

## South Dakota Sportswriters Year-End Awards

# Hegge Honored For Stellar Career

## Former Coyote Named College Women's Athlete Of The Year

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It's been nine months since Amber Hegge walked off the basketball court at the DakotaDome for the last time.

The Crofton, Neb., native, however, has not left the game.

Hegge spent five seasons with the University of South Dakota women's basketball program and was one of the consistent forces that drove the Coyotes from the Division II ranks up to the D-I level.

"We had a good run; did a lot of great things," said Hegge, who was named the College Women's Athlete of the Year by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association (SDSWA).

"Everything we were able to do over the past four or five years was awesome, I have no complaints. I was very fortunate."

Hegge guided the Coyotes to a 23-8 record and a berth in the WNIT during her senior season, when she led the Summit League in rebounding (8.5) and was second in scoring (19.2).

The four-time conference player of the week as a senior closed a career that moved her into second place all-time at USD in scoring (1,739), second in blocks (173) and fifth in rebounding (834).

Three months after graduating in May, Hegge left for Germany, where she played for a professional organization in that country's top league. The stay didn't last long, however, because of an injury.

"The second week I was there, we were in Poland and I hurt my ankle," she said. "We thought it was a sprain, but it was actually a torn tendon. I sat out for like six

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AMBER HEGGE

weeks, but eventually it was a mutual decision to go home and heal up."

In the end, the European style was significantly different than what she was used to in the old North Central Conference, the Great West Conference and later the Summit League.

"It's more of a finesse game over there. Their post players don't get too physical," Hegge said. "There's more unselfish play. Instead of taking a layup one on one, they're more about the extra pass — to a crazy extent."

Back living in Vermillion, Hegge has her eyes on returning to the game, but in a different capacity — partly because of all the injuries she suffered in her career.

"I definitely want to try to do something basketball-related, maybe get into coaching," she said. "That's my plan right now. It's a tough field to break into, but we'll see."

Next semester she will begin graduate school courses in USD's Kinesiology Department and will work as a graduate assistant in the weight room.

"Hopefully I can go somewhere after that for basketball," she said.

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoeck](http://twitter.com/jhoeck)



Former South Dakota forward Amber Hegge, 22, pulls up for a shot during the 2011-12 season. Hegge, who led the Summit League in rebounding and ranked second in scoring, has been named the College Women's Athlete of the Year by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association.

## Other South Dakota Sportswriters Association Year-End Awards

The South Dakota Sportswriters Association has announced the winners of its 2012 year-end awards.

Recognition is given for an athlete, coach and team in college and prep male and female categories, as well as independent male and female athlete, independent team and the state's sports celebrity of the year. Honors are voted upon by SDSWA members.

### Celebrity: Mike Miller, Mitchell

Mike Miller has made an NBA career hitting three-point baskets.

But none were as important as the seven he knocked down for the Miami Heat in Game 5 of last season's NBA Finals.

Miller was 7-of-8 from behind the three-point line, finishing with 23 points and helping clinch the championship over the Oklahoma City Thunder in his second season with the Heat.

Miami won the game 121-106 on June 21 to help Miller to his first championship in his NBA career.

Playing with a bad back and ailing knees, Miller played 21 minutes in the previous four games in the Finals. Through that period, he had made two field goals, with no 3-pointers and eight points.

In Game 5, he knocked down his first 3-pointer of the series, playing a major role in the win.

"It was an opportunity," Miller said after the game.

Miller played in just 39 games last season and he finished the season by averaging 6.1 points and 3.3 rebounds per game.

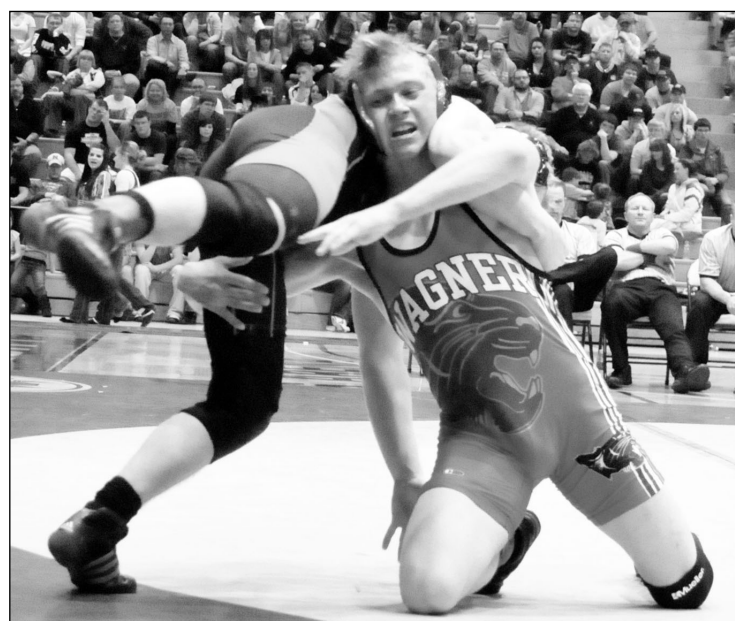
### Independent Female: Kim Kaufman, Clark

Clark native Kim Kaufman is receiving the Independent Female Athlete of the Year award for the second time in four years after another whirlwind year on the golf course.

