

Gymnastics: Veteran Gazelles Raise The Bar

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With everyone back from a ninth place finish a season ago and a number of other gymnasts pushing them, the Yankton Gazelles gymnastics team has raised the bar. How far up that bar goes remains to be seen, but coach Luke Youmans is confident that it's pretty high.

"We've been a team the last five years, that we've been happy just to make it to the state meet, be one of those top eight teams," Youmans said. "We're planning on being one of the teams that's going to be a top-tier program."

The Gazelles finished ninth at state a year ago. They also had five compete individually, led by eighth grader Jaiden Boomsma's pair of top-20 finishes, fifth in the vault and 11th on the balance beam. Junior Haleigh Diede was an all-around competitor at state. Juniors Kaitlin Guthmiller, Morgan Mason and Cameryn Specht also competed in individual events at last year's state meet.

Yankton did not have a senior or junior on last year's squad, and does not have a senior this year.

"We've had a couple of years where we had some really young girls, and it was going to take a little bit of time to transition them into really good gymnasts, and we're there. We saw last year that it was the transition year of taking some really young kids and starting to turn them into some really good athletes," Youmans said. "We're out of the transition this year. This is the year that the expectations are there."

The Gazelles are excited about the expectations as well.

"We are a lot better this year because all the hard work we've put in," said junior Sophie Bisgard.

Yankton also returns juniors Cassie Echols and Shanna Hill, and sophomores



Yankton's Sophie Bisgard

GYMNASTICS			
Dec. 3	vs. Mitchell/Parkston-Ethan-Hanson	Team: 135.2	
Dec. 5	Lolly Forseth Inv.		
Dec. 8	at S.F. Lincoln/vs. Mitchell	Team: 131.325	
Dec. 10	at S.F. O'Gorman/vs. S.F. Roosevelt	5:30 p.m.	
Dec. 14	at Wagner-Bon Homme	5:30 p.m.	
Dec. 18	Mitchell Inv.	5:30 p.m.	
Jan. 9	Brookings Inv.	noon	
Jan. 14	at Brookings	5:30 p.m.	
Jan. 21	vs. Vermillion	5:30 p.m.	
Jan. 26	vs. S.F. O'Gorman/ S.F. Washington	5:30 p.m.	
Feb. 6	ESD at Watertown	noon	
Feb. 12-13	State at Brookings		

Lauren Vik, Madison Stahly and Storm Yaggie. One thing that has helped the Gazelles is their athletic diversity, according to Youmans.

"The great thing about this junior group of girls is that they're not just gymnasts. They're all girls that are varsity athletes in multiple sports," he said. "The thing you can't impress on kids enough is that if you want to be a competitor, you

have to go out and learn how to go compete. They've all been out in other activities, been competing at the varsity level. They walk in here knowing what it takes to be a varsity competitor."

With all the returning experience, the Gazelles are able to pick up where they left off, Diede said.

"We are starting out with a higher skill level than we had last year," she said. "We need to work to perfect everything. We have the skills."

Freshmen Alexus Brandt, Samantha Kortan, Alexa Griffith, Madison Schaefer and Miranda Schulte, and eighth graders Hailey Gokie, Mackenzie Havranek and Trinity Goeman are also on the Gazelle roster.

"We're going to be really competitive at the varsity level, but we're expecting to have a really competitive JV team this year, too. We don't want to make everything about five girls," Youmans said. "We want to make it about a team, which means

we want to be really competitive at the varsity level, but we want to go to meets and have a JV team that's competitive with a lot of varsity teams in the state.

"That's the beauty of our situation here. We are as competitive as we've ever been at every position and every level in our gym."

That depth and experience has been tested early. Each of the Gazelles' first three events included defending state champion Mitchell. The Gazelles also went up against traditional powers Rapid City Stevens and Sioux Falls O'Gorman in the first week of the season.

The Gazelles were looking forward to the challenge, Youmans said.

"I don't think there is any other way to start the season other than seeing the best. We've had years past where it's kinda, the moan and groan of, 'Oh, we gotta go against Mitchell right off the bat.' This year it's a little different," he said. "Our mind-



Yankton's Jaiden Boomsma

set is, 'We want to see them right away. We want to find out how competitive we can be with the best team.' We're going to find out right away on Monday night how good we are, and how competitive we're going to be with, what we believe, is the best team in the state."

For the Gazelles to get to their goals, shying away from tough competition cannot be on the agenda.

"This is the year that we compete with every program

in the state, where we don't say 'Mitchell's too good for us. Rapid City Stevens, they're too good for us,'" Youmans said. "We go in with the expectations that there isn't a team in the state that we can't be competitive with. That we can't be close to them, no matter what level – ESD, state – we feel that we are as good, as competitive as any team in the state."

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Yankton's Renee Cross (left)

Yankton Girls Continue To Build Program

BY ROGELIO RODRIGUEZ
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After a 6-11-1 season a year ago, the Yankton Miracle girls' hockey team is looking to continue the progress it made last season.

All but two players return for the squad, coached by Ryan McClellan and assisted by Mike Weber. The 2014-15 team got off to a strong start, but lost its last three regular season matches and went 0-3 at state.

"We played really well in the regular season and we just fell off on tournament play," said Assistant Coach Mike Weber.

