

Season Preview | Yankton Boys' Basketball

Bucks Look To Build Off Sixth Place Finish

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Coach Chris Haynes is in his third year as head coach of the Yankton High School boys' basketball team. The Bucks have been working hard at practice since late November in order to build on last year's record of 15-11.

The 2013-2014 season saw the Bucks advance to the state tournament as the seventh ranked team. Unfortunately, they lost to eventual champions Sioux Falls Roosevelt by a narrow margin of 59-53.

"We're excited to get started" Haynes said.

The team and coaching staff is eager to step out on the court and show the Eastern South Dakota Conference (ESD) that they are a team that needs to be taken seriously.

"Wining the ESD Conference is always the goal," said senior captain Brady Hale.

Hale is one of four senior captains this year. He, along with Evan Greenway, Matt Fitzgerald and Austin Johnson will be looking to make this season one to remember. Both Hale and Haynes believe that this team has the ability to compete at a very high level.

"We have a lot of guys who are willing to come in and practice hard every day," Hale said.

The confidence and commitment of this team has steadily improved in the last three years under Haynes.

"It's the third year of the system, the kids have adapted, we have a bunch of really good kids who are really willing to work hard and they all get along with each other," Haynes said.

The Bucks have seven sen-

BOYS' B-BALL		
Dec. 12	at Watertown	7 p.m.
Dec. 16	vs. Huron	8 p.m.
Dec. 19	vs. S.F. Washington	8 p.m.
Jan. 3	at Mitchell	6 p.m.
Jan. 6	at Brookings	7 p.m.
Jan. 9	vs. Harrisburg	7 p.m.
Jan. 10	vs. Brandon Valley	6 p.m.
Jan. 13	at S.F. Lincoln	7:30 p.m.
Jan. 16	vs. Pierre	8 p.m.
Jan. 20	vs. O'Gorman	8 p.m.
Jan. 23	vs. Watertown	8 p.m.
Jan. 24	vs. Aberdeen Central	5 p.m.
Jan. 27	at Huron	8 p.m.
Jan. 30	vs. Mitchell	8 p.m.
Feb. 3	vs. Brookings	7 p.m.
Feb. 5	at Harrisburg	7 p.m.
Feb. 14	at Aberdeen Central	5 p.m.
Feb. 17	at S.F. Roosevelt	8:30 p.m.
Feb. 19	at Brandon Valley	8 p.m.
Feb. 21	at Pierre	7 p.m.
Feb. 28	District 2AA Play-In	7 p.m.
Mar. 3	District 2AA	7 p.m.
Mar. 6	District 2AA	7 p.m.
Mar. 10	Region 1AA	7 p.m.
Mar. 19-21	State AA (Sioux Falls)	7 p.m.

iors on their roster this year including their four captains. Haynes believes that this team has the talent and dedication to make some noise in the ESD this year. He believes in the leadership and ability of an amazing group of seniors.

"We'll go as far as our seniors will take us," Haynes said.

The key to a successful season for the Bucks will be how hard they practice and how much they want to get back to the state tournament. After last year's performance there is no doubting that it is possible to go even further this season.

"If we put the effort in, by the end of the year we will be unstoppable," Hale said.

The Yankton Bucks will open up their season on Dec. 12 when they travel to Watertown; a team they defeated 82-71 in last season's opener.

You can follow Rogelio Rodriguez on Twitter at @RogelioUlisesR. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.



BRADY HALE

Fitz

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The art of coaching was not just learned in the classroom, but in practice.

"Sean and I probably didn't realize that we were learning," Shannon said. "We were at practice at a young age, and we were asking questions about what was going on. We weren't even recognizing that we were learning."

Some of those same questions have come up since the former athletes have turned to coaches.

"Now when we ask advice, we try to filter our memories through eyes," Ramsey said. "We remember things as athletes. He can remember things the way you want to remember them now, as a coach."

And, in some cases, it's about trying to remember the "why" of a certain situation. "When I was under pressure (as an athlete), a lot of times I didn't want to know. It was just 'tell me what to do and I'll do it,'" Ramsey said. "I've relied on (Dan) over the years to gain knowledge."

While Dan has the most coaching experience in the family, Cilla — herself a Hall of Fame athlete at USD — has also been a valuable source of knowledge, not just for the kids but for Dan as well.

"The brains of the whole operation is my wife. She sees things from their truest perspective," Dan said. "When they have had struggles, the come to see Cilla."

Shannon agreed. "She's the reason all of us are able to coach. Mom is at the center of it all," she said. "She would probably make a better coach than all of us, but she let us go do our thing."

The younger Fitzsimmons also draw on their own resources, like Sean on his science background, Cilla said. "Sean teaches biology and chemistry, and he uses his science in with his coaching philosophy," she said.

