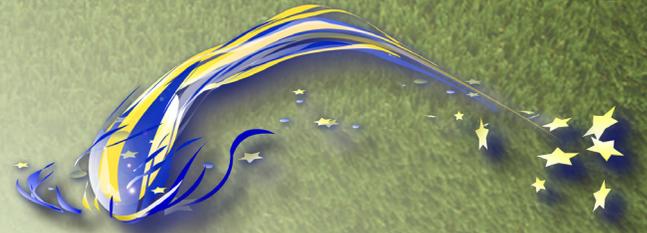




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Fatima Pages 14B-23B

2023 Fall

Sports Guide



WEDNESDAY,
AUG. 30, 2023
PAGES 1B-24B

OSAGE COUNTY
Unterrified Democrat

Perspective: Hey, Summer ... WTH man?

I know I'm old, and you're probably not expecting me to use a text abbreviation, but I seriously had to stop myself from using anything more profane.

Everything is cyclical. We start the new school year in August, and life takes on a fresh feel. Temperatures finally begin to drop, sports practice is underway, and the smell of fresh-cut grass fills the air.

By the time we start school, families have gone away to some exotic locale or maybe just a couple of states away to visit friends and relatives. Either way, summer memories begin to fade in favor of new encounters.

In our case, that didn't happen. We had a plan and dates set, and the condo paid for the time we intended to spend on a beach in Florida.

Kari and I love Florida, at least the places we've seen. This would have been our second year in the same location, and already, we envisioned doing things we missed last year.

You know what they say about "best-laid plans," so it should not surprise those who do not know that our plans were laid to waste.

Kari never lets grass grow under her feet. After considering it for a long time - like 15 minutes or so - she decided to become a motorcyclist. I honestly don't know what drove her to this decision, but I knew she was committed.

How? Well, she exhausted every possible online how-to video on the subject and bought a helmet, gloves, and boots.

Perhaps the best thing about this is she didn't purchase a bike.

Instead, she wanted to learn the ins and outs, figure out how to ride safely, and eventually be able to attend the rally in Sturgis.

After the first day of training, she came home a little beat up and tired, but that spark was still flashing in her eyes.

Only one concern reared its head: the size of her hand compared to the handle and brake. That set off alarm bells because I don't care how good you are at riding a motorcycle; if you can't stop it safely, what's the point?

Of course, I voiced my concern and suggested she walk away. Yes, it would cost us a little because I'm sure they don't credit half the program.

Kari was stubborn, and her sense of pride stepped into the forefront. She said she didn't want to give up or be a quitter, so she was committed to finishing the course.

As a husband, my job is to be supportive, so I just said good luck as we closed the conversation.

The following day, June 4, I was awakened by the kids because my phone was on silent, and I missed some calls. Oops.

For a second, I had visions I'd rather not contemplate further. Fortunately, it was a relatively minor accident, but that

didn't exactly make it better.

She and her classmates were practicing maneuvering on a closed course, traveling at about 5 MPH. Kari was following another rider when she realized she was about to hit them.

In her effort to stop using the hand brake and turn away from the potential victim, Kari inadvertently hit the throttle at the same time as the brake. Remember those tiny hands?

The bike spun, and she toppled, with the 350CC motorcycle falling on her ankle.

Kari made it a point to determine how much the bike weighed: 440 pounds.

I traveled to University Hospital and found her in the ER waiting room.

Considering the circumstances, it's a wonder she didn't do more damage. As it happened, she broke her ankle and tore some ligaments.

Whether I'm the one being treated or it's Kari, I have to admit that being in the hospital brings out my inner juvenile delinquent. "My wallet's gone!" I like to yell into an empty corridor just to see if I get a reaction.

However, many of today's medical professionals are not Seinfeld fans. Occasionally, another patient will laugh. One time, however, the laugh turned into a horrible coughing and choking fit, and I was asked to refrain from joking as it might kill someone.

I thought laughter was the best medicine; apparently, I was wrong.

After the x-rays and other tests were performed, there was talk about admitting her, but doctors decided it wasn't necessary.

My first question after learning she wasn't going to A) die and B) lose her foot was what this meant for our vacation. We were planning to get away the third week of June, so I was curious how we would drive to Florida with this problem. Further, I realized I would do all the driving, packing, loading and unloading, etc., and she would watch me swim from the beach if we were lucky.

Regardless, it was quickly evident that even without hospital admission, she could not travel.

Doctors explained a couple of days later that she would need surgery the next week to fix the break and repair the ligaments. I guess my question was a little off-color, but in my defense, the juvenile delinquent in me was coming out when I asked if amputation would be easier.

Kari gave me a look, and I stopped goofing around. This was serious, after all.

Cramming her into the back seat of my Tahoe was relatively easy, and I silently added that to the list of reasons I am happy to have a large vehicle.

For a while, as a kid, I thought about going into medicine, but the truth is, I don't really like being around sick people. I greatly admire those in the medi-

cal profession; however, it's not for me. I had a full plate with news stories and finding summer games, but I had to put some of that on the back burner while I tried to take care of her. For better or worse, in sickness and in health, right? I'm just glad she didn't need bathroom help.

We got through the appointments and surgeries, moving through two boots, crutches, a walker, and even a wheelchair. We also got one of those knee-scooters, which was not her favorite.

We rescheduled our vacation for the week following Labor Day. All we had to do was get through unscathed, and we could get a break.

I suppose I was experiencing a need to feel her pain or something. More likely, it was just stupidity on my part, but I did injure the left foot, just like Kari, so you tell me. Sympathetic injury?

A friend asked when she saw my little half-boot whether what happened to me was a cool story or a "tripped in the dark" thing. It was option B.

I went out on the deck late and tripped over my portable stairs in the dark. When I stumbled about like a drunk, I somehow managed to step down the stairs. All four of the minor toes on my

left foot bent backward. The great toe was unaffected.

In addition to spraining my toes, the middle toe ripped away from its support at the first knuckle. I could see the inner workings of my toe. I finally got home after four hours in the ER, a tetanus shot, antibiotics, and eight stitches.

I know it could have been much worse. However, I'm not losing another vacation.

So, hopefully, fingers and toes (right foot only) crossed, we can still get away.

The fall guide was to be printed on Aug. 23, but that wasn't possible with my injury. I hope you'll forgive the delay.

In this special tab, you'll find stories on all the high school teams. A few highlights:

- For the second year, Linn is fielding a JV football team, and it's incredible how the community has shown support.
- Two Fatima VB players return to coach, the Comets have a new assistant soccer coach, and the softball team starts with a target after winning it all last year.
- Chamois continues to field XC and VB teams with the goal of being competitive in every meet and match.

See you at the game. NAJ

GOOD LUCK TEAMS!

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Chamois cross country team is small but full of potential

Chamois cross country coach John Leach is confident his runners will be competitive, considering the mix of returners and new student-athletes. While the squad is relatively small, with just eight runners, Leach said there is plenty of potential.

"I'm optimistic the girls can advance individually to state," said Leach, who has two Lady Pirates out this fall. "The top 30 advance and anything can happen at districts, so if they continue to improve, they could get to Gans Creek."

Lone senior Madeline Gerloff is poised for a return to state, where she ran a 23:15 for 47th place last year. Gerloff posted a time of 23:33 at districts to advance. Gerloff was second in 22:43 at the Show-Me Conference meet to earn All-Conference.

"Madeline is coming off a great cross-country season," said Leach. "She has a lot of experience, and her positivity is excellent. With improved times, she will go a long way. I'm hoping she can not only return to state but come home with an All-State medal."

Freshman Emma Mehmert is running well in practice. "She might surprise some folks and get out of districts," said Leach. "She's stronger and more experienced, so anything is possible."

Mehmert's run of 15:43 was good for 10th place to earn All-Conference honors.

For the boys, Leach said the six-member team is capable of making a move at the end of the season. "I expect them to work hard all season and do their best," he said. "If we let it all hang out at districts and leave it all on the course, we have a chance for the entire team to get to state. That hasn't happened in a long time, but I'm confident these guys want it."



Juniors are Caleb Keilholz, Bill Kirsch, and Dawson Brandt.

"Caleb is no stranger to state cross country," said Leach. "He's motivated to get back to state and do even better. He's faster and has no one to push him in practice. Caleb's work ethic is incredible, and he's got a great shot at having a stellar postseason."

Keilholz ran very well at state last year, his time of 19:24 (77th place) close to his best of the year. He earned 22nd

place for his run of 19:58 at the district meet, and at conference, he finished sixth in 19:42.13 for All-Conference honors.

Kirsch had a solid year in 2022, and his goal is to get to state. "Bill has slimmed down, and he's a lot quicker," said Leach. "He has an excellent opportunity to get out of districts this year. He'll have to improve his time, and I believe he can do it."

At the district meet last year, Kirsch ran a time of 25:25 for 77th place and was 36th (28:34) at conference.

Brandt ran track last year but is new to cross country. "He could be a dark horse," said Leach. "Dawson works hard and could be near the top by the end of the season. He's a nice addition to the team."

