

Yankton's Paula Ready For 'Premier Opportunity'

BY JEREMY HOECK

jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

Ryan Larsen calls it a "gift from the basketball gods." Ketty (Cornemann) Paula calls it getting her foot in the door.

The former had been exhausting every connection, looking for an assistant coach. The latter was ready and interested.

After a call out of the blue to ask if the position was still available, Paula, a Yankton native, was later hired as Larsen's assistant coach with the S.D. School of Mines women's basketball program in Rapid City.

"I always wanted to get my foot in the door and try the whole college coaching thing, and this seemed like the premier opportunity," Paula said Tuesday, a day after the hiring was

announced.

The NCAA Division II team now has two coaches with Division I experience — one as a former player at South Dakota State (Paula) and the other as a 5-year assistant at the University of South Dakota (Larsen).

And yes, that led to some good-natured ribbing, Paula said.

"I had to go really test the waters and make sure he was past the USD stage," joked the former Jackrabbit standout who played from 2006-10, helping the program reach the WNIT and NCAA tournaments.

Paula, a 2006 Yankton High School graduate, has spent the last three years as a physical education and health teacher at Southwest



Paula

Middle School in Rapid City. She was also the freshman and varsity assistant girls' basketball coach at Rapid City Stevens.

Still, when Larsen was hired as Mines' head coach on July 10, Paula's name was not immediately on the radar — he jokes that his coaching colleagues hid the "gift" from him.

"I really couldn't get a better hire," Larsen said Monday night. "My whole philosophy in looking for an assistant was, 'Is this the best person?' I knew from day one she'd be the best fit for the team."

Shortly after Larsen was hired, he says he received a call from Paula, who later came to the campus and made clear her interest in the job.

"At first, I wasn't sure how qualified I was as a coach," she said. "I mean, I don't have any college

coaching experience, but he encouraged me to apply."

Paula does, however, have experience with the Hardrockers. She spent the 2011-12 season as a volunteer coach on former head coach Barb Felderman's staff.

Mines, which graduated only two players from last season's 14-11 team, needed a shot in the arm, Paula said.

"I feel like the program needed a revived energy. That's not knocking on what they had before, but sometimes you need a fresh take on things," she said. "Coach Larsen and I both come from a division one program, so we understand what it takes to reach a high level."

"The two of us will do a good job raising the level of basketball."

In the process of looking for a new athletic director and a perma-

nent conference home for its athletic programs, Mines has a bright future, Larsen said.

"The potential is here, it's good situation right now," he said. "It could pop into something really big with the right hire."

Where women's basketball is concerned, the Lady Hardrockers have some talent to recruit in the West River area, Paula said — pointing to the small number of colleges around Rapid City.

"When you're new to the program, you inherit the players, and we have some really great kids here already," she said. "It'll just be molding players. It's a process, you don't learn how to play at that level in a day, it takes time."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck

End Of The Road For Irene At State Amateur Tourney?

Irene's Matt Sees, 20, slides into second base safely as Larchwood shortstop Koury Kramer has the ball get away from him during the first inning of their second-round game in the S.D. Class B Amateur Baseball Tournament on Tuesday at Sioux Falls Stadium.

The game was in progress, with Larchwood in front 11-0 in the seventh inning, at press time Tuesday night. A full game story will be posted online at www.yankton.net

JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D



NFL Training Camps | Kansas City Chiefs

Special Teams Feeling Special Again In KC

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. (AP) — Dexter McCluster faded back as if he was in slow motion, the Chiefs wide receiver settling under a booming ball off the foot of Saints punter Thomas Morstead in the middle of the Superdome.

Once he had secured it, McCluster started up field. He angled to his right and found a crease to the sideline, running almost untouched 55 yards before he was finally brought down.

McCluster popped right up with a grin visible through his facemask.

"It's been a while since I returned punts and I wanted it. I was anxious and nervous but at the same time, I was excited," McCluster said after practice this week. "When the hard work pays off, it makes you come back and work harder."

Even on special teams, which so often hasn't been all that special in Kansas City.

The Chiefs haven't returned a punt for a touchdown since McCluster took one back against the Chargers in September 2010. The last time they brought back a kickoff for a touchdown was November 2011, when Pro Bowl running back Jamaal Charles was still forging his name in the league.

Everything about this season is a fresh starts, though.

The Chiefs have a new general manager in John Dorsey, a new coach in Andy Reid and, quite naturally, a new person directing special teams. That would be Dave Toub, whose name may not be well known to the casual football fan but whose work is extremely well known: He's the guy who tutored dangerous Chicago Bears returner Devin Hester.

Toub was hired by Reid while he was assembling the rest of his coaching staff, and so far he's been busily piecing together the Chiefs' special teams units. McCluster appears to be the choice to return punts, but there are still half a dozen options for returning kickoffs.

He hopes to settle on a couple of primary options by the third preseason game.

"We have high expectations for this group," Toub said. "They've worked their butts off and it's good to see guys work hard and reap rewards in the game."

The rewards were plain to see last Friday night in New Orleans.

McCluster began the proceedings with a bang, Devon Wylie brought another punt back 22 yards early in the second quarter, and then had a nice kickoff return to start the second half.

Knile Davis provided an exclamation mark on the Chiefs' preseason opener when the rookie running back, who had never before fielded a kickoff, returned one 79 yards late in the game.



DAVID EULITT/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT

Kansas City Chiefs defensive back Quintin Demps (35) defends a pass attempt to Kansas City Chiefs running back Knile Davis (34) during Monday's morning practice at Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph, Mo.

NFL Training Camps | Minnesota Vikings

Gerhart Lurks In Peterson's Shadow

MANKATO, Minn. (AP) — Toby Gerhart is as good as new.

