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Vermillion Resident Skates States To Fight MS



Vermillion's Melissa "Mo" Dittberner, far left, and her teammates from Sioux City Roller Dames are skating across states to raise money and awareness for the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

BY ELYSE BRIGHTMAN
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Six states in five years. That's what Vermillion's Melissa "Mo" Dittberner has skated across with two teammates and one sag (support and gear) car to raise money for the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society.

"(MS) seemed like such a debilitating disease and something that I just didn't understand so I thought that it would be cool to bring some more awareness to that," Mo said.

The women skate together as part of the Sioux City Roller Dames roller derby team and put together the Sk8 the State fundraising event.

"One of the girls in our group, her aunt has had MS for the last 40 years," Dittberner said. "She's kind of an inspiration for us for pushing through."

So far, the trio has skated across South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Texas, Kansas and just finished crossing North Dakota.

"This was our sixth state that we skated and we just finished up North Dakota with 206 miles," Dittberner said.

The idea came to Dittberner from a friend who wanted

to start something himself, but "never quite got around to it", so she and her teammates took it on themselves.

The team aims to cross at least one state every year. "We like to do it every year, but sometimes they come quicker sometimes they take longer to plan, like Texas took a while to plan," Dittberner said.

The farthest they've skated in one day was 63 miles that took about 12 hours to complete, but Dittberner says the hardest part is not physical.

"As we prepare our bodies for the skate, I had no idea that wouldn't be the hardest part," Dittberner said. "It's your brain and what keeps pushing you when the hours get long and the days get hot and you're tired and dehydrated. Just mentally proving to myself, and to others, that I have what it takes to make a difference."

Dittberner says there isn't much physical training for the events because finding 12 hours straight to go skate is nearly impossible between work and families, but they keep in shape by running and competing in roller derby.

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Vermillion Finishes 2-2 At SSC Tournament



ELYSE BRIGHTMAN/ FOR THE PLAIN TALK
Vermillion's Ethan James on the mound in a game earlier in the season. James pitched in Vermillion's 5-3 win over Wisner-Pilger at the South Sioux City Tournament last weekend.

BY ELYSE BRIGHTMAN
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Vermillion Post 1 baseball team traveled to the South Sioux City Senior Legion Tournament this past weekend in South Sioux City, Nebraska.

Vermillion played four games and earned a 2-2 record over Saturday and Sunday to take fourth place.

Game One

Post 1 faced Wisner-Pilger in the opening game at Klasey Park. Vermillion took a 2-0 lead in the first inning when Carter Kratz stole home and Cole Anderson's RBI double scored Jack Brown.

Scoring resumed in the third with seven Vermillion runs followed by one in the fourth and another six in the fifth. Post 1 went on to win 16-1 in five innings.

Kratz led Vermillion's offense with five RBIs on a double and a triple. Jake Odens had three RBIs and Brown had two. Ethan James, Joe Miller, Nate Robertson and Brown all recorded one RBI.

In all, Vermillion had 10 hits with 12 walks as Wisner-Pilger's pitchers faced 38 batters in the game.

Hunter Christopherson pitched the complete game for the win with one run on three hits, one walk and two strikeouts.

Game Two

Post 1 survived a seventh inning rally by Wakefield Post 81 to take Saturday's second game 5-3.

A fourth inning error by Wakefield put Vermillion up by two followed by an RBI single from Travis Weber made the score 3-0. Weber recorded another RBI in the sixth inning to score Anderson for what would be the winning run.

Wakefield scored on a throwing error in the bottom of the frame.

Vermillion's final run came in the seventh when Ethan James scored on a passed ball.

They then gave up two runs in the bottom of the inning off a two-out, two-run double by Wakefield's Alex Conley before recording the final out of the game.

Anderson went 3-for-3 at the plate, Weber was 2-for-3 and Brandon Mockler was 1-for-2.

James pitched four innings with one hit and four strikeouts. Kratz replaced James at the start of the fifth and gave up three runs on six hits and one strikeout.

Game Three

Vermillion dropped the first game Sunday morning to Elmwood-Murdock 5-2.

Miller recorded the lone RBI in the third inning to score John Benson.

The game was tied at one going into the fifth inning, but Elmwood-Murdock scored three on a double and a two-run single.

Elmwood-Murdock scored again in the off an RBI single in the seventh.

Kratz went 3-for-4 in the game with a double. Brown, Christopherson and Roberston also recorded hits.

Odens pitched four and two-thirds innings for Vermillion with four runs on eight hits and six strikeouts. Mockler replaced Odens in the fifth for one run on two hits and one strikeout.

