

STATE-U FOOTBALL | MISSOURI VALLEY FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

MVFC Ready For Rivalry

BY JEREMY HOECK
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The Missouri Valley Football Conference, one of the nation's most competitive FCS leagues, is about to experience for the first time an impassioned rivalry nine years in waiting.

Thing is, this is what commissioner Patty Viverito had in mind when her league pursued the University of South Dakota two years ago: Coyotes and Jackrabbits on the field.

"I would imagine the entire state of South Dakota will be a standstill, taking up sides," Viverito joked in a phone interview last week from St. Louis, Mo. "Certainly throughout the Midwest, and everyone in our conference, knows and respects the magnitude of this rivalry."

"Maybe our friends at ESPN can even pick up on it."

The series between the two schools dates back to 1889, with USD holding the all-time edge over South Dakota State at 51-48-7. The Jackrabbits, however, won eight of the final 10 meetings before the series was discontinued after 2003 when SDSU made the move to Division I.

Nine years later, those old divisions statewide figure to rise back up to the surface, albeit it at a different level.

"I've said from the start that I absolutely applaud the enthusiasm both sides bring to the rivalry, and I think it's wonderful that it's being renewed," Viverito said. "This is the kind of rivalry that makes college sports special. My own plea is that it not involve dead animals."

"There are new ways to celebrate this tradition."

Viverito and her league partners were welcomed to the rivalry in October 2011 when a USD billboard emerged along Interstate 29 south of Brookings with the phrase "Have an old friend for dinner." Shortly after, a dead coyote was hung from the sign.

"That, to me, was the most remarkable fact in all of that, that it was hyping a game that was more than a year out," Viverito said. "It speaks volumes to the emotions and intensities involved, for good or bad."



Missouri Valley Football Conference commissioner Patty Viverito is pictured during the November 2010 announcement in Vermillion that the University of South Dakota was accepted into the Division I league. The Coyotes began their first season in the MVFC this fall, and though they are 1-9 overall and 0-7 against conference teams, Viverito said she doesn't believe those fortunes will last long.

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PATTY VIVERITO

Before the billboard could be conceived, one key question had to be addressed by the conference: Which school would host the first D-I meeting?

Saying that it is not a "coincidence that the first is in Brookings," Viverito said that SDSU requested the 2012 matchup be played at Coughlin-Alumni Stadium.

"Because they (SDSU) were a standing member, I said that I would honor that," she said. "It seemed like the right thing to do."

As to whether the USD-SDSU rivalry game will be played in the regular season finale each year, Viverito said she wasn't ready to promise it will be. She did say, however, that she would prefer it be later in the season — the FCS regular season ends the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

The 2013 meeting, for example, will be played Nov. 16 at the DakotaDome in Vermillion, the second-to-last Saturday of the regular season.

As far as the current season

is concerned, Viverito was on the USD campus Sept. 8 when the Coyotes made their home opener against Colgate, a game that gave her an up-close look inside her league's new member.

"I came away so impressed by the level of enthusiasm, the gameday experience, and their level of commitment and attention to detail," she said. "I have all the respect in the world for the administration, they understand the challenge of the transition and they embraced that challenge."

"I can't imagine that this is a team that will struggle to get wins in this league for long."

Conference wins have been hard to come by for the Coyotes (1-9, 0-7) this season, however. Discounting one-sided losses at North Dakota State and Indiana State, USD has lost its other five league games by a combined 19 points.

Viverito was certain, though, that the program will turn it around under head coach Joe Glenn, a coach she called "our

most quotable."

"Coach Glenn went in with his eyes wide open about how tough this league this, and might have found that it's even tougher," Viverito said. "The defense in this league is the best in the nation, and I think that's a tough introduction to this level of football. They've proven they can compete, though."

"The schedule was a lot to take on in their first year, but I don't have any doubt that they'll grow and adjust."

Recent history suggests that, yes, it likely won't take long for the Coyotes to compete with the league's elite. Viverito likes to share the story of Youngstown State in its first season in the then-Gateway Football Conference in 1997 — the Penguins finished third in the league standings but won the national championship.

When South Dakota State, for example, joined the Missouri Valley in 2008, it did not take long for the Jackrabbits to be competitive — they were 6-2 in league

play that first year. The next year SDSU was 7-1 and qualified for the playoffs.

North Dakota State, on the other hand, was just 6-10 over its first two seasons in conference play, but turned it all around in 2010 and won a national title last season.

With 10 members, league teams play eight conference games each season, with one team rotating out. USD, for example, did not face Southern Illinois this season and is not scheduled to until 2014.

"We're very happy with the 10 teams we have. We're very committed to being a regional conference whose geography makes sense," she said. "Bringing in the Dakotas further defines this part of the world as Valley country. We're very satisfied with this arrangement."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck

STATE-U FOOTBALL | ROTC RUNNING THE BALL

'Operation Road Runner' Set To Deliver Game Ball To Brookings

BY VANCE JANAK
P&D Correspondent

Ross Nelson and Aaron Schultz have each heard the stories. That's what made them want to experience it themselves.

