

Gazelles Look To Build On Experience

BY JEREMY HOECK
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With starters back at key positions, the Yankton Gazelles are now able to boast a key characteristic: Experience.

Yankton, coming off a 3-18 season last fall, returns seven varsity players, including both setters, its libero and a group of hitters.

In short: There doesn't figure to be a slow start to the season while everyone acclimates to each other, according to senior libero Haley Mines.

"Our biggest thing last year was that we weren't used to playing together," Mines said. "Over the summer, we've all spent time together and bonded."

"When you're dealing with younger kids, it takes some time, but we're past that."

Though Yankton graduated six seniors from its varsity roster, it brings back seniors Joselyn Salvatori, Paige Thieman and Mines, as well as juniors Ellie Fedders, Becky Frick, Hannah Bockholt and Sophie Drotzmann.

A number of junior varsity players will also join the varsity roster, but at least the Gazelles won't have to overcome any jitters associated to inexperience, according to Thieman.

"We had the ability to do good things last year, but as soon as we got in a situation, that got in the way," said Thieman, one of the two setters — along with Fedders.

"I know we have the talent, it's just mentally getting it done."

As far as getting it done, one area the Gazelles needed to work on after last season was getting into its offense, according to second-year head coach Tiffany Beste.

"We had to spend so much time on our serve receive; just getting the ball up to the setter that we didn't spend much time at all running anything more than a simple offense," Beste said.

"I'm hoping with where we're at, we'll be able to do that sort of thing."

Receiving serves and thus getting the ball to the setter is key to speeding up the pace, Frick said.

"Because then the blockers get tired and don't know where it's coming from," she said. "If it's a high set, you can get ready for it sooner."

With its 6-2 system, the Gazelles will have two setters to rely on, and conse-



Yankton's Becky Frick (left), Paige Thieman (above) and Haley Mines (below, #15)



quently, they'll have a number of hitters to rely on, Thieman said.

"I know I can always depend on Becky, she can do

something with the ball," Thieman said. "And I have a lot of faith in Sophie."

And more than just with the returning varsity play-

ers, Yankton will have some other options as well, Beste said.

"I feel like there's a few more options, whether they

start or can go to throughout the match, where we can feel confident," Beste said.

Confidence is a rather important trait, especially for

GAZELLES V-BALL

8/29	vs. Watertown	7 p.m.
9/2	at SF Lincoln	7 p.m.
9/4	vs. Huron	7 p.m.
9/6	vs. Pierre	5 p.m.
9/9	at Brookings	7 p.m.
9/12	at Mitchell	7 p.m.
9/15	at Watertown	7 p.m.
9/16	vs. Brandon Valley	7 p.m.
9/23	vs. Roosevelt	7 p.m.
9/27	at Aberdeen	5 p.m.
9/30	at Harrisburg	7 p.m.
10/3	at Pierre	7 p.m.
10/7	at Huron	7 p.m.
10/9	vs. Mitchell	7 p.m.
10/13	vs. Brookings	7 p.m.
10/16	vs. Harrisburg	7 p.m.
10/20	vs. O'Gorman	7 p.m.
10/21	at Brandon Valley	7 p.m.
10/25	vs. Aberdeen Cent.	5 p.m.
10/28	at Washington	7 p.m.
11/3	District 2AA Play-In	7 p.m.
11/4	District 2AA	7 p.m.
11/8	District 2AA	7 p.m.
11/13	Region 1AA	7 p.m.
11/20-22	State AA at Yankton	

players new to the varsity level, Frick said.

"The first time you walk on the court, it's intimidating," she said. "For me, just playing a couple years, it's almost like home; like it's normal."

Last season, the Gazelles were the No. 5 seed in the District 2AA tournament and had to travel to Harrisburg for a play-in match that was ultimately won by the hometown Tigers.

Avoiding that play-in scenario (in which one loss ends your season) is key for Yankton, Beste said.

"Hopefully we're not in the same spot again," she said with a smile.

Based on the two key areas — returning experience and post-season improvement — the schedule for Yankton might be favorable. The Gazelles start the season with three of their first four matches at home, and will close the regular season with five of the final seven at the Summit Center.

If the Gazelles were able to get through District 2AA, they would advance to the state tournament on their home floor. The S.D. State Class AA Tournament will be held Nov. 20-22 in Yankton.

For now, though, progression is more important, Mines said.

"We want to have a better record, so we'll work hard at that," she said.

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.

Strahl

From Page 3A

stands the game. Hopefully, this fall we can get him better pass protection and good things will happen."

Likness also saw him grow as a leader in the offseason, as well.

"Mason is a very strong leader," he said. "He's committed and wants others to

be the same. He really led by example last season. We are looking for him to be more vocal as a senior this season."

