

# South Dakota State Basketball Teams Look To The Future

BROOKINGS (AP) — For the South Dakota State basketball teams, the 2014-15 season was successful by most any measure - the men's and women's teams both won conference championships, after all.

Still, both teams will look back on the year with at least a few what-ifs, as coming up short in a few areas gives each team motivation and focus going forward. Both squads graduate program greats, but both also return the kind of talent that will put them among the favorites in 2015-16.

For the Jackrabbit women, the primary objective for this season was

getting back to the NCAA Tournament after getting left out for the first time since becoming eligible in 2013-14. Though SDSU was denied the regular season conference title by rival South Dakota, the Jacks got the last laugh in postseason, defeating the Coyotes 72-57 in the Summit League finals to punch their ticket to a sixth NCAA tournament berth in seven seasons.

Once there, the Jacks were tasked with snapping an 84-game losing streak for 14-seeds in the event, and for 20 minutes proved themselves capable before ultimately falling 74-62 to third-seeded and 10th-ranked Oregon

State on the Beavers' home floor.

The Jacks can look back at a few road losses that probably cost them the regular season Summit crown, but ultimately their 24-9 season can be added to the long list of successful ones, the Argus Leader reported.

Immediately after the loss to Oregon State, coach Aaron Johnston was asked to look ahead to next year, and while he acknowledged the future is bright, he wanted to ensure this year's squad received its due.

"We had a lot of challenges and I'm proud of how they stayed focused and competed," Johnston said. "If

that translates into success in the future that's great, but my immediate thought is to recognize this group and these seniors."

Megan Waytashek closed out a decorated career by leading the Jacks with 14.1 points per game, and leaves 13th on the all-time scoring list with 1,390 career points. Mariah Clarin averaged 11.5 points and 6.6 rebounds as a senior, while Rachel Walters ranked third on the team with 32.3-pointers as a key bench player. Megan Stuart played just four games due to injury after three solid years of reserve play herself.

That won't be an easy group to replace, but there are people in place to make a mark of their own. SDSU will welcome back All-Summit freshman guard Macy Miller (13.7 ppg), along with sharpshooter Kerri Young, posts Clarissa Öber and Ellie Thompson and wing Chynna Stevens. There's still optimism that senior guard Gabby Boever will be granted another year of eligibility, while reserve guards Chole Cornemann (who, not counting Boever, would be the only senior on next year's team) and Alexis Alexan-

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# Lancers Split With DSU

BY JEREMY HOECK  
[jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net](mailto:jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net)

Momentum officially re-established.

In the final tune-up to conference play, the Mount Marty College baseball team not only earned a double-header split of in-state rival Dakota State but did so with an offensive flourish.

The Lancers were held to four hits in a 3-1 loss in the first game, but exploded for 20 hits in a 15-3 rout in the second game Wednesday afternoon at Riverside Field at Bob Tereshinski Stadium.

A year after winning 14 games prior to the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) season, the Lancers will open league play Saturday at Doane with an 18-9 record.

