

Kocer Gives SDSU Wrestling A Big Boost

Wagner Native, Five-Time S.D. Prep Champ To Return To Mat

BY JEREMY HOECK

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BROOKINGS — Talk about a mid-season addition.

It wasn't a professional trade or anything, but Alex Kocer went from being an average student at South Dakota State to a member of the Division I wrestling program literally overnight.

A five-time state high school Class B champion at Wagner, Kocer was not heavily recruited and decided instead to not pursue wrestling at the collegiate level. All that soon changed.

"As soon as last year ended, I didn't think I'd want to; never really thought I was going to," he said outside the wrestling room at Frost Arena before Thursday night's USD-SDSU men's basketball game.

"I missed competing on the weekends. Not competing is tough."

Kocer, who is redshirting this season as a late addition, said the biggest influence on him changing his mind was going back to Wagner and watching his brother, David, wrestle for the Red Raiders. "I usually went home on the weekends and

watched my brother," Alex said. "I heard they (SDSU) were doing really good, and the coach seems like a really good guy, so I thought, 'Let's give it a try.'"

Thus began the conversations between Kocer — who graduated in May 2012 after an undefeated (44-0) senior season — and head coach Chris Bono, who was hired at SDSU from Tennessee-Chattanooga in mid-April 2012.

"I hadn't been here more than two days and I had eight phone calls telling me about this kid back in the day," Bono said Thursday at Frost Arena. "I reached out to him early in the summer and he said he wasn't ready to get out there, so I said, 'Take your time.'"

"When he was ready, I was here to listen."

Understandable, given Kocer's success at the high school level. He won state titles at four different weight classes — 103, 118, 130 and 152 (twice). He also became only the third South Dakota wrestler to win at least five crowns, one behind Kirk Wallman and Logan Storley.

Still, it took some persuading for Kocer to want to continue his career for the Jackrabbits.

"Everybody wanted me to, that made it easy,"

he said. "They were all pushing me to. That was the last straw, so I thought, 'Alright, let's do it.'"

And when he did decide to join the team in Brookings, he only added to what was the sixth-ranked recruiting class, by two publications — The Open Mat and Amateur Wrestling News.

"It's huge for us. He's one of the biggest recruits we got," Bono said. "We had the sixth-best class without him, and with him in there, we're excited. He's a great kid, and to get a local product is even better."

Bono said Kocer is already practicing with the team and will begin his eligibility next season.

"He'll be an immediate impact kid for sure, he'll bring our team up another level," Bono said. "Hopefully he can help bring us back where this program used to be. We'll start making waves across the country."

On the question of how his style would translate to the Division I level, Kocer said, "I have a more loose style; roll around a lot. Everyone else is up tighter with more muscle, but hopefully it works here."

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



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Carlie Long, left, of Dakota Valley runs into Elk Point-Jefferson defender Brittany Hanson, 30, during their girls' basketball game Friday night in Elk Point.

Gazelles Hold Off Pierre

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE

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Knowing Pierre is an aggressive team, the Yankton Gazelle basketball players kept one thing in mind during their game Friday night.

"The message we had for them was this: We are not going to let Pierre come into our gym and push us around," said head coach Doug Pesicka, whose team edged Pierre 37-35 in a hard-fought ESD game at the Summit Center.

"We challenged our kids to be a little more physical and play with a little bit more of a presence on the court for this game, and we did that."

The Gazelles jumped ahead 8-0 with 4:07 left in the first quarter, and kept their lead for the rest of the first half. Yankton ended the first half ahead 21-14 against the Lady Goves.

Kelsey Fitzgerald led the Gazelles at the half with seven points and four rebounds, with Mikala Hora adding five points and four rebounds.

For Hora, the first half proved that she and her teammates they could compete.

"For us to come out and work so hard — you can't ask for anything more than that from your team," she said. "It was amazing."

Stevi Clauussen had seven points and three rebounds at the half for the Lady Goves, while Kaitlyn Severyn contributed four points and two rebounds.

Ending the first half with a solid lead helped the Gazelles to their victory, Pesicka said.

"It's always nice when you shoot the ball well early in the game," he said. "We shot the ball well and were able to get a lead. That helps when you can put the ball in the basket — it makes a lot of the other parts of the game a little easier."

