



JEREMY HOECK/P&D
Yankton resident John McCuin, a department head for replay and slow motion for ESPN's Monday Night Football, speaks at Wednesday's Yankton Quarterback Club.

Yankton Man Takes Pride In ESPN Position

BY JEREMY HOECK
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John McCuin's personal touch to a national football broadcast is seen by millions of people every week. They just don't know it.

Each week that a viewer watches Monday Night Football on ESPN, they aren't just watching an NFL game, they are watching McCuin – a Yankton resident – doing a job that he loves.

McCuin, whose family moved to Yankton nearly four years ago, serves as a department head for replay and slow-motion for Monday Night Football broadcasts.

It's been a long journey to Yankton for the Arizona native who has worked behind the scenes at many of the nation's top sporting events – from the Super Bowl to the Winter X-Games.

"I have had the opportunity to navigate through a system that has landed me on a show

"Every person should dream big. With sacrifice, persistence and hard work, there is no goal that is unobtainable."

JOHN MCCUIN

that I take great pride in," McCuin said Wednesday at Yankton Quarterback Club, where he was the featured speaker.

"Every person should dream big. With sacrifice, persistence and hard work, there is no goal that is unobtainable."

McCuin, who grew up in Vermont, spent 13 years in the Phoenix, Arizona market, where in addition to his TV station responsibilities worked on Phoenix Suns (basketball) and Phoenix Coyotes (hockey) games.

He and his family McCuin then moved to Denver, Colorado, where he helped with Denver Nuggets (basketball) and Colorado Avalanche (hockey) broadcasts, as well as

with the Mountain West Conference.

Then came an opportunity for his wife, Debbi, to take an assistant professor position at Mount Marty College in Yankton. The family, with children Tanner and Sahara, moved to South Dakota, which still allowed McCuin to continue his work with Monday Night Football.

"I could live anywhere, as long as I'm close to an airport," McCuin joked.

The short drive to Sioux Falls has enabled McCuin to criss-cross the country to places such as Indianapolis, Green Bay, Seattle, San Diego, Philadelphia, Cincinnati (this past Monday) and Boston (for next Monday's

game).

Being away from home for five days a week and 21 weeks out of the fall/winter months does, yes, require patience from his wife and children, McCuin said.

"It takes a special partner to understand and tolerate a husband that is on the road over 200 days a year," he said.

"They are the true champions in my life."

His work, though, with Monday Night Football isn't simply a situation where McCuin hops on a plane the day before and leaves after the game. It's a lengthy process, he said.

His average week begins with a Wednesday conference call, a travel day on Friday, a 'technical day' on Saturday, production work on Sundays and then the usual grind of a Monday.

With a crew of 150 people who travel to each game, they

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S.D. State Volleyball Tournament

Pheasants Soar Into Semis

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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SIOUX FALLS — The Parker Pheasants survived a shaky start to defeat Philip 25-16, 23-25, 25-13, 25-16 in the opening round of the South Dakota State Class B Volleyball Tournament on Thursday at the Denny Sanford Premier Center.

The victory pushes the Pheasants (27-5) with a semifinal showdown with Big East Conference rival Chester Area tonight (Friday) at 6 p.m. The Flyers (28-2), who swept Sanborn Central-Woonsocket in the other afternoon quarterfinal Thursday, won both matches against Parker this season.

"We have to be more consistent," Parker head coach Jill Christensen said of the rematch. "They got on runs on us last time. We have to cut down their runs."

Parker overcame Philip with a balanced attack, with Rylie Christensen (13 kills, 4 blocks), Gabby Herlyn (10 kills, 9 blocks) and Contessa Harold (8 kills) leading the net game. Makenzie Dean finished with 24 assists and 12 digs. Hannah Carlson had a team-best 13 digs, Lexi Olson had 12 digs and Grace Leberman had 10 digs for the Pheasants.

Cylver Lurz led Philip with 15 kills and six blocks. Kendal Hooks had four assisted blocks and 10 digs. Tia Guptill posted 29 assists and 12 digs. Peyton Kuchenbecker added 10 digs for the Scotties.

Parker jumped out to a quick 8-1 lead in the match, thanks to two kills each from Rylie Christensen and Harold, but Philip rode Lurz back to within one, 14-13. But the Pheasants survived the surge to put the opening set out of reach.

A 4-0 run early in the second set got Philip going, as the Scotties were able to spread out their offense. Four different Scotties had four kills in the match.

"They had us guessing defensively," Coach Christensen said. "We would hustle on a few plays, then we were uncertain who would take ball on a couple and it would hit the floor."

"I thought we cleaned that up a lot better in sets three and four."

