

Press & Dakotan DAILY DOSE

Daily opinions from the P&D Sports Staff on local and national high school, college and professional sports.



BY JEREMY HOECK
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As we prepared for the Yankton High School volleyball season back in August, *Press & Dakotan* sports editor James Cimbrek and myself were joking about the 2012 State Volleyball Tournament. We looked at what the Gazelles had coming back from last year, with not much varsity experience, and thought: "Two years ago state was here, and last year it was in Sioux Falls, but watch Yankton make it to state this year and have to make the trip all the way to Rapid City."

Gazelles In Position For A Much-Coveted Road Trip

It's been an impressive season for the Gazelles, despite a sub-500 record. Those inexperienced players have now gelled with the senior leadership of Mikala Hora and Kelsey Fitzgerald, and have the Gazelles as a tough "out" in the post-season. But consider: The Gazelles haven't qualified for state since 2007, when they finished seventh. Since that time, the 'AA' has been held in Rapid City (2008), Brookings (2009), Yankton (2010) and Sioux Falls last year. There lies the joke. The state tournament was literally in Yankton's own gym two years ago, but the Gazelles were relegated to being spectators. And last year, with all the talent it had, Yankton came up just short of making the short trip to Sioux Falls. Now, faced with a 6-hour trip to Rapid City, the Gazelles are in prime position to potentially put together a nice run. Who could've predicted that, three months ago?

South Dakota Announces Promotions For Saturday's Football Game

VERMILLION — South Dakota has announced a set of promotions for Saturday's home football game against the Northern Iowa Panthers. Kickoff is set for noon. The Midwest Dairy Association and the Yippin Yote Kid's Club will host a Fuel Up to Play 360 Football Bash Party Saturday morning from 9-11 a.m. at the Muenster University Center Ballroom. Attendees will get \$5 off membership to the Yippin Yote Kid's Club and will have the opportunity to get involved, be active, take challenges and receive awards. For more information on the Yippin Yote Kid's Club please visit the Yippin Yote Kid's Club online.

Visitors will have the opportunity to meet USD head football coach Joe Glenn, Charlie Coyote and win NFL Merchandise. Attendees will also receive half-price adult admission and free admission for kids at the football game. Saturday's football game is also Military Appreciation Day courtesy of CorTrust Bank. Veterans and military members will gain free admission and their family members will receive half-price tickets with presentation of a Military Appreciation Day coupon which can be found at GoYotes.com. A pre-game tailgate party for military ticket holders and their families is being hosted by Classic Hits 106.3 in Coyote Tailgate Nation. Prior to Saturday's game members of USD's ROTC will repel from the rafters of the DakotaDome to present the game ball prior to the Coyote football team entering the field. The Sound of USD will perform an "Armed Forces Salute" at halftime.

For more information on Military Appreciation Day please visit www.usd.edu. Saturday is also Senior Day at the DakotaDome, and as such senior citizens (60 and over) will receive half price admission to the game upon request. Senior members of the Coyote football team will be recognized during the pre-game ceremonies.

Carney At QB Club

The Yankton Quarterback Club will meet Wednesday at noon at the Elks Lodge, 504 West 27th Street, Yankton. This week's speaker is South Dakota High School Activities Association executive director Wayne Carney, who will talk about issues currently facing the SDHSAA. The public is invited to attend.

Gophers Still Trying To Get Over That Big Ten Hump

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The good news for Minnesota last weekend was that the Gophers had plenty of legitimate opportunities to compete a strong enough game to beat Michigan, one of the Big Ten powers they've been least successful against. The bad? They still lost at home by 22 points. So the Gophers (5-4, 1-4) have moved on, buoyed by their clear improvement over last season when they fell 58-0 to the Wolverines but frustrated by a lingering inability to put together the kind of performance required to beat the traditional big boys of the conference.

"You can't really practice it. You've just got to get in the games and do it. That just comes by experience," quarterback Philip Nelson said Tuesday. "I think that we're so close to getting there that it really creates some disappointment after the games." This is what happens with many rebuilding projects. They're still lacking the overall talent and attitude to play well most of the time. "When you first take a program over, they're usually open because there's a reason for it. There's a struggle there. And your first year, you're just not very good," Gophers coach Jerry Kill said. "The second and third year, and you hope you can move it quickly, is that you win some games, but then you're close in a lot of games that you don't win because you're not quite good enough to get over that hump, and I'd like to see us be able to get over that hump a little bit."

