

USD Ready For WBI Semifinal Showdown With McNeese State

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — Amy Williams was wrapping up her team's quarterfinal run through the NAIA Tournament. Nicole Seekamp was in street clothes on the bench watching her Coyotes compete in another tournament.

That was a year ago. Now, they're joined together as coach and player for the University of South Dakota women's basketball team, which hosts McNeese State tonight (Thursday) at 7 p.m. in the Women's Basketball Invitational (WBI) semifinals at the Dakota-Dome.

"It's been a whirlwind," Williams said before a team practice this week. "I feel like most of the year I've been dog-paddling, trying to keep my head above water. But here we are."

Winners in seven of their last eight games, the Coyotes (19-15) are two wins shy of making their third straight Division I post-season appearance a rather memorable one.

Seekamp, a sophomore from Australia, was a redshirt last year when USD advanced to the second round of the WNIT — ultimately losing at home to Colorado.

"I just can't believe last year I was sitting out and now I'm out there," said Seekamp, who has turned a corner of late and has scored 27, 20, 33 and 13 points over her last four games.

"It's gone really quickly. It'd be great to get a championship win, even if it's the WBI."

There was a time early in the season, though, when any kind of playoff run seemed unlikely.

Playing for a new coach and in a new faster-paced system, the Coyotes started 2-5, having scored 46, 50, 49, 54 and 45 points in those losses. Following a rout of NAIA Peru State, USD dropped consecutive games on the road before Christmas by a combined three points.

"We had a lot of ups and downs, and there were some games we shouldn't have lost," senior Tempest Wilson said. "We've dealt with a lot of adversity and

come a long way.

"Being a Cinderella team right now is a lot of fun."

Despite having 10 players available because of pre-season injuries, the Coyotes rolled to a third-place finish in the Summit League regular season. They then advanced all the way to the conference championship game before losing by three points to South Dakota State.

Seeded No. 6 in the WBI, the Coyotes then picked up road wins at higher-seeded Utah State and Lamar (Texas). Tonight's winner will travel to either Detroit or Pennsylvania for the championship, set for Saturday or Sunday.

The main goal all along, Williams said, was to be consistent by this point in the season — not unfamiliar to her from her stint at NAIA Rogers State (Okla.).

"To be honest, traditionally, the teams that I've coached in my past have been very similar," she said. "Not necessarily starting off strong, but playing our best ball at the end of the season."

Following suit, other than the loss to

SDSU in the Summit League final, the Coyotes have scored wins of 17, 4, 11, 20, 10, 8 and 23 points in the recent 8-game stretch. It took some time for the team to click, but clearly things are different now, Seekamp said.

"We've been beating teams by 20-some points, and we have to stop and think, 'How did we do that?'" she said. "It's like we expected it to be a closer game and it wasn't."

While USD has made a playoff push after nearly reaching the NCAA Tournament, it's opponent tonight has done the same.

McNeese State (20-14), based in Lake Charles, La., lost to Oral Roberts in the Southland Conference title game after advancing to the NCAA Tournament each of the past two years.

The Cowboys are led by twin sisters Ashlyn Baggett (Sr., G, 18.8 ppg) and Caitlyn Baggett (Sr., G, 15.4 ppg). Ashlyn is a prolific three-point shooter, with 100 made treys on the season — she has also reached double figures in all but two games. For good measure, Caitlyn

has scored 61 points over two WBI games.

McNeese also has a third Baggett on the roster, in freshman Allison Baggett who averages 6.2 points per game.

"We'll have to guard that three-point line," Williams said. "It'll take a very special defensive effort from us."

Asked about McNeese State, Wilson compared the Cowboys and their athleticism to the styles of IUPUI and Lamar — teams the Coyotes went 4-0 against this season.

"I feel like we can do some of the things we did against those teams, if we keep sticking with our game plan," she said.

