

Tennis team gets seventh

The junior varsity Cowboy tennis team scored 21 points and placed seventh among 12 teams at the first meet of the season Monday in Garden City.

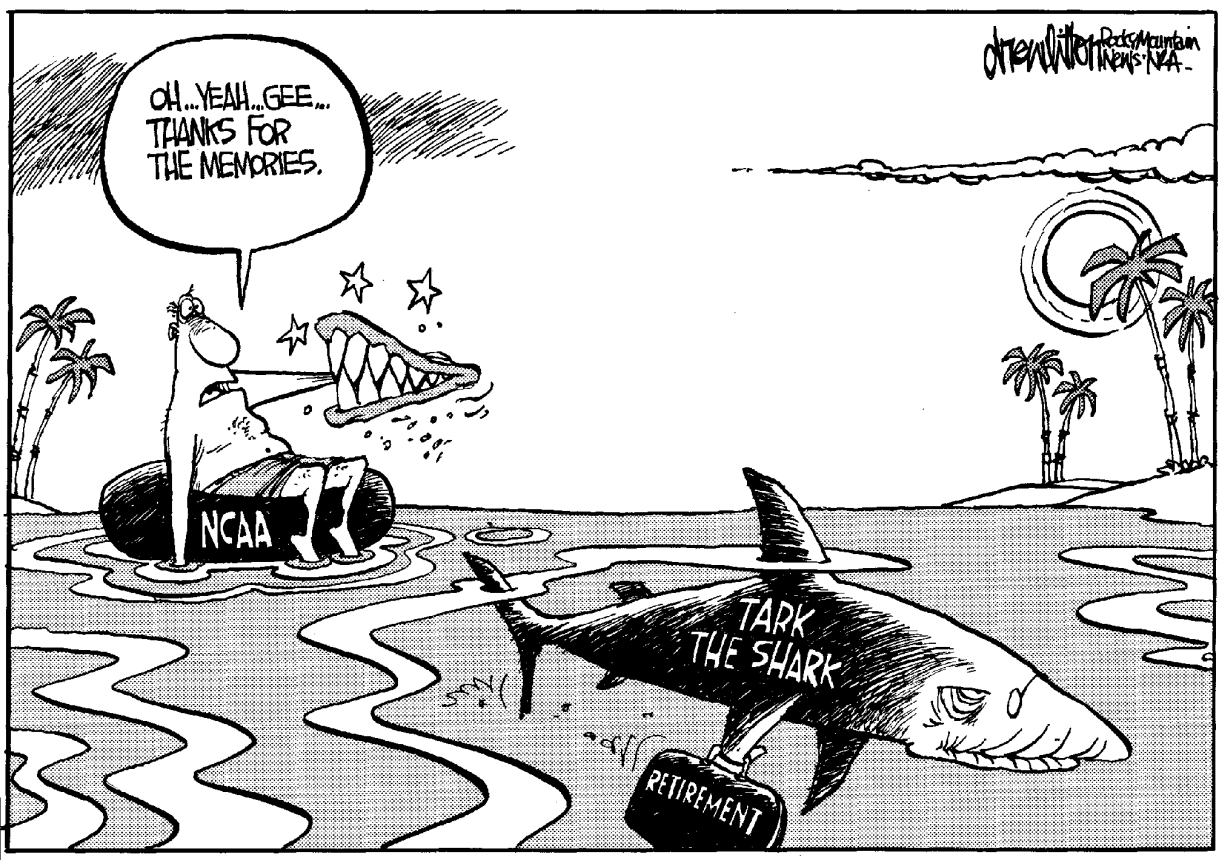
Coach Wallace Hansen said considering that only one Cowboy had played competitively before, he thought the

team did a good job. "I'm happy with the way the kids competed," he said, noting a few Class 5A and 6A schools attended. Goodland is a smaller Class 4A school.

Hansen said Jake Johnson and Matthias Goodley both placed sixth,

and each ended the meet with a 2-2 record. In doubles, Matthew Hurst and D.J. Sparks tied for sixth with a 3-2 record and Mark Pianalto and Brandon VanVleet, 0-4, tied for last place.

The varsity tennis team will travel to Larned on Tuesday for its first meet.



Avs not bothered by pressure

DENVER (AP) — The Colorado Avalanche are barely ahead of the San Jose Sharks in the Western Conference standings and are about to play road games against two teams fighting to get into the playoffs.

Judging by the laughter and smiles at practice Thursday, the pressure doesn't seem to be bothering them.

Colorado, which leads San Jose by three points in the race for the second playoff seed in the West, faces Dallas on Friday and St. Louis on Sunday.

"Playing big games at this time of the year, I think is the best thing for everyone," Colorado coach Bob Hartley said Thursday. "It brings the best out of everyone and it's going to prepare us better for the playoffs."

Colorado's rising confidence can be attributed to two factors: the end of its offensive struggles and the improving health of key players.

The Avalanche went into an offensive funk in March, scoring eight goals and getting shut out three times in a six-game stretch. They seem to have found their rhythm over the past week, scoring 17 goals in four games.

Colorado beat San Jose 3-2 on the road Friday in a game that had a play-

off-type atmosphere, and followed a tough loss to Phoenix Saturday with resounding victories over Nashville and Atlanta.

The Avalanche beat the Predators and Thrashers by a combined score of 11-1 after losing to those teams earlier in the season.

"Since the San Jose game, our offense has becoming good and we've been getting more chances," Colorado center Joe Sakic said. "Guys are bearing down and the energy level has picked up."

After struggling to keep players in the lineup all season, the Avalanche have finally gotten some good news on the health front in recent weeks.

All-Star forward Peter Forsberg, who has been out all season with foot injuries, started skating last week. He has increased his ice time to about 45 minutes per day and started skating with his teammates earlier this week.

The Avalanche have also been impressed with the progress of forward Milan Hejduk, who has missed 15 games because of an abdominal injury. Hejduk started skating again earlier this week and increased his ice time to about 40 minutes on Wednesday.

Both players are expected to be with the team on the road trip.

"We're trying to get everyone on the same page and everyone together on the team," Hartley said. "We think it's good team building at this time of the season."

The Avalanche also got Dan Hinote back against Atlanta on Wednesday after the forward missed 11 games because of shoulder surgery.

Colorado needs just three points to clinch its eighth consecutive Northwest Division title.

After Dallas and St. Louis, the Avalanche play Vancouver at home on Tuesday, Anaheim on the road next Thursday and end the season at home against the Stars on April 14.

Dallas is tied with Vancouver for ninth place in the West, three points behind Edmonton and Los Angeles.

"I think all understand the importance of that (Friday's) game," Avalanche goalie Patrick Roy said. "That could clinch a playoff for us and we're in a good battle with San Jose."

Defenseman Adam Foote will be back in the lineup against Dallas after serving a two-game suspension for a crosscheck against Phoenix.

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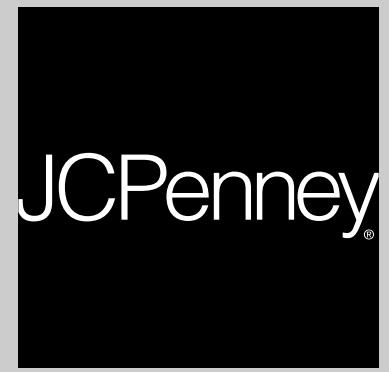
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