Among the team's sophomores is Jaxon Wuelling, who, in his first foray into the state championships, met his goal to run the best time of the year, finishing in 19:56 for 110th place. "I have high expectations that he will improve his time and get closer to 19:00," said Leach. "I want him to get back to state and finish higher so he can get a medal."

Wuelling was 26th in 20:01 at the district meet and earned 13th place at the conference meet with a solid run of 20:12.

Sophomore Kaden Wuelling finished last year's district meet in 21:33 for 44th place and is primed to return to state. "He's another dark horse with a great chance to get through districts," said Leach. "Last year's district meet went well, but he wants more."

K. Wuelling finished 19th at the conference meet with one of his best times of the year (21:10).

See **CHAMOIS XC** on Page 5

Chamois VB includes six returners

Chamois hits the hardwood for volleyball this year with six returning players and three new to the squad.

"We're excited to build on the varsity experience we've gained and welcome our freshmen to the team," said coaches Samantha Mitchem and Erin Gerloff. "We've got a busy schedule again and look forward to a fun and healthy season."

Team members are seniors Madeline Gerloff (MH), Eevie Halbert (OH), and Elsey Wuelling (S), juniors Rylee Davis (S) and Kendall Mitchem (O/MH), sophomore Savannah Sieg (O/MH) and freshmen Brie Keilholz (S), Emma Mehmert (DS), and Addison Powers (OH).

Gerloff earned All-Conference and All-District second-team last year and was team captain. "Madeline is an all-around great player, go-to girl for offense and dependable on defense and serve receive," said Mitchem. "She's quick, athletic, and a team leader with a good attitude. We'll depend on her for a lot this season."

Halbert is a quiet team leader and always gives her all. "She's quick on defense and a reliable hitter and server," said Mitchem. "We know she'll do her

job well, whatever she's doing."

Wuelling played setter last year and looks more comfortable in that role. "Elsey is more aggressive getting to the ball and doing a great job," said Gerloff. "She's a consistent server and good defender as well."

Mitchem will be playing some outside and middle this season. "Kendall is versatile and works hard," said Coach Gerloff. "She missed last season due to a broken foot, and we're excited to have her back on the court."

Davis is a fierce competitor. "Rylee played almost every position last year at some point, and we're all happy to have her in a more consistent role as a setter," said Coach Mitchem. "She's quick to get to the ball and is improving."

Sieg was thrown into the fire last year as a starting middle hitter. "Savannah got great experience there and has learned to be more aggressive at the net, blocking and hitting," said Gerloff. "She'll play middle and some outside this year and will be getting more comfortable playing defense this year. She

See **CHAMOIS VB** on Page 4

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Chamois VB • from page 3

always has a positive, encouraging attitude, and that's appreciated."

Keilholz, Mehmert, and Powers will sub in to help as needed. "Addison played setter in junior high and brings that skill set with her," said Mitchem.

"Emma will likely play most of her time in defense, and we'll take advantage of her consistent serves. Brie played outside hitter in junior high last year and brings that experience and a great attitude."

CHAMOIS HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Aug. 31		Fatima	5:00 PM
Sept. 4		Calvary Lutheran	6:00 PM
Sept. 5		Otterville	6:00 PM
★ Sept. 7		Russellville	6:00 PM
Sept. 8		Christian Fellowship Sr.	6:00 PM
Sept. 18		New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
Sept. 19		North Callaway	6:00 PM
Sept. 21		Missouri School for the Deaf	6:00 PM
Sept. 23		Bourbon Varsity Tournament	TBA
Sept. 25		Dixon	5:30 PM
★ Sept. 26		Columbia Independent	6:00 PM
Sept. 28		Russellville	6:00 PM
Oct. 2		Eugene	6:00 PM
★ Oct. 3		New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 9		Christian Fellowship Sr.	6:00 PM
★ Oct. 12		Missouri School for the Deaf	6:00 PM
Oct. 17		Columbia Independent	6:00 PM
Oct. 19-25		Districts	TBA

CHAMOIS VARSITY CROSS COUNTRY

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 2	-	New Haven	9:00 AM
Sept. 6	-	Vienna	
Sept. 9	-	Linn	4:00 PM
Sept. 9	-	Linn	9:00 AM
Sept. 21	-	Belle	4:00 PM
Sept. 30	-	Calvary Lutheran	9:00 AM
Oct. 4	-	Show Me Conference	4:00 PM
Oct. 7	-	Harrisburg (Gan's Creek)	9:00 AM
Oct. 16	-	Vienna (HS ONLY)	4:00 PM
Oct. 21	-	Fatima (HS ONLY)	9:00 AM

*All meets are HS and JH unless noted

CHAMOIS JUNIOR HIGH BASKETBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Sept. 11	G/B	Dixon	5:30 PM
Sept. 18	G/B	Tuscumbia	5:00 PM
Sept. 22	G/B	St. Elizabeth	5:00 PM
Sept. 29	G/B	Cuba	5:30 PM
★ Oct. 2	G/B	Jamestown	6:00 PM
Oct. 5	G/B	Eugene	5:00 PM
Oct. 6	G/B	Fatima	5:00 PM
Oct. 9	G	Bland Middle	5:00 PM
Oct. 10-13	G	Bland Middle	TBA
★ Oct. 17	G/B	Tuscumbia	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 19	G/B	Vienna	5:30 PM
★ Oct. 21	B	Chamois Classic	TBA
★ Oct. 23	G/B	St. Elizabeth	5:00 PM
Oct. 24-27	B	Bland Middle Tournament	TBA
Oct. 31	G/B	Linn	5:00 PM



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Chamois XC • from page 3

Rounding out the team is sophomore Evert Mehmert, who has a year of state-level experience behind him. "He's always near the top," said Coach Leach. "He has a great work ethic and attitude and runs hard in every practice. I have high expectations for Evert and would love to see him get to state."

At districts last year, Mehmert ran 21:38 for 46th place. He was also part of the Pirates' fourth-place team finish, earning 26th in 22:34.

Chamois has four runners at the JH level, three with experience.

"We have some very talented runners in this group," said Leach. "I have high expectations for these kids."

Eighth-graders Grayson Gerloff and Levi Weed are running better than last year. "They're bigger and stronger, and I think they can do well," said Leach.

Seventh-grader Carly Schollmeyer earned sixth place in 15:12. "She's a hard worker, always trying to get better," said Leach. "She'll battle to improve her times, and I'm confident she will have a great season."

Sixth-grader Jaelyn Thoenen is new to the team and cross country. "She's doing well and has great athleticism," said Leach. "Jaelyn is learning to run properly and getting into cross-country shape. She wants to run with Carly, and if that happens, it will push them both."

Linn boys' XC has two HS and three JH runners

Linn junior Cole Franken returns as one of two high school Wildcat runners.

"Cole struggled last year with health issues but decided to give it another try. He is working hard and pushing himself," said Coach Robyn Baker.

Sophomore Reid Baker is the other team member.

"Reid had some adjusting last year as a freshman, but he is trying hard this year," said Baker. "He's trying to keep up with those senior girls and doing well. Reid has also been swimming, and I believe that is helping to build strength in his legs and his core, which will be helpful with his running. I'm excited to see how much better he fares."

Coach Baker added that though there is no team aspect in terms of points; however, she believes that, individually, Franken and Baker are driven to do better for themselves. "They're also great cheerleaders for the girls, which is awesome," said Baker. "I want them to succeed in every meet this year."

Reid Baker finished 99th in 23:24 at last year's Class 2 district meet. At the Show-Me Conference meet, Baker earned 34th place in 25:10.

At the JH level, eighth-graders Colton Bridges and Isaiah Franken are joined by seventh-grader Huck Goss.

"I believe that Colton and Isaiah will be competitive in every meet this year," said Baker. "Huck is new, but he's a good runner. The boys are meshing well with the high school runners, and I'm eager to watch them compete."

Franken (13, 14:49) and Colton Bridges (15, 14:51) ran well at last year's Show-Me Conference meet, just missing All-Conference honors.

Coach Baker is also pleased with Assistant Coach Tasha Haslag, who continues to help with cross country at St. George and runs with the kids with the kids on the team. "Her running with them has helped and gives them a little extra push," said Baker. "Tasha is a wonderful addition to the team."



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Linn cross country has a full girls' team

Linn's cross country features a full girls' team, which means the Lady Cats can score team points and potentially advance as a squad from the district meet.

"I am excited we've got a whole team this year," said Coach Robyn Baker. "I was not sure what was gonna happen. They've been practicing hard, and I'm eager to see how they perform."

After earning second as a team at the Show-Me Conference meet, the Lady Cats continued to battle at districts.

Last year, senior Reagan Klouzek was the lone Lady Cat to advance to state, and Baker is hoping she and the entire team will advance this season.

"I always hope to be able to get the team out, and we have been close many times, this might be the year" said Baker. "We don't know what district we're in yet, so we don't know what that competition looks like. I've got several girls just coming into the program and several that have not run in a cross country competition, but they are practicing well. I am excited to see what they look like in competition, and believe there is always a shot to do well as a team."

