because it's time for previews.

'Hunger games: Sunrise on the Reaping'

"The Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping" is going to be a huge hit for all the book lovers out there. This movie is a prequel to the main trilogy and a sequel to another prequel, "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes." Plus, this movie has a cast full of stars like McKenna Grace, Maya Hawke, Elle Fanning and returning cast members Jennifer Lawrence and Josh Hutcherson. With such a packed cast and good media coverage, this movie is expected to make at least \$170 million. Let's just hope the book lovers pull through on Nov. 20 for the box offices.



'Avengers Doomsday'



"Avengers: Doomsday" has been the talk of the town since its announcement last March, with a wide release coming on Dec. 18 of this year. Fans went crazy for Robert Downey Jr's return as Dr. Doom, and the absolutely nail-biting cast reveal livestream. The idea for the live stream was that the camera would pan to chairs with each cast member's name on it while music for the specific character played in the background. This five-and-a-half-hour livestream was very nerve-wracking for the 275 million fans watching. However, some say it was worth it for the reveal of other returning actors like Patrick Stewart as Professor X, Ian McKellen as Magneto, Rebecca Romijn as Mystique, James Marsden as Cyclops and my personal favorite, Alan Cumming as Kurt Wagner. This star-filled cast has given Marvel fans hope for the movie, and the box offices agree, estimating it will be the highest-grossing film of the year.

'Michael'

"Michael" is a biopic about the "King of Pop" Michael Jackson, coming out on April 24. Obviously, we all know the impact left on MJ on parents and peers, especially at school dances, but this movie has had a bit of drama to help boost its popularity. A Michael Jackson impersonator with 12.3 million followers on TikTok, known as Fabio Jackson, created a reaction video to the trailer, and he didn't seem to like it. Now this wouldn't be a big deal if it weren't for his claiming that he is the "original" Michael and his comments on Michael not "being black." This controversy, however, has boosted the movie's popularity more, and the box office estimates that the film will make at least \$1 billion.



'Moana' (Live Action)



"Moana" is coming back to the theaters in live-action form! Some might say we're too old for the musical island adventure, but "Moana" was a big part of our childhoods, and we deserve a nostalgia-filled trip to our local movie theaters. This has been Disney's goal lately with their countless live-action films, both good and not so good, cough, cough, Snow White, which has gotten the movie some criticism. However, with the original movie being such a big success, making over \$6 million worldwide, The Rock reprising his role as Maui, and the score being produced by Lin-Manuel Miranda, people are still holding out hope for this remake. But one thing is for sure: expect the theaters to be filled with little kids and maybe a few sentimental teens, on July 10.

'Housemaid': the ultimate review

By **Anabelle R.**
Voice Reporter

"The Housemaid" is a movie that was released on Dec. 19, 2025. This movie is a recap of the book "The Housemaid" by Freida McFadden. McFadden has written three books, all a part of the "Housemaid" series. This housemaid book was one of Freida McFadden's best-selling books, so of course, the movie was just as popular. The movie is about a young adult whose name is Millie. She is becoming a live-in maid for a rich couple who have many secrets. The wife, Nina, was said to be crazy, but little did everyone know it was Andrew's fault (the husband). By the time Millie found out, she was already tangled up in the mess. Millie and Nina had to find a way out.

Many movie adaptations of books usually aren't the same as the source material. Unlike the other movies, "The Housemaid" followed the storyline well. There were, however, small changes, like the attic scene or how Nina escaped. But the attic scene change was appropriate for the movie, considering that the movie was listed as a thriller and a mystery. The main difference between the movie and the book was that the book was more psychological. In the book, Andrew died of dehydration and starvation as a result of his actions of locking Nina or Millie in the attic. In the movie, he had to pull out his teeth and later got thrown down the stairs because he started a fight. I think the changes fit into the movie to keep the watcher entertained, although I do not think the change of how Nina escaped was good.

In the book, Enzo was a more prominent character. He was an important part in helping Nina escape and later helping rescue Millie. Enzo has a tragic past with his sister that helped him form a bond with Millie. Early on in the book, he warns Millie of the danger in the house. He does that in the movie, but that's about all his role was. The movie showed that Nina was responsible for how she got out. In the book, Enzo was an important part in getting Cece (Nina's daughter) and Nina passports and helping them get money to escape.

