

Iowa State winning its battle for respect

by Scott Howard-Cooper
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They came from nowhere. That's not a commentary on Ames, Iowa, either. (Although ...)

They came from everywhere: Coach Larry Eustachy from Southern California, where he played at Arcadia High, Citrus College and Long Beach State, and later from the Rockies, where he coached at Idaho and Utah State.

Marcus Fizer, the All-American forward, from Louisiana, a big-time recruit who signed out of desire and not a lack of options.

Jamaal Tinsley, the mouthy point guard, from Brooklyn, then Mount San Jacinto Community College.

Michael Nurse, the dangerous shooter, from Teaneck, N.J., a junior college in Arkansas and a Division III school in New York.

Martin Rancik, a top reserve, from Slovakia and a suburban Minneapolis high school.

Mostly, they came from obscurity, by way of disappointment, through a battle for top standing in their own state. Of course, that only means the Iowa State Cyclones were prepared for what was to come, finishing the regular season ranked sixth in the nation and being made the second-seeded team in the Midwest Regional and having everyone wonder what gives.

"We read about an individual saying that if we beat them, it's an upset," Eustachy said. "It's amazing. We're a two seed and still fighting for respect."

This week can take care of a lot of that. Iowa State, at 31-4 the winningest Division I team ever in the state, surpassing the beloved Hawkeyes of 1986-87, goes to Auburn Hills, Mich., to play resurgent UCLA in the Sweet 16 as a legitimate threat to advance to Indianapolis. That much is certain, after a season that has included two victories each over Kansas and Oklahoma State and one over Texas, tournament teams all.

Having that translate into acceptance among the elite is another matter. Part of it is coming from Ames, not quite pushing to become a communications mecca. The bigger part,

since CNN hasn't opened a bureau in Lawrence or Durham or Lexington either, names that can stand alone as synonymous with college basketball excellence, is that there hasn't been a reason to know of the Cyclones.

After Jeff Hornacek, Jeff Grayer and Kelvin Cato played there, after Johnny Orr coached there for 14 years and six tournament appearances, and immediately after the heartbreaking Sweet 16 overtime loss to UCLA in 1997, there was the 12-18 finish.

Then the Chicago Bulls plucked Tim Floyd to replace Phil Jackson, Eustachy came in from Utah State, and the Cyclones went 15-15 last season. Not long after, the Iowa Hawkeyes, continued to bite into the attention by bagging Steve Alford as coach.

Fizer was a budding star all along, the first McDonald's All-American to go to Ames, "budding" being the operative word. Floyd's departure, though without hard feelings, was a personal blow to him. Even the Big 12 coaches made him second-team all-conference a year ago.

Then, he exploded. As a junior, he is a candidate for player of the year. In the nation.

No one else in Division I finished in the top nine in shooting and scoring. He averaged 7.5 rebounds and the Cyclones' 6-foot-8 pseudo-center. He became the symbol of the leaps of a program.

"Against Texas Tech in Lubbock, I think it's the first time I've ever played against a box and one where the man was on me," Fizer said. "Usually, it's on an outstanding perimeter shooter. For a little while, I couldn't understand why this guy was just standing behind me."

There was a lot of that this season, only the other way around. The Cyclones played a weak nonconference schedule, beating Arkansas by six and losing to Cincinnati by 15 at the Big Island Invitational in the most notable outcomes, then started rolling in the Big 12, and kept putting their ears to the ground, wondering when the bandwagon would roll through.

Losing in January at then-No. 17 Oklahoma State in double overtime in the first major conference test hurt, but they came back to beat Kansas a week later and the Cyclones were



Iowa State's Brandon Hawkins hangs on the rim after a dunk over Auburn's Marquis Daniels (3) in the first half of Iowa State's 79-60 victory in the second round of the NCAA Tournament Saturday.

ranked 20th in the nation.

Then 17th. And 14th. Then back to 17th after losing in overtime at Colorado, bound for a 7-9 league finish. The march started there.

