

# Young Tanager Squad Looking For Continued Improvement



**TANAGERS:** Junior Beth Szymonski

**BY CASSIE BARTLETT**  
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VERMILLION — Despite graduating only a few seniors from last season, the Vermillion High School track and field team will have only a few seniors again on the roster this season. Head coach Leni Billberg said the team will be strong, although they are lacking upperclassmen.

"This year, we're looking forward to a lot of returners to our team—we didn't graduate very many seniors last season," Billberg said. "We graduated some quality athletes, but we have some nice returners. Our freshman class from last year has really stepped it up so we're going to see success with our sophomores."

Returning for his final season, senior Cody Olson has been the boys' team top-sprinter for the past three years. Billberg said she is looking forward to what he will accomplish this season.

On the girls' team, Billberg said one of their top-competitors will be junior Elizabeth Szymonski. Szymonski is the track team's lone-winner from state last year, competing in throws. This season, she will be a bigger part of the team, as she will not only take part in the field events, but in the track events as well after being injured the past couple seasons.

Billberg said there aren't very many standout athletes individually, but as a whole, the team will

be strong.

"We don't have a lot of amazing individuals in regard to statistics, but we have hard workers that by the end of the season, who knows what could happen," she said. "We're going to put together some really good relay teams that I think can be successful."

Compared to other teams in the region, Billberg said the competition will be tough. She said the stiffest competition in distance events will come from Beresford and Canton. One area where Vermillion will have an advantage over other teams will be their returning runners.

"We have returned most of our relays that were pretty inexperienced last year, whereas a lot of our region graduated a lot of their kids," she said. "We're not going to have that flashy runner like we've had in the past, but we're going to have a really solid team."

The team will compete in the Dan Lennon Invitational Monday at the DakotaDome in Vermillion — the first event of the season. Billberg said the team always looks forward to the first event, but there are others to look forward to this season. For the first time ever, Vermillion is hosting a "mini-meet" against Gayville-Volin, Dakota Valley and Elk Point-Jefferson. The difference between the mini-meet and others is that no scores are kept — it's just an opportunity for the kids to compete and see where they stand



## Vermillion Track 2011 Season Schedule

March 28	Dan Lennon	Dakota Dome	12:30 p.m.
April 5	EPJ Invitational	Elk Point	3:30 p.m.
April 7	VHS Booster Club	Vermillion	2:30 p.m.
April 9	Dakota Valley Invite	North Sioux City	11 a.m.
April 12	Canton Invitational	Canton	4 p.m.
April 14	Lennox Invitational	Lennox	4 p.m.
April 21	Lennox Booster Club	Lennox	4 p.m.
April 28	Yankton QB Relays	Yankton	4 p.m.
May 6	O'Gorman Invite	Sioux Falls	12 p.m.
May 6	Howard Wood	Sioux Falls	4 p.m.
May 7	Howard Wood	Sioux Falls	8 a.m.
May 12	Big 8 Conference	Madison	3 p.m.
May 19	Region 4A	Lennox	3 p.m.
May 27	State Meet	Madison	9:30 a.m.
May 28	State Meet	Sioux Falls	9:30 a.m.

against the competition in a friendly atmosphere.

The team is also looking forward to meets at Lennox and the favorite meet of the season—the Yankton QB Relays.

"The kids' favorite meet is the Yankton meet—they have one of the fastest tracks in the nation, so of course in the region," Billberg said. "We're really looking forward to running on a fast track."

Later in the season, the team will prepare for the Howard Wood Relays and then regions, where they will hopefully qualify some athletes for the state meet.

Billberg said the team was disappointed with last year's state finishes.

"Last year, we had some really sad things happen at state," she

said. "We finished just out of the finals in everything — we ran our best times but we were a tenth of getting into finals. We were ninth in two relays and tenth in another relay. This year will be really good for us — a little retribution, a little revenge."

In order to improve on last season's finishes, the team has set goals.

"Our goals are to see everybody improve. We'd really just like to see everybody step up, take one step forward, getting the team points instead of just a few points here and there," Billberg said. "Our throwers are going to be strong, our distance runners will be pretty strong. Now we just need to get some good relays together."

## YHS TRACK

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second in the state a year ago.

"Every year we look at our roster and, no matter who we graduated, we see someone there who can pick up the slack," Youmans said. "We've got some great girls back that have state meet experience."

Headlining that list is Rachel Weinandt, the defending champion in the 800-meter run. Weinandt, though, suffered a knee injury this past fall and is working hard to return to form.

Junior Jenna Grossenburg, who placed in both the 1600 (8th) and 3200 (5th), and freshman Whitlee Larson, who placed seventh in the 800, headline the returning distance runners. Seniors Angie Dvorak (100 hurdles) and Emily Anderson (high jump) each return after third place finishes.

The Gazelles have 76 athletes on the roster, including 11 seniors, nine juniors and several experienced underclassmen.

"Depth will be our advantage," Youmans said. "We should have at least one quality girl in every event. It isn't always about having a lot of kids on one or two races. You have to be able to spread things out."

Youmans expects those athletes to give the Gazelles a chance at another ESD title.

"I'd say this about any team. Until somebody beats you, you have to believe that you're the team to beat," he said. "At the state level, the girls come back as runners-up, and we don't



**GAZELLES:** Senior Emily Anderson, third in Class AA high jump last season

want to lower expectations. We've been up in the top four for 10-plus years. Outside of Rapid City Stevens, there's not another program that can say that."