Although I loved the changes in the movie compared to the book, I feel the movie needed more of Enzo. Producers just announced that the sequel, "The Housemaid's Secret," had been approved for 2026. With the first movie not having a lot of Enzo, I'm curious to see how the second movie will be produced, considering he's a love interest in the second book.



Stranger Things

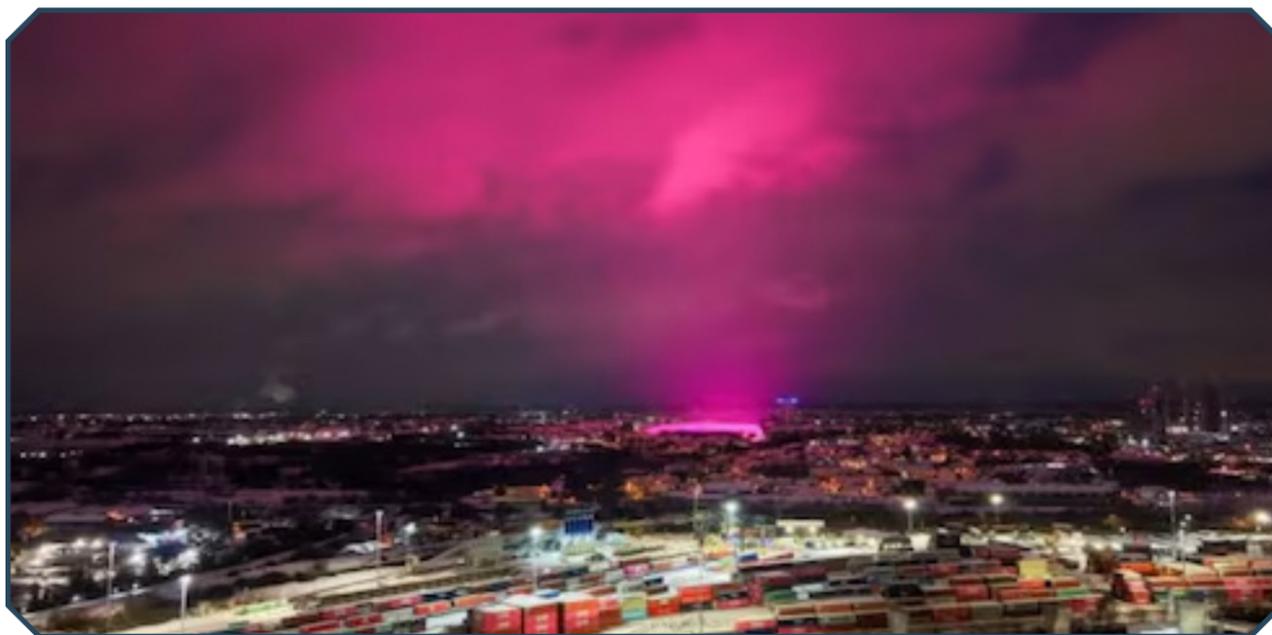
By Jocelyn J.
Voice Editor

After 10 long years, “Stranger Things” has finally come to an end. The ending was more or less underwhelming, the storylines all felt off and unresolved, and the Duffer Brothers made an ending that was so bad that it sent their fans into a mass psychosis. These are just some of the cliffnotes.

It took five long seasons to destroy Vecna; you would think the final battle would last most of the episode. Instead, it took 6 minutes and 34 seconds. The rest of the episode was very slow and tried to end the story in a “happier” way. Their endings felt half-baked and like they just threw all the storylines together in one night. Because of this ending, fans went into a mass psychosis and started a conspiracy called “Conformity Gate.”

Many little clues were pointing to an alternate ending, which made fans have hope for the end of “Stranger Things”. They came up with a theory called “Conformity Gate”. Some of the clues consisted of everyone at graduation having their hands positioned like Henry Creel. We’ve seen this before when Billy, in season three, was possessed by the Mind Flayer. People have also speculated that things are being seen through Vecna’s memory. Steve is depicted as a baseball coach when the only sport we ever saw him play was basketball, but through Vecna’s memory, he always saw Steve with a baseball bat. Multiple characters are breaking the fourth wall and staring right at us. Also, in a flashback, the dial was grey, but when the actual scene happened, it was red. With Lucas also looking at us, saying he doesn’t believe in coincidences anymore, this gave fans even more hope.

