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By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

The key players lost for the NRHEG boys’ basketball team are big — both literally and figuratively.

Brady Agrimson and Jacob Schuller, all 6-foot-5 of them, have graduated, along with a combined average of more than 31 points and 14 rebounds per game last season, when the Panthers finished 12-15 overall and 6-8 in the Gopher Conference.

It leaves second-year head coach Isaiah Lundberg in a bit of a rebuilding mode, but he doesn’t have to look far to pick up the pieces. Five letterwinners return, including a pair of athletically gifted seniors, and Lundberg’s list of key players is a long one.

The seniors are football standouts Blake Ihrke and Lonnie Wilson.

“Blake will need to improve on his 6.7 points per game from last season, be one of our go-to guys on offense and be a leader for our team as a returning starter,” said Lundberg. “Lonnie will be relied upon to be a top defender and be a scorer for us. He is a returning starter from last year.”

Another football standout, junior Kordell Schlaak, returns as a letterwinner, as do juniors Tory Christenson and Ashton Johnson.

“Kordell is a good athlete who can play multiple positions and guard various positions,” said Lundberg. “We will need him to be a double-digit scorer. Tory will be a guy we need to do a variety of things. We will need him to step up and score and also to guard multiple positions. Ashton can score, but does a nice job of setting up other guys to score.”

Other players to watch, according to Lundberg, are sophomores Porter Peterson, Jaxon Beck and Ben Schoenrock, and eighth-grader Daxter Lee, pressed into varsity play after a football injury put Peterson out of action until at least January.

“Porter was going to be the starting point guard and be a guy we leaned on for scoring and getting us into our offense,” said Lundberg. “Daxter’s role has changed due to the injury to Porter. We will count on him to play older than he is. We will need some scoring from him and his ability to play older will help him. Jaxon is one of the few guys with some size that we have. We will need his size inside for rebounding, guarding post guys, and setting screens in our offense. Benjamin will be asked to do the dirty work, guard post guys, rebound, and set screens in our offense.”

What does Lundberg look for from the Panthers? Daily

“We should have much better shooting.”

— Isaiah Lundberg

NRHEG Boys’ Basketball

Conference: Gopher
Section: Section 2AA, South Sub-Section
Coaches: Head coach Isaiah Lundberg, assistants Ryan Evans, Tyler Schlaak

Last year: 12-15 overall, 6-8 conference
Key losses: Brady Agrimson, Jacob Schuller
Key returnees: Blake Ihrke, Lonnie Wilson, Kordell Schlaak

Home opener: Dec. 17 vs. JWP
Key dates: Jan. 25 at Hayfield; Jan. 31 vs. Blooming Prairie; Feb. 4 at Waseca

Coach’s comment: “We will have to play faster than we have in the past.”

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Basketball

from Page 2

improvement.

“I expect this team to get better as we play,” he said. “We will be young and smaller in size. We do play a tough schedule with a lot of our conference teams returning a lot of players. I would expect us to be competitive and hopefully surprise some teams. With having younger guys playing, we should improve greatly as the season goes on.”

Lundberg expects the Panthers’ quickness on offense and defense will help them overcome an overall lack of height.

“We aren’t going to be very big, but will be quick and active,” he said. “After a run of having a couple of 6-4, 6-5 guys, we only have one guy who is 6-4 and a bunch of guys around 6 feet.”

Lundberg also looks for the Panthers’ outside shooting to be improved after summer workouts.

“We should have much better shooting and more guys who can shoot,” he said.

The Panthers are also lacking overall varsity playing experience. Although two starters return, along with three juniors who came off the bench, only one of the reserves played more than 20 minutes a game last season.

Lundberg is also concerned with the Panthers’ physicality.

“Our post players aren’t very big and thick kids, but they will be going against some big and powerful post players during the season,” he said.

The result?

“We will have to play faster than we have in the past,” said Lundberg. “We are going to have to try and push the ball up the floor and try to get easy baskets this way and be active on defense and force turnovers that lead to fast breaks. Our outside shooting, especially from three-point range, has to be better than last season when we only shot 28%. If we can shoot in the upper 30% as a team, then I will feel good about it.”

Limiting turnovers is also key.

Lundberg, assisted by Ryan Evans and Tyler Schlaak, lists Hayfield and Blooming Prairie as the favorites to win the Gopher Conference, with Waseca and Jordan and teams to beat in Section 2AA.

