

Basketball | South Dakota State Girls' Class A Tournament

Vermillion Returns To Site Of '07 Title Run

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VERMILLION — The last time the Vermillion girls' basketball team went to Spearfish, it proved to be a magical moment, the school's first and only state girls' basketball title.

A new coach, a new team, but the Tanagers are hoping to capture that magic again.

Vermillion begins its first South Dakota State Class A Girls' Basketball Tournament since that 2007 title run today (Thursday) in Spearfish against Miller, a 7 p.m. Central Time start. The tournament is being played at the Young Center on the Black Hills State University campus.

The Tanager program had fallen off after 2007, the third of three straight tourney appearances and five trips to state in eight years. With a new coach — Nick Mayer — and some hard work, Vermillion is back at state.

"A lot of things had to happen. The most important thing was that the kids saw that they had the potential to get there," said Mayer, who was an assistant on the 2007 title team. "It was really important that our kids believed that they could do it."

A tough district loss to eventual state runner-up Beresford a year ago helped light the fire for this season's drive.

"Last year we were really embarrassed in that district final," Mayer said. "Our kids said that they were not letting that happen again."

Senior forward Kelly Amundson has been a key component in the Tanagers' success, averaging 14.5 points and 7.4 rebounds per game. She also ranks among the team leaders at 1.8 assists per game.

Senior guards Lexi Regnerus (9.4 ppg, 3.8 rpg, 1.2 apg), Val Robinson (9.2 ppg, 2.4 rpg, 1.4 spg, 1.9 apg) and Beth Szymonski (8.3 ppg, 6.4 rpg, 1.7 spg, 1.6 apg) provide a strong perimeter balance for a team shooting 36 percent from 3-point range. Regnarus leads the team with 38 three-pointers, with Robinson sporting 23 on the season.

"We like to pound the ball inside when we can, but our guards can take it to the rim or shoot the three," Mayer said. "That makes us tough to scout. If you take one away, another one steps up. We have kids that can come in off the bench and contribute as well."

Senior speedster Blair Gilykson (2.5 ppg, 1.3 rpg, 2.0 apg), fellow junior Mackenzie Huber (1.4 ppg, 1.5 rpg) and sophomore Josie Huber (4.5 ppg, 2.7 rpg, 1.4 spg) have all been solid contributors to the Tanagers' effort. Juniors Courtney Johnson, Mariah Larson, Brooke Schwasinger and Allison Heine have also seen action for Vermillion.

Part of what has sparked the Tanagers' success this season is not only the talent level, but the willingness to defer to teammates.

"You watch our kids play together it's amazing," Mayer said. "You can preach it all you want in practice, but the kids have to buy into it. They are willing to give up potential points of their own so that a teammate can get a better shot."

The Tanagers have also proven to be a solid club defensively, allowing 41.4 points per



Vermillion senior Kelly Amundson, 31, attacks the basket during the District 8A Girls' Basketball Tournament earlier this season. Amundson and the Tanagers make their first trip to the State A Girls' Basketball Tournament since winning in 2007 as the tourney begins today (Thursday) in Spearfish.

P&D FILE PHOTO

Briar Cliff, Northwestern Win Openers

SIoux CITY, Iowa — Kendra DeJong posted a double-double, one of four Northwestern players in double figures as the Raiders beat Indiana Southeast 76-56 in the opening round of the NAIA Division II Women's Basketball Tournament Wednesday at the Tyson Event Center.

DeJong finished with 18 points, 15 rebounds and four assists for Northwestern (24-7), which will play Jamestown (N.D.) in the second round on Friday.

Kami Kuhlmann and Mallory Cunard each had 11 points. Mackenzie Small added 10 points in the win.

Ashmere Woods scored a game-high 24 points, and Megan Murphy had 14 points and 10 rebounds for Indiana Southeast (26-8).

BRIAR CLIFF 79, ST. THOMAS, FLA. 50: Christa Stewart scored 19 points on 8-10 shooting to lead Briar Cliff to a 79-50 rout of St. Thomas (Fla.) in the opening round of the NAIA Division II Women's Basketball Tournament on Tuesday.

Sara Reeves and Megan Salcedo each had 12 points for BC (23-9), which faces Davenport, Mich., in the second round on Friday. Ashley Zobel scored 11 points, and Avon native Kela Cihak added eight rebounds in the win.

