



DICK CARLSON/INERTIA

Players on the South Dakota bench celebrate a basket late against South Dakota State during their 72-58 semifinal victory at the 2014 Summit League Basketball Championships at the Sioux Falls Arena Monday. USD will face sixth-seeded Denver in the championship, today (Tuesday) at 1 p.m.

'Yotes End 'Rabbits' Reign

South Dakota Beats SDSU 72-58 To Derail The Jackrabbits' Quest For A Sixth Straight Summit Title



DICK CARLSON/INERTIA

Bridget Arens, #22, from the University of South Dakota takes the ball to the basket against Steph Paluch from South Dakota State University in the first half of their semifinal game Monday afternoon at the 2014 Summit League Basketball Tournament in Sioux Falls.

BY JEREMY HOECK

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SIoux FALLS — Tia Hemiller tried hard to shrug off the magnitude of a rather key win.

That lasted all of three seconds.

"It's just another game," the University of South Dakota sophomore said, eliciting laughter throughout the room.

"Not really, though."

There was plenty of reason to celebrate in Coyote land on Monday afternoon, as USD upset — not to mention, dominate — five-time defending champion South Dakota State 72-58 in the semifinals of the Summit League Championships.

Not only did the Coyotes (18-13) hand the Jackrabbits (22-9) their first-ever loss in the Summit League Championships, USD moved to the final for a second straight year. The Coyotes will face sixth-seeded Denver, an overtime winner over second-seeded IUPUI, in today's (Tuesday) 1 p.m. final

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Williams said reaching this point is the goal for her program.

"We want to be champions. We're always striving to be at that championship level," Williams said.

Up to this point, though the Jackrabbits have bested every challenger. Until Monday.

"They have the target on their back," Williams said. "We've wanted to knock them off. They've raised the bar, and that continues to push us to raise the bar."

That attitude was evident big time on Monday.

Riding the high of a buzzer-beating win in the quarterfinals, the Coyotes came out strong — especially

in the paint — and never looked back against SDSU.

USD's biggest area of dominance was down low, where it out-scored the more experienced Jacks 19-8 on second-chance opportunities. The Coyotes later said they took offense to being out-rebounded by 12 in a home loss to the Jacks over a week ago.

"We rebounded today. We had a want-to," senior Polly Harrington said. "We went after every rebound we could, and when we did that, we got the ball."

In a first half completely dominated by the team in red, the Coyotes controlled the scoring in paint to the tune of a 26-10 edge.

Ten of USD's rebounds were of the offensive variety, and that helped the Coyotes to a 37-25 lead at halftime — quieting the Jackrabbit faithful.

"In the first half, they just showed they had more energy than we did," said SDSU freshman Kerri Young, who had eight points off the bench.

"Coming out with a lot

more energy and fire in the first half would have helped us a lot more."

As would have shooting, on either side. SDSU shot 32 percent, while USD shot 36 and just 1-of-13 on three-pointers.

If there were any questions, though, that USD would falter once the Jacks made a run and their crowd started roaring, that was quickly put to rest.

The Coyotes led by as many as 23 points in the second half, and although SDSU cut it to 56-45 with 7:14 to play, USD kept on rolling.

So no, the Coyotes never really felt like a 23-point cushion was enough, Williams joked.

"I never felt comfortable. Not with a team like the Jacks," she said. "They made a nice run there, and we knew it was coming."

"I was glad we built the cushion we did, because we needed every point of it."

Once again, junior Nicole Seekamp had a big game,

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USD's Miles Earns Regional Coach Of The Year Honor

VERMILLION — South Dakota's Derek Miles was named Midwest Region Women's Assistant Coach of the Year Monday by the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association (USTFCCCA).

Miles, who is in his ninth season at USD, leads a duo of pole vaulters to the NCAA Indoor Championship Meet to be held Friday and Saturday in Albuquerque, N.M. Junior Emily Grove enters with the nation's top vault this season, a program-record mark of 14 feet, 9 1/2 inches. Senior Bethany Firsick, the defending national outdoor champion, enters with the 11th-best mark of 14-1.75. Together, the duo has combined to earn six All-America honors under Miles.

A native of Four Oaks, Calif., Miles was a five-time All-American in the pole vault at USD. He also qualified for the Division II national championships in the long jump, triple jump and decathlon during his collegiate career.

Post-collegiately, Miles was one of the best professional pole vaulters in the world for more than a decade. Miles is a three-time Olympian who finished fourth in Beijing in 2008 and seventh in Athens in 2004. He represented the United States on six world championship teams and was a three-time U.S. National Champion.

Miles has been enshrined into both the USD Hall of Fame and the USTFCCCA Division II Hall of Fame.

'Dons Derail Jackrabbits' Three-Peat Hopes

BY JEREMY HOECK

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SIoux FALLS — Fort Wayne denied South Dakota State a chance at a third consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance.

And in the process, ensured the Jackrabbits will not be represented in the championship round of the Summit League Championships.

The second-seeded Mastodons survived a tight men's semifinal contest, 64-60, on Monday night in front of another loud and involved crowd at the Sioux Falls Arena.

In reaching the finals for the first time in school history, Fort Wayne (24-9) ended SDSU's season short of the title game for the first time in three years.

The Mastodons will face top-seeded North Dakota State (24-4) in tonight's (Tuesday) 8 p.m. championship tilt, with the winner advancing to the NCAA Tournament.

South Dakota State, meanwhile, falls to 19-12 and will await word on a possible invitation to another post-season tournament.

Including the women's final at 1 p.m., today's Summit League championship games will not feature a Jackrabbit program for the first time since both teams became eligible.

