

Twins Relax Before Long Season

Fishing, Hunting Join Baseball Talk As Winter Caravan Hits Yankton

BY JEREMY HOECK
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Sure, Ron Gardenhire was in Yankton to talk baseball; to reassure fans that yes, things will get better.

Stop with the baseball questions, though, and the manager for the Minnesota Twins seems more relaxed talking about another one of his passions: Being an outdoorsman.

"We were riding in the bus, and our doggone windows keep freezing over. I like to look out. I'm looking for roosters and deer," Gardenhire said during a Twins winter caravan stop at the WNAX radio station Wednesday morning.

The 12th-year manager was joined by infielder Brian Dozier, bench coach Terry Steinbach and broadcaster Dick Bremer, and though the bulk of the talk centered about the Twins, Gardenhire was quick to talk hunting and fishing — one of the topics later was what grouper taste like.

"And now I'm seeing a river and I want to go fishing," he added. "This is my kind of place."

Any luck yet spotting birds? "No, haven't seen any roosters yet," he said, looking out the window. "They're hiding from us. They know I'm coming around; they're scared."

Following a large gathering in Sioux Falls on Tuesday night and before making the trek to Sioux City, Iowa, Wednesday's crowd at WNAX was considerably smaller and more private. There were still balls and bats to sign, and photos to be taken, but the atmosphere in small-town Yankton was a welcome change, Gardenhire said.

"I grew up in a small town down in Oklahoma, so this is more familiar to me," he said. "It's incredible how far you reach out and find Twins fans everywhere in this area."

"That's what's good for us, we get a chance to say thanks."

The caravan this year, more than probably most in recent years, was also a chance for the Twins to help fans move past consecutive 90-plus loss seasons and look to the future, Bremer said.

"All you have to do is look back to 2012 and see a couple teams — Oakland and Baltimore — in the American League that once they got headed in the right direction, things really took off in a hurry," said Bremer, the play-by-play TV broadcaster for Fox Sports North.



The Minnesota Twins winter caravan made a stop at WNAX in Yankton on Wednesday morning, part of the team's annual effort to reach out to fans in the upper Midwest.

ABOVE: Twins television announcer Dick Bremer, left, and Twins infielder Brian Dozier, check out the autographs on a piece of memorabilia brought to the event by a fan. Besides speaking with the media, the Twins personnel in attendance also signed autographs and talked with a few fans.

LEFT: Twins manager Ron Gardenhire speaks about the upcoming season with the Press & Dakotan's Jeremy Hoeck, not pictured. Also in attendance was Twins bench coach Terry Steinbach.

JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

"That's the hope here with the Twins, that if the starting pitching can be improved, this team can go a lot further than people think."

First comes the matter of moving on from 99 losses in 2011 and 96 last summer, Dozier said. "That's part of it; everyone goes through it," said Dozier, who played in 84 games and batted .234 last season. "We've had our ups and downs, but we've made a few moves this off-season that should help us out."

As each of the four caravan members pointed out, starting pitching was the key area of focus after 2012.

Not only did the Twins use 12 starters last season, those pitchers recorded a 4.77 ERA, worst in the American League. The one guy who did put together a solid season, lefty Scott Diamond (12-9, 3.54 ERA), didn't start a game until May.

"There's no secret that pitching was not satisfactory last year," Steinbach, the new bench coach, said. "For us, it'll be exciting to get to spring training to see what those guys can bring, and how we can form our staff. Hopefully we can stay away from the injury bug and start turning things around."

To do so, the Twins not only

plan to bring 34 pitchers to spring training in Florida next month, the front office added some pieces to bolster the rotation. Minnesota brought in Kevin Correia, Mike Pelfrey and Vance Worley to not simply provide experience, but to reverse recent trends, Gardenhire said.

The organization also signed right-hander Rich Harden to a minor league deal with an invite to spring training. The 31-year-old boasts a career ERA of 3.76 but has been beset with injuries throughout his career.

"There's no talk of rebuilding, inside our organization," Gardenhire said. "I know there's a lot of talk outside, but we're talking about re-tooling for this year and years to come."

"When you're in a ballpark like Target (Field), you don't want to have a losing season. You want to win. We've had a couple of bad ones; some tough ones, with a lot of injuries and just didn't play well, and it's time to get back to playing well."

