



SPORTS

STRONG EFFORTS

West women, men excite home crowd

By Doug Wolter
The Globe

Worthington

In a doubleheader basketball night at Minnesota West Community and Technical College on Monday, the Lady Jays escaped with a hard-fought overtime win and the Bluejay men appeared to right themselves after a rough performance on Saturday.

The men did lose Monday, 98-93 to MState-Fergus Falls, but they deserved kudos for their fight, their focus and their determination. In a 103-79 setback against Western Tech on Saturday, the men's team played arguably its poorest game of the season — an undisciplined effort that forced the players to take a hard look in the mirror.

The message of Saturday's loss, apparently, was learned.

"First of all, I want to apologize for the way we played on Saturday, and everything that happened," was the first thing 5-10 freshman guard CJ Ligon said coming out of the locker room. "Honestly, I feel we needed that game on Saturday. As crazy as it sounds, it showed us who we are, and today we came in and tried to show more discipline."

In the early game on Monday, the West women went to the wire against MState, finally prevailing by an 84-81 score.

The summaries:

MEN

Bluejays 98, MState-FF 93
Fergus Falls got the jump early, leading 17-9. It was 48-35 in the Spartans' favor at halftime.

That was the point where the Bluejays fell apart on Saturday, opting for an undisciplined, street-style kind of basketball. But on Monday, they came out strong to start the second half and maintained their focus to the end. With a little more than five minutes remaining they cut MState's lead to three points and got to within a point, 87-86, at the 2:29 mark on an Amos Alford free throw. Fergus Falls pushed its lead to six, saw MW whittle it back to one, and finally won by five.

Ligon finished with 17 points. London Campbell and Christian Kyles each scored 20 for the Jays, and Campbell added 12 rebounds. Alford had 18 points.

The game was exciting to watch, made possible by a spirited team effort by the home team.



Tim Middagh / The Globe

Minnesota West Blue Jays CJ Ligon (1) leaps up to make two points on a fast break past Minnesota State Fergus Falls Spartans Langston Davis on Monday evening in Worthington.

"I think we responded pretty well (to Saturday)," said head coach Brian Stoebner. "Give our guys a lot of credit, they busted their butts. They played under control. We still have to play better — we had 29 turnovers."

Part of that had to do with the Bluejays fast-breaking, up-tempo effort, however. In response, Stoebner said it's OK to play fast, but it has to be "controlled chaos."

He added: "I think we're taking steps in the right direction. But that's part of playing together and growing."

For his part, Ligon hoped Monday's game is the start of something better for the Jays, now 3-13 on the season.

"I feel we can keep it up. All the guys played well. We just gotta get over the hump," he said.

MState-FF 48 98
Bluejays 35 93
MSTATE-FF (3FG-2FG-FT-TP) — Edwards 3-2-9-22, Taylor 2-6-3-21, Davis 0-6-0-12, Lee 1-3-0-9, Engelmeyer 2-1-2-10, Pearson 2-0-4-10, Aasness 0-2-0-4, Bell 1-3-1-10. Totals 11-23-19-98.
BLUEJAYS (3FG-2FG-FT-TP) — Ligon 0-5-7-17, Muktar 0-1-0-2, Dorian 1-1-0-5, Campbell 1-7-3-20, Paulson 0-4-1-9, Kyles 3-4-3-20, Sohn 0-1-0-2, Alford 0-6-6-18. Totals 5-29-20-93.

WOMEN

Lady Jays 84, MState-FF 81 (OT)

It was a crazy finish to regulation. West's Dannyn Peterson made one of two free throws with 16.4 seconds remaining to give the Lady Jays a 70-68 lead, but with 9.1 seconds left MState's Jayna Gronewold's two free throws tied the score. At 5.3 seconds, West's Jayden Zebe made her first free throw but missed her second, but there was a foul on the rebound. So with 4.0 seconds left, Gronewold made the first but missed the second to force overtime.

Tia Murray scored West's first four points of overtime, giving her team a 75-74 lead. Peterson made a big shot for a 81-79 West lead just outside the final minute, then rebounded a Fergus Falls miss on the other end and was fouled at :59.4.

She made both, and West led

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Jason Reitmeier success story rooted in heritage

Worthington
When Jason Reitmeier was a young carrot-topped boy growing up in Bigelow, his little sister saw red all right.

