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# Sports

## MSU women's hockey team bottoms out

During the first decade of Minnesota State women's hockey history, Minnesota State hardly established itself as a national power.

There was one winning season, 2003-04, and an All-American goaltender, Shari Vogt, who remains the standard bearer for the program's success.

Halfway through their 11th season, the Mavericks appear to be back at square one.

Last week, coach Jeff Vizenor decided to step down after 7 1/2 years at the helm and was reassigned within the athletic department.

After skating across the hill from All Seasons Arena

to Taylor Center, he'll now be charged with doing several tasks for the Mavericks, including fundraising, at least until his coaching contract expires at the end of June. Vizenor, who was the Western Collegiate Hockey Association's coach of the year in '03-04, said he hopes his new job will include helping to market, promote and plan for a proposed on-campus hockey rink.

Although such a rink would — or should — be a tremendous upgrade of the current practice facilities and other amenities for

both of MSU's hockey programs (women's and men's), it is being pitched as a women's rink, as it was when original drawings for a rink across Riverfront Drive from the Alltel Center were unveiled last summer.



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The new rink, which the Mankato City Council discussed last week, would be the home arena for MSU women's games, while the men's team would practice there but continue to play downtown.

That might be a hard sell right now.

The economy's a mess, the city and the university are facing budget cuts and the women's program is at ground zero.

Days after Vizenor's departure, the Mavericks traveled to Bemidji State, which was winless in Western Collegiate Hockey Association play and had just one league win last season. The Mavericks got thumped, losing 2-1 Friday and 4-1 Saturday. It was the first time the Beavers swept the Mavericks in a weekend series in four seasons.

If the rumblings are indeed true that the players wanted Vizenor out — the "no comments" were conspicuous last week — then

that was no way to prove the coach was to solely blame for their woes.

After a 6-3-1 start to what might have been Vizenor's final season anyway, Minnesota State is now on a 10-game winless streak that includes nine defeats and a shootout loss that officially went down as a tie. If that wasn't enough, defending national champion Minnesota Duluth, which handed the Mavericks two of their early-season losses (when things seemed to be going well), comes to town this week.

Minnesota State athletic director Kevin Buisman is expected to sit down with

assistant coaches Mandy Krause-Rideout and Paul Willett today and name an interim head coach for the remainder of the season before Friday's game against the third-ranked Bulldogs. In the spring, the school will conduct a search for Vizenor's permanent replacement.

That new coach will inherit a team that loses just one senior — the program's all-time leading scorer, Maggie Fisher — but faces some major reconstructive surgery.

*Shane Frederick is a Free Press staff writer. Read his blog at [www.mankatofreepress.com/hockeyblog](http://www.mankatofreepress.com/hockeyblog).*