

# Gazelles Open Softball Season With Veteran Squad

BY KEITH A. BROCKBERG  
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The Yankton Gazelles softball team issued a surprise during last year's South Dakota State Softball Tournament, and they have the pieces in place to add to that finish in 2012.

The Gazelles, who finished with a 17-14 mark, went into the tournament as the eighth seed and finished fourth.

Yankton coach Bernie Goeden, who will be coaching the Yankton girls for a 14th season, returns seven letter-winners from the 2011 team along with junior Brooke Loecker, who lettered in 2010.

"We have a pretty good nucleus coming back with eight letterwinners," Goeden said. "We're looking at finishing higher than we did at last year's state tourna-

ment, and we have a good chance to do that," Goeden said.

Seniors who return are Hannah Horn, Tayler Hutchison, Jessica Wirth, Karlee Kozak and Kourtney Erickson.

The Gazelle juniors are Loecker, Abby Schulte, Alisa Ruzicka, Brynn Albers, Jennifer Feilmeier and Kaylyn Peterka.

Andriana Sprakel and Jaclyn Arens return as sophomore letter-winners. Other returning sophomores are Heather Hauer, Danielle Schmidt and Madison Dangler.

Arens will manage the bulk of the Yankton pitching duties while Peterka and Dangler battle to back her up.

The Gazelle infield should be comprised of Wirth at third, Kozak at shortstop and Sprakel at second base.

Though the Gazelles opened their season Monday, the early season version may

not resemble the finished product.

"Probably the first part of the season, we'll get the girls used to their roles," said Goeden. "Wins aren't too important during the early part of the season; it's a feeling-out approach at the beginning of the season, and we'll try to get the girls used to their roles."

With their returning experience, Yankton hopes to incorporate all of the facets of the game in to a winning season.

"We should be a pretty solid defensive team," Goeden said. "For us to reach our goals, we're going to have to play the defense we're capable of."

"Our hitting can be pretty good this year," Goeden said. "The girls coming back have spent a lot of extra time to improve on their hitting and it could pay off."

The Gazelles also hope to add an ele-

ment of speed to the game this year.

"We have some team speed we'll try to incorporate into our offensive scheme and we'll try to take advantage of that at times," Goeden said.

As the fall season commences, Sioux Falls Washington leads the AA pack.

"They have the best pitcher in the state and that's a pretty big deal," Goeden said of the Warriors. "Rapid City Stevens should be tough and Sioux Falls Roosevelt is pretty good then it's pretty wide open after that."

Goeden is assisted by Bob Cabalka, who has teamed with Goeden for all of his 14 years. Jon Andersen and Tiffany Townsend will coach the Gazelle JV squad while Kim Velk, Sean Cordell, Mark Velleck and Amanda Sparks will coach the Yankton middle-school girls.

## Interceptions Must Increase For Vikings To Improve In '12

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. (AP) — The Minnesota Vikings tied for the league lead last season in sacks, so opposing quarterbacks should've been flustered into forcing plenty of bad throws that the secondary could take the other way.

But rarely did that happen against this depleted group of defensive backs. The Vikings matched the NFL's worst interception total in 2011.

"I don't know the exact number we had last year," cornerback Antoine Winfield said.

Eight.

"That's it?" Winfield said, shaking his head. "That's pretty low." Only seven came from the secondary. All-Pro defensive end Jared Allen, who was busy applying all that pressure with his 22 sacks, had an interception in the season opener.

"We had a lot of opportunities last year. We just didn't catch 'em," said Winfield, who appeared in only five games because of a strained neck and then a broken collarbone. "That's the main thing. You'll have chances. Just got to come up with the ball."

Defending the pass has more or less been a decades-long problem for the Vikings, who have ranked 26th or worse in the NFL in yards passing allowed in six of the past 10 seasons. In touchdowns given up through the air, they've ranked 21st or lower in the league in six of the past 10 years.

In 2011, no NFL team surrendered more than the 34 passing scores against them, 25 of which came during a nine-game streak without a single interception by the Vikings over the period from Oct. 16 through Dec. 18.

This is an area that must be improved if the Vikings (29th in the preseason AP Pro32 rankings) are going to put that 3-13 record of last season in the past, particularly in this increasingly pass-driven league. They're banking on an influx of new players and the return of others who missed time last season to make this more of a formidable group.

At safety, rookie Harrison Smith — drafted late in the first round out of Notre Dame — is on track to start next to second-year player Mistral Raymond, a sixth-round draft pick who started five games down the stretch in 2011. Both Smith and Raymond showed some signs of ability in Friday's exhibition game against Buffalo.

Winfield is 35, but he's still one of the best tacklers in the NFL for his size. Whenever there are more than two wide receivers on the field, he'll move inside to the slot to better maximize his skills and keep him from being overexposed to speedier, bigger opponents.

That's where Chris Cook comes in. He played in only six games last year before being arrested on a felony domestic assault charge. Now acquitted, Cook has returned this year trying to reward the Vikings for their patience with him.

