

Year-End Awards | South Dakota Sportswriters Association

# Firsick, Iverson Among Honorees



SHANE KEYSER/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT  
Colorado State's Colton Iverson (45) grabs a rebound in the second half against Missouri in the NCAA Tournament second-round game at Rupp Arena on March 21, 2013, in Lexington, Ky. Iverson has been selected as the Independent Male Athlete of the Year by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association.

## Independent Male Athlete: Iverson Makes Most Of Fresh Start At Colorado State

Q&A: Yankton Native Currently Playing In Turkey

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK  
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With Yankton's own Colton Iverson being selected by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association as their Independent Male Athlete of the Year, we chose this as a time to catch up with Iverson.

Iverson, who was drafted by the Indiana Pacers and acquired by the Boston Celtics in a draft night trade, is currently playing for Besiktas in Turkey. He averages 9.0 points and 6.9 rebounds per game for the Eagles.

**What do you feel were the main reasons for your success at Colorado State?**

I feel like a lot of my success from CSU last year attributed to my hard work put in in my redshirt year after transferring, head coach Larry Eustachy who really invested and believed in my abilities to lead the team, and great teammates who played together and loved playing together all season.

**What did you do between March and the NBA Draft to prepare yourself for a professional career?**

A week after our season ended with NCAA tourney loss to Louisville, I met with several agents who my parents had helped me narrow it down to during the season so I could focus on the season and went with the guys I re-

ally had a great feeling about in Adam and Ben Pensack of Pensack Sports management. After signing with them I moved to Vegas several days later and began pre-draft training and Impact Basketball Academy with many other draft prospects. I was able to do this as I only had one online class my last semester that I needed to graduate so it worked out perfect and the training at Impact really prepared me for the 17 workouts I had with different NBA teams.

**What did you learn in your time with the Celtics' summer league team?**

Being with the Celtics summer league team was a great experience for me, playing with and against current NBA players and many other players being rookies like me. You get a feel for the lifestyle of being in hotels and traveling and playing games and not having to worry about school anymore. It was a great experience for me because I learned so much from the coaches in such a short amount of time and current players like Jerrod Sullinger and Jeff Green were there giving advice and helping coach us rookies which was great for me.

**What were your deciding factors in playing internationally, and what were the factors in deciding on the team in Istanbul?**

Being drafted by Boston, I knew there was a good chance that it wouldn't work out this year for me because there was a tough situation

with roster availability there and with Rajon Rondo out and only one other point guard on roster that I felt it would be best for me to play overseas, get international playing experience and being able to play more minutes as a rookie would be best for me. My agents were really excited with the opportunity to play for Besiktas in Istanbul as it is a organization with successful history and a new coach who likes to play with rookies and young players. Ultimately we agreed that it was the best option for me for life on and off the court and it has been great so far.

**What have been some of the biggest adjustments for you, on and off the court?**

Coming here at first, the biggest adjustments were off the court. It was my first time being in Europe and everything is so new to me and not knowing how or if you can communicate with people was difficult. Other little things like time change and not being able to talk to family and friends whenever was also tough at first. Then once basketball started, learning the European style of basketball was and is still an adjustment. Everything from the way the game is officiated to the way European players play is just so different from American basketball, so I just work hard every day to keep getting better and learn the style as it can greatly benefit me the rest of my career.

**How is your season going, and what are you**

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## College Women's Athlete: Vaultier Overcame Injuries, Juggled Wedding Plans As She Won USD's First D-I Title

BY JEREMY HOECK  
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VERMILLION — Between overcoming a pair of rather serious injuries and preparing for a summer wedding, Bethany (Buell) Firsick had plenty of real-life outlets this year for her pursuit of a psychology degree.

It also helped her in winning a Division I national championship in pole vault.

Firsick, a fifth-year senior at the University of South Dakota, became the school's first D-I national champion when she won the vaulting title at the NCAA Outdoor Track & Field Championships in early June.

For that performance, Firsick has been named College Women's Athlete of the Year by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association, the second time in three years she earned the statewide honor.

"It's still kind of crazy to think about all of it," she said, looking back on the year. "I go back to the feeling after the injury, not knowing if I would be able to finish it out."

"All of that was icing on the cake."

The native of St. Louis, Mo., missed most of the outdoor track season with a torn ligament in her left shoulder, that required surgery after the national meet. Adding salt to the literal wound, Firsick also battled through torn ligaments in an ankle.

Did she expect a return after that injury?

"Not really," she said, laughing.

"When it first happened, it was pretty drastic. I could hardly move it at all," she added. "The doctors said, 'You can try to vault, but it might not work.' My coaches and I pretty much agreed, 'Let's put a pole in her hand and see what happens.'"

What happened was a second-place finish in the Summit League Outdoor Championships, and within a month, a national championship on her final jump.

It was another accomplishment on a USD resume that now includes five career conference titles (between the Great West and the Summit League) and three All-American honors at the D-I level — indoor and outdoor meets.

Those two injuries this spring could have easily derailed a once-promising season, according to USD women's track coach Lucky Huber.

"She knew she was there, being ranked number one all season, but with that injury, it was like, 'Shucks, this could have been the year,'" Huber said.

With vaulting coach Derek Miles helping managing her number of vaults, Firsick battled through rehabilitation.

"Certain kids are really tough, they like to compete, but it takes a lot of mental toughness," Huber said. "With a kid like Bethany, she thinks, 'OK, it's time to do it, it doesn't matter if I'm banged up.'"

