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FOOTBALL

## Ford leads Bobcats on road to improvement

By [Marjie Ducey](#) / World-Herald staff writer

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Heavy equipment lumbered by as Peru State football players trudged through the mud to the practice field.

The sounds of construction in the nearby Oak Bowl drowned out play calls and cadences. When the practice field wasn't muddy, it was dusty.

That was tough, offensive lineman Tyler Ford said. But then there were the games.

Peru State played every game out of town, as delays pushed completion of an \$8.7 million renovation to their home stadium back from the start of October.

Players lugged their equipment to high school fields in Auburn, Falls City and Nebraska City.

"It was kind of a tough thing to do," Ford said. "But we got by."

The Bobcats did more than get by. They finished 7-4 and No. 24 in the final NAIA poll — the only ranked NAIA team in Nebraska.

There's more work to do, said Steve Schneider, Peru State's football coach and athletic director. After being ranked as high as ninth, the Bobcats lost their last three games, slipping to fourth in the Heart of America Athletic Conference. Three of their defeats were

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to top 10 teams, and two came down to the final minutes.

“We are not where we need to be yet,” Schneider said. “Our goal is to win a conference championship and not be fourth. I think the pieces of the puzzle are coming together.”

He said part of the puzzle is the remodel of the Oak Bowl, a field that dates back to 1900. About all that's left is the concrete base from the 1950s-era grandstand. A ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held Sept. 6 at the Bobcats' game against Midland University.

While waiting for the facility upgrade, Peru State has been getting big contributions from players like Ford. He joins Concordia's Darnell Woods as honorary captains of The World-Herald's NAIA football team.

Ford, a junior from Lincoln Southeast, is a first-team NAIA All-American as well as an academic All-American with a 3.7 grade-point average. He wants to be a state trooper.

Ford, who plays right tackle, is an impact player with a passion for football, Schneider said. He helped the Bobcats rank third in the NAIA in rushing offense.

“The qualities that Tyler has will keep moving the ship forward,” Schneider said.

The Bobcats were 2-8 during Ford's first season in 2011, then 5-6 the next year.

The biggest change was a new weight training program, Ford said.

Schneider, who came to Peru in 2009 and took over as coach in 2012, told the players anything besides a Heart of America title was unacceptable. He pointed out that the new stadium showed the team had support from the administration and fans. Now it was up to them to do their part.

“He told everybody he wanted to turn the program around and put Peru State back on the leader board,” Ford said. “He's done a great job.”

With input from across the school, Schneider put together a three-year plan.

First was building unity and leadership, second was instilling discipline, third was raising expectations and fourth was to become a more physical team.

Thanks to the help of a talented staff and a strong commitment from the school, Schneider says the Bobcats are on their way.

Recruiting will be a crucial part of moving forward. Schneider said he'd love to have 50 more players like Ford.

“We're pretty close to where we want to be. Our expectation is next year to win a conference championship,” Schneider said. “The easier part is getting there. The harder part is staying there.”

Ford is already talking about getting back to work after winter break.

Despite the construction and travel for every game, Ford said it was a fun year, and everyone is ready to do what it takes to make next season even better.

“I think if everybody just did their job better and was disciplined,” he said, “and do what we need to do this year for conditioning, I think we will do great things.”

## Offense

WR, Connor Zumpfe, Nebraska Wesleyan, Jr.  
WR, Austin Curlee, Hastings, So.

Time to rip on 2013 in comedy roast - 6:18 pm

Cooks bring festive holiday meals to Iowa inmates - 5:43 pm

Court to review case of driving while license revoked - 5:42 pm

Lincoln man involved in gunfight gets prison term - 5:41 pm

Iowa gets more info in lottery jackpot mystery - 5:40 pm

Iowa appeals denial of disaster aid for electric cops - 5:37 pm

Nebraska State Fair honored at Las Vegas convention - 5:35 pm

Services set in Plattsburgh for 17-year-old crash victim - 5:34 pm

Family of Plattsburgh teen killed in accident to donate organs - 5:33 pm

Sculpture offers some Christmas cheer to passers-by - 5:32 pm

Some Iowans will get 8-year driver's licenses - 5:28 pm

Tax credits for Iowa apartment development hit cap - 5:27 pm

## ON TWITTER »

### World-Herald Sports

Tweets from a list by World-Herald Sports

A collection of The World-Herald's sports staff writers on Twitter.