NRHEG 2019-20 Boys’ Basketball

Dec. 3 at Albert Lea
Dec. 5 at St. Peter
Dec. 10 at WEM
Dec. 13 at Blooming Prairie
Dec. 17
Dec. 20
Dec. 27
Dec. 28
Dec. 30
Jan. 3
Jan. 10
Jan. 13
Jan. 14
Jan. 17
Jan. 21
Jan. 25
Jan. 28
Jan. 31
Feb. 3
Feb. 4
Feb. 7
Feb. 11
Feb. 14
Feb. 17
Feb. 21

Dec. 17 at Bethany Invitational
Dec. 20 at Bethany Invitational
Dec. 27 at Bethany Invitational
Dec. 28 at City United
Dec. 30 at Bethlehem Academy
Jan. 3 at LeSueur-Henderson
Jan. 10 at Bethlehem Academy
Jan. 13 at Maple River
Jan. 14 at Medford
Jan. 17 at St. James
Jan. 21 at Hayfield
Jan. 25 at WEM
Jan. 28 at Blooming Prairie
Jan. 31 at Fairmont
Feb. 3 at Waseca
Feb. 4 at United South Central
Feb. 7 at Maple River
Feb. 11 at Bethlehem Academy
Feb. 14 at Blue Earth Area
Feb. 17 at Medford
Feb. 21

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NRH EG girls still among school's most popular

Panthers look to improve on last year’s 8-18 overall record

By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

The current players were in elementary school when Carlie Wagner last donned a uniform and led the NRHEG Panthers to three straight state tournaments and consecutive state titles.

But her legacy lives on.

Girls' basketball remains one of the most popular sports at NRHEG, evidenced by the 10 players returning for this year's team.

The Panthers have found wins tougher to come by in the post-Wagner era, though they were 27-8 and won the state consolation championship as recently as 2017. They were 8-18 last year, 6-8 in the Gopher Conference.

One remnant from the Panthers’ glory days is back. John Schultz, the head coach who retired from coaching after NRHEG’s second straight title, is the assistant under Onika Peterson, who has guided the Panthers to a five-year record of 90-53.

The Panthers graduated a plethora of players from last year: Caitlin Goette, Darian Pearson, Hannah Budach, Alexis Anderson, Jayna Budach, Alexis Anderson, Jayna Finseth, Olivia Christopherson and Lexie Ignaszewski. Anderson had 229 points and 174 rebounds last year, Pearson 185 points and 232 rebounds.

Sophomore guard Sophie Stork, a three-sport standout, leads the list of returnees for the Panthers. She totaled 431 points, 182 rebounds and 46 assists last year.

Guard Sidney Schultz, the daughter of Coach Schultz, netted 268 points, 105 rebounds and 123 assists last year as an eighth-grader.

The lone returning senior is guard Jayna Domeier, who averaged eight points a game last year. Junior forward Sarah Johns tallied 81 points, 67 rebounds and 42 steals a year ago, while junior guard Kendall Johnson totaled 37 points and 39 rebounds.

Also returning: Cassidy Martin, junior forward; Aubrey Fischer, junior guard; Erin Jacobson, freshman guard; Raquel Fischer, freshman guard; and Tegan Sutter, freshman forward.

Fans can look for the Panthers to play an up-tempo, fast-paced game reminiscent of their Wagner-led state tournament teams. Although they won’t have a lot of height, they’ll make up for it with overall speed and aggressiveness.

"With our height, we are going to want to push our opponents into a quick-paced game and run the floor as much as possible," said Coach Peterson. "Defensively, we need to play tough inside since we don’t have the height. We’ll focus on rebounding and running whenever we can."

At this point, Peterson just wants to see what the Panthers can do, and she's excited for the prospects.

"I am extremely excited for the team that we have this season," she said. "The girls worked hard this summer, bought into what we are wanting to do as a program, and taking ownership of their game. We have a tough schedule and I am excited to see how we will compete. We are looking to improve throughout the season, and hopefully playing our best at playoff time."

Peterson picks Medford as the Gopher Conference favorite, with Waseca and Medford the favorites in Section 2AA.

2019-20 NRHEG Girls’ Basketball

Dec. 3 Medford at Hayfield
Dec. 5 WEM
Dec. 10

Dec. 13 at JWP
Dec. 19 at USC
Dec. 20 NRHEG Invitational at Blue Earth Area
Dec. 26 NRHEG Invitational at LCWM
Dec. 27 Fairmont at Bethlehem Academy
Jan. 4 Jan. 6 Jan. 9 Jan. 10 Jan. 11
Jan. 14

Jan. 17 at Medford
Jan. 23 at St. Peter
Jan. 25 Hayfield
Jan. 28 at WEM
Jan. 31 at Blooming Prairie
Feb. 7 United South Central
Feb. 11 at Bethlehem Academy
Feb. 13 Maple River
Feb. 18 Tri-City United

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NRHEG Girls’ Basketball

Conference: Gopher
Section: Section 2AA, South Sub-Section
Coaches: Head coach Onika Peterson, 5th year, 90-53 overall record; assistant coach John Schultz
Last year: 8-18 overall, 6-8 conference
Key losses: Caitlin Goette, Darian Pearson, Olivia Christopherson
Key returnees: Sophie Stork, Sydney Schultz, Sarah Johns
Key date: Jan. 17 at Medford
Coach’s comment: “The girls worked hard this summer and bought into what we are wanting to do as a program.”


