

On Wisconsin: Badgers Derail ‘Cats



SAM RICHE/TNS

Wisconsin's Frank Kaminsky (44) celebrates late the second half of a 71-64 win against previously-unbeaten Kentucky in the NCAA Tournament national semifinal at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Saturday. The Badgers face Duke in the championship tonight (Monday).

Duke Awaits Badgers In Final

BY JIM O'CONNELL
AP Basketball Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The scene will bring smiles to many for a long time. Players chest-bumping and hugging. Fans on the fringe of delirium. A celebration perfect for highlight reels and posters.

It has to end in a hurry, though. There's another game to be played.

Wisconsin has joined the list of teams which won a game of historical proportions only to be faced with a game that will decide how great the magnitude of the event will be.

The Badgers beat Kentucky 71-64 on Saturday night, ending the Wildcats' pursuit of an

unbeaten season and avenging a bitter loss in last year's national semifinals.

Now, they face Duke on Monday night for Wisconsin's first national championship in 74 years. If the Badgers can't find a way to beat the Blue Devils — a team they lost to by 10 points at home in December — how will the upset of the top-ranked Wildcats be remembered?

"We know we've got 40 more (minutes), as I've said a thousand times," Wisconsin coach Bo Ryan said Sunday. "But we know we've got some work to do. I think last night's game simply says, 'OK, it puts you in position now to go after the championship.'"

NCAA | PAGE 8



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Mount Marty pitcher A.J. Griffith sends the ball home during the opening game of the Lancers' Great Plains Athletic Conference baseball doubleheader with Dordt on Saturday at Bob Tereshinski Stadium at Riverside Field.

Lancers Take Two From Dordt

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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The Mount Marty College baseball team ended a string of five consecutive doubleheader splits with a doubleheader sweep of Dordt on Saturday at Bob Tereshinski Stadium at Riverside Field.

MMC took the opener 8-4 and the nightcap 3-1. The wins pushed MMC to 22-13 overall, 5-3 in the Great Plains Athletic Conference. Dordt is now 8-16, 2-6 in GPAC play.

"We did a lot of nice things today," said MMC head coach Andy Bernatow. "It was a collective team effort."

The Lancers' most recent split, at Northwestern on Thursday, fed into Saturday's motivation, said game two winner Brandon Nickolite.

"Thursday we weren't satisfied with a split at Northwestern," he said. "That fed into today, and we were ready to go."

In the opener, Hunter Hallock had a double, two singles and three RBI to lead the MMC offense. Bryton Carlson and Derek Blumenstock each doubled and singled, with Blumenstock driving in two runs. Cody Ulmer also had two hits, and Derrik Nelson had a hit and a RBI in the win.

Dordt's Jake Thayer, who entered the day as the GPAC's leading hitter, had three hits and two RBI to lead the Defenders. Nate Forseth, who came in ranking second in the league in hitting, had two hits.

Also for Dordt, Aaron Parks doubled and singled. Teddy Steffel had two hits and two RBI for the Defenders.

A.J. Griffith pitched into seventh, striking out two, for the win. Josh Teichroew got the final two outs. Schyler Kane, who pitched the first three innings for Dordt, took the loss, with Alex Terpstra allowing two runs in three innings of relief.

Dordt used four first-inning hits to take an early 2-0 lead, but MMC answered in the bottom of the frame. Free passes to Zac Hollenback (hit by pitch) and Carlson (walk) got the Lancers going. Blumenstock and Ulmer followed with run-scoring singles to tie the game, then Hallock laced a shot down the right field line to give the Lancers a 4-2 lead.

After Dordt cut into the Lancer margin in the top of the third, MMC answered again, scoring on Hallock's two-out single and an error to stretch the MMC margin to 6-3.

The Lancers put the game out of reach in the sixth with a Nelson RBI single and a Blumenstock run-scoring double. Dordt did get a run back in the seventh on a run-scoring groundout, but could not complete the rally.

In the nightcap, Hollenback and Nelson each had two hits, and Blumenstock homered to lead the wav. Ryan Buck and Ulmer also had hits.

LANCERS | PAGE 8

Track & Field | Dakota Duels

USD Depth Shines Through

BY JEREMY HOECK
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SIOUX FALLS – All three women's races between the 800-meter and 5,000-meter were dominated by the red and white of the University of South Dakota.

While that depth was on full display Saturday at the Dakota Duels track meet in Sioux Falls, another message had already been sent: The Coyotes are on the national map.

A week after seeing eight athletes crack the top-25, the USD men's and women's teams came into the weekend with a combined 13 ranked in the top-50 nationally – three in the top-10.

"I think it's a starting point," women's head coach Lucky Huber said during a break at Howard Wood Field. "We're obviously not satisfied with that."

In part because there's still a month left in the outdoor season, he added.

"We know two or three weeks into the track season doesn't mean they're ready to hand out All-American awards," Huber said. "We do feel like that's the level we want to be at, getting kids to that level."

A year ago, USD sent 15 athletes to the NCAA West Preliminaries (the qualifier for the national meet), and the goal for this year is understandably to send more, according to Eichkorn.