Klouzek earned a 30th-place finish in 23:36 at the Class 2, District 3 meet in 2022, and at state, she ran 23:46 for 111th place in Class 2 Grans Creek. At the conference meet, Klouzek worked hard to move to the top 10 for All-Conference but was a bit short, finishing 11th in 24:56.

"She ended the cross-country season really well last year," said Baker. "She made it to state for the first time and ran in some horrible weather. Reagan is determined to get back this year and working harder at the beginning of the season. She's a leader, cheers for the other kids, and encourages them, which is great to see."

Senior Ramsie Tschappler started last year's district race well but, unfortunately, was unable to hold that pace through the end of the race, finishing 40th in 24:31. She missed the cut for state for the first time last year after making consecutive appearances as a freshman and sophomore.

"It was a bit of a disappointment last year with her not making it to state, but it lit a fire under her," said Baker. "She's worked hard through the summer, and I see her being a great asset to the team."

Tschappler was the lone girls' varsity All-Conference medalist, finishing fifth in 24:28.

Linn's final senior Lady Cat is Hope Wolfe, entering her first cross-country season. "Hope ran track for the first time last year, and found she's a natural runner," said Baker, noting it took some prompting from her teammates and parents to run cross-country, but she has been a great addition. "She is fun for the other kids, and I'm excited to see her in our first competition."

The lone junior is Vidella Loughridge, also running cross country for the first time. "She is a thrower in track, and last year, she ran a race and loved it," Baker noted. "I think she's using this as training to hopefully be able to run some in track, but she has surprised herself and us. Vidella has done things she didn't know were possible. She's probably not going to be our lead runner, but she will definitely push others."

Linn has just one sophomore on the girls' squad, Emerson Bowser, who has run cross country since the seventh grade. "She's finally finding her running legs and has done well at practice," said Baker. "She did a lot through the summer and is committed to helping the team."

Freshmen are Elyse Brandt and Kylie Messenger.

Brandt was a runner at St. George last year. "She's quiet, but I am seeing her come out of her shell, and she is going to be a consistent runner for us," said Baker. "She tries hard on everything she's done to this point."

Mengwasser ran track last year, and Baker convinced her to come out for cross country. "She ran all summer, and I think she's gonna surprise even herself how well she does," the coach said. "She has worked hard, and I can see she's going to have a successful year."

At the JH level, eighth-graders Shay-



la Burnett and Ava Franken return to the course, and Adrienne Lansford is new to the team.

"All my returners were competitive last year, so I'm excited to see how they do this fall," said Baker. "Adrienne is also playing volleyball, so we're figuring out how she can succeed in both sports."

Franken just missed All-Conference last year with a 12th-place run of 18:06.

Coach Baker is also excited to have Assistant Coach Tasha Haslag join the team. Coach Haslag has helped with the cross country and track teams at St. George, and has been running with the team at practices. "Her running with them has helped and really pushes a few of them," said Baker. "She is really excited to be a part of the Wildcats cross-country team, and we are fortunate to have her."



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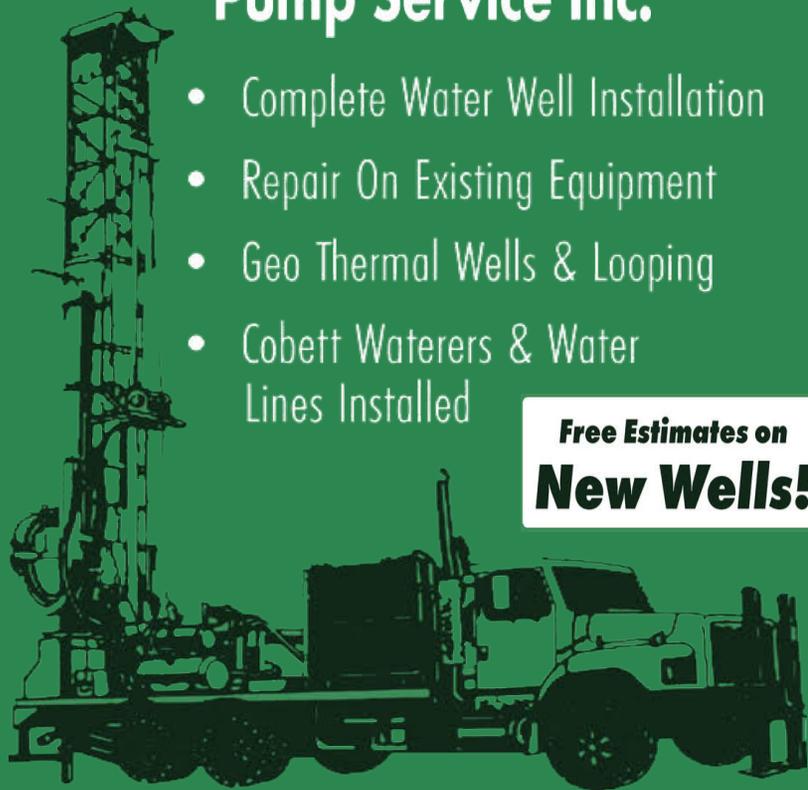
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Petersons return to coach Linn VB with 29 players

Kayla Peterson and her mother, Sharlet, return to coach Linn volleyball, the former leading the varsity squad, the latter helming the JV team. They continue to build relationships with players and have worked with the older Lady Cats to expand leadership responsibilities.

“I started meeting with the leadership team last school year,” said Kayla Peterson. “We talked about what we want to see and what they want this leadership group to look like. What did they need when they were younger players? It’s always hard to go into practice and stop somebody and go, ‘Hey, let me help you with this.’ You never know how people are going to take it. So, talking through their fears and stuff like that allowed returning varsity players to gain a little more than just playing their senior year on the varsity team. They get to learn the leadership and communication skills that sports want to teach all kids.

“Ultimately, we want to teach life skills through sports,” Peterson added. “But, they say if you want to perfect something, you should teach it.”

All returning varsity players are part of the leadership group this year, and each is assigned four or five players who are not returning varsity players.

Recently, the varsity team was practicing rotations.

Peterson pulled JV players over and told them to work on timing their hits. “We have two new setters because two graduated last year,” said Peterson. “I needed them to go somewhere, find a wall, talk to the setters, time out, the hits, whatever they needed while I was working with the others. I think the leadership group understands what I



expect of them a little more.”

She added that the returning varsity players led a brainstorming session to figure out how to work on timing with no net since the Lady Cats have only one. “And

then they went and did it,” said Peterson. “I was able to work with the JV-B team because I coach both, so I have split my time up there. I trust them to stay on track and work on what they need to improve.”

Peterson set up group chats so younger players could ask questions. In addition to helping on the court, varsity leaders are responsible for taking the younger players in and making sure they have rides or answer questions during practice. “They pull them aside and help them out,” Kayla said. “It just gives them that extra layer of help and attention that maybe we can’t give being two coaches with 29 players.

Peterson said she hopes the integration of older and younger kids will lead to a successful season. “We want to win districts this year,” she said. “We got closer last year but want to push through and win it all.”

Seniors Saylie Schaefer, Kendyl Peters, and Natalie Ramsey lead the team.

Schaefer has played all four years at Linn and club volleyball. She is Linn’s middle varsity hitter this year.

“Saylie has run with our leadership program and has done a phenomenal job in practice,” Kayla said. “She goes to everybody, not just our leadership groups. She’ll pull people aside and say, ‘Hey, why don’t you try this?’ She’s thrived with this leadership program and stepped into that role. I’m impressed with her leadership abilities. All the varsity girls are doing a great job, but Saylie tends to go above and beyond at practice.”

Schaefer’s passes are stronger, and she’s reading the

See **LINN VB** on Page 8



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Linn VB • from page 7

ball very well in practice. “One of the things that we talked about was being able to read the other side of the court and know when power is important and when a more strategic, weaker hit, a roll, or tip, is the better option,” Kayla said. “She’s taken that and understands that while she’s a power hitter and great passer, what does she need at the moment? I’ve had her since she was a sophomore. Seeing that mental growth of knowing what’s appropriate is super important. When you have a seven-foot-tall Amazon lady in front of you, powering into her block may not be the best option.”

Toward that end, Peterson had members of the leadership team act as coaches during a scrimmage. “I told them to be a little aggressive with the refs,” she explained. “We talked about how it felt when you made a call, whether it was good or bad, people in your face being inappropriate, and as line judges, we talked about the process, like is it okay to ask questions? There are appropriate ways to ask questions, especially with there being such a reffing shortage.”

Peters (OH) is in her third year on varsity. “She played all the way around last year and will again this year,” Kayla said. “She is amazing at hitting lines. I don’t know how she’s able to twist her body in the air. It looks like she’s going cross every time, and she does an excellent job of dropping on the line. She gets so excited. She’s also part of that leadership group she tends to go above and beyond more outside of practice, keeping everybody informed and that group chat going. Kendyl has a good handle on the leadership side when it comes to getting people together.”

