

Lancer Softball Team Opens Season Today

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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After a season where coach Albert Fernandez felt his Mount Marty College softball team took a step backwards (8-28, 3-17 Great Plains Athletic Conference), he took a deep look at himself and his team and came back with a new approach.

As the Lancers prepare to open their 2015 season today (Wednesday) in Tucson, Arizona, he feels his new approach is starting to pay dividends.

"The main thing we wanted to do is try to develop team chemistry," he said. "We've been doing that since day one, and now we're seeing our upperclassmen lead our new kids. We've been having a lot of success so far."

Just six of the 18 players on the roster are juniors or seniors, and Fernandez feels the team added several key pieces in the seven

freshmen on the team.

"We feel like our recruits were the pieces we needed," he said. "We had our best fall ever. We had our best off-season workouts ever. And so far, up to this point, every practice has been so consistent with attitude and effort."

Sophomore Amber Krause (7-13, 5.77 ERA, 57 K in 111 2/3 IP), a returning second-team all-conference pitcher, and junior Katie Groteluschen (0-8, 6.24 ERA, 19 K in 58 1/3 IP) return to the pitching circle for MMC. Freshman Brooke Becker (Brandon) will also be expected to contribute in the circle. Behind the plate the Lancers plan to use freshman Kelsey Mitera (Omaha, Nebraska; Bellevue West), sophomore transfer Nicole Elster (Sioux Falls) and junior Olivia Rodriguez (279, 2 HR, 23 RBI).

Rodriguez returns at third, backed up by transfer Cassidy Janicek (Columbia, Missouri; Lincoln

University), with Janicek expected to be in the lineup at DP.

Freshman Jen Mitera (Omaha, Nebraska; Bellevue West) is expected to play shortstop, moving honorable mention all-conference selection Karlee Kozak (So., .302, 10 RBI) to left field. Kozak will still play some at short.

Sophomore Jessica Wirth (.271, 3 HR, 11 RBI) will play second, with Krause (.327, 2 HR, 15 RBI) and Jen Mitera also potentially seeing time. Senior Shaina Lonneman, Elster and freshman Erin Boyle (O'Neill, Nebraska; St. Mary's)

In the outfield, Kozak and freshman Marissa Cantrell (Hotchkiss, Colorado) will play left. Sophie Lopez (St., Carlsbad, California), Krause and Megan Meister (.205, 1 HR, 3 RBI) will share time in center. Lauren Orwig (.128, 3 RBI), Jean Zarkewski (Fr., O'Neill, Nebraska; St. Mary's) and Grace Eschelmann (Fr., Aurora, Colorado; Bishop

Machebeuf) will share time in right.

"This is probably the most talented group I've had," Fernandez said. "We have a pretty good lineup."

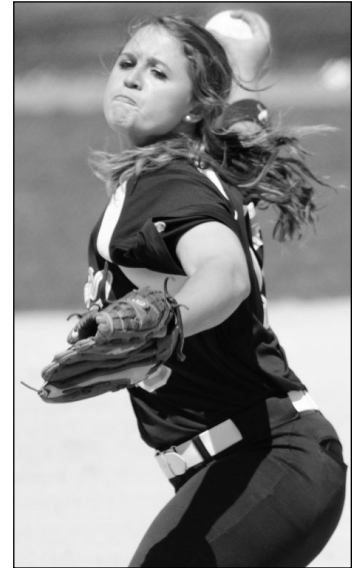
The Lancers open the season in Tucson, Arizona, playing 11 games in six days.

"We will really find out who we are," he said. "I think we'll be good. We're going to surprise some teams."

Less than a week after returning from Arizona, the Lancers head to Crete, Nebraska, to open Great Plains Athletic Conference play. They open the home portion of their schedule March 24 against league foe Briar Cliff.

"When we get back, we get right into it," he said.

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



P&D FILE PHOTO
Mount Marty pitcher Amber Krause sends the ball home during a game in the 2014 season. MMC opens the 2015 season today (Wednesday).

Bison Defend Summit League Title, Beat SDSU

BY JEREMY HOECK
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SIOUX FALLS — Lawrence Alexander lived up to his Player of the Year selection.

The lone senior for a new-look North Dakota State squad sparked the Bison once again and willed his team back to the NCAA Tournament.

Alexander scored 25 points as the Bison upended South Dakota State 57-56 in Tuesday night's Summit League tournament championship game at the Premier Center in Sioux Falls.

And so, the Bison (23-9) are back in the 'Big Dance' — where NDSU won a game last year.

Getting there for a second year a row, though, was far from easy for NDSU.

Down 38-34 with just under 12 minutes left, the Bison — Alexander, namely — exploded for a 17-4 run to take a 51-42 lead at the 6:36 mark.

The Jacks, though, came roaring back.

