

South Dakota Women In A ‘Unique Situation’ In WBI

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

VERMILLION — Amy Williams calls it a ‘unique situation.’

It was a bitter pill to swallow at the time, but her University of South Dakota women’s basketball did just about everything right, especially on the glass, three months ago at Utah State, but still fell one point short, 70-69.

The Coyotes get their chance at revenge tonight (Thursday) at 8 p.m. Central when they take the floor in Logan, Utah, as part of the 16-team Women’s Basketball Invitational (WBI).

“There’s definitely a little bit of revenge there,” Coyote senior point guard Alexis Yackley said Wednesday from the team bus. “We felt like we let that game go. We played a great game for 35 minutes, but

lost it for ourselves in the last five.”

“Hopefully we can go in there and play a full 40 minutes this time.”

The unique part of that game was the way USD dominated the rebounding edge. The final tally was 63-26 in favor of the Coyotes, who didn’t help themselves by shooting 35 percent and 4-of-22 on three-pointers.

“The girls probably think I’m a liar,” Williams joked Wednesday. “I’ve always told them that if they dominated the boards like that, we wouldn’t lose.”

“I still think that’s a huge key for the game, and we’ll go in trying to keep that mindset.”

Winners in five of their past six games, the Coyotes (17-15) welcomed the opportunity to continue their campaign into the post-season for the third consecutive year.

Two years ago, they earned an invite to

the WBI, and last year played in the WNIT.

This season, though, USD vaulted itself to third place in the Summit League regular season standings and advanced all the way to the tournament championship game — losing to South Dakota State by three points.

“We put together a great finish, even leading up to the tournament,” Yackley said. “It was disappointing to lose to State, but we get to go on and play somebody else. Hopefully we can keep it going.”

Doing so won’t be an easy task tonight.

Utah State (18-13), coached by Jerry Finkbeiner (formerly of Oral Roberts), has lost only twice at home and like the Coyotes, has been playing well of late — despite a loss in the Western Athletic Conference Tournament.

“It’s a tremendous team,” Williams said. “After watching a few of their last couple

games, you can tell it’s a tale of two teams that have gotten a lot better.”

Devyn Christensen leads the Aggies in scoring at 20.2 points per game, aided by 36 percent shooting on three-pointers. Utah State also boasts Jenna Johnson (14.3 ppg, 7.7 rpg) and Jennifer Schlott (13.9 ppg).

The Aggies rank in the top 10 nationally in three categories: Second in free throw percentage (80.1), fifth in scoring offense (76.7) and ninth in steals per game (12.1).

USD, meanwhile, is among the nation’s best, 30th, in rebounding margin at 6.3 more than its opponents — a trend that was in full display in the first meeting.

“That’s always a goal of ours,” Yackley said.

Not that their season is over following one game, but Yackley said a third consecutive post-season appearance can have a

trickle-down effect for a team that will return 11 of 15 players next season.

“It’s great, not only for us seniors, but because we have a pretty young team,” she said. “To give those younger girls a couple more games, and especially in the post-season especially, can really help.”

Of course, the present also has some rather large significance, Williams said.

“It’s a great feeling,” she said. “I love this team, I love their fight and their work ethic. They’ve bought in and continue to grow.”

“For us to have an opportunity to keep playing and maybe make a run at something special here, we feel great about that.”

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

Iverson Ready For Return To NCAA

Yankton Native Hopes To Lead Colorado State To Tourney Wins

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

A year ago, Colton Iverson was technically a member of the Colorado State men’s basketball roster, but because of redshirt rules, he had to travel separately from his teammates and couldn’t sit with them on the bench during the NCAA Tournament.

It was almost like he was simply a fan, the Yankton native said Monday, a day after CSU earned an at-large bid into this year’s tournament.

“It was a tough thing sitting there, watching the team,” Iverson said by phone following a team practice in Fort Collins, Colo.

“Now that I can play in one, I’m ready,” he added. “It’s my third time, and I still haven’t gotten a win yet.”

Iverson made two NCAA Tournament trips while at Minnesota, in 2008-09 as a freshman and 2009-10 as a sophomore. Both times, the Gophers lost their first game.

He then transferred to Colorado State and redshirted last season’s tourney run.

The 2008 Yankton High School graduate will get his chance for that elusive win later this week.

Eighth-seeded Colorado State (25-8), making its second straight NCAA Tournament appearance, will play No. 9 Missouri tonight (Thursday) in Lexington, Ky.