Though its game plan wasn't to lose to SDSU and fall to the third tier of post-season tournaments, USD is anxious to have its season continue, Wilson said.

"I knew we had a chance at maybe the WNIT or this one, but we were really excited to just keep playing," she said. "That was a heart-breaker losing to

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Basketball | S.D. Class A Girls' All-State Team

First Team Boasts Well-Rounded Game

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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Major basketball awards are often reserved for the pure scorers, the ones that fill up a box score. But the five players in the 2013 South Dakota Class A All-State Girls' Basketball team fill up the entire stat sheet.

Clark-Willow Lake's Chynna Stevens, Sioux Falls Christian's Hayley McCarron, Tri-Valley's Allison Cross, Parkston's Erica Herrold and Beresford's Alyson Johnsen — all seniors — comprise this year's elite list, as selected by the South Dakota Basketball Coaches Association and the South Dakota Sportswriters Association.

Stevens is the only holdover from the 2012 first team. Cross was a second-team selection last year.

Three of the five average better than 19 points a game, and all average better than 13 points a contest. But this year's first team has more going for them than scoring.

Four of the five average 7.5 rebounds per game and have over 50 steals on the season. Four of the five also average a blocked shot or more per game. Three of the five average better than one made three-pointer per game, and have free throw percentages of 75 percent or better.

Stevens, a South Dakota State recruit, averaged 19.8 points, 10 rebounds and 2.6 assists per contest, and finished the season with 56 steals and 30 blocked shots.

"She's a gym rat," said CWL head coach Wade Stobbs. "She's constantly in the gym or asking for the keys."

A threat both inside and out, the 6-0 Stevens made 31 three-pointers and shot 42 percent from the field overall.

"Her ability to post up and score with her back to the basket, then score outside, opens up so many things for the other girls," Stobbs said.

Stevens wrestled the Clark career marks for points (1,583) and rebounds (965) away from another player who made her mark at SDSU, Shannon Schlagel (1,518 points, 903 rebounds). Stevens also set school marks for blocked shots (122) and career free throw percentage (73 percent).

Stobbs is looking forward to being able to follow Stevens' career at SDSU.

"It's a great place to go and

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Beresford's Alyson Johnsen (left photo, 3) and Parkston's Erica Herrold (right photo, 12) were both named to the South Dakota Class A Girls' Basketball All-State Team, announced today (Thursday) by the South Dakota Basketball Coaches Association and the South Dakota Sportswriters Association. Johnsen will play basketball at the University of Sioux Falls, while Herrold will play at Dakota Wesleyan. Also selected to the first team were Mount Marty College volleyball recruit Allison Cross of Tri-Valley, SDSU recruit Chynna Stevens of Clark-Willow Lake and Augustana recruit Hayley McCarron of Sioux Falls Christian.



P&D FILE PHOTOS

S.D. Basketball Academic All-State Honors Announced

WATERTOWN — The South Dakota Basketball Coaches Association has released its Academic All-State list for boys' and girls' basketball.

To be honored, a student-athlete, manager or statistician must have a 3.5 or better cumulative grade-point average and have participated in the sport for at least three seasons.

Here is the list of area honorees:

Girls

YANKTON: Jessica Wirth, Mikala Hora, Kelsey Fitzgerald, Kelsey Butler, Abby Mitchell, Whitney Specht

AVON: Emily Mudder
BERESFORD: Taryn Twite, Ashley Ostrem, Sophie Doeden, Hayley Hansen, Alyson Johnsen
BON HOMME: Karlee Kozak
DAKOTA VALLEY: Nicole Rasmussen
ELK POINT-JEFFERSON: Audrey Truhe, Haylee Erickson, Anna Chicoine
FREEMAN: Carli Lager, Brian Schamber
MARION: Katherine Luke
MENNO: Ashton Diede, Courtney Schaeffer, Allie Zanter
PARKER: Micalanne Hanten, Tessa Weeldreyer
PLATTE-GEDDES: Kelly Knudson, Shelby Rabenberg, Mackenzie Millar

