

Vermillion Girls Hold Off Stars At Home

BY ELYSE BRIGHTMAN

elyse.brightman@plaintalk.net

The two halves of the Vermillion High School girls' basketball 63-57 win Monday night might as well have been two different games.

The Sioux City North Stars came out fast with a high pressure defense and took the lead for the first two quarters. Vermillion trailed by nine points going into the locker room at halftime, but a few adjustments to start the second half made all the difference, and the Tanagers build a 17-point lead in the third quarter.

"We knew coming that they were going to be a physical basketball team," Brooks said. "They were going to be very athletic and fast. "We told the girls that before the game and I think it took us a little bit to adjust."

The adjustments were apparent in the second half when Vermillion outscored Sioux City North by 10 points in each of the last two quarters.

"We tell the girls, the first thing you have to do is catch, square up and look," Brooks said. "We always say that if you start to dribble you can't go half speed because they are coming at you full speed, so when you do dribble, you need to go and you need to go hard just knowing there's people coming from behind you. You have about two to three dribbles then you have to pass because they are just going to swarm you."

By the end of the game, the Tanagers went 14-for-24 from the free throw line, but had committed 24 fouls against the very physical Stars team.

"It looked sloppy because they make you play that way with all the pressure and trapping. We got a little careless sometimes, but down the stretch I thought we handled the ball pretty well," Brooks said. "We got some layups, we got some good shots. We made enough free throws to get the win."

Haleigh Melstad's 29 points, including nine field goals, six free throws on seven attempts, seven rebounds and six steals led in the game for the Tanagers.

"We need her to score, obviously and I don't know how many threes she ended up with, but she made a bunch of them," said Vermillion head coach Jon Brooks. "She attacked the hoop well, she made free throws. When she scores it just kind of opens up things for everybody else."

Melstad made five three pointers on 13 attempts and sister Kyleigh Melstad went 2-for-2 on three's.

Vermillion also proved all members of the team can contribute with 18 points off the bench. Shantel French subbed in to score six total points by shooting two field goals on two attempts then draining two free throws on two attempts.

"I thought Shantel French did fantastic off the bench," Brooks said. "She brought ball handling, she brought some leadership and she attacked the hoop well and scored for us. Our bench was good tonight and she kind of led us in that category."

The next game for the Tanagers is scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 29, at home against Tea Area at 5 p.m.



ELYSE BRIGHTMAN/ FOR THE PLAIN TALK
Haleigh Melstad drives to hoop in Monday night's 63-57 win over Sioux City North in Vermillion. Melstad ended the game with 27 points including five three-pointers, six free throws on seven attempts, seven rebounds and six steals.

Florida Athlete Commits To USD

Tevon Wright, a wide receiver and cornerback from Hialeah, Florida, announced Sunday night that he had verbally committed to play football at the University of South Dakota.

The 6-foot-2 Wright is a standout at Champagnat Catholic High School, the same school that produced current USD running back Michael Fredrick.

Wright said he also held scholarship offers from Florida Tech and Northwest Missouri State.

Westergaard

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works hard, but he knows this is just high school wrestling."

Before going onto the mat, Westergaard says he prepares by thinking about the match and stretching a bit. But, before any of that, he says he has to make sure he is eating right in order to make weight before meets.

"I have to watch what I eat. I can't just eat a whole bunch of junk food," he said. "I have a salad and water a lot because I weigh 184, usually, so I just have to get to 182. It's not that hard."

As a team captain, Westergaard also tries to help teammates who might need a little extra work to make the weigh in that day by acting as a liaison between players and coaches.

"(I help) communication stuff we need," he said. "Like, if we need to have a 'make-weight' practice in the morning because a guy is over by a couple pounds and he wants to eat that day then I talk with coaches and we get the room open in the morning so we can work out a little bit."

Delvaux says Westergaard may not look like a stereotypical wrestler, but his positive attitude allows him to continue to be successful and all the coaches are hoping to see him place at the state tournament this year.

"He's just really happy to be where he's at, so he brings a lot of positive emotion to the team because he's a really positive kid and we like that a lot," Delvaux said. "Sometimes this sport gets really serious and that's OK, but it's still high school wrestling."

USD Men Top Wisconsin In OT, Fall To Illinois

MILWAUKEE, Wis.—South Dakota senior Tre Burnette hit a spinning jumper from the left side of the lane with 1.2 seconds left to give the Coyotes a 92-91, double-overtime win against Milwaukee Thursday at Panther Arena.

It was the sixth win in seven games for South Dakota (7-4) and their second double-overtime victory in that span. Milwaukee (8-4) lost for the first time at home this season and had a season-long, four-game win streak come to an end. USD beat Milwaukee 84-60 last season in Vermillion.