The challenge for Firsick



P&D FILE PHOTO  
Bethany (Buell) Firsick vaults during a meet in the 2012 season. Despite battling torn ligaments in her left shoulder and an ankle, Firsick became USD's first-ever Division I track and field champion when she won the pole vault at that event in June. She has been named the SDSWA College Women's Athlete of the Year for the second time in three seasons.

now is: How do you repeat a national championship performance?

Simple, she says.

"Being my last season, I just want to have fun with it and enjoy it; see how high I can jump," Firsick said.

Huber heard a similar message at the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association Convention, held earlier this month in Orlando, Fla.

Indiana high jumper Derek Drouin earned the male Bowlerman Trophy (the track equivalent of the Heisman Trophy) and during his acceptance speech, talked about having to motivate himself for the 2013 season after earning silver at the 2012 Olympics.

"To get yourself up again and repeat it, that's the challenge here with Bethany," Huber said. "We know the things to do, we have the proven model, but it comes down to, 'Are you hungry enough?'"

With eight of the top 10 finishers from the outdoor national meet set to return, Firsick's climb back to the peak of the Division I vaulting world figures to again be challenging. She will be joined by junior teammate

Emily Grove, who finished seventh last spring.

Understandably, Firsick will enter her senior seasons (indoor and outdoor) with a target on her back when the Coyotes open their indoor season Jan. 17 at the Holiday Inn Invitational in Lincoln, Neb.

"Derek likes to remind me of that," she said, with a chuckle. "I have certain personal benchmarks that I want to accomplish."

Among those goals is reaching the hallowed 14-foot-9 range, which Firsick said was her goal last season before getting hurt. Her career best stands at 14-feet-7.5.

That's where he focus will remain, rather than worrying about what some of the other vaulters across the nation are doing.

"I've realized that when I get too concerned with everyone else, I'm not close to my potential," Firsick said. "I'll do all I can, but if they beat me, they were the better competitor."

"I understand that's how sports works."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoeck](http://twitter.com/jhoeck). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net).

## Yankton's Somsen Highlights S.D. Sportswriters Honorees



BROOKINGS REGISTER PHOTO  
South Dakota State pitcher Layne Somsen fires the ball homeward during a home game in the 2012 season. Somsen, who was the 2013 Summit League Pitcher of the Year, was named the College Men's Athlete of the Year by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association. Somsen, a Yankton native, was drafted by the Cincinnati Reds in the MLB Draft in June, and played his first professional season for Billings this past summer.

A banner year in Pierre, three men with South Dakota ties being drafted in two professional leagues and the University of South Dakota's first NCAA Division I champion highlight an exciting year in sports in the state.

These and others were honored by the South Dakota Sportswriters Association with its annual year-end awards, being announced statewide on Thursday. They were voted on by sportswriters from the state's daily newspapers.

Here is a look at each of the honorees:

### Celebrity

The St. Cloud, Minn., native and former South Dakota State standout was the eighth pick in the second round (38th overall) of the 2013 NBA Draft. Wolters was selected by the Washington Wizards, traded to the Philadelphia 76ers and traded again to the Milwaukee Bucks on draft night.

He was the eighth Jackrabbit ever drafted in the NBA — and first since 1981. The highest selection in school history is one of three SDSU players to appear in an NBA game.

As of Dec. 17, the 6-foot-4, 190-pound point guard was averaging 7.2 points, 4.1 assists, 2.7 rebounds, 0.7 steals, 0.35 blocks and 24.7 minutes in 20 games, including seven starts, for the Bucks (5-19).

Wolters was the Summit League Player of the Year and an AP All-America third-team honoree as a senior in 2012-13. He is the Jackrabbits' all-time leader in assists (669) and points (2,363), ranking second and third, respectively, in Summit League history.

Wolters' career averages were 18.5 points, 5.2 assists, 4.7 rebounds, 1.5 steals and 0.2 blocks in 128 games. He led the Jackrabbits to consecutive Summit League tournament titles — earning MVP honors both years — and two berths in the NCAA Tournament.

### Independent Female Athlete

Sam Ostarello's transition from a small gymnasium in Fort Pierre to the Division I stage ended with a flurry in 2013. The former Stanley County Lady Buff completed her career with the Purdue Boilermakers in successful fashion during the 2013 season, earning herself South Dakota Female Independent Athlete of the Year honors.

Ostarello capped her career with the Boilermakers by leading them to the Big Ten Championship and the second round of the NCAA Tournament. The senior's ultimate team goals were cut short with a

second-round loss to South Carolina in the Big Dance, but Ostarello achieved great individual triumph throughout the season.

Ostarello earned Big Ten Player of the week honors once over the course of the 2013 season, and she also earned All Big Ten second-team honors from the media and All Big Ten honorable mention from the coaches within the conference.

Ostarello set Purdue's single-season record for most rebounds in a season with 341, helping the South Dakota native claim second on Purdue's all-time rebounding list with a career total of 901 rebounds.

After she had successful shoulder surgery after the NCAA Tournament concluded, Ostarello is now ready for the next step of her career. She plans on playing for a club in Turkey in the next month.

"I just want to give a big thank you to everyone in Fort Pierre and Pierre for supporting me all four years at Purdue and continuing to do so," Ostarello said. "I couldn't be more thankful for this award from South Dakota, and I'm still trying to make the state proud."

### Independent Team

ALEXANDRIA — It was a big year for the Alexandria Angels as they won their first-ever Class B amateur baseball