Consecutive victories over then-No. 14 Texas by 12 and No. 10 Oklahoma State by 11 pushed them to 10th in the country. By the time the conference tournament started, Iowa State was all the way to seventh, and at the start of the NCAA tournament, the Cyclones had a seven-game winning streak and were ranked sixth.

"So, it is about falling into place like it should," Eustachy said. "We march to the tune of respect. I am not big on motivating. We just coach. The players have picked up on it. It has flipped over. We find ourselves with a bull's-eye right on our backs."

It caused only minor problems in the opening rounds at Minneapolis. The Cyclones began with an 88-78 win over Central Connecticut State. They blew a 19-point first-half lead, were tied with six minutes left, then pulled away for good.

Two days later against Auburn, the challenge was to overcome Fizer's being relegated to supporting role most of the way, but Tinsley made consecutive three-pointers midway through the second half to start the eventual blowout, a 79-60 victory.

That Tinsley was shooting 15.2 percent on three-pointers heading into the tournament did not go without notice. Yep, falling into place like it should. Just in case anyone is paying attention.

Winthrop baseball team trades barbs with Penn State after Confederate flag flap

by David Newton
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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ROCK HILL, S.C. - Winthrop pitcher John Swanson whistled "Dixie" from the dugout during a weekend baseball game against Penn State, whose players wore red wristbands in protest of the Confederate flag flying atop the South Carolina State House.

Several teammates of the freshman from Surfside Beach shouted "Yankee" at the Nittany Lions during the game. When a Penn State player dived back to first on a pick-off attempt, the Eagles' first baseman said, "Safe by a wristband."

"That was absolutely offensive," Penn State coach Joe Hindelang said Monday. "All we did was make a statement and wear red wristbands. Nothing else. We weren't trying to be rebels. In wearing the wristbands, we, the Penn State baseball team, were stating our opposition to the racist views that have been associated with the Confederate flag."

Swanson said the only way his team would return to South Carolina before the flag is removed would be to play a postseason game.

The protest had nothing to do with Winthrop or a request by the NAACP for an economic boycott of the state, he said.

"If one thing is so offensive to a large group of people, why don't you change it?" said Hindelang, who is white. "I remember a number of years ago the nickname of St. John's University was Redmen. They're the Red Storm now."

"It's like the Spike Lee movie, 'Do The Right Thing.' Let's do the right thing in society."

The flag has become a national issue with the NAACP's request for a boycott. The New York Knicks will no longer train for the NBA's preseason in Charleston as they normally do. And several college tennis teams pulled out of a spring trip to Hilton Head Island as a protest.

Franklin & Marshall, a Division III school in Lancaster, Pa., canceled trips

by the women's lacrosse and softball teams and the men's and women's tennis teams.

Hindelang wasn't aware of the issue until a month and a half ago when a newspaper reporter from a small town in Pennsylvania asked if he planned to boycott any games. He then spoke to the minorities on his team two blacks and a Hispanic to get their views. He also discovered several campus organizations were discussing the matter.

"We met as a team and gathered as much information as we could through the Internet, through articles in The State newspaper and from some very knowledgeable people in and around Penn State who we respected," Hindelang said.

The 38 players and four coaches then voted overwhelmingly in favor of wearing wristbands as a means of protest during the two-game series played Saturday and Sunday, Hindelang said.

Hindelang said the reaction of Winthrop fans and players surprised him.

Swanson told a reporter he was glad the flag flies over the State House. "It's heritage, not hate," he said.

Flag supporters say the flag represents Southern heritage and honors the Civil War dead. Opponents say it represents racism and hatred.

Hindelang got the impression from some that many South Carolinians don't consider the flag a major issue.

"It's time to wake up and smell the coffee," he said. "It's a national issue. Someone asked me if this was a black issue. I said if I didn't have any blacks on my team, I would feel the same way. It's a human relations, human being issue."

"We're all better, the team specifically, for having discussed it, researched it, come up with a course of action and followed through."

