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Panthers win second-straight MVC Tournament

Stifling defense and strong bench presence propel Panthers



SCOTT KINTZEL/Northern Iowan

By **TIM GETTING**
Sports Editor

The University of Northern Iowa men's basketball team defeated Wichita State University Sunday 67-52 to become Missouri Valley Conference Tournament champions for the second consecutive season.

The top-seeded Panthers capitalized off a 23-3 run, spanning more than 12 minutes in the game's second

half to propel themselves to the victory over the tournament's No. 2 seed.

Junior guard Kwadzo Ahelegbe contributed nine points during that run and ended the game with a game-high 24 points. Twelve of those points came from the free-throw line as he converted 12 of 14 free throws. Following the performance, Ahelegbe was named the tournament's "Most Outstanding Player."

Last season, Ahelegbe came up big in the MVC

championship game at the Scottrade Center in St. Louis, Mo., as he led the Panthers in scoring with 17 while being named to the All-Tournament team.

"I do love St. Louis," Ahelegbe said.

For the second-straight game, the Panthers' bench came through, scoring 25 points. Throughout the tournament, five non-starters combined to score 64 points for UNI.

"(That 23-3 run) had more to do with our bench. Our

bench stepped up huge for us tonight just like they did the night before," said UNI senior Ali Farokhmanesh.

Redshirt freshman Jake Koch led UNI's bench presence with a 13-point showing that included three of four shooting from three-point range. Before today's game, Koch had converted 11 three pointers the entire season.

"Jake has the confidence to make shots and to make plays. He's doing it all the time in practice," said his older

brother, senior Adam Koch.

"It was good today to see him play with some confidence and aggressiveness to start making those plays."

Adam Koch, who was recently named the MVC Player of the Year, was held scoreless for the first time since his freshman season.

"I certainly wouldn't have thought we would have won the basketball game, let alone by double figures, if Adam doesn't get on the scoreboard,"

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LIVING THE DREAM

Man in the mirror

By **JON HEIPLE**
NI Fantasy Sports Expert

The fantasy sports world is sometimes hard to measure properly because so much of what goes on in the locker rooms is beyond our control. Coaches tweak rotations to net more wins for their club without any consideration to the value we lose in our virtual rosters.

Trades are struck for financial reasons and players are buried on benches instead of giving quality shooting or valuable blocks. Truth be told, what's good for your fantasy squad is almost always terrible for a real-life club, so players need to be prepared to respond to change.

As far as change goes, the

trade gave us about as much as we can handle. Several rosters suddenly got weaker, while others blew up overnight. The goal of fantasy basketball is to key in on your weaknesses and cover them as best you can, and some players just received a huge hole in their armor Valentine's Day.

Dallas is the clear winner on the trade front, but if you have any of their main rotation players, expect the numbers to dip by the end of the month. New center Brendan Haywood is out with back spasms while long-time starter Erick Dampier is nursing a dislocated finger, and spark-plug Jason Terry is resting from facial surgery to repair a broken bone. Once everyone is healthy and in shape,

minutes will be tight, and I expect everyone to dip for the better of the team.

In New York, Tracy McGrady has all but taken the point guard minutes by default. His scoring numbers have been terribly inconsistent, but he is the only relevant option, because Chris Duhon has not played since T-Mac touched down in the Big Apple. After eight DNPs, anyone clinging to him needs to search for another option immediately. Former King Sergio Rodriguez is clearly the next option if T-Mac goes down with another injury on his bum knee.

In Houston things are looking good for new acquisition Kevin Martin, but Trevor Ariza has missed a major amount of playing time

with an injury in his right hip. Martin is scoring at a high clip, and there is little else happening on the Rockets' bench to slow him down, so it looks as if Ariza and Martin could pair together well without losing too many minutes. In Sacramento, Larry Hughes has been cut loose to consider other options, possibly with the Cavaliers or Celtics.

Milwaukee has finally given John Salmons an opportunity to play off a scoring big man, and he is making the most of it. All of Salmons's numbers have jumped since the move, most notably his terrible shooting percentage and lower turnover rate. He may have been dumped in some leagues because of early

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Dak, Hosch run well at Iowa State NCAA Qualifier

NEWS SERVICE

Both Stephen Dak and Holli Hosch recorded season-best performances at the Iowa State NCAA Qualifier.

Dak clocked in a season-best 4:06.14 in the mile run, also taking second place.

Hosch clocked in a career-best 2:09.61 to take eighth place. That time moves her into second place on the University of Northern Iowa all-time best list, and is just .61 seconds short of the school record of 2:09.00 set by Emily Montgomery in 1996.

The Panthers found out if their provisional qualifiers were selected for the 2010 NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships Monday following publication of *The Northern Iowan*.