Out Of Comfort Zone

Besides the bonds of family and coaching, Dan and Sean have something else in common: coaching a sport in which he did not participate. For Dan, it was gymnastics, where he went from novice to one of the more veteran coaches in South Dakota in his two-plus decades at the Gazelles helm.

"One of the things I learned was that coaching is a vehicle, not an end to justify the means," Dan said.

Part of Dan's learning process in gymnastics was learning from longtime Vermillion coach Mark Upward. Seeing his daughter coaching Upward's former program is a source of pride.

"There wasn't a moment any of the success I had in Yankton that wasn't because of something he taught me," Dan said of Upward, who retired two years ago. "Now for my daughter to be coaching his program is incredible."

For Sean, it was swimming, which he coached for two years before taking the cross country helm. After learning the art and the science of coaching, he stepped into that position believing he could do the job.

"When I got the job at South Sioux City, I was asked to coach swimming. Swimming wasn't something that runners did when I was growing up," he said. "But I knew I could develop confidence there and be a successful coach there as well."

Family Time

Even before Sean, Shannon and Ramsey went in to coaching, life in the Fitzsimmons household revolved around sports, not just the sports that the family coaches and participates in, but pro sports as well.

"You can't be a Fitzsimmons without loving sports," Ramsey joked.

Watching football with Dan is how Ramsey became a New England Patriots fan.

"Ramsey used to come to town on Sundays. I would be watching football and, after a while, she would come and watch it with me," he said. "Now when the Pats come on, we're usually texting back and forth during the game. That's a common bond that she and I have."

The dinner conversations, though, aren't much different with a house full of coaches than they were with a house full of athletes.

"I don't think dinners have changed," Dan said. "But now instead of traveling to my events or my kids' events, we travel to my kids' coaching events."

Cilla says that these days, the discussions around the house are more philosophical.

"It's more fun. We can talk philosophy, coaching styles,"

she said. "To hear my kids talk like Dan does, to hear them say the things that Dan has said for years, is pretty enjoyable."

While the younger Fitzsimmons' coach at three different schools in two states, their teams will converge a couple of times this season. Sean and Shannon also serve as assistant track coaches, meaning that they will join Ramsey at the Dan Lennon track and field meet, an high school event run by USD. Both Dan and Connor, a junior track and field athlete at USD, will be on the work detail for the meet.

"Someone will say 'Fitz' and all of us will turn around," Shannon joked. "We don't get to see each other every day, so getting to see them at a track meet is fun."

And, as she has done for much of their lives, Cilla will sit back and take it all in.

"It's fun watching them coach, watching get excited about their athletes," she said. "In our house, it's always been kids first. That's our own philosophy of being a parent, too."

"And that's what they're showing their kids."

You can follow James D. Cimburek on Twitter at twitter.com/JCimburek. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net

Coaching Runs In Many Families In The Region

When the *Press & Dakotan* sports staff decided to delve into family coaching connections, we knew there would be many more than we could tackle in one preview section.

We asked area athletic directors and coaches to submit those connections within their school. Here are the ones we received, besides the three that were featured:

■ Wagner's Michael and Tera Koupal have coached together for nine years, with Michael serving as head coach and Tera as a top assistant. Two other couples in Wagner are also on the coaching staff: Jason (head football) and Stacey (assistant volleyball) Knebel, and John (assistant wrestling) and Amy (head volleyball) Tyler.

■ The Eisenhauer family has coaching brothers spread across Northeast Nebraska. Rick is the assistant boys' basketball coach at Niobrara-Verdigre. Gary is head boys' basketball and junior high football at Bloomfield. Randy is head football, girls' basketball and golf at Elgin Public-Pope John.

■ Brothers Steve and Lee Heimes

both coach at Wymot. Steve is head football coach and is an assistant for boys' basketball. Lee is head boys' basketball and track coach, and is the junior high football coach.

■ Yankton girls' basketball coach Trey Krier is the son of O'Gorman coach Steve Krier, a Yankton native. One of Krier's assistants, Robb McClemons, is the son-in-law of longtime Mount Marty College athletic director Chuck Iverson.

■ Freeman coach Rory Hermesen's daughter Brooke is a coach at West Central.

■ At Hartington-Newcastle, the husband and wife duo of Nick and Leigh Haselhorst are both head coaches, Nick for boys' basketball and Leigh for volleyball.

■ Vermillion boys' basketball coach Jay Drake is the son of longtime Winner coach Jim Drake, who recently retired.

■ At Creighton, Zac Kliment is in his third season of running the wrestling program that his father Randy coached for 30 years. Randy is still at Creighton as the athletic director.

■ Allen's Dave Uldrich, who serves as athletic director, head football coach and head track coach, has a son, Corey, who is head football and boys' track for Humphrey-Lindsay Holy Family.

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