**Jon Nyatawa**

@JonNyatawa

3h

Nice piece today by @swmckewonOWH on [#Huskers](#) QB recruit Zack Darlington, who most certainly plans to play again [m.omaha.com/article.html?h...](#)

Expand

**Jeff Sheldon**

@OWHJeffSheldon

3h

Hope you're all having a great Christmas and feel half as lucky as I do.

Expand



**Nick Rubek**

@nickrubek

4h

LeBron James....if you need him [#funkdunk](#)



**Steve Pivovar**

@PivOWH

5h

Merry Christmas to all; glad to hear folks that got "Road to the Big Time" under the tree are enjoying it.

Expand



**Samuel McKewon**

@swmckewonOWH

8h

Shine a light on Christmas. [pic.twitter.com/cXYG4IojV5](#)

TE, John Tatum, Doane, Sr.  
 OL, Dillon Carmichael, Doane, Sr.  
 OL, Tanner Paxton, Hastings, Jr.  
 OL, Ryan Beebe, Nebraska Wesleyan, Sr.  
 OL, Joe Vetrovsky, Doane, Sr.  
 OL, Tyler Ford, Peru State, Jr.  
 QB, Von Thomas, Concordia, Jr.  
 RB, Dustin Bryant, Nebraska Wesleyan, Sr.  
 RB, Ethan Bray, Peru State, Sr.  
 Honorary captain: Tyler Ford, Peru State.

## DEFENSE

DL, Phil Latimer, Nebraska Wesleyan, Jr.  
 DL, Dylan Heithoff, Concordia, Sr.  
 DL, Taylor TeKolste, Nebraska Wesleyan, Sr.  
 DL, Zach Lempka, Peru State, Sr.  
 LB, Jeremy Wallace, Doane, Sr.  
 LB, Langston Jones, Concordia, Sr.  
 LB, Brandon Reeves, Nebraska Wesleyan, Sr.  
 LB, Curtis Larsen, Peru State, Sr.  
 DB, Darnell Woods, Concordia, Sr.  
 DB, Alex Gildon, Hastings, So.  
 DB, JerSean Walder, Doane, Jr.  
 DB, Dalton Jenkins, Midland, Fr.  
 Honorary captain: Darnell Woods, Concordia.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K, Aaron Lorraine, Nebraska Wesleyan, Sr.  
 P, Kelby Vandenberg, Nebraska Wesleyan, Sr.  
 KR, Derek Blessing, Concordia, Sr.

**Honorable mention:** Michael Gill, Josh Powell, Tait Sibbel, Josh Slechta, Concordia;  
 Kenny Boggs, Brett Eyer, Rob Keeney, Kam Lenhart, Doane; Jacob Claeys, Sean Robnett,  
 Josh Watchorn, Erik Wylie, Hastings; Michael Karls, Trey McCluskey, Nathan Schlueter,  
 Kirk Zinerman, Midland; Jack Barteldes, Corey Cundall, Tyler Francis, Seth Wardyn,  
 Nebraska Wesleyan; Tyler Audsley, Dayton Graf, Logan Paben, Lance Steffen, Peru State



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Marjie Ducey covers state colleges, women's sports, high schools, select sports, outdoors, holes in one, soccer, running and any other type of interesting story. She also puts out the metro edition and does some updating on Omaha.com.

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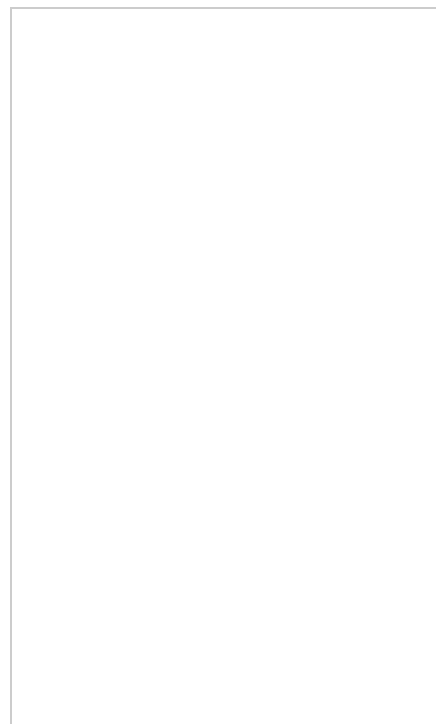
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