

# Bucks Look To Improve On 5-5 Finish

BY NICK ROBINSON  
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The Yankton Bucks football team is looking to rebound from a 5-5 record last season, that saw them bounce 32-14 in the semifinals to Watertown.

## online

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Strahl said. "It hasn't sat with me very well. We have had a long time to prepare ourselves for the season and the opener at Mitchell. It's awesome having teammates who push you to get better everyday; it's hard to not want to get better with this group of guys."

The 2013 campaign was a bit of a roller-coaster ride. Between struggling, or a half of football away from making it to the DakotaDome for the state title game, which Yankton hasn't made since 2005.

"It was disappointing at the end of the year," Yankton Bucks head coach Arlin Likness said. "But, we had fun, and we reached our potential. I think we should have been in the DakotaDome, we were a bad half with five turnovers away from that."

The turning point for last season, was when Yankton lost to Aberdeen. Likness decided to turn away from the power-run game, which has been a staple in Buck football for decades.

"I wasn't happy with the point production," he said. "We lost a few games and after getting beat by Aberdeen Central, I knew we had to change our offense. It worked out, we were able to throw the ball around and really saw some numbers we haven't seen around here."

Some of those numbers were led by all-state and all-time leading receiver, J.J. Henja, who had 1,205 yards receiving and 10 touchdowns last season. He posted 1,659 yards with 93 catches during his career.

"There is really no replacing a guy like Henja," Strahl said. "Whenever we needed a play, he delivered for us. But, we have guys like Matt Fitzgerald, Evan Greeneway, Brady Hale, Charlie Stephenson, the list goes on and on with our play-makers. We are going to need everyone to contribute to have a successful passing attack this fall."

Strahl also had a record of his own: The single season passing record. Strahl had 1,712 yards through the air a season ago. When asked about closing the gap on the all-time record, he was more focused on winning games and being a team player.

"It all depends on the defenses we see this fall," he said. "It would be cool to have the all-time passing record under my belt. But, I'm focused on winning games and I know the team's limit is nothing but the sky."

Yankton, which will miss 12 letter-winners and two all-state players from a season ago, used the summer to

"Looking back, wow, it has been a long time since that Watertown loss," Yankton senior quarterback Mason



Yankton's Jordan Lightner (with ball)

YHS FOOTBALL		
8/30	at Mitchell	7 p.m.
9/5	vs. R.C. Stevens	7 p.m.
9/12	at Brandon Valley	7 p.m.
9/19	vs. Aberdeen (HC)	7 p.m.
9/26	at O'Gorman	7 p.m.
10/3	vs. Watertown	7 p.m.
10/10	at Pierre	7 p.m.
10/17	vs. Harrisburg	7 p.m.
10/30	Playoffs First Round	
11/7	Playoffs Semifinals	
11/14	11AA Final at Vermillion	7:30 p.m.

their full advantage.

"Everyone has been working out and putting time in," Yankton senior running back Levi Kabella said. "We had three trainers helping out this summer and I don't think I can name many guys who didn't train."

The Buck's turning point this pre-season was the University of South Dakota team camp in July.

"We went to the USD team camp, we had a very tough schedule, and the progress we made was great," Likness said. "We stepped up and were dogfights with big schools. In the scrimmages, we played tough schools, we were capable of realizing we can compete. Our mindsets changed a little bit, now we have to transfer being able to talking about it, to doing it on Friday nights."

With momentum on their side, this past week, Likness has seen great strides from his team and work ethic during their fall camp.

"I like our work ethic and I love this group of kids," he said. "When we're done with practice, they are not done. They go up behind the hill and run so many sprints. Those are the kind of things that will help determine their character and mental toughness this fall. Being mentally tough can go a long ways in the game of inches in football."

The biggest surprise of fall camp has been the attitudes of the Buck football players, according to Likness.

"The pleasant surprise is the attitudes," he said. "If something goes wrong, I'm not seeing guys hang their heads or pout, they're out there ready to make the next play. They motivate each other and are doing the little

things. We are working very hard, we have a long ways before we peak, but we need to step up now and better ways to get it done."

Team unity and quickness are strengths for the Bucks this season.

"I think our key strengths will be our unity and team quickness," Likness said. "We may not have the fastest guys in the state, but our overall, between the skill position and the line should be great. Together we are a lot stronger than fighting each other or alone."

Kabella noted that depth will be on the Bucks side this fall.

"Having depth is really going to help us fight through games," he said. "Instead of getting down early and having to play behind, we can control and play with our tempo."

In order to be a complete football team, the Bucks will focus on communication.

"We need to communicate better," Likness said. "We need more confidence in each other. It has to be we get to do it, not me. It doesn't matter who gets the ball, or making the block, as long as it gets done."

