

Young Gazelles Not Backing Down From Challenge

Cross Country: Yankton Heads To Huron For Today's State Meet

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
james.cimburek@yankton.net

The 2012 Yankton Gazelles don't quite resemble the 2011 squad that claimed the Class AA state title for seventh title in nine seasons. In fact, nearly half of the team's runners in today's (Saturday) South Dakota State Cross Country Meet were not even eligible to run last season.

But that does not mean that Coach Dave Dannenbring and the Gazelles won't try to make waves.

The Gazelles graduated fourth place finisher Jenna Grossenburg (South Dakota State) and lost ninth place finisher Whitlee Larson (Jr.) to injury, but still return two placewinners from a year ago, each of which have thrust themselves into individual title contention.

"One of the funny things about athletics is, when you lose one your good ones,

you hope everyone else wants to get better to fill that void," said Dannenbring. "Annie Kruse (Jr.) and Savannah Woods (Fr.) are running extremely well. There's a threat for one of them to win state.

"When you have a good 1-2 punch, it's easier for the 3-4-5 runners to run their races."

Kruse, who placed 10th a year ago, and Woods, who finished 20th as an eighth grader, have taken turns leading the Gazelles since Larson went down with an injury last month. Junior Ashtyn Haak has stepped in to lead the Gazelles' second pack, which includes sophomore Tristan Roy and seventh graders Tessa Folkers, Holly Hicks and Madison McClure. If an alternate is needed today, eighth grader Kristin Rezac will step in.

Only one other team — Sturgis — will run three seventh graders today. Sioux Falls Washington will run three eighth

graders, and Brandon Valley boasts three eighth graders and a seventh grader.

"There are a lot of teams that do have middle school runners this year," Dannenbring said. "It seems to be in waves every few years. For a school like Washington to put three eighth graders out there is really unheard of."

Dannenbring and the rest of the Yankton coaching staff, though, have not put any pressure on the young Gazelles to uphold the YHS distance tradition.

"I'm hoping their youthful enthusiasm takes over," he said. "They just need to go out there and run. They're good athletes, so I think they'll do fine."

The Yankton boys will be looking to improve on last season's eighth place finish against what is a closely-packed field.

"There are eight to 10 really good teams this year," Dannenbring said. "It might be hard for us to break into the top four, but

we're still hoping for a shot at the combined title. If both our boys and girls run great, and Brandon Valley or Pierre have an off day, we could have a shot."

Juniors Brice Cowman, who finished 19th a year ago, and Ryan Olson have led the Bucks' herd all season.

"We're hoping Brice is in the top 10, and we're talking about Ryan Olson being on the podium in the top 25," Dannenbring said. "We're excited about having these guys up front."

The Bucks will also have seniors Evan Bergeson, Jacob Bies and Andrew Struck, junior Justin Grode and sophomore Paul Fanta on the starting line today.

The Class AA girls' race will be held at 3 p.m. After the awards for Classes A & B, the Class AA boys' race will be held, starting at approximately 4:15 p.m. Awards in Class AA will follow at approximately 4:45 p.m.

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

Crofton Girls Win Seventh Straight Title

KEARNEY, Neb. — For the seventh consecutive year, the Class D girls' race at the Nebraska State Cross Country Championships has ended with the Crofton Lady Warriors on top.

Crofton put four runners in the top 14 to easily extend their string of state meet success at Friday's championship meet, held in Kearney, Neb.

In its 23-76 finish over North Platte St. Patrick's Crofton put all four of its scorers ahead of all but one team's second runner. The Lady Warriors' sixth runner finished ahead of all but two teams' third runners.

Senior Danielle Riesberg completed her CHS cross country career with a runner-up finish, clocking a 15:47.1 over the 4,000-meter course to place behind Aquinas Catholic senior Marissa DeWispelare. DeWispelare successfully defended her 2011 title, finishing in 15:08.8.

Also for Crofton, sophomore Kendy Kube (16:05.7) placed seventh, sophomore Quinn Wragge (16:14.8) finished 13th and senior Tiffany Tramp (16:15.0) finished 14th. Tramp, like Riesberg, finishes her CHS cross country career with four individual top-15 medals at state.

Sophomore Vanessa McFarland (30th, 16:55.6) and senior Abigail Braun (41st, 17:04.8) completed the Crofton girls' roster.

Crofton assistant coach Jason Arens credited the seniors for helping keep a deep and highly-competitive team together.

