

SPORTS

VOLANTEONLINE.COM/SPORTS | @VOLANTESPORTS

MALACHI PETERSEN | THE VOLANTE

THE VOLANTE ■ WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2014 ■ VOLANTEONLINE.COM

Climbing to another Summit

USD enters season with experience, high expectations



FILE PHOTO | THE VOLANTE
The University of South Dakota women's basketball team celebrates after winning the Summit League Tournament March 11 in the Sioux Falls Arena.



FILE PHOTO | THE VOLANTE
Amy Williams, head coach of the University of South Dakota women's basketball team, walks the sideline March 22.

Nathan Ellenbecker
Nathan.Ellenbecker@coyotes.usd.edu

The University of South Dakota women's basketball season is approaching, but coach Amy Williams isn't worried about games today — she's focused on eliminating weak practices.

The faces aren't much different this year under the practice court hoop — only one player left from last year, two transfer players moved in and one first-year joined.

"We've started off with several really good, sharp practices, and then we didn't have our best practice Friday," said Williams, the third-year head coach. "It made coach Williams a little antsy over the weekend."

Williams said her team cannot afford practices without

high effort or improvement, because the team hasn't earned the Summit League-favorite status yet.

This year the team was not picked as the top Summit League women's team. The award was given to South Dakota State University, and USD was picked second.

"We don't put a whole lot of weight on those preseason polls," Williams said. "There might be some people who thought the second pick might be too high for our buckle."

But four starters are back who aren't afraid of the Summit League stage: junior Tia Hemiller and seniors Nicole Seekamp, Lisa Loeffler and Raeshel Contreras.

Contreras said the team won't take rankings personally.

"Coach Williams came in the next day and told us to ignore

that and focus on getting better in practice," she said.

For both Contreras and Williams, the first place to look for improvement is defense.

"Fortunately, we were the No. 1 scoring team in the conference last year," Williams said. "But we don't want to have to win games 92-90. On the defensive end of the floor, that's where we feel we can make our best improvements and not have to depend so much on having to score a lot."

So the coaching staff decided to practice defense — and lots of it.

The team spent its first week of practice doing what players called "Camp Defense." The practices for one week were exclusively defensive drills. Players didn't touch the

SEE CHAMPS, PAGE B3

Smith looks to raise bar



PHILLIP MILLAR is a first-year majoring in media & journalism

A new era of South Dakota basketball is almost here.

The University of South Dakota is on the verge of being a strong mid-major program due to two factors — a new coach and new arena.

Let's start with the coach.

Craig Smith is a big-time coach, as he has spent much of his career as an assistant to one of the best young coaches in the game, University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Tim Miles.

Under the leadership of Miles, and with the assistance of Smith, Nebraska went to its first NCAA tournament in 16 years. Smith even gained some head coaching experience in the NCAA tournament when Miles was ejected.

Alongside Smith, a new sports arena coming in 2016 is already underway.

Recruiting will be easier with a state-of-the-art basketball venue to showcase. The new arena should create a better home-court advantage for the Coyotes.

With fans closer to the court, fans will have more opportunities to yell nothing but encouragement to the home team.

Also, the opening of the new arena should see event attendance spike, which is vital as players want to have fans to admire their game. According to NCAA documents, USD only draws roughly half the crowd of its rivals to the north.

SEE B-BALL, PAGE B2

Men's basketball coach adjusts to life in Vermillion

Grant Bosiacki
Grant.Bosiacki@coyotes.usd.edu

In two days, it will be seven months since Craig Smith was announced as the new men's basketball head coach at the University of South Dakota.

For Smith, realizing it has been that long already seems crazy.

"It's really hard to believe that it's been seven months," Smith said. "It's gone really, really fast, but it's been an exciting time. The people here are fantastic."

Over the last seven months, it hasn't just been Smith who has had to get acclimated to life in Vermillion but also his entire family. Smith, who grew up in the small town of Austin, Minn., said he feels right at home at USD and in Vermillion.

"It's been a great transition and my family couldn't be happier," Smith said. "My wife is in heaven. We have a very nice house on an acre lot, and she's a country girl, so she loves it."

Since his hire, he's been constantly busy. Whether it's been recruiting or hiring a staff to work with, Smith said it no doubt has been an enjoyable process, but one that's required plenty of work.

"Living away from my family for three months, recruiting like crazy and trying to put a staff together and figuring out your team was a challenge, but I knew it would be when they hired me," Smith said. "The staffs I've been on have always taken over struggling programs and have been able to flip them around and we expect to do the same here."

The school announced the hire of the former University of Nebraska-Lincoln assistant coach last March. He left his family behind so his kids could finish out the school year. But he said now his four kids, Landon, 13, Brady, 11, Carson, 9, and Lauren, 4, are even starting to get used to Vermillion.

"Once school started they

started to meet a lot of people, especially when they got involved in sports," Smith said. "Plus, we've been having a lot of sleepovers recently, so I think they like that."

But he isn't just having fun. He realizes the adjustment period is nearing the end. His team's first game is less than a month away. They begin the season on the road against Utah State Nov. 14.

Assistant coach and former Jackrabbit Austin Hansen said only time will show how great of a coach Smith is.

"He does a really good job of bringing a lot of energy and excitement to practices and workouts," Hansen said. "He gets players' juices flowing."

Junior guard Casey Kasperbauer agreed with Hansen.

"Everything about him has been positive so far. He's really easy to play hard for because you know he holds everyone accountable," he said.



MALACHI PETERSEN | THE VOLANTE
Craig Smith, University of South Dakota men's basketball coach, splits the team into two groups for a scrimmage during practice Monday in the DakotaDome.

SEE SMITH, PAGE B3