Burnette's jumper was the fourth lead change in the final 50 seconds. He caught an inbounds pass with six seconds left, drove to the left side of the lane and spun back to his right for an off-balance shot that touched nothing but net. It was Burnette's first points since the 6:23 mark of the first half. He finished with eight.

"Coach [Smith] had faith in me even though I was sitting for such a long time," said Burnette, who grew up 80 miles west in Madison. "I stayed in the game and cheered on my teammates while they were going. When it came down to it, he trusted me with the shot."

Coyote freshman Tyler Hagedorn scored a season-high 17 points off the bench and finished one rebound shy of a double-double. He fouled out with a minute to go in the second overtime which forced Burnette back into the game.

USD guard D.J. Davis also had a career-high 17 points and pulled down 10 rebounds for his first collegiate double-double. His layup with 1:07 left in the second half tied the game at 67 and were the final points scored in regulation.

"We made some big-time plays down the stretch to win this one," said USD head coach Craig Smith. "We have played in so many close games the past two seasons. With the exception of a few, we have learned to win those games."

South Dakota led 38-27 at halftime and by nine, 56-47, on a layup by Shy McClelland with 8:32 remaining. Shortly thereafter, Milwaukee hit two

of its 14 3-pointers during a 10-0 run that gave the Panthers a 60-58 lead. Milwaukee's largest lead during the game was two points and the Panthers trailed for nearly 38 minutes.

Milwaukee erased a five-point lead in both overtimes and had the final possession of regulation and the first overtime. Tiby missed a 3 that ended the second half and Jordan Johnson missed a tough jumper near the hoop at the end of overtime one on a play when Milwaukee's timer inadvertently stopped the clock with 1.7 seconds left. A review gave Milwaukee possession with 0.4 seconds remaining but the Panthers couldn't score.

USD forward Eric Robertson scored eight of his 15 points during the overtime period and had seven rebounds. McClelland, a Milwaukee native, had 10 points before fouling out with 4:38 left in regulation.

"To be able to come to an athlete's home state and win is awesome," said Smith. "Our guys knew it meant a lot to Shy and Tre to play here. It's fun to see those guys lock in and want to win it for their teammates more than anything."

South Dakota shot 47 percent from the field to overcome the Panther's 14 of 43 effort from beyond the arc and 21 of 25 shooting from the free-throw line. Tiby made 13 out of 14 from the stripe. The Panthers also got 16 points from Austin Arians and 13 from Akeem Springs.

South Dakota will travel to Champaign, Ill., to take on the Illinois Fighting Illini at 2 p.m. Saturday at the State Farm Center.

CHAMPAIGN, Ill.—Illinois junior guard Malcolm Hill had career highs of 34 points and 11 rebounds in leading the Fighting Illini to a 91-79 win against South Dakota Saturday at the State Farm Center.

It was the first meeting between the programs in 44 years and the second Big Ten foe for the Coyotes this season. South Dakota (7-5) beat Minnesota 85-81 in double-overtime back on Dec. 5.

Hemiller Powers USD Past Tigers

BY JEREMY HOECK

jeremy.hoeck@yankeeton.net

Left with a sour taste in his mouth after a home loss to Washington last weekend, the University of South Dakota women's basketball team had some things to correct.

Such an opportunity presented itself Thursday night.

In a game where plenty of reserves saw plenty of time, the Coyotes — in their final non-conference home game — rolled past NAIA Dakota Wesleyan 94-54 at the DakotaDome.

"We talked a lot about doing all the little things," said USD junior Bridget Arens, a Crofton (Nebraska) native who had eight points and six rebounds.

What were some of those little things? Setting better screens and talking on the defensive end.

"She really made a point that we're not going to play the scoreboard," Arens said of head coach Amy Williams.

"We're going to get better at the things we need to do right against really good teams."

As to be expected in such a game, the Coyotes dominated in such areas as points in the paint (50-24), points off turnovers (30-4) and fast-break points (25-3).

About the only moment of frustration for USD (7-4) was in the early stages of the first quarter when Dakota Wesleyan — which counted the game as an exhibition — was able to knock down a couple of open shots.

Quickly, though, the Coyotes turned the tides. They forced 30 turnovers and turned up the defensive pressure on a team certainly capable of putting up some points.

"Our number one key heading into the game was to be the aggressor and get after it defensive-

ly," Williams said.

The ability of Dakota Wesleyan's post players to step out and its perimeter players to go down low presented USD with a "unique" challenge, Williams said.

