

Kate Smith has ridden the waves of emotion the game of golf can bring from tears of joy in this photo after securing her fifth MSHSL state championship to earlier this month when her senior season at the University of Nebraska was cut short.

Paul Gregerson / Special to the Tribune



SPORTS

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B1

DECISIONS AWAIT FOR HUSKER GREAT KATE SMITH

By Robert Williams
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Nebraska senior Kate Smith got news of NCAA changes due to COVID-19 while warming up for a tournament as the spring golf season kicked into gear in a year she was playing her best golf.

"It was pretty devastating," Smith said. Smith and her teammates were pulled off the golf course mid-round under sunny skies.

"Usually when you get pulled off there should be something wrong like weather," she said.

The players were informed the tournament was canceled, but coaches wanted players to keep practicing and focusing on getting better.

Moments later, far more than the tournament was off, so was Smith's final season.

"It was pretty scary; you wake up in the morning preparing for a tournament and while I was packing up I saw the NCAA tweeted about no championships,"



Robert Williams / Tribune

Kate Smith said the time spent as a Husker from her national signing day at Detroit Lakes high her senior year to her last tournament in a Nebraska uniform was a journey of personal growth on and off the golf course.

she said. "I went from preparing for a tournament to I'm unemployed without a job or a purpose with this thing. It was pretty hard to swallow, especially because I work really hard in my sport and always have. It's always been really important to me. I've gotten to see a lot of things through and find a lot of success."

Smith was the leader of the Cornhuskers. She entered her senior season holding

the Huskers' season record stroke average of 73.52. Through her first three years, Smith accumulated 13 top-10 finishes among 20 top-25 showings and a school record 73.70 career average. She was a NCAA regional qualifier her true freshman season and holds plenty of other individual records at NU like best 18-hole score (64), best 54-hole score (202), among others.

Not having all that come to fruition on



Paul Gregerson / Special to the Tribune

Kate Smith watches a putt on the 18th hole, where she clinched the Minnesota Women's Amateur Championship by one stroke over the reigning Big 10 Player of the Year, Sarah Burnhams, in 2017.

her final go-around was a big emotional letdown. Unlike her fellow teammates who are underclassmen, the finality hit hard for Smith and fellow seniors Haley Thiele and Jessica Haraden. "They all know they are coming back in August," she said. "I just kind of broke down.

I was pretty much a puddle the rest of the day."

The fact is Smith is one of the top golfers, if not the best, in Nebraska history and she competed and found success through multiple transitions at Nebraska with five different coaches, two different nutritionists and two

different strength coaches.

"I only had four months with these new coaches," she said. "I felt like I was at a point in my golf game that I had never seen before — how good I was playing. To lose that but to know maybe I have a whole

SMITH: Page B2

MSHSL clarifies spring sports protocol

By MSHSL

The Minnesota State High School League has clarified its protocol for spring activities.

Effective between March 18 and March 27, the following direction is provided for MSHSL member schools:

Coaches and directors may not:

- ▶ Have in-person contact with participants.
- ▶ Require or suggest groups of participants to gather.
- ▶ Suggest or support "captain's practices" or "open gyms."
- ▶ Provide evaluations or feedback on participants' performance (i.e., require participants to submit video of a skill or performance).
- ▶ Require participants to take part in individual workouts or skills training, etc. (i.e., journaling, reporting of time spent, submission of results).
- ▶ Place undue influence on participants to take part in any individual workouts or skills training.

Coaches and directors may:

▶ Connect with participants via technology (i.e., email, Learning Management System, school approved communication tools).

▶ Provide optional individual workouts or optional individual skills training via electronic communication.

▶ Connect with and support participants who are challenged by the changes in their routines and life due to changes caused by COVID-19 limitations and restrictions.

Coaches and directors must:

▶ Include the activities administrator on all communication to participants.

▶ School administration at their discretion, may place more restrictive limitations on practice and participation. As COVID-19 is rapidly evolving, the MSHSL will continue to monitor the situation and make adjustments as necessary.

Spring sports are officially in season. Therefore, all League rules, policies and bylaws surrounding participation are in effect.

