

USD's Eichkorn Headed To NCAA Cross Country Meet

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — Three weeks after playing a key role in one first for her program, Amber Eichkorn isn't done making history.

The junior will become the first University of South Dakota cross country runner to compete at the Division I national meet on Saturday in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Eichkorn, a junior from Wichita, Kansas, helped lead the Coyotes to their first-ever Summit League earlier this month and a week ago finished 10th at the NCAA Midwest Regional meet.

"Coming into the season, it was a hope of mine, it's always been a long-term goal," she said this week. "I did-



Eichkorn

n't know if I would accomplish it this season.

"But apparently I did," she added with a smile. Eichkorn recorded a career-best clocking of 20:30.02 at the Midwest Regional in Peoria, Illinois and despite recording the program's best-ever finish, still had to wait to see if nationals came calling.

The top four individual finishers not part of a qualifying team (she was the only Coyote runner) from each region received automatic berths to the national meet.

The good news came last Saturday afternoon when Eichkorn was in the USD library trying to write a paper. It

was going rather well until her phone buzzed and coach Dan Fitzsimmons was on the other end.

"Actually, walking off the course at regionals, I was pretty sure cross country was done," Eichkorn said. "Until Saturday when I got the phone call from Fitz, when he said, 'Pack your bags, you're going.'"

Was it a prank, she thought? "I'm pretty sure at one point I told him, 'This isn't a joke, is it?'" Eichkorn said.

Eichkorn now heads to Indiana where she will join 37 other runners from across the country (from nine regions) where they will compete in the women's 6,000-meter race at 11 a.m. Central. A live webcast will be available on NCAA.com.

Big picture, Eichkorn's appearance could springboard USD cross country to national prominence — following the path by the track and field program.

"It's a great stepping stone for the program," she said. "It allows other high school runners to actually see that, 'Hey, you can compete at this level.'"

As far as expectations, sure, she'd like to crack the top 10, but it's more about the experience, Eichkorn said. "It should be a really good time, and I'm just looking to have some fun and see what happens," she said.

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

EPJ's Paulsen Headed To South Dakota

BY JEREMY HOECK
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Three months ago, Hunter Paulsen had no serious thoughts about running cross country in college.

A state championship helped change his mind. Paulsen, a senior at Elk Point-Jefferson High School, signed in the past week to run cross country and track at the University of South Dakota — a 15-minute drive from his home in Elk Point.

"At the beginning of the year, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to run in college," he said.

But as his season started and he began winning meets, Paulsen considered his options.

"I figured I'd give it a try," he said.

It was after Paulsen won the South Dakota State Class A individual title in late October that USD head coach Dan Fitzsimmons called. Eventually, after a visit to the Vermillion campus, Paulsen agreed to sign with the Coyotes.

"I felt comfortable with the campus, I liked it a lot," Paulsen said. "It's close to home, only fifteen minutes."

He's not, though, completely unfamiliar with USD, he added.

"I was pretty excited," Paulsen said. "I had two sisters that went there, so I knew they had a good school. I was pretty familiar with it."

And, as it turns out, the Coyotes were rather familiar with Paulsen.

"Hunter is a proven winner," Fitzsimmons said in the release. "He is a young man with a lot of talent who will thrive in our program. He reminds me of some of the Class A and Class B athletes we have had in our program in the past who had tremendous success here."

"We like to think that he is one of those diamonds in the rough."

Paulsen said he plans to major in kinesiology and sport science with an emphasis in sport management at USD, which will open its new academic laboratory attached to the new arena in the fall of 2016.

"I guess the training will be a lot better, which should help me," Paulsen said.

Paulsen will also run track for the Coyotes, who will open a new outdoor track complex in time to host the 2016 Summit League outdoor meet.

In the meantime, he's ready to embrace the transition from high school cross country into the college ranks, Paulsen said.

"I'm really excited for it," he said. "I'm up for the challenge, it should be fun."

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Four Yotes Earn All-Summit League Honors

INDIANAPOLIS — South Dakota volleyball players Kendall Krittenbrink, Sydney Dimke, Melissa Firtko and Brittany Jessen were all named to the All-Summit League team during the league's annual volleyball banquet on Thursday. The 12-member team was voted on by the league's head coaches.

