

# Geography, Fan Support Make Summit League Meet A Different Animal

Track & Field: USD Hosts Its Fourth Conference Championships Since Moving To D-I; Meet Begins Sunday

BY JEREMY HOECK

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VERMILLION — Hosting track meets, even ones at the Division I level, is nothing new for the University of South Dakota.

The school brought the Great West Conference indoor meets to the DakotaDome in 2009 and 2010, and then hosted the Great West outdoor meet in 2010 in Yankton. This most recent event, however, is significantly different for USD.

In short, the Summit League — which will hold its Indoor Track & Field Championships in Vermillion on Sunday and Monday — is a whole different animal.

Just ask senior sprinter Michael Burrus. “That conference was so spread out, you had teams from like Texas and they didn’t bring many (fans) with them,” Burrus said during a practice this week in the Dome. “It’s a big thing when you have fans you know.”

Not to mention more of a relationship with the athletes from other school.

Instead of schools from Texas and New Jersey in the Great West days, USD will now compete for individual and team titles with the likes of South Dakota State and North Dakota State.

Like Burrus, senior Brandon Kovash from Harrisburg saw those Great West meets up close and personal — despite not competing in 2010. The Coyotes swept the team indoor titles both of those years, and finished second at the outdoor meet in Yankton.

“I didn’t know much about our conference, and definitely not much about the other ones,” Kovash said. “It’s definitely something to be excited about.”

The Summit League will have eight women’s teams and six men’s squads competing at the meet (Nebraska-Omaha and Fort Wayne do not sponsor men’s track, while IUPUI does not compete indoors).

North Dakota State is the favorite to win titles on both sides. The Bison women are the five-time league champs and the men have won four titles in the past five years.

Put another way, a little different from USD’s current league home.

“In the Great West, everyone had pockets of really good kids or certain events they did well in,” men’s coach Dave Gottsleben said. “There were no bad teams, but it wasn’t nearly as deep as the Summit.”

Combined, USD leads the conference in eight events, while NDSU ranks first in 10 and SDSU in one. The Bison women figure to run away with the team title, but the men’s team race looks to be closer.

Like his coaches, Coyote senior jumper Chad Pinkelman tried to map out exactly how the men’s team standings would go at the meet. Of course, meets don’t always pan out according to seedings, there will naturally be some movement.

“There’ll be a lot of big swings,” Pinkelman said. “You just have to be patient. We’ll get our 20-30 points all of a sudden, but then another team will do the same thing.”

The way Gottsleben figures it, before the meet even starts, the Coyote men are eight points behind league powerhouse North Dakota State.

“It’s so hard to predict,” he said. “NDSU’s been very successful in these things, so it’s great for our kids to take a shot at them.”

The Coyote men have two athletes leading the league in two different events. Junior Jeff Mettler owns the top time in the 3,000-meter run and the 5,000-meter, while freshman Christian Nielsen is first in the 200-meter and 400-meter dashes.

Burrus leads the conference in the 60-meter dash, while senior Kyle Ballew is first

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## SDSU Looking For ‘Wow’ Moment This Weekend

BY JEREMY HOECK

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As one school along Interstate 29 prepares to host the Summit League Indoor Track & Field Championships and another school further north comes in as the favorite, the school sandwiched between is looking for a strong finish to a frustrating few months.

Though the South Dakota State men’s and women’s squads were picked to finish third, injuries and otherwise below-average performances have slowed those expectations.

Reaching that potential has been a struggle but is still an attainable goal for SDSU, head coach Rod DeHaven said this week.

“Largely we’ve just been waiting for something big to happen, that ‘Wow’ moment,” DeHaven said. “It has to happen now, or we’d walk away with a little disappointment with the indoor season.”

Summit League powerhouse North Dakota State enters the 2-day meet with the top mark or time in 10 events, as does host school University of South Dakota — which was picked second in the pre-season polls.

The Jackrabbits, meanwhile, have just one such No. 1 time, from senior Tera Potts in the women’s mile run.

