



Sports

Next few weeks will be telling for MSU men

It's been a pretty easy first 12 games for the Minnesota State men's basketball team, with only two victories of fewer than 10 points. The Mavericks have a victory margin of more than 24 points, having out-rebounded opponents by 8.2 per game and shot almost 10 percent better from the field.

Eight games have been at Bresnan Arena, two on a neutral court and two on the easiest road trip of the



CHAD COURRIER
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Northern Sun

Intercollegiate Conference — at Minnesota Crookston and Minnesota State-Moorhead.

Though it's been a good start for the Mavericks (12-0, 5-0 in Northern Sun), the toughest games remain in the future.

On Saturday, the Mavericks play at Winona State (10-3), the only time the teams meet in the regular season. The Warriors have struggled some of late, and at 4-2 in Northern Sun games, a loss would put

Winona State three games plus the tiebreaker behind the Mavericks in the conference chase.

Next weekend, the Mavericks host St. Cloud State (10-2, 4-1), the top pick in the conference pre-season poll. After that, the Mavericks travel to Augustana (11-1, 4-1) on Jan. 23.

With a good three-week stretch of basketball, the Mavericks could be in control of the conference race. If Minnesota State struggles, they could sink in the standings.

Most likely, the result

will be somewhere in between.

Certainly, this is the best defensive team that coach Matt Margenthaler has had in his nine seasons at Minnesota State. Opponents are shooting only 41.8 percent from the field and averaging just 68.0 points. The Mavericks average 9.4 steals and cause 17.6 turnovers

Offensively, five different players have led Minnesota State in scoring for a single game. The team is averaging 92.1 points, with four players scoring more than 12 points per game, and

have to be setting some kind of school record for dunks.

Over the last four seasons, the Mavericks have been one of the best teams, if not the best, during November and December, but other conference teams have gotten the prize in February and March. However, there certainly seems like something is different about this team, something intangible like focus, camaraderie and intensity.

What that means for the next seven weeks is anybody's guess. The

Mavericks need only win about half of the remaining 15 games to claim a spot in the national tournament, but that's not the goal. Winning conference championships and hosting league and regional tournaments have become the measuring sticks for this program.

In three weeks, we'll have a pretty good idea if those goals are possible.

Chad Courrier is a Free Press staff writer. To contact him, call 507-344-6353 or e-mail at courrier@mankatofreepress.com.