“We’re pretty happy with our draw,” Iverson said. “We know it’s a tough one, but we’re excited. It’s a good opportunity for our program.”

The Rams set a school record for wins under first-year coach Larry Eustachy (who took over for Tim Miles), but lost in the Mountain West championship game last Friday night to UNLV.

A strong start to the season, however, set CSU up for a likely tournament berth.

Colorado State started the season 13-2, with wins over Montana (NCAA Tournament qualifier) and Denver, and later picked up league wins over fellow at-large selections San Diego State and Boise State.

Along the way, the Rams — keyed by Iverson — established themselves as one of the nation’s top defensive teams.

Iverson leads the Rams in scoring (14.7), rebounding (9.8), total blocks (22) and shooting percentage (.599), helping CSU rank first nationally in rebounding margin (12.1 more than its opponents).

Missouri (23-10), meanwhile, finished fifth in the Southeastern Conference this season. The Tigers, who lost to Ole Miss in the SEC Tournament quarterfinals, are hoping to avoid last year’s NCAA fate — they lost in the second round to No. 15 Norfolk State.

Like CSU, Missouri, is also one of the best rebounding teams in the country — ranking third in rebounding margin.

The Tigers boast six players scoring in double figures, led by Laurence Bowers (14.4 ppg), while Alex Oriahki leads the team in rebounding (8.6). Missouri is also rather long — with seven players at least 6-foot-7.

“Obviously we know they’re very talented, with a lot of size and athleticism,” Iverson said. “They’re coming out of a tough conference, but our style’s match each other. They’re a top five rebounding team just like we are.”

With a veteran-heavy squad, the Rams understand the challenge in front of them, Iverson said. If Colorado State beats Missouri, it would likely face overall No. 1 seed Louisville.

“We have five seniors on this team, and we’ve all been the tournament before, but it’s our last go-round,” Iverson said. “We have to give it everything we got and make a deep run.”



Colorado State’s Colton Iverson lines up a shot during a shoot-around as the team prepares for the second round of the NCAA Tournament in Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky., on Wednesday. Colorado State meets Missouri on Thursday.

SHANE KEYSER/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT

Michigan, South Dakota State Play Similar Styles

BY NOAH TRISTER
AP Sports Writer

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. (AP) — Trey Burke versus Nate Wolters is the matchup everyone is waiting to see.

Turns out Michigan and South Dakota State have more in common than just their star point guards.

“They don’t turn over a lot, we don’t turn over a lot,” Jackrabbits coach Scott Nagy said. “They don’t foul, we don’t foul. There are a lot of similarities, so I think it will be interesting.”

The fourth-seeded Wolverines take on their mirror image from the Summit League on Thursday night when they face 13th-seeded South Dakota State in the NCAA tournament. Michigan is the clear favorite, especially since the game is about 50 miles from the school’s Ann Arbor campus, but both teams play a similar style, relying on sharp shooting from the perimeter by guards who don’t make many mistakes.

It should make for an entertaining, free-flowing matchup in the South Regional.

“I think what both teams have is terrific point guards, and you get the ball into those two young men’s hands and anything can happen. The way the game is played now, there are things happening in transition that it’s just hard to practice for,” Michigan coach John Beilein said. “In order to run, people have got to make stops. We have to make stops. They have to make stops. But when both teams are running, they’re really good.”

Burke is a national player of the year candidate. The 6-foot leader of Michigan’s efficient offense can shoot from outside and drive past defenders into the lane. He aver-

JACKS | PAGE 9

Basketball: James Madison Escapes LIU-Brooklyn In First Four

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — A.J. Davis, who stepped in as a starter because James Madison’s leading scorer was suspended for a half, led the way with 20 points as the Dukes beat LIU Brooklyn 68-55 on Wednesday night in the First Four.

The Dukes (21-14) advance to meet top-seeded Indiana (27-6) on Friday night at the same University of Dayton Arena.

James Madison was without suspended starter Rayshawn Goins for the first half but built a

big lead. After the Blackbirds (20-14) battled back to take a brief lead, the Dukes surged again to win going away.

Charles Cooke added 15 points and Andre Nation 14 for the Dukes, who hadn’t won an NCAA tournament game since 1983 and hadn’t played in the big dance in 19 years.