Ramsey returns as the team’s libero. “She’s a very stoic player, and she tends to keep everybody focused,” Kayla said. “Natalie is very focused and willing to help anybody. Even last year, she worked with our younger kids all the time. She brings all the liberos in, checks in with them constantly, and tries to be a real leader for a position that’s so unique. It’s different than just a back-row player or defensive specialist. Natalie coached PAL

league in the offseason, so she tends to read and see things from a different perspective, which is nice. When we get on the court, she tends to see a little more of that coaching perspective when she’s reading things, which helps kind of round the team out, especially this year. She might not be a powerhouse hitter, but she’s going to get to the ball.”

Managers this year are seniors Faith Hines and Andrew Ely.

JUNIORS

Harlee Klebba is a returning varsity player who will set up opposite Schaefer. “She is a power hitter and an incredibly hard worker,” Kayla said. “She goes to weights every day and every open gym. She is one of the most consistent players I know. Harlee has worked hard to get her vertical up and dominates in that position. She’s very vocal and takes direction well.”

Vivien Baker also returns to the varsity squad as an outside hitter. “She is one of the most positive, well-rounded, fun-to-coach players,” Kayla said. “She’s been our MVP the past two years, and there is nothing that girl can’t do. We originally had her as a middle last year, but her approach is very long. So we moved her to outside, and she has flourished. Vivien will do anything anyone asks her to do.”

Baker also earned second-team All-Conference honors last year.

Madison Mengwasser is an outside hitter new to varsity this year. “As a freshman, she came in very green. She was on our JV-B team. In the past two years, she’s worked her way up to varsity. The improvement we’ve seen from her freshman year to now attests to the idea that if you work on it outside of practice, you’ll get it, and it’s pretty phenomenal. Madison worked a lot with Vivien outside of practice at State Tech, and it shows in her abilities. She’s become a solid all-around player. We have her playing front row for the setter, but I have no qualms putting her in the back row if I need to.”

Lizzie Wingrath is one of the team’s setters a year after playing JV. “She has much better hands than she thinks she does, but she fell into the center position last year with her club experience,” Kayla noted. “She let the cat out of the bag

that she had good hands, but she’s done well and strives in that position. One of the things that I’m pushing hard with the varsity is communicating with the setters. Lizzie takes direction well and listens.”

Linn’s other varsity setter is Nicole Grellner, who played for St. George and competed in club volleyball. “She came in and absolutely shocked us,” Kayla said. “She knew she was a setter from the beginning. Nicole plays outside hitter on the front row, but her abilities as a freshman are incredible. You can tell that she has worked on it. She’s got good hits, too, but she can set the ball no matter where she is, and it will get to where it needs to go. It always makes me nervous putting freshmen on varsity, but she earned that spot.”

Linn’s JV teams are ready for action, and Sharlet Peterson is pleased to have an enthusiastic group.

“We have some great young ladies, and I’m super excited to see them compete,” she said. “We have strong players coming in this year.”

JV-A standouts are juniors Alexis Cicero (S), Bren Hamil (BR), Lydia Kleffner (MH), and freshman Carley Brandt (MH).

“Alexis played her freshman year, then moved and is back now,” Sharlet said. “She’s a strong all-around player, even with a year off. Her sets are beautiful. She’s also effective on the front row as an outside hitter.”

Hamil is a strong back-row player.

“She’s not terrible on the front row, but believe her strengths are on the back row,” Sharlet said. “She and Alexis are two peas in a pod. She strives to do better, she’s good at reading the ball, and her passes are beautiful.”

Kleffner was injured last year but has returned healthy and is vying for time on varsity, and Brandt transferred from Chamois. “They share many of the same qualities,” Sharlet said. “Lydia is on the cusp of a varsity spot, and Carly came in and shocked us. She is solid, and she will be a force when we get her timing down. She has an opportunity to play varsity as well.”

Juniors Lauren Jacquin (libero), Gracie Schaefer (DS), and Vidella Loughridge (S), and freshmen Paige Loethen (OH), Jorja Kempker (OH), and Ali Russell (OH) are also vying for time on the varsity level. All are working hard for that chance.

The JV-B team includes juniors Natasha Jewell (MH), Courtney Wood (MH), and Jaiden Scheiner (DS), sophomores Karley Frank (S) and Fayth Davis (libero), and freshmen Emma Rieke (OH), Brooklyn Kruger (S), Adyson Brown (MH), Maddison Rotter (DS), and Lauren Rhoads (OH).

“These girls are doing a good job in practice, and they’re eager to face competition other than their teammates,” Kayla said.

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LINN GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Aug. 31	V/JV/F	Owensville	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 5	V/JV/So	Fatima	5:00 PM
Sept. 7	V/JV	New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
Sept. 12	V/JV/F	New Haven	4:30 PM
★ Sept. 14	V/JV/F	Hermann	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 16	JV	Linn JV Tournament	TBA
Sept. 19	V/JV/F	Belle	5:00 PM
Sept. 21	V/JV/F	Centralia	5:00 PM
Sept. 23	V	Bourbon Varsity Tournament	TBA
Sept. 23	JV	Russellville Junior Varsity Tournament	TBA
Sept. 25	V/JV	Calvary Lutheran	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 28	V/JV/F	Southern Boone	5:00 PM
Sept. 30	V	Rolla Invitational	TBA
Oct. 2	V/JV/F	St. James	5:00 PM
Oct. 3	V/JV/F	North Callaway	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 5	V/JV	Russellville	TBA
Oct. 7	V	Belle Varsity Volleyball Tournament	TBA
Oct. 9	V/JV/F	Fulton	TBA
Oct. 10	V/JV/F	Eugene	5:00 PM
Oct. 12	V/JV/F	Eldon	5:00 PM
Oct. 14	V	Versailles Invitational	TBA

LINN 11-MAN JUNIOR VARSITY FOOTBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Sept. 5	-	St. James	5:30 PM
★ Sept. 11	-	St. Francis Borgia	5:30 PM
Sept. 18	-	Harrisburg	6:00 PM
★ Sept. 25	-	North County	5:30 PM
Oct. 2	-	Centralia	5:30 PM
★ Oct. 9	-	Russellville	6:00 PM
Oct. 16	-	Tipton	5:30 PM
★ Oct. 23	-	Cuba	5:30 PM

LINN CROSS COUNTRY

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 2	V	New Haven	8:30 AM
★ Sept. 9	V	45th Annual Linn XC Invitational	9:00 AM
★ Sept. 9	V/JV	Eldon	9:00 AM
★ Sept. 9	V	Fulton	9:00 AM
Sept. 16	V	South Callaway	9:00 AM
Sept. 21	V	Belle	4:00 PM
Sept. 27	V	St. James Invitational	TBA
Oct. 4	V	Fatima	4:00 PM
Oct. 7	V	Harrisburg	10:00 AM
Oct. 16	V	Vienna	4:00 PM
Oct. 21	V	Fatima Invitational	TBA

LINN BOYS BASKETBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Oct. 31	8TH/7TH	Chamois	5:00 PM
Nov. 2	8TH/7TH	South Callaway	5:30 PM
★ Nov. 7	8TH/7TH	Cuba	5:30 PM
Nov. 9	8TH/7TH	New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
Nov. 13-17	8TH	Harrisburg Tournament	TBA
Nov. 21	8TH/7TH	St. James	5:30 PM
★ Nov. 27-Dec. 1	JH	2nd Annual Linn/NB JH Tournament	TBA
★ Dec. 5	8TH/7TH	Russellville	5:00 PM
Dec. 7	8TH/7TH	Hermann	5:30 PM
★ Dec. 12	8TH/7TH	New Haven	5:00 AM
Dec. 14	8TH/7TH	Owensville	5:30 PM
Dec. 18	8TH/7TH	North Callaway MS	5:30 PM
★ Dec. 20	8TH/7TH	Lewis and Clark	5:30 PM

LINN FALL SEASON SOFTBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Aug. 30	V/JV	Capital City	5:00 PM
★ Aug. 31	V/JV	Owensville	5:00 PM
Sept. 5	V/JV	Iberia	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 6	V/JV	Cuba	4:30 PM
Sept. 7	V/JV	Fatima	5:00 PM
Sept. 8	V/JV	Belle	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 11	V/JV	New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
Sept. 13	V/JV	Laquey	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 14	V/JV	South Callaway	5:00 PM
Sept. 18	V/JV	St. Elizabeth	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 21	V/JV	Tuscumbia	5:00 PM
Sept. 23	V	AA Softball Tournament	TBA
Sept. 25	V/JV	Russellville	5:00 PM
Sept. 28	V/JV	Eugene	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 29-30	V	Linn Wildcats 25th Annual Softball	TBA
Oct. 2	V/JV	Pacific	4:30 PM
Oct. 7	V	Fayette	5:00 PM
Oct. 7	V	Harrisburg	11:15 AM

LINN GIRLS BASKETBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Oct. 31	8TH/7TH	Chamois	4:00 PM
★ Nov. 2	8TH/7TH	South Callaway	5:30 PM
Nov. 7	8TH/7TH	Cuba	5:30 PM
★ Nov. 9	8TH/7TH	New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
Nov. 13-17	8TH	Harrisburg Tournament	TBA
Nov. 20	8TH/7TH	Fulton Middle	5:30 PM
Nov. 27-Dec. 1	JH	2nd Annual NB/Linn JH Tournament	TBA
Dec. 5	8TH/7TH	Russellville	5:30 PM
Dec. 14	8TH	Rolla	5:30 PM
★ Dec. 18	8TH/7TH	North Callaway MS	5:30 PM
Dec. 20	8TH/7TH	Lewis and Clark	5:30 PM

*Photos in this edition by Neal A. Johnson,
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Linn to field 18 softball players this fall

Linn's softball team has the benefit of numbers this year, with 18 gearing up for the fall season under Coach Ryan Rost.

