

Vermillion High Track Warms up at Lennon Meet

By Alan Dale
The Plain Talk

The University of South Dakota DakotaDome was the place for another edition of the Dan A Lennon A High School Track & Field Meet and a feisty Vermillion High School Tanager program got a chance to get started on a new chapter this spring.

No team scores are tabulated as only individual results are accounted.

Pacing the Tanager girls were Maddie Lavin (7th place, 3,200-meter run, 12:22.16), the 4x400-meter relay team (7th place, 4:25.26), the 1,600-sprint medley team (9th place, 4:36.82) and Rachel Brady (14th place, 800-meter run, 2:40.36).

Jeremiah Johnson finished in 10th-place in the 400-meters (56.00) to end up with the top boys' result while the 1,600-meter relay team (11th place, 3:59.98) and the 4x200-meter relay (13th Place, 1:41.49) also scored well.

"The 2015 Dan Lennon was a great event for the Tanagers," Vermillion High head coach Lenni Billberg said. "Our athletes competed very, very hard and well. We are a very young team, yet saw some good success

against some very, very stiff competition.

"Every single one of our kids competed hard."

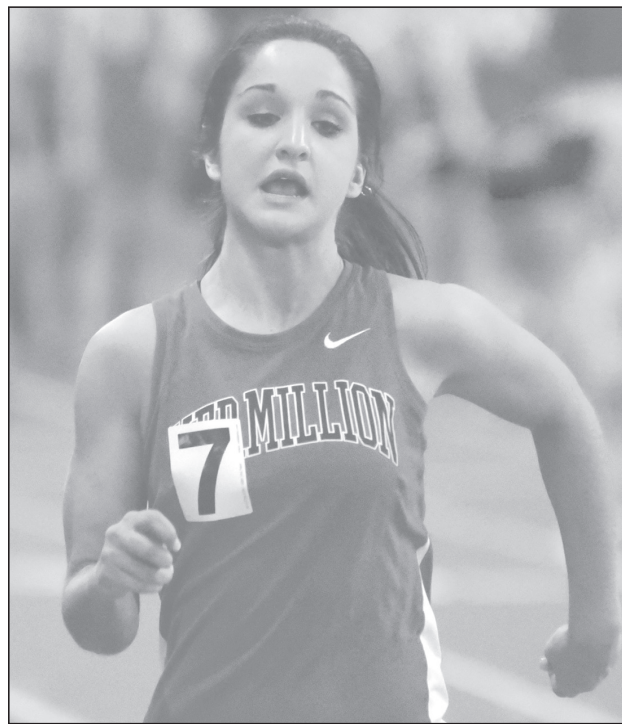
Billberg was pleased with a number of performances as the team got its legs under it.

"Maddie had a great meet running against athletes that have run multiple other meets already this year and finished above all other class A kids," Billberg said. "Our girls' medley of Ashley Schulz, Maddie Gregoire, Makenna Koble, and Maddie Lavin finished ninth in a tough field, but most impressively ran 10 seconds faster than last year at this time."

The medley relay team finished third in state last year.

"Our girls 4x400 were led by Makenna Koble, Madison Martinez, Rachel Brady, and Maddie Lavin and their time was 15 seconds faster than last year," Billberg said. "We can't wait to get to an outside meet." Billberg noted Johnson's performance as well as some other top results for her boys.

"We ran three really great legs of the sprint medley in a team of Jeremiah Johnson, Rylan Pratt, Jon Rosales, and



Maddie Gregoire and the Vermillion High track team opened up its season Monday at the Dan Lennon Meet at USD.

JAMES CIMBUREK / PRESS & DAKOTAN

Logan Peterson," Billberg said. "This young team also qualified for state last year and will be back bigger and faster."

There were still some issues to fix such as a dropped baton, trippings, lost footing and troubles on tight curves but Billberg feel things will work themselves out.

Next up, the Tanagers

compete at the "Mini Meet at the Dome" beginning at 4 p.m. on Tuesday.