Fort Wayne, in beating the No. 3 Jackrabbit men, made SDSU pay for 18 turnovers, scoring 22 points off those mistakes.

Perhaps the biggest play of the game came on a Steve Forbes put-back at the rim with 42.6 seconds left, giving Fort Wayne a 63-57 cushion.

SDSU senior Jordan Dykstra followed with a three-pointer, but the Jacks missed a potential game-tying three from senior Brayden Carlson with 10 seconds left.

And that was that. For the second night in a row,

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Denver Women Earn Another Upset

SIoux FALLS — Sixth-seeded Denver continued its cinderella run through the Summit League Women's Basketball Tournament, claiming a 76-69 overtime victory over IUPUI in the semifinals on Monday at Sioux Falls Arena.

The victory sends the Pioneers (9-22) to the finals against South Dakota.

Jordan Johnston scored 15 points off the bench, and Paige Bradley had 14 points and eight assists to lead Denver. Theresa Wirth and Kailey Edwards each scored 12 points. Desiree Hunter had a game-high 14 rebounds in the victory.

DeAirra Goss led IUPUI (22-9) with 20 points. Neena Markovic had 15 points and 10 rebounds.

Men

N.D. STATE 83, DENVER 48: SIoux FALLS — Taylor Braun scored a game-high 28 points to lead top-seeded North Dakota State to an 83-48

route of Denver in the semifinals of the Summit League men's basketball tournament on Monday at Sioux Falls Arena.

Trayvon Wright finished with 12 points and nine rebounds for NDSU (24-6), which will face Fort Wayne in the finals today (Tuesday).

For Denver (16-15), Cam Griffin scored 13 points and Chris Udofia had 12 points to lead the way. Bryant Rucker added 11 points.

Other Women's

ST. JOHN'S 68, CREIGHTON 63, 20T: CHICAGO (AP) — Aiyah Handford made four consecutive free throws in the final 11 seconds of the second overtime as No. 2 seed St. John's beat third-seeded Creighton in the semifinals of the Big East Conference tournament on Monday.

Handford was 3 of 8 from the line before her game-clinching makes. She finished with 19 points.

Danaejah Grant led St. John's (22-9) with 20 points and scored all four of St. John's points in the first overtime. She scored the first basket of the second overtime, but fouled out on Creighton's next possession.

Creighton (19-13) was led by Sarah Nelson with 20 points and Marissa Janning added 11.

Neither team scored in the first 3 minutes of the first overtime. Grant was fouled on a drive and made both free throws to force the second overtime.

St. John's Keylantra Langley hit a layup with 3 seconds left to end regulation.

The Red Storm will play top-seeded DePaul in the championship game on Tuesday.

Softball: Lancers Carry Momentum Into 2014 Campaign

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK

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It is not often that a 6-22 team can legitimately claim that they have momentum going into the next season. But that is the case for the Mount Marty College softball team, which opens the season on Wednesday in Tucson, Ariz.

The Lancers take a three-game win streak and a 5-5 finish from 2013, and return seven regulars who started 20 or more games.

"It carried over into the summer, and they all came back in the fall ready to play," said Mount Marty head coach Albert Fernandez, who enters his ninth season with the program. "We were picked last (in

the Great Plains Athletic Conference), which is always motivation. I think we can play with anybody."

If there is anything that takes away from that momentum, it is some early injuries. Senior Michaela Bunde (.228, 6 doubles, 10 RBI) suffered a broken finger in the team's final scrimmage, and senior Sophia Lopez (.263, 5 doubles, 10 RBI) has also been fighting an injury.

Senior catcher Kristin Loutsch and junior infielder Lauren Orwig (.164, 4 RBI) are among the other key returning players for MMC. Juniors Karley Seuntjens (.167, 8 RBI) and Shaina Lonneman (.190) return, as do sophomores Maggie McMahon (.200), Olivia Rodriguez (.191, 7 RBI), Courtney Hansen (.156) and

Katie Groteluschen (.125).

While the team hit just .214 a year ago, they have looked better in preseason games and in practice.

"We're a lot further in the offensive game than we were this time a year ago," Orwig said. "It's been exciting."

The Lancers also have a strong freshmen class, including area recruits Jessica Wirth (IF, Yankton), Karlee Kozak (IF, Tyndall), Beth Finnegan (OF, Newcastle, Neb.) and Tiffany Tramp (Fr., Crofton, Neb.). Amber Krause (P/OF, Tekamah, Neb.), Megan Meister (IF, Kingsley, Iowa), Emilie Pechacek (UTI, Omaha, Neb.) and Allison Roepke (P/IF, Sloan, Iowa) are also expected to be key contributors.

"We feel like we had a good recruiting class," Fernandez said. "They're very athlete, have good speed and are players who can play multiple positions."

Bunde has said that the younger talent has kept the veterans on their toes as well.

"Our freshman class is solid. Every one of them can hit the ball," she said. "Now we're two-deep at every position. It's really pushed everyone to work harder to be better."

Hansen (1-11, 7.54 ERA, 26 K in 69 2/3 IP) and Groteluschen (0-4, 8.40 ERA, 7 K in 18 1/3 IP) are looking stronger in their second season on the rubber. Krause has also been a strong addition to the pitching staff. "They are looking good," Fernan-

dez said of the pitchers. "They've put a lot of time in on their mechanics, and have improved their velocity and movement."

The Lancers will play 10 games in Tucson, beginning with NAIA Purdue and Peru State on Wednesday. MMC will play 10 games in Arizona before returning home on March 22 to begin GPAC play against Doane.

"We feel really good about where we're at," Fernandez said. "We've already done a lot of good things. We're going to bring high energy and be positive."

You can follow James D. Cimburek on Twitter at twitter.com/JCimburek. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net