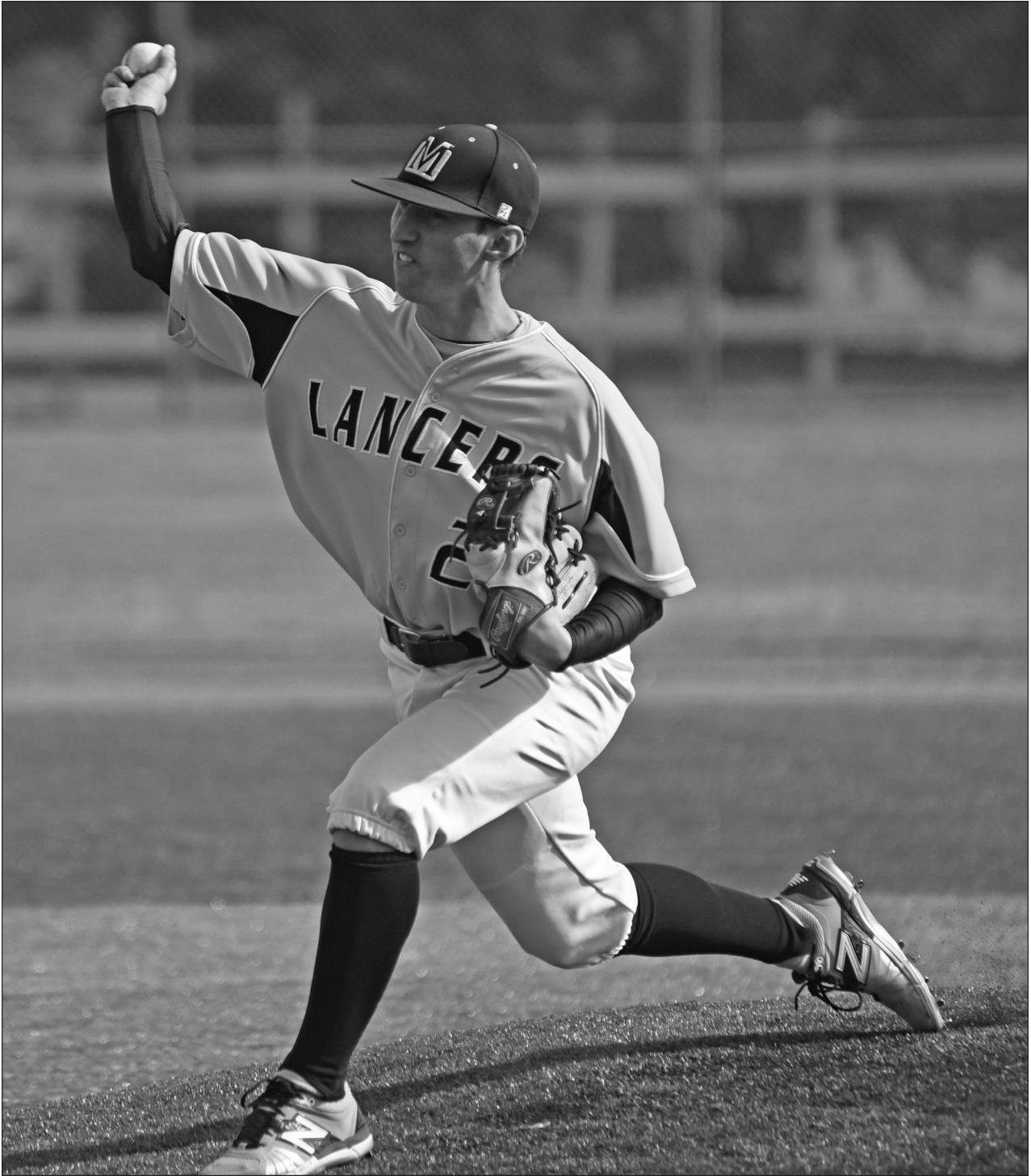
"Hopefully it can set us up to do well now; motivate us to keep going in the right direction," said senior Ryan Buck, who combined for six hits, four stolen bases and three runs scored on Wednesday.

If the Lancers are to be successful in the GPAC, they'll have to eliminate the up-and-down nature of Wednesday when they had four hits in the opener and 20 hits in the second game, according to head coach Andy Bernatow.

"We had a little Jekyll and Hyde there," he said.

That will be a focus for Mount Marty as it prepares for the conference season, Bernatow added.

"It's been a little redundant, so it's got me a little scared," he said. "Hopefully it's one of those things we can pinpoint and our leaders can help make sure we're doing better with the approach."



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Mount Marty pitcher Josh Teichroew sends the ball home during the second game of the Lancers' non-conference baseball doubleheader with Dakota State on Wednesday at Bob Tereshinski Stadium at Riverside Field.

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# One-Handed Tennessee-Martin Pitcher Carter Smith Excels

BY DAVID BRANDT  
AP Sports Writer

Rick Robinson was settling into his new job as the baseball coach at Tennessee-Martin, moving some things around his office when he came across a few articles that had been written about the previous year's team.

He made a somewhat startling discovery: His best returning pitcher had just one hand.

Now, Carter Smith is turning into one of the best pitchers in the Ohio Valley Conference. The 6-foot-2 left-handed senior has been solid as a weekend starter for the Skyhawks, leading the conference with a 2.03 ERA in 31 innings while striking out 29.

Most gratifying for Smith is he's being looked at as a good college pitcher instead of a curiosity.

"It's great that it's a good story, but what I really wanted is to have success at this level," Smith said. "It's just

working hard, staying persistent and being willing to put the time in to get better."

The 22-year-old from St. Louis was born without a right hand, but that didn't stop him from grabbing a ball and glove as a youngster to play catch with his five siblings. He learned how to throw and catch through trial and error, slowly perfecting the technique that would allow him to have success at the Division I level.