In May, the Texas Tech senior capped her junior season by tying for eighth along with teammate Gabby Dominguez in the NCAA Championships at Franklin, Tenn. Kaufman earned honorable-mention All-American honors from the National Golf Coaches Association.

She continued preparation for her senior season by qualifying and then reaching the match play semifinals in the U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship in June; finished third in the Royale Cup Canadian Amateur Championship in July and defended her South Dakota Women's Amateur Championship at Brookings in August.

Back at Texas Tech, she opened the fall portion of her senior season with a bang — notching top 15 finishes in all four events, including three top five finishes and a weather-shortened victory in October at the Landfall Tradition in Wilmington, N.C. She averaged 71.5 strokes per round in a fall season



Former Wagner wrestler Alex Kocer, right, shoots in on an opponent during the 2011-12 season. Kocer, who won a fifth straight Class B wrestling title, has been named the Prep Boys' Athlete of the Year by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association.

that ended with her being ranked as the nation's No. 1 golfer by Golfweek Magazine, which also named her the player of the fall.

"It's always nice to get recognition for all of your hard work," said Kaufman, who won fourth South Dakota state Class B individual titles in high school. "At the same time, winning an award doesn't make you a better player. I know I can't stop working or setting new goals."

She'll close out her collegiate golf career during the spring season at Texas Tech.

### Independent Male: Shane Van Boening, Rapid City

Rapid City native Shane Van Boening capped a stellar 2012 with his second U.S. Open title at the 37th Annual U.S. Open 9-Ball Championships in Virginia Beach, Va.

Van Boening, who is widely regarded as one of the best billiards players in the world, also won the 2007 U.S. Open before taking home the crown again this year.

Van Boening, a Rapid City Stevens graduate who is hearing impaired, added the U.S. Open championship to three other wins in 2012 as he took home the Derby City Master of the Table, the U.S. Open One Pocket title and the Players Championship.

Van Boening is currently ranked No. 1 by the United States Professional Pool Players Association and is No. 2 in the Association of Billiard Professionals rankings. He was ranked No. 1 by the ABP in 2011.

Just 29 years old, "The South Dakota Kid" has already left quite a mark on the professional billiards world and is set up for what should be a long and lucrative career.

### Independent Team: Brookings Legion Baseball

It truly was the "Year of the Bandits," as the Post 74 squad won the first state American Legion baseball title in Brookings history.

The Bandits beat defending champion Sioux Falls East 11-10 in the title game on Aug. 5, a few hours after knocking off perennial power Rapid City Post 22 by a 3-1 margin. In all, the Bandits won four consecutive elimination games to reach the top of the podium.

"A couple things come to mind — it really kind of validates what you've been doing," said head coach Rob Hirschhoff, who grew up in Brookings and pitched at South Dakota State. "Baseball has been a huge part of my life since I was four years old and it's probably the highlight of my baseball career so far, as a player or coach."

"From a personal standpoint, that's exciting; but even more importantly for the program. I think it validates what we've been doing. In terms of baseball, I think we've done a great job here of trying to keep as many kids as possible involved with baseball. A lot of people put in a lot of time behind the scenes and I really think this validates what everyone has been doing — not just us, but our whole program."

Brookings got what Hirschhoff called a "heroic" pitching performance from Matt Thomas on championship Sunday. The right-hander, who earned Tournament MVP honors, tossed a five-hitter on two days rest in the win over the Hard-Hats before returning later in the day to throw two scoreless innings and earn the save in the victory over Post 15.

Every Brookings starter had at least one hit in the title game, with Kelly Beste driving in four runs.

Beste tossed the first five innings and Skyler Cary earned the pitching win after getting through the sixth and seventh frames.

Brookings, which went 5-1 against East during the season, finished with a 43-12 record. Post 74 posted a 1-2 mark at the Central Plains Regional — including a 7-3 win over West Fargo, N.D. — to close out the season.

Brookings opened the state tournament with a 10-0 win over Sioux Falls West, as current Kansas State pitcher Landon Busch struck out 14 in six innings. Following a 4-2 loss to Post 22, the Bandits bounced back with a 7-5 win over host Aberdeen and an 8-4 victory over Sioux Falls East — in which the Bandits jumped out to a 7-0 lead in the first frame and Busch struck out nine in seven-plus innings — to set up the wild Sunday.

### Prep Boys' Athlete: Alex Kocer, Wagner

After completing a perfect senior wrestling season at 46-0 and taking home his fifth consecutive individual state championship, Alex Kocer of Wagner tacked his name up as one of the top high school wrestlers in South Dakota state history.

Only four wrestlers in state history had won five or more state individual titles, and after Kocer's 14-5 decision over Newell's Taygen Schuelke at the 2012 Class B state tournament, Kocer joined those ranks.

Kocer competed at four different weight classes throughout his decorated career, finishing his final two years at 152 pounds. His individual championships helped propel the Red Raiders to three consecutive state team titles, as well as a runner-up and two fourth place finishes.

