

Kasperbauer, Hunter Power Coyotes Past Milwaukee

USD Rolls To 84-60 Victory, Opens Summit League Play Next

BY JEREMY HOECK

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VERMILLION — The Coyotes had seen similar performances by Casey Kasperbauer, but had been waiting for a big game from James Hunter.

For how long? "About two months," joked head coach Craig Smith.

On Sunday against an NCAA Tournament team, the University of South Dakota men's basketball team got both.

Kasperbauer tied a career high with seven three-pointers and Hunter had his best game of the season as the Coyotes got ready for Summit League action by rolling past Milwaukee 84-60 at the DakotaDome.

"Yeah, it was a lot of fun," said Hunter, a 6-foot-10 Australian, who had season highs of 15 points and five rebounds.

Hunter, a senior transfer from Washington State, has struggled with his consistency this season — his previous season-high was nine points at Montana last time out.

He had that within a 4-minute span in the second half, highlighted by a one-handed baseline dunk that brought the crowd to its feet.

"Confidence is an amazing thing," Smith said, pointing out that Hunter had a solid game at Montana.

"Now he's had positive thoughts for five days. It's not only for himself but it's also for his teammates to be-

lieve in him, and they did a good job finding him."

Winners of three straight heading into Friday's league opener, the Coyotes (6-8) put four players in double figures and scored 51 points after halftime in beating the reigning Horizon League champions.

Was it the team's best performance of the season?

"Yeah, I think so," said Kasperbauer, who scored 23 points. "It was the first game we actually put an opponent away. There were a couple times when we had teams down by 10 or 15 and we just couldn't close the door on them."

He was right. In their previous four Division I victories, the Coyotes (who have a D-II win over Wayne State College) won by margins of 2, 3, 2 and 5 points.

USD Women Score Eighth Straight Victory

SAN ANTONIO — Nicole Seekamp and Margaret McCloud both tallied 16 points as the South Dakota women's basketball team recorded its eighth straight win with a 76-69 victory over Texas-San Antonio in the Convocation Center on Sunday afternoon. The game was part of the UTSA Holiday Classic.

McCloud shot 7-of-10 from the floor and grabbed six rebounds while Seekamp added six assists and five rebounds. Five USD (10-2) players reached double-digit point totals as Tia Hemiller tallied 15 points, Raeshel Contreras scored 11 points and Lisa Loeffler added 10 points. Loeffler led the team in rebounds with seven.

UTSA (4-7) was led by Crystal Chidomere's 14 points and Akunna Elonu's 13

points and 10 rebounds. Manasha Bell was one point short of a double-double with nine points and 10 rebounds.

South Dakota shot 50.9 percent from the field (29-of-57) while the Roadrunners finished with a 33.8 shooting percentage (26-of-77). USD also held a 40-34 advantage in points in the paint.

UTSA edged the Coyotes in rebounds (44-41) and turnovers forced (15-10).

McCloud tallied 10 points and five rebounds while Contreras recorded nine points in the first half to lead USD to a 37-32 halftime lead. USD trailed for just 16 seconds in the half (12-10 with 12:14 remaining), but couldn't grow its lead to more than six points (23-17 with 7:19 remaining).

Hemiller scored 11 points

while Seekamp added 10 points in the second half. The Coyotes led by as many as 13 with 12:22 left and didn't let the lead shrink to less than six points the rest of the way.

South Dakota will finish the tournament with a game against Chattanooga today (Monday) at noon.

SOUTH DAKOTA (10-2)

Lisa Loeffler 5-9 0-0 10, Margaret McCloud 7-10 2-2 16, Tia Hemiller 5-13 3-4 15, Raeshel Contreras 4-7 1-3 11, Nicole Seekamp 7-13 1-1 16, Kelly Stewart 0-0 0-0 0, Bridget Ames 1-2 5-6 7, Jaylah Jackson 0-1 1-2 1, Katie Liveringhouse 0-0 0-0 0, Heidi Hoff 0-2 0-0 0. TOTALS: 29-57 13-18 76.

UTSA (4-7)

AKUNNA ELONU 5-10 3-5 13, MANASHA BELL 4-9 1-2 9, KAMRA KING 2-14 4-6 10, ASHLEY SPALETTA 3-9 0-0 9, DWANISHA TALE 1-3 0-2 2, MATHILDE HERGOTT 2-7 0-0 6, CRYSTAL CHIDOMERE 7-19 0-0 14, TIESHA SMITH 2-6 2-3 6, HAYLEE BEARD 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 26-77 10-18 69.

At the half: USD 37, UTSA 32. Three-Pointers: USD 7-22 (Spaletta 3-7, Hergott 2-5, King 2-6, Chidomere 0-4), USD 5-13 (Hemiller 2-3, Contreras 2-4, Seekamp 1-2, Loeffler 0-1, Jackson 0-1, Hoff 0-2).

