



# Sports

NBA, PAGE D5  
Wolves return to Boston, face K.G. today



College hockey gameday



Mick Berge



Trevor Bruess

## Minnesota State's Linder going home again

Mavericks senior defenseman R.J. Linder will play what will likely be his final hockey game in his hometown of St. Cloud Saturday night.



Pat Christman

### Maverick senior holds fond memories of St. Cloud hockey

By Shane Frederick  
Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — Minnesota State men's hockey senior R.J. Linder is your classic, stay-at-home defenseman. So when he first got the news, his instinct was to do what he does best:

Stay back. Stay strong. Help out. It was the day before the Mavericks' first practice of the season last October, and Linder learned that his father,

Ronald Jerome Linder Sr., was diagnosed with cancer. "I went home, saw him and spent time with him," Linder Jr. said. "He wanted me to come back (to Mankato) and play. He thought that was the best way to battle with him. It was as important as being home with him."

This weekend, the Mavericks will play a Western Collegiate Hockey Association series against St. Cloud State. Tonight's game will be at the

Alltel Center. Saturday's will take place at St. Cloud's National Hockey Center, the rink Linder grew up playing in and the place where he and his dad watched many college hockey games from, appropriately, just a few rows behind the visiting team's bench.

"It is special," said Linder, who, barring a playoff matchup, will be playing in his hometown for the last time.

Linder said his dad, 51, who is going through treatments for esophageal and liver cancer, has been at all of the Mavericks' home games this season, and the two talk on the phone every day.

Please see LINDER, Page D3

## LINDER: Ranks third in plus-minus

Continued from Page D1

"His spirits are high," Linder said. "He's so determined — he and my mom (Joan) together — to beat it." Linder has done his part, too, playing, according to Mavericks coach Troy Jutting "better than he ever has." Although Linder has just two assists — for his career he has one goal and eight helpers — he ranks third on the team with a plus-6 rating. He's also committed just four minor penalties, which is good for the Mavericks

because he's also become a reliable penalty killer. "He's somebody who does things the right way," Jutting said. "He's a dependable hockey player. You can count on him. If he gets beat, it's because the other team earned it, not because he gave it to them." Linder graduated from St. Cloud Tech High School in 2002 and played two seasons with Portage of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League before being recruited by MSU in the summer of 2004. Barely a step above a walk-on, Linder was

n't expected to be an everyday defenseman. Instead, he's stayed in the lineup, reaching 114 games and counting. "He's really grown into a player," Jutting said. "He understands the game, and he understands what his role is. He's been a really solid hockey player because of it." Linder said he also understands how much college hockey means to him. He fell in love with the sport watching St. Cloud State games as a kid, and he's gotten a greater appreciation for the game in

his final season as a player. "You always have to remind yourself, first, what an amazing experience this is," he said, "and, also, if my dad can fight through a disease like this, I can give it my all on the ice — which is a lot more fun." As for going home again, Linder said he's looking forward to Saturday night and playing in his favorite road rink. "But," he said, "my last game at Mankato will be a lot more emotional than my last game at St. Cloud."

### In other action ...

**Minnesota State women at Minnesota:** The Mavericks (6-15-1, 3-12-1 in WCHA) will try to snap a five-game losing streak when they travel to Minneapolis today and Saturday to play No. 4 Minnesota. Including 6-0 and 6-1 losses to the Gophers Dec. 7-8 in Mankato, Minnesota State has dropped seven of its last eight games. The Mavericks were idle last weekend, while the Gophers (17-4-3, 13-4-1) are riding a national-best 13-game unbeaten streak.

The Mavericks (9-10-4, 3-9-4 in WCHA) and the No. 13 Huskies (11-10-3, 6-8-2) will play a home-and-home series in their only meeting of the season. Minnesota State owns a three-game unbeaten streak against St. Cloud, including a 0-4 tie last Jan. 13 in Mankato, and has lost just one of the last six meetings between the two teams.

### The 5-hole

Five things to know about this weekend's games:  
**1. Mick the Knife:** Mavericks forward Mick Berge (12-3-15) leads the team in goal scoring and already has equaled last season's career high in that category. "It's going in for me," said Berge, who had three points in the Mavericks' two losses to North Dakota last week. "I'm just shooting the puck. Berge and Geoff Irwin (5-4-9) each have four power-play goals. No one else on the team has more than six goals total.

**2. Bruess is back:** Sophomore forward and leading point scorer Trevor Bruess (5-11-16) will be back in the lineup after missing last Saturday's game because of a major penalty for fighting. Bruess, who leads the Mavericks with a plus-12 plus-minus rating, centers what has been the team's most-productive forward line, which includes Joel Hanson (4-9-13) and Kael Mouillierat (3-8-11). Both Bruess and Hanson saw scoring streaks — eight and five games, respectively — end last Friday.  
**3. Wipe up:** The Mavericks aren't just trying to stay in the race for top-half finish and home ice for the WCHA playoffs. Their four-game winless streak has dropped them from a tie for 16th in the Pairwise Rankings, which mimic the NCAA tournament selection process, to No. 25. St. Cloud State is 15th in the Pairwise. "This is the closest we've been in the three years I've been here," Berge said.

**4. Man advantage:** The Mavericks allowed five power-play goals to North Dakota last weekend and now face the team with the best power-play in the WCHA and sixth-best in the nation (20.7 percent). Sophomore Ryan Lasch (17-17-34) and freshman Garrett Roe (15-17-33) rank Nos. 1 and 2 in the league scoring race and have combined for 16 goals and 37 points on the power play.

**5. Scouting the Huskies:** St. Cloud State is coming off an idle weekend. Before that, it took three points in a home-and-home series against Minnesota. Last season's WCHA rookie of the year, Andreas Nodl (11-17-28) gives the Huskies three of the conference's top-five scorers. Sophomore goalie Jase Welslosky (.922, 2.36) has carried the bulk of the load, although freshman Dan Dunn (.927, 2.25) has played more of late.

**This weekend's series**  
7:37 p.m. today, Alltel Center; and 7:37 p.m. Saturday, St. Cloud's National Hockey Center  
**Radio:** KTOE 1420 AM  
**TV:** Charter cable channel 14