"We look pretty good so far in practice," said Rost. "We're young with just two seniors and seven freshmen, but it's a good problem to have. I've seen big jumps in decision-making and maturity, and the girls get along well. They're all friends, so it makes my job a lot easier."

"From what I've seen so far, I expect us to have a very solid season," Rost added. "I don't see there being any reason we don't compete with every team we play if not, have a chance to win."

Hitting has improved, and Rost has emphasized the need to keep getting better at the plate. "That was probably one of the more disappointing things last year," he said. "I know a lot of the girls didn't have the season they quite wanted at the plate. One of our team goals going forward this year is to emphasize our hitting and what we're trying to do during games because our defense is always pretty good. Our problem last year was we didn't score enough runs. From what I've seen in the first week and a half of practice and over the summer, we're putting a stronger focus on hitting, and I think it's starting to show or hopefully starting to show, not to jinx myself."

Linn ended last year with a 9-2 loss to Eugene in the C2D2 semifinal at Iberia with a 13-15 record. In the district opener, the Lady Cats defeated Laquey 12-1 in five innings.

Following the semifinal game, Rost said the team dealt with nerves because many players didn't have big-game experience. He was pleased with the progress, however.

"We had a lot of learning again this year," he said last fall. "Our experience this year will help next season because we won't have our seniors to rely on. The girls have shown a lot of grit, and I can't wait to see what next year brings."

Leading the team this year are seniors Katlyn Starke and Lily Strobe.

Starke returns to left field after last season's performance that saw her hit .291 (16-63) with two doubles, a triple, and 12 RBI. She earned second-team All-District as an outfielder and looks to do even better this fall.

"She's coming off a pretty decent year," said Rost. "Katlyn always brings a pretty steady presence to the plate. She always hits pretty solid, but she will have to step up this year since we lost a couple of excellent hitters last year. She's improved so much in all the years I've had her, but the biggest jump I've seen was from last year to this year. Her fielding has become much better. Katlyn takes great routes and has evolved as an outfielder. She's much more vocal in leading our outfielders and communicating. She's stepped up, so I'm excited to see what this season brings for her. Katlyn knows I have pretty high expectations of her."

Strobe, meanwhile, continues to expand her horizons, especially between last year and now. "She's made a big transition and is learning a new position at first base," Rost noted. "So far in practice, she's shown great improvement and picked up the position very fast. She's also one of the players that has improved a lot from last year at the plate. Her swing looks pretty good so far at practice, so I'm eager to see what she does with the opportunities she may get this year."

Strobe only had one at-bat last year on varsity and hopes to see more action at the plate.

JUNIORS

Emma Monnette will monitor the hot corner at third this year. "She has shown tremendous improvement from last year this year, especially in the field," said Rost. "I've watched her make more diving plays so far, and she radiates confidence



over there in the corner. No matter how hard a girl hits at her, Emma's always in position and always makes good throws. One of the keys to success for defensive softball is to have good defense at the corners of your infield, and she has been phenomenal so far."

See **LINN SB** on Page 11



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Offensively, Monnette went 20-77 (.260) with a double and 11 RBI. "In the first few weeks of practice, she's hit very well, so I'm excited to see how she improves that aspect of her game," said Rost.

Monnette earned second-team All-District in the infield.

Kiana Hostetler returns to the outfield and has stepped into her own. "She's taking the leadership role in centerfield, making sure she's communicating with not only her fellow outfielders but the infielders, too," said Rost. "When she talks, the other girls listen. Kiana has also made improvements to her route-running in the outfield. She is so fast and lanky that she can get to almost any ball in the corner. It's always nice to have a centerfielder like that. I look forward to seeing how she also improves at the plate. She's going to have more of an opportunity this year to really contribute and drive in some runs."

Hostetler hit .234 (15-64) with three doubles and five RBI.

Kylie Peters is the team's returning catcher, boasting a .958 fielding percentage last year. Offensively, she collected eight hits in 55 at-bats (.145) with five doubles and an RBI. "She's looked terrific so far to start the year in practice," said Rost. "Kylie is putting power behind her swing, and she's gotten much stronger with her throw-downs. She has improved every year that I've had her and keeps getting better as she gets older. As far as

throwing girls out, she's going to be a force, and teams are really going to have to consider whether they want to steal on her."

Hannah Hackmann, who earned second-team All-District in the infield while playing at shortstop last year, will play at first base this season. "She's had some experience playing there in summer ball and stuff like that," said Rost. "As far as a new position goes, she's picked it up fast, like she's played there forever. She's looked great over on that side. It's always nice to have a player that can play any position. Hannah's been that for two and a half years, so I'm excited to see what she can do in a new position. I'm excited for her; she's going to have a lot of opportunities to drive in some runs and to have a big year."

Hackmann went 23-83 (.277) last year with 10 doubles, a triple, and a home run with 16 RBI.

SOPHOMORES

Ava Warren is coming off a great freshman year, hitting .282 (24-85) with a double and 12 RBI. "She was phenomenal on both sides of the ball," said Rost of the first-team All-District (Utility/DP) player. "I think she wanted to have a little better season at the plate last year, but from what I've seen so far, she's putting all the work in the offseason into her practice now, and she is swinging the bat well. Ava looks even better in the field. I really looked for her to have a great sophomore season following up what was a great freshman year."

Warren also pitched 52 innings in 10 starts

(12 games overall) last year, going 5-4. She allowed 34 earned runs on 71 hits with 24 walks and 31 strikeouts.

Sophie Voss also earned first-team All-District, finishing the year with a mark of .333 (12-36), with four doubles, two triples, and nine RBI. Voss went 5-3 from the circle and threw 51.1 innings in 14 games with eight starts.

"Sophie was probably our dominant force on the mound last year as a freshman, which is a tough ask, but she did awesome for us last year," said Rost. "She has improved a ton from last year; her pitches have more movement,

and she seems to be in more control. I look for her to have an even better year commanding on the mound. Sophie was a late bloomer last year as far as showcasing her talents, but she did well at the end of the year when she got to play. I look for her to be a solid contributor."

Mara Mitchell enters her second year with the team, and Kylie Blackford is new to the squad. Both will battle for time in the outfield. "Mara has improved quite a bit, and Kylie has impressed me so far," said Rost. "They will have opportunities to succeed."

See **LINN SB** on Page 13



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Linn football team features much more experience

Last year, Linn fielded its first football team in almost 50 years, and of those who participated, just four had previous experience; now, it's 25, with a year on the gridiron behind them.

"That makes a big difference, going from four to 25 in one year," said Head Coach Steve Samson. "That's pretty good. Overall, practices are more intense. They know what to expect and bring the other kids along with them. We're starting to turn the corner. I can see light at the end of the tunnel, but it's still a long way to go."

Linn has also increased the total number of kids from 18 to 29. Samson said he would like to get 10 players per class on the field but acknowledges it's a tough prospect. As participation in Wildcats Club Football increases, so does the number of kids feeding into the high school program, which plans to enter the varsity ranks next season. "Once they start getting success down at lower level, I think we'll be a lot better off," said Samson.

In 2022, with 18 players on the sideline, Linn faced the harsh reality of a start-up program. "It took a toll on us, physically," said Samson. "A lot of teams wore us down. We played well in the first half, but without depth to keep it going, games got away from us. Having backups to cover situations that arise means we won't be throwing kids into new positions in the middle of a game."

Last year, a player with a twisted ankle might be out, and the position covered for a couple of weeks. This year, Samson said a similar injury would have a different outcome. "We have somebody we can plug into that position and get us through," he added. "Maybe it's not gonna be like having two first-teamers, but having two at every position will be important."

As the year unfolds — with the Wildcats kicking off the season on Monday at Montgomery County — Samson believes Linn will be competitive in every game.

"I want to win every game, and I know the coaching staff wants to win every game, and realistically, we will try to win every game," said Samson. "We're going out to win every game, but I know that's not going to happen. I think we should be competitive in more games than last year."

Coach Samson is relying on his assistants for their help in developing a solid squad. "They're doing a great job," he said. "They've come in and taken to the kids, and the kids like being around them. They're very intelligent as far as football knowledge is concerned. The assistants are willing to get right down with the kids and teach fundamentals, which I'm big on. They are willing to stay late if a kid needs help. So, I'm very pleased with our coaching staff this year. And there's more of them, so it's going to be easier. The coaching staff has more experience than we did last year. I had to spend a lot of time coaching the coaches last year, but now I can spend more time teaching kids."