There were at least three glaring examples in Saturday's 35-13 loss for the Gophers of a team capable of hanging with one of the Big Ten's best but not yet able to produce enough confidence, smart calls or clutch plays to win. —Michigan had the ball at the Minnesota 45 midway through the second quarter, facing third down and 17 yards to go and a 7-0 deficit. Gophers linemen got to the backfield, forcing quarterback Devin Gardner to scramble around to avoid a sack. After running the equivalent of roughly the entire width of the field, Robinson saw Drew Dileo wide open in the end zone and threw him ball for the tying touchdown. As well as the Gophers had the rest of the receivers covered, one lapse cost them dearly on that play. "We had all the momentum in the world. At some point, we lost it. And we struggled to get it back," safety Brock Vereen said. —Trailing 21-7 late in the third quarter, Minnesota had first-and-goal at the Michigan 3. But Donnell Kirkwood was stopped for no gain, and then Nelson was too. Next came the false start penalty on left guard Zac Epping, and Nelson's third-and-long pass was incomplete, prompting a short field goal. "Anytime you get inside the 5-yard line, you've GOT to come out with a touchdown," Nelson said Tuesday. "I'm sure that's something that's going to be a huge point of emphasis this week in practice." —When the Wolverines got the ball back, Gardner completed a third-and-4 throw to Dileo for 11 yards to midfield. Then on the next play, Gardner flung a pass into double coverage that Ray Roundtree somehow came down with at the 3-yard line. Troy Stoudemire was in prime position for the interception, but the ball landed in Roundtree's hands last. "We're making good plays, we're making strides, but that's not much of a consolation," linebacker Mike Rallis said. A trip to Illinois is on tap for this Saturday. The Illini (2-7, 0-5) are already playing for next season. With a game at Nebraska on Nov. 17 and Michigan State due at TCF Bank Stadium on Nov. 24, this is obviously the best chance for the Gophers to ensure themselves an extra game. "Not making a bowl game is not really an option for me," Rallis said, adding: "We're getting down to the end of it, and we need to find a way to get a couple victories here and go out the right way. But we've got to start with this one game and kind of get in that atmosphere where every game is a huge game." The Gophers will likely be without leading receiver A.J. Barker again. He didn't play against Michigan because of a sprained right ankle suffered in the previous week's win over Purdue. Barker has 30 receptions, 577 yards and seven touchdowns, by far the most on the team in each category. The freshman Nelson has showed promise and poise in three starts since taking over the job, but success is harder for him without his best target.

SCOREBOARD

Table with columns for sport, date, and results. Includes sections for Volleyball, Football, Nebraska Playoffs, and Nebraska State Tour.

AREA CALENDAR

Table listing various sports events and dates for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Includes basketball, volleyball, and football events.

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to close the set, 25-22. Yankton controlled set two, jumping ahead 12-5 thanks to a consistent ability to find open spots on the floor. The momentum on their side, the Gazelles hung on for a 25-21 win. "There was a lot of physical and emotional energy on both sides. I was proud of our girls for coming out so fired up," Yankton coach Leasa Woodward said. "We battled back, but just couldn't quite match them." As would be the case in the final two sets, the celebrations after each point and after each win were understandably intensified, considering what was on the line. "You could tell, both teams were playing for something," said Washington coach LaDawn Nesje, whose team returns to the state tournament. "We both wanted to get it done tonight, and not have to try again." The Warriors were the aggressors in the third set, using an early lead and some aggressive serving to take the Gazelles out of system. It was much the same story in set four — Washington had all the momentum. "Once we gave them too big of a lead, we got back on our heels," Woodward said. "We had a tough time receiving their serves and getting our offense in rhythm." Though early on they found ways to get around the blocks, the Gazelles struggled containing Washington's one-two offensive punch of Emma Hanson (24 kills) and Lexi Bordeaux (16). "We were finally able to do some things against them, especially serving, and to try to take Mikala away a bit," Nesje said. "But honestly, I think Yankton will get make it there (state) anyway, they're a scrappy team." Senior Kelsey Fitzgerald added 12 kills and 16 digs for Yankton, while senior Maria Binder had 34 set assists and junior Brooke Wuebben posted 16 digs and five kills. A loss at Washington now in the rearview mirror, the Gazelles turn their attention to the Watertown Arrows on Friday. Yankton, which opened district play with a home win over Brandon Valley, swept Watertown during the regular season. "The energy you saw against Brandon Valley is hopefully what people will see Friday," Woodward said. As Washington was celebrating on its side of the net after Tuesday's match, Hora was consoling her

