



TANAGERS: Audrey Miiller

Vermillion Track & Field Team Looks To Finish Big 8 Era With A Bang

BY JILANNE DOOM
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VERMILLION — In the final season of the southeastern South Dakota Big 8 Conference, the Vermillion Tanagers are hoping to leave an impression on their longtime conference rivals.

"The Big 8 historically in track and field is one of the toughest in the state," Vermillion head track coach Lenni Billberg said. "It's almost a mini state tournament."

With perennial powers West Central, Madison and Harrisburg to compete against, Billberg says the likelihood of winning the conference meet is not as great, but she hopes her team can cause some surprises.

"That's just a fun meet for us," she said. "We like to go out and work hard. Sadly, to go against these fine teams it'll be the last time this will happen, but we'd like to go out with a big bang."

Another aspect of the team the Tanagers will enjoy for one last season is a large group of high scoring seniors who will lead the squad.

The boys' sprint medley team returns three of four legs from the 2012 state champion relay, and all of them are seniors. JT Sorensen, Colin Olson and Austin Krier return to defend their relay title one more year and Billberg believes this will be their breakout season.

"We had a lot of success with them and that same group of boys was also second in the 4x400 at the state," she said. "They broke the school record that was 28 years old and they just had success every meet along the way."

Distance runner Nathan Ford, who placed 13th at the State A Cross Country meet, enters his final season for the Vermillion boys as well.

For the girls, Paige and Megan Olson — triplets on the team with their brother Colin — return as members of several Tanager relays, including the state qualifying sprint medley.



TANAGERS: Nick Jensen

Mackenzie Huber also returns for one more season after placing third in the pole vault at the 2012 state meet.

Although Billberg knows her large group of seniors will be difficult to replace, she said many new faces will make an impact this season, including seventh grader Madisen Lavin who was the runner-up finisher at the state cross country meet.

"Of course track and field is about staying healthy, but I think she can really make some noise on the track, as well as looking toward the growth of other younger athletes," Billberg said.

One challenge the boys will face is a smaller squad, but Billberg thinks the quality of her athletes will overcome that.

"I think our boys are going to challenge," she said. "We aren't going to have the same numbers that the other schools are going to have because we have a few other sports that draw athletes but they're going to do really well."

The girls will not have to face that issue as they have a larger team this season. Billberg said this will allow them to score more points as there will be more girls to fill both relays and individual events.

The Vermillion tracksters also have a new facility to train on, thanks to money raised by athletes.

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Veteran Lineup Give Tanagers Strong Squad

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE
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VERMILLION — The Vermillion golf team is looking forward to a season full of experience. Losing only one senior to graduation, this year's seniors are each stepping up to build off last season's fifth place finish.

Head coach Kirk Hogen said he has a good group this year, who will continue to improve.

"We've got some letterwinners coming back — four good seniors and three of them with some pretty good experience," he said. "We're looking forward to going back and seeing if we can improve on that finish a little bit with the experience we have. We have a pretty good core of girls."

What could hurt or help the

Date	Event	Time
April 2	vs. Madison	2 p.m.
April 4	Elk Point-Jefferson Inv.	9 a.m.
April 9	Dakota Valley Inv.	9 a.m.
April 15	vs. Lennox	4 p.m.
April 16	at West Central	2 p.m.
April 18	vs. Dakota Valley	3:30 p.m.
April 29	Vermillion Inv.	10 a.m.
May 3	Big 8 (Madison)	10 a.m.
May 9	Harrisburg Inv.	9 a.m.
May 13	Region 2A (Bakker Crossing)	9 a.m.
May 20-21	State A (Milbank)	10 a.m./9 a.m.

Home Meets At The Bluffs Golf Course

Tanagers the most this season is not having one 'hot-shot golfer' to lead them.

VHS GOLF | PAGE 4

Date	Event	Time
March 25	Dan Lennon Inv. at Vermillion	
April 2	Elk Point-Jefferson Inv.	3:30 p.m.
April 4	VHS Booster Club Inv.	2:30 p.m.
April 9	Canton Inv.	4 p.m.
April 11	Lennox Inv.	4 p.m.
April 18	Lennox Booster Club Qual.	4 p.m.
April 23	Dakota Valley Inv.	4 p.m.
April 25	Yankton First Dakota Relays	4 p.m.
May 3	O'Gorman Inv.	11 a.m.
May 3-4	Howard Wood Relays	2 pm/8 am
May 9	Big 8 (Harrisburg)	3 p.m.
May 17	Region 4A (Harrisburg)	2 p.m.
May 24	State A (Lennox)	10:30 a.m.
May 25	State A (Sioux Falls)	9 a.m.

Home Meets At VHS Track

YHS Track

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Yankton also boasts some veterans in the throws, including senior Clara Schild, whose toss of 39 feet earned her a runner-up finish at Dan Lennon. Junior Allie Murphy and seniors Kelsey Butler and Abbie Mitchell are also solid veteran competitors.

Led by a healthy Larson and the 2012 state cross country champion in Woods, the Yankton distance corps is back to its competitive self.

"We certainly have some strong upperclassmen and a solid group," Youmans said of the distance squad. "We have former state placemen like Whitlee Larson, Annie Kruse (Jr.), Ashtyn Haak (Jr.) and Savannah Woods. It's a great group coming back in the distance events."

Depth will be a strength for the Gazelles this season.

"We have six or seven sprinters that could be in the four in the 4-by-1, 4-by-2, 4-by-4," Youmans said. "We're going to be able to pick and choose, and have some friendly competition within the program."

