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FALL SPORTS

PREVIEW



NRHEG  **Star Eagle**

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2016

Low numbers do not equal low expectations

By **JIM LUTGENS**
Editor/Publisher

The players change and the seasons come and go, but one thing remains constant nearly every fall around New Richland.

The football squad is seeking some sort of championship.

This year is no different, especially after finishing only a half game out of first place last year, when the Panthers went 6-2 in district play and 6-3 overall.

“Our goal is to compete for a district title,” said head coach Dan Stork. “We will be very young and our depth could be a problem, but I feel like we will compete with every team in the district.”

The Panthers did that last year with a senior-laden team led by quarterback Palmer Peterson (1080 yards, 12 touchdowns), wide receiver John Cole (26 catches, 448 yards, 10 touchdowns) and leading tackler Zeke Erickson (95 tackles, 13.5 sacks). All three were all-district selections.

Senior lineman Jack Schultz — son of assistant coach John Schultz, a college football player — was also all-district last season, his second as a starter. He attended three summer camps and has another year of weight training under his belt, so Stork expects great things.

The other returning lettermen are seniors Chad Agrimson, Carter Fischer, Joe Jensen, Jason Jongbloedt, Sam Prigge and Noah Sletten, juniors Cole Staloch and Perry Peterson, and sophomores Lucas Bailey and Alex Buckmeier.

Buckmeier started all nine



Stork



Schultz

games at guard and defensive end last year. Jongbloedt led the team in rushing and Peterson was second in rushing before breaking his leg in the section opener. Peterson also started nine games at outside linebacker.

Prigge was the backup quarterback last year and is the early favorite to start this season. He returns as the kicker and will also play some safety.

Agrimson is an excellent athlete, playing offensive and defensive end, and returns as the Panthers' punter.

Staloch was the team's second leading receiver last year.

Jensen, the Panthers' biggest player, came off the bench last year to play offensive and defensive tackle.

The rest of the varsity roster — as of Monday — includes juniors Brendon Strand, Cole Thompson, Caleb Harpel and Jamie Ranniger, and sophomores Sawyer VanMaldeghem and Brady Agrimson.

That makes Stork's greatest concern an obvious one: avoiding injury.

“Our weakness is our lack of depth in a number of positions,” he said. “We need to stay healthy!”

The Panthers' strength, according to Stork, is excellent speed at

2016 NRHEG Football

District: South Central, Blue Division

Section: 2AA

Coaches: Head coach Dan Stork, starting 14th season, 71-54 career record

Assistants: John Schultz, Grant Berg, Drew Paukert and Pat Churchill

Last year: 6-3 overall record (6-2 district)

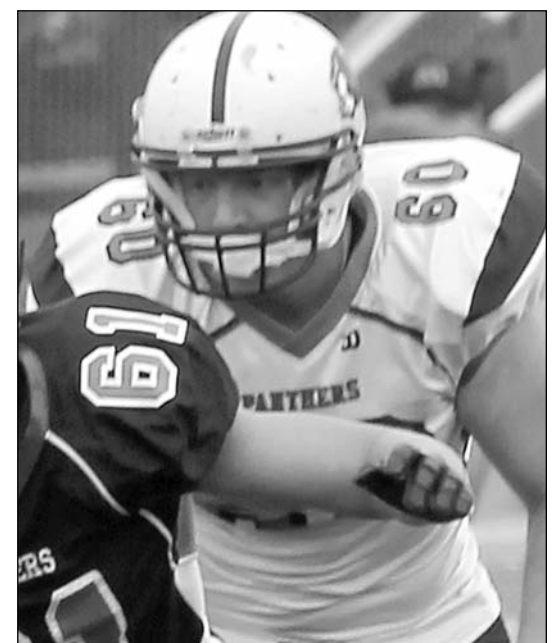
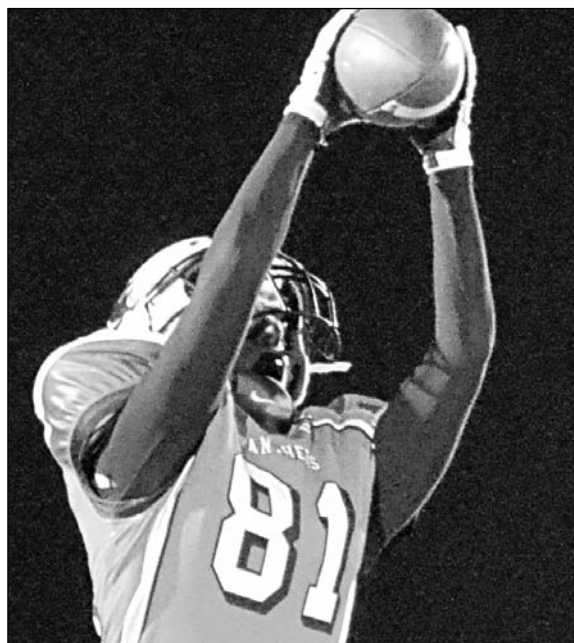
Key losses: Palmer Peterson (1080 passing yards, 12 TDs), John Cole (26 catches, 448 yards, 10 TDs), Zeke Erickson (95 tackles, 13.5 sacks), Wyatt Fitterer