"He's coming along the way we think he should, and we're just waiting to see how high that ceiling is," defensive coordinator Alan Williams said.

Veterans Chris Carr and Zack Bowman were signed as free agents for depth at cornerback, and Marcus Sherels — the primary punt returner last season — is also in the mix.

But the player who has caught the most eyes at that position is rookie Josh Robinson, the third-round draft pick from Central Florida who ran the fastest recorded time in the 40-yard dash at the NFL scouting combine earlier this year at 4.33 seconds.

"We have high hopes for him," coach Leslie Frazier said. "We hope he is going to be a major factor in our secondary this season."

Robinson, slowed by an injury to one of his hamstrings at the beginning of training camp, could be the nickel back this year. He is well aware of the interception deficit the Vikings had before his arrival.

# USD Men Headed To Canada

Coyotes To Play Three Exhibition Games North Of The Border This Weekend

BY JEREMY HOECK  
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An early opportunity to gauge strengths and weaknesses three months before the season? Sure, why not.

For the University of South Dakota men's basketball team, though, that means traveling north of the border for a weekend series.

The Coyotes will get that chance this weekend, as they will play three exhibition games in Canada. USD will face the University of Winnipeg on Friday and Saturday, and then will travel to the University of Manitoba on Sunday.

"With all the new guys, this is good to get us ready," junior center Trevor Gruis said Monday. "You can tell the chemistry is a lot higher leading up to the trip. In all the practices, the guys brought energy."

The program had planned to schedule an international trip this year, assistant coach Joey James said, and had examined options in Vancouver, Toronto and the Bahamas. An NCAA rule allows schools to participate in international trips once every four years.

"This is a great opportunity for our young guys and those new guys who sat out last year, to go up there and compete and face college players," said James, who enters his 10th season on the bench.

A trip to Canada follows a similar path taken by South Dakota State and North Dakota State over the past two years. The Jackrabbits traveled to Canada in 2010 and the Bison made the trek last year.

The team leaves today (Tuesday) for the 8.5-hour drive north on Interstate 29. They will spend parts of Wednesday and Thursday sight-seeing, and will hold their 10th pre-season practice in

*"It's nice to see some other teams and gauge yourself that way."*

TREVOR GRUIS

Canada — the limit per NCAA rules for pre-season trips.

For a team coming off a 10-18 season (5-13 in the Summit League) and with eight new faces joining the fold, such an early test could pay dividends, James said.

"It gives us a measuring stick for what we need to work on once we get back," he said.

Each of the last two seasons, the Coyotes opened their season at the University of Nebraska — no doubt a tough barometer right out of the gate.

"The past few years, we've rolled into Nebraska but we weren't sure where we really were," Gruis said. "It's nice to see some other teams and gauge yourself that way."

Of the 15 players on the roster, nine are entering their first or second year with the program. The only returning starter is Gruis, who averaged 11.3 points and 6.7 rebounds last season.

Back for the Coyotes this season will be Gruis, Jordan Boots (Sr., G), Steve Tecker (Jr., G), Brandon Bos (So., G), Jared Bartling (Jr., F), Jake Krogman (So., G) and Jack Foley (So., G).

New to the program are transfers Tyler Larson (Jr., G), Adam Thoseby (So., G) and Karim Rowson (Jr., G), as well as freshmen Casey Kasperbauer (G), Tyler

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South Dakota's Trevor Gruis gets past Texas State's Brooks Ybarra, 2, and Matt Staff for a lay-in during the second half of their ESPN BracketBusters game last season at the DakotaDome. Gruis and the Coyote men will travel to Canada for three exhibition games next weekend.

## Nebraska Records 17-1 Win At LLWS

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. (AP) — The kids from Kearney, Neb., have earned the state's first-ever win at the Little League World Series — and set a tournament record, too. The Midwest champs muscled up at the plate Monday to beat Germany's Ramstein Air Base 17-1. Thirteen-year-old Jared Wegner went 3 for 4 with a homer and five RBIs in the game delayed by rain and played under sometimes sloppy conditions.

Nebraska scored 15 runs alone in the second, a single-inning record for a World Series game.

The boys were relegated to the consolation round after losing their first two games of the double-elimination tournament. Friends and family are planning a big celebration back home in Kearney.

First, Nebraska plans to play an exhibition game with another World Series rookie, Uganda, on Wednesday morning. Uganda is the first team from Africa to advance to youth baseball's biggest tournament.

Kearney's kids are also rather enjoying their new-found stardom. Besides playing baseball, 13-year-old Blake Quintana, who went 2 for 3 with two runs, said his favorite part of the experience was signing autographs and taking pictures.

"Ha, a celebrity," skipper Brad Wegner said with a laugh.

Tyler Woodberry had a hit and RBI for winless Germany. The players' parents serve or work at the U.S. military installation overseas.