Jamal Olasewere had 20 points and 10 rebounds and C.J. Garner 16 points for the Blackbirds, who have lost in their first game in each of their six trips to the tournament.

NIT
IOWA 68, INDIANA STATE 52: IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Devyn Marble scored 24 points, Aaron White added 11 with 13 rebounds and Iowa cruised past Indiana State 68-52 in the opening round of the NIT on Wednesday night.

Melshan Basabe had nine points and eight boards for the Hawkeyes (22-12), who won a home game in the NIT for the second straight season.

Iowa will host Stony Brook in the second round on Friday night.

Iowa shook off a sluggish start with a 19-4 run to open the second half. Playing before a sellout crowd of over 15,000, the Hawkeyes maintained a comfortable lead the rest of the way.

Iowa had 16 points to lead Indiana State (18-15), which was playing in the NIT for the first time since 1978.

Valley Commissioner: No Rush To Replace Creighton
OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Missouri Valley Conference apparently harbors no hard feelings toward Creighton. In fact, commissioner Doug Elgin says he understands why Creighton is leaving for the new Big East.

“I can see the rationale,” he said Wednesday. “Certainly there is a commonality, a shared mission with the institutions. It’s a national branding step for the institution in their eyes. They’ve made a decision they think is right for Creighton University and for Omaha, I guess, and we respect that decision.”

The Valley will be a nine-team league when Creighton leaves on June 30. Elgin said his preference would be 10 teams, but there is no rush to replace Creighton.

He said the league is studying potential candidates for membership, with preference given to schools in or near major markets in the geographic footprint of the Valley and

with strong basketball tradition. Denver, Milwaukee and Belmont are most often mentioned in media reports.

Elgin said Valley officials have had preliminary discussions with schools but it’s not imminent a school would join before 2013-14.

But he added that if a school “meets the threshold of acceptability” and would strengthen the league, “we’d act as quickly as we could to bring in a new member.”

Creighton athletic director Bruce Rasmussen said his school received an invitation to join the Big East on March 13. Creighton accepted two days later and immediately notified the Missouri Valley of its intent to withdraw.

Elgin said while it’s a blow to lose Creighton, the Valley isn’t defined by any single institution.

Creighton is as close to a flagship team as the Valley has had. The Bluejays have been the dominant men’s basketball team from 2000-13, with seven NCAA tournament appearances, and rank in the top 10 nationally in attendance at more than 16,000 a game.

MMC Volleyball Adds Elk Point-Jefferson’s Abbey

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
james.cimburek@yankton.net

ELK POINT — The connection between the Elk Point-Jefferson High School and Mount Marty College volleyball programs is sending another standout player up the road to Yankton.

And this time, it wasn’t just the connection between the two coaches that paved the way.

Libero Kelsey Abbey will join former teammate Lexie Branson on the Lancer volleyball team, announced by EPJ on Wednesday.

MMC head coach Candice Climer was in Elk Point on Wednesday for the signing event.

“It feels pretty good to get back-to-back players,” Climer said Wednesday afternoon. “They look to be a good team the next couple of years, so I’m glad to make that connection.”

Abbey’s connection to Branson played a factor in her decision to attend MMC.

“She was always telling me, ‘You should come to open gyms, come hang out.’” Abbey said. “She’s definitely a factor.”

Abbey was a three-year starter for the Huskies, including the past

two seasons as the team’s libero, a defensive specialist who plays solely in the back row and has special substitution rules that allow her to stay on the floor nearly the entire match.

“She’s a hustler who goes after every ball,” said Tracy Kollbaum, who has coached Abbey during her entire EPJ career. Kollbaum resigned her coaching position after the 2012 season. “She keeps the ball alive.”

Abbey posted 204 digs as a sophomore, then recorded 507 digs in her first season as a libero. Her numbers dipped to 382 digs this past season as teams started to hit away from the passer.

“She was a solid player as a sophomore, and she’s become more and more consistent as the years went on,” Kollbaum said. “She reads the ball well.”

Besides being a passer with 1,093 career digs, Abbey also was a solid offensive weapon for the Huskies. She posted a career-best 41 ace serves this past season, finishing with 119 ace serves in her three seasons on varsity.



Elk Point-Jefferson libero Kelsey Abbey, front left, will attend Mount Marty College and play volleyball for the Lancers. Abbey is pictured with MMC head coach Candice Climer, front right, and parents Larry and Cammy Abbey.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

ABBEY | PAGE 9