Offerdahl to lead Jacks' girls golf

By Micah Friez
Forum News Service

Editor's note: The Detroit Lakes girls golf team is slated to play in Class AAA this season after a dominating run in AA, including seven state team titles since 2006 and 12 podium finishes (top three) in 12 appearances. This is one of the new faces from Section 8AAA competition.

For the first time ever, a former player will be leading the Bemidji High School girls golf team.

Tina Offerdahl, a 1996 BHS graduate, will take the reins of her alma mater's team this spring and become the third head coach in program history.

"It essentially was easy because I like the game of golf," Offerdahl said of the decision. "We've got a good group of girls. We have fun with them. That part of it was easy. The other part — making it work with life in general — that was what took me a while to figure it out."

Nevertheless, seeing the confidence Activities Director Troy Hendricks had in her helped win Offerdahl over. "I had a talk with Troy, and



Jillian Gandsdy / Forum News Service

Tina Offerdahl was recently hired as the new head coach of the Bemidji High School girls golf team. Offerdahl is just the third coach in the program's history and is also the first former player to fill the position.

he threw some encouragement my way," she said. "His backing and support, his confidence in me being able to do a good job in this position (was the biggest thing)."

Offerdahl follows in the footsteps of Jeff Nelson (1988-2015) and Paul Daman (2016-19) as head coaches of Bemidji

GOLF: Page B2

Perham played a season to remember

By Jason Groth
Forum News Service

What an abrupt end to an otherwise perfect season for the Perham boys basketball team.

Despite being cut short because of the coronavirus, the 2019-20 season was a memorable one. The Yellowjackets rattled off win after win on their way to the Section 8AA Championship game against Fergus Falls.

The Yellowjackets will go down in history as one of just two teams in Minnesota to finish with an unblemished record. Eden Prairie is the other, finishing with a 28-0 record ahead of their Section 2AAAA Championship game with Shakopee.

During the Section 8AA semifinals, heading into what was supposed to be Perham's championship game, there were a lot of questions on press row: Would they continue the tournament? Would there



Jason Groth / Perham Focus

The Perham boys basketball team huddles up prior to the start of their Section 8AA semifinal victory over East Grand Forks. It was the final pregame huddle for the 2019-20 season as the Section 8AA Championship game was canceled due to COVID-19 pandemic.

be fans in attendance? And then the most common question, did you see the NBA suspended

its season? Ultimately, what was supposed to be a joyous time for several teenage

basketball players quickly changed. Friday morning, March 13, the Minnesota State High School

League announced the cancellation of the 2019-20 basketball season.

The Perham coaching staff, along with Erin Anderson and Mitch Anderson, informed the team of the news in a group meeting. The news hit the team hard at first, but they quickly shook it off as the day wore on.

In fact, the players did what they do best — they played hoops. They gathered at a team member's house and held a mini two-on-two tournament. The Perham Boys Basketball Twitter account highlighted the event, with videos of the team doing their typical warm-up routine and team huddle before playing the tournament. It was a great way for the boys to bond during what has to be a trying time for them.

This team set the standard for future teams. Many had predicted that Perham would be a highly competitive team and

in the mix at the end of the season, but I don't think anyone predicted the Yellowjackets would post 28 wins against their schedule. The Yellowjackets posted 28 wins against teams with a combined 316-257 win/loss record during the season.

Another impressive feat for these Yellowjackets was their ability to turn the Hive into one of the toughest places to play.

They rattled off 28 straight wins at the Hive and 50 overall at home, which includes games at the Prairie Wind Middle School. Quite the impressive run.

Unfortunately, we won't get to see how it would have played out or how the Section 8AA Championship would have finished. But that doesn't mean this team can't be celebrated.

Jason Groth is Sports Editor for the Perham Focus and the Wadena Pioneer Journal.

SMITH

From Page B1

another year with those coaching. I'm trying to find the silver lining; the NCAA is working on giving us another year of eligibility, but you don't want to put all your eggs in that basket."

Despite the changes in charge of the team, Smith has learned to find ways to excel with new faces, drawing on her experience that dates back to winning five straight high school state titles, getting her start with then Laker head coach Carl Harrier. "No matter who they are or what their experience, or what they think, you can learn from everybody," said Smith. "Cali always knocked herself down for her lack of golf knowledge, but I learned a ton from her. If you keep an open mind, anybody in this world can make you a better athlete."