Parker took control of the third set, outscoring the

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JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
Parker players celebrate a block during the Pheasants' match with Philip in the opening round of the South Dakota State Class B Volleyball Tournament on Thursday in Sioux Falls.

Dakota Valley Earns Class A Showdown With S.F. Christian

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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SIOUX FALLS — The Dakota Valley Panthers took care of business in the opening round of the South Dakota State Class A Volleyball Tournament, sweeping Mobridge-Pollock 25-14, 25-17, 25-16 on Thursday at the Denny Sanford Premier Center.

The victory sends the Panthers (27-4) to the semifinals against defending champion Sioux Falls Christian tonight (Friday) at 7:45 p.m.

"I was happy with how they looked, especially in this environment," said Dakota Valley head coach Rick Pruett. "I don't know how many times Dakota Valley, or any school in South Dakota, is going to play in front of 4,000 people."

Dakota Valley senior Anne McCabe said that the Panthers' club experience — several players play club volleyball during the off-season — helped the team deal with the unusual three-court setup.

"A lot of our girls play club volleyball so they are used to bigger arenas, huge courts, lots of people," she said. "For the most part, I'd say we responded pretty well for the first time in this arena."

Meredith Lammers pounded out 15 kills and had a team-best nine digs to lead Dakota Valley. Elizabeth Lammers had seven kills and two assisted blocks. Taylor

also

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assists and eight digs. Alexa Schaeftbauer added 11 digs.

Dakota Valley wasted little time setting the tone, as Meredith Lammers had five early kills and four other players had points at the net as the Panthers built a 15-6 lead on the way to an easy first-set victory.

"I could see a little bit of excitement and jitters, but it really didn't effect how they played," Pruett said. "I was happy that they came out focused in this environment."

In set two, Mobridge-Pollock scored the first five points, including two on Wollman kills, to take control. Meredith Lammers had four kills in a 6-1 Panther run to give Dakota Valley the lead, 10-9.

After the Tigers ran off three straight points to briefly regain control, a 7-1 Panther run allowed Dakota Valley to put the set out of reach.

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JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
Dakota Valley's Anne McCabe goes up for the block against Mobridge-Pollock's Geneva Wollman during their first-round match in the Class A Volleyball Tournament on Thursday.

USD's Eichkorn Returns To National Meet

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION – A year ago, Amber Eichkorn took off from the start line of the NCAA Division I Cross Country Championships with the hope that she could surge toward the front against the best runners in the nation.

She surged, yes, but still crossed the finish line in 135th place.

It was a whole new experience for Eichkorn, who was last year the first University of South Dakota runner to qualify for the national meet.

Now she'll have another shot. Eichkorn, a senior, will compete at Saturday morning's national meet in Louisville, Kentucky. The race will be broadcast live at ncaa.com.

"That was definitely an eye-

opener for me," Eichkorn said this week. "Now I know what to expect."

Part of those expectations center around the realization that Eichkorn – the runner-up at the Summit League meet each of the last two years – will need an extra special day to even reach All-American status.

"I'm just shooting for All-American, and if I get that, we'll just see where else that takes me," she said. "It would be nice to walk away as a national champion, but the cards would have to play out."

What she experienced last year plays into the realistic outlook.

According to USD's account of last year's race, Eichkorn moved up 49 spots from the 184 position to No. 135 over the final 4,000 meters.

"The best way to explain it, I went out just like I had all season, and I was at the back of the pack," Eichkorn said.

"I remember thinking, 'Wait, what's happening?'"

What happened from that point was another strong season for Eichkorn, who helped guide the USD women to a second straight Summit League title. She then finished eighth at the NCAA Midwest Regional last Friday, with a time of 20:32.9 – a nearly three-second improvement from a year ago.

Still, there's the matter of improvement at the national meet.

"This is the real deal, so I know I can't do my normal pace," Eichkorn said. "You have to go out even harder."

And that's the difference to that level.

"That's how much talent is

at the national meet," Eichkorn said. "You have to continually fight your way forward."

One of four individual qualifiers from the Midwest Regional, Eichkorn is one of two Summit League runners to toe the line – Erin Teschuk from North Dakota State.

Having USD represented at the Division I national meet for the second year in a row will understandably provide another boost to a program on the rise under head coach Dan Fitzsimmons.

"This hopefully shows all the newcomers and high school kids that what we're doing works," Eichkorn said. "We all have this notion that we have to be the best we can be, and if that's not good enough, you have to be better."

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South Dakota runner Amber Eichkorn, shown here during last month's Summit League championships, will compete Saturday at the NCAA Cross Country Championships.

P&D FILE PHOTO