"Last year it was really only me and Jeff Mettler (in the steeplechase), but hopefully this year we can have more of the distance crew going," said Eichkorn, a junior, who won the 1,500-meter run Saturday.

"Trips like that are so much fun. We've developed kind of a family atmosphere with the men's and women's teams."

The men lead the way with seven top-50 athletes in the national rankings, including Cody Snyder (fifth, discus), Kevin Sarekhani (24th, pole vault), Peter Chapman (26th, pole vault), Mach Dojiok (26th, 800), Lukas Bernard (27th, 400 hurdles), Brant Haase (40th, 5,000) and Josh Petersen (43rd, decathlon).

On the women's side are Megan Glisar (4th, high



A Day At The Duels

ABOVE: South Dakota's Megan Glisar nearly clears the bar in the women's high jump at Saturday's Dakota Duels track meet at Howard Wood Field in Sioux Falls. Glisar was first in the event at 5 feet, 11 1/2 inches.

LEFT: South Dakota State's J.J. Hejna, a Yankton High School graduate, competes Saturday in the men's long jump.

BELOW: South Dakota State's Jenna Grossenborg, a Yankton native, looks up at the scoreboard during the women's 5,000-meter run.

JEREMY HOECK/P&D



Omaha's Blais Back In Frozen Four Decade After North Dakota Run

BY ERIC OLSON
AP Sports Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Back in the NCAA Frozen Four with a different school, Dean Blais has recaptured the sense of contentment he couldn't find outside college hockey.

Blais had won two national championships and was coming off his fifth 30-win season in 10 years when he gave in to ambition and left North Dakota for the NHL in the summer of 2004. Three years in the Columbus Blue Jackets' organization brought Blais to the realization he missed not only his family in the upper Midwest but also the game at the college level.

"Life's too short. I realized it wasn't for me," he said.

Blais this week will be in his fourth Frozen Four as a head coach, this time with a Nebraska-Omaha team making its first appearance in the national semifinals.

The Mavericks (20-12-6) play Providence (24-13-2) in Boston on Thursday. Boston University (27-7-5) meets North Dakota (29-9-3), now coached by Blais successor Dave Hakstol, in the other semifinal. The title game is Saturday.

The 64-year-old Blais is in his

sixth season leading a program that has never won even a conference championship in its 18-year history. Each of its three NCAA tournament bids, two under Blais, has been as an at-large selection.

This season might go down as Blais' best work. The Mavericks went into this season without 2014 National Collegiate Hockey Conference player of the year Josh Archibald, who turned professional, and two underclass defensemen who left.

Blais has seven NHL draft picks on his roster but the lineup regularly includes 14 freshmen and sophomores. When it was suggested the deep tournament run happened a year early, Blais said, "Or two."

"These guys, they all get along. They like each other. They work hard together. They have great attitudes. Good in the classroom," Blais said. "So it's a whole lot of fun coaching them every day."

Omaha athletic director Trev Alberts said the hiring of Blais in 2009 raised the profile of the hockey program and happened at a pivotal point. Except for hockey, all of the school's sports competed in Division II, and at the time the department was bleeding money and facing the

prospect of shutting down.

Two years later, Alberts took a calculated risk by dropping football and wrestling and elevating all sports to Division I. That put more pressure than ever on hockey, the flagship sport, to generate revenue. Blais has not disappointed, with his team ranking among the national leaders in attendance, as it did under Kemp.

"UNO is pretty honored he's our coach," Alberts said, "and grateful for it."

Blais' .679 winning percentage at North Dakota was best among active Division I coaches, and he went to the NCAA tournament in seven of his 10 seasons in Grand Forks. There were national championships in 1997 and 2000, and his team was runner-up in 2001.

When Alberts called in 2009, Blais was the highest-paid junior coach in the country with the Fargo (North Dakota) Force.

"I wasn't just going to apply for jobs and take any college job," Blais said. "Omaha intrigued me because it was kind of a new program, had the fan base and had some success in the past."

Alberts initially offered Blais \$180,000 a year. Blais, who said he was making about the same salary in Fargo, told Alberts no. Undeterred, Alberts called back

a few days later and asked Blais what it would take.

The answer: \$250,000 a year and a new arena.

Alberts came up with the money to pay Blais with the help of donors. Next was muddling through the politics and fundraising that led to the 2013 announcement of a new 7,500-seat arena, which will open in October. The Mavericks have been playing at the oversized CenturyLink Center as co-tenants with the Creighton basketball team.

If the arena project had fallen through, Blais said, he probably wouldn't have signed a contract extension last June. Blais was locked up through 2017-18 with a deal worth \$1.3 million, not including bonuses.

Blais said he would like to coach another three or four seasons "as long as I have good kids like I have this year."

Senior goalie Ryan Massa, who stopped 73 of 74 shots in regional wins over Harvard and RIT, will be the biggest loss from this year's team. All the top scorers are expected to return.

"It has nothing to do with winning and losing," Blais said. "It has everything to do with the players I'm coaching. They're a great bunch."

UND | PAGE 8