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MONTANA SWEEPS TENNIS COACHES OF THE YEAR

OGDEN, Utah (May 2, 2014) – The University of Montana swept the Big Sky Conference tennis Coach of the Year awards. Kris Nord has been named the men’s Coach of the Year. Steve Ascher has been named the women’s Coach of the Year.

This is Nord’s second Coach of the Year honor in the last three seasons. Overall, this is Nord’s third time receiving the honor. Ascher won his second Coach of the Year honor in the last three seasons. This is the third time a Grizzly tennis coach has won the women’s tennis coach of the year award. Before the formation of the Big Sky, Nord was named the women’s Coach of the Year in 1986 in the old Mountain West Athletic Conference.

The Coach of the Year was chosen in a vote by the league coaches earlier this week.

In Nord’s 32nd season with Montana, he led the Grizzlies to their first Big Sky Championship title. After going 9-1 in conference and earning the No. 2 seed in the Big Sky Championship, the Griz defeated No. 1 Weber State in the title match, 4-0.

For the first time in program history, the Grizzlies will represent the Big Sky in the NCAA Tennis Championship. On May 10, Montana will face No. 2 Oklahoma in the first round of the NCAA Tennis Championship.

Four players were named to the all-conference team under Nord. Andrew Warren and Se-mion Branzburg received first-team status, Tomasz Soltyka was named to the second team, while Ethan Vaughn was named honorable mention. Warren was also the Big Sky MVP.

Nord was hired as the head women’s and assistant men’s tennis coach in 1982. He became the head coach for both programs in 1986. Nord coached both programs until 2006, when Montana hired its first fulltime women’s coach.

Under Nord’s guidance, the men’s team has played in the postseason tournament every year since 1991.

A Missoula native, Nord was recruited to play football for the Grizzlies but opted to sign a tennis scholarship with UNLV, where he spent his freshman and sophomore years. Following his second year, Nord took a year off from college and went to Alaska, where he served as a teaching professional at Tanana Valley Community College in Fairbanks.

Nord enrolled at Boise State in the fall of 1979, and he finished out his collegiate tennis career with the Broncos. He was the Big Sky Conference champion at No. 3 singles and Boise State’s Big Sky Conference Scholar-Athlete in 1981. He then spent a year on the Satellite Circuit before being appointed to the Montana tennis coaching staff in 1982.

Steve Ascher has earned his second Big Sky Conference women's Coach of the Year honors.

In Ascher's sixth season as the head coach, he led the Grizzlies to an undefeated 9-0 conference record. This season, Ascher's Grizzlies snapped Sacramento State's 112-match winning streak against Big Sky opponents.

With the undefeated conference record, the Griz earned the No. 1 seed in the Big Sky Championship. After defeating No. 4 Portland State 4-1 in the semifinals, the Grizzlies' season ended in the Big Sky Championship match with a 4-3 loss to No. 3 Sacramento State.

Four players were named to the all-conference team under Ascher, along with the 2014 MVP. Haley Driver, Ashley Mackey and Sasha Carter received first-team status, while Laurence Pelchat earned second-team honors. Driver was named the MVP.

Montana has made the Big Sky Conference tournament each season under Ascher. The Grizzlies' back-to-back-to-back appearances in the championship match in 2012, 2013 and 2014 were the first time making the title match in program history.

Prior to taking the job at Montana, the Portland, Ore., native started his coaching career as an assistant with the University of Portland in 1997-98, Ascher moved on to assistant coaching positions at Millersville (Pa.) (1998-2000) and Davidson (N.C.) (2000-01).

Ascher returned to the Pacific Northwest after one season at Davidson, once again taking an assistant position at Portland. Ascher was hired by Portland State University in the summer of 2006 to rebuild a Viking tennis program that had been eliminated for budget purposes in 2002. Ascher has been the head coach of the Grizzlies since 2008.