SCOTLAND: Kennidy Asche, Sam Geiman
TRIPP-DELMONT-ARMOUR: LaNae Fuerst, Elizabeth Bitterman
VERMILLION: Mackenzie Huber, Courtney Johnson, Brooke Schwasinger, Allison Heine, Blair Gilkyson
VIBORG-HURLEY: Danielle Voss

Boys

YANKTON: Andrew Hummel, Michael Rucker, Sam Wendte
AVON: Taylor Mudder
BON HOMME: Les Jelsma, Alec Weber
ELK POINT-JEFFERSON: Brock

Zeller, Sam Vreck, Hannah Klinkhammer
FREEMAN: Shaun Becker, Jordan Rinehart, Arron Lickteig, Caleb Lang
PARKER: Blake Reynolds, Jake Vollmer
PARKSTON: Andrew Schnabel, Parker VanZee, Kyle Hohn, Devin Kurtz, Rebecca Herman
PLATTE-GEDDES: Matthew Randall, Drew Turnis
SCOTLAND: Garrett Kotalik
VERMILLION: Austin Krier, Tanner Andersen, Tanner Settles
VIBORG-HURLEY: Andrew Hora, Trevor Jacobsen, Clay Jorgensen, Tyler Novak
WAGNER: William Hollmann, Spencer Peters

Nebraska Women Relish Improbable Run To Sweet 16

BY ERIC OLSON
AP Sports Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Dominique Kelley tweeted after Nebraska's upset at Texas A&M that she couldn't decide whether it was more fun to reach the NCAA tournament's round of 16 as a player in 2010 or as a graduate assistant coach in 2013.

By Wednesday, after thinking it over a couple days, she had it figured out. Yeah, this season's journey has been a bigger thrill.

The 2010 team was loaded with talent and won its first 30 games. It would have been a surprise if that team hadn't reached the Sweet 16.

This season, the Huskers started out with barely enough healthy players to conduct meaningful practices. The team was so inexperienced and lacking in depth that coach Connie Yori junked her free-wheeling motion offense and replaced it with the more structured Princeton system. After losing three of five to start Big Ten play, she scrapped her favored full-court man-to-man defense, swallowed hard and played zone.

The Huskers, winners of 13 of 15 games

since mid-January, suddenly are the team no one wants to play.

"It's been more of a ride this year, and I totally think it was unexpected," said star point guard Lindsey Moore, one of two holdovers from 2010. "My freshman year, after we got on that streak, everybody kind of expected it. We had high expectations for ourselves this season. I don't necessarily think everybody else did."

Next up for the sixth-seeded Huskers (25-8) is Sunday's game against No. 2 seed Duke (32-2) in the Norfolk Regional.

The Blue Devils swept the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season and tournament championships. They made it to the regional semifinals by rallying from 15 points down in the second half to beat Oklahoma State 68-59 on Tuesday.

"Duke is one of the most talented teams in the nation," Yori said. "They have a roster filled from top to bottom with college All-Americans, All-ACC players, high school All-Americans and USA national program players. It seems like they are in the national-championship discussion every year, and there are some really good reasons for that."

Duke's 6-foot-3 Elizabeth Williams might be the most intimidating center the

Huskers will have seen since they played against Baylor's Brittney Griner during their Big 12 days. The Blue Devils also play a pressure defense conducive to forcing turnovers.

But Nebraska is on a roll and believes it can play with anybody, especially after Monday's 74-63 win over Texas A&M on the Aggies' home court.

"I think we can do it," Moore said. "I'm confident in the way we're playing right now and I think we're playing our best basketball. And it's the most important time to play your best basketball."

Kelley said Yori, the Big Ten coach of the year, has done a masterful job with this season's team.

That's not to say she didn't in 2010, Kelley said. But that team had All-American Kelsey Griffin and three other players who had at least three years of starting experience.

