

## HOW A #1 RANKING CAN AFFECT AN ENTIRE ATHLETIC PROGRAM



**By Reece Hemmesch**

The results from Waco are in, and for the first time in program history, the MSU Mavericks football team gets to bill themselves as the best team in the country. That's right, after top-ranked Valdosta State's stunning 49-30 upset loss to rising West Alabama, all the Mavs needed Saturday was a victory against conference-foe Augustana to become the best team in the nation, which they received after a 20-10 victory over the Vikings.

For those of you in need of a little Maverick history lesson, this is the eighth time in school history that a

team has pulled down a no. 1 ranking in sports. Only the men's basketball team in 2005, the women's basketball team in 2008 (including a postseason no. 1 ranking after a national championship), the wrestling team in 2008 and women's soccer have been competitive enough to boast as the top-spot.

So what does this mean for athletics at MSU? Well, in the near future, it really means nothing more for the school. After all, if the squad jumped from no. 20 in the country to no. 19 instead of the jump from 2 to 1, would anybody really notice? It is not the size of the jump or jumps in general that make this a big deal, it is the fact that out of the 148 or so football teams that call themselves division II, we are at the top of the list.

This is a big deal Mavericks, whether you are someone who supports athletics, supports a few but not football, or just someone who really has no affiliation towards the sports world at all, this is huge.

It sounds a little ridiculous but the truth of the matter is, especially in Division II, the jump from second-best in the country or in the top 5 to the no. 1 spot is a huge leap that can only mean more national media attention on our athletic program and our school in general.

After all of last year's success in athletics where the Mavericks finished fourth in the Learfield Sports Director's Cup (given to the program in each division with the highest finish in intercollegiate athletics), one must assume that with our athletic program on the rise, a jump to Division I could be the answer many of us see at the end of this tunnel.

So far in the 2013-2014 campaign, it appears as though the football team could go for a further run than last year, even if there 2012 season did end up one game short of the ultimate goal of a national championship, but all the other sports in the fall have also been carrying their own weight.

Women's soccer is once again tops in the nation like last year, proving the coaching tactics of incoming head coach Brian Bahl as a program that doesn't rebuild, but reloads. Cross country, golf and volleyball are all keeping up as well during this time, making the thought of advancement once again roam through the heads of the upper officials in the athletic department.

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It is true that if we were to make the leap up to Division I athletics, it would be the lesser-known sports that would receive the most appraisals. You cannot leap up in divisions simply because a few sports (more likely the popular ones) are doing well, it has to be an all-program fight that sees each team going up for NSIC championships and national tournament berths every single year.

Though they need all the teams to cooperate, it doesn't hurt matters that the football team is now no. 1 in the nation and could hold onto that role for a long time, which could also do nothing but help out the program. For as long as the team stays on top of the poll, that is how long the big wigs of college athletics will see the name Minnesota State- Mankato at the top of the list, meaning that is the first name they will see for weeks to come as the football squad attempts to put the finishing touches on what should be another fantastic year.

I don't believe any of us will see MSU as a division 1 athletics university anytime in our tenure here, but if the football team can keep it up as well as the other squads in the University, it could be a matter of years to get the job done and make MSU the second all-division 1 University in Minnesota.