"In the overall scope of things, we're only 38 players and four coaches, but we feel good about what we did and how we handled the sensitivity of the issue. It can only be a healthy and positive thing."

Gonzaga: March's team?

by Christian Ewell
The Baltimore Sun
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TUCSON, Ariz. - Joy is what makes the Gonzaga men's basketball team a Cinderella-type phenomenon.

It isn't the West Coast Conference affiliation, the school's size, nor the fact that in a sport heavily appropriated by blacks, the roster is nearly all-white.

There isn't another tournament favorite that would have its coach pointing toward the stands to say thank you, as Gonzaga Coach Mark Few did following his team's 82-76 win over second seed St. John's at the McKale Center last weekend. And after a second-round win, the players on most front-running teams wouldn't be caught dead reveling in the highlights of their exploits.

Yet, afterward, there the Bulldogs were, forming a human mound of navy blue nylon jumpsuits as they crowded around a small locker room television, watching the "SportsCenter" clips of Matt Santangelo knock down one of his six three-pointers in the face of a St. John's player.

Gonzaga players maintain that they expected to make it this far. In normal seasons a 10th seed reaching the Round of 16 would be cause for wild celebration. But with the top three seeds gone in the South Region as well as the West, the Bulldogs have plenty of company being as happy with their not-taken-for-granted wins as the ousted are sad about their unexpected losses.

"If people need to call this an upset, or that we are a Cinderella team," Santangelo said after advancing to the region semifinals Thursday against

Purdue in Albuquerque, "then it's OK, because it means that we are still winning, and that's what it's all about."

But the team's reaction to its latest success should be the only surprise in a season that's produced a 26-8 record. Santangelo, who beat St. John's with 26 points, four rebounds and five assists, is a first-rate point guard who was a gold-medal winner on the U.S. team at the World University Games. He's complemented by Richie Frahm, who averaged nearly 17 points a game this season to lead the team and torched Louisville for 31 points in the Bulldogs' first-round win.

Inside, 6-foot-11 Axel Dench and 6-8 Casey Calvary present a formidable inside punch that was pivotal in getting Gonzaga to the Sweet 16; 43 of the team's 82 points against St. John's came from inside players.

St. John's guard Erick Barkley, who saw Gonzaga's outside strength as being the key, said, "I didn't expect their big men to dominate the way they did."

All of these guys were around last season, when the Bulldogs beat the No. 7 (Minnesota), No. 2 (Stanford) and No. 6 (Florida) seeds in the West Region, and came within five points of beating top seed and eventual national champion Connecticut in the regional final.

The run gave the 4,400-student school recognition, and gave Santangelo credibility when he joined the World University Games team.

"When I walked into the gym, I didn't have to explain where I was from," he said. "That kind of recognition is mostly what I experienced."

With three starters and four key re-

serves returning, and with former assistant Few taking over after last year's coach, Dan Monson, left for Minnesota, Gonzaga took some lickings against high-profile teams, but gave its share back as well.

In the space of four days in early December, there was the 16-point neutral court loss to Temple, coupled with an easy blitzing of UCLA (59-43) at Pauley Pavilion.

"After last season's success, we have gotten our opponents' best effort," Frahm said. "We didn't compete well at certain points in the season, but we have been here before, and we know what it takes to win."

It takes good athletes, which Gonzaga has plenty of. Anyone paying attention would have seen sinewy reserve forward Mark Spink rising well above the rim for several slams last weekend, or Frahm shaking free of Louisville defenders for any shot he wanted.

Still, because of the complexion of all but two of the Bulldogs, they are seen as an overachieving bunch that walks the ball up the court and shoots three-pointers. The team averages nearly 80 points a game.

"People, unfortunately, still haven't got it," said St. John's coach Mike Jarvis, who is black. "Most people would look at Gonzaga and they would say that because they're all white, they're not good athletes. They're very athletic. Some would say they're athletic for white kids. They're good athletes."

