



# Sports

## Rochester Mayo blanks Mankato West



## Division II is OK, Northern Sun is not for MSU

Despite repeated statements to the contrary, few people could have left Wednesday's forum on the future of Minnesota State athletics feeling like the decision hasn't already been made.



**CHAD COURRIER**  
The Free Press

Intentional or not, the figures presented made an overwhelming case that Minnesota State should remain in Division II and hope the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference plans for expansion to include the Mavericks.

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## COURRIER: Northern Sun not a premier Division II conference

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Nobody at the decision-making level appears to have the stomach or drive to commit to a reclassification to Division I and the tough choices that accompany that option. Which is OK. You can make the argument that this is a Division II university in a Division II town, and both always will be.

But when you listen to the voices who call for Minnesota State to remain Division II, the common theme is that the Mavericks have an opportunity to be among the best at that level.

For that reason, Minnesota State should not look to the Northern Sun, but should explore other Division II conferences, such as the Mid-America Intercollegiate Conference or the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

The North Central Conference

was created with the intention of being a premier Division II league, and it was. But as the demise of the league has become apparent, its stature has also slipped. You can make the case that the Northern Sun has risen to the level of the NCC, but it's more true that the NCC has sunk to the Northern Sun. The reason that Northern Sun teams beat NCC teams is that in most sports, the best of NCC has already left, intent on growing their programs in Division I.

If Minnesota State is able to join the Northern Sun, the football program — which will be hit hardest by scholarship reductions — will be able to compete for conference championships, but Northern Sun programs are little more than a road bump in the national tournament.

The Northern Sun is a strong conference for women's sports, but with the mandatory budget

cuts, Minnesota State's programs will be hard-pressed to compete. Any sport at Minnesota State that loses scholarship money will struggle to compete nationally. Winona State's national championship in men's basketball last season is an anomaly, not a trend.

Minnesota State has made impressive strides in the financial commitment to athletics over the last two years to make its programs more competitive, and you see the results on the field and courts.

All of that effort will be wasted by joining the Northern Sun.

There certainly are tough issues with applying to join the MIAA or GLIAC, which have scholarship limits that allow their teams to compete for national championships. Those leagues would require more money for travel and might involve more missed class time, but those

problems can be worked out.

If the decision Minnesota State makes, or has already made, is to be the best Division II program possible, these are far better options than the Northern Sun. Of course, any league would have to accept Minnesota State, which isn't a given.

The Northern Sun is not a premier Division II league, and adding four NCC schools that have to shave scholarships to be accepted will not elevate that status.

It appears as though Minnesota State is ready to settle for the Northern Sun, not continue the last two years of trying to be the best it can be. Other Division II options aren't being strongly considered at this time.

*Chad Courrier is a Free Press staff writer. To contact him, call 344-6353 or e-mail him at [ccourrier@mankatofreepress.com](mailto:ccourrier@mankatofreepress.com).*