



**GAZELLES:** Yankton Cheer Team

# Gazelles Look To Defend Large-Squad Cheer Title

**BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK**  
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The Yankton Gazelles competitive cheer posted the top score in the state in Class AA large squad stunting/non-tumbling a year ago. With a dozen returning athletes, they will look to do it again.

The Gazelles hope to use depth in the high-profile flier positions and some versatile athletes to wow judges and fans alike in the 2011 season.

Last season, Yankton also competed in small squad stunting/tumbling but, with some of the graduation losses, won't try to double-dip this year.

"We don't have the tumblers, so we're going to stay out of that category," said Angie Luken, who shares head coaching duties with Kerry Svatos. "We are going to have one team, in large-squad stunting/non-tumbling."

While the Gazelles lack the tumblers that impressed the judges last year, they do have plenty of athletes who are ready and able to be tossed through the air.

"We have the potential of flying six different people, which is exciting for us," Luken said. "In the past we've struggled to get four."

With the Gazelles' routine typically having no more than four fliers needed, others will be used elsewhere in the routine.

"Some of (our potential fliers) will be used as bases because we don't need more than four at a time," Luken noted. A "base" is an individual at the bottom, or base, of a pyramid. "We have some versatility between our bases, back spots and fliers. We're excited to have some girls that we can do that with, that we can put in whatever position we need them."

The Gazelles boast four seniors this season: Megan Christopher, Courtney Fender, Kelsey Megard and Lindsay Vik. Juniors include Michaela Trail, Kayla Diefenderfer, Shelby Hammit, Noemi Nino, Morgan Privett, Logan Ramey, Cyndal Sathe, Allyssa Schroeder and Nichole Steiner. Gabrielle Swenson, Brooke Lange, Jessica Popovich and Elizabeth Rueppel are the

team's sophomores. Freshmen include Bailey Franzen, Shelby Kleinschmit, Tori Sage and Kelsey Rokahr.

"We have 12 returning to the competitive team. Nine are new," Luken said. "Some of our new ones have been sideline cheerleaders."

The biggest changes for this season include the reduction of the penalty for improper hair, nails and jewelry, and the publication of the scoring format. Previously, the only thing available to coaches was the scoring penalties formula.

"That will maybe level the playing field, knowing what the judges are looking for," Luken said. "The change for hair, nails and jewelry was because they found it to be excessive."

The previous penalty formula deducted 15 points per infraction involving hair, nails or jewelry, meaning it only took one or two individuals to sink a team's score. The new penalty is five points.

Another change involved the elimination of the non-stunting/non-tumbling division. Yankton did not compete in that division.

Sioux Falls Washington claimed the team title a year ago, and are one of the favorites to do it again, Luken noted.

"Watertown, Washington, Brandon Valley and Brookings all stayed in large squad stunting-tumbling," she said. "Huron started in stunting-tumbling but pulled out at state."

While the Gazelles will be at a disadvantage in the state race — since they won't get any points for tumblers — they can still make a run at some state tournament hardware to add to their collection.

"We've got a great routine," Luken said. "We have set goals for where we want to be for our home opener, the middle of the season and state."

"We're going to increase our difficulty throughout the season, and we're going to work together every week to make sure that happens."

Yankton begins the 2011 season with its lone home appearance, the Yankton Invitational, on Sept. 10.

# Changes Mean Fans Will See Less Of YHS Dance

**BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK**  
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Whether or not the Yankton Gazelles continue their run in the top two of the world of South Dakota competitive dance, one thing is certain: You will see less of the Gazelles in 2011.

Between state rule changes and a decision to cut one competition from a grueling schedule that runs from Aug. 1 to Nov. 12, there just won't be as many chances to watch the talented Gazelles take the floor.

The state made two major changes to the dance format in 2011. The first was that a school could not compete in both large and small squad or the same discipline. The other was that a team may only compete in three of the four disciplines — jazz, hip-hop, kick and pom — at a competition.

"We cut down from 32 last year to 20 this year," said Yankton head coach Katie Nelson. "We are still going to have four routines until state, then we will choose what categories we're going to compete in."

Of the 20 on this year's squad, 16 competed for the Gazelles last year. But Yankton still took a big hit from graduation.

"We lost 10 seniors last year. It's a big jump," said Nelson, now in her second season at the helm of the Gazelles. "With only four new girls, almost all of them have worked together before. They're doing a great job of listening."



**GAZELLES:** Yankton Dance Team 2010 Jazz Routine

The team has just three seniors but features a large contingent of juniors (nine). One of the pluses for a small senior class, Nelson said, was that it is easier for the underclassmen to know who to listen to.

"It can help listening to three instead of 10," she noted.

Courtney Clark, Lindsey Lien and Megan Hiltunen are the seniors for Yankton. The large junior class consists of Savannah Chambers, Mackenzie Larson, Frae

Binder, Jessica Winterringer, Paige Medeck, Alyssa Klimisch, Joslyn Moon, Sarah Pearson and Katie Kotchagarow. Hailey Luken, Lillie Tacke, Moriya LaCroix and Elsie Kotalik are the sophomores. First-year competitors include Johanna Lippert, Beth Pearson, Jessica Kotchagarow and Alexandra Foxhoven.

