

Another Top-10 Team Escapes Coyotes' Clutches

98-Yard Kick Return Lifts Montana Past South Dakota

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — Another top-10 opponent and another late gut punch for the University of South Dakota football team.

Deja vu in the Dakota-Dome.

Montana, ranked No. 10 and 12 in the FCS polls, scored a pair of non-offensive touchdowns in the final 6:33 to stun the Coyotes 31-27 in front of 6,567 fans Saturday afternoon in Vermillion.

In short, much the same way USD (4-6) lost a week ago to Youngstown State.

"Just a horrible loss; I can't even qualify how bad it is," said a dejected Coyote head coach Joe Glenn, whose team now has to bounce back for rival South Dakota State next weekend.

"It's just a shame because it should have never happened."

With USD up 24-17 with 6:33 to play, Montana's Matt Hermanson — no stranger to the DakotaDome as a former Sioux Falls Washington standout — returned a Trevor Bouma fumble 35 yards for a touchdown.

The Coyotes, though, took a 27-24 lead on a 38-yard field goal by Miles Bergner with 1:48 remaining.

Then came the ensuing kickoff, which was caught by Montana's Ellis Henderson and returned 98 yards for a touchdown. USD, with two timeouts left, was unable to find the end zone on its final series.

And just like that, the Grizzlies (8-2) walked away with a victory.

"That's football, crazy stuff happens. You can't predict those kinds of things," said USD sophomore quarterback Kevin Earl. "We were trying to close the game out by running it, and Bouma he gave every ounce of energy he had. Kid fought his butt off."

As did Henderson, a sophomore receiver for Montana. He accumulated 315 all-purpose yards, including four catches for 188 yards and two scores.

"I don't know how many miles Ellis covered in that game before that, but somehow he found that energy to run through the kicker, and then I knew it was over," Montana head coach Mick Delaney said.

In the minds of USD, though, the series should have never occurred.

"We just can't fumble the ball, and you can't kick off to their best guy," Glenn said. "That's my fault; should have never let that happen. I know that, and I didn't change it."

The day wasn't a total let-down for the Coyotes, particularly on defense.

Montana, which rushed for over 300 yards in last year's meeting in Missoula, mustered only 53 yards on the ground Saturday. Grizzlies quarterback Jordan Johnson was also intercepted three times, after coming in with only one pick all season.

Johnson's second pass of the game was intercepted by USD senior safety Aaron Swift and returned 60 yards for a touchdown. Johnson, though, eventually settled in and hit



South Dakota running back Trevor Bouma tries to bust through the Montana defense during their non-conference football game on Saturday at the DakotaDome in Vermillion. Bouma rushed for 147 yards, but Montana got a 98-yard kickoff return with under two minutes to play for a 31-27 victory.

DAVID LIAS/VERMILLION PLAIN TALK

Cross Country: Smelker Wins GPAC Title As Lancer Women Finish Fourth

BY JEREMY HOECK
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Her coach calls her a 'rockstar.' Saturday down in Seward, Neb., Katie Smelker rose to the occasion like a true top performer.

Smelker, a senior at Mount Marty College, won the program's first-ever individual title at the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) Championships. That effort propelled the Lancer women's squad to fourth place, the best finish in school history.

"In the 21 years we've had this program, it's huge for us," MMC head coach Randy Fischer said Sunday.

"Katie's a rockstar for us. She's been running really well, not only in cross country but in track ever since she got here."

Not only was Smelker's win-

ning time of 18:12.16 good enough for her third straight meet victory, but it qualified her for the NAIA Cross Country National Championships on Nov. 23 in Lawrence, Kan.

"We had a good visit the night before, talking about getting out fast and setting the pace," Fischer said. "And then we get out there and she does exactly that."

As a team, the Lancer women finished fourth with 120 points, behind champion Dordt (35), Doane (65) and NCAA Division III Nebraska Wesleyan (71).

Smelker defeated Lauren Opp of Dordt by nearly six full seconds, but the champion Defenders put four runners in the top 10. Mount Marty freshman Karen Mayfield finished 18th, while the Lancers also put freshman Mandy O'Malley in

29th, sophomore Jordyn Hudelson in 37th, freshman Tiffany Tramp in 42nd and freshman Berkley Rietveld in 49th.

The trend there? Even with Smelker rounding out her cross country career, the Lancers remain rather young — with Mayfield of Watertown leading the way for the future. As of Sunday afternoon, Mount Marty was still awaiting word on whether or not Mayfield qualified for the national meet.

"She's actually a little better than Katie was at this stage last year, so early in her competitive career, but we'll see," Fischer said. "Karen's working so hard. She's probably the best freshman we've ever had."

