



Sports

Cupcakes queue up for MSU whipping post

Question: When are easy wins anything but?

Answer: When you're saddled with Minnesota State's home nonconference basketball schedule.

Men's coach Matt Margenthaler has been using words such as "hammered" and "murdered" to describe how he's been ripped by fans for an early season schedule rich in assorted pastries.

But he says the cupcakes and cream puffs aren't of his making. He's been dealt this hand, and he has to play it.

"Our league has gone to hell, and my hands are tied," he says.

Hence a first-half home schedule that, if it were on a shelf at the Dollar Store, would be marked down to 49 cents.



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The Free Press

OJANPA: Playing weak teams is no-win scenario for MSU

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"The average fan looks at our schedule and thinks it's not a great home schedule, that we're trying to schedule wins, when we're just trying to get the best schedule we can get," Margenthaler says.

The cause of the competitive imbalance is twofold: The North Central Conference has become the Titanic, and fellow NCAA Division II teams in the region don't want to play at Minnesota State simply because they don't have to; they have plenty of D-II competition within their own realms.

Meantime, the NCC has run out of lifeboats as member institutions clamber to escape, including four schools that have opted upward to become Division I programs.

Left in the lurch are the Un-Fab Four: Minnesota State, St. Cloud State, Minnesota Duluth and Nebraska-Omaha, all castaways on "Gilligan's Island."

Ginger or Mary Ann? More precisely, Bethany Lutheran, Hamline, or Saint Mary's?

Those Division III teams lining up for their whippings represent the Mavericks' next three home opponents.

MSU's home nonconference schedule is all D-III schools, except for three programs that only recently moved up to D-II status and clearly demonstrated in Bresnan Arena that they're not ready for D-II prime time.

One of those, Upper Iowa, was MSU's opponent the other night. The Peacocks posed Margenthaler and the Mavericks with what will be an ongoing coach-and-players quandary: What is the proper "etiquette" for beating over-matched opponents?

Answer? There isn't one. It's a can't-win scenario.

Beat these teams by "only" 15 and you're called out for

dogging it. Beat them by 50 and you're a sandbagging bully.

In this upside-down Alice in Wonderland world of competitive imbalance, an easy win brings less joy than a good loss.

Minnesota State's Tale of Two Seasons doesn't begin anew until Jan. 4, when it plays its first game in what's left of the NCC.

Meantime, the nonconference home opponent line to the woodshed forms here.

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