

WOKSAPE

Gazelles are Optimistic Going into Basketball Season

BY NICK ROBINSON

The Yankton Gazelles basketball team will look to build off a successful season last year, in which they were only a game away from the Girls AA State Tournament.

Yankton lost seven key seniors with seasoned varsity experience.

The Gazelles will have a fairly new look this season, adding practically a whole new roster into the mix.

“We are going to have to be executing our plays to perfection,” senior Mikala Hora said. “We don’t have as much experience as other teams in the state, so we’re going to have to do all the little things right.”

In order to get to the state tournament in Rapid City this spring, the Gazelles will have to work harder than before and show up to practice ready to play.

“We have to show up to practice like it’s a game,” senior Brianna Newman said. “It’s going to take a lot of teamwork and leadership, but I think if we do all these things, we will be successful this season.”

Seniors Mikala Hora and Kelsey Fitzgerald will be asked to take the role as team leaders, since they have the most experience.

“Just be calm in any situation,” Hora said. “Listen to the coaches, but be confident in yourself.”

However, due to a lingering knee injury, Hora will have to sit out some time to heal up for the long haul.

Hora hurt her knee during a volleyball match this past fall. “I am starting physical therapy,” Hora said. “I also am spending time in the ice bath and E-Stim.”

E-Stim is electrical stimulation through the nerves.

For now, Hora cannot do any physical contact due to the pain. She is going to be sidelined for at least two weeks.

“Not one player is going to have to pick up the slack,” head coach Doug Pesicka said.

“Everyone’s going to have to

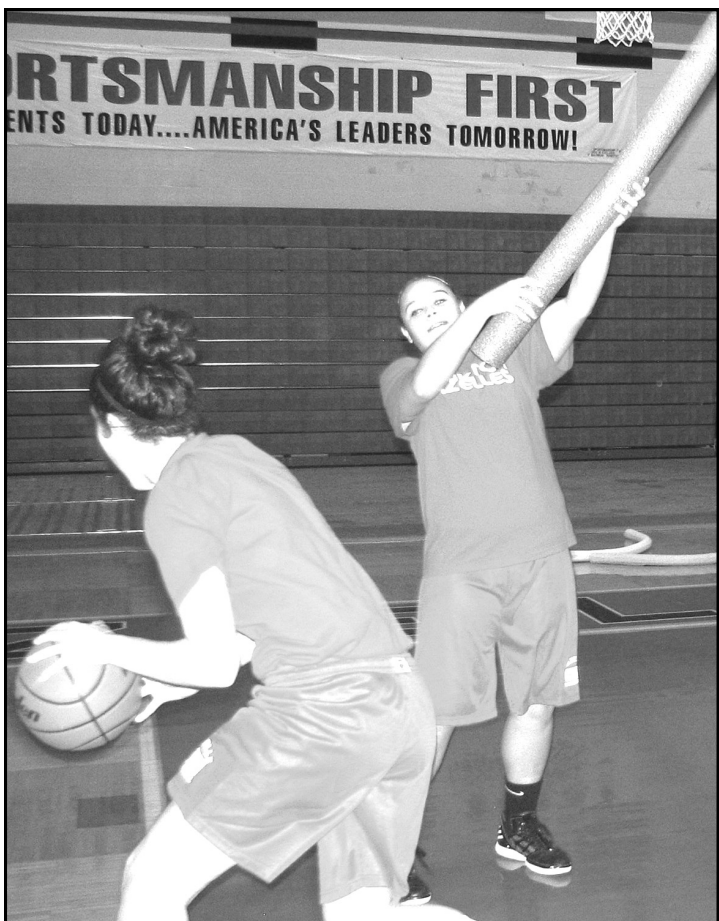


PHOTO BY MATTIE BLAGG

Kelsey Butler looks for a way around Allie Murphy who is shown wielding a Styrofoam noodle during practice.

contribute and work a little harder,” Pesicka added.

Expect to see Kelsey Butler (Sr.), Morgan Tessier (Jr.), Whitlee Larson (Jr.), Andi Sprakel (So.), Becky Frick (Fr.), Jessica Wirth (Sr.), Abby Mitchell (Sr.), and Brianna Newman (Sr.) get vital varsity minutes this season as well.