A look at assistant coaches

Linn has five seniors leading the action on the field. "Our expectations are high now, and our seniors are doing a good job showing the younger guys what has to be done because we have to be ready to go to varsity next year," said Samson.

Senior quarterback/outside linebacker Chris Brandt returns after earning Offensive Player of the Year in 2022 and is poised to run the offense. "He's come along at quarterback and does an excellent job reading the option," said Samson. "He's improved his throwing accuracy, which will allow us to throw the ball just a little bit more than we did last year. I've talked to him and the other quarterbacks; I've talked to the receivers. I want to throw the ball, but we need to catch it when we throw it. We've been working hard in the last couple of practices, really emphasizing

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Linn FB • from page 12

throwing and catching. It will help us open our running game that much more.”

Senior Arlyn Martin (C/DT) spent a lot of time in the weight room during the offseason and is more physical. “He’s stronger, and I’m expecting big things from him this year,” said Samson of the 2022 Defensive Player of the Year. “Arlyn continues to improve, which I like to see.”

Another senior, Jaylen Jones, will be a running back and free safety. “He will do well on both sides of the ball,” said Samson of the likely two-way starter. “He’s a very explosive player with good speed and instincts. Jaylen is working hard to be the number one right-side back, and defensively, he’s a solid tackler and has picked up the defensive scheme quickly.”

Senior Hunter Haslag will demonstrate his strength as a fullback and middle linebacker. “His last two games were solid,” said Samson, hoping he’ll be medically cleared to play soon. “He had minor injuries, and he’s doing what he can right now. Hunter is a big, strong kid who runs pretty hard between the tackles.”

Curtis Deeken (RB/OB) rounds out the seniors. “He has good speed and instincts,” said Samson. “He continues to improve his knowledge and will be an important part of our team.”

JUNIORS

Devin Brandt saw a lot of playing time last year at fullback and multiple other positions. “We’re going to try to concentrate him more on a fullback position,” said Samson. “He will also be working a little bit at a tight end. On defense, he’s very aggressive as an outside backer. Devin has improved a bunch since last year, as far as his tackling ability and his understanding of the game.”

Trevor Brandt (WR/CB) started both ways last year and will be especially integral this year, primarily on defense. “We’re gonna rely heavily on him, especially on the defensive side,” said Samson. “He’s a good tackler, knows his assignments, and he’s gotten stronger in the weight room over the winter, so we expect good things from him.”

Gabe Branson (C/NG) saw some playing time last year, but a knee injury sidelined him. “He helps us on the line because of his ability to snap the ball,” Samson noted. “Plus, Gabe is a big, strong kid and very smart, so he knows many line calls. He’s going to help the defense and give the defensive line breaks during games.”

Samson added that one nice aspect of the

game is how positions are taught. “If you can play one, you can play the other three because it’s basically the same,” he said of the line. “It’s a different position, but the techniques are the same. That will make it easier, so hopefully, we can keep rotating guys and stay fresh.”

Logan Martin (OT/DT) played every snap last year as a guard. “We moved him out to tackle,” said Samson. “He’s gotten a lot stronger over the last year; he’s very aggressive and loves to block people. On defense, he’s very aggressive too. We can rotate guys through and stay fresh, which will help us both on offense and defense.”

Ian Kline will play outside tackle and defensive end. “This is his first year with the team,” said Samson. “He’s lifted weights during the winter. Ian is a strong kid, and he’s learning quickly. He’s learning the schemes should get plenty of playing time; he’s in the mix.”

Bobby Winkelman (RB/WR/DB) recently joined the team, bringing great athleticism to the mix. “He plays multiple sports, is highly athletic, and a very quick individual,” said Samson. “He’s gained a lot of weight during the offseason as far as lifting is concerned, so he should be a great asset for us. Once Bobby learns what he’s doing, I’m confident he’ll be successful.”

SOPHOMORES

Jake Bish (OG/C/DL) played last year and was one of the few with previous football experience. “He’s one of the few kids with three years of experience already. He can play multiple positions on both the O-and D-line,” said Samson. “He’s a utility player that does a good job for us. He’s gotten stronger over the winter and lifted hard during the summer. We’re expecting good things from him.”

Joe Brandt will play outside tackle and middle linebacker, returning as Linn’s leading tackler. “We moved him from center last year to tackle this year because of his blocking ability,” said Samson. “Defensively, we changed schemes, and he’s the middle backer. Hopefully, he will run and make tackles because he’s very good at that.”

Jason Grier (OL/DL) can play multiple positions. “He did a little bit of snapping last year, so he’s another great utility person to have,” Samson noted. “He’s a lot stronger than last year and has good feet.”

Carson Kliethermes will play at running back and cornerback. “We may have him play safety, too,” said Samson. “It depends on how everything shakes out. Carson has great speed and worked hard in the weight room. He comes to practice and puts in the same effort, no matter what’s going on. Like every-

body else on this team, he has one year under his belt and needs more. Game experience is going to help them all.”

Craig Laughlin (TE/FB/DL) played tight end last year and will be there again, but mainly he’ll play the fullback position. “He can play any D-line position and might even play a little outside linebacker,” said Samson. “Craig is another kid that’s come along in the last year, and he’s doing a heck of a job running, looking, and finding the right holes to go through. He was the best running back in our scrimmage, and we’re expecting big things from Craig, both on offense and defense.”

Tyler Wagner (QB/S) is doing a great job this year at quarterback and progressing nicely. “He’s reading the option well and very fast,” said Samson. “He’s a multi-sport athlete, so he’s very capable of playing quarterback and safety; he likes to hit people. Tyler only weighs a buck-sixty, but he brings it.”

Cameron Hoelscher (WR/RB/CB) just started this year after running track last spring. “He did a good job in track and is a speedy individual,” said Samson. “Cameron is struggling because it’s his first year out, and he doesn’t know the plays, but once he gets the terminology down, he should be much better. Cameron got run over last night in practice. Two plays later, same play, he made the tackle. That tells me he’s learning, and it takes a while. Football is a different animal from other sports.”

Jacob Wilder (OL/DL). “This is his first

year out, so he’s behind on the other linemen, but he’s getting there,” said Samson. “He’s improving every practice, and he’s big enough. I think once he learns technique and the scheme of things, he’s going to be able to help us going to be able to spell some guys for a couple plays.”

FRESHMEN

This year’s incoming group includes Hunter Bish (QB/CB), Lane McKim (WR/CB), Cory Sanders (RB/CB), Owen Reichart (WR/OB), Aiden Nelson (RB/S), Tommy Scheulen (WR/OB), Preston Keillholz (WR/CB), Connor Knoll (OL/DL), Xavier Knoll (OL/DL), and JJ Worley (OL/LB).

“Most of these freshmen have played club ball, so they’re not coming in without at least some experience,” said Samson. “Aiden, Tommy, and Preston are very athletic kids, and they will probably see some playing time. I don’t know if any of them will start.

“Connor and Xavier are bigger individuals, and they will work into the rotation on offensive and defensive lines,” Samson added. “Whether it’s just to spell who’s out there or what have you. They played last year at the club level, and this year is a little different for them.”

Overall, the freshmen need time to develop and learn the team’s schemes. “The weight room is going to do them a great service once they get into lifting,” said Samson.

Linn’s first home game will be on Tuesday, Sept. 5, against St. James. Every other game is on a Monday.

Linn SB • from page 13

Freshmen are Ellie Dudenhoefter (C/IF), Brynlee Ferguson (IF/OB), Kenzy Hackmann (IF/OB), Heshie Higginbotham (IF/OB), Lydia Kaullen (OB/P), Anna Peters (IF/OB/P), Paige Senevey (IF/OB). “A couple of these girls are gonna play a lot of varsity, but they’re all pretty talented,” said Rost. “This is one of the more talented freshman groups that’s come through. I haven’t seen much of the nerves, you know, the freshmen mentality of this group. They came in ready to compete for positions, and they’ve been

fighting every day. I’ve been impressed with them.”

Rost credits years of club and travel ball for the development of these young players. “I’m excited to see how that transfers over to high school ball and see how they compete, but I think these freshmen are gonna make all of my upperclassmen work every single day, and that’s what you look for when you’re coaching. You want every practice to be competitive with no job guaranteed. I want them to earn a spot.”

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Comets field 22 soccer players this fall

Fatima soccer has a robust roster, with 22 players competing this fall under the direction of Head Coach Dustin Cox and assistant coaches Kelley-Marie Wibberg and Sami Jo Freeman.

From a conditioning perspective, the boys' team is in excellent shape and has grown tactically in the last few weeks — but that's just part of the coaches' strategy. "We expect to be competitive against all teams on our schedule and hope to have our first varsity winning season since 2019," said Cox. "Last year, we graduated 12 seniors from our roster, so it's a new start for those on the team this year. Our goal will be to maintain wins from last year and close the gap against teams we lost to previously."

