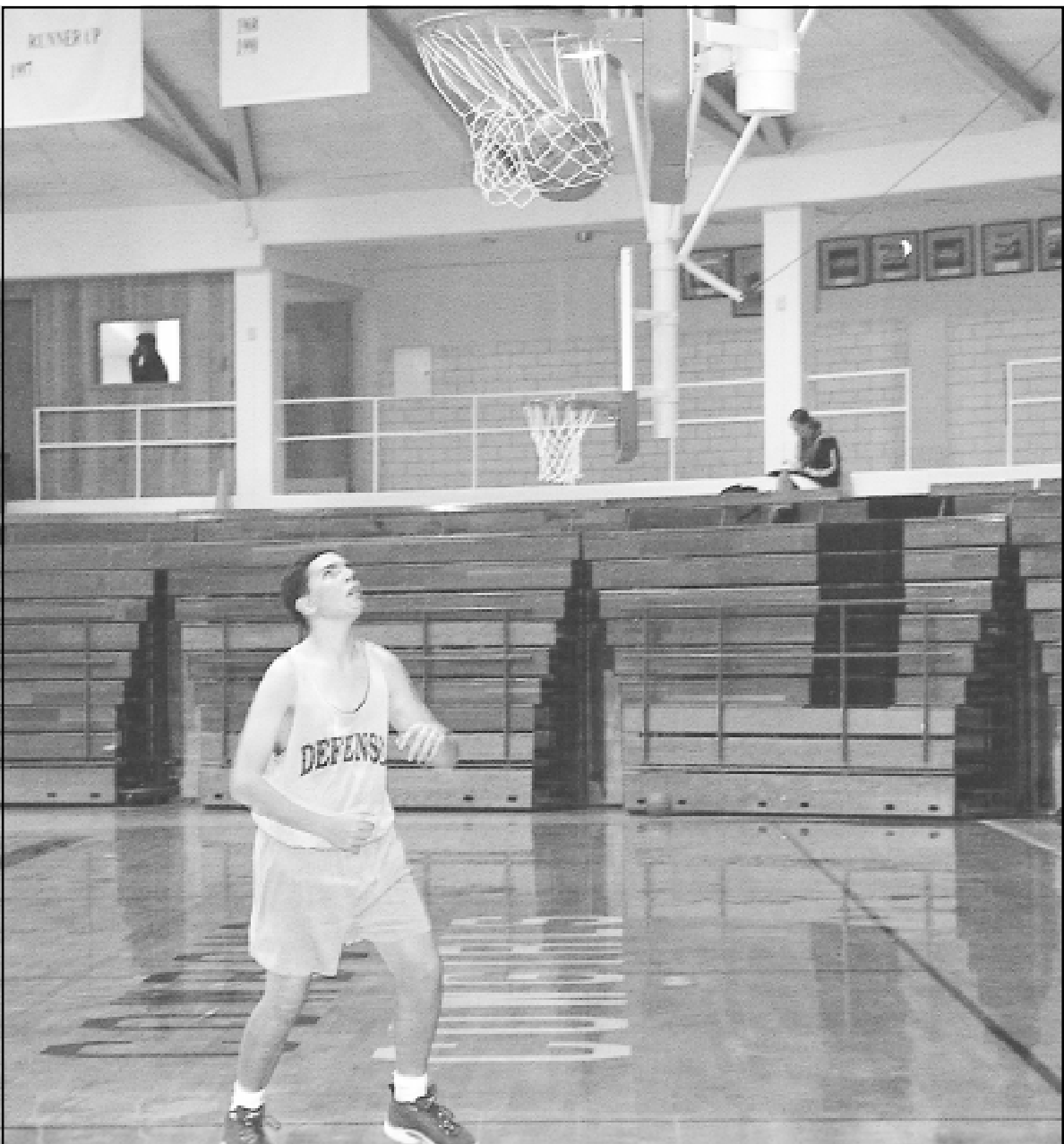


Season off to a good start



Michael Larson, a Goodland High player, sank a basket on the first day of practice. Practice for all winter sports started on Monday night, with the first game for the Cowgirls and Cowboys at home at 5:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 1 and the first wrestling match at St. Francis at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 2.

Photo by Dana Sulsberger/The Goodland Daily News

Broncos' rookie turns golden

DENVER (AP) — The Gold Rush returned to the Rocky Mountains, and not a moment too soon for the Denver Broncos.

Rookie linebacker Ian Gold returned his own blocked punt for a touchdown and forced a turnover on his only tackle Monday night in Denver's much-needed 27-24 victory over the Oakland Raiders.

"He made a couple of plays, the most obvious one the blocked punt," Broncos coach Mike Shanahan said. "He has great athletic ability, and the block was a big play that we needed at the time. It shifted the momentum of the game."

