

Vermillion Baseball Program Stacked For Another Strong Season

BY ALAN DALE
Vermillion Plain Talk

VERMILLION – Is Vermillion a baseball town? Maybe, but it would most likely depend on who someone asks.

Yet, there is no disputing that the sport has taken front stage as arguably the one that has brought out the most consistent success over recent years.

In 2011, Jason Gault led the Tanagers of Vermillion High School to the South Dakota High School Baseball Association (SDHSBA) title and the 16th year head coach enters 2015 with hopes of making things interesting once again.



Vermillion's Brandon Mockler

The Tanagers opened their season March 30 at Dakota Valley.

Vermillion (13-5 in 2014) comes off a Region 1B title game loss to Parkston and will hope to overcome some key losses if they hope to win the 1B-East and make a move toward a state berth.

"We have to be a team that hustles and gets after it every day because we don't have a lot of power hitters and we're playing in a wood bat league," Gault said. "We have always really preached, no matter what kind of team we had, that we were going to hustle, play good defense, and throw strikes. We are going to pitch to bats instead of throwing strikeouts."

The players believe it's more of a matter of just re-injecting the program with that winning Tanager DNA.

"We've never approached anything like it's a rebuilding year but more that we just reload every year," senior Jack Brown said. "We have some young guys coming up that are pretty good and we have sophomores that will play varsity and play well."

"A lot of guys play hard, fly around, hustle. We don't have the biggest guys – ever – but we have athletes across the board, class guys, and good pitchers."

The Tanagers will aim to replace departed players Jayce Huska, Ty Iverson, Ethan James, and Regan Bye.

Gault will need to in order to navigate through a tough 1B-East featuring Dakota Valley, Beresford, and Elk-Point Jefferson.

The 1B-West includes Parkston, Bon Homme-Scotland, Wagner-Avon-Lake

Andes, and Turner-Hutch.

"The East is tough, Dakota Valley and Beresford are going to be tough," Gault said. "Elk Point-Jefferson had some young kids who were out there that I thought if you give them another year they would be tough. It's an absolute crapshoot to figure out who the powerhouse is going to be."

"Starting out with Dakota Valley is going to be a good test for us."

Gault has returning veterans Jack Brown, Travis Weber, Brandon Mockler, and Carter Kratz in the field, while the staff includes ace Jacob Odens, Hunter Christopherson, Kratz, Cole Anderson, and Carter Andre. Andre is back on the diamond after a number of years away from the game.

"We'll be young and we'll have some older guys that have been there and done that," Gault said. "We are hoping the young guys get on their backs and that we play some small ball. We are going to be pretty fast. An important aspect of our game is we are going to either have to steal second or sacrifice bunt just to get guys into position. We try to put the pressure on opposing pitchers by putting runners in scoring position."

The team's arms are coming along fine, according to Gault.

"Jake, Hunter, and Carter (Kratz) have been guys who have been on the hill in clutch situations and have done a nice job," Gault said. "I am confident they are guys

BASEBALL		
3/30	at Dakota Valley	5 p.m.
4/1	at Yankton	5 p.m.
4/8	at Beresford-Centerville	5 p.m.
4/13	vs. Elk Point-Jefferson	5:30 p.m.
4/15	at Wagner/Avon/Lake Andes	5 p.m.
4/17	vs. Dakota Valley	5 p.m.
4/24	at Elk Point-Jefferson	5:30 p.m.
5/2	vs. Parkston	1 p.m.
5/3	vs. Turner-Hutch	2 p.m.
5/6	vs. Beresford-Centerville	5 p.m.
5/8	vs. Bon Homme-Scotland	5 p.m.
5/12	at Dakota Valley	5 p.m.
5/25-29	Districts First Round	TBD
6/1	Region Finals	TBD
6/6	State B Championships (Sioux Falls Stadium)	TBD

that will locate fastballs and allow hitters to put balls in play, but hit their pitches."

Odens said last year the Tanagers' collective heads were too big when they were defeated in Legion ball by Dakota Valley, despite being the heavily favored top seed.

"That definitely (fueled their offseason)," Odens said. "We have to know the level of your talent and know who you are. Know your level of skill and how your teammates are."

These guys know each other, they know the past, they know what is expected of a Vermillion baseball player.

"There is always an expectation," Brown said. "Anything else besides making the state tournament is considered an off year. We didn't make the state tournament last year and it was sort of a shock."

"If we give it 100 percent, or give it our all I can live with that. (But not making it to state), that's tough. We want to win a championship."

Tanager Tennis Squad Continues To Grow

BY ALAN DALE
Vermillion Plain Talk

VERMILLION – Tennis in Vermillion isn't an activity that rises to the front of line for peoples' attention.

Yet there is proud group of just under two dozen young men who are hoping to represent Vermillion High School's tennis program this spring with a bit more edge and earn a lot more positive results.



Vermillion's Joe Ford

Fourth-year head coach Betsy Hughes hopes to see her squad improve from last year where they won one dual match and saw a little progress at the state level.

"The kids have to have an ability to keep playing when they are frustrated and these kids really do and I am proud of them for that," Hughes said. "They are playing so hard and are totally self-motivated and dedicated. They want to play so much better than they were and they are. They are playing so much better now than they were at the end of last season. That's definitely what we want."

The season starts for the Tanagers on April 7 at 4 p.m. when they host Luverne (Minnesota).

Everyone is back from last year and Hughes said a lot of her players spent a lot of time studying the game and playing when they could during the off-season.

