

Destination: Ames



DAVID LIAS/VERMILLION PLAIN TALK

Members of the South Dakota women's basketball team erupt into wild applause when they learn during Monday's watch party in the Muenster University Center that they will face Stanford in Ames, Iowa, in the NCAA Tournament March 22. Pictured from left are Emily Smith, Raeshel Contreras, Bridget Arens, Madeleine White, Tia Hemiller, Heidi Hoff and Taylor Moore.

South Dakota Plays Stanford On Saturday To Open NCAA Women's Tourney



DAVID LIAS/VERMILLION PLAIN TALK

South Dakota women's head coach Amy Williams takes a moment to embrace her 4-year-old daughter, Bentli, before the start of Monday's "watch party" in the Muenster University Center. Her husband, Lloyd, and their kids took part in the celebration.

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — The University of South Dakota women would have been excited with any location. But Ames, Iowa?

Hearing that pop up on the big screen TV at the Muenster University Center was a welcomed surprise for the Coyotes, who celebrated their NCAA Tournament selection with a special ceremony Monday night.

The Coyotes (19-13) were given a No. 15 seed into the 64-team field and a 5:30 p.m. Saturday afternoon date with second-seeded Stanford (29-3) at Hilton Coliseum in Ames, Iowa.

In short: It was exactly what USD wanted.

"I was saying my prayers," joked freshman Bridget Arens, of Crofton, Neb.

"Travel-wise, it's hard to sit on a plane or a bus for six hours. This is a very positive thing for us, to be that close to home."

Not only close, but three and a half hours from campus — a much shorter jaunt, for example, than a home game

that was moved to Rapid City last December.

It was a nice surprise for the Coyotes, who won their first Summit League championship last Tuesday and had to spend the past week wondering who they would play and where they would go.

"I saw a whole bunch of teams that we could play, but I never heard Stanford," sophomore point guard Tia Hemiller said. "Ames, I heard, but wow, Stanford? That's pretty cool."

That's where Monday night's nationally-televised selection show wasn't so much about the opponent but the location, in the eyes of the Coyotes.

"To be honest, that was more exciting than anything," head coach Amy Williams said later. "It allows the fans here to be able to sneak down for that game."

"I'm really excited for that opportunity to share this journey even further with Coyote nation."

Even so, for a first-time entrant into the 'Big Dance,' USD wasn't especially picky where it was sent. But as time

went on through the ESPN selection show, the possible locations were dwindling.

Gone were Iowa City; Waco, Texas, and Lexington, Ky. — all possible locations for the Coyotes in mock brackets.

"It was exciting, but I didn't know my heart would race that much," sophomore Kelly Stewart said. "Especially when we saw Louisville come up, and it was like, 'OK, now who?'"

"When we finally saw our name, I was just ready to play a game right then."

When USD does take the floor Saturday afternoon in Ames, it will be going up against one of the giants of women's college basketball.

Stanford, which earned its 27th consecutive tournament bid, has played in 11 Final Fours (third most all-time), owns a 71-25 tournament record, and boasts one of the nation's best players. Chiney Ogwumike is the only player in the country to rank in the top 10 in scoring (26.8 ppg, third), rebounding (12.3 rpg, seventh), field goal percentage (61.0, third) and double-doubles (24, sixth). Understandably, the Coy-

otes will be significant underdogs.

"They've got a very rich tradition, with tons of tournament experience," Williams said. "They'll have a leg up with the experience factor."

For now, until USD formulates an actual game plan for Stanford, the excitement of Monday night will linger for a long time.

"It's really exciting," junior Lisa Loeffler said. "I can't wait to see how we match up with them. But we'll give them our best, and go out there and have fun."

To even be talking about an NCAA Tournament game is certainly a surreal feeling, according to sophomore Margaret McCloud — one of four South Dakota natives on the roster.

"I didn't think it would come this quickly," McCloud said. "It was always my dream to be here."

"It just shows you how hard work pays off. Anything can happen."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.

Area Natives Celebrate NCAA Selection

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — Bridget Arens has experienced many celebrations in her athletic career.

Not much, though, compared to what she experienced Monday night in Vermillion. She was in the front row with her University of South Dakota teammates as they watched ESPN's selection show for the NCAA Tournament.

Fifteen seed. Ames, Iowa. Stanford.

It was all rather good news for Arens and the Coyotes (19-13), who got about what they figured — and what they wanted.

