

4 Mount Mercy teams heading to NAIA nationals

Written by Jim Ecker

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These are exciting times at Mount Mercy University with four of its fall sports teams headed to NAIA national tournaments this Saturday.

The men's and women's cross country teams, the men's soccer team and the women's volleyball squad have all qualified for the national events and will be playing on the same day.

"It's unprecedented, to be honest with you," said Mount Mercy athletic Paul Gavin, calling it the No. 1 accomplishment in school history in terms of collective achievement. "It's exciting."

The cross country teams will compete at the NAIA national meet in Charlotte, N.C., this Saturday morning. The men's soccer team will play at Missouri Valley College in the opening round of the NAIA national tournament on Saturday, and the volleyball squad will play at Dordt in the first round of their NAIA tournament on Saturday as well.

The soccer and volleyball tournaments begin at campus locations before moving to national sites for the final rounds. The men's soccer tournament will move to Delray Beach, Fla., for the Sweet 16 from Nov. 30 through Dec. 5. The volleyball tournament will move to the Tyson Events Center in Sioux City following the opening round.

Gavin became Mount Mercy's athletic director on Nov. 1 and is delighted the Mustangs have gotten his term off to such a strong start.

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"We've always had good teams here, but to see what's going on here the first few weeks has been wonderful," he said. "But I want it to be known, this shouldn't be the exception."

"This is what Mount Mercy athletics should be about in striving to get to this point and competing at a high level, winning conference titles and getting to national tournaments and making a run at it there."

Gavin led the Mount Mercy men's basketball team and men's golf squad to national tournaments as head coach before moving into the athletic director's chair.

This is the first trip to the NAIA national tournament for Coach Deb Marlin and the volleyball team. This is the second trip to the national tournament for Coach Amir Hadzic and the men's soccer team. The cross country teams, coached by Ryan Scheckel, have participated in national meets before, according to Gavin.

Mount Mercy's switch to the Heart of America Conference this year has paid immediate dividends in terms of reaching national events. Both of the cross country teams placed second at the Heart of America meet, but they qualified for nationals according to league and NAIA rules.

The men's soccer and women's volleyball teams have not begun competing in the Heart of America as the school's entry into the league is phased in, but both teams competed in the Association of Independent Institutions (All) conference this fall and qualified for the NAIA national events by placing second in their conference tournaments.

Gavin called the All events "wonderful" opportunities for Mount Mercy.

Mount Mercy will host the All postseason men's and women's basketball tournaments at the U.S. Cellular Center Feb. 26-28. Eight teams will participate in both tournaments, and the top three finishers in both events will advance to the national tournament. Mount Mercy will receive

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an automatic spot in the All conference tournament as the host school.