People also fail to take the Bulldogs seriously because of the league they play in, the West Coast Conference. If not for Gonzaga's results in last year's tournament, Pepperdine might not have made this year's field, de-

spite winning the WCC regular-season title.

The WCC isn't on ESPN, nor should its members hold their breath waiting to be. But Few maintains that lower-tiered teams in major conferences couldn't win his league.

So he's equally bemused on the recruiting trail, by parents and AAU coaches involved with high school players who still turn up their noses at the Spokane, Wash., school in favor of a ninth-place team in the Pacific-10 or Mountain West Conference.

"There was one kid who dearly wanted to come to our program, but his parents and the people around him didn't think we were big-time enough," Few said. "The AAU coaches are in there - 'Well, he's getting recruited big-time, Coach.' The teams are seventh, eighth and ninth in the Pac-10 or the Big Ten, so I ask, why isn't he being recruited by a big-time school that went to the Elite Eight?"

As it stands in a tournament that Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson described as having 12 contenders for a national title, Gonzaga should feel good about its chances of being a national semifinalist, with Purdue, Louisiana State and Wisconsin as obstacles in its road to Indianapolis.

With a feat like that, perhaps the program's move out of Cinderella-dom would be accomplished at last. "You're constantly being told to prove it, prove it," Few said. "Ah, you're in the Elite Eight, 20 seconds away from the Final Four. That's a one-year deal."

Well, maybe not.

Niedermayer awaits punishment from NHL

by Ralph Vacchiano
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It was exactly one month ago Tuesday that Marty McSorley's infamous stick attack on Donald Brashear shocked the hockey world and brought a swift and harsh judgment from the NHL. This afternoon, Scott Niedermayer will find out just how much he's been caught up in that wake.

The Devils defenseman will be at the league offices in Manhattan at noon to discuss his own stick attack on Florida's Peter Worrell, which occurred in the final minutes of the Devils' 5-2 win at the Meadowlands on Sunday. That he'll be meeting with NHL VP Colin Campbell in person, and not by phone, all but guarantees he'll be suspended. And even Niedermayer knows the suspension could be long.

"I deserve something, there's no doubt about it," Niedermayer said yesterday. "It was a stupid play. I deserve to be suspended."

The question for Campbell, though, is how long should the suspension be? There are nine games left in the Devils' regular season, including tonight against Carolina. McSorley was suspended for at least the Bruins' final 23 regular-season games. And while McSorley's may have been the far uglier of the two incidents, it's still likely to have an impact on the Niedermayer case.

"It's definitely not a good time for something like this to happen," Niedermayer said. "There's no doubt the league is going to be watching it, obviously, with what happened. So we'll see."

Undoubtedly, since Niedermayer has

admitted his actions and intent, the crux of his defense this afternoon will be that the McSorley incident should have no bearing on his own. "I have all the confidence that it will be treated as an isolated situation," said Devils GM Lou Lamoriello, who will join Niedermayer at the hearing. "And it should be."

Worrell - who a team spokesman said is still suffering from headaches - and the Panthers obviously disagree. But the more important opinion is that of the league. How much will the NHL factor in Niedermayer's spotless record? And how much will the league weigh the things Worrell did to provoke the attack?

The Devils hope Worrell's actions count heavily. Though he received only two penalties prior to the game-ending fight - including a penalty for elbowing Niedermayer 4:22 into the game - the Devils accused Worrell of taking illegal shots at their heads all game long. And they criticized referees Dan Marouelli and Scott Zelkin for not stopping him.

"(Niedermayer) was waiting for justice to be done," Devils center Bobby Holik said. "But nobody would do it."

Of course, even Niedermayer admitted that was no excuse for his actions. As he did after the game, he again stated yesterday, "It was not the right thing to do." However, he did not go so far as to offer an apology to Worrell.

"I don't know, I guess would apologize if he thinks I need to apologize to him," Niedermayer said. "But there's going to be a lot of apologizing going on. Is he going to apologize for every elbow that he aimed at my head? Probably not."