South Dakota had the most all-league honorees with Denver finishing second at three. Fort Wayne's Emily Spencer was named the league's Player of the Year, IUPUI's Beth Howard was the Defensive Player of the Year and Denver's Bailey Karst was the Setter of the Year.

Four is the highest number of all-conference honorees in program history. The Coyotes previous high of three was set three times: first in 2004 when USD was in the NCC, then in 2010 in the Great West and again last season in the Summit League.

Krittenbrink, USD's senior outside hitter who was last season's league Player of the Year, will finish her career earning all-Summit League honors in all four years of

S.D. State Class AA Volleyball



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Sioux Falls Roosevelt's Kalei Wilson, 5, Kyra Wagner, 15, and Bailey Lamb celebrate a Rough Rider point during their opening round matchup with Aberdeen Central in the South Dakota State Class AA Volleyball Tournament on Thursday at the Summit Center in Yankton.

Riders Ground Eagles

BY JEREMY HOECK
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Tagyn Larson wasn't about to let the Sioux Falls Roosevelt tournament tradition come to an end.

Lower seed or not. Strapped with the No. 7 seed, the Rough Riders upset No. 2 Aberdeen Central 3-1 (18-25, 25-20, 30-28, 26-24) in Thursday night's first-round match at the S.D. State Class AA Volleyball Tournament at the Summit Center.

Larson, the 6-foot-2 University of Iowa basketball recruit, dented the floor with 30 kills.

"There's nothing more exciting than being the underdog and coming up with the win," she said later, sporting a wide smile.

The seeds may have mattered to the outside world, but the Riders were more so concerned with playing their game, according to head coach Holly Lynch — whose team had a Thursday morning practice at a state tournament for the first time in her nine years on the staff.

"I guess I don't even look at seeds when we come to this tournament, it's all about playing well," said Lynch, whose team plays Watertown in tonight's (Friday) 7:45 p.m. semifinals.

And so continues the Riders legacy on the big state.

Roosevelt has finished in the top three in eight consecutive state tournaments, with titles in 2006, 2008 and 2012 — it was runner-up in 2010, 2011 and 2013.

The Riders, though, would have to go through No. 1 O'Gorman in the finals to host

also

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knew the whole tournament would be a fight, just because of that," Larson said.

Aberdeen Central (20-3), meanwhile, saw its hopes of challenging O'Gorman for the title dashed.

The Golden Eagles fall to the consolation bracket where they face No. 6 Harrisburg today at 1:45 p.m.

And the biggest reason they're on the wrong end of the bracket? The Golden Eagles didn't execute the game plan, which was simple: Don't let Larson go crazy.

"What do you think we talked about when we were scouting?," Aberdeen Central head coach Dennis Northrup said. "There wasn't anything else. We didn't get it done."

The Golden Eagles, behind an edge in fan support, surged to win the first set despite struggling early.

They then had issues most of set two, as the Riders got rolling with the win to tie the match.

Set three was easily the best action of the day, as the two teams went well beyond the 25-point mark — Roosevelt won with a 30, its most of the season.

The fourth set was much the same, as the Riders broke

the championship trophy. Their No. 7 seed coming in certainly didn't make that goal any easier.

"We



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Aberdeen Central libero Kendall McDaniel passes the ball during the Golden Eagles' opening round matchup with Sioux Falls Roosevelt in the South Dakota State Class AA Volleyball Tournament on Thursday at the Summit Center in Yankton.

State AA Tournament

Thursday

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Pierre, 25-6, 25-12, 25-13
Huron def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-19, 25-18, 25-18
Watertown def. Harrisburg, 25-15, 25-19, 25-20
Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Aberdeen Central, 18-25, 25-20, 30-28, 26-24

Friday

Pierre (8-16) vs. R.C. Stevens (25-8), noon
Harrisburg (12-11) vs. Aberdeen Central (20-3), 1:45 p.m.
S.F. O'Gorman (31-5) vs. Huron (19-5), 6 p.m.
Watertown (20-4) vs. S.F. Roosevelt (19-18), 7:45 p.m.

Saturday

SEVENTH PLACE: Consolation losers, noon
FIFTH PLACE: Consolation winners, 1:45 p.m.
THIRD PLACE: Semifinal losers, 6 p.m.
CHAMPIONSHIP: Semifinal winners, 8 p.m.