

Wildcat teams roar onto national scene

Volleyball and cross country 'Cats make NCAA appearances



Volleyball

At the December 2002 press conference announcing his return to Northern Michigan University as the Wildcat volleyball coach, Jim Moore said that his goal was to get the NMU program back national prominence, but he repeatedly reminded those in attendance, "Doing so will take some time."

"I'm a little concerned about unrealistic expectations when people have already started asking me how long it will be before we can win another national championship," Moore said, only partly kidding the crowd.

Moore served as Northern's coach from 1989-93, and was at the helm when the Wildcats captured their first of two consecutive national titles in 1993 and 1994.

Obviously, Moore didn't give the same speech to his 2003 squad. This year's 'Cats not only advanced to the NCAA Regionals, they also made Northern history by going undefeated through the regular season (23-0) and winning the school's eighth Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference North Division regular season title (18-0)—the first since 1998. They beat Grand Valley State University for the GLIAC Tournament crown.

Northern's first loss of the year came Nov. 21 at home in the second round of the NCAA Great Lakes Regional Tournament versus Northern Kentucky, 3-0. The loss closed NMU's season at 26-1. NKU bowed to Grand Valley 3-0 in the regional title match.

"We had a fabulous year, an

incredible year, but that first and last loss was a painful one and will stay with us for a long time," said Moore.

Further proof of Northern's return to the elite national level came when junior middle blocker Aimee Dewitte and sophomore right-side hitter Jennie Little were named to the American Coaches Volleyball Association's (AVCA) third and honorable mention All-America squads, respectively.

Dewitte and Little were also All-Great Lakes Region Team picks, while outside hitter Ashley Kiel was selected the All-Great Lakes Freshman of the Year. Moore was named the Tachikara/AVCA Great Lakes Region Coach of the Year.

Little led the 'Cats with 348 kills (3.62 per game) and a .318 hitting percentage. She also had 35 service aces and 133 digs. Dewitte had 214 kills (2.82 per game), 13 solo blocks, and 47 blocking assists for a total of 60 blocks for the year. Both were GLIAC All-Tournament Team members with Little capturing the tournament's Most Valuable Player award.

Kiel led Northern in service aces with 47. She had 17 block solos and 82 assists. Kiel was also an honorable mention pick to the all-region team.

In addition, Dewitte and Little were first-team all-conference, Kiel and sophomore outside hitter Andrea Smith were chosen to the second team, and sophomore middle blocker Holly Greenamyre were chosen to the third team.

Moore was also chosen the GLIAC Coach of the Year for the third time. The regional award is the

fourth of his career.

"I know a lot of people will try to give me all of the credit for this year's success, but really the praise goes to the athletes who had to quickly adjust to a new coaching staff and new systems of play, but who came to practice and matches every day ready to give everything they had," Moore said.

He added that among the most exciting moments of the season—"and there were many"—was the crowd of more than 1,170 who packed Vandament Arena for the GLIAC title-deciding match against Grand Valley State, setting a Vandament Arena attendance record.

"Once the streak got going, our home crowds started getting bigger and bigger, so one of my personal goals was to have a crowd of more than 1,000, but until the second to the last match of the regular season, we couldn't break that mark. Then, everything came down to the GVSU match. When we walked into the arena, the roof was practically rocking off the building. It was that kind of moment when you know why college athletics are so exciting," said Moore.

Northern returns all but one member, setter-defensive specialist Anne Kinsella Hansenstab, to next year's team.

Cross Country

The NMU women's cross country team captured seventh place at the NCAA Division II Championship in Cary, N.C., on Nov. 22. The Wildcats had 268 points, four points shy of Harding University

and South Dakota State University who tied for fifth. Adams State College was crowned the champion with 38 points.

The performance marked the fourth year in a row that Northern finished in the top eight. Last year, NMU was fourth.

"I am very happy with the results and the way we ran," said Coach **Sten Fjeldheim '86 BS, '93 MA**. "I'm pleased that we have been a team qualifier to the national meet and finished in the top 10 for the past several years."

Senior Jennifer Lahr was the top Wildcat performer at 28th place overall and 16th place in the team rankings. Her overall rank earned her All-America honors.

Northern qualified for the national meet with second place at the Great Lakes Regional Championships behind Grand Valley State. Lahr was again the top Wildcat runner with a seventh-place finish. Juniors Tami Kochen and Maria Stubers were 14th and 15th respectively. All three were named to the All-Great Lakes Region Team.

At the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletics Conference (GLIAC) Championship, GVSU took the title while the 'Cats were the runners-up. Lahr finished fourth and Kochen was sixth. Both were named First Team All-GLIAC.

One of Northern's top performances of the season came at the Michigan Intercollegiate Championships in October when the Wildcats were second behind Division I Michigan State in the six-kilometer event. Kochen was Northern's top

finisher with eighth place while Stuber was 10th. Two other highlights of the year were winning the Roy Griak Invitational in St. Paul, Minn., for a second consecutive year and taking first of 32 teams at the Midwest Cross Country Championships in Kenosha, Wis.

Nineteen of 26 team members, including six of the squad's top seven runners, are slated to return for the 2004 season.

"We have some very strong runners back next year as well as some solid recruits, so remaining one of the top 10 programs in Division II is certainly our goal," said Fjeldheim.

