

# Johnsrud keeps on running

## Former W.C.H.S. runner competes with MSU Beavers

By Robin Wark

When Kara Johnsrud stood at the start line in September in Rapid City, S.D., the decorated runner was ready for a new experience.

Yes, the former Watford City stand-out had success at the prep level, including the State Track and Field Meet, but this was different. For the first time, Johnsrud was running a cross country event.

"Cross country is a lot different – physically and mentally. Everything is just different," the daughter of Kent and Laura Johnsrud said in a phone interview. "I like it a lot."

As a freshman at Minot State University, Johnsrud is competing both as a harrier and, this winter and in the spring, on the track. She did not compete in the sport in high school as it was not offered, she recalled, until she was a junior. By then Johnsrud had committed to playing volleyball and did not want to juggle two sports at once.

Stu Melby, Minot State University head track and cross country coach suggested Johnsrud try cross country after speaking with her high school coach, Greg Brown, who she praised for his support. Melby told Johnsrud, who usually runs the 400 and 800-meter events, that with the miles she was putting in during the summer she'd be able to handle the five-kilometer (three-mile) distance of women's college cross country.

She certainly has so far. Johnsrud cracked the Beavers top seven and posted a solid 23:37.98 time in her first meet. She was, unfortunately, hampered by an ankle injury in her second outing, but Melby has been very pleased with her progress.

"Every day she keeps getting stronger and more comfortable," he said in a phone interview. "I am excited about her future."

Johnsrud said she is getting the hang of the different workouts. She has appreciated and enjoyed the support of her teammates.

"On our team, we all push each

other and help each other during the races," Johnsrud said.

As well, she has enjoyed meeting new people, the level of competition and the travel. The Beavers are certainly happy to have her.

"She has a good attitude," Melby said. "She is willing to do the things that are asked. She is a good addition to the team."

While Melby has enjoyed having her on the cross country squad, the coach is already thinking about the spring.

"The big thing for Kara is looking at how it will make her better for track," he said.

As she did in high school, Johnsrud will be looked at to run the 400 and 800 events as well as compete on relay teams.

"I think she has the speed to help us with the 400 and the 4x400 relay," Melby said. "Getting some distance under her belt will help us with the 800."

Johnsrud first started competing in track and field in seventh grade. Over the years she has had great success, but when asked about her career highlights Johnsrud quickly pointed to her senior season. At the regional meet she was selected as the Senior Athlete of the Year. That was followed by a very successful State Meet.

Johnsrud helped two relay teams capture State titles and was part of two school record-breaking runs. The Wolves won the 1,600 and 3,200 relays and set the school record in the 1,600. Johnsrud helped break a record set by a squad she was a part of in 2006. At that time Johnsrud, Christine Bruins, Sibee Jokela and Samantha Johnson finished in 4:07.94. Last spring Johnsrud, Jokela, Kade Ross and Marti Quale set the record in 4:04.08. Johnsrud, Quale, Olivia Sundeen and Stephanie Deutsch also teamed up to win the 3,200 in 9:52.20.

Individually, in the 400-meter dash, Johnsrud finished third with a time of 1:00.26. The Wolves 800-me-



ter relay team placed third in a school record time of 1:46:84. The efforts of Johnsrud, Sundeen, Jokela and Ross bested the Wolves record (1:47.3) set back in 1978 by Debbie Sax, Robin Snyder, Rita Johnson and Tammy Fox.

Whether it has been a State Meet or a college cross country event, Johnsrud knows she always has the backing of her family. Her mother is a frequent face and voice at her daughter's competitions.

"I always know when she is there because I hear her because she is the loudest one," Johnsrud said.

She was also quick to note the support of her father and that of her older sister, Chelsey and nephew, Briar, who often comes to cheer her on.

"My family is big (for me)," she said. "If I am down, they're always there. They keep picking me up."

As for Johnsrud, she just keeps running. There are a few reasons why the freshman, who is undecided on a major, but is considering corporate fitness, is still lacing up her shoes.

"I really like being physically fit. It is fun and I enjoy the adrenaline rush in a race."