• Football Panthers coming off breakthrough year, Page 2
• Volleyball Panthers 'new look' for this season, Page 4
• Numbers up for NRHEG cross country, Page 6
• Fall cheerleaders, Page 8
NRHEG football coming off dream season

By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

Last year was a dream season for NRHEG football.

The Panthers, under first-year head coach Marc Kruger, finished with a record of 9-3, winning the section championship for the first time ever while advancing to the state quarterfinals.

What can they do to top it? After last year, who knows?

The Panthers are looking to replace a lot of graduated talent, including Brady Agrimson, Alex Buckmeier and Quinten Arndt, who are all playing college football, but it doesn’t mean they aren’t extremely optimistic after last year.

“We will be a young team that will take its lumps early,” said Kruger. “But the talent is there for another section title run.”

While the Panthers will have a lot of new faces, they fared well in Minnesota State-Mankato’s seven-on-seven passing league and at Bemidji State’s team camp.

NRHEG returns the area’s top quarterback in senior Blake Ihrke, right. Schlaak moves to tailback after being the Panthers’ backup quarterback last year. Ihrke threw for 1,700 yards and 24 touchdowns last year.

“Lonnie is the type of player who are all playing college football, but it doesn’t mean they aren’t extremely optimistic after last year,” said Kruger.

Also returning is the Panthers’ top receiver, senior Lonnie Wilson.

“Lonnie is the type of player who can score from anywhere on the field,” said Kruger.

Wilson and Knutson were all-district last year, Ihrke honorable mention.

Strengths for the Panthers, according to Kruger, are Ihrke’s passing skills and the Panthers’ ability to move the ball down the field.

“The team will have a lot of speed we hope to utilize,” said Kruger. “I think we will still be a very good team this year and we expect another section championship. Obviously, that’s easier said than done.”

The Panthers face several new opponents as the district has been restructured, with WEM moving out. The toughest test may be the Aug. 29 season opener at Jackson County Central, a Class 3A school that won a section title last year. The district favorites, according to Kruger, are Maple River and NRHEG.

The Panthers’ slogan is the same as last year, “Count on Me,” though they’ve also added “Win the Moment.”

“Which means winning at everything you do,” said Kruger. “That’s kind of our slogan this year.”

2019 NRHEG Football

District: South Central
Section: 2AA
Coaches: Head coach Marc Kruger, starting 2nd season, 9-3 career record
Assistants: Duey Ferber, Neil Fuchs, Matt Schultz
Last year: 9-3 overall record (6-2 district)
Key losses: Brady Agrimson (playing at UW-River Falls), Alex Buckmeier (playing at Augsburg), Tyler Jacobson, Sawyer VanMaldeghem, Jacob Schuller

Key returnees: Blake Ihrke, Lonnie Wilson, Hunter Knutson, Kordell Schlaak, Nick Staloch, Mason Ferber, Andrew Reich (injured)

First action: Aug. 29 at Jackson County Central

Key dates: Aug. 29 at Jackson County Central; Oct. 4 at Maple River

Coach’s comment: “We will be a young team that will take its lumps early, but there is enough talent for another section title run.”

Star Eagle photos by Chris Schlaak

Other team notes:
- NRHEG football are looking to replace a lot of graduated talent, including Brady Agrimson, Alex Buckmeier and Quinten Arndt, who are all playing college football, but it doesn’t mean they aren’t extremely optimistic after last year.
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Sept. 6 Blue Earth Area
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Sept. 27 LS-Henderson, HC
Oct. 4 LCWM
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Oct. 16 at GFW

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New look for NRHEG spikers

By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

Playing against the likes of state powers Bethlehem Academy, Waterville-Elysian-Morristown and Medford, it’s always a challenging year for the NRHEG volleyball team.

This year looks extremely challenging.

The Panthers graduated almost everyone and then some, bidding farewell to no less than 10 seniors from last year’s team that finished 11-15-1 overall and 2-5 in the Gopher Conference.

Included among the graduated: Olivia Christopherson (272 kills, 221 digs), Sydney Schlinger (190 digs), Laura Worrell (240 assists), Hannah Budach (294 assists), Alexis Anderson (56 kills, 85 digs) and Caitlin Goette (81 kills, 39 ace blocks). Also gone are Darian Pearson, Kylie Arndt, Jayna Finseth and Lexie Ignaszewski.

The player returning with the most experience is one of the school’s best all-around athletes, Sophie Stork. She had 84 kills and 97 digs a year ago.

Also seeing varsity action last year was junior Cambria Nissen. Juniors Anna Jacobson and Elli Baker were on the varsity last year but did not play.

“Sophie stepped in as a starter last year when a teammate went down with an injury,” said Panthers coach Onika Peterson.

She finished No. 2 on the team in kills and No. 3 in digs.

Nissen is a defensive specialist who saw playing time at the libero position last year.

“Cambria was consistent for us in the back row in serve receive, and in defensive coverage,” said Peterson. “We will look for both of these players for their varsity experience and leadership this upcoming season.”

Also vying for varsity time this fall are seniors Summer Kath, Madi Kormann, Katie Cliff, Mia Farr, Madie DenHerder, Grace Tufte and Kendall Johnson.

“We graduated a lot of experience last year,” said Peterson. “We will look like a completely different team. It is not always easy transitioning from JV to varsity; it is going to take us a bit to get all of our pieces in place. The goal is to continue to improve throughout the whole season, so that we are playing our best at playoff time.”

The Panthers’ biggest strength, according to Coach Peterson, is “A group of energetic and hard-working girls who want to improve every practice and game.”

The coach’s biggest concern is obvious: a lack of varsity experience.