However, this season, Strahl has experience and will do whatever the team asks of him to win football games.

"I will do whatever this team needs me to do, hopefully we will be able to bring back the air attack," he said. "I'd like to use the read option this season, too. I love using my feet and being a dual threat. But, if I have to hand the ball off 70 times, I will. Whatever it takes for us to be playing in November."

His 1,321 passing yards were good enough to break the single-season passing record for Yankton. Strahl, confident in his arm, would like to own the career passing record if that were to happen. But, is more concerned with his teams' potential and reaching it.

"It all depends on the de-

fenses 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 teams' limit is nothing but the sky."

When asked about the three quarterback system Yankton showed off in the middle of the season, Strahl realized how open the field was in the offense, and how it was able to expand for the Buck play-makers.

"At first, when Coach Likness showed me it, I didn't really think he was serious. It worked out very well for us, though. Being the middle quarterback of the three was fun. It really spreads the defense out and they don't really know what to do. We have guys on this team that can make the moves when they see a hole, so it could be interesting again."

The Bucks open their season on the road at Mitchell on August 30th. Strahl knows the potential his team could reach,

but wants to work and take it day-by-day, game-by-game.

"Last year, we didn't have much experience," he said. "We only lost about five starters from a year ago, so our realistic goal should be playing 30 miles southeast in the DakotaDome. But, we have a lot of work before we get there, and our ultimate goal right now is defeating Mitchell."

When it's all over and done with, he wants to look back and reminisce on the bond he created with his teammates. He also noted, he wouldn't mind bringing Yankton their first state title since 2002.

"Hopefully we are able to say we are state champions. But, I'd love to say that I have 40 guys who are like brothers to me. But, the state title wouldn't be bad either."

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BON HOMME CAVALIERS

Football

Aug. 29at Canton(7 p.m.)
Sept. 5at Winner(7 p.m.)
Sept. 12vs. McCook Central-Montrose(7 p.m.)
Sept. 19	.....vs. Tri-Valley	.....(7 p.m.)
Oct. 3	.....at Sioux Falls Christian	.....(7 p.m.)
Oct. 10	.....vs. Wagner	.....(7 p.m.)
Oct. 17	.....vs. Elk Point-Jefferson	.....(7 p.m.)
Oct. 23	.....at Parkston	.....(7 p.m.)
Oct. 28	.....Playoffs First Round	.....TBD
Nov. 3	.....Playoffs Quarterfinals	.....TBD
Nov. 8	.....Playoffs Semifinals	.....TBD
Nov. 13	.....State Championship	.....Vermillion (1:30 p.m.)

Volleyball

Aug. 30	.....at Avon	Oct. 2	.....at Menno
Sept. 2	.....at Andes Central	Oct. 7	.....at Dakota Christian
Sept. 6	.....Gregory Inv.	Oct. 9	.....at Freeman
Sept. 9	.....Vermillion	Oct. 14	.....vs. Scotland
Sept. 11	.....at Platte-Geddes	Oct. 16	.....at Corsica-Stickney (S)
Sept. 16	.....vs. Tripp-Delmont-Armour	Oct. 21	.....at Parkston
Sept. 18	.....vs. Irene-Wakonda (HC)	Oct. 24	.....vs. Viborg-Hurley
Sept. 20	.....Cavalier Clash (Home)	Oct. 25	.....SESD (Chamberlain)
Sept. 23	.....vs. Wagner	Nov. 4-11	.....Region 5B
Sept. 25	.....vs. Burke-South Central	Nov. 20-22	.....State A at Watertown
Sept. 30	.....at Dakota Valley		

Cross Country

Aug. 30	.....Mitchell Inv.	.....(10 a.m.)
Sept. 2	.....McCook Central-Montrose Inv.	.....Salem (4:15 p.m.)
Sept. 6	.....Corsica-Stickney Inv.	.....Corsica (9 a.m.)
Sept. 8	.....Scotland Inv.	.....(1 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. 2	.....South Central Inv.	.....Burke (4:15 p.m.)
Oct. 6	.....SESD Meet	.....Wagner (3 p.m.)
Oct. 15	.....Region 3A	.....Lenkota GC, Lennox (3 p.m.)
Oct. 25	.....State Meet	.....Broadland Creek GC, Huron (1 p.m.)

Competitive Cheer

Aug. 30	.....Gregory Inv.	.....11 a.m.
Sept. 8	.....Dell Rapids Inv.	.....6:30 p.m.
Sept. 13	.....Winner Inv.	.....TBA
Oct. 4	.....Dakota Valley Inv.	.....noon
Oct. 11	.....Mitchell Inv.	.....10:30 a.m.
Oct. 18Platte-Geddes-Dakota Christian Inv.noon
Oct. 24State at Watertown5 p.m.

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