Nickerline Montana led St. Thomas (24-8) with 15 points. Dannisha Pierce added 12 points and 10 rebounds.

Northwestern, Dordt Men Cruise

POINT LOOKOUT, Mo. — Northwestern used five players in double figures to cruise to a 95-69 rout of Tennessee Wesleyan in the opening round of the NAIA Division II Men's Basketball Tournament on Wednesday in Point Lookout, Mo.

Zack Leeper scored 18 points, and Ryan Stock and Daniel Van Kalsbeek each had 16 points off the bench for Northwestern (25-6), which faces Northwest (Wash.) in the second round on Friday. Walker Seim netted 14 points and Ben Miller added 12

points in the win.

Shannon Smith led TWC (24-9) with 20 points. E'Jay Ward had 13 points and Quincy Scates added 10 points in the effort.

DORDT 63, CAL MARITIME 54: Trevor Wolterstorff posted 19 points and 10 rebounds to lead Dordt to a 63-54 victory over Cal Maritime in the opening round of the NAIA Division II Men's Basketball Tournament on Wednesday.

Dordt survived offensive control issues, shooting 51 percent to counter its 21 turnovers.

Cliff Warner had 15 points and Jordan Vogel scored 12 points on 6-6 shooting for Dordt (29-4), which faces Warner Pacific in the second round on Friday.

For Cal Maritime (21-10), Josh Greenwell led the way with 16 points. Ty Houghton added 13 points.

Manning

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ning's former offensive coordinator, as a consultant last season — although it's unclear if he'll be back.

Despite the Jets' recent success under Ryan, the locker-room discord might be a deterrent for Manning. He also might be unwilling to play in the circus atmosphere of New York, a town in which Eli has become a huge star. Think the city's media would play up the sibling rivalry?

Salary cap issues also might prevent the Jets from being a true contender, financially.

Seattle

Seattle has its franchise running back in Marshawn Lynch, and seems to be solid on the outside with receivers Sidney Rice, Mike Williams, Doug Baldwin and tight end Zach Miller. The offensive line is young and improved, but the remaining question for Seattle's offense is at quarterback.

Tavaris Jackson toughed his way through a painful pectoral injury for more than half of last season, but was never overly impressive. Manning could be the answer.

Still, Jackson has never been given much of a chance as a starter and played fairly well while battling his injury and was respected in the locker room.

Tennessee

Fans have already started a "Come Back, Peyton" campaign, with billboards and radio ads pushing for Manning to return to Tennessee, where he started in college for the Vols.

The Titans drafted Jake Locker with the No. 8 pick last April and signed Matt Hasselbeck to a three-year deal last July, but they went 9-7. They have around \$30 million in cap space they need to use on finding a pass rush.

While a happy homecoming would make for a nice story, general manager Ruston Webster has said twice in

the past month — to season-ticket holders — and at the NFL combine that the team is happy with its quarterbacks.

Washington

Owner Dan Snyder always seems to be in play when it comes to signing big-name free agents, and the Redskins are in major need of a quarterback.

Mike Shanahan has whiffed on (Donovan McNabb, Rex Grossman and John Beck) in his two years in Washington, and the Redskins are expected to pursue Manning if they can determine he's healthy. They have plenty of cap space, and the Redskins can lobby Manning

by saying they'll use that room to be aggressive in free agency.

But that also could make them less appealing to Manning, since they're lacking at so many positions.

AP Sports Writers Bob Baum, Tim Booth, Mike Marot, Dave Skretta, Arnie Stapleton, Teresa M. Walker, Joseph White and Steven Wine contributed to this story.

Wynot

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year, so they all got good playing time."

Wynot's first round opponent, Falls City Sacred Heart (16-8), is making its first appearance at state since 2009 and 16th overall. The Irish won the D2 title in 2008.

Of Sacred Heart's eight losses, four have come by three or fewer points.

It's much the same case for the Blue Devils, with both losses coming by five or fewer. Even with so many new players to the mix this

season, they have been able to overcome any early worries.

"The team kept improving," Heimes said. "Getting the chemistry back down took a while. The starters were role players a year ago, and that takes a while."

But now, Wynot will have to use that confidence on the state's

biggest stage, its coach said.

"It's a different environment down there, for sure," Heimes said. "You just have to figure out that you belong down there, and you can win just like anybody else can."

"These guys have the confidence," he added. "They're ready for the challenge."

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