The Gazelles will lean on the defensive side of the ball to turn into offense for this inexperienced team. Yankton will rely on the post game for most of the team’s scoring this season.

“We have some girls who can knock down some shots,” Newman said. “We need our defense to step up; I think our defense is what is going to win us games.”

With inexperience comes growing pains, and Pesicka isn’t expecting the best results in the beginning of the season.

The Gazelles will have their greatest competition from the defending state champion Mitchell Kernels this season.

“They have a lot of returning girls this year that have played

together throughout high school,” Hora said. “They have the experience together, so they know each other so well.”

In order for Yankton to have success against the top tier teams in South Dakota, the Gazelles will need to play consistently and work to find the right shot.

Yankton opened the season at home on Dec. 6 against eastern South Dakota foe, Brandon Valley Lynx.

The following day the Gazelles traveled to Watertown to battle the Arrows.

Scores for these games were not available at press time, though Pesicka felt comfortable about the Gazelles’ potential heading into this season.

“We’re a young team, and we will continue to get better as the season goes on,” Pesicka said. “The more experience we have, the better the team will get. Look to see us a lot better in February than we will be in December. I feel optimistic about the future of my team.”

Bucks Basketball Team Approaches their Season Under New Leadership

BY DREW KONOPASEK

The Yankton Bucks basketball team begins a new chapter this year under first year head coach Chris Haynes.

The Bucks lost five seniors from last year’s team, but return some players who got a significant amount of playing time in Kellen Soulek (Sr.), Michael Rucker (Sr.) and J.J. Hejna (Jr.).

Zach Benjamin (Sr.), Andrew Hummel (Sr.), Sam Wendte (Sr.), Troy Hunhoff (Sr.), Landon Breen (Jr.), Brady Hale (So.), and Ryan Olson (Jr.) will see a large amount of playing time this year to lead the Yankton attack.

Last year the Bucks finished 4 -18, so they are looking to improve upon this record, compete for the ESD crown, and make it to the State AA Tournament, which Yankton has not attended since 2008.

Senior center, Kellen Soulek, is optimistic about the team this year and the record he thinks Yankton will achieve.

“I cannot give you an exact record count,” Soulek said. “But I know that we as a team will work hard in practice each and every day and that will translate to the games. I feel we have the talent to compete with anyone in the state.”

The Bucks started out the season with a home game versus Watertown on Friday and then hit the highway to play in four straight road games before Christmas break.

Not much is expected of the Bucks according to rankings,

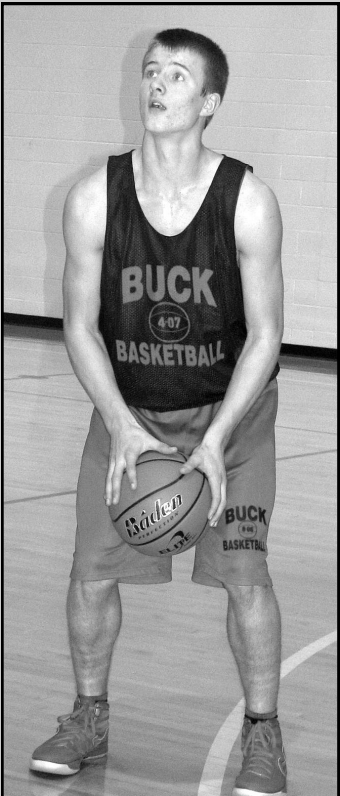


PHOTO BY MATTIE BLAGG

Matt Fitzgerald looks for the shot during a recent Bucks basketball practice.

but the outlook for the season is promising.

“Sometimes playing under the radar is a good thing,” senior forward, Troy Hunhoff, said. “This will allow us to play with a chip on our shoulder. I guarantee we will earn the respect of every team across the state and give them everything they can handle by the end of the year.”

Results from Friday evening’s home game against Watertown were not available at press time.



Local Deals And Perks on The Fly!

Yankton Gymnasts Confidently Begin Season

BY ABBEY VANMEETEREN

The Yankton Gymnastics team started practice just a few short weeks ago and already has had three meets in the young season.

They had to hit the beam, floor, and bars right away, because their first few meets came up really quickly.

The team has their entire varsity team back from last year.

While the team is young, they’re full of potential.

