

The Free Press

50¢

Tuesday,
April 3, 2007

www.mankatofreepress.com

24 pages
Volume 123, No. 359

NSIC ACCEPTS MSU'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP



John Cross

At Minnesota State Monday to announce the school's acceptance into the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference were (left to right) NSIC Commissioner Butch Raymond, MSU Vice President for Academic Affairs Scott Olson and MSU Athletic Director Kevin Buisman.

Rising sun

By Brian Ojanpa
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Minnesota State University, Mankato will change athletic conference affiliation in 2008.

The Northern Sun Intercollegiate Athletic Conference announced Monday it has accepted Minnesota State's application for membership.

The NSIC also accepted three other schools — Augustana, Minnesota Duluth, and St. Cloud State.

"This is a new beginning for our athletic program — and a very exciting future," MSU athletic director said following a Monday vote of NSIC schools.

Minnesota State and the three other applicants from the moribund North Central Conference needed approval from seven of the 10 NSIC Division II schools in order to be accepted into that conference.

NSIC Commissioner Butch Raymond, on hand at MSU for Monday's announcement, declined to disclose how member schools voted.

He said the focus now will be deciding upon how to reformulate a conference that will grow to 14 teams.

The NSIC likely will form two divisions based upon geographic considerations.

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Coaches react to Northern Sun conference change.

"We've got some work cut out for us. By the end of July we should have that finalized," Raymond said.

The NCAA Division II North Central Conference began unraveling in 2002, when Morningside announced it was leaving the league.

In the next four years, five schools with Division I aspirations — Northern Colorado, North Dakota State, South Dakota State, North Dakota and South Dakota — either left or said they intended to.

The 10-school NSIC in its present form includes Bemidji State, Concordia-St. Paul, University of Mary (N.D.), Minnesota State Moorhead, Minnesota-Crookston, Northern State (S.D.), Southwest Minnesota State, Upper Iowa, Wayne State (Neb.) and Winona State.

The Mankato school had looked into the option of becoming a full

MSU begins new athletic conference affiliation next year

Division I institution (men's and women's hockey are MSU's only Division I sports), but the prevailing view is that it's not financially feasible.

Research showed a move to Division I, with its added travel and athletic scholarship expenses, would require at least \$2 million a year in additional net revenues.

Raymond said a proviso in the NSIC's acceptance of the four applicant schools stipulates that they guarantee a minimum of five years of membership in the Northern Sun.

If a school were to jump to another conference before that five-year period elapsed, that school would be assessed a penalty of two years' league dues, payable in advance.

Raymond said the NSIC's acceptance of the four schools was personally special. Raymond coached men's basketball at Mankato State, then at St. Cloud State before leaving to head the NSIC.

Minnesota State's move represents a full-circle change. The school was a founding member of the Northern Sun in 1932.