With South Dakota State and the University of South Dakota renewing its rivalry on the gridiron, the two professors of military science at each school got together to rekindle "Operation Road Runner." The Army ROTC programs from both schools will run the ceremonial game ball from Vermillion to Brookings and present it prior to Saturday's 2 p.m. kickoff at Coughlin-Alumni Stadium.

"I thought it was a pretty cool idea, so I proposed it to the SDSU ROTC and they were on board with it," said Maj. Nelson, professor of military science at USD. "We're excited about it. It's a good way to raise awareness for the ROTC programs at both uni-

versities."

Thirty cadets from each school will take in the 132-mile trek that will start at noon on Friday in Vermillion at the DakotaDome. The plan is to have a cadet from each school run one mile and then switch with a cadet from the other school. Behind the runners will be two buses housing the rest of the cadets.

"The overall goal is each cadet will run two miles. They will run one mile at a time," Schultz said. "Our goal is to have them leapfrog one SDSU cadet, one USD cadet all the way from Vermillion to Brookings."

The cadets will run around the clock. They will go through Centerville, Chancellor and Hartford during the afternoon and late evening on Friday. They will run through Colton, Chester, Colman early Saturday morning before arriving in Brookings.

"They aren't too sure about being up all night, but those are some of the unique things that cadets like about the ROTC program," Schultz said. "We try to push their limits with those types of things, and they don't normally get to experience that. Then they will get to see the football game between the two schools for the first time because

all they've heard is the stories from alumni."

Both Nelson and Schultz said cadets aren't altering their training to prepare for the run because both programs have physical training three to five days a week. One of the biggest challenges, Nelson said, is running at night in the middle of November in South Dakota.

"You never really know what the weather is going to give you. Light snow isn't too bad, but if we start getting into icing conditions, that's going to be a huge challenge and may cause issues for the run," Nelson said. "The other part is just the logistics of it. There's a lot of moving pieces that people don't realize with taking the cadets to different locations."

Schultz said he hopes many community members come out and support the cadets during the run.

"We ask that if local communi-

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SUBMITTED PHOTO/SDSU PUBLIC RELATIONS
South Dakota State's Mathew Martin (left), a sophomore from Burbank, and Eric Flynn, a junior from North Sioux City, will be among the ROTC officers from both schools that will relay the ceremonial game ball from Vermillion to Brookings for Saturday's game. The 30 cadets from the two schools will carry the ball the 132 miles between the campus, rekindling the old tradition of 'Operation Road Runner.'

SDSU, USD Rivalry Gets New Symbol

BY JEREMY HOECK
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EDITOR'S NOTE: This article originally appeared in the Nov. 8 edition of the Press & Dakotan.

Beyond wins, losses and standings, the athletic meetings between the University of South Dakota and South Dakota State will now have added significance.

The idea of a "Showdown Series" announced Nov. 7 was welcome news to the ears of USD head women's track and field coach Lucky Huber, himself a native South Dakota.

"To me, being a South Dakota kid, I think it's great," Huber said. "The rivalry has always been fun, and I like the idea that we're looking at all the sports, recognizing all our kids."

At a press conference in Sioux Falls, officials from the South Dakota Corn Utilization announced that it will sponsor a new South Dakota Showdown series between the state's two Division I schools.

The series — which starts during the 2012-13 seasons, with points retroactive — will have a total of 24 possible points, with 21 devoted to athletic victories and three via academic scores.

Using the devised points system, USD leads SDSU 3-2 in matchups already contested this fall. The next head-to-head meeting will be the Nov. 17 football game in Brookings.

For example, the football games will be worth two points, while the two men's and women's basketball contests will be each worth one point. No points will be awarded for post-season action.

Sports like indoor track, outdoor track, cross country, golf, and swimming and diving will award the points to the team that places higher at the Summit League Championship.

The fact that 17 sports, not just one or two, will take part in the Showdown Series was welcome news, Huber said.

"It helps the athletic departments be able to spread their support to all the teams, because now all the teams and all the matches are worth something," he said.

At the end of the school year each spring, the winning school will earn bragging rights to the specially-designed traveling trophy.

"It should give all the fans in South Dakota a good way to follow how both schools are doing, to get them interested in every sport," Huber said.

The multimedia rights holders for each school, Coyote Sports Properties and Jackrabbit Sports Properties, will lead the initiative. Putting equal weight to all sports and academics was important, according to Travis, general manager of Coyote Sports Properties.

"This all-encompassing rivalry series will showcase the talents of both schools' student-athletes with a point system that not only focuses on wins and losses, but also on academics and scholarships," Lee said.

A "philanthropic aspect," as Lee put it, will also allow fans at USD-SDSU games the chance to donate money to Feeding South Dakota when purchasing concessions.

Times have changed since the rivalry became one of the nation's most heated at the Division II level.

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