“We have a lot of younger kids on our varsity team,” junior Elsie Kotalik said. “So it is really important for us upperclassmen to lead them. I feel like we can do really well at ESD and state this year.”

The first three meets went well for the Gazelles.

Their first meet was on Monday, Nov. 26 at Sioux Falls Washington. The second meet was the Sioux Falls Invite at Roosevelt High School on Friday, Nov. 30.

The most recent meet in which Yankton competed was a triangular at Sioux Falls Lincoln on Tuesday, Dec. 4.

“We beat Roosevelt and Lincoln, and last year we didn’t beat them at all,” junior Ashley Haak said. “So that’s really exciting for our team.”

The girls only have two home meets this year, and the rest of the season, they’re on the road.

The Gazelles’ head coach, Luke Youmans, has a positive outlook on the season.

“The Gazelles will contend to be in the top half of ESD,” Youmans said. “We hope to be

much more competitive this upcoming season, and compete with many of the best teams in the state.”

The Eastern South Dakota Conference meet will be held on Saturday, Feb. 2 in Huron.

This gives the team plenty of time to prepare, practice and perfect their skills.

Two weeks after the Eastern South Dakota Conference meet, the Gazelles will head to the state meet in Rapid City.

“Our team goal this season is to get on the podium at the state meet,” Youmans said. “Which would mean we need to place in the top eight at state.”

The varsity team has spent almost an entire year in club gymnastics preparing for this year, so they feel confident and ready for those bigger meets.

“Our goal is to stick with the Sioux Falls teams and go after Pierre and Aberdeen,” Haak said.

The Gazelles are confident, because now they know that they can compete with the bigger schools.

The competitors feel like the team is getting stronger and stronger every year.

“We have a long season ahead of us,” Kotalik said. “So I just try to stay positive.”

The Gazelles will have a positive outlook on this season which will help their performances too.

When it is said and done, the gymnastics team will look to push themselves as hard as they can to reach their potential.

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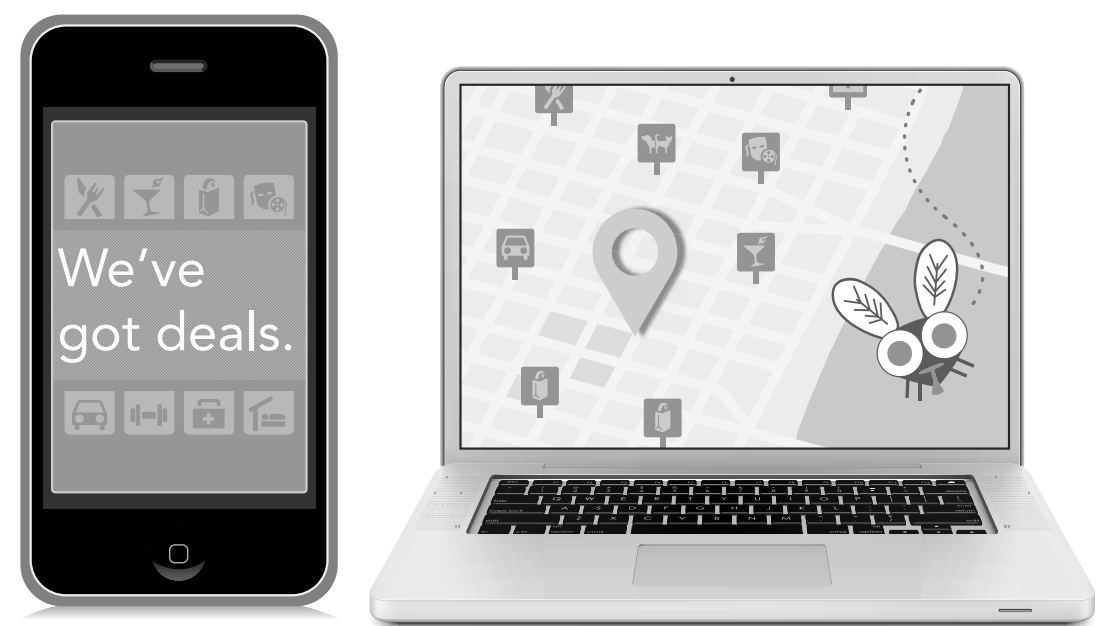
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