Morningside won the GPAC men's title with 41 points, followed by Nebraska Wesleyan (61), Concordia (63), Dordt (96), Northwestern (120),

Doane (120) and Mount Marty (225). The seventh place finish for the Lancers came up just short of the best finish in program history — sixth in 2011.

"I was happy with that; they couldn't have done much better," Fischer said.

Senior Jordan Pater finished 23rd to lead the Lancers, while senior Sam Lopez took 55th, freshman Christian Petrich was 57th, senior Josh Monson was 61st and sophomore Gage Blaschke finished 63rd. Mount Marty had five other runners competing.

For Pater, he closed out a strong cross country career with one final surge, Fischer said.

"He gave it his best shot, actually took the lead at about a mile and a quarter," the coach said. "In those races, you either sink or swim, and you hope you

hit a day. He sure tried."

Having fallen just short of qualifying the team for the national meet, the Lancer women are naturally progressing in the right direction, Fischer said.

"We're moving where we want to," he said. "Hopefully next year we'll be able to get there."

Smelker, meanwhile, will be traveling to Kansas to represent the Lancers. Of the conference champions across the country, her league title time ranks 10th.

"If she hits a race, she could be top 10," Fischer said. "Top 30 is what we're shooting for, but she could still be up there in that next tier."

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

Pirates Stuff Wall To Earn 9B Finals Berth



Avon's Logan Mudder, 3, beats a Wall defender to a loose ball during their Class 9B semifinal game on Saturday in Avon. Avon caused six turnovers in a 40-14 victory over the Eagles.

JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Avon To Face Hamlin For Title Friday At 11 a.m.

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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AVON — The Avon Pirates forced six turnovers, clamping down on a high-powered Wall attack in grounding the Eagles 40-14 in the semifinals of the S.D. Class 9B football playoffs on Saturday in Avon.

The victory sends Avon (11-0) back to the state finals in the DakotaDome for the second time in three years. The Pirates will be looking for their first championship since 2008.

"It's a great opportunity," said Avon running back Devin Tolsma, who rushed for 219 yards and four touchdowns in the win. "I played there my freshman year on the 2011 team."

"It's a great accomplishment to make it there. Winning would be a lot better."

Wall, which was also looking for a return to the finals after one year away, finishes with a 10-1 record.

"We had excellent execution all year," said Wall head coach Kent A. Anderson, who had previously coached at Beresford. "It's too bad that we have to finish on a game that we didn't execute well."

Tolsma also had a team-high 16 tackles, including 3.5 for loss, for Avon. Brandon Kocmich also had a big game on both sides of the ball, rushing for 140 yards and a score, returning an interception for a touchdown and recording 6.5 stops.

The development of Avon's Kocmich-Tolsma tag team has played a big part in the Pirates success, said Avon head coach Tom Culver.

"Those kids have worked so well together," he said. "Where they've improved so much is in blocking for each other. They'll hit one guy, then get going and hit the next one."

Carson Johnston rushed for 132 yards and two touchdowns for Wall. Lane Blasius was 6-15 passing for 101 yards.

Parkston Edges STM 19-16 For Class 11B Title Berth



Parkston's Mitch Heisinger (5) is stopped by St. Thomas More defenders during their playoff game at O'Harra Stadium.

BENJAMIN BRAYFIELD/RAPID CITY JOURNAL

BY PADRAIC DUFFY
Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY — In the world of sports, one of the favorite sayings is that all games are just a matter of inches.

Saturday night's Class 11B football semifinal between St. Thomas More and Parkston at O'Harra Stadium truly was, as Parkston came up with a huge fourth-down stop late and then saw Brady Reiff make one of the greatest plays in South Dakota high school football playoff history to escape with a 19-16 win and secure a spot in next week's Class 11B championship game with Canton.

"This one hurts even more than getting to the Dome because we were right there against a great team," St. Thomas More head coach Wayne Sullivan said. "Were they ever."

The Cavaliers stood toe to toe with the Trojans for 46 minutes, before Reiff made a season-saving catch for Parkston.

Leading 14-13, More converted on a 4th-and-9 by about an inch with 3:48 to play and it looked like the Trojans might be done. The Cavaliers got behind the chains after a first-down penalty, but More's Riley Scherr peeled off a 10-yard run on 3rd and 12 to set up a 4th and 2 from the Parkston 10-yard line with 2:16 to play.

But More's Lincoln Feist was stopped less than half a foot from a first down, giving the Trojans the ball on their own 8-yard line with 2:11 left.

That set up a must-throw situation for the Trojans, who had passed just six times until