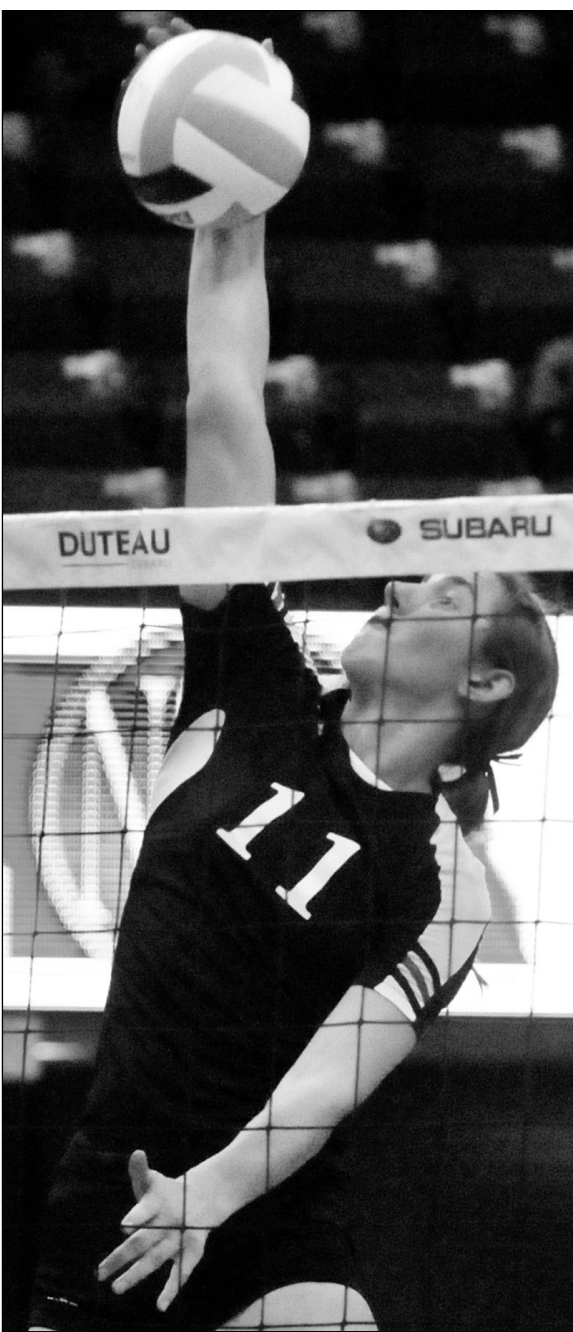
Rebounds: UTSA 44 (Elonu 11), USD 41 (Loeffler 7).

Personal Fouls: USD 17, UTSA 15. Fouled Out: None.

Assists: USD 18 (Seekamp 6), UTSA 14 (King 5). Turnovers: USD 15, UTSA 10. Blocked Shots: USD 3 (Loeffler 3), UTSA 3 (Hergott 2). Steals: UTSA 9 (King 5), USD 8 (Hemiller 2).

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P&D FILE PHOTOS

Crofton seniors Allison Arens (left), Maria Wortmann (center) and Quinn Wragge (right) have each played key roles in multiple team championships for CHS in the past year. All three were a part of the championship teams in girls' basketball last winter and track last spring. Wragge also helped lead the Crofton girls to a ninth consecutive cross country title, while Wortmann and Arens led CHS to a runner-up finish in the state volleyball tournament, matching the best finish in school history. All three have been recognized as the Press & Dakotan's Prep Female Athletes of the Year for 2014.

Trio Has Crofton On Top

BY JEREMY HOECK

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CROFTON, Neb. — Allison Arens and Maria Wortmann grew up watching former standout Amber Hegge lead Crofton High School to three consecutive state girls' basketball championships.

In time, they were going to get their chance.

They just had to be patient. "I remember being little and riding on the bus, and hearing Maria's older sister (Laura) talk about the Lady Warriors," said Arens, now a senior.

"It was kind of like one of those fairy tales. They were like professional athletes to us."

Arens and Wortmann were student managers in 2007, when Hegge — now playing professionally overseas — hit a game-winning three-pointer at the buzzer in the state championship game.

"I thought that was the coolest thing ever," Wortmann, also a senior, said.

Some have said that it's no coincidence that Crofton's first state basketball title since 2007 didn't come until Arens and Wortmann became high school students.

The Warriors lost in the state final in 2011, when the tandem were eighth-graders, and then won three straight titles from 2012-14.

Seven years later after that dramatic game-winner by Hegge, three Crofton seniors matched the previous feat of three consecutive state titles.

And yet, it's not been in just basketball that Arens, Wortmann and Wragge (who transferred to Crofton before her sophomore year) have been successful.