While the boys have 13 seniors and 13 juniors on the roster, they return just one medal winner, junior Connor Fitzsimmons, who finished sixth in the triple jump at state last season.

"This will be a test of how good a job we can do as coaches," Youmans said of the boys' team, which includes 20 sophomores and 21 freshmen. "We're

taking the old 'lumps of clay' approach. Talent-wise, we have some good kids in a lot of events. We just have to mold them."

The Bucks return several athletes who just missed out on state a year ago.

"We had some pretty good athletes that were right on the bubble last year," Youmans said. "For example, Neil Hohenthaner (Sr.) is a kid that could make a big difference this year. Connor Fitzsimmons got better every time he competed last year."

Yankton could make a return to the team's historical form in the throwing events. The Bucks were a dominant force in the throws until recent years.

"Field events are a place where we could run the table," Youmans said. "We could get back to dominance in Yankton throws."

The Yankton boys just missed the state podium last season, finishing fifth. But the Bucks are looking to get back on the stand this year, not just as a boys' team but with the boys and girls combined.



**BUCKS:** Junior Connor Fitzsimmons, sixth in Class AA triple jump in 2010

"Our goal is a combined team championship," Youmans said. "There are not many teams in the state that can say they have a great track team, not just a great boys' or girls' team. We were happy when our girls won ESD last year, but not when the boys didn't. We want to come together and have a great state meet."

Yankton has five home meets

this season, including three in a nine-day span from April 19-28. The Bucks and Gazelles open the outdoor season April 5 with a quadrangular at Sioux City East, and the home portion of the season April 12 with a triangular against Mitchell and Brandon Valley.



**BUCKS:** Senior Cody Ulmer, Second-Team All-State Outfielder

## BASEBALL

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Mike Janish, Josh Teichroew and Cody Ulmer (an all-state second team outfielder), Alec Sprakel, Heath Arens and Cameron Schiltz figure to all see time on the mound.

Additionally, McClemons said that juniors Alex Wagner, Alex Mueller and Jordan Groves (who moved to town two years ago) should also figure into the pitching fold.

"That'll be our biggest question mark," McClemons said of the pitching prospects. "The good news is a lot of guys threw some last year. We've got some guys who are definitely capable, it's just a matter of being confident and not trying to do too much."

While there may be concerns over pitching, offense does not figure to be much of an issue for Yankton.

The Bucks graduated short-stop Derrik Nelson (now at Mount Marty) and catcher Zach Johnson, but return depth to the

### Yankton Baseball

#### 2011 Season Schedule

March 31	Bon Homme	Riverside Field	7 p.m.
April 2	Harrisburg	Riverside Field	TBD
April 5	Brandon Valley	Riverside Field	5 p.m.
April 8	Vermillion	at Vermillion	5 p.m.
April 9	Brookings	Riverside Field	2 p.m.
April 13	Vermillion	Riverside Field	5 p.m.
April 16	Sioux Falls Roosevelt	Sioux Falls	noon
April 19	Sioux Falls Washington	Riverside Field	5 p.m.
April 22	Brookings	at Brookings	noon (DH)
April 26	Sioux Falls Washington	Sioux Falls	5 p.m.
April 29	Sioux Falls Lincoln	Riverside Field	5:30 p.m.
May 3	Mitchell	Riverside Field	6 p.m.
May 5	Brandon Valley	Brandon	5 p.m.
May 9	Sioux Falls Lincoln	Sioux Falls	5:30 p.m.
May 11	Bon Homme	Tabor	7 p.m.
May 13	Mitchell	Mitchell	6 p.m.
May 17	Sioux Falls Roosevelt	Riverside Field	6 p.m.
May 21	Region Tournament	TBD	TBD
May 24	Class A Wild Card Game	TBD	TBD
May 30	State A Tournament	Sioux Falls	TBD

other seven positions on the field. Kory Bromley (Sr.) will slide into the starting catcher role, and will also provide another bat to an already deep offense.

McClemons said Janish, Sprakel and Trevor Bailey (Sr.) will battle for the 1-3 spots in the lineup, while Ulmer, Schiltz,

Arens, Nik Davis (Sr.) and Devin Gullikson (Sr.) should slide back into the middle-of-the-order spots.

Evaluating the lineup pre-season, McClemons called it "one of the deepest in the state."

"If we're going to be as successful as we want to be, we're going to have to be able to put

some runs on the board," he said. "In the past, they've been able to use the bunt effectively, and I'm sure that's something we'll do again."

"One through nine, we should be able to put out a good lineup."

Yankton opened its season March 31 with a varsity game against Bon Homme and follows with consecutive home matchups with Harrisburg (April 2) and Brandon Valley (April 5).

In Region 1A, Sioux Falls Washington graduated nine seniors but brings back a quality group of kids. Sioux Falls Lincoln and Brandon Valley will also pose a threat to Yankton's hopes of a repeat berth in state.

"Our region is pretty open again," McClemons said. "Lincoln returns a lot of kids, Brandon Valley graduated their top pitcher, but has a lot of experience coming back."

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## YHS TENNIS

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their system in hopes of an equal or better result at the ESD Conference meet in Aberdeen on May 13.

"The thing I'm looking for-

ward to the most is competing in that ESD Conference meet," Muth said. "It's our goal everytime that we take the court that we are representing Yankton High School and the Yankton community in a good way."

"Anytime that we are playing anyone in the ESD, we want to be giving it our all."

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