Pierre came out strong and aggressive in the second half, quickly closing the gap. Yankton barely held on to their lead, just ahead 21-20 with 5:42 left in the quarter. By the end of the third quarter, the Lady Goves had tied the game 25-25, only allowing Yankton to score twice.

Yankton increased their lead to 31-25 less than two minutes into the fourth quarter, but found Pierre firing back to put them ahead only 33-30 with 5:59 left in the game. The Lady Goves tied the game once more, 35-35, with 1:16 to go. With 46 seconds left to play, Yankton's Andi Sprakel scored to put the Gazelles ahead 37-35, taking the victory.

Fitzgerald had a total of 11 points and six rebounds in the win, with Hora recording 10 points and five rebounds. Sprakel also contributed eight points and six rebounds.

For Pierre, Clauussen and Severyn each scored nine points, Clauussen also putting up five rebounds and Severyn adding four rebounds. Taylor Hyde and Sydney Palmer each



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Yankton's Kelsey Fitzgerald, 24, shoots against the defense of Pierre's Katie Berg, 14, Miranda Panzer and Taylor Hyde during the second half of their Eastern South Dakota Conference girls' basketball game on Friday at the Summit Center.

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Boys: Pierre Powers Past Yankton



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Brody Van Ginkel of Dakota Valley picks up the ball off a deflection during Friday night's boys' basketball game against Elk Point-Jefferson in Elk Point.

Dakota Valley Outguns EPJ Despite Zeller's 33 Points

PIERRE — The Pierre Governors showed part of why they are considered one of the top teams in South Dakota, shooting 52.1 percent and jumping out to a 35-13 halftime lead on the way to a 69-41 victory over Yankton in Eastern South Dakota Conference boys' basketball action on Friday.

While Yankton head coach Chris Haynes knew the Bucks would have their hands full, he felt his team played scared at the start.

"This team wasn't much of a surprise. They played pretty well," Haynes said of the Governors. "But I thought we played timid, played scared."

South Dakota State recruit Lane Severyn finished with 20 points and eight rebounds for Pierre. Zach Hanson, a Creighton recruit, scored 18 points. Cody Honeywell matched Severyn's team-high three three-pointers to finish with nine points in the win.

Brady Hale was the lone Buck in double figures, as the sophomore went 3-5 from three-point range to score 13 points. "Brady has the tools to do some nice things," Haynes said. "But we want him to be

more consistent. It's February. In the coaches' eyes, he's no longer a sophomore."

Both teams are in action today. Pierre, 9-4 and winners of seven straight, takes its 7-2 ESD record in to Brandon Valley. Yankton, 4-8 and 2-6, looks to bounce back as it hosts Aberdeen Central.

"We challenged our guys to come out and compete," Haynes said. "It doesn't get any easier for us. Aberdeen is a team that beat us the first time, and they are going to come in with the confidence that they can beat us again."

Pierre edged the Bucks 54-48 in the JV game. Austin Johnson led the Bucks with 12 points. Johnson also led the Yankton sophomore squad as it beat Pierre 44-41.

The Bucks scored a sweep in the freshmen games. In a 70-43 'A' game rout, Tanner Frick scored 13 points, and Bradley Sorenson and Jared Rafferty each had 12 points. Levi Schmidt and Gabe Dannenbring each scored seven points as Yankton won the 'B' game 39-37.

Panthers Rally Past EPJ In BSC Girls' Action

ELK POINT — Dakota Valley overcame a halftime deficit to take a Big Sioux Conference victory against Elk Point-Jefferson by a final of 49-45 on Friday night in Elk Point.

Trailing 30-24 at the half, the Panthers outscored EPJ 25-15 in the second half to take their ninth win of the season.

Allison Sexton scored 20 points to lead the Panthers while McKenzie Mennenga added 10 points and a game-high nine rebounds.

Keely Bertram scored 19 points to lead the Huskies. Elk Point-Jefferson shot just 34 percent from the field for the game.

Dakota Valley, 9-7, travels to Vermillion on Tuesday. Elk Point-Jefferson, 10-6, hosts Homer, Neb. on Tuesday.

DAKOTA VALLEY (9-7)	10	24	38	49
ELK POINT-JEFFERSON (10-6)	13	30	37	45

Lewis & Clark Conference Tournament

Wynot 61, Emerson-Hubbard 50

WAUSA, Neb. — Wynot worked their way back from an early deficit to top Emerson-Hubbard in the semifinals of the Lewis and Clark Conference Tournament on Friday night in Wausa.