When he pitches, he throws with his left hand while balancing the glove on right forearm. After he lets go of a pitch he quickly slips his left hand into the glove so that he can field a potential line drive, bunt or hard grounder. If he catches the ball, he pulls the glove off with his right arm, lets the ball fall into his left hand and gets in position to throw again.

It sounds difficult, but Robinson said Smith does it so seamlessly that it's barely noticeable.

"Honestly, I'd rather have

him on the mound fielding a bunt in pressure situations than anyone else," Robinson said. "He's so smooth with it."

Smith's system is similar to that of former Major League Baseball pitcher Jim Abbott, who was also born without a right hand. He played 10 seasons in the big leagues, winning 87 games and even throwing a no-hitter.

Smith said his dad took him to Busch Stadium to watch Abbott pitch in the 1990s and it helped reinforce that having only one hand didn't have to stop him from playing baseball.

Abbott, now 47 and living in California, said he was excited to learn about Smith's success on the mound. He also can relate to one of Smith's biggest goals: Wanting to be known as a good pitcher instead of the guy who plays with one hand.

"When you grow up missing a hand, you know what it's like to want to fit in and want to be a part of something," Abbott said. "Being a good teammate means not always wanting to

call attention to yourself, so I know the battle he's going through. I'm proud that he feels that way."

Smith said he's tried to never let one hand affect what he can or can't do in athletics. He even played basketball as a freshman and sophomore in high school before deciding to concentrate on baseball.

There have been a few adjustments in college — like learning to hide the ball a little better during his windup and delivery so batters can't pick up the pitch from his grip — but for the most part his system has stayed the same since he was 6 years old.

He said teams have tried to lay down a few early bunts to see if he can field his position, but after a couple outs, they try a different strategy.

"It's never bothered me," Smith said. "I just look at it as a free out."

Smith was voted a team captain during the offseason and has validated his teammates' decision with great

performances.

Robinson said Smith keeps opposing batters off-balance despite a fastball that tops out between 86 to 88 miles per hour. Instead of pure velocity, he relies on good command, a slider and a deceptive change-up.

"Not only is he a really good pitcher for us, but he brings the love of baseball to the field every day," Robinson said. "We have yet to find anything he can't do. When you watch him handle himself on the mound, it's pretty incredible."

Like most playing Division I college baseball, Smith hopes his career can continue at the professional level next year. But if it doesn't, he's well prepared. He's majoring in sport management and has made the OVC Commissioner's Honor Roll the past three seasons.

"I'd love to stay on the field playing, but maybe someday I'd like to get into the front office," Smith said. "I definitely want to stay around the game no matter what happens."

# Elliott Heads To Martinsville To Attempt First Sprint Cup Race

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Of all the places Hendrick Motorsports could have picked for Chase Elliott's first Sprint Cup Series race, the organization landed on historic Martinsville Speedway.

The Virginia race track has hosted so much Hendrick success — the organization has 22 Cup wins at Martinsville — but is also a place of tremendous tragedy: In 2004, a Hendrick plane crashed en route to the track, killing all 10 on board.

The history of Martinsville and the place it holds in Hendrick lore is not lost on Elliott, who will turn his first real laps in a Cup car Friday. The 19-year-old will have to qualify on speed to make Sunday's race.

"The Hendrick history at Martinsville, that's something that will never be forgotten,"

Elliott said. "That's such a special place for HMS, they've had a lot of success there, and it's a place that everyone always wants to step up and do well at, and they certainly have done that as an organization, no matter who is driving."

Elliott will drive the No. 25 NAPA Auto Parts Chevrolet for Hendrick. It's the first of five races he has scheduled this season as he prepares to transition from reigning Xfinity Series champion to the replacement driver for four-time NASCAR champion Jeff Gordon. Elliott in January was picked to replace Gordon in the No. 24 Chevrolet when Gordon retires at the end of this season.

The Hendrick affinity for Martinsville aside, on paper the track might seem a curious choice for Elliott's first

Cup event.

He has very little experience at the track — just two Truck Series races in 2013 — and the odd paper-clip layout with its long straightaways and flat, narrow turns makes it a challenge for drivers.

Elliott isn't sure how his schedule was set by the Hendrick braintrust, but isn't complaining. He always enjoyed watching races at Martinsville, and at just .526 of a mile, the length suits him.

"I kind of look at it as it's just a short track," said Elliott, who prepared for NASCAR racing short tracks across the Southeast.

