

MMC Cross Country Ready To Build On 2011 Finish

BY JILANNE DOOM
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Coming off one of the best seasons in school history, the Mount Marty men's and women's cross country squads will have a tough road ahead to reach the successes of last year. But head coach Randy Fischer believes he has just the returning and incoming personnel to do that.

"We were really happy with both sides and how the season ended," Fischer said of the 2011 season. "We have some of the returners back from each of those squads so we're hoping to move up a bit from our finish on the guys' side. We're a little bit younger this year but hopefully we can do similar to last year, maybe even a little better."

Last fall, the Lancer men placed sixth out of eleven teams at the Great Plains Athletics Conference Championship meet, the highest team placing in school history, and five members of that team rank on Mount Marty's all-time Top 10 List. Among the women, who placed eighth at the conference meet, is junior Kaylee Fly, the Lancers lone qualifier for the NAIA National Cross Country Meet.

Despite the loss of a couple key seniors, the men's side still looks to be strong but young. Composed of eight men, the roster boasts five returners, all juniors, and three incoming freshmen. According to Fischer, the front of the pack for the men's squad could look different every week because of two talented returners, Jordan Pater and Sam Lopez.

"I can see them going back and forth," Fischer said. "They're pretty equal. Both are very good competitors."

Pater is the school record holder in the 5,000 meter run and also competes in the 10,000 meters while Lopez is an All-American in the indoor 800 meter run.



MT. MARTY LANCERS: Sam Lopez

"They both have a little different talents, but they both are very competitive," Fischer said. "They will really be good leaders for us and I think they will help carry the team to what we want to do for success. They both bring a lot to the table with how hard they work and the good attitudes they have."

Two incomers who will be looked upon to make big contributions this year are Gage Blashke of Sioux Falls and Ryan Oye of Luverne, Minn. Blashke placed 28th at the State AA Cross Country Championships and Oye was also a qualifier for the Minnesota state meet.

For the women, Fly will be looked upon to take a leadership role along with fellow upperclassmen Brittney Mikkelson, Au-

Coyotes Excited To Have Transition Period Behind Them

BY CHRIS RILEY
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The wait is finally over. After four years of transition, the University of South Dakota cross country team is now a full fledged member of NCAA Division I athletics.

For the first time since 2007, their last season in the NCC and NCAA Division II, the Coyotes are eligible for regional and national competition. That is exciting news for a team loaded with both local and regional talent.

"We are excited about the school records we have been setting and the opportunities that lie ahead for us as we begin our first season of complete NCAA eligibility," fifth-year head coach Dan Fitzsimmons said.

One of those opportunities that is "looming large" according to Fitzsimmons would be to lay claim as the first Coyote harrier to qualify for the NCAA Division I Cross Country Championships.

If any athlete on this squad can accomplish that feat, it has a good chance of being USD junior Jeff Mettler. Mettler, a Eureka-native, paced the Coyote men last season, garnering All-Summit League honors by virtue of his fifth-place finish in the conference championships. The 2010 Great West Conference freshman of the year (the coyotes spent their first three seasons of transition as members of the GWC) was the top USD runner at all five meets last year.

When asked what he expects from Mettler this season, Fitzsimmons pointed out what makes Jeff a successful runner, a strong inner-drive. "It is not so much what we expect from Jeff but what Jeff expects from himself. He has had a great summer of training and as long as he continues to improve and remain healthy only good things will be in store for him."

Joining Mettler as a returning leader for a USD team that placed fifth at the 2011 Summit League Championships is lone senior Ethan Marquardt. The Albert Lea, Minnesota-native placed 21st at conference last year and was in the Coyote

Coyotes X-Country	
9/1	Creighton/UNO/Nebraska Quad
9/15	Nebraska Woody Greeno Inv.
9/29	Minnesota Roy Griak Inv.
10/13	Tim Young Inv. at Vermillion
10/27	Summit League Championships at Rochester, Mich.
11/9	NCAA Midwest Reg. at Springfield, Mo.
11/17	NCAA Championships at Louisville, Ky.

top-three all season long.

Former Yankton standouts Travis Brenner and Alex Hohenthanner, both juniors, should also be near the lead pack for the red and white.

Incoming freshmen Isaac Allen (Lincoln, Nebraska East High School) and Mubarik Musa (Worthington High School) form a dynamic pair of cross country state champion recruits that could make an immediate impact for the Coyotes. Junior Benson Langat, a native Kenyan and transfer from Butler Community College, turned some heads in the 2012 track and field season for the 'Yotes and should also be in the mix.

The Coyotes women also found success last season, placing fifth out of 10 teams at the Summit League meet.

They are led by senior Jessica Brandli, a Rapid City Stevens graduate who is entering her third season competing for USD after spending her freshman season running for Northern State University. Brandli just missed Second Team All-Summit League honors a year ago, placing 16th at the conference championships.

Senior Carol Miller and juniors Britni Waller and Megan Hilson, a former Gazelle standout, will join Brandli as the top returners from 2011.

Also expected to contribute are freshmen Kelsey Barrett (Britton-Helca High School), Amber Eickhorn (Wichita, Kansas North High School), and Katie

Wetzstein (Hudson, Wisconsin High School).