Maggie Schulte led Wynot with 18 points while Kelsie Higgins scored 12. The Blue Devils trailed 23-12 after the first quarter but held Emerson-Hubbard to just 15 points after halftime to fight their way to the win.

Abby Dreiling scored 27 points to lead E-H. Wynot will now play Homer in the title game on Monday in Laurel for the Lewis and Clark Conference crown.

EMERSON-HUBBARD	23	35	43	50
WYNOT	12	29	39	61

Homer 62, Ponca 53

WAUSA, Neb. — Brooke Tighe led Homer with 24 points to secure a spot in the Lewis and Clark Conference championship game with a 62-53 semifinal victory over Ponca.

Cassandra Stowe added 16 points in the win. For Ponca, Kianna Krampfer scored 13 points while Megan Pollard added 12.

Homer will face Wynot on Monday in Laurel.

PONCA	6	26	40	53
HOMER	11	32	48	62

Other Games

Centerville 67, Parker 59

CENTERVILLE — Kieran O'Malley continued her stellar season as the senior dropped 40 points on Parker on Friday night in a 67-59 Centerville victory in Class B girls' basketball action.

Logan Wieseler added 13 points for the Tomatoes, who improve to 14-2 on the year. Carleigh Oster also had an excellent effort in the win, scoring eight points and grabbing a game-high nine rebounds.

For Parker, seniors Micalanne Hanten and Amber Dysthe each scored 14 points while junior Morgan Hay added 11. The Pheasants are now 10-7 after losing for only the second time in the past eight games.

Centerville travels to Freeman on Monday to battle Freeman Academy while Parker hosts Viborg-Hurley on Friday.

PARKER (10-7)	11	23	41	59
CENTERVILLE (14-2)	20	43	56	67

Avon 41, Bon Homme 39

TYNDALL — Avon defeated Bon Homme 41-39 in South Dakota girls' basketball action on Friday.

Ariana Orlong led Avon (10-4) with 17 points. Chelsey Nagel added 14 points in the victory.

Emily Pechous led Bon Homme (6-9) with 12 points. Karlee Kozak had nine points in the loss.

Avon hosts Ethan today. Bon Homme travels to Platte-Geddes on Monday.

AVON (10-4)	13	17	28	41
BON HOMME (6-9)	9	15	25	39

Vermillion 48, Sergeant Bluff-Luton 37

VERMILLION — The Vermillion Tanagers shot only 39 percent from the field but 85 percent at the charity stripe to take a 48-37 victory over Sergeant Bluff-Luton (Iowa) on Friday night in girls' basketball action.

Josie Huber led the Tanagers, 9-7, with 18 points and two steals. Brooke Schwasinger and Blair Gilkyson added 10 points apiece.

Amber Schubert scored 18 points to lead SB-L. Vermillion hosts Dakota Valley on Tuesday as the Tanagers begin their final week of the regular season.

SERGEANT BLUFF-LUTON	9	18	27	37
VERMILLION (9-7)	14	27	34	48

Viborg-Hurley 50, Freeman Academy 33

HURLEY — Viborg-Hurley held Freeman Academy to 10 or fewer points in all four quarters on Friday night to take a Class B girls' basketball victory in Hurley.

The Cougars, 8-7, led 30-17 at the break and held on for the 50-33 victory. Abby Hora and Val Sunderland scored 12 points apiece to lead V-H while Sunderland also added 10 rebounds to record the double-double. Hannah Jorgensen was also in double-digit scoring for the Cougars, netting 11 points.

Freeman Academy, 1-12, was led by Hannah Yoder's 22 points.

Viborg-Hurley hosts Avon on Tuesday in Viborg. Freeman Academy hosts Centerville on Monday.

FREEMAN ACADEMY (1-12)	7	17	24	33
VIBORG-HURLEY (8-7)	20	30	41	50

Beresford 51, Alcester-Hudson 29

ALCESTER — Beresford claimed their seventh win in a row with a 51-29 victory over Alcester-Hudson on Friday night in Alcester.

Taryn Twite led the Watchdogs with 20 points, seven rebounds and four steals. Alyson Johnsen added 13 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

Fro A-H, Shenia Doering recorded 12 points while Sierra McConnell added seven.