



Pat Christman

Minnesota State junior forward Geoff Irwin has four goals and four assists in his last six games. He recently played his 100th career game.

Irwin finding his groove

MSU junior riding six-game scoring streak

By Shane Frederick
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — When Geoff Irwin first joined the Minnesota State men's hockey team, he was pleased to see that he was surrounded by about a half dozen of his fellow countrymen.

Now a junior for the Mavericks hockey team, Irwin is one of just three Canadians on the roster, and looking ahead at next sea-

son's rookie class, there doesn't appear to be anyone set to cross the border before Irwin graduates.

"We're a dying breed," Irwin said, laughing through a blonde beard that looks nearly playoff-ready. "I get on our coaches a little bit about that, about giving our guys a fair shot."

The Victoria, British Columbia, native plays left wing on the MSU's top line. Edmonton, Alberta, native

10 years of WCHA hockey

Minnesota State is closing out its 10th season in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association. Who have been the Mavericks' best players over the last decade? Go to Shane Frederick's blog at www.mankatofreepress.com/hockeyblog to vote for your favorites.

Galiardi is the team's other Canadian, having grown up in Calgary, Alberta.

"When they bring you all the way down here and give you a scholarship, you want to prove they made the right decision," Irwin said.

Irwin has certainly done that of late.

The 6-foot-0, 195-pounder is riding a six-game scoring streak in which he has four goals and four assists.

"Geoff's playing a pretty darn-complete game right now," Mavericks coach Jutting said.

Kael Mouillierat is on the other side with Minneapolis' Trevor Bruess in the middle.

Sophomore center Rylan

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IRWIN: MSU still eyeing fifth in WCHA

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Going into tonight's series-opening game against No. 16 Wisconsin, he has a career-high 24 points, including 12 goals — three of them short-handed — and has averaged a little more than a point per game since 2009 began.

"Things are bouncing my way now," Irwin said. "I'm shooting the puck as much as I can, like I thought I was doing all year. But I'm going to continue to shoot the puck and, hopefully, keep riding this wave."

According to Jutting, Irwin is doing a lot more

than getting a few fortunate bounces.

"I think Geoff's taken some ownership in his game and in his team," he said. "I think he's really looking at it — more than ever — from a team standpoint, and his role in it."

Irwin admitted that he's become more assertive this season, including vocally.

Besides being in his third season of college hockey with 100 games under his belt, he's 23 years old — the oldest non-senior on the roster — and was part of a Canadian junior national title-winning team in 2006.

"When I come to the rink

on game night, it's about working hard to do what I

can personally to help the team be the best it can be," Irwin said. "It's, 'What can I do to make us better?' Not 'What can the team do to make me better?'"

The Mavericks have four games remaining in the regular season and are hoping to somehow sneak into the upper half of the Western Collegiate Hockey Association standings. They're in eighth place currently, six points out of fifth.

Whether the Mavericks gets there or not, Minnesota State is ultimately shooting for the WCHA Final Five, an

event it has not reached since 2003.

Irwin, Mouillierat and Bruess will be called on to lead the way, having accounted for 35 percent of the Mavericks' goals and 41 percent of their points.

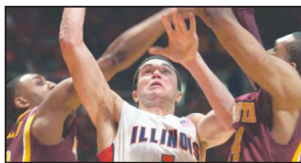
"I don't think (Irwin's) changed anything around," Mouillierat said. "He's always been a guy who works his (butt) off every day. He does things right and plays good defense. Everything's going in the net and turning around for him. He's got the hot hand right now, and that's due to hard work."

And that translates, no matter where you're from.

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Illinois keeps stomping Gophers at home

Sports