

SPORTS

WOMEN'S SOFTBALL PREVIEW

Voyageurs to seek national championship

BY KEVIN BONESKE
Sports Editor

Absent most of the players who were part of last year's Rainy River Community College women's softball team that finished first in the Minnesota College Athletic Conference's Northern Division, won the Region 13B championship and advanced to the NJCAA Division III National Tournament, RRCC will be seeking more success in 2015.

The Voyageurs, who finished 30-9 last season after placing sixth at the national tournament, have seen the departure of three All-Conference and All-Region players – the team's primary pitcher, Oashaja Dobie, and fielders Rachel Clark and Lynsi Emery.

Dobie, who also was one of the team's top hitters last season, received second-team All-American honors and the national tournament's Marucci Elite Hitter Award.

Other players who have departed include Lexi Fancy, Sam Cantu, Alisha Brinker, Marina Johnson and Courtney Branham.

Longtime RRCC softball coach Dieter Humbert is back this season with his list of top returning players in-

cluding infielder Beth Austad and catcher/outfielder Megan Johnson, two of the team's four captains.

"I think we've got a lot of talent on the team – a lot of young talent," said Austad, a sophomore from St. Cloud. "I'm thinking they're going to help us pull through the season...."

"The freshmen here will really help us out and really benefit the team, I think. We've got a lot of strong hitting this year, and I do think we will rank nationally."

"We do have a lot of talent, so I think we could (return to the national tournament)," said Johnson, a sophomore from Dryden, Ontario. "We did have a lot of talent last year, but there's something about these girls (this year)."

"I think we have a lot of experience on other teams," said freshman captain Brooke Millerbernd, an infielder/pitcher from Littlefork who was part of Littlefork-Big Falls' Section 7A runner-up girls softball teams the past two seasons. "I think we'll be really good offensively. We just have to work on more defensive things, but I'm really looking forward to (the season)."

"I can already tell you that we are going to have a strong defense," said freshman



The Voyageurs' Brooke Millerbernd lays down a bunt during Friday's softball practice in the RRCC gym.

captain Jaimie Shaw, an infielder from Lorette, Manitoba. "To add to that, we have strong hitters, which will make up a powerful lineup. Our pitchers and catchers have been working hard leading up the season and I think that they will be great strengths to our team."

Humbert said the Voyageurs' primary pitchers this season include two incoming freshmen, Sierra Ramirez from Vero Beach, Fla., and Deven Chandler from Moscow, Idaho.

The strengths of this year's team, Humbert said, include pitching, catching, defense and offense, while a weakness is inexperience at the college level.

In addition to having

"high academic achievement, great team chemistry (and) excellent sportsmanship," Humbert lists winning the MCAC Northern Division, Region 13B Tournament and NJCAA Division III National Tournament titles among this year's team goals.

He said he is worried about "absolutely nothing" this season and is looking forward to "working with these wonderful young adults and my assistant coach (Roger Hasbargen)."

Humbert said the teams to watch out for this season include Mesabi Range, Itasca and Northland.

The Voyageurs open the season next week on their trip to Florida.



In front from right, the Broncos' Ben Humbert shoots in the lane while being guarded by Deer River's Cody Shevich (35) in Saturday afternoon's Section 7AA quarterfinal at Duluth Denfeld.

BASKETBALL

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missed two free throws and Humbert completed a 3-point play from the charity stripe, the Falls made it a one-possession game at 70-67 with 34.3 seconds remaining. However, that was all the closer the Broncos could come before time expired.

The Falls had three players score in double figures led by Humbert with 29 points. Johnson added 11 points with Jack Bartkowski scoring 10 more.

Deer River was led by Drotts with 29 points, which included seven 3-pointers. Tyler Anttila added 16 points with Cody Shevich scoring 11 more.

The loss ended the Broncos' season at 22-6, while the Warriors advanced to Tuesday's Section 7AA semifinal at UMD against Esko. The Falls lost in the Section 7AA quarterfinals for the fourth year in a row with three of those losses coming against Deer River.