According to Likness, there are a lot of intriguing games on the Bucks schedule this fall. However, they cannot look past their first contest, at Mitchell, on Aug. 30. Yankton lost to the Kernels



Yankton's Brady Hale (with ball)

offer him a scholarship.

Then on July 30, Guthmiller made his commitment to the Huskers official.

"It was a lot of weight off the shoulders," he said. "It had been a decision he had been seriously weighing for a year, he said, as other options presented themselves."

"Something about Nebraska made me feel at home," he said. "I liked the coaches and the facilities, and it's going to be a blast."

A summer golfing away from Yankton had made Guthmiller's decision understandably even more difficult, Sime said.

"It was funny, talking with Jace, I didn't even know Nebraska was in the picture," said Sime, who referenced Minnesota, Iowa and Kansas as other potential options.

"I'm happy for him, that he got to make the decision

earlier. Now he doesn't have to worry about it."

Guthmiller's D-I journey can also serve as a template for current Yankton athletes, his father said.

"Hopefully it inspires some of the younger kids from Yankton to know they can compete on the national level, if they want to put in the work," Dan said.

Work is exactly what Guthmiller has done to reach this point in his career, according to his mother.

"We're very proud of his accomplishments, and excited to see him go to Nebraska," Kami said.

"The proximity to home is great for everyone, and especially for mom and dad," she added, with a smile.

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoeck](http://twitter.com/jhoeck). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net).

## Strahl Ready For More After Record-Setting Season

BY NICK ROBINSON  
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Yankton quarterback Mason Strahl had his ups and downs last year. He learned as he went and figured out what it takes to play consistently at the varsity level.

"The beginning of the season was pretty shaky for me," he said. "I thought I was ready, but the varsity level is a whole different ballgame. I was able to watch how Michael Rucker did things, and he did it the right way. But, as the season went along, I thought the team and I got a lot better and were one of the better teams in the state. J.J. Henja helped me out a lot; he was one of the best players in this area last fall."

Yankton head coach Arlin Likness stuck to his guns when Strahl struggled early, which paid off in the long haul.

"As the season went on last year, he got better and confident," he said. "All of our quarterbacks were young, which means this season, we will be able to execute better."

Last season, the Bucks were defeated by Watertown, in which they committed five turnovers, in the semi-finals. Strahl has that game in the back of his head as motivation for this upcoming season.

"Looking back, wow, it has been a long time since that Watertown loss," he said. "It hasn't sat with me very well. We have had a long time to prepare ourselves for the season and the opener at Mitchell. It's awesome having teammates who push you to get better everyday; it's hard

to not want to get better with this group of guys."

With a year of experience under center, Strahl, a senior at Yankton High School, is looking to lead his team to the DakotaDome.

"I hope he can make the jump this season," Likness said. "It's about all 11 guys on the field connecting to be one. We need our wide receivers to step up and find a comfort zone."

The Bucks will be without Hejna this fall. He was Strahl's go-to receiver a year ago, with 38 receptions for 821 yards and six touchdowns. However, he feels the receiving corp. has enough talent to get the job done.

"There is really no replacing a guy like Hejna," he said. "Whenever we needed a play, he delivered for us. But, we have guys like Matt Fitzgerald, Evan Greeneway, Charlie Stephenson, the list goes on and on with our play-makers. We are going to need everyone to contribute to have a successful passing attack this fall."

This summer, Strahl has been in the weight room and attending camps as he goes.

"The USD team camp went great last month," he said. "We played awesome as a team and it kind of set the bar for where we want to be when fall camp starts."

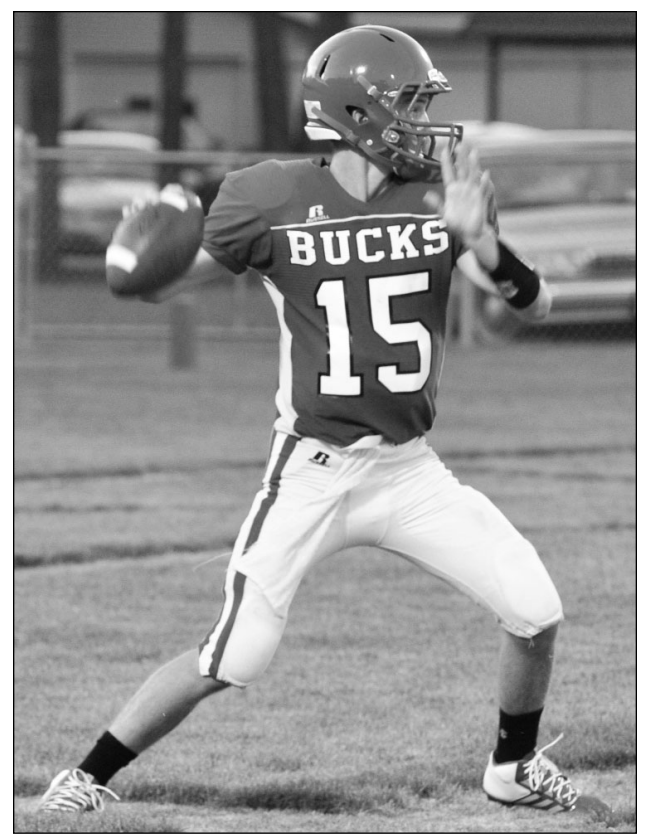
He also attended the Nebraska Quarterback Academy this summer. The Academy got him back to the basics and focusing on the little things.