One challenge that awaits the Gazelles is finding a way to get past three-time defending champion Washington — and hold off

the hoard of other programs that are nipping at Yankton's heels.

"All the Sioux Falls schools have stepped up, and everyone else has stepped up, too," Nelson said. "We have to go out there with new techniques, new choreography, new skills, so we can try to get those Washington girls beat."

Yankton opens the 2011 season with its lone home appearance, the Yankton Invitational, on Sept. 10.

# Gazelles Tennis Team Sets High Standards For '11

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was originally published in our Aug. 20 edition. It has been modified to reflect competition since its publication.*

**BY CODY BALL**  
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With four seniors returning for the 2011 season, the Yankton Gazelles girls' tennis team is looking to have success throughout the season and into the state tournament.

"We have set some high goals for the season, and will look to improve all season keeping those goals in mind," said head coach Ginger Larsen.

Those goals that they have set for themselves include improving on last season in which the Gazelles took third in conference and ninth at the state meet.

The seniors who are looking to lead the Gazelles' tennis squad are Dani Gill, Leslie Henderson, Lexie Klimisch and Vanessa Rockne. All of which, according to Larsen, are showing great leadership. The Gazelles' seniors know that experience on the court is crucial for success. Larsen agreed that their experience is one of their biggest assets coming into the new season.

"They've played a lot of tennis and know the abilities of all their opponents," she said. That familiarity should help with their confidence in games as they know what to expect."

Senior leadership is not the whole story of the team, though. Along with those four seniors, also taking the court to play important roles are Sarah Santos, Sarah Rockne and Taylor Rothenberger.

Rounding out the roster are Bre Schmidt, Erin Rasmussen, Kaitlyn Frank, Alexa Bryan, Kim Cap and Anna Kokesh who have all "shown marked improvement over last season," according to Larsen's evaluations.

Another beneficiary from experience is Coach Larsen. Last year was her first season as the head coach of the Gazelle tennis team,



**GAZELLES:** Vanessa Rockne (left), Lexie Klimisch

and having that year of experience will help the success of the entire team. When asked what the most valuable lesson she learned in her first year of coaching she said:

"Just being familiar with the different formats at every match will help me be more relaxed. There are a lot of things you can't control so you just need to go with it."

"I want the players to have a good high school experience and play to the best of

their abilities. If they do that the wins will come."

The Gazelles opened the season with a 1-2 showing in a quadrangular Aug. 20 in Yankton. Yankton beat Vermillion and lost to pre-season favorite Rapid City Stevens and Eastern South Dakota Conference rival Watertown.

# YHS VB

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will be Kelsey Fitzgerald (Jr., MH), Jena Nelson (Sr., DS), Mindy Doering (Jr., MH), Tory Gross (Jr., OH/DS) and Sarah Ekeren (Jr., OH).

Doering played primarily on the junior varsity team last year, while Ekeren shifts from middle hitter to the outside, opposite of Hora.

"With the kids we have back

in those spots, we feel like we're in a good situation," Woodward said.

Yet, once again, the focus of the offense invariably returns to Hora, who has proven to have a knack for the big-time kills.

"She's obviously someone teams key on," Woodward said. "If I was a team coaching and playing against her, I'd definitely plan our attack around her."

The key, once again, Woodward said, is to develop other weapons around Hora, so she does not become the main focus for opposing teams.

"Mikala knows it's not a one-man show, and she understands it doesn't have to be a one-man show for us to win," Woodward said.

The combination of Fitzgerald (6-foot), Doering (5-9) and Ekeren (5-10) on the same front row on defensive formations could pay dividends for the Gazelles, Woodward said.

"(Fitzgerald) has a wingspan like nobody I've ever coached, and Mindy has a knack for blocking," she said. "Finally, we have some height back. We went through a few years there where we didn't have much of that."

One area where the Gazelles have been seeking improvement is on receiving serves, and get the ball cleanly to the setters for

the offensive schemes.

"Our serve-serve struggled at times," Woodward said. "We've gotten served out of games before. And as a coach, that was something I had to learn; how important it was."

Yankton opens its season Aug. 26 at Pierre, followed by four of the next five matches at home in the Summit Activities Center.

Woodward pointed to Mitchell and Aberdeen as potential contenders. Mitchell will be without leading hitter Kerri Young this season, as she will focus all her attention on basketball.

Huron graduated three All-ESD selections, while Aberdeen graduated two, with Watertown and Mitchell each losing one.



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9/9	Oakland-Craig	H	10/7	Laurel-Concord	A
9/16	West Holt	A	10/14	Wakefield	A
9/23	Ponca	H	10/20	Homer	H
Cedar Catholic Lady Trojan Volleyball					
9/2	Battle Creek/Elkhorn Valley	Tilden	10/11	St. Mary's	H
			10/13	Boone Central	A
9/6	Madison/Crofton	H	10/18	Wakefield/Emerson-Hubbard	Emerson
9/13	Norfolk Catholic	A	10/21	O'Neill/Wayne	O'Neill
9/15	Lutheran High NE	A	10/24-28	Mid-States Conference	
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9/27	Wakefield/Wausa	H	10/24	Lewis & Clark Tourn.	
9/29	Plainview	H			TBA