The Broncos are losing eight seniors on the ros-

ter to graduation – Humbert, Johnson, Bartkowski, Greg Harris, Trace Clark, Kameron Koerbitz, Connor Ward and Cole Miggins.

"It's been a fun year – a lot of fun," Dowty said. "A great group of seniors – definitely, definitely going to be missed. They put a lot of time into the program, a lot of effort into the program to make it what it is. It's going to be tough to see them so, but they've got a lot to be proud of this year."

"Overall, it was a pretty good year. We didn't want it to end this way, but it is what it is."

Deer River 76, Int'l Falls 69
Deer River 37 39 – 76
Int'l Falls 22 47 – 69
Deer River: Chad Benham 1, Aaron Drotts 29, Ben Eby 6, Kole Schultz 8, Todd Tibbetts 5, Cody Shevich 11, Tyler Anttila 16. 3-pointers: Drotts 7, Eby 2, Tibbetts. Free throws: 22-37. Fouls: 24. Fouled out: Anttila.
Int'l Falls: Jack Bartkowski 10, Allen Johnson 11, Wyatt Helgeson 4, Ethan Phung 4, Max Vergeldt 2, Clay Tomczak 9, Ben Humbert 29. 3-pointers: Johnson 3, Bartkowski 2, Phung, Tomczak. Free throws: 14-21. Fouls: 26. Fouled out: Johnson, Helgeson.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Broncos seeded No. 1 in Section 7AA

L-BF No. 6 seed in the Section 7A

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The International Falls girls basketball team has received a No. 1 seed and will open the Section 7AA playoffs with a home game at 7 p.m. today against No. 8-seeded Greenway.

The winner advances to the Section 7AA quarterfinals to play at 2:45 p.m. Saturday at the University of Minnesota Duluth against the opening-round winner between No. 4-seeded Proctor and No. 5-seeded Mesabi East.

The quarterfinal winner advances to the semifinal game at 5:45 p.m. March 12 at the UMD. The Section

7AA championship game is set for 7 p.m. March 14 at UMD.

In Section 7A, the Littlefork-Big Falls girls basketball team has received a No. 6 seed and will open the tournament at 5:45 p.m. Thursday at Hibbing Memorial against No. 6-seeded Bigfork.

The winner advances to the Section 7A quarterfi-

nals at 5:45 p.m. Saturday at Hibbing Memorial to play the opening-round winner between No. 2-seeded Cherry and No. 7-seeded Northeast Range.

The quarterfinal winner advances to the semifinal at 7:30 p.m. March 11 at Hibbing Memorial. The Section 7A championship game is set for 7 p.m. March 13 at Hibbing Memorial.

Section 6A Meet
Team scores: Grand Rapids 423, Hibbing 336, Chisholm 320, Mesabi East 251, Virginia 207, Eveleth-Gilbert 206, Duluth Marshall 174, International Falls 90, Duluth Denfeld 42.
International Falls finalists
200-yard individual medley – 10. Alex Belanger, 2:26.9.
1-meter diving – 2. Cole Tatsak,

279.55.
100 butterfly – 7. Belanger, 1:03.33.
200 freestyle relay – 6. Tatsak, Belanger, John Cowman, Jared Hunter, 1:44.75.
100 breaststroke – 11. Cowman, 1:17.1.
400 freestyle relay – 8. Tatsak, Cowman, Joey Griffith, Tanner Sether, 4:12.32.

TATSAK

► continued from B1

Lake Park, fourth; Nathan Stone of Simley of Inver Grove Heights, sixth; and Jacob Doble of Chisago Lakes of Lindstrom, eighth.

Tatsak, who has quali-

fied for state for the first time, said he is preparing this week's meet so that he won't be "stressed out" competing at the U of M Aquatic Center, where the Class A diving preliminaries begin at noon Thursday. The Class A finals start at noon Saturday.

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