Key returnees: Jack Schultz (all-district), Jason Jongbloedt, Chad Agrimson, Sam Prigge, Perry Peterson, Alex Buckmeier

First action: Sept. 2 vs. Mayer Lutheran

Key dates: Waterville-Elysian-Morristown Sept. 16 Homecoming vs. LCWM Oct. 14; at Maple River Oct. 19

Coach's comment: “We need to stay healthy!”



Players to watch for the Panthers in 2016 include Chad Agrimson, left, and Jack Schultz, right. On the cover, Perry Peterson.

the skilled positions and also some depth in the backfield, which he hopes to utilize to give opponents several different looks on offense.

“We had a number of players hit the weights really hard this summer,” said Stork. “We held our own team camp in July and the guys looked pretty sharp.”

In addition, the Panthers participated in MSU's seven-on-

seven passing league this summer.

Stork, who has a win-loss record of 71-54 in 13 seasons as the Panthers' head coach, is assisted by Schultz, Grant Berg, Drew Paukert and Pat Churchill.

Stork picks Maple River and Sibley East as the district favorites, with Blue Earth the top team in the section.

NRHEG 2016 Football

Sept. 2	Mayer Lutheran
Sept. 9	at LP/Holy Trinity
Sept. 16	WEM
Sept. 23	at GFW
Sept. 30	Sibley East
Oct. 7	at LeSueur-Henderson
Oct. 14	LCWM (HC)
Oct. 19	at Maple River
Oct. 25	Section
Oct. 29	Section



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Panther football returning letterwinners for 2016 include, front from left: Carter Fischer, Cole Staloch and Perry Peterson. Row two: Lucas Bailey, Sam Prigge, Jason Jongbloedt and Noah Sletten. Back: Alex Buckmeier, Joe Jensen, Jack Schultz and Chad Agrimson. Star Eagle photo by Jim Lutgens

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Lack of height a concern for VB

By **JIM LUTGENS**
Editor/Publisher

They used to do it on a consistent basis, but still, every once in a while, the NRHEG Panthers rise up and challenge perennial powerhouse Bethlehem Academy for the Gopher Conference volleyball crown.

Let's hope this is one of those years.

Led by the Wagner twins, now in their senior season, along with four other returning letterwinners, the Panthers enter their fourth year under head coach Onika Peterson hoping to better last year's record of 14-13 overall and 3-6 in conference play.

The Panthers graduated a slew of athletes from last fall, including all-conference middle hitter Abby Wacholz (155 kills), Anna Lundberg (233 assists, 111 digs), Hailey Schuller (68 kills, 47 digs), Abby Christopherson (133 digs), Sophia Fischer (109 kills, 63 digs) and Corrie Powell (135 digs).

The Wagner twins, however, return with a combined 226 kills and 447 digs last season, Marnie

totaling 148 kills and 293 digs, Maddie 78 and 154. Both had 14 ace serves.