Fatima coaches augmented conditioning practices with open field days during the summer. They have also seen players go above and beyond on their own with improvements in several areas.

"Team morale is high, and everyone is ready for a winning season," said Freeman.

"The thing that will stick out the most is our ability to adapt as a team," Freeman added. "We have numerous players who could play nearly any position on the field thanks to their speed, conditioning, and skill. We will push ourselves to try new starting lineups, formations, and plays until we find exactly what works for us. We're also building on the characteristics that Fatima has long been known for hard work, determination, good sportsmanship, and being respectful. If there is one 'best' thing about this team, it has to be that they are a tight-knit group that cares about each other and is eager to learn. As coaches, you can't ask for anything better, and we've improved as coaches because of it."

Fatima finished the 2022 campaign with an 11-14 record after falling in the Class 1, District 4 semifinal.

COACHES

Dustin Cox, his wife Lisa (Boes), and their two kids moved back to Osage County five years ago. Shortly after, he became a coach in the Westphalia Soccer Club and made several connections within the soccer community and families that support it. It was through that experience that he was recommended as a soccer coach for Fatima High School. Dustin has experience coaching the Fatima boys and girls high school teams and still coaches his children's WSC teams. This is his first season as head coach of the boys' team, but second year on the coaching and teaching staff at Fatima. Dustin graduated high school in southern Indiana and col-

lege in Springfield. He played soccer most of his life, but coaching is his true passion.

Kelley-Marie Wibberg excelled as a

goalkeeper, playing for the Scott Gallagher Soccer Club at the club level and both Lindenwood University in Belleville, Ill., and Mizzou Soccer at the collegiate level. While managing the Mizzou soccer team after playing for three years, she studied the game. She was mentored by some of the best collegiate coaches in the nation. Kelley-Marie is originally from Millstadt, Ill., and recently moved to Osage County with her husband, Matthew Wibberg, of Linn, and their son, Mark. Kelley-Marie is excited to join the Fatima soccer family this year and coach this season for the Westphalia Soccer Club.

Sami Jo Freeman played soccer competitively at the local, state, national, and international levels, starting at a young age with Tony Glavin Soccer Club and continuing into high school. While playing, she coached many youth teams alongside her family as an offensive coach and refereed in the St. Louis area. Dustin and Sami Jo became friends through his wife, Lisa. After a connection was made to

See **FATIMA SOCCER** on Page 15



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Fatima Soccer • from page 14

soccer, Dustin invited Sami Jo to join the Fatima coaching staff for both the boys' and girl's teams. Sami Jo is originally from rural Lincoln County, where she graduated from Troy Buchanan High School before heading to the University of Missouri. M-I-Z! She lives on the outskirts of Columbia and works in communications for the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services.

SENIORS

Captain Christian Stephens (Wing/Midfield) challenges his teammates to think in new ways and pushes for better performance at every practice. "For that reason and many more, he will also serve as a team captain," said Cox. "Christian brings energy, speed, and creativity to the wing midfield and will also share in the responsibility for corners and set pieces."

Captain Cody Koenigsfeld (All Positions) is a hard worker and very competitive on the soccer pitch. "We haven't seen many players outwork him," said Wibberg. "His work ethic, leadership, and competitiveness is what makes Cody a great soccer player and captain."

Chase "Budd" Buddemeyer (Midfield/Offense) brings exceptional athletic talent to the field and a great personality. "He is respectful, hardworking, and eager to learn more," said Freeman. "The team will look to Budd to fill multiple positions throughout the season. He has the ability to be a great goal scorer and a solid defender all in the same game."

Jacob Bax (Defense/Midfield) is one of Fatima's most experienced defenders, bringing an impressive amount of speed to go with it. "He's a physical defender that can catch up with nearly any striker the opposing team may throw at us," said Freeman. "Jacob is one player we may call on to play offense, midfield, or defense, depending on the team's needs."

JUNIORS

Tyler Koenigsfeld (All Positions) brings a solid all-around athletic personality to the team. "Tyler is always up for a challenge, which is how he has learned to support his team from anywhere on the field," Cox said. "The team will ask a lot of Tyler as he switches from defensive midfield to striker."

Austin Schenewerk (All Positions) is a valuable player, not only on the field but off as well. Coach Wibberg said, "He's smart and uses that ability to read the field well and make strategic decisions. He can always be counted on to crack a joke and help bring up the mood of the team."

Trevor Schulte (Midfield/Offense) has the explosive speed, creative moves, and talent on the ball that Fatima needs in the offensive unit. "Trevor does very well in compact and tight spaces and consistently scores for his team," said Cox.

Richard "Richie" Luebbert (Wing/



Midfield) will be one of Fatima's captains this year. "That's a testament to his leadership and selfless attitude on and off the field," said Wibberg. "He plays a critical position for our offense. He will also be responsible for taking corner kicks and other set pieces to create goal-scoring opportunities for his team."

Jonathan "JJ" Block (Midfield) lends his talents throughout the midfield. "Jonathan has been great at finding opportunities to advance on the field and works hard to improve his game," Freeman noted.

SOPHOMORES

Goalkeeper Michael Sesti is described as "the ultimate protector: our guy in the box."

"He is always up for a challenge and strives to build his skills to be the best player he can be," said Cox. "Michael brings a 'can-do' attitude to the field every day he is there."

Peter Schwartz (Midfield/Offense) trains for soccer year-round, and it shows. "Peter's love for the game is only beaten by the skill and smarts he brings to the team," said Freeman. "He handles the ball exceptionally well with a soft, precise touch in stressful situations, and it makes a difference for his teammates who benefit from his strategic mindset."

Jase Rehagen (Midfield/Offense) can play any position throughout Fatima's offense, seamlessly switching from striker to wing and center midfield. "He has a great touch and strike on the ball, scoring consistently under pressure in scrimmage and drills," said Cox.

Drew Riegel (Defense) is one of the Comets' most experienced defenders. "He's scrappy and extremely fast," said Freeman. "Those skills combined allow him to win the ball from nearly any opponent. He will play a huge part in our ability to switch between three or four players in the back line."

Eli Koenigsfeld (All Positions) shows

up game-ready to every practice and is always willing to learn and grow as a player. "This mindset has allowed him to become a strong, reliable asset to the team in any position he plays," said Wibberg. "He is the ultimate utility player."

Colten Scheulen (Midfield) is very

athletic and talented with a soccer ball. "Colten is so important to our team on set-pieces and opening up space on the field to score, but is also great at shutting

See **FATIMA SOCCER** on Page 17

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Fatima sports schedules

FATIMA JUNIOR HIGH CROSS COUNTRY

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Sept. 2		New Haven	
Sept. 9		Fr. Tolton (Gans Creek)	
★ Sept. 16		Fulton Middle	
Sept. 21		Belle	
Oct. 4		Conference Meet	

FATIMA HIGH SCHOOL CROSS COUNTRY

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 2	Varsity	New Haven	
Sept. 9	Varsity	Tolton Catholic Invitational	
Sept. 16	Varsity	Fulton Invitational	
Sept. 23	Varsity	Gans Creek	
Sept. 30	Varsity	Camdenton Invitational at HaHa Tonka	
★ Oct. 4	Varsity	Show Me Conference (Westphalia)	
Oct. 14	Varsity/JV	Hancock (St. Louis)	
★ Oct. 21	Varsity	Fatima Invitational (Westphalia)	9:00 AM
★ Oct. 21	Varsity	Linn	9:00 AM

FATIMA BOYS BASKETBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Sept. 22	8th	Vienna	6:30 PM
Sept. 25	JH	Tuscumbia	6:15 PM
Sept. 28	JH	Eugene	6:15 PM
Oct. 5	JH	St. Elizabeth	6:15 PM
★ Oct. 6	8TH	Chamois	6:15 PM
★ Oct. 6	JH	Chamois	6:15 PM
★ Oct. 9	JH	Stoutland Jr. H.	6:15 PM
Oct. 12	JH	Dixon	6:15 PM
Oct. 19	JH	Jamestown	7:00 PM
★ Oct. 20	JH	Prairie Home	6:15 PM

FATIMA FALL SEASON SOFTBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Aug. 31	Varsity/JV	Timberland (Wentzville)	4:30 PM
Sept. 1	Varsity/JV	Capital City (Jefferson City)	5:00 PM
Sept. 5	Varsity/JV	Jefferson City	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 7	Varsity/JV	Linn	5:00 PM
Sept. 9	Varsity	Helias/Jackson/Willard/Fatima Quad	TBA
Sept. 11	Varsity/JV	Russellville	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 13	JV/So	Vienna	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 14	V/JV	Eugene	5:00 PM
Sept. 15-16	V	Lady Jays Classic	TBA
★ Sept. 18	V/JV	South Callaway	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 19	V/JV	Centralia	5:00 PM
Sept. 21	V/JV	St. Elizabeth	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 23	V	Fatima/Helias/Sullivan/Chillicothe	TBA
Sept. 23	V	Sullivan	TBA
Sept. 23	V	Chillicothe	TBA
★ Sept. 25	V/JV	New Bloomfield	5:00 PM
Sept. 26	V/JV	Iberia	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 27	V/JV	Blair Oaks	5:00 PM
Sept. 28	V	Tuscumbia	5:00 PM
Sept. 29-30	V	Kewpie Classic Varsity Tournament	TBA
★ Oct. 2	V/JV	Hallsville	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 3	V/JV	Father Tolton Regional Catholic	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 5	V/JV	Helias Catholic	5:00 PM