"This will give us a chance to let all of our kids get out there to see what they can do," Billberg said. "After this, we can think about Elk Point (the following week) and assess who we need to place where and get excited about."

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age and loving it. We need some new blood, new energy and some people who are really committed to the game of tennis overall who could come in and really work with kids to help them see the sport as something high profile."

In the meantime Hughes returns junior Sam Craig who won a match in both singles and doubles last year during the state meet and senior Jacob Ford who battled at No. 1 singles for the Tanagers.

"We aren't the No.

1 team in the state, but we play," Ford said. "We know we aren't that great, but we'd like to win a few matches and we won our first (dual) last year for the first time in (three years)."

"There is definitely the underdog advantage in Vermillion. If we call ourselves the worst team in the state, come to practice late, leave early, well then...but if we come to practice early, stay late, and work our butts off - which is what we are doing - and get as much tennis in as possible - we totally want to change our status."

Craig's modest success at state has given him more confidence to proceed to-

ward progression heading into this season.

"It gives me the winning attitude that I can win more," Craig said of his state victories. "In the summer I played tennis a lot. We carried over the varsity from last year and as a whole we put a lot of time in. I'd say we played at least four times a week."

"We have the power to push ourselves," Craig said.

Hughes believes the team could do some solid things this season.

"You have to start somewhere and I think we can win 3-4 matches," Hughes said. "At state, I think we could have some singles and doubles teams

make it further into the tournament."

VHS TANAGER BOYS TENNIS ROSTER HIGH SCHOOL

PLAYERS: Jacob Ford, Sam Craig, Ryan Styles, Tim Ellison, Andrew Callahan, Daniel Robinson, Isaac Rosdall, David Wang, Owen Mechling, Avery Mollet, Ananth Venkatachalan, Tyler Hauck, Austin Davoux, Gavlin Wells, Sevie Ashes, and Caleb Blue.

MIDDLE SCHOOL PLAYERS: Jung Xu, Phillip Hauck, Parker Anderberg, Brennan Stone, Liam Mechling.

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size where you lose a couple and you score four out of five, that's huge. Sometimes that void is hard to fill back up.

"This year we have a good range of ages. We are not just one pot. You need a feeder group and to have a buddy they can play with in the offseason and that keeps a program going. We've got that going again a little bit."

The Tanagers return top performers in juniors Kate Brockvelevt and Kayla Stammer and sophomore Kyleigh Moran, while senior Audrey Miiler and junior Emily Schmitz are expected to make serious strides.

For this team, growth is about figuring out the nuances of the mental game.

"Luckily in golf just because you play badly one day doesn't mean you will the next day," Stammer said. "So yeah, we were younger and playing with girls a lot better than you and would bring down your confidence so you might not step up that day. But, even for our state meet, you can go play well the first day and do terrible. Or you can go back and do even better than the first day. You can recover in the sport. That's not how you are going to do forever."

Mastering that mindset came with age. Now comes the challenge of competing with yourself rather than the other girl.

"It's definitely harder to play yourself because mentally you can do badly and make yourself play bad," Stammer said. "Or you can do really well. It's all about how you are thinking about it. Golf is definitely harder than (volleyball, which she plays) just because of the mental aspects."

Brockvelevt was the lone Tanager to make an all-state spot as she finished in 18th place, improving eight strokes from her first round to the second to secure the spot.

"She shot a 97 and came back with an 89, but (Stammer and Moran) came out there fairly decent the first day and ballooned up in the second but that will happen at a state tournament," Hogen said. "They are fairly tight as a group so they'll mix

and match.

"Our most improved golfer last year was Emily and she is still improving."

The familiar faces makes for a comfort in knowing how good the team was and that it remains intact.

"Not losing any seniors from last year definitely helps because we all know where we stand and expect how we're each going to play," Moran said. "We all worked hard to improve from last year. Playing well together definitely is going to help."