Also back are senior setter Rachel Collins (246 assists, 153 digs, 11 aces), senior libero player Grace Johns (133 digs), and seniors Gretchen Ramaker and Natalie Aaseth. Ramaker is coming off a torn ACL sustained early last basketball season.

The rest of the roster includes senior Aubrey Schlinger, juniors Gabby Muri, Emily Crabtree, Kelly Harden, Michelle Katzung, Natalia Galindo, Lauren Herrmann, Makenzi Rhoades and Betsy Schoenrock, and sophomores Laura Worrell and Olivia Christopherson.

Coach Peterson, again assisted by Jackie Schultz and Corrine Schuller, has guarded expectations for the season.

"We would like to have an above-.500 record, finish in the



Peterson

2016 NRHEG Volleyball

Conference: Gopher
Section: 2AA
Coaches: Head coach Onika Peterson, fourth year, 31-44-5 career mark. Assistant coaches Jackie Schultz and Corrine Schuller
Last year: 14-13 overall record, 3-6 conference
Key losses: Abby Wacholz (155 kills), Anna Lundberg (233 assists, 111 digs), Abby Christopherson (133 digs), Hailey Schuller (68 kills, 47 digs), Sophia Fischer (109 kills), Corrie Powell (135 digs).
Key returnees: Seniors Maddie Wagner, Marnie Wagner, Rachel Collins, Grace Johns, Gretchen Ramaker, Natalie Aaseth
Conference opener: Sept. 1 at Blooming Prairie
Key dates: at WEM Sept. 29; at Bethlehem Academy Oct. 11
Coach's comment: "We would like to have an above-.500 record, finish in the top four of the conference, and make a run in the playoffs."

top four of the conference, and make a run in the playoffs," she said.

Although there are some tall underclassmen who could possibly contribute to the varsity, Peterson knows the Panthers will have to hustle to compensate for an overall lack of height.

"That's our weakness," she said. "The average height of our team is around 5-6. We are not going to be a big blocking team. We are going to have to rely on our defense to be quick and scrappy."

The key to success for the 2016 Panthers?

"Communication, competitive-

ness — going after every single ball," said Peterson.

The Panthers have made a strong playoff run the last three years, finishing as sub-section runners-up. Their best win-loss record in recent memory was 23-7 in 2011.

Peterson pegs Belle Plaine, Jordan and Kenyon as this year's top section teams.

Again, of course, Bethlehem Academy is the lone team listed among Peterson's picks to win the Gopher Conference. The Cardinals were, however, upset in last year's state championship match, falling 3-2 to conference rival WEM.

NRHEG 2016 Volleyball

Aug. 30	Nicollet
Sept. 1	at Blooming Prairie
Sept. 6	at Alden-Conger
Sept. 8	Maple River
Sept. 10	at Mankato West Inv.
Sept. 13	LeSueur-Henderson
Sept. 15	Medford
Sept. 19	at JWP
Sept. 29	at WEM
Oct. 4	at Tri-City United
Oct. 8	at Blue Earth Inv.
Oct. 11	at Bethlehem Academy
Oct. 13	United South Central
Oct. 18	Blooming Prairie

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Returning letterwinners for NRHEG volleyball include, front from left: Rachel Collins, Maddie Wagner and Grace Johns. Back: Natalie Aaseth, Marnie Wagner and Gretchen Ramaker. Star Eagle photo by Jim Lutgens

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Fleming leads NRHEG cross country boys

Three runners comprise current girls' squad

By **JIM LUTGENS**
Editor/Publisher

Last year, Josh Fleming was voted the MVP of the NRHEG boys' cross country team.

He could be even more valuable this fall.

Fleming returns for his senior season with high hopes, bolstered by some experienced teammates intent on improvement for 2016.

"I believe that Josh could be an all-conference runner this season," said eight-year head coach Mike Weber, who's again assisted by Lori Tomsche.

Last year's boys' squad, ninth in the Gopher Valley Conference and 21st in Section 2A, graduated four seniors in Tyler Schlaak, Zach Mely, Aaron Seath and Jorey Fischer.

This season Fleming is joined for the boys by junior Ben Lewer, last year's Most Improved Runner, along with juniors Braden Routh, Kollin Reese and sophomore Aaron Fleming.