Star Eagle photo by Chris Schlaak
Wrestlers shoot for continued progress

Panthers still young, but appear ready to take another step in the right direction

By JIM LUTGENS
Publisher

It’s been an up-and-down journey for the NRHEG wrestling team since Paul Cyr retired as head coach several years ago.

To be totally honest, there have been more ups than downs.

But the Panthers showed genuine improvement last season and figure to do so again under seventh-year coach Shawn Larson, Cyr’s hand-picked successor. Larson has help in the wrestling room from 23-year assistant coach Nate Jensen, four-year veteran Jamie Harshman and second-year volunteer assistant Dan Petsinger.

Graduating off last year’s squad were state entrants Quintin Arndt and Tyler Jacobson. Arndt, who played football at Augsburg, planned to walk-on for the wrestling team.

The Panthers, 8-11 overall and 3-2 last year, have no less than 12 returning letterwinners from a team that saw its season end in the Section 2A semifinals.

The letterwinners are seniors Andrew Reich and Agro Gushwa, juniors Thor Routh and Conner Okland, sophomores Ralph Roesler, Nikolas Petsinger and Clay Stenzel, freshmen Makota Misgen and Aden Berg, and eighth-graders Annabelle Petsinger, Parker Bunn and George Roesler.

The rest of the varsity roster includes juniors Max Seltun, Brayden Hill and Cameron Cantu, sophomores Matthew Olson, freshman Ethan Thompson, eighth-graders Amichai Gassmann, Drake Herschberger and Elijah Jussbaum, and seventh-graders Ben Hagen, Cole Hutchens, Colton Krueger, Erik Nelson and Aiden Schlaak.

The Panthers had good participation in the Iron Sharpens Camp in Dubuque, Iowa, according to Larson, with eight wrestlers making the trip.

“We are expecting to make a strong attempt at regaining a top three in the conference,” said Larson. “We are hoping to learn from our setbacks from last season, and have a winning season this year.”

The Panthers’ strengths, according to Larson, come from two seniors and two juniors who have seen a lot of varsity action.

“Although we had a difficult season last year, we are optimistic that we can come back strong this year because we brought almost everyone back,” said Larson. “We are a bit older and more experienced from last season, and ready for competition. Our main issue will be maintaining a full lineup as we have several wrestlers in the same weight range.”

Once again, staying off their backs is crucial for the Panthers.

“We need to wrestle full matches,” said Larson. “Last season, our downfall was giving up too many bonus points. If we can eliminate that, we will be much more competitive.”

Larson also looks for the Panthers to be more aggressive and, wherever possible, wrestle aggressively.

“Are a bit older and more experienced.”
— Coach Shawn Larson

Don’t mess with these guys — NRHEG wrestling coaches, from left, Dan Petsinger, Shawn Larson and Nate Jensen.

Star Eagle photo by Chris Schlaak

Star Eagle photo by Chris Schlaak

“We need to take risks to score points in situations where we have been tentative in the recent past,” he said. “If we focus on scoring instead of the winning and losing, the wins should come as a result.”

Although Larson expects Maple River and Medford to be strong in the Gopher Conference, he said Maple River is the favorite. Defending champion Kenyon-Wanamingo is favored in the section, with possible challenges by Maple River or Blue Earth Area.

2019-20 NRHEG Wrestling

Nov. 30 at Faribault Invitational
Dec. 12 Pine Island
Dec. 14 at Jackson Co. C. Inv.
Dec. 20 at Redwood Valley
Dec. 21 at Redwood Valley
Jan. 9 Medford
Jan. 11 at Stewartville Invitational
Jan. 16 at Maple River
Jan. 18 at LCWM Invitational
Jan. 23 at Blue Earth Area
Jan. 30 Westfield
Feb. 1 at Rochester Century Inv.
Feb. 6 at United South Central
Feb. 15 Section at St. Clair

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Winter cheerleaders

2019-2020 NRHEG winter sideline cheer team. Front from left: Aracelis Sepulveda, Maggie Maloney, Madi Kormann; row two: Brenlee Knudson, Cassie Kormann, Avery Hill, Eva Wayne, Lorelei Strom; back: May Soulisak, Grace Wilkenson, Josie Strom, Katie Lee.

Submitted photo