Their exploits have crossed over

Past Honorees

2006, Amber Hegge, Crofton; 2007, Amber Hegge, Crofton; 2008, Abby Burbach, Yankton; 2009, Bethany DeLong, Laurel-Concord; 2010, Chrissy Strassburg, Elk Point-Jefferson; 2011, Devon Brecke, Wagner; 2012, Lexi Steffen, Cedar Catholic; 2013, Keely Bertram, Elk Point-Jefferson; 2014, Allison Arens, Quinn Wragge and Maria Wortmann, Crofton.

four sports — three of which, basketball, cross country and track, won a state title during the 2014 calendar year. The fourth, volleyball, lost in the state championship match.

"Especially in our school, we have so many that are three sport athletes," Wragge said. "It's a lot of work, but it makes all the more rewarding."

That hard work and eventual success led the Press & Dakotan sports staff to name the senior trio as the 2014 Prep Female Athlete of the Year, the first time in the award's history that more than one person shared the honor.

"So many things that have gone right for that group," said Crofton basketball coach Aaron Losing, whose Warriors (7-0) are unbeaten this season and ranked No. 1 in Class C2.

"And they've earned it, too." Basketball has gotten the most notoriety over the years, which makes sense given Crofton has won six state titles in 10 years.

But the calendar year of 2014 saw the rise in two other sports and a continuation of one of the state's

top dynasties in another.

- Volleyball: Crofton hadn't reached the state tournament since 1993. The Warriors won 20 matches and made it to state in 2013, and this past season got all the way to the state championship match.

- Track: Crofton won four straight state titles from 2004-07, but didn't win another one until last March when the Warriors senior trio — of only five girls' athletes who competed — played key roles.

- Cross Country: Crofton, with Wragge as the second runner, won its ninth consecutive state Class D title in October.

From The Start

Like many schools that have sustained success over a number of years, Crofton has developed its talent in the younger ranks.

Much like Arens and Wortmann were each motivated by older sisters and also former players like the Hegge sisters (Amber and Holly), the current seniors have been role models for the younger Crofton players, their coach said.

"They've raised the level of performance in a lot of kids behind them," Losing said.

It came with time, and with first-person experience, Wortmann pointed out.

"When we got to be eighth graders, we got to be managers and see what they do at practice to get better," Wortmann said. "So when it came to high school, we already knew how hard work could pay off."

And yet, it's not just hard work in one sport like basketball or volleyball, it's across three for each of the three seniors — and Arens also has cross country success on her resume.

Between open gym sessions,

AAU tournaments in basketball and team camps in the summer, there hasn't much down time during the so-called off-season for the senior trio.

They haven't, though, complained once, Losing said.

"If you look at the off-season work they all do in their sports, it's pretty impressive," he said. "Whether it's weight lifting in the summer or practices in the winter, they support each other."

What also helps, especially the last two years, is that Crofton has the luxury of practicing against three college-bound athletes. Arens will play basketball at the University of South Dakota, Wortmann will play volleyball at Wayne State College, and Wragge is still deciding on her path — it could be cross country or basketball, or maybe both.

"There aren't a lot of high schools our size where you can get that level of competition every day," Losing said.

Wragge Joins Crofton

One of the many things that kick-started the multi-sport success at Crofton High School was the appearance in the summer of 2012 of a 6-foot blond-haired athlete.

She was Quinn Wragge and she was a transfer.

Wragge, whose father Mark accepted the position as principal at Crofton Elementary, came to Crofton via Fillmore Central High School in Geneva, Nebraska.

"I really had no idea what to expect at first," Quinn said. "I talked to the coaches and realized they were pretty good. It was a lot of fun to come in and be part of a family like this right away."

Wragge and her family didn't move to Crofton until the end of

that summer, but she made several trips — about three hours from Geneva — to practice with the Warriors, who had to learn a new face.

"The first thing we did was Google her," Wortmann joked.

"We thought, 'If she can run like that up here, she'll fit in great.' She's the nicest girl ever. It was like a blessing from God."

And a blessing her teammates saw right away, Arens said.

"Right away, when I first heard about it, I thought, 'Give her a week,'" Arens recalls, with a chuckle.

"She came to our first open gym and we were all like, 'She's a keeper.'"

Wragge's first experience in Crofton athletics was in cross country, where she helped the Warriors win yet another state title. Then came basketball, where she was a sophomore starter on a championship team, followed by track where she won the 800-meter run and anchored the team's first-place 3200-meter relay.

What might have been if not for Wragge is understandably a scary thought.

"We talk about that all the time," Arens said, "What if we didn't know each other and didn't meet."

Those inside the high school probably wouldn't point out Wragge's athletic abilities right away, Losing said, they'd likely first mention her personality and work ethic.

But make no mistake, she can play.

"She's improved immensely over the years," Losing said, "and really gotten stronger."

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