

Vermillion Girls Return Four Starters From .500 Squad

BY ALAN DALE
Vermillion Plain Talk

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VERMILLION — They will come at you fast and ferocious even if they won't have a ton of timber to support their desire to drive opponents batty.

Yet, the Vermillion Tanager girls' basketball team has enough returning experience and good youth in the mix to have hope for a solid season as the 2014-15 campaign is set to begin.

The Tanagers opened up their season Tuesday at home against the girls from Elk Point-Jefferson.

One thing Vermillion will have to do in order to improve from an 11-11 season (5-6 in Dakota XII play) which ended with a 1-1 ledger in regional tournament action, is to find a way to replace the scoring ability of graduated Josie Huber who is now playing for Dakota Wesleyan.

"She averaged 18-20 points for us last year," second-year head coach Jon Brooks said of Huber. "So we will have to pick up that scoring. We were a young team last year. The nice thing was we were very young, very inexperienced and we have a lot of kids coming back that played a lot last year. We lose those points but we can replace them with a lot of people. We don't have to rely on one kid so much this year."

"We relied a lot on Josie with her shooting, but I think if we come together more as a team and push it more, we should do fine," Peters said. "We are finding a lot of the kids are starting to step up. It should be a good year."

Brooks does have four starters back from last season in Tori Gregoire, Sydney Peters and Kyleigh and Haleigh Melstad and he has seen a lot of development throughout the roster.

"We had a great offseason and last year was a learning curve for everybody," Brooks said. "This year just after three practices we are so much farther ahead of last year. They know what to expect. They know the offense, they know the defense, and we are just jumping right back into it. Overall, everybody is ahead of where we were last year."



HALEIGH
MELSTAD

Gregoire feels the first week or so of practice has gone well for the squad thanks in large part to getting a jump start on proceedings.

"We did a week of 'Pride Week' before practice started to get us in shape and I think that helped a lot," Gregoire said. "We did a lot of running and two plate workouts to get us a little bit stronger. We weren't slugging around that

first week and we knew what was going on and what we were expecting."

The program only has 18 players out and despite the low number the team is a solid one in terms of ability. Throw in the addition of the middle school players who will move over once their season ends after Christmas and Brooks should have enough cards to deal.

"We're young, we have a lot of young kids, so we will expect some of them to play a big role," Brooks said. "It's competitive. We don't have a lot of kids out there, but it's competitive freshmen through seniors."

"Last year we only had one senior which hurt our numbers because that class was low and this year we only have two sophomores.

Our freshmen class is pretty big with having eight freshmen. They are a pretty good group."

Brooks wants to employ an up-tempo game that exploits a small team's strength: speed.

"We want to play fast, so we practice fast and we are getting after it," Brooks said. "We don't want to slow down. We don't run a lot of sets we just go into our motion on offense and play a lot of man-to-man pressure defensively. Hopefully we can make teams uncomfortable."

It doesn't hurt that the players understand their identity and have bought into it.

"We are fast and are looking to push the ball at a high pace," senior Rachel Finnegan said. "We are going to be playing a high pressure game."

Peters acknowledges that Vermillion basketball hasn't been known for having tremendous height on the girls' side. She does believe that they have the grit to make up for it.

"We are aggressive," "The other day in practice we had a bloody nose and a bit elbow. That's only in the first week so... Our bigs, which aren't that big, are really, really physical in practice."

That will be important since small, fast teams usually don't succeed by simply being quicker than the other team. Usually their success is derived from how well they can play once they encounter a club that can counter that speed with an ability to slow the tempo down and grind it out.

"We talk about that no matter what at some point and time you have to be efficient in the half court," Brooks said. "You can pressure, but you aren't going to turn the ball over every time. You have to buckle down defensively and you have to make half-court stops. Offensively, we can run our fast break and it may not work and you have to score in the half court."

"What's nice this year is that we do have a little bit more size. Last year we didn't. Our size was young and wasn't quite ready. This year we are hoping it's ready and hopefully we can play two different ways."

It should also help being able to adjust because they will face a lot of zone defenses and the team will aim to find the way to score against them.

