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Pat Christman

Minnesota State University basketball player Curt Greeley reads a sportsmanship statement to the home crowd prior to the MSU-Minnesota-Duluth game Thursday. MSU has taken steps to discourage uncivil fan behavior.

Fans encouraged to clean it up

MSU taking steps to curb crude behavior at athletic events

By **Brian Ojanpa**
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Minnesota State University fans with a yen for yelling "You suck" at an opponent might want to consider a more civil alternative.

Say, "Sir, your performance

appears to be inferior."

In keeping with a National Collegiate Athletic Association emphasis on cleaning up fan behavior nationwide, MSU has taken some steps to upgrade arena decorum.

But because "decorum" and "fan behavior" can be all but

mutually exclusive, especially at hockey games, the challenge is not only daunting but at odds with student fans' ideas of appropriateness.

"Student sections are there to support the team, but also to get in the heads of the other team," said MSU senior Chris Kaufman, part of a small but

raucous fan cluster at the MSU-Minnesota-Duluth men's basketball game Thursday.

Kaufman and fellow student fans said crude behavior is rarely in evidence at basketball games because of the intimacy of Bresnan Arena.

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BEHAVIOR: Easier to guide before it becomes a problem

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But it's a different matter at the cavernous Alltel Center for hockey games, where fans are more numerous, more "hidden," and typically more emboldened by alcohol.

New MSU initiatives include letters distributed to students outlining behavior expectations, modifying any in-game musical selections that might promote vulgar language, and having student-athletes read a prepared sportsmanship statement prior to selected games.

As for enforcement, MSU Athletic Director Kevin Buisman said NCAA findings have shown that good-cop works better than bad-cop.

"What has failed is being really heavy-handed, being a police presence. Peer-to-peer interaction is more effective."

And if fans can't keep each other in check after being warned, they get the boot.

Buisman said that has hap-

pened at hockey games, though Kaufman, who attends plenty of hockey contests, claims enforcement is lax.

"When UND (University of North Dakota) comes to town, everyone yells 'F-- the Sioux,'" Kaufman said.

"I don't participate in that stuff, and I wouldn't mind seeing it toned down. But this is a college. Try to enforce it, and students will just get pissed off."

Buisman said the logistics of enforcement also come into play. How does security staff go about clearing out an entire student section?

In the big picture, Buisman said MSU sports-crowd behavior is relatively benign.

"We don't have that much of a problem here. I've been to arenas where it's been far worse."

Buisman said MSU prefers to be proactive on the fan-behavior issue because it's easier to guide behavior before it becomes a large-scale problem.