In the modern NFL, that's as important of an attribute as any, especially in the case of a guy like Gerhart whose participation in games for the Minnesota Vikings has been sporadic at best. Being Adrian Peterson's backup is far from the glamour roles around this league, but the former Stanford star and second-round draft pick has done his best to maintain perspective and optimism despite an inevitable dissatisfaction with his status.

"It's a double-edged sword. It's definitely frustrating because you want to be the guy and be featured, but at the same time these last four years I feel like I've grown as a player," Gerhart said. "I've stayed relatively healthy. I haven't gotten the pounding that other guys would've got their first four years, so hopefully that prolongs my career, longevity-wise, and I get an opportunity to show what I can do here in the future."

Gerhart is in the final year of his rookie contract, so he's eligible for unrestricted free agency next spring and, perhaps, the chance to finally be a starter if he chooses to sign with another team.

But assuming Peterson again handles the bulk of the ball carrying again this season, there is little evidence with which to evaluate Gerhart and establish a market for his services. He started one game in 2010 and four more in 2011 when Peterson was

hurt, and he had his best game that season after Peterson tore up his left knee by rushing 11 times for 109 yards at Washington.

That's it, though. Over three years, Gerhart has 240 carries and three touchdowns on the ground, plus another 64 receptions and three scores through the air. In 2012, with Peterson on his way to the NFL MVP award, he ran the ball only 50 times for 169 yards.

Gerhart's agent has encouraged him with the example of Michael Turner, who toiled in the shadows of LaDainian Tomlinson in San Diego for four years with about the same amount of action there as Gerhart here before signing a big-money deal with Atlanta. Turner topped 1,300 yards rushing three times in a four-season span and was picked for two Pro Bowls.

Peterson was held out of the first preseason game and might not play this Friday, either, at Buffalo. That hasn't given Gerhart much more of an audition, though, because the Vikings are more concerned about scrutinizing players lower on the depth chart.

"You want him to get some timing and be able to hit some holes and get some things that he may not get a lot of chances to get during the regular season," coach Leslie Frazier said. "But at the same time, we don't want to overexpose him. He's a very important part of our football team, so we're cautious on how we use him in

the preseason as well."

The irony for Gerhart, the Heisman Trophy runner-up in 2009, is that he entered the league at a time when more and more teams have given significant playing time to their No. 2 running backs. The leading rusher on most clubs last season took only slightly more than half of the carries, but Peterson handled 71.6 percent of Minnesota's attempts.

Only Tampa Bay (76.7 percent for Doug Martin) and Tennessee (73 percent for Chris Johnson) put their lead running back in heavier use than the Vikings did with Peterson, and just five other teams (Houston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Washington and St. Louis) topped 59 percent.

"We'll take what we can get. It's the role I have right now. If I get a chance to make a play, I'll make a play," Gerhart said, adding: "With a guy like him who can wear down a defense and do so many things that he does, it's hard to ever have him step off the field. So he's a special talent."

Peterson's 2,097 yards rushing last season was more evidence of that, even though that oh-so-close run at the all-time record meant more watching for Gerhart.

"I could say I was his, ah, behind-the-scenes partner, I guess," Gerhart said, adding: "Working with him every day, that 'wow' factor has kind of worn off. But it's funny. When you have friends and family come by, it's always, 'I just want to meet Adrian.'"

Yankton Boy Records 12 Medals At Dwarf Games

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Yankton's Miles Krajewski captured six gold medals and six other medals at the 2013 World Dwarf Games, which were held Aug. 3-10 in East Lansing, Mich.

Krajewski, 8, competed in 10 events in the Junior 'A' division (ages 7-11). He or his team finished first in six events, including curling, swimming, badminton mixed doubles, badminton same sex doubles, floor hockey and volleyball.

He also took silver in the tennis ball throw, 4x20-meter shuttle relay, soccer, basketball and table tennis. Krajewski also recorded a bronze medal in the 20-meter dash.

"It was inspiring to see so many athletes get an opportunity to compete on a level playing field," father Mike Krajewski said. "There were so many kids there that were trying new sports. They don't get a chance every day to play all those sports against average-height kids."

The World Dwarf Games, hosted by the Dwarf Athletic Association of America (DAAA), were open to any athlete who meets the definition of dwarfism.

Krajewski and some of the other athletes even got a chance to watch a Michigan State University football practice, and later got their photo taken with MSU football coach Mark Dantonio.

The Krajewski family is thankful for the support from people in Yankton and the surrounding area, Mike said.

"He got so many well-wishes. So many people were following what he was doing," Mike said. "It was just really neat to see the community get behind him like that."

Thayer Named Voice Of USD Women's Hoops

VERMILLION — John Thayer will serve as play-by-play announcer for University of South Dakota women's basketball during the 2013-14 season, USD announced Tuesday. Thayer is the sports director of KVHT/KVTK in Yankton, which serves as the flagship station for the Coyote Radio Network.

Thayer is a 2008 graduate of Doane College where he helped launch the Tiger Sports Network. He worked for stations in Colorado and Nebraska before arriving in Yankton in July of 2012.

Thayer has covered state basketball tournaments and football playoffs in Nebraska, Colorado and South Dakota. He has announced NAIA national volleyball and basketball tournaments. He even covered a basketball game at Oklahoma Baptist when they played Rogers State and their coach Amy Williams, who now enters her second season as the general at USD.

Thayer grew up in Eustis, Neb. He is the host of "On the John," a weekday sports talk show that airs from 9-11 a.m. on KVTK 1570 AM and online at kvtk.com. Press & Dakotan assistant sports editor Jeremy Hoeck is a weekly guest on the show at 10:05 a.m. every Wednesday.



Thayer