GIRLS' B-BALL		
Dec. 9	vs. Elk Point-Jefferson	
Dec. 12	vs. Bon Homme	7:45 p.m.
Dec. 16	vs. S.F. Christian	7:45 p.m.
Jan. 2	at Tea Area	6:30 p.m.
Jan. 3	at Tri-Valley	5:15 p.m.
Jan. 8	vs. Canton	7:45 p.m.
Jan. 9	vs. Parkston	6:30 p.m.
Jan. 13	at Madison	7:30 p.m.
Jan. 15	vs. Lennox	7:45 p.m.
Jan. 17	vs. MMC (Garretson)	1:30 p.m.
Jan. 20	at Elk Point-Jefferson	8 p.m.
Jan. 23	at Lennox	7:45 p.m.
Jan. 27	vs. West Central	6:15 p.m.
Jan. 29	at Dell Rapids	6:15 p.m.
Jan. 31	Dakota XII Classic (Lennox)	
Feb. 3	at Beresford	8 p.m.
Feb. 7	at S.C. North	4 p.m.
Feb. 10	vs. Dakota Valley	8 p.m.
Feb. 12	at West Central	7:45 p.m.
Feb. 17	vs. Wagner	6:30 p.m.
Feb. 24	Region 4A (top two seeds)	
Feb. 26	Region 4A (highest seed)	
Mar. 3	Region 4A (TBA)	7 p.m.
Mar. 12-14	Slate A Tourn. (Watertown)	

The players are prepared for the grind of Dakota XII play even though a number of players from other teams have moved on except for one squad that should be considered the favorites.

"It's going to be a tough season, but it won't be as hard as last year," Peters said. "We got a little bit of everything in the league. Lennox is going to be tough because they didn't graduate many and they are all around good. Elk Point graduated everyone."

EPJ finished third at the Class A state tournament last year.

Brooks agrees that this season anything could happen.

"There isn't a team that is head and shoulders above everybody else," he said. "It's going to be even, it's going to be a battle. Our conference is tough and I may be biased but it's the best conference in our class. Tri-Valley, Dell Rapids are top five, top 10 teams. It's a competitive league."

The Tanagers believe they are ready for anything.

"We're ready for anything and Coach Brooks knows what to tell us to do," Gregoire said. "We are usually faster than other teams and we play the in and out game well, so that will help."

"We just have to come together here and we have to find scoring," Brooks said. "When we struggle it usually comes when we go 4-5 minutes where we can't score. Without Josie that's a little bit of a concern. I know how hard our girls worked in the offseason and they are ready for the challenge and have been ready for a long time. We have a gritty group. We will rely on our defense, but if we can score consistently, we will be in a good spot."

Tanager Wrestlers Look To Build On 11th Place Finish

BY MARK UPWARD
For the Plain Talk

VERMILLION — Ask any wrestler on the Vermillion High School wrestling squad and they will tell you that the team is very capable of improving on the 11th place finish from last year's state meet.

Vermillion High School's head wrestling coach, Hazen Bye, is very optimistic about this year's season. Bye is assisted this year in the wrestling program by Luke Heine, Keith Burkhart and Gary Culver.

"Our goal as a team is to make it to the team podium, which means we are in the top eight teams at state," said Bye. "We have several wrestlers that have made it to state the past two years, but they didn't finish on the podium and if we want to move up on the podium as a team, they will need to place."

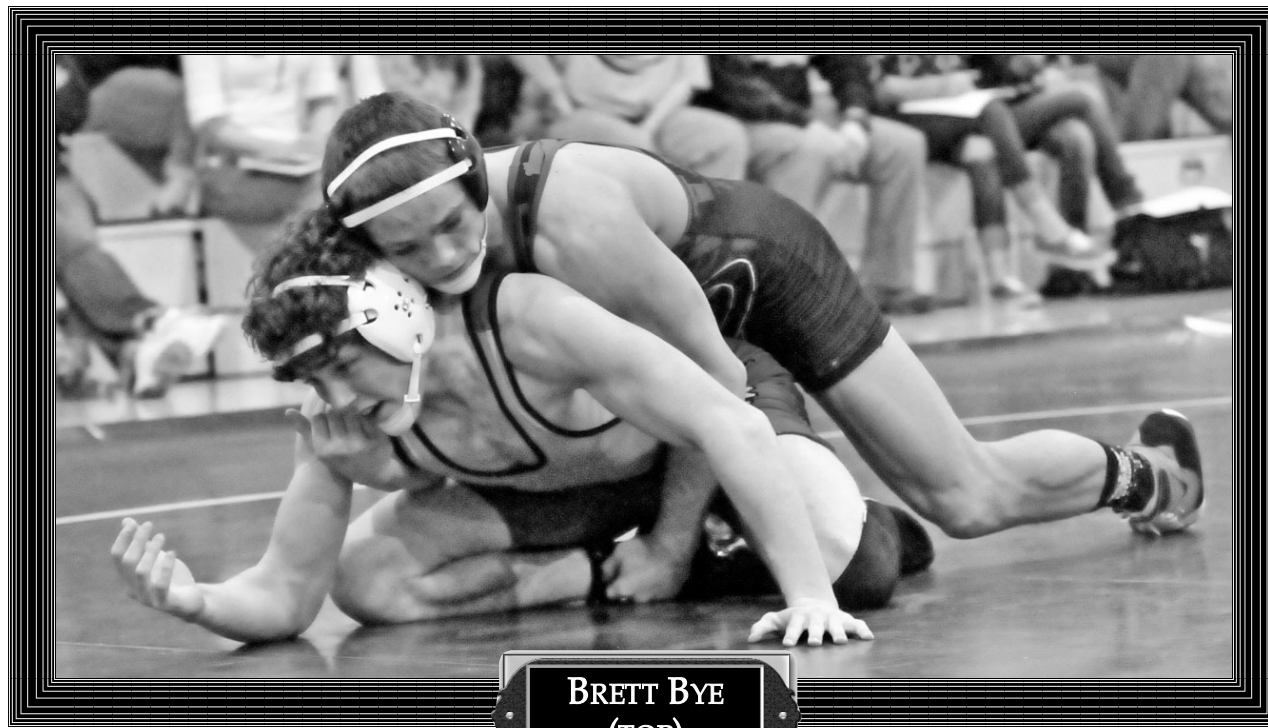
There are 22 wrestlers in grades seven through 12 on this year's squad. Of those 22, three wrestlers stood on the podium at the awards ceremony after the state wrestling meet last year. This year the Vermillion program hopes to increase that number.