A pair of Cody Larson free throws pulled SDSU within 57-56 with 42 seconds left, and after a missed foul shot by the Bison, the Jacks turned the ball over with 8.7 seconds left — after an official review.

Alexander missed a free throw after being fouled, but a three-pointer by SDSU's Deondre Parks was off the mark

and the Bison celebrated.

And in the process, completed an improbable run from the start of the season.

The Bison graduated six seniors (including their top three scorers from last season) and were picked fifth in the pre-season poll under first-year head coach Dave Richman.

They, like the Jackrabbits (23-10), exceeded expectations.

Under new head coach Dave Richman, the Bison who graduated six seniors (including their top three scorers), were picked fifth in the pre-season poll and like the Jackrabbits exceeded expectations.

South Dakota State, which has nine newcomers to the roster this season, were picked fourth in the pre-season poll. They didn't get Wisconsin transfer George Marshall eligible until midway through the season, and with him in the mix, SDSU went 12-4 in conference action and earned the No. 1 seed.

Larson scored 19 points to lead the Jackrabbits, while Parks added 13 points and six rebounds, and Marshall chipped in with nine points and six rebounds.

As would have been expected, both sides were fired up.

Mixed into the action was

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South Dakota State's Kerry Young, 10, and South Dakota's Heidi Hoff battle for possession during the Summit League women's basketball Championship on Tuesday at the Denny Sanford Premier Center in Sioux Falls.

Summit

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of the gates slow.

Nine of the first 10 shots the Jacks hoisted up went in, and the Coyotes conversely had their worst shooting half of the season — they made 4-of-31 before half.

"It's disappointing to come out with a loss in this one, but I though we fought until the very end," junior Margaret McCloud said. "That's something to be proud of."

Freshman Ellie Thompson added 18 points for the Jacks, who will find out their NCAA Tournament fate next Monday.

That's also the same night USD will learn its opponent and location in the WNIT — the Coyotes earned an automatic bid by virtue of the regular season Summit League title.

"At this point, any game's our last game, so we have to go out and play for each other and with each other," said McCloud, who scored 13 points and grabbed eight rebounds in Tuesday's final.

"We need to start our next game the same way we ended this one."

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

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE (24-8)
Marah Ciarn 3-6 2-2 8; Ellie Thompson 6-9 5-5 18; Kerri Young 0-6 0-0 0; Macy Miller 5-9 9-9 19; Megan Waytashek 2-10 2-2 7; Chlyna Stevens 2-3 1-4 5; Alexis Alexander 0-0 0-0 0; Clarissa Ober 3-7 0-0 6; Chloe Cornemann 1-2 1-2 4; Rachel Walters 1-1 2-2 5. TOTALS 23-53 22-26 72.
SOUTH DAKOTA (25-7)
Margaret McCloud 5-8 3-6 13; Nicole Seekamp 7-15 21; Lisa Loeffler 1-2 0-0 2; Tia Hemiller 1-10 2-2 4; Raehel Contreras 1-10 0-0 3; Kelly Stewart 1-5 2-3 4; Bridget Arens 2-5 2-2 6; Kate Livinghouse 1-3 2-2 4; Heidi Hoff 0-3 0-0 0. TOTALS 19-61 18-23 57.
Halftime: SDSU 37, USD 19. Three-Pointers: SDSU 4-15 (Thompson 1-1, Walters 1-1, Cornemann 1-2, Waytashek 1-7, Stevens 0-1, Young 0-3), USD 1-16 (Contreras 1-7, Seekamp 0-1, Hoff 0-1, Stewart 0-2, Hemiller 0-5). Total Rebounds: SDSU 40 (Miller 6), USD 36 (McCloud 8). Assists: SDSU 16 (Waytashek 5), USD 8 (Seekamp 5). Turnovers: SDSU 15, USD 15. Personal Fouls: SDSU 21, USD 19. Fouled Out: None. Attendance: 6926.



South Dakota's Margaret McCloud tries to score in the post against South Dakota State's Clarissa Ober during the Summit League women's basketball Championship on Tuesday at the Denny Sanford Premier Center in Sioux Falls.

WNIT

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The 64-team WNIT field — 32 automatics and 32 at-large — will be announced following the NCAA Tournament selection show next Monday night.

Every game is played at sites of host schools, based on facility availability, fan base, travel constraints, according to the WNIT website.

The first round is set for March 18-20 and the tournament will conclude with the championship on April 4.

South Dakota last appeared in the WNIT in 2012 when it won a game before losing at home to Colorado, but the Coyotes made an even deeper run a year later in the Women's Basketball Invitational (2013) — reaching the semifinals.

"At this point in our program, when we can have a chance to win another tournament, that's a really good thing," head coach Williams said.

Even if that was tough to grasp immediately after Tuesday's loss.

"It's tough, because on one side you see the ladies in the locker room crying, they think they're done, but not

quite," Herbster said.