In the end, though, there was no new episode. Fans were extremely disappointed. After the documentary was released, there were scenes where you can see the Duffer Brothers using ChatGPT to help write the ending. Adding onto this, they have been saying for months how they’ve had the ending planned since the beginning, just for them to say when they started recording season five, they didn’t even know what the ending would be. Let’s just say that fans lost a lot of hope in the Duffer Brothers after ruining the most anticipated Netflix ending.



What lies within the pink skies?

By Ella D.
Managing Editor

The day was Dec. 28, 2025, and to no one’s surprise, another frigid snowstorm was tearing through Iowa. However, what did surprise many was the sky, which had turned a glowing bright pink, leaving those witnessing it mesmerized and confused as to what was going on and if it had happened before.

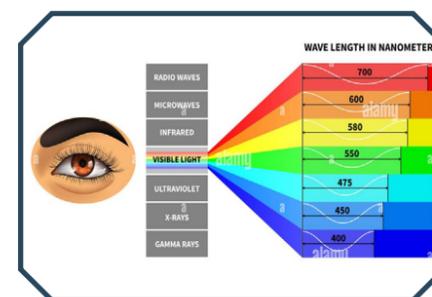
The skies glowing brightly with pink are actually more common than you may think. After the Iowa incident, another notable situation happened in Birmingham City, which is located in the England. Although this is another example of the skies glowing with unusually bright colors, which happened in early January of this year. So, what caused these breathtaking and strange sights?

Shockingly, the answer to why it happened is underwhelming compared to the sight. The answer is simple: The snow caused the light to reflect off the water droplets, and as a result, the pink came out. Let’s break it down. Light waves are different lengths: blue wavelengths are shorter, while colors like red, orange and pink have longer wavelengths. The blue wavelengths are easily scattered by snowflakes and water droplets, leading to colors like pink getting through. This is most commonly seen during sunsets and sunrises, where sunlight has to travel through more of the atmosphere, giving the sun more opportunities to break through those shorter wavelengths, leading to the breathtaking view.

This, combined with low-hanging dense clouds, was the source of the light in Iowa. These

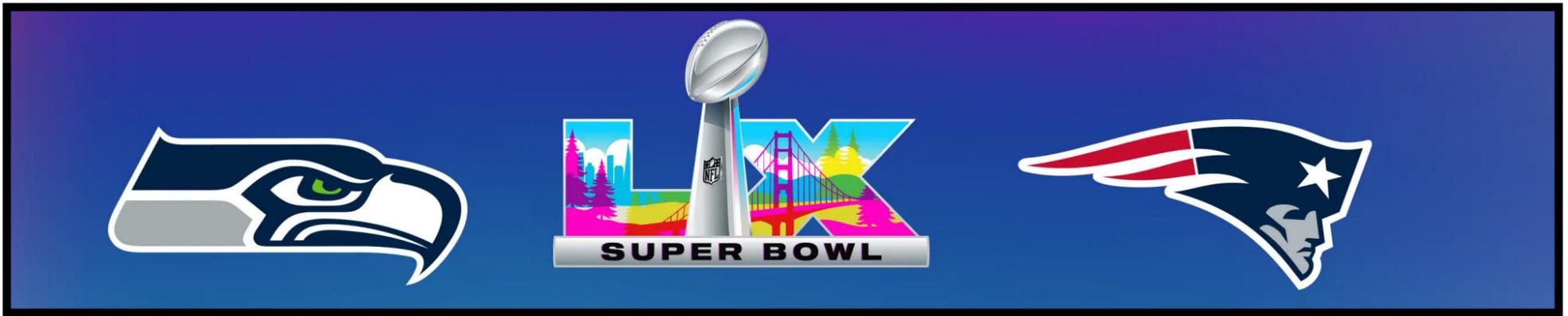
lower-hanging clouds allowed the light to sweep under the clouds, causing the brightness of the pink hue to significantly increase. Additionally, the water droplets in the snow acted as a mirror reflecting it back, and added even more color to the glowing skies.