The key to overcoming some of their obstacles, according to Peterson, is to maintain a “Grit” mindset, “Staying resilient and optimistic when things aren’t going our way.”

Peterson, who enters her seventh season as head coach, is again assisted by Jackie Schultz and Corrine Schuller.

Peterson has a career record of 63-89-6 for the Panthers, with a best finish of 14-13 and sub-section runners-up in 2015.

Medford and WEM tops Peterson’s list of teams to beat in the Gopher Conference. Section 1AA favorites are Stewartville and Kasson-Mantorville.

### 2019 NRHEG Volleyball

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference: Gopher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section: 1AA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaches: Head coach Onika Peterson, 7th year, 63-89-6 career mark.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant coaches: Jackie Schultz and Corrine Schuller</td>
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<td>Conference opener: Sept. 5 at Hayfield</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 27</td>
<td>at Nicollet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 3</td>
<td>Alden-Conger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 5</td>
<td>at Hayfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 9</td>
<td>Fairmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 12</td>
<td>WEM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 14</td>
<td>at St. Peter Inv.</td>
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<td>Sept. 17</td>
<td>at Le Sueur-Henderson</td>
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<td>Sept. 19</td>
<td>Bethlehem Academy</td>
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<td>Sept. 24</td>
<td>Blooming Prairie at USC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 26</td>
<td>at Bloomington Prairie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 3</td>
<td>at Blue Earth Area Inv.</td>
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<td>Oct. 7</td>
<td>Tri-City United</td>
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<td>Oct. 10</td>
<td>Maple River</td>
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<td>Oct. 14</td>
<td>Medford</td>
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### 2019 NRHEG Volleyball Conference opener

- Sept. 5 at Hayfield
- Sept. 12 at WEM

### Key dates

- Sept. 12 at WEM
- Oct. 14 Medford

### Coach’s comment

“We graduated a lot of experience. We will look like a completely different team.”

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Numbers are up for NRHEG CC teams

By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

Aside from personal highlights, last year was mostly a forgettable one for the NRHEG High School cross country teams. The Panthers just had too many injuries to compete as a squad in both the boys’ and girls’ divisions.

So forgive second-year head coach Miles Ostot if he doesn’t dwell on 2018.

“We didn’t graduate any senior boys this year, so we return with a lot of the same runners as last year and are ready to build upon last year’s success,” said Ostot.

Ostot is happy to see overall numbers in the program up, especially on the boys’ side.

And the boys’ squad is still young, with only one senior, Addison Deyle. Junior Daniel Nydegger is expected to lead the squad, which also includes juniors Caden Riewer and Gavin Anderson, sophomores Matthew Mueller, Tylar Malakowsky and Eric Arvis, and freshman Conner Nelson.

Riewer was the Panthers’ top runner in last October’s section meet, placing 93rd.

Nydegger started the 2019 season strong, finishing first in a three-team meet at Medford Aug. 23. The Panthers were last among three squads.

“We have a deep boys’ team that returns a lot of talented runners who will be competing for the conference championship,” said Ostot.

The NRHEG girls can’t afford any injuries this year if they hope to compete as a team. So far, five girls are out: seniors Mia Williams and Micaela Vaale, sophomore Tori Vaale and eighth-graders Annabelle Petsinger and Debra Rollins.

The lone graduate off the 2018 squad was Madisyn Bueltel.

“The girls are younger, but they bring in some hard-working girls who will contribute at the varsity level right away,” said Ostot.

Like Nydegger, Micaela Vaale had a strong season opener, taking first among individuals at Medford, where the Panthers did not field a full squad.

“Daniel and Micaela both had strong seasons last year, before having their season ended by injury,” said Ostot. “They are both looking great so far this season and look to be strong runners who will be competing for the conference championship. At Medford, they picked up where they left off prior to their injuries last season. The rest of the team got a good run out in the first meet of the season and will look to build upon that next week in Stewartville.”

The Panthers have a busy schedule this year, with their home meet set for Sept. 17 at Riverview Golf Course.

2019 NRHEG Cross Country
Aug. 23 at Medford
Aug. 30 at StewArtville
Sept. 5 at Tri-City United
Sept. 10 at Blooming Prairie
Sept. 12 at Maple River
Sept. 17 NRHEG Invitational
Sept. 26 at JWP
Oct. 3 at Waseca
Oct. 8 at United So. Central
Oct. 15 Conf. at Hayfield
Oct. 24 Sect. at Blue Earth

“We are ready to build on last year’s success.”
— Coach Miles Ostot
2019 NRHEG Cross Country

Conference: Gopher-Valley
Section: 2A
Coaches: Head coach Miles Otstot, 2nd season
Last year: The boys were 3rd in the conference. The girls had an incomplete squad. Both teams were incomplete for section.
Key athletes lost: None. The Panthers have all runners returning on both the boys’ team. The girls’ squad returns all but one runner.
Key returnees: Boys: Daniel Nydegger (7th in conference last year), Addison Deyle (11th in conference), Caden Riewer (all-conference honorable mention); Girls: Jade Mely (all-conference honorable mention), Micaela Vaale (all-conference honorable mention), Mia Williams
First action: Aug. 23 at Medford
Home meet: Sept. 17 at Riverview Golf Course
Coach’s comment: “We have a deep boys’ team that returns a lot of talented runners who will be competing for a conference championship. The girls are younger, but they bring in some hard-working girls who will contribute at the varsity level right away.”
Fall 2019 NRHEG cheerleaders. Front from left: Maggie Maloney, Grace Kofstad, Aracelis Sepulveda, Cassie Kormann, Taya Lembke, May Soulisak; back: Brenlee Knudson, Lorelei Strom, Katie Lee, Josie Strom, Eva Wayne, Trinity Smith, Aubrey Fischer

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