While the girls brought back their state meet points, the Bucks — for the most part — did not. State hurdle champ Justin Lillie, who also placed eighth in the 300 hurdles and was part of the 400 relay team, is now competing at Baker (Kan.) University. Connor Fitzsimmons, who placed in the long jump (4th) and triple jump (5th), as well as part of the 400 relay, is competing for the University of South Dakota. Ty Soulek, who was runner-up in the shot put, is a walk-on football player at South Dakota State. Zach Sage, part of the Bucks' place-winning 800 relay, also graduated.

"We lost a couple of key guys — Kipp Kinsley (SDSU track), Justin Lillie, Connor Fitzsimmons, Ty Soulek, Terry Huber — all contributors. We lost studs in all four major events," Youmans said. "We've got some holes to fill on the boys' side, but we're



BUCKS: J.J. Hejna

going to fill a lot of those holes more easily than we anticipated."

Senior Alexander Savage and junior Ricky Culver — part of the seventh place 400 relay and eighth place 800 relay a year ago — have both returned to lead the Bucks' sprint corps, as did senior Michael Rucker, who was on the 800 relay.

"In our first meet we had guys who exceeded expectations in a few events, especially in the sprint corps," Youmans said. "We have four, five guys running faster than our top sprinters had run in the past four, five years. We closed the gap on a few schools."

Two athletes who come into their junior track seasons off strong efforts in other sports are

J.J. Hejna and Brice Cowman. Hejna was a leader for the Bucks in both football and basketball. Cowman was a top-10 finisher in last fall's state cross country meet.

"J.J. will be a big part of our jumps," Youmans said. "Brice had a great cross country season, and we look for him to continue that success."

With Soulek and Huber — the Bucks' top two throwers from a year ago — gone, senior Troy Hunhoff will be looked upon to lead that group.

"Troy will have to be our guy in the throws," Youmans said.

While the boys do not have the top-level depth that the girls do, they still have the potential to make some waves.

Date	Event	Time
March 19	Bob Prince Early Bird at Vermillion	
March 25	Dan Lennon Inv. at Vermillion	
April 2	vs. SC East/Washington	4 p.m.
April 6	Brandon Valley Inv.	10:30 a.m.
April 9	vs. Brandon Valley/Mitchell	4 p.m.
April 11	vs. Brandon Valley (Fr/So)	4 p.m.
April 13	Sioux City Relays	8 a.m.
	Corn Palace Relays	9 a.m.
April 16	Washington/O'Gorman/Br. Valley	4 p.m.
April 22	at S.F. Lincoln	4 p.m.
April 25	First Dakota Relays	4 p.m.
April 30	vs. O'Gorman (Fr/So)	4 p.m.
May 3	O'Gorman Inv.	11 a.m.
May 3-4	Howard Wood (S. Falls)	2 pm/8 am
May 4	Junior High Relays	9:30 a.m.
May 11	ESD (Aberdeen)	11:30 a.m.
May 16	Last Chance @ Brandon	4 p.m.
May 24	State AA (Brandon)	10:30 a.m.
May 25	State AA (Sioux Falls)	9 a.m.

Home Meets At Williams Field

"We have a good mix of boys spread around through the events," Youmans said. "We've got some great individuals but we don't have a great team yet. As long as we keep everyone healthy, we'll be well-balanced."

The Bucks and Gazelles have four varsity home dates in 2013, beginning with a triangular with Sioux City, Iowa, East and Sioux Falls Washington on April 2, and ending with the First Dakota Relays on April 25. Yankton will also host sub-varsity duals with Brandon Valley and O'Gorman.

With the high volume of home events, Youmans and the Yankton squad are looking not only for fans, but volunteers to help with meets as well.

"We're looking for volunteers to help out," he said. "We also have an invitation to get the community here to support the team when we're in Yankton. Hopefully we'll fill up the stands and get people excited about track."

"It makes it a great experience for the kids."

To volunteer to help with a track meet, contact the YHS Activities Office or Coach Youmans at YHS.

You can follow James D. Cimbrek on Twitter at twitter.com/aceman904



GAZELLES: Whitney Specht

YHS Golf

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their game to be able to fill her shoes," he said. "We've got experience, and we're going to look at building on the success we've had. We just have to try and do the best we can to keep our place in the state."

Megan Mingo was Yankton's highest finisher — runner-up at state last year — while Whitney Specht has been playing for the last three years, Sime said.

Sime also said Becky Frick played well for Yankton last year, and he will also look to Livingston's years of state tournament experience.

"We're a young team, so getting the younger girls experience will help build our team," Specht said. "It's just about being leaders for the younger kids this year and showing them how it goes to help them along."

Although weather has kept the team from having many outside practices, Specht said the team is still ahead of many other towns.

"We're definitely in a better position than other towns be-

cause we don't have any snow," she said. "A lot of towns up north still do, and we're off to a good start getting a couple of outside practices in already. We'll be ready."

Once the team can take advantage of the outside practices, Livingston said short game will be a big focus.

"We wasted a lot of strokes around the green last year, easy strokes that could have been fixed to decrease our scores a lot," she said. "That's really our main focus."

But overall, Sime said the goals are still the same.

"We're hoping to be competitive this year and do well at state," he said. "We've got a big year for golf in Yankton, and we're just hoping things go well."

You can follow Emily Niebrugge on Twitter at twitter.com/ENiebrugge

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