

# Gymnastics: Vermillion Tanagers Young But Ready

BY MARK UPWARD  
For the Plain Talk

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This article originally appeared in the Nov. 28, 2014, edition of the Plain Talk and the Dec. 2, 2014, edition of the Press & Dakotan. It has been edited to reflect the ongoing season.

**VERMILLION** — The Vermillion High School gymnastics team is being guided this year by first time head gymnastics coach Shannon Fitzsimmons. Fitzsimmons, a former Yankton High School gymnast, had been the assistant coach in the Tanager program for the last two seasons.

Fitzsimmons is excited about taking over the program as head coach. "We are really young this year," said Fitzsimmons. "We don't have a senior on our squad this year, but our young kids are doing really well getting ready for the first meet."

Fitzsimmons' assistant this year is Michael Rucker. Rucker, a sophomore at the University of South Dakota, is a rookie to the sport of gymnastics. "I'm really excited to be here helping Coach Fitzsimmons," said Rucker. "I am learning something new about gymnastics everyday and I am looking forward to learning all the ins and outs of assisting the girls with their routines." Rucker was also Fitzsimmons assistant coach this fall in the girls' soccer program.

The gymnasts have been working hard since Nov. 3 to learn new skills, polish skills they have and putting together new routines on each event.

"We are trying to give



CARTER WILLIAMS

everyone a chance to compete in the first meet," said Fitzsimmons. "Most of the girls will be ready, but some of the rookies may need a little more time. We have been learning new skills and then putting those skills into routines to complete the routines."

With no seniors on the squad, the Tanagers will be relying on junior Cheyenne Mallory, freshman Anneliese Taggart, and eighth grader Carter Williams. These three gymnasts are the returning nucleus from last year's squad that placed 4th at the state gymnastics tournament.

"The difference for me

this year is that I know I have to be tighter on my skills in my routines and more fluid in my routines," said Williams. "For the team, I hope we can have fun this year, but still place well at state. My personal goal is to complete my double twist on floor and my front tuck on floor."

As a seventh grader, Williams was the only Tanager gymnast to place in the top 10 on any event at last year's state meet when she placed sixth on the beam with a score of 8.5.

"I think this is going to be a fun year for us with all the young girls we have," said Mallory. "For the team, we

got 4th place last year, so I hope we can move up a spot this year. Personally, I would like to finish a full on floor and get a handspring full on vault."

The Tanagers with four juniors, four ninth graders, five eighth graders, and seven seventh graders on the 2014 gymnastics team have a lot of work ahead of them to improve on last year's performances. This gives Fitzsimmons and Rucker lots of things to work on during each practice session.

Sophomore Taggart has been a state competitor since seventh grade. As a sophomore this year, Taggart will

be called upon as one of the veterans to help the younger gymnasts develop. "I really want our team to go, possibly into the top three at state," said Taggart. "Personally, I would like to get into the top five at state and maybe win an event at regions."

Fitzsimmons believes the varsity competitors for the first meet will be Mallory (Jr.), Shayla Kiertzner (Jr.), Sydney Furry (Jr.), Taggart (9th), Morgan Graham (9th), Peyton Larson (8th) and Williams (8th).

There is no doubt in the state who the powerhouse in Class A gymnastics in the state is. In the past 20 years,

the Class A state title has

GYMNASTICS		
Dec. 2	vs. S.F. Lincoln	
Dec. 13	Wagner Inv.	noon
Dec. 18	Roosevelt Tri.	6:30 p.m.
Dec. 30	Winter Wonderland	11:30 a.m.
Jan. 10	Stanley County Inv.	11 a.m.
Jan. 13	at Madison	6:30 p.m.
Jan. 17	Madison Inv.	noon
Jan. 22	vs. Yankton	6:30 p.m.
Feb. 2	West Central at Wagner-BH	
Feb. 6	Region 2A (Wagner)	6 p.m.
Feb. 13-14	State A (Watertown)	6 p.m.

been won by either Duel or Madison. Madison had the longest winning streak with 15 straight titles until Duel took over in 2011 and won 3 consecutive Class A state titles.

Madison regained the champions' podium in 2014 when they scored 141.4 points to Deuel's 134.125. Third place has been spread around the state for the past 20 years and it looks like the Vermillion team is eyeing it carefully in the 2014 season.

The Vermillion High School gymnasts hosted Sioux Falls Lincoln Dec. 2 (Tuesday) at the Vermillion High School. The remaining schedule sees the Tanagers home two more times, hosting the Winter Wonderland Invitational on Dec. 30 and then a dual with Yankton on Jan. 22.

The remaining meets for this year include the Wagner Invitational on Dec. 13, the Stanley County Invitational on Jan. 10, the Madison Invitational on Jan. 17, and the Wagner/West Central/Vermillion triangular on Feb. 2.

The Region 2A meet will be held in Wagner on Feb. 6 with the state meet Feb. 13 and 14 in Watertown.

# Wagner, Bon Homme Begin New Gymnastics Era

BY JEREMY HOECK  
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The world of gymnastics along Highway 50 will see a marked change this season.