"I've been fortunate to do a lot of short-track racing over the last several years, and that place definitely has its differences from a lot of short tracks I raced in Florida

and Georgia and North Carolina and Alabama. But at the same time, you are still short-track racing ... you don't want to reinvent the wheel. You still want to race with the same goals, and you are still going to be looking for the same things. The key is going to be to try to marry the excitement of the weekend and your first Cup attempt with the fact that you are still going short-track racing. That's going to be important."

**UNCONTROLLED TIRE:** Denny Hamlin made his overdue return to Auto Club Speedway last weekend and had a strong run until a late-race pit road penalty ruined his race.

Hamlin, who broke his back in a 2013 crash at the California track then missed last year's race when he was not medically cleared to compete because of a piece of metal in his eye, led two times for 56 laps on Sunday. But he was penalized when his Joe Gibbs Racing crew lost control of a tire during a late pit stop, and the punishment contributed to

his 28th-place finish.

Hamlin crew chief Dave Rogers argued vehemently with a NASCAR official over the call, but a television replay eventually showed the tire indeed did get away from the No. 11 crew.

Still, Rogers believed it was a subjective call on NASCAR's part.

"I saw it on TV and certainly the right front (tire) rolled away and out of our box a little bit," Rogers said. "In years past, that would be a common sense rule and the tie goes to the (team)."

Rogers said teams were concerned with NASCAR's new electronic monitoring of pit road, which debuted this season, because it removed any wiggle room in the rule book.

"NASCAR emphasized this offseason when we expressed our concerns over this system — black or white, ball or strike type of a deal," Rogers said. "NASCAR assured us that they would use common sense and things wouldn't change and I can certainly tell you that last year that wouldn't have been called."

"I don't know if it's me getting used to a new system or NASCAR pushing harder for the ball or strike. It's frustrating."

# Baseball Careers Often Start With Winter Grunt Work

BY DAVE CAMPBELL  
AP Sports Writer

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP) — Long before any of that major league money starts landing in their bank accounts, most players are in a similar predicament as everyone else in the regular workforce.

Between baseball seasons there are no paychecks and bills don't stop for the winter. So they need to find some other income.

"Especially the guys who got picked in the 10th round and above," Minnesota Twins reliever Casey Fien said. "I signed for \$500 and a plane ticket. So I had to go out and earn my money."

He went to Costco.

The right arm that would eventually fetch Fien a \$1.38 million salary from the Twins for 2015 was once used for stacking crates, pallets and boxes at the bulk retail giant's location in San Luis Obispo, California. Drafted in the 20th round in 2006 by Detroit, Fien showed up for five-hour night shifts at the store during his offseasons until making his major league debut in 2009 with the Tigers.

First-round draft picks receive multi-million-dollar signing bonuses, but by the 10th round, players get around \$140,000 in guarantees. The bonuses drop sharply further down the board.

Minor league living is hardly large. Meal money, for one, is tough to stretch beyond Pizza Hut and pales in comparison to the majors. The minimum salary for a player in Class A is \$1,100 per month over a five-month season. In Triple-A, it's \$2,150 per month. Prospects on the 40-man roster make at least \$41,400 annually while they're still in the minors, but that's a category that covers only up to 15 of the 150-plus minor leaguers in most organizations.

Unglamorous jobs outside the game can be important, humbling reminders for aspiring major leaguers to appreciate their athletic talent and opportunity. After all, this placeholder work can be a career for others.

Twins bullpen coach Eddie Guardado gained that perspective at a bait shop in his Stockton, California, hometown during the 1994-95 strike, when his major league career was just beginning.

"Spring training drags, absolutely, but guess what? It beats coming to the bait shop and shelling clams," Guardado said.

Being hired can be another matter, though. Players are typically only available from October through February, if they're not invited to instructional league or Latin American winter ball. They need time to train, too, so hours can be tricky.

"I interviewed about 15 places and heard back from one," said Twins prospect Taylor Rogers, recalling his 2013-14 offseason with a Denver-area substance abuse counseling service for offenders on probation.

An internship was offered, but he couldn't make himself available enough. So he was assigned to supervise urinalysis testing instead.

"To make sure they weren't doing any drugs. So I would watch them do that. I didn't have to handle the samples. I just made sure they weren't tampering with it," Rogers said. "It just kind of happened where I couldn't find anything else. It's tough to get a seasonal part-time job."

Rogers, an 11th-round pick in 2012 out of Kentucky who pitched last year for Minnesota's Double-A affiliate, considered joining relatives who are firefighters and carpenters, but the occupations aren't ideal for a guy trying to stay healthy and fit for baseball.

"That kind of takes down

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