"He was rough on me when I was young, I'm not gonna lie," Joni Reitmeier says. "He was not always real kind to me but I think that made me tough and made me the person I am."

Then she laughs. "I hate to give him too much credit but it's true," she says.

What's also beyond dispute is a tale of spirited siblings from Worthington High who have become role models and mentors for hundreds of young athletes in southwest Minnesota and beyond.

Jason, the former superstar Worthington wrestler who is now head mat coach at Augustana (S.D.) University, and Joni, the highly successful head coach of the WHS Trojan girls gymnastics team, have always brought much glory to their school.

They're hometown heroes, thanks both to professional success and memories mindful of their roots.

"I was very small and so I was picked on a lot when I was younger," Jason laughs. "I was a little redhead and I suppose that gave me a chip on my shoulder when I walked on the mat, knowing this kid was the same size as me and maybe I could handle him instead of facing my cousin who was maybe 100 pounds heavier."

Worthington's history is replete with wrestling tradition. And Jason, who was a two-time state champion for the Trojans, an NCAA Division II national champion at Augustana and is now in charge of the nationally ranked Augie wrestling program, is on the short list of WHS's all-time best grapplers.

"My brother's always been an inspiration to me," Joni says.

Joni is a tremendously talented coach, too, having led the Trojan girls to the Minnesota State Gymnastics Tournament seven years in a row. In

16 years as head coach of the program Joni has 160 victories and counting. Her team this season is unbeaten and state-ranked.

Jason, a 1992 WHS graduate, was an amazing 138-14, during his prep wrestling career. After a couple of years with the Nebraska Cornhusker mat team, he transferred to Augustana and in two seasons posted a 66-7 mark that included a national championship at 142 pounds in 1997.

"He's obviously an amazing person," Joni says, "and we have the same coaching philosophies. We're hard-nosed, but deep down I think we're both very soft-hearted."

"We love our athletes and we have high expectations, but we also have high expectations for ourselves."

Joni pauses.

"I was never blessed with his athletic abilities, but I sure wanted to be like him when I was young," Joni says. "He's a bigger deal than I am, but hopefully I'm inspiring and influencing my athletes in the same way that he does."

Joni is eight years younger than Jason. She's always looked up to her big brother.

"At a young age I think everybody knew he was something special, that's for sure," Joni says. "He never wanted to be in the spotlight or thought he was the best. He was so stoic about it. He was never a bragger and always put the team first. I think that's his most amazing quality. I hope that I was that way and I certainly preach it to my girls now."

The Reitmeiers say much is owed to their folks.

"With our parents," says Joni, "we hit the lottery."

Her brother agrees. "My parents (Connie and Al Reitmeier) made sure we got our grades, but they never really pushed sports on us," says Jason. "I'm not really sure how it happened, but I fell in love with wrestling and my sister fell in love with gymnastics."

Says Joni: "Our parents were hard-working, middle-class people who told us, 'If you want something, you've got to go after it. Because no one's going to give it to

SUCCESS: Page 14

For Madison Shaffer, dance is an exhilarating challenge

By Doug Wolter
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — To many, dance team doesn't appear to be like any other high school sports activity.

There are many reasons for that. Many fans don't see dance teams perform on their own, but instead as entertainment at the halftimes of football and basketball games. Or at pep rallies.

But the honest truth is that dance team isn't a sideshow, or a brief diversion, or anything of



the kind. It's practitioners partake in a sport that requires a kind of endurance, athleticism and coordination that football players might require years to master. Practices can be grueling, the repetitions exhausting, and the competitions are tense.

The Worthington Trojettes dance squad

competes in competitions every year in jazz and high kick, but mostly they go quite a distance from Worthington for their meets — to Olivia, Clara City and Montevideo, for instance. They had one meet scheduled this year in Worthington, on Jan. 10, which was blown away because of a snowstorm. Just one more time local fans weren't able to stay close to home to see their Trojettes demonstrate the rigors of competitive dance.

Worthington dancers deserve some special attention this winter, especially. And that is why we chose high school senior Madison Shaffer to represent the squad in a Drill feature. Shaffer, who also participates in tennis and FFA, started dancing early, as she testifies.

"I've been in dance for 14 years. I started when I was 3 years old. It was difficult for me to pick up choreography in

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Madison Shaffer, Worthington Trojettes Jazz dance competitor.



Madison Shaffer
Worthington High School
Senior
Jazz Dance



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