According to Weber, the key to success in this season will be the girls' ability to

MIRACLE GIRLS' JV HOCKEY			
Nov. 28	vs. Aberdeen	L 0-13, L 0-6	
Nov. 29	vs. Aberdeen	L 0-10	
Dec. 4	vs. Brookings	L 1-2 (OT)	
Dec. 5	vs. Sioux Center	L 0-7	
Dec. 13	at Brookings	9 a.m./4 p.m.	
Dec. 18	vs. Sioux Falls	6 p.m.	
Jan. 2	vs. Osage	1 p.m./7:30 p.m.	
Jan. 3	vs. Osage	10 a.m.	
Jan. 9	at Rushmore	10 a.m./7 p.m.	
Jan. 10	at Rushmore	noon	
Feb. 6	at Sioux Falls	noon/4:45 p.m.	
Feb. 13	at Sioux Center	11:10 a.m./3:10 p.m.	
Feb. 26-28	State Tourn.	at Aberdeen	

find themselves on the ice and their ability to channel their aggression in the right directions; namely into their opponents. They must also be more precise with their passing.

"We have girls who have

never played hockey before, we're building this from the ground up because we don't have that where players dads have played and things like that," said Weber.

Despite all of these obstacles, these girls are ready to prove themselves on the ice and show their worth.

"We have a lot of girls where this is their first experience with hockey," said Weber.

Abby Weber (6 goals, 5 assists), Anna Lyman (4 goals) and McKenna Van Winkle (3 goals, 6 assists) are the returning scorers from a season ago. Victoria Weiland (2 goals), Isabelle Plath (1 goal, 2 assists), Anna Johnson

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Hockey

Yankton Boys Ready For Season

BY BEN HEGGE
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In the second year of fielding both a varsity and junior varsity team, the Yankton Bucks are determined for success.

"We have a group of kids that love hockey," said head coach Chad Kapla. "They will be put to the test this season."

The Bucks will feature a strong group of seniors that include Austin Barger (Captain), Colby Benson (Captain), Bryce Jensen, Cody List (Co-Captain), and Cody Perakslis (Co-Captain).

The question for Yankton this year will not be talent but the amount of depth for the Bucks.

"We are excited to showcase our top forward line of Austin, Coby, and Bryce, who we feel will match up with any top line in the state," said Kapla. "We will need young players to step up and support this top line and make us a competitive team in this tough varsity field."

A determined Bucks team is focused on success this season and has set team goals for the upcoming year. Goals that include a state tournament berth, which would require finishing in the top eight of the 12 teams in South Dakota.

However, Kapla and his team are more focused on daily improvement.

"A top eight finish would be huge for our program," said Kapla. "But in order for that to happen we need to be focused on daily improvement at the varsity and junior varsity level."

More specifically, the Bucks are "committed to improvement in three main



Yankton's Austin Barger

areas: competing harder, getting ourselves in better physical condition, and playing smarter hockey."

Now in the second year of the program, the Bucks have some experience under their belt. With a number of returning seniors, Yankton will look to thrive off their leadership in helping the younger players.

"Our seniors are tremendous," said Kapla. "The younger kids really look up to them, and they know what it takes to play varsity hockey. As the year goes on, I think our younger guys will learn a lot from them."

BOYS' HOCKEY			
Dec. 6	at Watertown	L 1-7	
Dec. 12	at Aberdeen	8 p.m.	
Dec. 13	at Aberdeen	12:30 p.m.	
Jan. 1	at Brookings	7:30 p.m.	
Jan. 2	vs. Watertown	5:30 p.m.	
Jan. 8	vs. Mitchell	8 p.m.	
Jan. 9	vs. S.F. East	8 p.m.	
Jan. 16	vs. Osage	3 p.m.	
Jan. 17	vs. Osage	3 p.m.	
Jan. 23	at Huron	7 p.m.	
Jan. 24	vs. S.F. West	3 p.m.	
Jan. 29	at Mitchell	6 p.m.	
Feb. 12	at S.F. East	9:15 p.m.	
Feb. 13	vs. Huron	7 p.m.	
Feb. 19	at S.F. West	7 p.m.	
Feb. 21	vs. Brookings	5:30 p.m.	
Feb. 27	at Rushmore	7:15 p.m.	
Feb. 28	at Rushmore	noon	
Mar. 11-13	State Tourn.	at Brookings	

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YHS GBB

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Drotzmann said. "It's really nice to have Christmas break, see where we're at individually, then really hone in on each other, what we have to do as a team."

After going 7-9 in Eastern South Dakota Conference play, the Gazelles will look to break into the top half of the league. But Krier knows his squad will be tested every time out.

"There's no easy game in our schedule. You look at the ESD, and the ESD's all competitive," he said. "You look at our non-ESD games, and we play all four Sioux Falls

teams. We get tested every game we go out and play."

Improving on the team's eight victories is one goal, and advancing to state – which Yankton has not done since 2011 – is another.

"It's going to take a lot of hard work, but I know every single girl on that court wants to get better," Frick said. "We're going to get better. We want to succeed. We want to make the state tournament so bad. I think with this group of girls, we can go really far."

While recent Gazelle teams have failed, but this year's squad is confident it can succeed.

"We've gone through some tough seasons where we had enough talent to make it (to

state) if we would have put the pieces together right," Drotzmann said. "I think this season has the capability to fall into place, to be that team."

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