"Our seniors gave us so much leadership. We had 17 girls on the team and were always switching spots, but they took it in stride," he said. "Dani was tremendous for us all throughout the season. Tiffany is quiet, but she's always right there pushing her teammates. Abbi is always the life of the team, always the most positive individual. Brayton (Hagge), even though she didn't make the state team, was always there working hard.

"I don't know how many people came up and thanked them for what they did for our team. It was really a lot of fun working with them this season."

Bloomfield junior Breana Gallup also earned a medal in the Class D girls' race, finishing 10th in 16:11.9. Laurel-Concord-Corleridge sophomore Sadie Petersen placed 40th (17:04.6), while teammate senior Samantha Camenzind placed 50th (17:25.6).

Crofton also finished fourth in the Class D boys' race with 76 points, behind Nebraska Christian (46), Ainsworth (71) and Stanton (75).

Bridgeport's Cody Franklin won Class D boys' race, finishing the 5,000-meter course in 16:33.9. Three Nebraska Christian runners followed: Jahn Landigan (16:41.9),



P&D FILE PHOTO

Yankton football players hold their helmets aloft as the Bucks prepare to kick off during a home game earlier this season, one of the many Yankton traditions that dates back to the 1990s and earlier, when Yankton was a dominant force in Class 11AA football. Yankton coaches and players are working to restore the tradition of winning championships to the program. Yankton's sixth and most recent title was in 2002.

YHS Works To Restore Former Glory

BY CHRIS RILEY
sports@yankton.net

From 1981 (the year South Dakota adopted a football playoff system) through 2005, Yankton traveled to the DakotaDome for the Class 11AA championship game 11 times. The Bucks claimed six state titles during that period and finished runner-up on five other occasions.

The longest "dome drought" during that 25-year period was the four years between their 1989 second-place finish and a 1994 title.

"I think success breeds success," long-time Bucks coach Jim Miner said. "One of our advantages early was tradition that other kids, certainly Sioux Falls kids, did not have because they had more (junior high) schools and sometimes those kids weren't even sure where they were going to high school."

But since a 2005 runner-up finish to O'Gorman in the title game, the Bucks have advanced no farther than the quarterfinal round of the playoffs.

"I think it is a lot of variables," Bucks head coach Arlin Likness said. "We have shrunk in enrollment and as a result we don't have the numbers we had 10 years ago. We had 32 seniors in 2006 and the last few years we're lucky to get 20."

Even if Yankton has regressed as of late, there is still no doubt that the Sioux Falls metro area (Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt, O'Gorman and Brandon Valley) has made a powerful push towards the top in recent years.

"The Sioux Falls (public) schools have been creeping up since 2000," Likness added. "In '99 we beat O'Gorman in the championship but we played an athletic Roosevelt team in the semifinals (a 23-15 Yankton victory). They were getting bigger numbers at that time and had obvious size and speed — they were getting bigger, faster and stronger."

