

Strong Metro flavor everywhere you look

Written by Mark Dukes

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Everywhere you looked, they were there ... NCAA basketball tournaments, NCAA wrestling, Major League Baseball, NASCAR, PGA Tour. In nearly every major sport that was in action in a four-day period, the Metro area was well represented.

Quite incredibly, former Metro area athletes were involved in, and often starred on, some of sports' biggest stages this past week. They were on the courts, the mats, the pavement and the grass of the events making headlines.

Jordan Printy (Linn-Mar) played a reserve role, scoring eight points, in Indiana State's first-round loss Friday to Syracuse in the NCAA men's tournament. His sister, Jaime (Linn-Mar), poured in 25 points for Iowa in an opening-round loss Saturday at Gonzaga in the women's tournament. Jade Rogers (Kennedy) also was on the Hawkeye women's roster.

K.K. Armstrong and Katelin Oney (both Cedar Rapids Washington) played pivotal roles for the University of Northern Iowa as the Panthers made the NCAA women's field and met Michigan State on Sunday night. Brenda Frese (Washington) coached her Maryland team to a rout of St. Francis in the first round Sunday. Frese, whose 2006 team won the NCAA title, is closing in on 300 career victories.

In the National Junior College Athletic Association tournament, Alex Coleman (Kennedy) scored a near-career high 15 points in Kirkwood Community College's victory in the fifth-place game Saturday.

The University of Iowa's Matt McDonough (Linn-Mar) was bidding for his second straight NCAA wrestling championship Saturday but fell to Arizona State's Anthony Robles in the finals. McDonough is 64-3 in his first two collegiate seasons.

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In the NASCAR Sprint Cup race at Bristol on Sunday, Landon Cassill (Jefferson) earned another paycheck with a start-and-park 42th-place finish. In February, Cassill pushed Tony Stewart to victory at the end and notched a third-place finish for himself in the Nationwide race at Daytona.

Zach Johnson (Regis) enhanced his reputation as a walking ATM on the PGA Tour with a solid Top 20 finish at the Transitions Championship on Sunday. Johnson, who is 33rd in the World Golf Rankings, has made the cut in each of his six events this season.

In spring training baseball, Ryan Sweeney (Jefferson/Xavier) swatted his first home run of the preseason in Oakland's victory Saturday over the White Sox. Sweeney, recovering from knee surgery, is hitting .533 with 8 hits in 15 at-bats for the Athletics.

Remarkably, we could witness much of the same next year. All the college athletes mentioned have eligibility remaining, and Cassill, Sweeney, Johnson and Frese aren't anywhere close to retirement. And with several Metro area seniors headed for major-college basketball programs, chances are even greater of more Metro representation in March.

It's a great time of year to watch your favorite team and sports. It's even greater with a Metro flavor.