

Bucks Aim For Return Ticket To Dome

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

Undefeated record. Nail-biting wins. State championship.

What will the Yankton Bucks do for an encore?

For starters, they'll turn to a number of new faces. Seventeen new starters, in fact.

"There's definitely a little bit of a change of pace," said head coach Arlin Likness, whose Bucks captured the Class 11AA state title last year with a perfect 11-0 record.

A graduating class of 21 seniors – 17 starters – all but ensured that fans will have some new names to learn this fall. The Bucks return four starters to the offense and two starters on defense.

Much as was the case a year ago, progression will be a welcome sight.

"We'll need to have other guys step up," Likness said. "It'd be nice to have some surprises, in a good way."

Not only with the championship, but the way in which the Bucks roared to the title will be hard to repeat. There were two overtime victories on the road against Class 11AAA teams and the homecoming situation where Yankton played three games in 17 days.

The season was then capped off with the thrilling overtime victory over Brookings in the championship game – decided by a deflected two-point conversion on what would have been the winning play.

Gone from that championship team is the leading rusher, leading passer, leading receiver and 11 of the top 13 tacklers on defense.

The offense will be guided by the senior line trio of Landon Binder, Alex Withrow and Bradey Sorenson, while senior Sheldon Gant (396 yards, 4 TD) returns to the backfield. He will be joined by senior quarterback Reid Sawatzke (missed the season with injury), senior running back Tanner Frick (73 yards, 1 TD) and senior receiver Blake Savey (missed 10



Sheldon Gant • Yankton

games with injury).

The defense returns senior starters Colin Muth (69.5 tackles) and Gant (52 tackles, 1 INT).

And on top of having to find new weapons to utilize on both sides of the ball, the Bucks are faced with a daunting schedule – one that is front-loaded this season.

Yankton's first six games will be against Brookings, Mitchell, Sioux Falls Washington, Aberdeen Central, Pierre and Sioux Falls O'Gorman. Then comes a 3-game stretch against Huron, Douglas and Harrisburg.

"I'm excited for it," said Savey, who played in one game last season before a knee injury sent him to the sideline. "We have tough games; the first six are really tough, we'll have to be ready to go."

It's that stretch that could define how the rest of the season – and potentially, the playoffs – shake out for the

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Football

8/28	at Brookings	7 p.m.
9/4	vs. Mitchell	7 p.m.
9/12	at S.F. Washington	3:30 p.m.
9/18	vs. Aberdeen Cent. (HC)	7 p.m.
9/25	at Pierre	7 p.m.
10/2	vs. S.F. O'Gorman	7 p.m.
10/9	at Huron	7 p.m.
10/16	vs. Douglas	7 p.m.
10/22	at Harrisburg	7 p.m.
10/29	Playoffs First Round	
11/6	Playoffs Semifinals	
11/13	State 11AA Finals at Vermillion	7:30 p.m.

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Bucks, according to Likness. "Ideally, we'd love to win all six games, but that would take a total team effort and a lot of hard work," he said. "I would guess all but one would be ranked. That means we'll have to strap it up and be ready."

The experience of having gone through – and won

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Sawatzke Excited To Return To Field

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

While playing basketball, one of his favorite sports, Reid Sawatzke felt the telltale sensation.

He knew something was wrong. It was his right knee. "I definitely felt a pop," recalled Sawatzke.

It wasn't supposed to happen to him. Not Sawatzke. Not someone who was bound for a strong junior season in both football and basketball at Yankton High School.

Initially, trainers and doctors weren't sure that the injury to the knee was as severe as Sawatzke feared.

"But I felt a pop and knew something was wrong," he said. "After the MRI, we knew for sure."

"It felt different than a little sprain or something."

Sawatzke later completely tore the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in that right knee, and would eventually undergo surgery a day before school started.

It also meant he would miss all of football and all of basketball.

And as it happened, the Yankton football team was able to recover – senior quarterback Mason Strahl guided the offense – and capture the Class 11AA state championship.

Sawatzke had a front-row seat. But from the sidelines, his arms draped over crutches.

"It was really tough," he said. "Especially after we're going through a winning season and you're not part of it, it's just not the same not playing."

He would have undoubtedly been a weapon for the undefeated Bucks, but he could do nothing but cheer on his teammates.

"You know you could be out there helping in whatever way you can, but there's nothing you can do about it," Sawatzke said.

The only thing he could



Reid Sawatzke • Yankton

do was go through rehabilitation. It was a lengthy, grueling ordeal, but that particular injury required patience.

"Especially with an ACL, it's just time," Sawatzke said. A year later, it's now Sawatzke's time. He's back, 100 percent healthy, ready to take over the quarterback position for the Bucks.

Sure, he still wears a brace on his knee (to be safe), but he's his old self. Quiet, confident and dangerous through the air or on the ground.

"I know he missed a year, but you can hardly tell," head coach Arlin Likness said. "He's really improved from day one (of fall camp) to right now."

In an effort to protect Sawatzke, the Bucks plan to use him only on offense. He's not alone, though. Senior wide receiver Blake Savey, like Sawatzke, suffered a knee injury last year – Savey, though, was able to play one game before he was sent to the sideline.