With the score tied at 10 late in the third quarter, Gold sprinted untouched through the middle and blocked Shane Lechler's punt a split second after it came off the kicker's foot.

"It almost went through my arms,"

Gold said. "I put my arms out, and thank God it didn't miss."

Gold, a running back during his first two years at Michigan, kept his feet after the block and chased after the loose ball. He bobbled it initially before scooping it up and running 12 yards for the score.

"I wasn't going to jump on the ball," he said. "I was a former tailback. I wanted to pick up the ball and show off a few of my skills."

When Gold reached the end zone, it marked Denver's first touchdown on a blocked punt since Rob Nairne scored on a 22-yard return against the New England Patriots on Nov. 11, 1979 — three months after Gold's first birthday.

"Obviously we had a communication breakdown of some kind," Raiders coach Jon Gruden said. "They were very opportunistic on special teams,

and that was a big play in the game."

Fellow linebacker Al Wilson was only 2 when Nairne scored, but he had a good idea what the celebration was like 21 years ago.

"I heard the fans screaming," he said. "I saw that Ian had blocked it and run it in. I believe that was the turning point in the game for us."

Playing behind Wilson, John Mobley and Bill Romanowski, Gold has been relegated primarily to special teams, but he made the most of his limited time on defense against the Raiders.

With Oakland threatening after William Thomas intercepted a pass by Brian Griese with 2:13 left in the second quarter, Gold charged around the left end and knocked the ball loose from Raiders quarterback Rich Gannon.

Denver defensive end Kavika Pittman recovered the fumble, and the Raiders failed to increase their 10-7 lead before halftime.

"I'm determined every day I go out, even if it's practice or only a walk-through," Gold said. "It's in my blood. I'm a competitor. My mother instilled that in me. I think I showed that tonight."

Gold said he planned to give the game ball to his mom, and he hoped his breakthrough performance would help shed an unwanted nickname created by his teammates.

"I have a tendency to kind of run down and not really pay attention to where I'm going. A lot of guys call me 'Crash Test Dummy,'" he said. "It's getting old, though."

Oklahoma State.

Stoops was asked what thoughts he had about Kansas State's 29-28 victory over Nebraska, which left the Wildcats in great shape to reach the title game and set up a rematch with the Sooners.

"I have no thoughts," Stoops said. "If we're in a position where that becomes a factor, I'll watch it with great interest and I'll have an opinion then."

No. 9 Kansas State (9-2, 5-2) needs only to beat Missouri this week to advance to the conference title game. The victory over Nebraska cleared the Wildcats' path to the North Division title, but coach Bill Snyder stressed that it didn't clinch it.

"Our approach was that it wasn't for the title, because it wasn't," he said. "This is the North Division championship game coming up, and that's the way we've approached it. I would hate to think anyone could lose sight of what's at stake here."

Young kids hit the mat

By Dana Sulsberger

The Goodland Daily News

Kids as young as 4 and 5 years old will start perfecting their wrestling skills in January with the Goodland Wrestling Club.

The club, for kids from as young as 3- up to sixth grade, has been in business for at least 20 years, said Randy Bahe, a club organizer.

The first information meeting was held Thursday, he said, and 70 kids came to sign up for the program.

"I'm sure we will get some more kids over the next couple of months," said Bahe, adding that registration is open until mid-January.

Last year, he said, 133 kids participated in the program and they are expecting to have about as many this year.

The first practice will be on Tuesday, Jan. 2, at 5:30 p.m. at Grant Junior High, said Bahe, and after that, practice will be every Monday and Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

"Kids don't have to make all the practices," he said. "We know how hard it is with kids that age to make it that regular."

Tournaments will be held throughout Kansas, he said, but kids can choose which tournaments they want to go to.

He said kids can go to all of the tournaments or none. The first tournament is in Hoxie on Saturday, Jan. 6.

"Some kids will travel as far as

Wichita to go to a tournament," he said, "and others will never go to a tournament and just come to practice."

Kids will start by learning take-down positions, Bahe said, and learn how to move so they aren't open to a take down. Then the kids will learn ways to escape when they are on the bottom and then ways to turn the opponent over and how to get back points once they are on top.

Many kids go on to high school wrestling and many have placed in the state wrestling tournament. Bahe listed 15 who had gone through the program and then done well once they were in high school.

"I am sure there are more that I am missing, too," he said.

The youngest kids in the program are 3, but, said Bahe, it is better if the kids are 4 or 5 when they start because they have a longer attention span.

The younger the kids start, he said, the easier it is for them when they get older. When kids start at 5 or 6 they are going to competitions with the advantage of several year's experience by the time they get older and often competing against kids without much experience.

"We have had kids start when they are in fifth and sixth grades," he said, "but it is more difficult for them in some cases because they are wrestling with kids with experience."

