

SPORTS

MEN'S BASEBALL PREVIEW

Voyageurs seek return region tourney trip

BY KEVIN BONESKE
Sports Editor

After having qualified for the Region 13 Tournament last season for the first time in school history, the Rainy River Community College men's baseball team is looking to get back there is 2015. The Voyageurs, who last season had an overall record of 17-21 and went 7-5 in the Minnesota College Athletic Conference's Northern Division, entered the MCAC North double-elimination playoffs as a No. 4 seed and swept Vermilion in the best-of-three series to qualify for the region tournament. Individually last season, Gino Strebing, a pitcher from Tucson, Ariz., was RRCC's first player in the baseball program's five-year history to be named to the NJCAA Division III All-Region 13 team. He was also on the MCAC All-Northern Division and All-State teams. Talon Kunkel, a pitcher/first baseman from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Colten Boudreau, a shortstop from Selkirk, Manitoba, who were both named to the MCAC All-Northern Division team. Strebing used his sopho-



Voyageurs catcher Dyan Zayas hauls in a pitch during Friday's baseball practice in the RRCC gym.

more year of eligibility and then signed with the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth. Other players not returning to play for RRCC this year include third baseman Makana Canda, pitcher/first baseman Robert Parrish, outfielder Drew Birss, outfielder Ben Churilla and pitcher Jose Pedraza. Josh Koenig enters his sixth season as head coach with his list of top returning players including Kunkel, Boudreau, outfielder Tanner Helms, second baseman Victor Rodriguez, catcher

Dyan Zayas, pitcher Joseph Hudson, catcher/utility player Sean Deviney, pitcher Stephen Rivera, first baseman/pitcher Jake Schulte and pitcher Kris Barber. William Thomas, an outfielder from Olive-Harvey College in Chicago, has transferred to RRCC. "With all the experience we have, I think we're going to have good success this year," said Kunkel, one of three captains on the team. "Our defense is going to be one of the bright points of



STAFF PHOTOS BY KEVIN BONESKE

At right, Voyageurs second baseman Victor Rodriguez relays the throw to shortstop Colten Boudreau (6) at left while Sam Pelechaty looks on in back in Friday's baseball practice in the RRCC gym.

the year, and I think pitching will come through for us in the end," said Deviney, another team captain. "We have a lot of good freshmen coming in. They're going to be impact players right from the start of the season." "We hope to win more games this year...", said

Boudreau, a team captain. "We'd like to beat Itasca this year, because they are our toughest competition." As long as the team stays healthy, Koenig said he expects defense to be a strength. "We have experience in the middle infield, at the

corners, and solid speed and experience in the outfield," he said. Koenig said he is concerned about pitching going into the season. "We need to throw strikes and trust our defense," he said. "Hitting with consistency and finding ways to score runners when they are in scoring position is always (a) concern." This year's team goals, Koenig said, include continuing "to build and develop a quality program on and off the field," as well as winning 20-plus games, being one of the MCAC North's top teams, earning a home playoff series and qualifying for the district/state tournament. "We are excited to get on the field and see what this group of players can accomplish this season and we look for this group of players to keep their perspective, stay focused on their process, work hard, and strive for excellence both on and off the field," he said. Koenig said the teams to watch out for this season include Itasca, Northland, Mesabi Range, Rochester and Minnesota State-Fergus Falls. The Voyageurs open the season next week on their annual trip to Florida.