Game four

Vermillion's tournament ended Sunday afternoon when the team lost 11-5 to Dakota Valley Post 319.

Christopherson went 3-for-4 and Jefferson Galvin was 2-for-3 to lead Vermillion's offense.

Vermillion went into the second inning down 2-0, but a four-run inning put them ahead by two.

Robertson's single brought home Christopherson followed by a two-run single by Galvin. Benson's sacrifice fly scored Odens for the fourth run.

The lead was short lived and Dakota Valley scored another two in the bottom of the frame to tie the game. Dakota Valley scored five in the third, one in the fifth, one in the sixth and one in the seventh to secure the win.

Christopherson's RBI single in the seventh tallied the last run, but Vermillion's late game efforts fell short.

Anderson and Benson on the mound with three innings each letting up 11 runs on 10 hits with five strikeouts and three walks.

Vermillion Post 1 continues the season at the First Dakota Classic in Yankton June 19-21. Vermillion will face Yankton for the tournament's only game on Friday at 7 p.m. at Riverside Park.

Full Schedule:

SATURDAY: Crofton vs. Yankton, 11 a.m.; Crofton vs. Vermillion, 1 p.m.; Vermillion vs. McCook-Miner, 3 p.m.; McCook-Miner vs. Piedmont, 5 p.m.; Piedmont vs. Yankton, 7 p.m.

SUNDAY: Piedmont vs. Vermillion, 11 a.m.; Crofton vs. Piedmont, 1 p.m.; McCook-Miner vs. Crofton, 3 p.m.; McCook-Miner vs. Yankton, 5 p.m.

From VHS To NFL Success

BY ELYSE BRIGHTMAN
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Ben Leber never had a favorite football team growing up.

"My two older brothers were so passionate about their teams that I didn't need one. I learned to watch their teams and enjoy their fights," Leber said.

But, the Vermillion High School graduate went on to have a successful career of his own by playing 10 seasons in the NFL and last month was voted to the inaugural class of the Vermillion High School Tanager Hall of Fame.

Leber was a three sport letter winner at Vermillion High School during his sophomore, junior and senior years for football, basketball and track; though, didn't run track as a senior. And, in 1995 was part of the 11A state championship football team.

"I was very fortunate to play multiple sports," Leber said. "It really helped me to become a more athletic player and kept my mind fresh. It's one of the things I try to advise parents on now, allow your kids to play other sports to help combat physical and mental fatigue in kids."

After high school, Leber accepted a football scholarship to play at Kansas State where he was a three year starter for the Wildcats at linebacker. He help Kansas State to five bowl games, the Fiesta Bowl, Alamo, Cotton, Holiday and Insight.com.

After college, the player from a small town in South Dakota went on to play 10 seasons in the NFL with the San Diego Chargers, Minnesota Vikings and St. Louis Rams.

"For many years I thought it was a disadvantage coming from a small town. I wasn't exposed to 'big' city life and come out pretty naive. It took a while to get used to the criticisms that come with bigger media and more straightforward people," he said.

Leber thinks coming from a small town helped his career more than anything. Growing up and in high school, his teams didn't learn the real X's and O's of football and he had to know it to play at higher levels. He said doing so helped him become a better player.

"I got to learn football with a fresh mind (with) no bad habits or techniques to break and I could learn



BY SHAUNA MARLETTE/ FOR THE PLAIN TALK
Two of Ben Leber's NFL jerseys on display in the commons area at Vermillion High School. Leber, a VHS graduate, played 10 seasons in the NFL before retiring after the 2011 season.

the game with an open mind," Leber said. "It required a ton more studying than others in my class but that in the end is what laid the foundation for me to keep my career going. In the end, I wouldn't change anything about coming from a small town."

He can also take lessons learned while playing football and apply to them to life outside the game.

"The mental and emotional skills I learned in pushing my body further than I thought possible still stays with me today. You can't walk away from this game and not be a changed man for the better. Along with that, having to think and take control amid the chaos of a game has strengthened my confidence to keep pushing no matter how stressful something seems," Leber said.

Outside of work, he likes to spend time with his children by fishing, shooting hoops, riding bikes and even coaching soccer and tee-ball teams.

Though Leber has retired from playing, he is still involved with football as a college football analyst with Fox Sports, a job he has held for three years. This year he will be working with them again covering the Big12 & C-USA conferences.



ELYSE BRIGHTMAN/ FOR THE PLAIN TALK
Vermillion's Ben Leber speaking at the induction banquet for the inaugural class of the Tanager Hall of Fame on May 2.

He also works with KFAN radio in Minneapolis and with the Vikings Entertainment Network on various projects.