So far Hogen's focus has been to get "the rust off" a little bit as the squad has gotten some practices and two qualifiers in.

He feels it's too early to tell where the team's short game is yet, but believes the team's putting must improve.

"It's just some basic mechanics and we have worked on that as a whole group," Hogen said. "They just need to get reminded of some basic setup and routines. Their setup isn't too bad as a whole, but it's more initial fundamentals of their stroke, and that's my job. You got to be able to putt."

The players are stock full of athletes in other activities such as volleyball, softball and dance and a number of them have taken seriously an approach to hitting the weights and getting stronger.

"They've gained about 15 to 20 yards and that's a big difference," Hogen said. "Some of the holes here you have to be careful to tone down a little bit and play smaller, be more technical."

Despite returning his whole squad, Hogen doesn't look at a team and concern himself with rosters and matchups. Instead he focuses on each player's ability to play their individual best against whatever Mother Nature brings to the table.

"With golf and with me it's not like we can worry about who we are losing and who we are playing, we are playing the golf course and the conditions presented to you that day," Hogen said. "It's not like we go out and work on a defense for Madison. I spend more time with the kids preparing them for the golf course we are going to play. They are individuals and we don't come up with plays."

"We'll do more individual prepa-

ration and not worry too much about the other teams."

The Tanager program on both the boys' and girls' sides have had long-term success thanks in large part to how they prepare.

"Our coach is a pro so that definitely helps where other teams have young coaches or coaches that coach a lot of other sports," Brockvelevt said. "Also we have a really good golf course (The Bluffs) that is always in really good condition and gets us ready for other courses that are harder."

"We get so used to our course and we had to play Bakker's Crossing last year and I was scared because it's a big course, but it's a lot like ours and that really helped me."

What will help them even more in 2015 is simply to continue to grow within the sport.

"Now it's more than anything, their confidence and playing smart," Hogen said. "Right now we just have to keep focus and play smart. You are going to have bad shots so it's matter of how you deal with it and how smart you play."

"It will be tough and Parkston (the defending champions) will still be the team to beat, but we can still improve. If we can shave one stroke per person per nine we are in the low 340s. You don't take the chunks, you take the pieces."

Those pieces could come in the shape of a bigger trophy at the state meet in Madison in late May.

With a chip on their broader shoulders from all their weight lifting and with a will to prove what they can do, the next chapter promises to be an interesting one.

"We definitely have the capacity to be better than (a Top 5)," Moran said. "Last year we got fifth, but we were disappointed in ourselves. We went in the first day and thought we were doing great and then..."

Madison, here they come...

VERMILLION TANAGER GIRLS GOLF ROSTER

SENIOR: Audrey Miiller; **JUNIORS:** Kate Brockvelevt, Allison Odens, Emily Schmitz, and Kayla Stammer; **SOPHOMORE:** Kyleigh Moran; **FRESHMEN:** Sierra Furry and Kara Mulheron; **EIGHTH-GRADER:** Jane Ni Struckman-Johnson; **SEVENTH-GRADERS:** Ashlyn Bickett, Katrina Heles and Alex Carr.

WILLIAMS EARNS DAK12 HONORS

Cooper Williams of Vermillion High School was named to the second team All Dakota XII Conference basketball team this past weekend.

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order to navigate through a tough 1B-East featuring Dakota Valley, Beresford, and Elk-Point Jefferson.

The 1B-West includes Parkston, Tabor, Wagner, and Parker.

"The East is tough, Dakota Valley and Beresford are going to be tough," Gault said. "Elk-Point had some young kids who were out there that I thought if you give them another year they would be tough. It's an absolute crapshoot to figure out who the powerhouse is going to be."

"Starting out with Dakota Valley is going to be a good test for us."

Gault has returning veterans Jack Brown, Travis Weber, Brandon Mockler, and Carter Kratz in the field, while the staff includes ace Jacob Odens, Hunter Christopherson, Kratz, Cole Anderson, and Carter Andre. Andre is back on the diamond after a number of years away from the game.