Ninth grader Trey Hage finished in fourth place in the 106-pound weight class last year.

"I know I have to be at practice every day and work hard every day so I can improve on my finish from last year," said Hage. "As a team, I hope can improve on our 18 wins and 3 loss dual record."

Regan Bye was a state champion in the 145-pound weight class while his cousin Brett Bye was a state champion in the 152-pound weight class last year. Both Regan and Brett were juniors last year at the 2014 state meet and are returning this year to defend their championship titles.

"My goal is to win another state title, but this year it will



BRETT BYE
(TOP)

have to be in the 160 pound weight class," said Regan Bye. "My advice to the young wrestlers coming into the program is to not give up. Fight through the tough times because things will get better."

Regan Bye has signed a letter of intent to join the wrestling program at the University of Nebraska.

"Overall my goal is to make myself a better wrestler so that I can achieve goals that I have set for myself down the road in my career," he said.

Brett Bye is also gearing up to defend his state title as he prepares for the 2015 state tournament. He has received a scholarship to attend South Dakota State University and join the Jackrabbit wrestling program.

"I would really like to go undefeated and not have a takedown against me this year," Brett Bye said. "I hope we can get into the top five as a team or maybe even into the top three."

The wrestlers listed as varsity for the opening match

of the season for the Vermillion High School wrestling program are ninth graders Riley Beach and Hage, sophomores Jacob Husby, Carter Kratz, Kyle Seibel, Noah Walker, junior Noah Westergaard, and seniors Regan Bye, Brett Bye, Brandon Hertz, Josh Westhuaser and Adam Winslow.

Husby has his eyes set on competing at the state meet. "My goal is to compete in the state meet as a 126 pounder," said Husby. "I know I need to work harder at practice and put in more time so I can see the results."

Two more sophomores that are hoping to make it to the state meet in February and compete for a medal are Kratz and Seibel.

"I really want to wrestle at the 132 pound class. I would like to get lots of takedowns and improve my wrestling overall," said Seibel. "My fu-

WRESTLING		
Dec. 2	Lennox Quad	(2-1)
Dec. 6	Roosevelt Inv.	(3rd)
Dec. 12	Yankton Quad	5:30 p.m.
Dec. 16	Tri-Valley/at W. Cent.	5:30 p.m.
Dec. 29-30	Floyd Farrand Inv.	11/10 a.m.
Jan. 6	Dakota Valley/at EPJ	5:30 p.m.
Jan. 10	Brandon Valley Inv.	9 a.m.
Jan. 13	Madison/at Dells	5:30 p.m.
Jan. 17	Wayne (Neb.) Inv.	10 a.m.
Jan. 20	vs. Lennox/Tea	5:30 p.m.
Jan. 24	West Central Inv.	10 a.m.
Jan. 27	Canton/at Beresford	5:30 p.m.
Feb. 5	vs. Wagner/Crofton	5:30 p.m.
Feb. 7	Yankton Inv.	9 a.m.
Feb. 12	Washington Quad	5 p.m.
Feb. 14	Dakota XII Conf. (Dells)	10 a.m.
Feb. 19-20	Region 2A (Tea)	5/6 p.m.
Feb. 27-28	Slate A Tourn. (SF)	10 a.m.

ture goal is to be a state champion."

Seibel believes that this year's team can make it into the top five at the 2015 state meet.

"Wrestling takes a certain mindset and great conditioning," said Kratz. "Having Brett and Regan at practice to push me will make me a better wrestler."

Kratz worked out at the Legends program this summer and he thought that

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