The silver lining of the two friends missing that much time last season was

that they not only rehabbed together, but strengthened their chemistry – particularly once they were both able to get back out on the field.

"There's a lot of non-verbal communication between those two which makes us that much better," Likness said.

Much like Savey is tasked with taking over a receiver spot vacated by former YHS greats J.J. Hejna and Brady Hale, Sawatzke takes over a quarterback spot vacated by Strahl, the program's all-time leading passer.

The last two Yankton quarterbacks (Strahl and Michael Rucker), in fact, both became the program's all-time leader in passing yards – both eclipsing 3,000 career yards.

It's now Sawatzke's turn. For one season.

"We've had some really good quarterbacks lately," he said. "Hopefully I can carry it on."

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Yankton Cross Country Squad Aims For The Top



Andrew Peitz • Yankton

YHS Returns 7 Seniors, State-Tested Runners

BY ROGELIO RODRIGUEZ
sports@yankton.net

For Yankton cross country coach Dave Dannenbring, the seasons may change, but the goal remains the same.

"We want to be state champs," he said.

With the Bucks finishing tenth in state and the Gazelles fourth last season, the goal of being state champs is within reach.

This season the Yankton cross country team has seven seniors, six for the boys' team and Savannah Woods, the 2012 state cross country champion and the state 3200-meter champion in track this past spring, returning for the girls. Gabe Dannenbring (55th), Sam Gusso (61st), Lincoln Megard, Ethan Brausey, Jordan Lucht and Andrew Pietz (60th) are the Bucks' seniors. Sophomore Brady Jaquith (59th) and freshman Nathan Zimmerman (63rd) also return from the 2014 state meet squad.

Coach Dannenbring admitted that the boys will have a tough time this season due to the high number of returning runners by rival schools. However, he is confident in his team's ability to show their quality.

"They all worked hard over the summer. That work

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Cross Country

8/28	S.F. O'Gorman Inv.	4 p.m.
9/4	Augustana Twilight	7:45 p.m.
9/12	Brandon Valley Inv.	4:30 p.m.
9/18	Norfolk Inv.	4 p.m.
9/24	Yankton Inv.	4:15 p.m.
10/1	South Sioux City Inv.	4:30 p.m.
10/10	ESD (Pierre)	11 a.m.
10/13	Yankton JV Inv.	4:15 p.m.
10/15	at Brookings/vs. Harrisburg/Mitchell	4 p.m.
10/24	State Meet at Sioux Falls	3 p.m.

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Savannah Woods • Yankton



Madison McClure • Yankton

will carry over into this season," Dannenbring said.

The girls' team is down in numbers this season but Dannenbring is confident that he has some of the best distance runners in South Dakota on his roster.

"I think that the spring track season proved we have some of the best runners

around," Dannenbring said.

Besides Woods, who placed 17th at the 2014 state cross country meet, the Gazelles also return Madison McClure (So., 7th), Tessa Folkers (So., 32nd), Emerson McClure (8th, 35th place) and Lauren Eidsness (8th grade, 67th place) from last year's state meet roster.

Coach Dannenbring has a clear vision of what he wants to improve on this season; he feels that his team could add to their competitiveness.

"We are working on getting stronger and building our confidence to finish the race," Dannenbring said.

Dannenbring is not afraid to say what he expects from his team, nor should he be. With many quality runners under his guidance, this season has the right components to end with a positive showing in the state meet.

"We are excited to get started, we have a great group of kids," Dannenbring said.

With all of the hard work that these young athletes have demonstrated already, it will be a fascinating season for Yankton this year.

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Football		9/17 at Baltic/vs. Freeman Academy		9/19 Freeman Academy Inv.		
8/28	vs. Burke-South Central	7 p.m.	5 p.m.	9/12	Nike Heartland Pre-Region (Sioux Falls)	4 p.m.
9/4	at Colome	7 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	9/16	Flyer Inv. (Freeman)	1 p.m.
9/11	at Avon	7 p.m.	TBA	9/21	Bon Homme Inv.	2 p.m.
9/18	vs. Andes Central-Dakota Christian	7 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	9/24	Yankton Inv.	4:15 p.m.
10/2	at Tripp-Delmont-Armour (A)	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	9/30	Parker Inv.	2 p.m.
10/9	at Scotland	7 p.m.	9 a.m.	10/2	Lennox Inv.	4 p.m.
10/16	vs. Marty	7 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	10/5	Howard Inv.	5 p.m.
10/22	vs. Corsica-Stickney	7 p.m.	9 a.m.	10/7	TVC/Irene-Wakonda Inv.	3 p.m.
9/1	at Canistota	6:15 p.m.	10/20	vs. Marty/Omaha Nation	5 p.m.	
9/3	at Alcester-Hudson	8 p.m.	10/26	at Avon	6:15 p.m.	
9/8	at Scotland/vs. Centerville	4 p.m.				
9/10	at Freeman	6:15 p.m.				
9/15	vs. Viborg-Hurley	6:15 p.m.				

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