This, however, was not the exact case in Birmingham. What had happened there has the same concept but a different source of light: the St. Andrews stadium. At the stadium, pink LED lights were used to increase plant growth, and then when the snow came in and the clouds were low, the light was shown.



Check out the online wrestling galleries at ibhstigertimes.com





Super Bowl LX predictions: Which team will win?

The Seattle Seahawks

By **Kaden H.**
Sports Reporter

The Super Bowl is a heated time in the football season, with the best teams in the NFL fighting for the Lombardi Trophy. Fans fight and make predictions about who is going to win, and I think the Seattle Seahawks are going to win the Super Bowl. They went 14-3 during the regular season, losing one away game and two home games. Led by Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Sam Darnold. Sam Darnold sat on the bench last season, but this season being a top 10 QB in the league with 4,000 passing yards, 25 passing touchdowns, and 14 interceptions. Jaxon Smith-Njigba, in his second season in the NFL, has become one of the top three wide receivers in the league and is number one in receiving yards. During the regular season, he was unguardable.

The Seattle Seahawks defense is also the number one scoring defense in the NFL and number one in the fewest yards allowed per game, arguably the best defense in the league. Mike Macdonald transformed the unit into an elite force, similar to his success in Baltimore, along with a strong defensive line. His defense averaged 28.3 points per game and limited other teams to an average of 17.2 points per game. The strong defensive line is a notable part of that success.

If you put that elite offense combined with the solid defense, they are sure to win the Super Bowl.



The New England Patriots

By **Eric P.**
Sports Editor

The Super Bowl is a game that is always a huge debate about who's going to win. Super Bowl 60 is between two teams: the Seattle Seahawks and the New England Patriots. However, I believe that the new Patriots dynasty starts now. The Patriots were one of the most annoying teams of the twentieth century, dominating Professional Football for years. Now, with new head coach Mike Vrabel, the Patriots look like they are ready to take over the league again, with their final season record being 14-3.

The Patriots' defense has been dominant in this postseason, forcing five turnovers against the Houston Texans, with an elite backfield. The long ball is almost impossible to get past, having four interceptions against the Texans.

However, the Patriots star studded sophomore has been on a tear this year. "Drake Maye" has been a fan favorite the whole year. Being an MVP candidate race between him and Matthew Stafford for MVP. Maye has been a force this year, protected by an O-Line that was ranked 11th best this season. The Patriots look to get back to the top of the NFL.

The Patriots are not new to winning. Being tied with the most Super Bowl wins in NFL history with six ties with the Pittsburgh Steelers, this is the year the Patriots will break that record and become the most formidable team in NFL history.



Illinois State University: A college football "Cinderella Story"

By **Christian M.**
Sports Reporter

The Illinois State Redbirds football team had a recent "Cinderella Story" run in the 2025 FCS Playoffs, becoming the first team in ISU history to win four road playoff games, in order to reach the national championship. Prior to this, they had made it to the championship only one other time before in 2014. This year, the FCS playoffs expanded from 16 to 24 teams, allowing the unseeded ISU to make the playoffs.

Although their year started out with a loss, the Redbirds ended the regular season play with a 12-5 overall record, along with a 5-3 record in the Missouri Valley Conference, placing third. The school was unseeded going into the first round of the FCS playoffs and had to take on the number one-seeded North Dakota State. ISU took the victory over the top seed and reigning champions, doing so with a last-second point conversion. This victory would be considered

nothing short of a miracle in Fargo.

Now having a boost of confidence, ISU went into their quarter-final game against UC Davis, which they lost to previously in the season. This time would be different though. After a grueling battle, the Redbirds had upset the tough team of UC Davis and advanced to the semifinals, where they then had a dominant win over Villanova that secured their spot in the national championship against Montana State, which

would prove to be a thriller of a game.

Now in overtime, which the Redbirds forced, Montana State would be the first with a touchdown and an extra point, throwing the first punch. Still not ready to admit defeat in the final seconds, ISU scored a touchdown, now leaving it all up to the kicker to put the extra point between the two opponents. Sadly, it was blocked by Montana State, who brought home the victory. Despite a devastating loss against Montana State, ISU was

still welcomed home by its fans, who supported them all the way through one of their greatest runs in a championship to date.



January Word Search

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