With hopes for improvements at the high school's tennis courts, the team practices behind Vermillion Middle School and plays its home matches at the University of South Dakota.

"The numbers are good and the kids that come out are great," Hughes said. "What we need and what we are hoping for is more organization at the community level. Right now most of tennis comes from the high school and from families who support the kids who play. If we could spread out our base instead of having such a small number of people who come through (the influence ill grow)."

"We need the broader base of support and more kids playing at a younger age and loving it. We need some new blood, new energy and some people who are really committed to the game of tennis overall who could

come in and really work with kids to help them see the sport as something high profile."

In the meantime Hughes returns junior Sam Craig who won a match in both singles and doubles last year during the state meet and senior Jacob Ford who battled at No. 1 singles for the Tanagers.

"We aren't the No. 1 team in the state, but we play," Ford said. "We know we aren't that great, but we'd like to win a few matches and we won our first (dual) last year for the first time in (three years)."

"There is definitely the underdog advantage in Vermillion. If we call ourselves the worst team in the state, come to practice late, leave early, well then...but if we come to practice early, stay late, and work our butts off – which is what we are doing – and get as much tennis in as possible – we totally want to change our status."

Craig's modest success at state has given him more confidence to proceed toward progression heading into this season.

BOYS' TENNIS		
4/7	vs. Luverne	4 p.m.
4/14	vs. Brandon Valley	4 p.m.
4/21	vs. Yankton/Washington	4 p.m.
4/24	at Mitchell Quad	4 p.m.
4/27	at S.C. North	4 p.m.
4/28	vs. Yankton	4 p.m.
5/2	at Brookings	10 a.m.
5/4	Yankton/Pierre/at Mitchell	1 p.m.
5/8	vs. S.C. East	4 p.m.
5/11	at S.F. Roosevelt	4 p.m.
5/14	at S.F. Lincoln	4 p.m.
5/16	Madison Inv.	9 a.m.
May 21-23 State (Sioux Falls)		9/8:45

"It gives me the winning attitude that I can win more," Craig said of his state victories. "In the summer I played tennis a lot. We carried over the varsity from last year and as a whole we put a lot of time in. I'd say we played at least four times a week."

"We have the power to push ourselves," Craig said. Hughes believes the team could do some solid things this season.

"You have to start somewhere and I think we can win 3-4 matches," Hughes said. "At state, I think we could have some singles and doubles teams make it further into the tournament."

Raiders Track And Field Program Excited About New Home



Kelia Barta, near, and the Gayville-Volin track and field team has a new track to train and compete on in 2015.

GV To Host Region 5B In May

BY ADRIENNE KUSEK
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GAYVILLE – For the first time, Gayville-Volin has a proper place to practice track and field.

"It gives us a chance to take pride in our program," girls' coach Jeremiah Dibley said of the new track, which will hold its first meets this spring – including the Tri-Valley Conference and Region 5B meets.

One of the best things about the track is it gets Gayville-Volin's runners off

the streets for practice.

"It's nice to be able to work in a safe facility. We don't have to be on the roads as much. We can practice exchanges and things like that," Dibley said.

Safety was especially an issue for the throws events for Gayville-Volin.

"The new track means just about everything to a guy like me who coaches throw," throws coach Tom Rice said.

"For the last eight years we have been throwing shot and discus out of a parking lot into a baseball field, and now we have a facility we have a facility that rivals anything in the state as far

as the size and even from a safety standpoint having the cages up."

Other events now have real places to work on their events. Before, there wasn't a nice place to work on any jumping events, and now Gayville-Volin has a home for all events on the track.

"The hurdles were an event that especially benefited from the new track," boys' coach Larry Buffington said.

The best part of the track according to the athletes is simple: Practicing on it.

"Being able to run on it is really exciting, and making new records and new experiences," jumper Viola Ishmel said.

"It's really cool because we've never had one before."

Before now, Gayville-Volin has never hosted a track meet. This upcoming season they are hosting three, including the Region 5B meet.

"We will be able to bring more schools together and bring more people to the town," Ishmel said.

Hosting track meets require a lot of volunteer workers to help run events. The community has really come together already to help out according to Dibley.

"Our community helped us fundraise, our community wanted this for our kids, and we did it together," he said.

VHS Golf

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in really good condition and gets us ready for other courses that are harder."

With a chip on their broader shoulders from all their weight lifting and with a will to prove what they can do, the next chapter promises to be an interesting one.

"We definitely have the capacity to be better than (a Top 5)," Moran said. "Last year we got fifth, but we were disappointed in ourselves. We went in the first day and thought we were doing great and then..."

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Menno Track & Field

March 24Dan Lennon (Vermillion)noon
April 7Scotland Inv.2:30 p.m.
April 14	.....Rotary Relays (Centerville)	.....1 p.m.
April 17	.....Avon Inv.	.....4:30 p.m.
April 21	.....Tri-State Inv. (Gayville)	.....3 p.m.
April 23	.....Flyer Inv. (Freeman)	.....1 p.m.
April 30	.....Erv Ptak Relays (Menno)	.....3:30 p.m.
May 1-2	.....Howard Wood Dakota Relays (Sioux Falls)	.....TBD
May 5	.....Don Dieder Relays (Freeman)	.....1 p.m.
May 14Combelt Conf. (Menno)1 p.m.
May 21Region 5B (Gayville)10 a.m.
May 29-30State Meet (Rapid City)TBD

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