



Wildcats back on track (and field)

After an 11-year absence, track and field has returned as a varsity program at Northern Michigan University—although this time the program consists solely of a women's squad.

Northern made the decision in the spring of 2003 to add the program, in part, to meet the NCAA requirement that all Division II schools have at least one men's and one women's team that competes in the spring. Northern's men's spring sport is golf. The track and field squad saw its first season of action last year, competing unofficially during the indoor season and officially during the outdoor season. This year, the 'Cats have declared NCAA teams for both the indoor and outdoor season, and they get under way with indoor action this month.

"With the Superior Dome as our indoor facility, I see a lot of potential for us to be a premier indoor program down the road," said Coach **Sten Fjeldheim '86 BS, '93 MA**. "Being declared as both an indoor and outdoor program puts us

in the rotation to host the conference championships in the future. We've even started discussions about the possibility of bidding to host a national indoor championship here someday, which would be great for our program, Northern, and the general Marquette community."

During the four years NMU last supported track and field—1988-92—the Wildcats finished sixth of six teams in both men's and women's indoor and outdoor competition at the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) Championships, except for the 1991 indoor meet when both were fifth. Twenty-five NMU men and 22 women earned all-conference status during that span.

Part of the reason for Northern's point struggles in league competition back then was the limited number of participants. The men's team averaged about a dozen members and the women's, six to 10. The subsequent impact was the inability to have entrants in all events.

History has not repeated itself

yet this time around the track. In its return season last year, the Wildcat women's team had 30 members, which was a bit of a surprise to the coaching staff. This year, the squad has 36 members.

"We are very pleased with the numbers, especially considering we had almost no time to recruit prior to last season," said Fjeldheim, who also guided the previous track program. "Last year, we had a good cross section of an entire team, being able to compete in every event except the hammer."

Northern also surpassed expectations in performance during its first campaign. Jennifer Lahr, an All-America cross-country runner, provisionally qualified for the NCAA Division II Championships in the 1,500 and 3,000 meters. She finished 14th in the 3,000 at the national meet.

"To have an NCAA qualifier in the first year as well as some of our women beating Division I athletes at meets was phenomenal," said Tom Barnes, assistant coach and coordi-

nator of the day-to-day training.

Other top performers last year included Stephanie Boyer in sprints and the long jump; Stephanie Mishica in the 400 intermediate hurdles and pole vault; Wildcat basketball player Tiffany Grubaugh in the discus, shot put, and javelin; and Breanna Riedel in the triple jump. Boyer and Mishica are now sophomores and Grubaugh is a senior. Riedel was a senior last season.

While most of the team's meets were non-scoring competitions, it finished fourth of 20 teams at the Wheaton Invitational and competed well in the non-scoring Division I Notre Dame Invitational. At the GLIAC outdoor championships, the 'Cats finished seventh of ten teams.

"It was a very solid team, and I know the women really enjoyed the experience. We set goals, and we accomplished many of them," Barnes said. "This year we want to continue to build our numbers and increase our depth. Eventually we'd like to have between 40-50 team members."

Jenny Ryan '02 MA is the other assistant coach. She is also the assistant to the women's cross country and men's and women's Nordic ski teams. She works primarily with the middle and distance events.

"I think Tom and Jenny have done a great job," said Fjeldheim. "Each of us was able to focus on different aspects of growing the program, and because of that we are ahead of schedule on the team's development and success."

—**Cindy Paavola '84 BS**

Two Wildcat teams post top 10 NCAA finishes

The cross country team placed seventh at the national meet for a fifth consecutive top 8 finish. It was also the program's fifth consecutive appearance at the meet. Junior Stephanie Howe of Forest Lake, Minn., earned All-America status, finishing 20th overall. She ran the 5-kilometer course in 22:40.5. Northern advanced to the meet as the NCAA II Great Lakes Regional runner-up.

The volleyball squad bowed out of the national tournament with a 3-1 loss to Minnesota-Duluth at the NCAA Elite Eight Tournament. It was NMU's first Elite Eight appearance since 1997.

The 'Cats went 24-7 for the year. While Northern bowed out of the GLIAC Tournament in the quarterfinals, it rebounded to win the NCAA Great Lakes Regional with victories over Hillsdale College, Grand Valley State University, and Northwood University.

Senior outside hitter Aimee Dewitte of St. Charles, Ill., was selected to the American Volleyball Coaches Association All-America Second Team. She led NMU with 406 kills. She had a .306 hitting percentage, 47 service aces, 375 digs, three block solos, 71 block assists for 74 total blocks, and had a team-high 491.5 points.



Stephanie Howe



Aimee Dewitte

USOEC adds women's wrestling

In September, 13 women freestyle wrestlers took to the mat as the newest student-athletes of the U.S. Olympic Education Center. Women's freestyle wrestling joins the USOEC's residential teams for men in Greco-Roman wrestling and for men and women in boxing, speedskating, and weightlifting.

"The program has gotten off to a great start at the USOEC and NMU. Things are really going well, both athletically and academically," said Coach Shannyn Gillespie. "In October, we started competition, and we were raring to go."

Two of the women wrestlers, Mary Kelly (105.5 pounds) of Mahomet, Ill., and Debbie Sakai (112.5 lbs.) of Miliani, Hawaii, are also members of the U.S. National Team based on their current top-three national ranking at the senior level in their respective weight categories.

Three others—Linse Meadows (Katy, Texas; 130 lbs.), Elena Mena (St. Paul, Minn.; 158.5 lbs.), and Donnell Bradley (Aiea, Hawaii; 158.5 lbs.)—have placed at past U.S. National meets.

As part of the USOEC program, all of the women are also enrolled at Northern. All but two are college transfers, having competed on collegiate teams at various universities around the country prior to the start of the USOEC program.

Future plans by USA Wrestling include growing the program to 30 athletes, with an additional eight athletes next year and another nine in the third year.

"We are excited to have this new team here," said Jeff Kleinschmidt, director of the USOEC. "Shannyn is a great coach, and we've been very impressed with the athletes. We believe there is a very strong possibility that some of these women will be members of the U.S. Olympic Team at the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, China."