

Around the horn with former Metro preps

Written by Mark Dukes

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One of my favorite pastimes is tracking the progress of former Metro area athletes in the college and professional ranks.

It's easy to follow someone like Zach Johnson on the PGA Tour. He was squarely on center stage Sunday in the final round of the Chevron World Challenge, locked up with one Tiger Woods in the final pairing. And many of the former local stars are easier to track when they're playing for Iowa, Iowa State, Northern Iowa and Drake because they're regularly on television, on radio or in the newspaper.

You have to work a little to keep up with others, though. Let's go around the horn with some of the former high school stars and what they're doing.

RYAN SWEENEY – This could be a newsworthy week for the former Jefferson and Xavier standout baseball player, as owners and general managers convene in Dallas for the annual Winter Meetings.

It was a year ago this week that Sweeney signed a one-year, \$1.4 million contract with the Oakland Athletics. He is up for salary arbitration this year and the A's have until Dec. 13 to tender a contract, otherwise he becomes a free agent.

Oakland figures to sign Sweeney because he will be one of the few experienced outfielders for the club. David DeJesus has moved on to the Chicago Cubs, signing a two-year contract. Josh Willingham and Coco Crisp also figure to sign elsewhere.

Those three players limited Sweeney's starts last season. Sweeney played in 108 games, batting .265. He's a .283 hitter in his career, which has included four seasons in Oakland. Whether Sweeney gets a big raise is questionable, mostly because of the uncertainty whether Oakland will be allowed to build a new stadium in San Jose and the dollars that will cost.

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KIAH STOKES – The former Linn-Mar star and Miss Iowa Basketball from last year is a solid player off the bench in her first season with the Connecticut Huskies.

Stokes is averaging 15 ½ minutes, 4.3 points and 4.6 rebounds. She leads the team with 13 blocked shots.

She recently had a reunion with former Ballard all-stater Taylor Greenfield, who is starting as a freshman at Stanford. UConn defeated Stanford Nov. 21, 68-58. Last winter, Linn-Mar and Ballard squared off in the U.S. Cellular Center in Cedar Rapids, with the Lions claiming a victory.

UConn has a big game Tuesday night against No. 4 Texas A&M. That will be shown on ESPN2 at 6 p.m.

TIA DAWSON – Less than a year removed from Washington High School, the 6-foot-2 Dawson is starting on the Dartmouth women's basketball team.

She is averaging 28 minutes per game, 5.8 points and 5.2 rebounds. She also leads the team in blocked shots.

JORDAN PRINTY – Printy has emerged as a standout at Indiana State, starting in all eight games for the Sycamores (6-2).

The former Linn-Mar star is averaging 9.3 points per game and leads the team with 18 3-point goals. You can see Printy in person soon, as Indiana State has games at Drake Dec. 28 and at Northern Iowa Jan. 4 in Missouri Valley Conference play.

KAYLON WILLIAMS – Now a senior at Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Williams is the second-leading

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scorer and top assist man for a 7-1 team. Its only loss was by 13 points to Michigan State, in which Williams scored 14.

Williams' college career has been a journey. He started at Evansville, went to Kirkwood Community College, then transferred to UW-Milwaukee. He led the Horizon League in assists last year, and this season is averaging 11.1 points and five assists per game.

Milwaukee plays at Northern Iowa on Saturday at 1 p.m.

CHRISTIAN FRENCH – The former Kennedy all-stater red-shirted in his first season on the Pac-12 champion Oregon football team.

Coaches and media have raved about French's size (6-5, 236) and speed (4.4 40) and believe he could develop into a dynamic tight end. But they also are quick to point out French had played only three years of football and will need development.

Oregon had two seniors and four freshmen among its tight ends this season. Senior David Paulson had 30 catches and six touchdowns. One of the freshmen, Colt Lyerla, had seven catches with five going for TDs.

(Mark Dukes is former sports editor of the Cedar Rapid Gazette. He is co-host of The Gym Class radio show weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM-AM 1600.)