

Gazelles Go Back To Basics

Yankton Has Young Lineup Around Its Senior Leaders

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE
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EDITOR'S NOTE: This article appeared in the Dec. 6 edition of the Press & Dakotan.

This season the Gazelles are focusing on the basics. After losing a class of seniors, players are looking to gain as much experience as possible.

Head coach Doug Pesicka said early in the season he will concentrate on getting the younger players acclimated to varsity level basketball.

"This year's team is probably a little short of overall varsity experience," he said. "It will be something we'll have to overcome, but the only way to get experience is to get experience. It's as simple as it sounds."

The coaches made the decision to simplify everything this year, and Pesicka said that will help them to focus on fundamentals.

"We're very much back to the basics and fundamentals, trying to keep all of our offensive and defensive schemes really simple especially early in the year," he said. "As our kids get more experience, we'll get more complicated. Right now, we think simple is best. We're going to try to do a few things really well."

Although the season will be a challenge, senior Kelsey Fitzgerald is ready for the challenge.

"Last year was last year. It may not have ended the way we wanted it to, but this year we're just going to focus on getting better," she said. "As a team leader you can't get frustrated. It was really intense last year, but I'm up for the challenge."

Senior Mikala Hora knows this year will be different from past seasons, but is optimistic.

"I think we can surprise a lot of people," she said. "We lost a lot of seniors last year, but we have a lot of girls coming up this year who are ready to play. Our game plan will be a little different, but we'll get it done."

Pesicka said having younger players step into prominent roles on the team will be important to keep improving.

"We're a team that's just going to have to continually get better and better, which we've already



GAZELLES: Kelsey Fitzgerald

done in three practices," he said. "We've seen improvements already."

Pesicka knows the Eastern South Dakota Conference, as well as the district will be full of tough competition, but said he feels the Gazelles will be able to

be compete.

"Our conference, the ESD conference, is always good," he said. "And our district has always been good, too. But everybody in Class AA can compete with or beat any other team. We certainly have that mentality as we

enter the season. We feel like we can be competitive and also win. That's the mindset this group has to have."

You can follow Emily Niebrugge on Twitter at [twitter.com/ENiebrugge](#)

Experienced Gymnastics Squad Looks Forward To Strong Season

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE
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EDITOR'S NOTE: This article appeared in the Nov. 27 edition of the Press & Dakotan. It has been updated to reflect the ongoing season.

This year the Yankton-Bon Homme Gazelles gymnastics members are taking advantage of an experienced group with the goal of putting themselves on the podium at the state competition.

Head coach Luke Youmans said the team hasn't been on the podium since 1998, but they have a big advantage this year since there weren't any senior who graduated last year, and there is only one senior on the team now.

"We brought back our entire varsity team, which significantly helps as far as having continuity," he said. "We knew what we had last year, and last year is back in the gym this year. We're in a really great place right now for the future of our program."

As well as being able to work with the same group of girls, Youmans said each member has been working harder than in the past.

"The tide has turned in gymnastics where you can't just be a one season gymnasts anymore and expect to be successful. Rapid City Central and Watertown are so good because they operate a club that runs year round," he said.

Junior Ashtyn Haak said she and her teammates put in a lot of hours over summer. She's looking forward to a good season with new skills.

"I'm excited because I feel we're going to grow as a team this year," she said. "Right after the season ended last year, we joined club and have been working all summer long. We all want to get new skills, but we know we can't we get new skills if we're not actually in the gym doing what we need to do."

To prepare for Monday's meet, the gymnasts spent their Thanksgiving break in the gym. Youmans said it's important for the beginning of this season to start where last season ended.

"We're trying to get to the point where we're able to go out and be confident about what we're doing on Monday," he said. "We took a whole season last year to get to a place where we were getting a little more competitive, and we want to begin where we left off."

Senior Charlotte Taggart is excited to compete in the first competition of the year, and will be watching for new things to bring back.



GAZELLES: Charlotte Taggart

"It'll be good to see the routines, see what we are doing well, but also how the judges are judging the other routines," she said. "For that first meet you really just have to throw yourself out there. You don't know what you're going to get judged on, you don't know what to expect for your scores. You just have to build up after you have that first competition under your belt."

Youmans is also looking forward to putting the seventh and eighth grade members on the varsity team this year.

"There aren't a lot of sports where seventh and eighth graders are part of your varsity team," he said. "In gymnastics, so many of these kids have been coming up from our club since they were second and third graders. Now they're going to step into the high school season and have that ability as a varsity athlete as middle schoolers."

The Gazelles opened the season with a score of 127.05 in a triangular hosted by Sioux Falls Washington on Nov. 27. The squad followed it up with a score of 125.625 at the Lolly Forseth Invitational on Nov. 30 in Sioux Falls. (The squad also competed in triangulars on Dec. 4 and 6, after this section went to press.)

You can follow Emily Niebrugge on Twitter at [twitter.com/ENiebrugge](#)

YHS Boys

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Three-time defending state champion Sioux Falls O'Gorman graduated a bulk of its talent, while all but three of the 12 all-state players were seniors last season.

Pierre will be led by college recruits Lane Severyn (South Dakota State) and Zach Hanson (Creighton), while Watertown returns first team all-state scorer Tanner Heiser. Huron's height will also give opponent's problems.

When talk trickles down to Yankton, there won't be much

talk of a team posing a championship threat, but again, the players don't mind.

"I think we'll surprise some teams," senior guard Andrew Hummel said. "We have good

chemistry and we'll be able to run."

Joining Haynes on the Bucks sidelines will be junior varsity coach Arlin Likness, sophomore coach Adam Tyhurst, freshman

coach Jason Savey and student assistant Zach Wevik (a Mount Marty College student).

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoeck](#)

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