MEN'S HOCKEY

Falls foes have shootout games at AMSOIL Arena

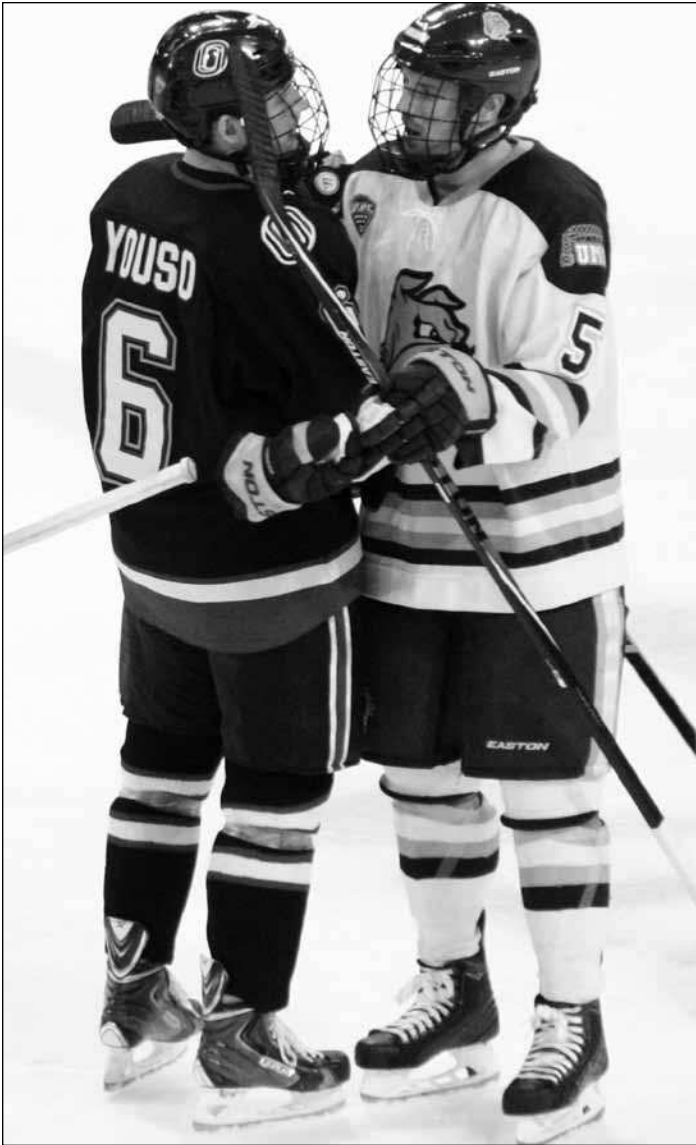
BY KEVIN BONESKE
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The men's hockey rivalry between 2010 International Falls High School graduates and defensemen Willie Corrin and Matt Youso being on opposing Division I teams – as well as Corrin opposing his head-coaching uncle from the Falls, Dean Blais – couldn't have been any closer last Friday and Saturday at AMSOIL Arena in Duluth. Both games ended in a 1-1 tie after overtime. However, the University of Minnesota Duluth, for which Corrin is in his junior season, lost both games on shootouts to the University of Nebraska Omaha, for which Blais is in his sixth year of coaching and Youso is a sophomore. "It was a hard-fought series, obviously," said Corrin, who recorded an assist on UMD's only goal Saturday. "Sixty shots on the weekend and each team got two goals. It was just an up-and-down battle – every inch you had to fight for. It was a good series.

"It was kind of a playoff atmosphere. That's our league. We got two points on the weekend, which obviously we wanted more, but that's all we could get." Though the games go down as ties for the teams' overall NCAA records, UNO picked up four points in the National Collegiate Hockey Conference for winning both games on shootouts. "There's a lot of close games (in the NCHC)," said Blais, who agreed last weekend's UMD-UNO series resembled playoff hockey. Going into the final weekend of league play this coming Friday and Saturday before the NCHC playoffs, in which the top-four teams will host the opening best-of-three series, the Mavericks jumped up to third in the conference standings at 11-8-3-3 with 39 points. The Bulldogs are in fifth at 11-8-3-0 with 36 points. Last weekend marked the second two-game series this season between the two teams. Last November

in Omaha, they split the series 1-1 with each team winning a game. "Earlier we split with them, so we knew it was going to be a tough battle," Youso said. "Two shootouts (in last weekend's series) and luckily we came out on top. We've got some good shootout guys, so we prevailed in the end." Youso and Corrin saw action in both games last weekend. Corrin had two shots on goal and picked up a two-minute penalty for holding Friday. His assist with 1:57 left in the second period on Saturday – when he relayed the puck to Tony Camaranesi, who fired the puck from the blue line that hit off of Justin Crandall and went into the net – was Corrin's third assist of the season. Youso, who saw time on the ice as part of a third line of defensemen, didn't record any points or penalty minutes last weekend. "Obviously, it's good getting in the lineup," Youso said. "I'm still earning my ice time as I go, and hope-

fully that will continue to progress as my time at UNO goes." As the lines skated on and off the ice, Corrin and Youso had been on the rink at the same time. In the second period Saturday, prior to UMD breaking the scoreless tie, Corrin fired the puck toward the net from just inside the blue line and into the path of Youso set up on defense. "I was waiting for him to close his legs and he finally closed them," Corrin said. "I was going to put (the puck) by him and hit him right in the shin pad." "Me and Willie, we got to see each other a little bit before weekend started, but once we get on the ice, it's all business," Youso said. "I think Matt and Willie are kind of on the same pages," said Blais, who noted the two defensemen continue to see more time on the ice. Following last weekend's series, Blais said he met up with several of his relatives who were on hand for the games.



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

From left, the Mavericks' Matt Youso (6) and the Bulldogs' Willie Corrin, both 2010 International Falls High School graduates, meet on the ice Saturday night following the men's hockey game at AMSOIL Arena.

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