The rest of the boys include eighth-grader Daniel Nydegger and seventh-graders Jager Beck and Tylar Malakowsky.

"Ben keeps improving over his career, and he could be one of our leaders on the team," said Coach Weber. "Orin, Braden, and Aaron all contributed last year on varsity. In regards to team scoring, Josh and Ben could lead the team; however, the success of the team will hinge upon the consistency and improvement of Orin, Braden, and Aaron. Daniel could also break into the varsity lineup this season."

Weber's best guesses for top conference teams are Mankato Loyola/Cleveland and Martin County West. He lists Glencoe-Silver Lake and Loyola/Cleveland as the teams to beat in



NRHEG boys' cross country runners are, front from left, Josh Fleming, Ben Lewer, Braden Routh, Tyler Malakowsky and coach Mike Weber. Back: Jager Beck, Daniel Nydegger, Orin Mely and Kollin Reese.

Star Eagle photo by Jim Lutgens

the section.

The NRHEG girls' squad starts the season with three runners: sophomore Destiny Medrano and freshmen Jade Mely and Mia Williams. Mely was the team's MVP last year.

"Jade had a breakthrough year last season," said Weber. "Mia was a novice runner last year, but she worked her way onto the varsity. With her work ethic, she remained on varsity through season's end. We are thin on experience for the girls, and we are going to be very young. In order to put a girls' team together, some of the younger runners will have to develop a willingness to work and compete. If several girls can answer the call, we will improve on last year and will have put together a core of girls, who

could be around for years to come. We did have a successful junior high campaign last season, but a transition to varsity can be difficult. I hope some runners, or even a couple, can make this transition."

Graduating from last year's team were Katharine Lewer and Marissa Mortenson.

"Our two senior runners will be dearly missed," said Weber. "They provided great leadership, team unity, and veteran experience. Both put many years into the program, and both were helpful with younger runners. Katharine was team captain the past two seasons."

The girls finished eighth last year in the conference, expected to be led by MCW and Loyola/Cleveland. The

Panthers were 20th in the section meet, where Fairmont and MCW figure to set the pace.

2016 NRHEG Cross Country

Aug. 26	at Fairmont
Sept. 1	at Stewartville
Sept. 8	at Mont.-Lonsdale
Sept. 15	at Maple River
Sept. 20	NRHEG Invitational
Sept. 27	at Blooming Prairie
Sept. 29	at JWP-Prairie Ridge
Oct. 6	at Waseca
Oct. 11	at United So. Central
Oct. 18	at JWP-Prairie Ridge
Oct. 27	Section at Blue Earth
Nov. 5	State at St. Olaf



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Coach Lori Tomsche, left, with NRHEG girls' cross country runners, from left: Destiny Medrano, Mia Williams and Jade Mely. Star Eagle photo by Jim Lutgens

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2016 NRHEG Cross Country

Conference: Gopher-Valley
Section: 2A
Coaches: Head coach Mike Weber, assistant coach Lori Tomsche, both starting 8th season
Last year: The boys were 9th in the conference and 19th in the section. The girls were 8th in the conference and 20th in the section
Key athletes lost: Boys: Tyler Schlaak; Girls: Katharine Lewer
Key returnees: Boys: Senior Josh Fleming (2015 MVP), junior Ben Lewer (2015 Most Improved); Girls: Freshman Jade Mely (2015 MVP)
First action: Aug. 29 at Fairmont
First (and only) home meet: Sept. 20 at Riverview Golf Course, 4:30
Key dates: Section 2A Meet at Blue Earth Oct. 27
Coach's comment: "Jade had a breakthrough year last season."

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Fall cheerleaders



Fall 2016 NRHEG sideline cheerleaders. Front from left: Kyra Possin, Taytum Ihrke, Maurya Johnson, Cece Torp, Lillian Bell and Tali Wayne. Back: Katie Crabtree, Lorelei Strom, Hailey Westrum, Karena Strom, Sophie Thompson and Mackayla Knutson. The cheerleading advisor is Kari Buendorf.

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