He said the important thing for the

kids to remember when they are older is to have fun and realize that they might not have as much experience as some kids they are competing against.

The club tries to get parents involved with their kids also, said Bahe. Parents are allowed onto the mat during practice to help the kids out.

"It gives them a chance to do something with their kids also," he said.

Parents and kids travel to tournaments together, too, he said, and develop a camaraderie.

"Children also make great friends with kids from out of town," said Bahe.

"One minute they will be wrestling on the mat and then they will be going to get a coke together in between matches the next minute."

Kids can still sign up through January by calling Bahe at 899-6116 or Robin Deeds at 899-6626. Kids need a birth certificate and \$25 for a wrestling card and need to watch a film before they can start practice. The program is for kids as young as 3 and up to 14. Kids in junior high and high school wrestling can sign up for the club after their season is over.

The team will have a web site up during the season at themat.com and Gordon Pettibone will be putting the clubs results on the web site throughout the season.

"The club provides the basics for kids to go into the high school with a head start," said Bahe.

Chiefs in for tough week

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — After losing two straight games and sinking to 28th in the NFL in total defense, the Kansas City Chiefs could be in for a tough week of practice.

Coach Gunther Cunningham even seemed to be making thinly veiled threats to his young defensive players in the wake of Sunday's 21-7 loss to a San Francisco team that had lost five in a row.

Asked if the defensive players were ready to "shake off" the reasons for their lack of effectiveness, Cunningham snapped, "They'd better be."

"If they don't shake it off, then I'm going to start shaking some guys around here," he said. "The way I'm going, the intensity I live with personally day-to-day, we've got to get something done. It's wearing me out having to adjust my life every two seconds to make sure they're OK. I think somewhere along the line they've got to take it on themselves to take care of the old coach, too."

For the second week in a row the Chiefs (5-5) failed to get any sort of running game going and got beat badly in time of possession. The 49ers, who came into the game ranked last in six defensive categories, held the ball for 36 minutes 10 seconds to Kansas City's 23 minutes and 50 seconds.

"When the defense gets out there they have to convert the third downs," Cunningham said. "This week (the 49ers) were 6-for-12 on first downs and 5-for-7 in the first half, when they scored three touchdowns. We can't let that happen."

William Bartee, a second-round pick from Oklahoma, may be about to unseat Patrick Dennis, another rookie, as starting cornerback.

Other changes could be pending at linebacker, where Mike Maslowski played well Sunday in place of Lew Bush. In addition, defensive end Eric Hicks may return this weekend against

Buffalo after sitting out three weeks with a knee injury.

Cunningham said he had a clear-the-air talk with his slumping team before practice Monday.

"The meeting centered around the defense, playing with emotion and excitement and tackling people," he said. "We're giving up five-minute drives left and right and when the offense gets on the field, we're not able to execute. We don't get the ball enough. Yesterday, we had the ball 10 drives and you don't win in the NFL with just 10 drives."

With Elvis Grbac's passing game not in sync, the Chiefs were again ham-

strung by lack of a running game. Against the 49ers, they ran just 15 times for 50 yards.

"I believe we can run the ball," said center Tim Grunhard. "Obviously there are a lot of people who believe we can't because we haven't shown it. You run the ball 21 times in two games, how do you know? We used to run the ball 21 times in one half."

The Chiefs are home Sunday against Buffalo after three consecutive trips to the West Coast, where they beat Seattle and lost to Oakland and San Francisco.

"It's about time," said Grunhard. "Especially when you're traveling 3,000 miles."

Avalanche finds new hero

DENVER (AP) — The Colorado Avalanche, with Peter Forsberg out for an indefinite period with a rib injury, needed a new hero.

So they found Joe Sakic, who delivered two goals — the second proving decisive at 3:56 of overtime — and had an assist as the Colorado Avalanche extended their unbeaten streak to five

games with a 3-2 victory Monday night over the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Sakic extended his point-scoring streak to six games. He has five goals and eight assists over that span. His linemate, Milan Hejduk, added a goal, and Patrick Roy made 27 saves for the Avalanche — 4-0-1 over the last five games.

Wildcats look to next game, not to Big 12 title game

By Owen Canfield

AP Sports Writer

Oklahoma and Kansas State have a huge game coming up.

No, it's not the Big 12 title game Dec. 2 in Kansas City. The coaches for each team say they're looking only at this week's opponents — Texas Tech for Oklahoma, Missouri for Kansas State — and no further.

"We still have two Big 12 South games remaining, so we have to be a little more focused" than teams closing out the season this week, Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops said Monday on the coaches' weekly conference call. "We're just focused on playing a good Tech team that's coming off an excellent win."

The top-ranked Sooners (9-0, 6-0 Big 12) took firm control of the South Division with a 35-31 victory over Texas A&M on Saturday. They finish the regular season with games at home against Tech and on the road against

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