Pressure built on that team as the wins piled up, and Kelley noted that Nebraska was thrust out of its usual underdog role.

"We got a feel for what it was like to be on the other end of that spectrum, to be the Connecticut, the Dukes, the Baylors. We had this target on our back," Kelley said. "I don't think we were overwhelmed

with the pressure, but everybody was out to get us every single night."

Kelley and her teammates rolled to wins over Northern Iowa and UCLA to reach the regional semifinals, and no one batted an eye. The Huskers, after all, were a No. 1 seed.

Nebraska advanced no further. Kentucky capitalized on Nebraska's poor shooting in the second half to beat the Huskers 76-67 and end a season that, according to Yori, easily could have extended to the Final Four.

"There's always a certain degree of pressure in sport," Yori said. "But during our 30-game winning streak, we did see virtually every opponent's best shot. There was also an increase in the requests for our players' time. Perhaps we did get worn down a bit."

That won't be the case this season, Moore said.

"I don't think anyone is ready for our season to be over," she said. "Nobody's burned out. Everybody wants to keep playing and keep winning. We know this team is special, and we want to prove to everyone why it's so special."

Crofton's Arens Sisters, Wynot's Schulte Earn All-State Honors

LINCOLN, Neb. — Two players from Class C2 champion Crofton and one from Class D2 champion Wynot were named to the Nebraska AP All-State Girls' Basketball first team, announced on Wednesday.

Senior Bridget Arens and sophomore Allison Arens were both first-team selections for Crofton. Maggie Schulte was a first-team selection for Wynot.

Several area players also received honorable mention recognition.

CLASS C1 — Ponca: Megan Pollard

CLASS C2 — Crofton: Quinn Wragge, Tiffany Tramp; Hartington Cedar Catholic: Katelyn Dickes, Karly Noecker; Laurel-Concord/Coleridge: Audra Corbit, Cameron Eddie; Niobrara/Verdigris: Tessa Ives

CLASS D1 — Allen: Lindsay Jones; Bloomfield: Autumn Luger; Hartington: Myranda Fischer; Randolph: Kirsten Fink, Michaela Strathman

CLASS D2 — Wynot: Ashley Heine, Kelsie Higgins, Samantha Wieseler

Augie Falls In D2 Semifinals

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Augustana College saw its quest for a national championship fall one game short of the final, as Dowling (N.Y.) downed the Vikings 76-54 in the semifinals of the NCAA Division II women's basketball Elite 8 on Wednesday.

Connie Simmons posted 24 points and six assists to lead Dowling (30-3), which will play either Western Washington or Ashland for the championship on Friday. Danielle Wilson had 18 points, 10 rebounds and six blocked shots. Nicole Caggiano netted 13 points. Christine Verelle added 10 rebounds in teh victory.

Dowling shot 57.1 percent from the field (28-49), including a blistering 8-13 (61.5 percent) from three-point range. Dowling averaged 4.3 three-point field goals made per game coming into the national semifinal and shot 27.7 percent from behind the arc.

Faith Tinklenberg scored 21 points, tying a career high, and had four steals for Augustana, which was held to 26.9 percent (18-67) from the field. Cami Koehn hit three three-pointers for nine points. Alex Feeny added seven rebounds for the Vikings, who were outrebounded 47-29.

Both teams opened the game at a blistering pace with the Vikings scoring in the first five seconds of the game off the opening tip. But despite the slow pace Dowling is accustomed to playing, the Golden Lions continued to shoot at a high percentage.

Augustana drew within six late in the first half but a run by Dowling, including a three with four seconds left gave them a 12-point lead entering intermission, 39-27.

The second half wasn't any more fruitful for the Vikings who were reeling from a 29 percent shooting performance in the first half. And within the first six minutes of the second half, the Dowling lead had reached 20 points, 52-32.

The Vikings trimmed it to 15 points off a Feeny layup, her first points of the game. Caggiano re-

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