SDSU still has the potential to be a threat in the team race with strengths in other areas. It’s distance medley relay squad is ranked second, while the Jacks figure to have some potential points in the throwing events.

The trio of senior Brooke Garner, junior Shelby Assmus and sophomore McKenzie Johnson are seeded 2-4-5 in the women’s weight throw, respectively, while Johnson and Assmus are 3-5 in the shot put.

“Brooke is capable of rising to the occasion in the weight throw, but we’re waiting for that ‘Oh wow’ moment,” DeHaven said. “With Tera, she’ll be running against some really talented girls in the mile, so we’ll see how she does.”

“It’ll be interesting to see what strategy we ultimately decide on.” The Jackrabbit men, meanwhile, have been hit hardest by the injury and illness bug. Last fall’s cross country champion, Michael Krsnak, is seeded second in the 3,000-meter run (behind USD’s Jeff Mettler) and fourth in the mile, but isn’t quite 100 percent after a sinus infection, DeHaven said.

“It’s not only an issue of physically, but it’s affected his training,” DeHaven said. “That’s probably the toughest thing for him, he just hasn’t gotten in much time on the track.”

Parkston native Luke Leischner ranks second in the 400-meter dash and third in the 200-meter.

North Dakota State enters as the clear favorite in both women and men. The Bison women have won five straight league titles, while the men are seeking their fifth title in six years.

The Bison boast the top time or mark in 10 events, six on the women’s side and four for the men.

“Even despite some injuries they’ve had, it probably won’t have a big impact,” DeHaven said of NDSU.

One team that could exceed expectations is the Nebraska-Omaha women, DeHaven said. The Mavericks were picked seventh in the pre-season poll, but could accumulate some serious points with junior Sami Spenner.

Spenner ranks first in the league in the long jump and triple jump, and is third in the high jump. On the track, she is third in the 60-meter hurdles, fourth in the 60-meter and 200-meter dashes and sixth in the 800-meter run.

Of course, the hometown Coyotes could find success in their

## Hockey | SDAHA JV Girls

# State Tournament Begins

## Top-Seeded Mitchell Outlasts Yankton 7-1

## Watertown Blanks Storm

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The Yankton Miracle did not make it easy for top-ranked Mitchell, but eventually the undefeated Marlins were too much as Mitchell defeated Yankton 7-1 in their opening round match on Friday night in the Girls’ State JV Hockey Tournament at the Alcoa Arena.

Mitchell out-shot Yankton 45-19 for the game, but the Marlins led just 3-1 despite out-shooting the Miracle 33-11 through two periods.

“We knew they (Yankton) were going to be good in the first two periods,” Mitchell coach Randy Rezac said. “I have to give hats off to the Yankton girls - they played an excellent game.”

After a pair of Mitchell goals in the first period gave the Marlins a 2-0 lead, Yankton Sam Straatmeyer found the back of the net just over three minutes into the second period to draw Yankton back within one point, 2-1.

Mitchell’s Destiny Pinder scored three minutes later to move the lead back to 2 points, but that would be all the scoring that Mitchell (20-0-1 in the regular season) would do in the first 31-plus minutes of action, thanks to the excellent play of Yankton goalkeeper Renee Cross.

Rezac also had praise for



NICK ROBINSON/P&D

Yankton Miracle captain Iesely Stone looks to shoot the puck in the opening round of the South Dakota Girls JV Hockey tournament at Alcoa Arena in Yankton on Friday night.

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# Mutschelknaus Powers Flyers Past Rangers

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE

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The Sioux Falls Flyers and the Brookings Rangers knew they would play a tough game Friday night. After splitting the season 2-2 against each other, both teams knew what they needed to do.

With Hanna Mutschelknaus leading the Flyers with four goals, Sioux Falls was able to take the 5-2 win against Brookings at the 4-H Ice Arena.