Smith's senior season was off to a bright start with a runner-up finish in Seattle last fall. Her final round included an eagle on the 340-yard, par-4 third hole, and back-to-back birdies on No. 15 and No. 16, to cap off one of only three rounds played better than par by the 60 players in the field over two days.

"It was the tightest course I've ever seen in my life," she said. "It was unreal."

Smith's final Husker round produced a 13-under-par 203 (65-66-72), good for second place, one shot off her school record, in Peoria, Arizona. The tournament was held at Westbrook Village Golf Club, the same course she set the school-record 202 on in 2018, along with three other school records.

"With the amount of great golfers there are in the field every week, if I play well and put up good numbers, I'm pretty happy," she said.

Last summer, Smith returned to Minnesota and made noise winning the Minnesota Women's State Open in West St. Paul July 31, a week after placing second at the Minnesota Women's Amateur Championship. She's also the holder of the 2017 Women's A title.

Decisions about the future at this time are difficult to make. The potential of returning to Nebraska for a fifth season could be possible, as is a future date with qualifying school in the fall.

"I think the obvious answer is yes, why not?" Smith said about



Scott Bruhn / NU Athletic Communications

Kate Smith rewrote the record books during her four seasons golfing for the Nebraska Cornhuskers.

returning to Nebraska.

Smith talked with her head coach Lisa Johnson as recently as Wednesday of this past week discussing the possibility of combining both Q school and the fall season. "I could get professional status while in college and they hold it for you until after college," said Smith. "That's a huge opportunity."

Smith remains unsure, just as concrete plans are impossible to make for many people right now.

"We kind of give our blood, sweat and tears for four years," she said. "On paper, it looks great, but people don't see the other side."

"That other side are the many demands of collegiate sports. Smith was really excited to go play golf after finishing her college career, as she anticipated. Her goal was the future after a last run with the Cornhuskers in the present.

"I wanted to find success on my own," she said. "Every time you go off to college you're hoping you'll end up loving your sport more. I keep trying to find the light at the end of the tunnel."

Even some of those have disappeared. Smith was anticipating competing in the U.S. Open qualifier in May. That was postponed earlier this week. "It's just day by day," she said.

The bad news is still fresh for so many athletes. Accepting it and dealing with those feelings are still tasks at hand.

"This is definitely out of my control," said Smith. "I think college sports have been used as an example as they everybody, this is serious. We were one of the first to get hit. Now, you look back and say, of course, but at the time my friends were still on a beach on spring break, why can't I golf?"

Smith holds out high hopes for Q school in the fall.

"That was definitely my plan before all of this because, in my eyes, I'm only just beginning to be a solid, quality athlete," she said. "You just don't know a lot in high school. I thought it was a natural next step for me, to try it. I've always had such a supportive community here in DL that wants to see it as much as I want to. Professional golf was definitely the next step. I'm just trying to see how the next few months go."

Getting a chance to come back home has been one benefit for Detroit Lakes' most decorated golfer in school history.

"I haven't been home in March in four years," she said. "I usually don't get to come home during the school year. I'm just trying to be grateful for being home and getting to do things I don't always get to do. I limit myself because of my sport."

Smith is currently completing classwork online and trying to find success in academics. Her second passion, as she calls it, is art, so she's been finding solace in creativity away from competition.

"I'm just lucky I get to play golf for the rest of my life in some capacity," she said. Looking back on four successful years competing at the Division I level, Smith has learned what it takes to win and lead a team.

"If you're doing what others want to, you're going to be successful," she said. "If you're taking the time to do the things people don't want to do, you're going to be better off for it, shooting lower scores. It isn't really the big things, it's all the little things and I think I've learned a lot of those little things the last four years. What to eat, how much sleep to get, how many times do I stretch per day and what kind of drills do I do. I felt like I was really figuring out this whole golf thing."

Vikings trade disgruntled Diggs

By Chris Tomasson
St. Paul Pioneer Press

So much for Rick Spielman saying he wasn't going to trade Stefon Diggs.

