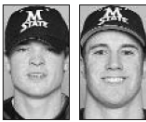


Minnesota State



MSU pitcher Nick Fellman (left) broke the school record for saves. Adam Sudbeck has hit 14 home runs.

Record: 37-11, No. 1 seed.
Players to watch: P Matt McMurry (9-2, 3.72 ERA, 71 strikeouts in 65½ innings), P Nick Fellman (1-1, 2.35 ERA, school-record 14 saves), OF Adam Sudbeck (.369 average, .452 OBP, 14 home runs, 53 RBIs), 3B Ryan Greene (.348 average, 11 home runs, 49 RBIs).

Team notes: Minnesota State is making its 22nd appearance in the 24-year history of the North Central Conference tournament. The Mavericks are 51-17 in tournament games. ... The Mavericks last won the tournament in 2002. Minnesota State has been second at the last two league tourneys. ... Coach Dean Bowyer has a 911-450-7 record in 30 seasons at Minnesota State. ... Minnesota State led the NCC in pitching with a team ERA of 3.99 and hitting with a team batting average of .335.

Nebraska-Omaha



UNO's Lyle Lafountain (left) is hitting .386 with 45 RBIs. Pitcher Tyler Cloyd is a perfect 7-0 this season.

Record: 42-11, No. 2 seed.
Players to watch: OF Bryan Frew (.399 batting average, 500 OBP, 42 RBIs), IF Lyle Lafountain (.393 batting average, .509 OBP, 14 doubles, 45 RBIs), OF Chad Leon (.386 batting average, 507 OBP, 10 home runs, 25 stolen bases), P Tyler Cloyd (7-0, 2.84 ERA, 72 Ks in 63½ innings).

Team notes: Nebraska-Omaha, the defending tournament champion, had a 19-game winning streak ended against Minnesota State last weekend. The 42 victories equals the school single-season record. ... Nebraska-Omaha was ranked as high as fifth in Division II this season. ... Coach Bob Herold won his 200th job this season. Herold has coached seven seasons at Nebraska-Omaha, winning at least 20 games each season to compile a 215-144-2 career record. ... Chad Leon needs one more stolen base to tie the school record.

Minnesota Duluth



UMD's Greg Aker (left) has six triples this season. David Olson has hit two walk-off home runs.

Record: 17-30, No. 3 seed.
Players to watch: OF Greg Aker (.399 batting average, .465 OBP, six triples, four home runs, 33 RBIs, 12 stolen bases), 3B David Olson (.341 batting average, 9 home runs, 35 RBIs), P Luke Hagman (2-5, 5.14 ERA, one complete game), P Justin Hayes (0-2, 2.25 ERA, 175 opponents batting average).

Team notes: The 30 losses is a school-record, as was an eight-game losing streak early in the season. ... Scott Hanna is in his first season as head coach at Minnesota Duluth after serving as an assistant coach for several years. ... Senior Greg Aker leads Minnesota Duluth in batting average, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, hits, triples, total bases, stolen bases, walks and plate appearances. ... David Olson has two walk-off homers.

NORTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE BASEBALL TOURNAMENT PREVIEW



Mark Dolenc received congratulations earlier this season from Minnesota State "batboy emeritus" Don Bowyer, coach Dean Bowyer's brother. Team batting leader Dolenc and the Mavericks begin North Central Conference tournament play today in Mankato.

Whiffs to rips

Minnesota State's Dolenc goes from iffy outfield candidate to .400 hitter

By Brian Ojanpa
 Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — During the Minnesota State baseball team's early-season Southern trip, Mark Dolenc didn't distinguish himself at the plate. The junior from Egan, recruited to MSU as a pitcher, was trying to establish himself as an outfielder as well. But with 12 strikeouts down South, he figured the odds against him went in that direction.

"They weren't very good," he says. "But I knew we didn't have a lot of depth in the outfield, so I knew I'd get a chance, although coming back from the Southern trip, I really wasn't in the picture outfieldwise."

But then a couple of things happened: Outfielder Ben Kaus sprained his ankle, and Dolenc began to rip.

The upshot? Dolenc went from being a strikeout-prone outfield hopeful to MSU's batting-average leader, who put together an 18-game hitting streak this season.

Dolenc and his Maverick teammates will take a 38-11 record into today's opening round of the North Central Conference tournament in Mankato. No. 1 seed MSU plays at 3:30 p.m. at MSU Baseball Complex against the winner of an 11 a.m. game between Augustana and St. Cloud State.

The Mavericks, who won the regular season NCC title, compiled the most wins in school history this season. One of veteran coach Dean Bowyer's best teams ever?

"I think that's accurate, if you look at our stats," Bowyer says. "We have more quality pitching than we've had in the past, and we really play defense. If you can pitch and play D, you've got a chance every game."

The Mavericks carry a conference-best .335 team batting average into the tourney. Dolenc is batting .404 in conference play, a point behind NCC leader Mike Loberg of Augustana. Bowyer says that despite Dolenc's Southern swoon, the 6-3, 215-pound player's raw skills were readily apparent.

"I call him more of a 'muscle swinger,' instead of using his hands. But with his speed, you've got to take a chance on a guy like that."

Dolenc's size doesn't make him the prototypical leadoff man, but his swiftness does.

His 60-yard dash time of 6.5-6.6 seconds makes him the Mavericks' fastest player.