Nor are the Coyotes done playing in the DakotaDome. South Dakota is likely to receive a high seed in the WNIT, which could mean at least one home game. USD would have no significant conflicts in the DakotaDome over the next couple weeks.

"They still have games under their belt left to play," Herbster said. "You've got a shot; you've got a chance to make a run."

South Dakota State made a deep run in the WNIT last year, winning home games against Butler, Creighton, Minnesota and Indiana before losing in the semifinals at UTEP.

Right now, however, the Coyotes have to treat every game like it could be their last, according to junior Margaret McCloud.

"At this point, any game's our last game, so we have to go out and play for each other and with each other," junior Margaret McCloud said.

"We need to start our next game the same way we ended this one."

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EMILY NIEBRUGGE/P&D
Parker's Zach O'Keefe makes a basket Tuesday night in Tea in the Region 5B boys' basketball championships between the Pheasants and Irene-Wakonda.

Parker

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Zach O'Keefe led the Pheasants with 24 points, eight rebounds, six steals and five assists. Kelby Peters recorded 14 points and four rebounds, while Cody Knock added another 12 points and four rebounds.

"We didn't realize (we had it) until about 30 seconds left," senior guard O'Keefe said. "We've had games before where we've been ahead and then they come back, and we fell short last year,

but this was so exciting."

Levi Van Beek scored 16 points and had three rebounds for the Eagles, with Tate Gale adding another 15 points. Trey King added 12 points, and Gabe King went home with a double-double with 10 points and 16 rebounds.

"The kids worked so hard to get here," Fuller said. "They wanted it bad, and there's nothing like a state tournament. We're going dancing."

You can follow Emily Niebrugge on Twitter at twitter.com/ENiebrugge. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net

NFL: Big Trades Steal Spotlight From Free Agents

NEW YORK (AP) — As free agency began Tuesday, the NFL looked more like fantasy football.

Trades, anyone? Monster deals sending Jimmy Graham to Seattle and Sam Bradford to Philadelphia stole the spotlight from free agent signings.

New Orleans agreed to send its star tight end to the Seahawks for center Max Unger, with draft picks changing hands. The Saints are to get a first-round pick, while Seattle receives a fourth-rounder.

That stunner was followed by Bradford, the injury-prone quarterback who barely has played the past two years (knee), going to Philadelphia for Nick Foles, who also comes off an injury-shortened season (collarbone). Bradford was the top overall draft pick in 2010.

Foles is the latest starter to depart Philadelphia. He joins two-time All-Pro running back LeSean McCoy, now in Buffalo, and Pro Bowl wide receiver Jeremy Maclin, headed for Kansas City, in going elsewhere.

Baltimore dealt nose tackle Haloti Ngata to Detroit, which is about to lose All-Pro defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh in free agency. Ngata, 31 and a five-time Pro Bowler, is due \$8.5 million next season and has a \$16 million salary cap figure.

The Bills confirmed acquiring McCoy for linebacker Kiko Alonso; McCoy also signed a contract extension for \$40 million over five years.

The Jets also confirmed a previously agreed upon trade, getting receiver Brandon Marshall from Chicago for a fifth-round draft pick. The Jets released WR-KR Percy Harvin, whom they acquired last season from Seattle.

Carolina released DeAngelo Williams, its career rushing leader.

Two retirements also drew attention away from the chase for free agents. Five-time All-Pro linebacker Patrick Willis, the heart of San Francisco's defense for eight seasons, called it quits. The 2007 Defensive Rookie of the Year is leaving because of recurrent toe and feet injuries.

"In my head, I'm already a

Hall of Famer," Willis said. "I am leaving this with closure, saying that I am happy today, more happy today than I was the day I was drafted. That says something to me."

Tennessee quarterback Jake Locker, his four-year pro career ravaged by injuries, also retired, saying he has no "burning desire" to keep playing.

The 49ers lost another mainstay when running back Frank Gore, their career rushing leader, joined the Colts.

Linebacker A.J. Hawk, who grew up in Ohio and attended Ohio State, agreed to terms with Cincinnati on a two-year deal. Hawk spent his first nine seasons in Green Bay.

Jacksonville, with lots of salary cap room, grabbed tight end Julius Thomas away from Denver among a slew of moves. The Jaguars agreed to deals with defensive end Jared Odrick, right tackle Jermy Parnell, cornerback Davon House, linebacker Dan Skuta and safety Sergio Brown.

Thomas agreed on a five-year deal worth \$46 million, with \$24 million guaranteed. Among other official free

agency moves early in the process were WR Brian Hartline to Cleveland; S Tyvon Branch to Kansas City; TE Owen Daniels to Denver; G Orlando Franklin to San Diego; CB Buster Skrine to the Jets; FB Jerome Felton to Buffalo; and QB Shaun Hill to Minnesota.



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