The Tigers, who rank among the top-10 in the NAIA in three-point shooting, were held to 5-of-18, and leading scorer Kristin Sabers was held to 1-of-12 shooting.

"That was a really good job on our team's part locking in to take away some of their strengths," Williams said.

USD, conversely, wanted to get back to one of its biggest strengths: Sharing the ball. In the loss to Washington, the Coyotes had only six assists, but Thursday night they rolled up 21 assists and committed only 12 turnovers.

"That was another focal point," Arens said. "Getting back to Coyote basketball and the way we play."

Senior point guard Tia Hemiller scored a career-high 22 points and grabbed seven rebounds, while senior Nicole Seekamp recorded nine points, seven steals and six assists.

"I feel like everybody has a lot of skills," said freshman Allison Arens, who had five points and five assists. "We can be very hard to guard if we execute our plays really well."

GRAND FORKS, N.D.—South Dakota senior guard Nicole Seekamp stole the ball as the clock expired to seal the Coyotes' 73-70 win over North Dakota Saturday afternoon inside Betty Engelstad Sioux Center.

"Today's game came down to grit," said head coach Amy Williams. "We found a way to grind it out. I could not be more proud of our seniors. They stepped up and made big plays right when we needed them. A great effort from our team as they overcame a lot of adversity."

South Dakota (8-4) has won eight of its last nine

The team's loss Saturday was its second in the last eight games.

The Coyotes entered with a higher RPI than their counterparts, but trailed 14-0 less than five minutes into the contest and by a 55-36 margin at halftime. South Dakota climbed within six points twice in the final five minutes, but drew no closer.

Tre Burnette scored 19 of his career-high 27 points in the second half to lead South Dakota, which beat Milwaukee in double-overtime two nights prior on a last-second jumper by Burnette. Casey Kasperbauer added 12 points Saturday and Shy McClelland had nine.

Hill had seven points before South Dakota recorded any. The Illini's second-leading scorer entering the game at 17 points per game had 17 points, eight rebounds and five assists in the first half. He finished 10 of 16 from the field, 4 of 7 from long range, and made 10 of 11 free throws. He and freshman Jalen Coleman-Lands combined for eight of Illini's 14 three-pointers. Coleman-Lands tied his season high of 17 points

South Dakota guard Trey Norris made it 81-75 with a jumper in the paint with 4:20 remaining. The Coyotes couldn't connect on two possessions to draw closer before Hill's fourth triple pushed the lead back to nine.

Burnette's fifth 3-pointer made it 84-78 with 2:03 remaining. Burnette was 5 of 10 from long range. He missed from long range on the Coyotes' next possession and Michael Finke hit a 3 on the other end for Illinois (7-5) that made it 87-78 with a minute to go.

Both teams shot near 48 percent for the game and combined for just six second-chance points. The Illini made 17 of 20 free throws while the Coyotes were 6 of 13.

The Coyotes will take on Florida Gulf Coast at the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls at 7 p.m. on Dec. 28 before starting Summit League play on New Year's Day.

games and two-in-a-row in the series. North Dakota (4-6) lost inside 'The Betty' for the first time this season and just the 29th time since the arena opened in 2004-05.

Five Coyotes scored in double figures Saturday. Seekamp finished with a team-high 15 points, five assists, and four steals. Senior center Margaret McCloud, senior guard Kelly Stewart, and sophomore Kate Liveringhouse each had 11 points. Senior guard Tia Hemiller added 10 more.

South Dakota held the lead for nearly 38 minutes of the contest. The Coyotes' reached their largest lead of 13 at the end of the first. With both teams scoring 12 points in the second quarter, the Coyotes took a 35-24 lead into the half.

North Dakota went on a 15-8 run in the final six minutes of the third quarter with eight points from Loyd to make it a one-basket game. A layup by Dyer with 7:55 remaining in the fourth put the Fighting Hawks up 50-49.

The Fighting Hawks gained momentum as the lead changed four times in the beginning of the fourth. Seekamp hit a 15-foot jumper with 7:27 to go to quiet the crowd inside The Betty. Hemiller had a steal two minutes later that she ran down court for an easy layup and extend the Coyotes' lead to five.

North Dakota would foul six times in the final 1:17 to send the Coyotes to the line. South Dakota sank 6-of-9 from the charity stripe to hold onto the lead.

Overall, South Dakota was 27-of-57 (47.4 percent) from the field, forced 23 Fighting Hawk turnovers, and held a 19-11 advantage in bench points. North Dakota also shot 47 percent (25-of-53) from the field.

The Fighting Hawks won the rebounding battle 34-28 which resulted in 20 second-chance points to South Dakota's eight. Liveringhouse and McCloud both had a team-high five boards.