"And I feel like I'm getting faster every day," says Dolenc, who is 15 for 15 in stolen bases this season. Meantime, he says he continues to work on his swing.

"I'm trying to be more consistent. There are at-bats where I have really



DEAN BOWYER, Minnesota State head baseball coach

good swings, and at-bats where I don't." Says Bowyer, "With Mark, it's just a matter of focusing — letting the game come to him."

Dolenc is one of three players on this year's squad who could be labeled the "Egan trifecta." Which is to say, the high school teammates have paid off big.

Junior second baseman Nick Gonzalez, who Bowyer recruited as a utility player, is hitting .321, nearly 100 points higher than last year.

Red-shirt sophomore closer Nick Fellman, who came to MSU as a non-recruited infielder, became the school's career saves leader this season.

And with only four seniors on this year's team, the Mavericks' immediate future looks well.

"Last year the team was still young, and now as juniors they're coming into their own," Bowyer says.

The North Central Conference double-elimination tournament will be held today, Friday and Saturday at MSU and Franklin Rogers Park.

Augustana

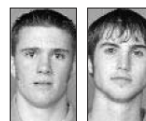


Augustana's Gary Walz (left) has 10 home runs with 60 RBIs. Pitcher Mike Schwartz is 8-2 on the season.

Record: 29-19, No. 4 seed.
Players to watch: POF Mike Loberg (.405 batting average, .507 OBP, 13 doubles, 8 home runs, 48 RBIs), OFC Gary Walz (.379 batting average, 10 home runs, 60 RBIs), P Nate Schwartz (8-2, 3.74 ERA, 65 Ks in 65 innings), P Troy Wunderlich (5-4, 2.65 ERA, 56 Ks in 54½ innings, 204 opponents' batting average).

Team notes: Loberg, who has been the NCC player of the week three times, leads the NCC with a .405 batting average. ... Walz holds the school career record of 236 hits. He ranks second with 142 runs and 146 RBIs. ... Troy Wunderlich ranks second in school history with 151 career strikeouts. ... Augustana needs two victories to tie the school single-season record. ... Loberg, Walz and D.J. Juhale all started every game this season.

St. Cloud State



SCSU's Nate Swan (left) has 35 RBIs. Pitcher Mike Hoelscher is 3-4.

Record: 11-31-1, No. 5 seed.
Players to watch: IF Nate Swan (.280 batting average, 11 home runs, 35 RBIs), IF Bruce Thompson (.362 batting average, 443 OBP, five home runs), P Ryan Carlson (4-3, 5.98 ERA), P Mike Hoelscher (3-4, 6.02 ERA).

Team notes: This is the Huskies' first NCC tournament appearance since 2001 and 14th postseason appearance in coach Denny Loesung's 28 seasons.

Loesung's career record in 541-554-4. ... Ryan Carlson had 10 strikeouts in a game. ... The Huskies turned 35 double plays in 43 games. ... Dan Skog has a team-high 10 stolen bases, almost half of the team's 24 steals. ... The Huskies rank last among NCC teams in team earned-run average (9.08) and team batting average (.270). ... Five conference victories is one more than last season. ... Infielder Luke Kitzke started every game this season.

North Dakota



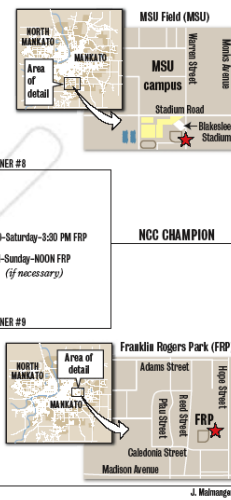
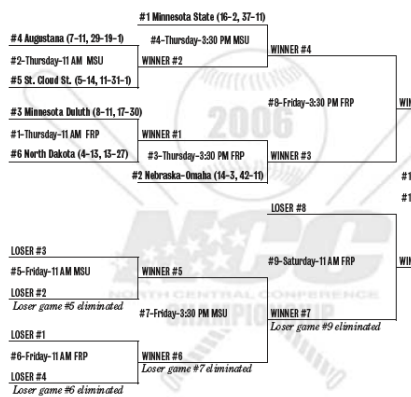
UND's Troy Wasiloski (left) is hitting .396 on the season. Outfielder Jason Fairchild has four home runs.

Record: 13-27, No. 6 seed.
Players to watch: 3B Troy Wasiloski (.396 batting average, .452 OBP, 15 doubles, 40 RBIs), IF Chris Gulsvig (.364 batting average, 407 OBP), OF Jason Fairchild (.299 batting average, four home runs, 34 RBIs), P Jason Heston (1-5, 4.91 ERA, four complete games, 49 strikeouts in 51½ innings).

Team notes: Sioux has lost eight of the last 11 games. ... North Dakota ranks fifth in North Central Conference with a .282 batting average and fourth in pitching with a 6.01 earned-run average. The Sioux also ranks fifth in fielding with a .937 fielding percentage. ... Wasiloski led the NCC with 15 doubles. ... Because of weather and scheduling conflicts, the Sioux have played just 40 games, fewest in the tournament field.

2006 North Central Conference Baseball Tournament

Mankato, MN • May 11-14



Times subject to change
 Source: Minnesota State Athletic Communications
 J. Malmanger