The Vikings agreed Monday night, March 16, to trade the disgruntled wide receiver to Buffalo. The deal will become official on Wednesday's first day of the new league year.

Fox Sports first reported the Diggs trade, and ESPN first reported the details. The Vikings will include with Diggs a seventh-round pick in 2020 and get back four picks, including a first-round selection in 2020, which is No. 22 overall. The other picks they got were in the fifth and sixth rounds in 2020 and the fourth round in 2021.

After several cryptic Diggs tweets, Spielman, the Vikings general manager, said at last month's combine that Diggs would not be traded.

"There's no reason — the rumors or whatever you're talking about — to anticipate that Stefon Diggs is not going to be a Minnesota Viking," Spielman said.

Diggs' cryptic tweets continued Monday after the Vikings agreed to a two-year, \$66 million contract extension with quarterback Kirk Cousins. He tweeted, "It's time for a new beginning."

Diggs' displeasure with the Vikings'

offense boiled over after a 16-6 Week 4 loss at Chicago last September. Diggs missed a day with meetings and a practice day and was fined more than \$200,000. After his return to the team, Diggs expressed frustration and said about rumors he wanted to be traded, "I feel like there's truth to all rumors no matter how you dress it up."

Spielman did not return a message. Diggs could not be reached.

Diggs, a fifth-round pick in 2015, is coming off his best season, having caught 63 passes for 1,130 yards. He had teamed with Adam Thielen to give the Vikings one of the best receiver combinations in the NFL.

The move leaves the Vikings thin at wide receiver but next month's draft is considered very deep at the position. After Thielen, Bisi Johnson and Chad Beebe are the top receivers currently on the roster.

The move gives the Vikings 12 picks for now in the draft.

In five Minnesota seasons, Diggs caught 365 passes for 4,623 yards, and had two 1,000-yard seasons. His greatest moment was the Minnesota Miracle in January 2018, when he caught a 61-yard touchdown pass from Case Keenum on the final play in a 29-24 win over New Orleans in a divisional playoff at U.S. Bank Stadium.



Brace Hemmelgarn / USA TODAY Sports

Minnesota Vikings wide receiver Stefon Diggs (14) carries the ball during the third quarter against the Miami Dolphins at U.S. Bank Stadium on Dec. 16.

GOLF

From Page B1

girls golf. Offerdahl is the first female head coach in the program's history and also joins Briana Fleischacker (gymnastics), Alicia Kriens (volleyball) and Kristen McRae (swimming and diving) as the school's current female head coaches.

Having a woman as a head coach can go a long way for the girls in her program, Offerdahl said.

"I think it's important for relatability more so than anything," she said. "Especially this age, girls are tough. ... I can relate to them more and have a little more understanding. But then it's also important for them to realize that there are a lot of successful women out in there in all kinds of things."

Offerdahl has spent the past four seasons as an

assistant coach to Daman. So even though her sophomore daughter, Tatum, is in the program (as was her oldest daughter and 2019 graduate, Taylor), there's already an understanding on how to handle the dynamic.

"There's the separation when we're at the course and at practice. I'm not 'Mom,' I'm 'Coach,'" Offerdahl said. "Call me Tina, just like I'm your coach. Tatum handles it really well. I commend her for that. ... It tells me she's got faith in my ability to coach, too, so that's a pretty cool thing."

"She was really excited when I told her that I was applying for (the job). And when I got it, I got one of the biggest hugs. That was exciting."

The hire brings Offerdahl full circle with the program, as she was one of the earliest Lumberjacks to ever swing a club. The girls team was formed in

1988, and, as a freshman in 1993, Offerdahl became just the program's second individual to reach the state level. Only her older sister, Tami, beat her to it.

Offerdahl returned to state as an individual her senior season, which came after helping the program to its first two section championships in 1994 and 1995.

BHS also went to state as a team in 2003 and 2004, winning its lone state championship the latter season, but Bemidji hasn't been back since. And so that becomes the goal moving forward.

"I'd like to see them continuing the success that they've had. They are, I think, one of the more dominant teams in the section and in the area," Offerdahl said. "I'd love to bring this team to state. ... The state championship team was the last team to go in 2004. We're due to return."