The Ramstein bunch plans to stay the rest of the week and attend a Yankees game in New York next week.

Both teams even had fun in the dugouts during the delay, where Nebraska second baseman Matt Masker, 13, showed off his dance moves to the hip hop song "Teach Me How to Dougie" by Cali Swag District.

## MVFC Member Indiana State On The Rebound

Football: Sycamores Host USD Oct. 27

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (AP) — Shakir Bell sits across a table in a small conference room, shaking his head.

He still can't believe the tales he heard about Indiana State's 33-game losing streak, its 2-60 mark over 5 1/2 seasons or the players who preferred anything over winning games.

It makes it tough to fathom how much has changed over the last four years, since Trent Miles took over as Sycamores coach in 2008 and Bell became arguably the school's biggest recruit since Larry Bird. What Bird did for Indiana State basketball in the 1970s is what Bell hopes to do for a football program that has finally shed its image as a perennial loser and started talking openly about a national championship.

Dallas is home to this year's Football Championship Subdi-

vision title game Jan. 5. The Sycamores' road to Dallas begins Sept. 1 with a game at Indiana.

"We're not just trying to get in the playoffs this year, we're trying to win everything," Bell said, his eyes growing in size. "I've always wanted to play in those lights and under that type of pressure, and I can see us going to Dallas and having some fun."

Three years ago, a comment like that would have drawn nothing but snickers and snide comments at the student union. But after the last two seasons, people in the small-town community have come to the realization that the wafting smell of tailgate parties in the football parking lot this fall suggests a strong measure of hope at Indiana State, an indication that anything is possible.

"When we came here we were competing to win games," Miles

said. "Now we're competing for a national championship."

Indiana State has won 13 games since ending The Streak midway through the 2009 season. The other three teams still ahead of the Sycamores on the NCAA's list for longest Division I losing streaks combined for only 20 wins over the next three-plus years — Prairie View A&M (7), Columbia (5) and Northwestern (10). That means the Sycamores can surpass the combined total with an eight-win season this fall.

Consider, too, that Indiana State's 12 wins over the past two seasons are just one fewer than its total over the previous eight.

But the changes in Terre Haute go deeper than stats.

Attendance has more than doubled since 2007, jumping from about 2,500 to roughly 6,500 last season. Fundraising has increased and talk about disbanding the football program has ceased.

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## Roger Clemens, At Age 50, Returning To Baseball For Texas Independent League

HOUSTON (AP) — Roger Clemens' signing with the Sugar Land (Texas) Skeeters has some wondering if it is the first step in a return to the majors.

The 50-year-old Clemens signed with the Skeeters of the independent Atlantic League on Monday and he is expected to start for the minor league team on Saturday at home against Bridgeport.

"His fastball was clocked at 87 mph. All of his pitches were working," said Randy Hendricks, Clemens' agent. "He threw a three-inning simulated game after an extensive workout warmup." Clemens and Skeeters man-

ager Gary Gaetti have been talking about this "for months," Hendricks said. Clemens is expected to discuss his decision Tuesday during a news conference in Sugar Land, about 20 miles southwest of Houston.

Clemens, acquitted in June of charges he lied to Congress when he denied using performance-enhancing drugs, hasn't played for a team since pitching for the New York Yankees in 2007 at the age of 45. He went 6-6 in 18 games with a 4.18 ERA that season.

Texas Rangers pitcher Roy Oswalt, a former teammate of Clemens with the Astros, is excited about his friend's return to

baseball.

"I think he's going to show everybody that all that stuff that he had to go through had nothing to do with the success he had in the big leagues," Oswalt said. "He said he's going to do it a little bit and see how his body responds. I wouldn't be surprised next year if he's pitching in the big leagues for somebody."

Clemens has been throwing batting practice to one of his sons often, and Oswalt said that Clemens "feels pretty good."

Yankees manager Joe Girardi, who is three years younger than Clemens, said it is difficult to get that urge to compete out of your

blood.

"He's always loved to compete," Girardi said of Clemens. "That's who he is. He kept coming back. There were times he felt he couldn't quite go a full season, but he gave it as much as he had. He loved to compete. That's a hard thing to replace is that competition. Guys miss it."

Clemens had two great seasons with the Astros after he turned 40, going 18-4 with a 2.98 ERA in 2004 to win his record seventh Cy Young Award. He was 13-8 with a career-low 1.87 ERA in 2005.

Clemens earned \$160 million and won 354 games in a 24-year

career with the Red Sox, Yankees, Blue Jays and Astros. His 4,672 strikeouts are third-most and he was named to 11 All-Star games.

Now he will see what he has left for the Skeeters, who play in the Atlantic League. He joins a roster that includes former major league pitchers Tim Redding and Scott Kazmir and Jason Lane, a teammate of Clemens' on Houston's 2005 World Series team.

It isn't clear how long Clemens will pitch for the Skeeters.

"This is a one game at a time thing," Hendricks said. "Let's see how he does on Saturday."