Mutschelknaus put Sioux Falls on the board unassisted with 3:59 remaining in the first period, and then put Sioux Falls ahead 2-0 less than five minutes into the second period. Mutschelknaus scored once more in the second period, with 2:50 remaining, when Brookings’ Jessica Laidlaw answered back to make it a 3-1 game with 2:25 left in the second. Mackenzie Oien ended the second period scoring a goal for Sioux Falls, put-

ting them ahead 4-1.

Mutschelknaus then scored the Flyers last goal less than two minutes into the third period, putting them ahead 5-1. Brookings was unable to score until 1:24 remained in the game, ending behind Sioux Falls 5-2.

Sioux Falls head coach Brian Wrightsman said the win felt good because his team didn’t have to make any changes to pull off the win.

“There’s a little rivalry between the two teams,” he said. “We’re one of the only teams in the state to skate four lines, and we do it the whole game. Our plan coming into the game — the four lines, the defense — that’s what we used the whole game, and we played well.”

Although Mutschelknaus played a major role in her team’s win, she said she couldn’t have done it with-



EMILY NIEBRUGGE/P&D

Brookings’ Mariah Gummer passes the puck during the Rangers match up with Sioux Falls in the opening round of the SDAHA JV Girls Tournament Friday at Alcoa Arena.

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# Crofton Girls Roll Past Homer For Return Trip To State

BY JEREMY HOECK

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WAYNE, Neb. — As far as 26-point wins go, this one certainly didn’t have the look of a blowout.

In the battle between the last two Class C2 champions, the Crofton Lady Warriors did just about everything right in a 76-50 rout of Homer in Friday night’s District C2-4 final at Wayne High School.

The win all but assures Crofton (24-0) of the top seed in next week’s state tournament in Lincoln.

Did it feel as lopsided as it looked? “Oh, not at all,” said senior Bridget Arens, who posted 19 points and nine rebounds. “They’re the type of team that if you get a lead, you can’t really think about it because they can come back.”

Crofton made sure that didn’t happen, though, jumping out to a 12-2 lead in the first quarter and turning a 9-point cushion at half-time into a 19-point lead after three quarters.

“We slowly kept making shots,” head coach Aaron Losing said, moments after celebrating with a group of Crofton students. “At one point I looked up and we had almost a 20-

point lead and it shocked me.”

With not much on the line other than state tournament seeding (Homer is likely to earn a wild card berth), the Lady Warriors showcased the intensity of a team fighting for a bid.

“It just shows us that our hard work is paying off,” said senior Tiffany Tramp, who scored 15 points.

Crofton’s victory was especially notable for the balance it showed. Sophomore Allison Arens added 16 points and five assists, while sophomore Quinn Wragge posted 12 points and nine assists. For good measure, sophomore Maria Wortmann had five points and five rebounds.

“It shows that we can compete at a high level, and can have people from all over score,” Bridget Arens said.

After Crofton built an 18-9 lead early in the second quarter, Homer climbed within 20-14 at the 5:04 mark and used a banked-in three-pointer at the halftime buzzer to cut the deficit to 25-16.

A 19-3 run by the Lady Warriors, however, eliminated any hope for a Homer comeback. From there, the rout was on — Crofton led by as many as 30 points, at 69-39.

Sisters Brandan Tighe (20) and Brooke Tighe (10) combined for 30 of the 50 points for the Homer Lady Nights (23-3), who like Crofton, are relatively young — just two seniors.

Of course, it’s the Lady Warriors, with just three seniors, who are looking for much more than a district trophy. The ultimate goal, Tramp said, is again a state title.

“Our chances are good, as long as we keep improving,” she said, holding a piece of the net she cut down during the post-game celebration.

There was time to celebrate the latest accomplishment Friday. Losing said, but when the time comes to focus on the state tournament, his team should be ready.

“Our kids are just really motivated,” Losing said. “They’re good at living in the moment; with each practice and each game.”

“It’s been a good train of thought for us.”

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



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Crofton sophomore Quinn Wragge, right, chases down a loose ball in front of Homer’s diving defender Brooke Tighe during their District C2-4 final Friday night in Wayne, Neb.