"I was able to go to the Nebraska Quarterback Camp this summer, in Lincoln, as well," he said. "I soaked all of it in. I got to meet guys like Eric Crouch and Elite 11 Quarterback Johnny Stanton. They really taught us stuff with a different spin on it and focuses on the mechanics."

With the offseason work, Likness believes Strahl has potential for a breakout season.

"He really brings a lot to the table for us. He's a hard worker and really under-

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Yankton quarterback Mason Strahl

## Guthmiller

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said. "That's invaluable for those kids, because they're facing some of the best players they'll ever see."

Guthmiller, though, wasn't the only Yankton golfer to compete at AJGA events this

summer, he was joined by fellow senior Mitch Schlingman on a couple stops.

"We've got a lot of great players in this state; some of the best out there, but if they're doing well in those tournaments, I think it makes sense they'll be more confident at the state level," Sime said.

And confidence is the biggest takeaway, Dan Guthmiller said.

"Those are the ones that are the toughest and have strengthened his game," he said. "The tougher the competition, the tougher it makes you."

### Future Husker

The call came to Guthmiller's cell phone in early July, as he was walking off the course at an AJGA event in Wales, Wisconsin.

It was the Nebraska coaches, and they wanted to

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**Football**

Aug. 29	vs. Burke-South Central	(7 p.m.)
Sept. 5	vs. Gregory	(7 p.m.)
Sept. 12	at Scotland	(7 p.m.)
Sept. 19	at Tripp-Delmont-Armour	Armour (7 p.m.)
Sept. 26	vs. Canistota (Homecoming)	(7 p.m.)
Oct. 3	at Gayville-Volin	(7 p.m.)
Oct. 10	vs. Marty Indian	(7 p.m.)
Oct. 23	at Andes Central	(7 p.m.)
Oct. 28	Playoffs First Round	TBD
Nov. 3	Playoffs Quarterfinals	TBD
Nov. 8	Playoffs Semifinals	TBD
Nov. 14	State Championship	Vermillion (10:30 a.m.)

**Volleyball**

Aug. 30	vs. Bon Homme	Oct. 6	at Mitchell Christian
Sept. 2	at Parkston	Oct. 7	vs. South Central
Sept. 4	at Andes Central	Oct. 9	vs. Bridgewater-Emery
Sept. 9	vs. Tripp-Delmont-Armour	Oct. 16	vs. Freeman
Sept. 11	vs. Centerville	Oct. 20	vs. Elhan
Sept. 16	at Wagner	Oct. 21	at Corsica-Stickney (S)
Sept. 18	vs. Hanson	Oct. 24	vs. Menno (PN)
Sept. 20	Bridgewater-Emery Tour.	Oct. 27	at Gayville-Volin
Sept. 25	vs. Irene-Wakonda (HC)	Nov. 4-7	District 12B Tour.
Sept. 30	at Scotland	Nov. 11	Region 6B Final
Oct. 4	Marion Tour.	Nov. 20-22	State B at Mitchell

**Cross Country**

Aug. 30	Mitchell Inv.	(10 a.m.)
Sept. 6	Corsica-Stickney Inv.	Corsica (9 a.m.)
Sept. 10	Freeman Academy Inv.	Valley View GC, Freeman (4 p.m.)
Sept. 17	Freeman Inv.	Valley View GC, Freeman (1 p.m.)
Sept. 20	Wagner Inv.	(9 a.m.)
Sept. 22	Bon Homme Inv.	Bon Homme GC, Tyndall (2 p.m.)
Sept. 27	Platte-Geddes Inv.	Platte (10 a.m.)
Oct. 1	Parker Inv.	Par Mar GC, Parker (2 p.m.)
Oct. 10	Ethan-Parkston Inv.	Parkston (4:15 p.m.)
Oct. 15	Region 3B	Valley View GC, Freeman (1 p.m.)
Oct. 25	State Meet	Broadland Creek GC, Huron (1 p.m.)