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Sacramento loses 11th
straight on the road

Sports

Mavs snap streak, but work remains

There was a sense of relief below the bleachers of the Alltel Center late Saturday night.

The Mavericks men's hockey team had just defeated nonconference rival Nebraska-Omaha 4-3 to break a six-game losing streak that all but ruined their Christmas.

"Good, now let's get back to work," senior defenseman Brian Kilburg said. "We stopped it, now let's start something. It's a new year. It's a clean slate."



**SHANE
FREDERICK**
Free Press

Well, just because it's 2009, the slate might not be completely clean. Minnesota State may be back to .500, but there's still enough chalk dust billowed about to remind everyone that it was once 8-3-3 and ranked ninth in the country.

That record was no fluke, either. In fact, the Mavericks were two bad periods from being a 10-win team by Thanksgiving weekend, and it was easy to think that once they shored up a few things they'd be a

lock for another upper-half Western Collegiate Hockey Association finish and their first NCAA tournament berth since 2003.

Those things, of course, didn't get cleaned up, and a slip turned into a slide.

The victory over Omaha was a quality win. The red Mavericks have 12 wins and are in the Pairwise Rankings. Last season, two losses to UNO were among the games that might have made the difference in Minnesota State's NCAA tournament chances.

While there was that relief after Saturday's win,

there wasn't necessarily a lot of celebrating. Perhaps the game reminded the Mavericks too much about the first two months of the season when they were good, not great, but riding high.

A narrow escape past Omaha caused them to put the win in perspective, as they head into the second half of the Western Collegiate Hockey Association schedule.

"Definitely, we needed this win to get ourselves going," Irwin said. "There are still things we have to work on, like closing out the

game."

Minnesota State dominated the first period and grabbed a 2-0 lead, only to let Omaha get back in it and tie the game in the second period.

The purple Mavericks took the lead on a Channing Boe blast from the blue line. Then, after goaltender Mike Zacharias made two amazing saves on Dan Charleston — a glove save on a partial breakaway with 5:54 left and a pad save on a backdoor, power-play shot with one minute to go — Geoff Irwin scored a short-handed, empty-net goal to give

MSU a 4-2 lead.

Irwin's goal ended up being huge, as Omaha, with the extra attacker still on the ice, added a goal with seven seconds left in the game.

"It's bittersweet," Kilburg said. "We came out in the first period and held them to five (attempted) shots, but they had 16 in the second period."

"We still have to work on the little things."

Shane Frederick is a Free Press staff writer. Read his blog at www.mankatofreepress.com/hockeyblog.