Asked later about the capacity crowd at the Muenster University Center cafeteria in front of a giant TV, Arens reminisced about her days at Crofton (Neb.) High School.

"It reminded me a little bit of home, actually, when we had pep rallies and the whole community comes," the Coyote freshman post said.

"We have a great support system here too."

Throughout her four years at Crofton, Arens' teams played in three state championship games — she was injured for one of those years — and came away with two titles. And now she is a key reserve for a program headed to the NCAA Tournament. USD was given a No. 15

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■ Video from USD's NCAA watch party on Monday in Vermillion. yankton.net

ESPN2.

After losing in the Summit League title game a year ago, the Coyotes were able to do one better this year — all with Arens on board.

"I followed USD a lot last year, hoping they would have made it here," Arens said. "I remember telling my mom on the phone, 'Somebody's got to break the tradition.'"

"You have to have that starting point."

Her high school team was proof of that. The Crofton Lady Warriors had made appearances at the Nebraska State Tournament from 1989-91 and again in 1994. When Aaron Losing took over the program in 2005, however, Crofton began a string of dominance that has rarely been seen in that state's level.

Six championships in a decade, including the last three years.

"It took that group in Crofton to break the tradition, and now it's a tradition of winning down there," Arens said. "I hope it can be the same

thing for us here."

Margaret McCloud was a member of last year's USD squad as a freshman, seeing big-time minutes in the conference tournament title loss to rival South Dakota State.

A year later, the Coyotes beat the top-seeded Jackrabbits in the semifinals and later defeated Denver for the crown. Did McCloud, a former Rapid City Stevens prep standout, expect to be celebrating an NCAA Tournament selection this earlier in her college career?

"I didn't think it would come this quickly," she said Monday. "It was always my dream to be here. It just shows you that hard work pays off."

"Anything can happen." Not that it wasn't a possibility, but the Coyotes were once 0-4 in their conference season. Still, all along, the players kept that title game loss in their minds, according to sophomore Tia Hemiller.

"Making it close last year and coming up a little short, I always knew in the back of my mind that this could happen," said Hemiller, a Watertown native. "It was a dream."

"When I set goals, I really strive to reach them, and we all did that this season."

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Three Lancers Named NAIA Scholar-Athletes

SIoux CITY, Iowa — Mount Marty College had three women's basketball players named 2013-14 Daktronics NAIA Scholar-Athletes. They included juniors Holly Hegge, Cheyenne Lambley and Kelsey Schmidt.

In order to be nominated, a student-athlete must maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale and must have achieved a junior academic status.

This past season for the Lancers, Hegge averaged 9.7 points and 4.7



Lambley

rebounds in 17 games. Schmidt averaged 8.0 points in 22 games, while Lambley averaged 5.3 points and 4.8 re-



Schmidt

bounds in 28 games. Among the other honorees included Dordt senior Elise Maresh (Beresford) and Concordia senior Tracy Peitz (Hartington, Neb).

Coach Don Meyer To Speak In Yankton Tonight

Legendary basketball coach Don Meyer will speak today (Tuesday) at 7:30 p.m., at the Yankton High School theater. The event is sponsored by Nation of Coaches.

In his 38-year career, Coach Meyer amassed 923 wins with three different college institutions. He retired from coaching in 2010 after an 11 year run as the head coach at Northern State University in Aberdeen. For 19 years, the Don Meyer Coaching Academy was one of the most popular opportunities for coaches to learn how to teach young people the game of basketball and life.

Meyer is presently a Regents Distinguished Professor at Northern State University and serves as an assistant to President James

online

■ Ted Quinn From Nations of Coaches Speaks With The P&D About Tonight's Event. yankton.net

leadership to schools, athletic teams, church groups and businesses.

Single tickets and group rate packages are being sold for the event. Tickets will also be available at the door. For ticket information, please contact Ted Quinn at 515-490-9032 or email at tquinn@nationsofcoaches.co

8 NCAA Teams Fall Below Grad. Standards

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — An annual study of the schools in the men's NCAA tournament shows a slight increase in teams that fall below graduation rate standards.

The University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport said Monday in its report that eight teams that made the 2014 men's bracket fall below the NCAA-mandated Academic Progress Rate score of 930, equivalent to a 50 percent graduation rate.

Last year six teams didn't reach that benchmark. Beginning with 2012-13 championships, teams must earn a minimum 900 four-year APR or a 930 average over the most recent two years to be eligible to participate in NCAA championships.