Other notes and quotes from Wednesday's caravan stop:

- Former Twins pitcher Jack Morris came up shy of the Hall of Fame once again last week, receiving 67.7 percent of the vote,

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Mount Marty's Raquel Sutura goes up for a shot against Dordt's Emily Newman, 21, during their Great Plains Athletic Conference women's basketball game on Wednesday at Laddie E. Cimpl Arena.

Dordt Women Avenge Loss To MMC

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE
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The Mount Marty Lancers women's basketball players are using their loss to the Dordt Defenders to fuel their fire for this weekend's game.

Dordt avenged an earlier loss to Mount Marty, claiming a 70-63 victory over the Lancers in Great Plains Athletic Conference basketball action Wednesday night at the Laddie E. Cimpl Arena.

"Everybody is going to work a lot harder," Raquel Sutura said after Wednesday's game. "This is

going to fuel our fire more to keep pushing and working harder in practice to keep winning."

"We're looking forward to getting out and playing again. We just need to get a big win against Midland and keep pushing toward that."

The Lancers put themselves ahead 18-13 eight minutes into the first half, and increased their lead 28-20 against Dordt with five minutes remaining in the first half. The Defenders fired back to close the

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San Diego State Jilts Big East, Staying In Mountain West

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — San Diego State is staying in the Mountain West and backing out on the Big East — just as Boise State did last month.

University President Elliot Hirschman said Tuesday that the school is pleased to be continuing as a full member of the Mountain West Conference.

San Diego State, a founding

member, had committed to join the Big East for football only, with Boise State, starting next season. San Diego State's other teams were going to compete in the Big West.

But recent defections from the Big East caused Boise State to reconsider and strike a deal to stay in the Mountain West. Without a western partner, San Diego State retreated, too.

Unlike Boise State, San Diego State is not on the hook for an exit fee, because Boise State left first. San Diego State becomes the third school in the last 16 months to leave the Big East before ever actually joining. TCU did the same, reneging on a commitment to join the league in 2012 and instead accepting an invite to join the Big 12. However, SDSU must pay a \$1.5

million exit fee to the Big West, which was where its men's basketball team was headed next season before Tuesday's decision. That money will be defrayed by an estimated \$2.5 million year-end distribution from the Mountain West.

"After substantial discussion

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Mount Marty Upends No. 12 Dordt 77-60

BY JEREMY HOECK
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All it took for an upset bid was to face a higher-ranked team.

It wasn't easy for the Mount Marty College basketball team, but the Lancers aren't going to complain — they were having too much fun.

"It's the first time we've beat these guys since I've been here," said senior Joe Hieb, who scored 15 points as Mount Marty upset No. 12-ranked Dordt 77-60 in a tense GPAC men's showdown Wednesday night at Cimpl Arena.

"I said it in the locker room, it's about time. We needed to get this one."

After losing by 22 last Wednesday at Morningside and by three on the road last Saturday at Doane, the nation's No. 16-ranked team, the Lancers (7-13, 3-9) did one better and were able to get it done.

Mount Marty, which trailed once — by 18 seconds — in the second half, shot 53 percent and turned 17 Dordt turnovers into 11 steals. And more importantly, into a victory.

"We played a good game at Doane, but we needed a win," MMC coach Jim Thorson said. "The guys responded really well. This was the smartest game we've played in a long time."

"The guys followed the game

plan, and we were impressed."

Part of that game plan was undoubtedly to try to slow down the Defenders' offense, which ranked fifth in shooting at 50 percent and averaged 79.6 points.

Dordt, also the nation's fifth-best three-point shooting team at 40 percent, was just 6-of-28 (21 percent) in that area against the energetic Lancers.

Mount Marty played inspired basketball, especially on hustle plays, and even got a chance to score.

The signature moment of the night came with 2:35 left when Hieb threw up a prayer before the shot clock hit zero. The shot bounced high off the rim and sailed directly down through the net.

"We've seen everyone in the conference once now, so we made it a point to get this going," Hieb said. "We needed to turn things around. And there's no better way to start."

Dordt got within 63-57 on a Cliff Warner three-pointer with 4:39 to play, but the Lancers responded with a Hieb three. With 2:35 remaining, Hieb threw up his off-balanced shot that went in.

From there, it was over. "In the past here, we've played in a hurry, but the guys let things come to them," Thorson said. "We



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Mount Marty's Saladin Smith shoots over a pair of Dordt defenders during the first half of their Great Plains Athletic Conference men's basketball game on Wednesday at Laddie E. Cimpl Arena.

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