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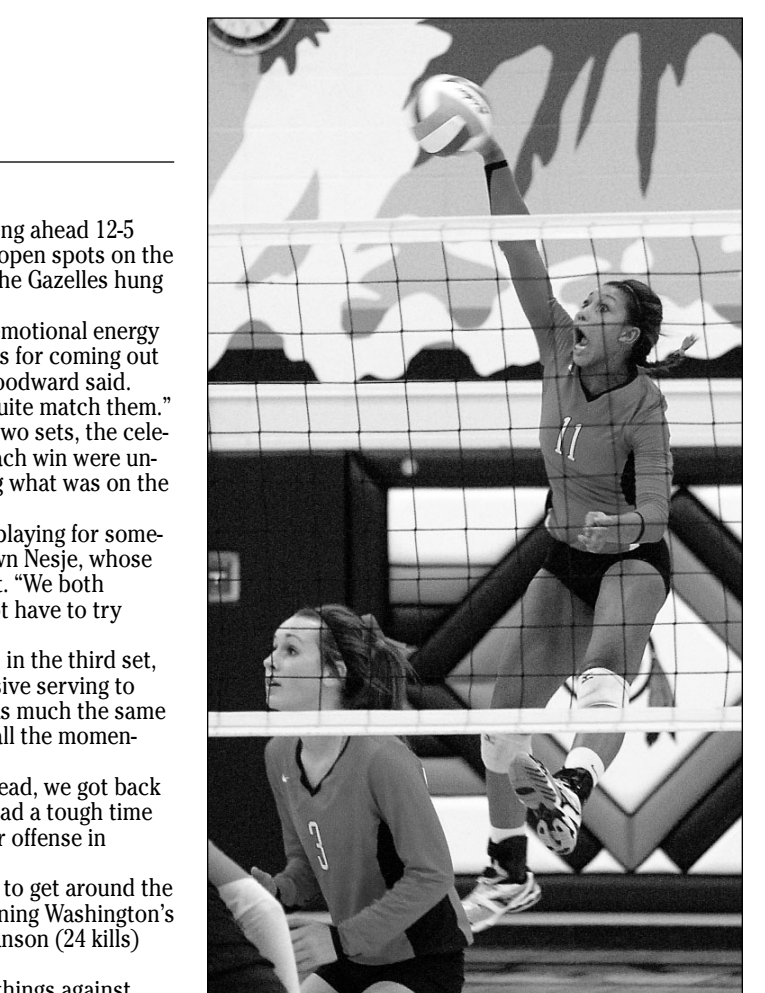
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JEREMY HOECK/P&D Yankton senior Mikala Hora jumps high for a kill against Sioux Falls Washington during their District 2AA championship match Tuesday night in Sioux Falls. Yankton's Brooke Wuebben looks on.

Region 4B

Thompson said there were good things happening during the match, and regardless of the rough night she was proud of what her

team accomplished. "I was pleased with my back row and their passing as well as their serve-receive. We struggled all season, but tonight it came together. The blockers in front finally timed the blocks and when I put our right hitter in she was able to pick up the slack there. "It was a good season and I'm very proud of what we did. The

girls all did an awesome job. I'm just proud of them, and we've still got next year." Parker will be the top seed in the state tournament, Nov. 15-17 at Mitchell.

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

because it's our last year," Kellie said. "We were really emotional on the bus ride up and in practice. To me, it means a lot because I'm really excited. I'm ready to play with my team because we're an awesome team."

teammates — a move she said was meant to narrow the focus. "We just had to tell the younger girls, 'It's not over yet,'" Hora said. "We wanted to get it over with, to be able to celebrate already, but this is a learning experience. "We'll get it done Friday," she added. "We'll get to state either way." You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck

Congratulations Roadrunner Convenience Ribbon Cutting. The Yankton Chamber of Commerce Ambassador Committee hosted a ribbon cutting for the new owners of Roadrunner Convenience Mart, Robert Zacher and Connie Somsen. Roadrunner Convenience Mart is located at 300 W. 23rd St. Robert and Connie are open at 5:30 a.m. and close at 11 p.m. They proudly endorse Shell Oil grade fuels available 24 hrs. a day and also have complete selections of beverages, tobacco, snacks, off-sale wine, on-sale beer as well as a gaming casino. For more questions you can call (605)665-3908 or email them at yanktonroadrunner@gmail.com

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