Barrett is a four-time South Dakota Class A state champion in cross country while Eickhorn won a cross country state title of her own in Kansas. Of Wetzstein, Fitzsimmons calls the former Wisconsin All-State performer "a raw talent."

Despite having just completed the Division I transition process, coach Fitzsimmons is allowing himself and his athletes to dream big heading into the season.

"Naturally, we are training with the idea that if the opportunity presents itself, we would like to win (the Summit League title)," Fitzsimmons said. "Our plan is to put ourselves in a place where we are better both as a team and individually from day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month, and from last-to-this-year."

As far as individual accolades go, numerous Coyotes are seeking out the same All-Summit League honors that Mettler earned last year.

"Now that we have a year of experience in the Summit League, I believe several of our athletes have All-Conference aspirations," Fitzsimmons added.

The Coyotes kick off their season with a pair of Nebraska meets, running in Omaha on September 1 and then in Lincoln at the prestigious Woody Greeno Invitational on September 15. They travel to Minneapolis for the Roy Griak Invite on September 29 before hosting the Tim Young Invitational in Vermillion on September 13.

Rochester, Michigan hosts the Summit League Championships on October 27 before the 'Yotes travel to the NCAA Midwest Regional in Springfield Missouri on November 9 to try and punch their tickets to the NCAA National Championships, held on November 17 in Louisville Kentucky.

Aiding Fitzsimmons once again will be longtime volunteer assistant coach Matt Hoyt, now in his ninth year in that role.

You can follow Chris Riley on Twitter at [twitter.com/ChrisCRiley](#)

U Soccer

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hand, were two standout members of the 19 incoming freshmen last year. Viktor returns as the Coyotes goal keeper after starting 18 of their 19 games and recording two shut outs.

Cameron, a mid-fielder and forward, was named to the Summit League Freshman team after her solid first campaign.

Another standout to look for in the Coyote stat book this season will be junior Jenny Teslow. After leading the team last season with 11 points, she has already shown her offensive dominance this year in two of USD's pre-season exhibition games.

Jenny has already scored a couple great goals for us in our exhibition games," Green said. "I think her touch on the ball is better. She is being a lot more dangerous this year than I've seen her in the last couple years so that's exciting to see."

The Coyotes' first exhibition matches against the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Nebraska Omaha on August 9 and 11 went well as they topped UNI 2-0 but fell to UNO.

"On the road playing against two quality opponents, we came out and had great energy, competed really well, kept posses-

sion of the ball against UNI, and scored a couple really good goals. It was great to get everybody in the game."

USD welcomes 10 newcomers this season, which will be a nice relief compared to last year's 21. Some freshmen who look to make an impact right away are mid-fielders Teagan Eberle and Rebecca Sparkman and forward Taylor Nivala. Eberle assisted in every goal the Coyotes scored this preseason while Nivala scored one of those goals.

Even with conference matches and rivalry games on the schedule, the Coyotes are not looking forward to any teams over others this year. With the mindset of facing each opponent equally, they hope to be more competitive every time they step on the field.

"We're going to look forward to every single game," Green said. "I think if we come in to every game with the right energy, the right amount of possessions, the right amount of being dangerous and defensive pressure, I really believe that we can be competitive in every single game

that we play."

The Coyotes finished in the bottom of a few crucial Summit League statistical categories last season, including goals scored and goals given up, so the team's goal for this season is simple: to finish in the top four in the conference, qualifying them for the conference tournament.

And with the experience coming back along with increased confidence, Coach Green and the Coyote women's soccer team are focusing on only themselves to reach that goal.

"I'm not worried about what other teams are doing," Green said. "We are working hard to push these girls out of their comfort zones, compete, and having the confidence to win a lot of these games. Worst to first is the attitude we're taking. So if we do that, I think we can put ourselves in a good position."

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USD VB

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Also back are Tori Kroll (Jr., 1206 assists) and Bailey Lupardus (Sr., 122 assists). Highlighting the defense will be Riley Haug (So., 444 digs), while Walseth led the team in blocks with 102. Lindsey Sathre (23 kills, 12 blocks) is the team's other senior.

"We're very experienced. Ever since I was a freshman, we came in and played right away," Bulaga said. "We've been together for a long time. Kendall and Riley played a lot.

"It definitely looks like we're inexperienced, but we've played quite a bit."

Also in the mix will be five freshmen, including former Viborg-Hurley standout Haley Jorgensen.

Whoever steps foot on the court, one of the areas of improvement from a year ago will be in finishing matches. The Coyotes played in 13 matches last season that went five games, including a stretch of eight in a row. In those situations, USD was 6-7.

"We wanted to work on finishing games," Bulaga said. "We're making sure that we're more conditioned this year, so that when we get to that fifth game, our bodies are ready.

"We didn't want it to play out that way, it just happened," she added, jokingly.

USD, which opens its season Aug. 24 at the Alabama State Tour-

namment, will play its eight home matches this season in a new location — upstairs in the dome. The new setup will include seating for approximately 500 spectators.

"I can't really hide my excitement. To have a home that's truly yours and practicing on the game floor will be a huge change," Houk said. "The crowd will be really close to the court; it'll fill up.

"I'm expecting us to sell that out quite a bit this year," he added. "That's an advantage for us."

Naturally, the excitement extends to the players.

"It'll be a totally different atmosphere," Bulaga said. "It definitely feels like home to us; like where we were meant to be."

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