Bucks assistant coach Justin Olson has a unique perspective on



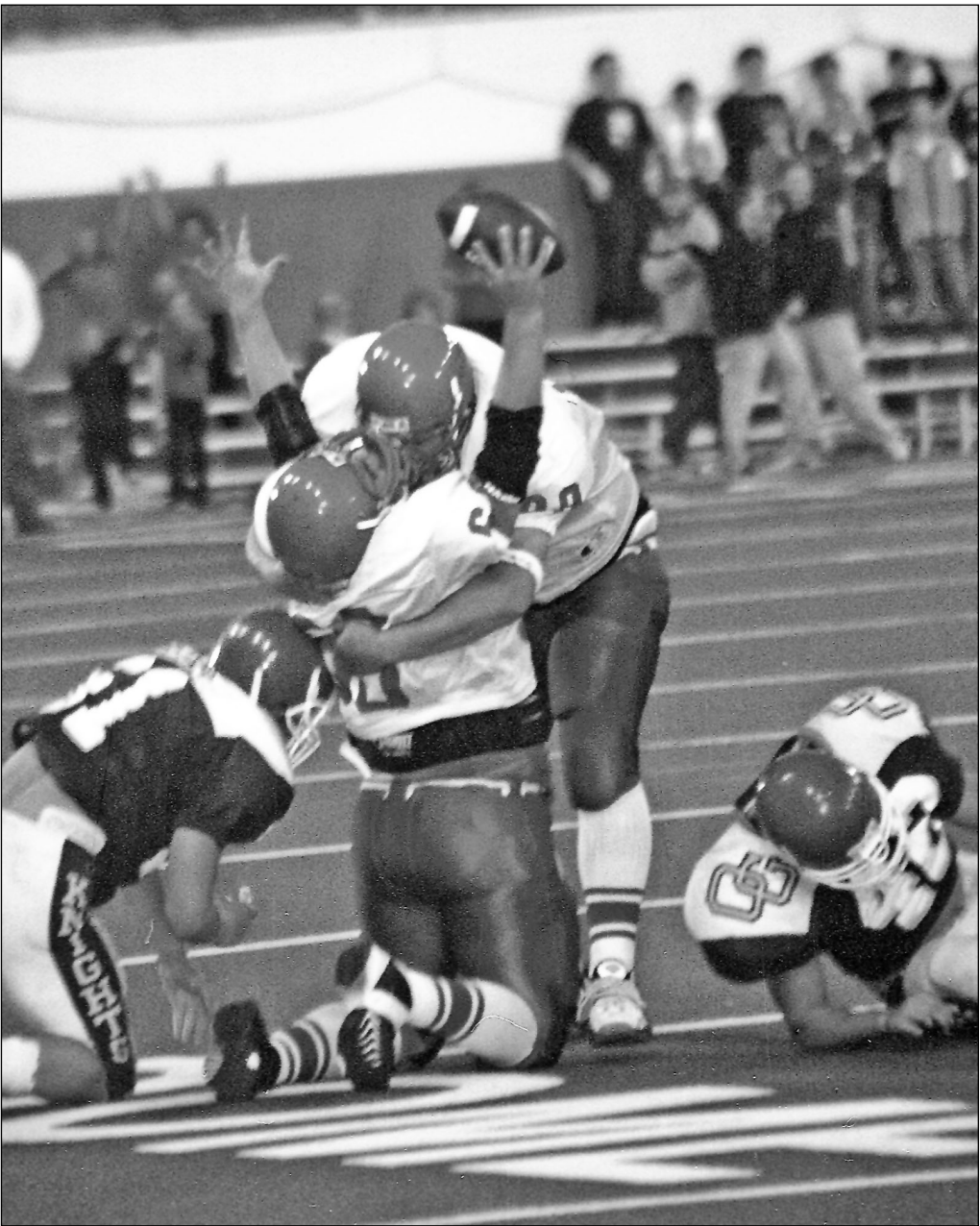
the subject. Olson graduated from O'Gorman in 1993 after playing on the Knights' 1991 state championship team and earned All-State Honorable Mention honors as the starting quarterback and safety his senior year in 1992. He then went on to coach for the Knights from 1996-2009 before moving to Yankton and volunteering for the Bucks in 2010. Last year he was hired as an assistant varsity coach and currently coaches the secondary and special teams units.

"Recently the Sioux Falls public schools have taken advantage of having great numbers in their programs," Olson said. "Those quality numbers creates a huge advantage. With some of the smaller rosters you might run into kids getting tired from playing both ways or if the team gets hit by injuries that could really take a toll on a smaller roster. The bigger public schools don't drop off nearly as much."

25-Year Dominance

While the Bucks were no stranger to "mythical" state titles prior to 1981, the advent of the playoff format to crown a champion gave Yankton their first official title in 1982 with a 10-6 victory over O'Gorman, a year after losing to the Knights in the inaugural Class 11AA title game.

This would certainly foreshadow a trend as six of Yankton's 11 title game appearances to date have come



P&D FILE PHOTO

Yankton players celebrate a fumble recovery that clinched the Bucks' 1999 championship game victory over Sioux Falls O'Gorman. The title was the third championship and fourth title appearance in six years for the Bucks, who rank second among all Class 11AA schools with 11 championship game appearances and six titles.

Parker Boys Look For Third Straight Title

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
james.cimburek@yankton.net

HURON — It's strangely appropriate that the South Dakota pheasant opener is today (Saturday), as once again the Class B boys' field at the South Dakota State Cross Country Meet will be chasing the Pheasants.

The Parker Pheasants, that is. Parker will go for a third consecutive Class B boys' title when the gun goes off at the state meet today at Broadland Creek Golf Course in Huron. For head coach Phil Bjornberg, it's been a fun ride.

"It's amazing to me that, when we won our first one, we did it with two freshmen and a sophomore," he said. "That really speaks to their talent."

At the top of that list is senior Duane Jongeling, who has run away with the individual title each of the past two seasons. His state cross country resume begin with a state berth as an eighth grader, when Parker was still in Class A.

"At the beginning of the year, Duane was a little slower than he had been last year," Bjornberg noted. "But since (Wessington Springs') Jace (Kraft) got him at McCook Central, he's turned it on."

Juniors Michael (16th) and Ryan (18th) Olson return from state medal finishes a year ago. The Pheasants also added one of their chief rivals in