"We'll be young and we'll have some older guys that have been there and done that," Gault said. "We are hoping the young guys get on their backs and that we play some small ball. We are going to be pretty fast. An important aspect of our game is we are going to either have to steal second or sacrifice bunt just to get guys into position. We try to put the pressure on opposing pitchers by putting runners in scoring position."

The team's arms are coming along fine, according to Gault.

"Jake, Hunter, and Carter (Kratz) have been guys who have been on the hill in clutch situations and have done a nice job," Gault said. "I am confident they are guys that will locate fastballs and allow hitters to put balls in play, but hit their pitches."

Odens believes he knows the whole team's formula for winning.

"We just have to do the same thing every day," Odens said. "Hustle everything out, play hard, give everything we got, and do what (coaches tell us)."

Baseball comes during a time of year where the season starts and ends in a blink before wrapping up the SDHSBA campaign moments before American Legion summer play goes into full throttle.

"It comes down to the philosophy of where you want your kids at come playoff time," Gault said of the short amount of practice time his Tanagers have in the spring. "We use it as a competitive season and to see who we are going to use on our legion team in the summer. A lot of guys come out having not picked up a baseball or bat since summer when Legion ended. No one expects you to come out and be game ready, but we do expect them to still understand game play and knowing how to do the little things correctly."

"A kid who puts his work in and takes his prac-

Williams, a sophomore, led a triad of Tanagers who earned postseason honors.

Senior Carter Andre and junior Jeremiah Johnson were named honorable mention DakXII team members.

The Tanagers finished 9-12 this past season.

- *The Plain Talk*

tice seriously is going to get better throughout the season. We are concerned with playing our best baseball in that first regional playoff game. Then it carries over into Legion season."

Gault has seen a shift from American Legion play to SDHSBA competition in terms of state popularity.

"They are pretty equal in popularity as we've seen a shift from Legion to High School," Gault said. "A lot of these small towns don't have Legion anymore. But there high schools are still playing high school."

There is still no mistaking the importance of all baseball here in Clay County.

"From amateur ball all the way down to T-ball and we have people who are dedicated and willing to put in the time, work, and money into building great things," Gault said. "Whether it's a field or a dad taking the time to coach a team. We always seem to have people willing to put in the extra effort to make the experience special."

"We kind of like to consider ourselves a baseball town and that started a long time ago. It's also a football town, a basketball town, a debate town, and all sorts of things. Our little baseball world we have just been fortunate to have people that have said 'this is important' and pride ourselves on."

Odens said last year the Tanagers' collective heads were too big when they were defeated in Legion ball by Dakota Valley, despite being the heavily favored top seed.

"That definitely (fueled their offseason)," Odens said. "We have to know the level of your talent and know who you are. Know your level of skill and how your teammates are."

These guys know each other, they know the past, and they know what is expected of a Vermillion baseball player.

"There is always an expectation," Brown said. "Anything else besides making the state tournament is considered an off year. We didn't make the state tournament last year and it was sort of a shock."

"If we give it 100 percent, or give it our all I can live with that. (But not making it to state), that's tough. We want to win a championship."

VHS TANAGER BASEBALL ROSTER SENIORS:

Kyle Larson, Travis Weber, Jacob Odens, Jack Brown, Carter Andre, John Benson, Andrew Heine, and Jefferson Galvin.

JUNIORS:

Brandon Mockler, Wyatt Markee, Cole Anderson, and Joe Miller.

SOPHOMORES:

Carter Kratz, Kaedyn Brown, Nate Robertson, Hunter Christopherson, and Jonah Fee.

FRESHMEN:

Riley Johnson, Cole Christopherson, Carter Larson, Gabe DeJong, and Even Lindquist.

EIGHTH-GRADERS:

Gray Peterson, Rylan Craig, Justin Hall and Cole Arbaugh.

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