He was also selected as the state tournament Outstanding Wrestler three times.

Kocer is now a freshman at South Dakota State University.

### Prep Boys' Coach: Adolph Shepardson, Deubrook

The Sturgis native led the Dolphins to their first-ever state football title — Class 9AA — in his second year at the helm. The Dolphins dominated the Dakota Valley Conference for its first league title, before battling their way through the playoffs while compiling an undefeated (12-0) season with a 25-22 victory over Howard in the DakotaDome.

Deubrook outscored its eight DVC foes 394-110, including a 43-6 win at Arlington in a matchup of unbeaten teams on the final day of the regular season. The Dolphins beat Ipswich/Edmunds Central 55-0 in the first round of the playoffs; scored 16 points in the final 1:03 of regulation and overtime to rally past Potter County for a 22-20 quarterfinal win; and outscored

Gregory 22-0 in the second half for a 44-37 victory in the semifinals on their way to the Dome.

"We've got really good kids; we've got a great batch of juniors and seniors," Shepardson said. "They really bought in to what we're doing in our program. We got a lot of breaks this year — we stayed healthy. Our best players stepped up; we had some younger guys step up; we had a foreign-exchange student that played a big role."

"We won the big games — we beat Castlewood when they were undefeated; we beat Elkton-Lake Benton when they were undefeated; we beat Arlington when they were undefeated. We knocked out Potter County, Gregory and Howard in the playoffs. So it was just a combination of great efforts throughout the year; and, you know, with a little luck, it turned into a great season."

Shepardson, 34, who played at South Dakota State and was later a graduate assistant coach at South Dakota, has posted a 20-3 record at Deubrook. The Dolphins had never advanced to the semifinals prior to his arrival and now have two such appearances in as many years.

The 2012 Deubrook squad rewrote the school record book — most notably Ryan Knutson. The tailback ran for a state nine-man record 40 touchdowns while piling up 2,434 yards on the ground in 2012 and was one of five Dolphins on the All-State team.

### Prep Boys' Team: Pierre Wrestling

Winning the state's prep boys' team of the year award is just the cherry on top of a monumental year for the Pierre Governors' wrestling team.

The Governors were nothing short of dominant in 2012 as a school not necessarily known for its excellence on the mat became a wrestling powerhouse.

The victories continuously piled up for the Governors this year as Pierre wasn't defeated by another South Dakota team in a tournament or dual throughout the year.

That dominance culminated in late February when the Governors won Pierre's first wrestling championship since 1974 when they showed how far a balanced roster can take a team.

The Governors road to the top of the mountain wasn't easy though, Pierre finished 17th at the Class A wrestling tournament in 2008, making their near perfect season of 2011-12 that much more impressive.

"The lower points of the program have certainly made our last year more special," Pierre wrestling coach Ryan Noyes said. "Everybody in the program has worked hard to get to this point, from the high school, to the middle

school and to our youth wrestling program. It's been great to see these kids be so successful."

The 2012 state champions featured state placers in Jebben Keyes (fourth), Tanner Monfore (third), Dawson Monfore (third) Lane Lettau (third), Trey Maier (fourth), Chase Lettau (fourth), Kyle Sarrang (fifth), Seth Scott (fifth) and Dylan Bennett (fifth) along with state champion Caleb Stoltenburg.

Perhaps most impressive is that the Governors are hungry for more. The state champs have begun their 2012 season with the same perfection they ended it on, even winning a tough Rapid City Invitational tournament to begin the season.

### Prep Girls' Athlete: Kari Heck, Sioux Falls

Kari Heck continued her assault on the South Dakota high school record books in 2012, making her mark as one of the top track and field athletes in state history.

The Sioux Falls Washington standout, now continuing her career at Nebraska, set an all-time record in the long jump with a leap of 20 feet, 6.5 inches as a senior. She also has top-10 personal sprint bests in the 100 (11.9), 200 (24.75) and 400 (55.5), with her 400 time ranking third all-time behind Rapid City Central's Jasmine King and Mitchell's Jill Theeler.

Heck was named Class AA girls MVP at the state track meet as a junior and senior, winning four individual titles in 2011. In 2012, she was upset in the long jump by Alexis Gannon of Brookings by an inch-and-a-half but responded with wins in the 100, 200 and 400.

Heck, a 4.0 student, plans to major in chemical engineering at Nebraska, chose the Huskers after also visiting USD, Minnesota and Auburn.

"When I visited Nebraska, a light bulb went on and it was like, 'This is the place,'" said Heck. "It's a really good school with a good tradition in jumps, and things clicked with (jumps coach Gary Pepin)."

Her high school coach, Everett Gebhart, was certainly sorry to see her go.

"She's a special kid," Gebhart said. "I'll probably never coach another trackster quite like her."

### Prep Girls' Coach: Todd Thorson, Ipswich

Todd Thorson of Ipswich has been named the association's girls' coach of the year for all sports.

Thorson's teams have become the gold standard for cross country since he initiated the program in 2000. Since that time, the Tigers have won four girls' state championships, one boys' state title and