Gone is the co-op between Yankton High School and Bon Homme, as Yankton is on its own, while Bon Homme has joined with Wagner.

Change, though, is already proving to be a good thing for those hitting the mats, bars and beams in Wagner.

"It's different, but exciting," said senior Chelsey Hisek, one of three departures from the YBH squad — McKeely Merkwan (So.) and Emily Duffek (Fr.).

"It's the first year for a lot of people, but it's definitely different in good ways."

How?

Experience and techniques, said Wagner-Bon Homme coach Cherie Petry, who enters her 15th season.

"The girls and the personalities they bring to the team has been really beneficial," Petry said. "Some of the different training ideas they've brought and with our close-knit family, it's really a perfect fit."

Along with the three newcomers, Wagner-Bon Homme also has nine other gymnasts back from last season. They include Hannah Fleming (Sr.), Krista Dvorak (Jr.), Rachel Dion (Jr.), Adrian Weber (Jr.), Jensen Holzbauer (So.), Alexis Dion (So.), Breanna Kotab (Fr.), Maggie Barnett (8th) and Megan Merkwan (8th).

Also new to the team are four seventh-graders: Ibanez Cournoyer (7th), Hollee Smejkal (7th), Violet Johnson (7th) and Izabella Cournoyer (7th).

If not for the co-op, Fleming would have been the lone senior on an otherwise young squad.

"I was the oldest, and we didn't have a lot of experience, so it was nice to get that," she said. "A few of them had done club stuff before, and that's really helped us."

Of the three newcomers from the Yankton-Bon Homme team, Hisek has the most varsity experience. She competed at the state

tournament last season, tying for 16th place in the parallel bars, while Duffek tied for 21st place in the balance beam.

Even without the additions, the returning Wagner gymnasts have started to develop consistency with their events, Petry said.

"They have such a new energy about it," she said. "They're no longer seventh graders, they're in a comfort zone and they know what their bodies can do."

The additions, though, have allowed Wagner-Bon Homme to do more things in practice and eventually into competitions.

"It's driven us to try more things," Fleming said.

With a variety of experience levels, it's understandably been a bit of a challenge in practice to switch between seniors — with as many as 4-5 years of experience — and seventh graders — who are new to the sport, Petry said.

But that's where the newcomers have helped out, the coach said.

"We don't have all of the amenities, like pits and bars and beams, to practice with, but they're still willing to do these things to help the team," Petry said.

For a sport based primarily on individual work, that says a lot, Fleming said.

"It's a very individual sport, but you have to remember you're supporting the team at the same time," she said. "You have to motivate yourself just beyond what you're doing."

Wagner-Bon Homme, a Class A team, opens its season with a home tournament on Dec. 13, followed by a dual with Yankton two days later.

As the season progresses, the new-look squad in Wagner will continue to develop chemistry, Hisek said.

"We're meeting new people, and they're getting to know us," she said. "I think it's good we can join together."

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KRISTA DVORAK



## Parkston-Ethan-Hanson Makes Debut

### Parkston-Ethan-Hanson

COACH: Bridget Muntefering  
ASSISTANTS: Heather Prunty, Stephanie Plastow  
VITALS: Class A, Region 2

**TOP PROSPECTS:** Jenna Bialas (Fr.), Kailay Feiner (Fr.), Amber Harrison (Fr.), McKenzie Prunty (8th), Kori Boschee (7th), Hanna Jackson (7th), Hope Kerr (7th), Jada Plastow (7th), Tyra Zens (7th)

### Wagner-Bon Homme

COACH: Cherie Petry  
ASSISTANTS: Samantha Dvorak, Craig Fleming, Stephanie Duffek  
VITALS: Class A, Region 2

**TOP PROSPECTS:** Hannah Fleming (Sr.), Krista Dvorak (Jr.), Rachel Dion (Jr.), Adrian Weber (Jr.), Jensen Holzbauer (So.), Alexis Dion (So.), Breanna Kotab (Fr.), Maggie Barnett (8th), Megan Merkwan (8th)

**NEWCOMERS:** Chelsey Hisek (Sr.), McKeely Merkwan (So.), Emily Duffek (Fr.), Emily Kezena (7th), Shaeleigh Broken Rope (7th), Hollee Smejkal (7th), Violet Johnson (7th), Deaja Tilly (7th)

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## VHS WR

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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 helped him to become a better wrestler.

"I'm excited for the kids because they are hard working kids. They know me now as a coach and what to expect each year," stated Vermillion coach Hazen Bye. "They are beginning to look forward to the grind of the season."

Vermillion opened the 2014-15 season on Dec. 2 at Lennox with a quadrangular

that includes Sioux Falls Roosevelt and Parker. The Tanagers went 2-1 in that event, then finished third in the eight-team Rider Invitational on Dec. 6.

The Tanagers have two home meets in January, a triangular with Lennox and Tea Area on Jan. 20, and a triangular against Wagner and Crofton-Bloomfield on Feb. 5.

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