★ - Denotes Home Game

FATIMA HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 22	8th	Vienna	6:30 PM
Sept. 25	JH	Tuscumbia	6:15 PM
Sept. 28	JH	Eugene	6:15 PM
Oct. 5	JH	St. Elizabeth	6:15 PM
★ Oct. 6	8th	Chamois	6:15 PM
★ Oct. 6	JH	Chamois	6:15 PM
★ Oct. 9	JH	Stoutland Jr. High	6:15 PM
Oct. 12	JH	Dixon	6:15 PM
Oct. 19	JH	Jamestown	7:00 PM
★ Oct. 20	JH	Prairie Home	6:15 PM



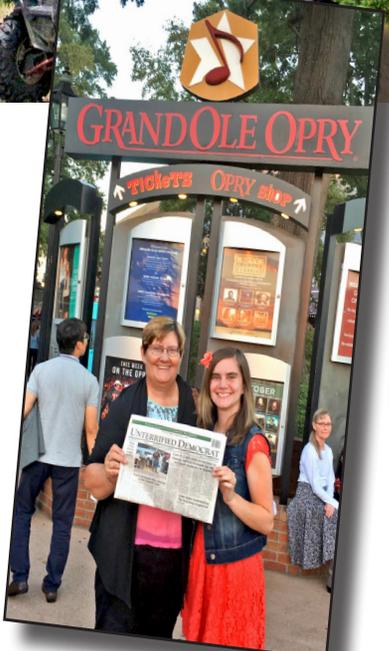
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FATIMA GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Aug. 31	JV	Chamois	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 1	V/JV/Fr	New Haven	5:00 PM
Sept. 5	V/JV/So	Linn	5:00 PM
Sept. 7	V/JV/Fr	Hermann	4:30 PM
Sept. 9	Varsity	Fulton Varsity Tournament	TBA
Sept. 9	Fr	Helias 9th Volleyball Tournament	TBA
★ Sept. 11	V/JV/Fr	Southern Boone	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 12	V/JV/Fr	Eugene	5:00 PM
Sept. 14	V/JV/Fr	Owensville	5:00 PM
Sept. 16	JV	Linn JV Tournament	TBA
★ Sept. 18	V/JV/Fr	Rock Bridge	5:00 PM
Sept. 19	V/JV/Fr	Boonville	5:00 PM
Sept. 21	V/JV/Fr	Jefferson City	5:30 PM
Sept. 23	JV	Jefferson City JV Tournament	TBA
Sept. 26	V/JV/Fr	Capital City	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 28	V/JV/Fr	Blair Oaks	5:00 PM
Sept. 30	Varsity	Rolla Invitational	TBA
Sept. 30	JV	Waynesville JV Volleyball Smackdown	TBA
Oct. 3	V/JV/Fr	Osage	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 4	V/JV/Fr	Battle	5:00 PM
Oct. 7	Varsity	Pinkfest (Lebanon)	TBA
Oct. 7	JV	Pinkfest (Lebanon)	TBA
★ Oct. 10	V/JV/Fr	California	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 12	V/JV	Russellville	5:00 PM
Oct. 14	Fr	Freshmen Volleyball Smackdown	TBA
Oct. 16	V/JV	New Bloomfield	5:00 PM

FATIMA BOYS SOCCER

DATE	LEVEL	OPPONENT	TIME
★ Aug. 31	Varsity/JV	Rolla	5:00 PM
Sept. 5	Varsity/JV	Crocker	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 7	Varsity	Dixon	5:00 PM
Sept. 11	Varsity	Cole Camp	5:00 PM
Sept. 12	Varsity/JV	Sullivan	5:00 PM
Sept. 14	Varsity/JV	Smithton	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 18	Varsity/JV	Missouri Military Academy	5:00 PM
Sept. 19	Varsity/JV	Camdenton	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 21	Varsity/JV	Boonville	5:00 PM
★ Sept. 25	Varsity/JV	Mexico	5:00 PM
Oct. 2	Varsity/JV	Helias Catholic	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 5	Varsity/JV	Southern Boone	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 9	Varsity/JV	Laquey	5:00 PM
Oct. 13-14	Varsity	Stover Classic	TBA
★ Oct. 16	Varsity/JV	Jefferson City	5:00 PM
Oct. 17	Varsity/JV	Moberly	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 19	Varsity/JV	Osage	5:00 PM
Oct. 23	Varsity/JV	Union	5:00 PM
★ Oct. 24	Varsity/JV	Sacred Heart	5:00 PM

Fatima Soccer from page 15

down space to cut off opponents,” Wibberg offered.

Andrew Muenks (Defense) adds a lot of height, speed, and intelligence to Fatima’s back line. “He is trustworthy against all types of opponents and isn’t afraid to make a tough tackle,” said Freeman. “His style will be especially valuable defending corner kicks, set pieces, and crosses.”

Kaedyn Rehagen (Defense) brings a hardworking attitude to the field every day, Cox noted. “Kaedyn is patient, always willing to learn, and a great teammate,” he added. “All these qualities have made him a huge asset to our defense.”

FRESHMEN

Ben Stephens (Midfield/Defense) started training with the team over the summer and has grown as a player in knowledge and ability. “He shows up with an open mind and willingness to learn every day,” said Wibberg.

Paden Luebbert (Defense/Goalkeeper) came to the team this summer for the first time. “He has stepped up and not only been an asset on the defensive line but also as a part-time goalkeeper,” said Cox.

Thomas “Goose” Kremer (All Positions) is new to the high school team. “He’s the team’s only left-footed player on the team and has a natural touch on the ball already,” said Freeman.

Troy Neuner (Defense) began working with the Comets early this summer

and has grown tremendously in a short period of time. “Even though it’s his first season, he’s developed primarily as a reliable defensive player,” said Freeman.

Cooper Berhorst (Defense) came to the team in August with a defensive intuition coaches don’t usually see this early. “He can read offensive players, anticipate when they are about to make a move, and strip them of the ball with ease,” said Cox.

Fatima will use quickness to stymie opponents. “One of the greatest assets in our defensive unit is speed,” said Wibberg. “Almost all of our starting defensive players rank among the top five players for speed. Depending on the game, we believe we’ll have the flexibility to defend with three or four players in the back line.”

As the season opens, the coaches expressed their gratitude to the Westphalia Knights of Columbus for their continued support of Fatima soccer. “We want to thank the managers of the soccer fields, Chris Angerer and Glenn Bock, as well as all the Knights who work concessions,” the coaches said. “They spend a lot of time helping us maintain one of the best grass fields in the state - our teams are proud to host home games because of it.”

Team managers are Jeanna Abbott, Chloe Adamson, and Maya Libbert.

**Photos in this edition by Neal A. Johnson,
Will Johnson and Jacob Warden**

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Crede, Bertels excited to return to coach Fatima volleyball

Fatima Head Volleyball Coach Ellie Crede and C-team coach Lacy Bertels are quite familiar with the program since they played together until graduation in 2020.

“The transition from player to coach has gone pretty well, but I think it’s a little confusing for the girls because I’m so close to their age,” said Crede. “I know it’s challenging to have coaching turnover. Everyone does it differently, but the girls are on board, and my assistant coaches are very supportive. Tracy (Quinn) has been here for four years, and his previous head coaching experience means a lot. Lacy is very helpful, and both offer a great deal to the team.”

Crede graduated from Columbia College this year with a general studies degree with an elementary education minor. She is pursuing a Master’s in Behavioral Analysis online at SEMO.

While substitute teaching at Fatima, then-Athletic Director Matt Verslues offered her the position. “I love coaching, but I wondered if I would have time,” said Crede, who also coaches OCVBC. “I’m glad I accepted the offer, and I can’t wait to see how the girls do this year. Growth is the most important aspect — in volleyball and in life — and our tough schedule will help us improve.”

Last season, the Lady Comets lost to California in the Class 3, District 8 tournament to finish the year at 11-18-4. Fatima claimed a 25-13, 25-20, 25-17 win in the opener against Fulton.

This year’s varsity team has four seniors: Lucy Crede (OH), Jacey Hoskins (OH), Carly Mengwasser (S/DS), and Nevin Wilde (libero).

Crede is a team captain and consistent leader. “So far, she’s doing everything we ask of her and helping us bring along the younger kids,” said Coach Crede.

Hoskins brings a lot to the team. “She has a good swing, but she also makes a good shot selection,” said Crede. “She’s quiet but leads by example.”

Mengwasser is very coachable, which has helped make her the most improved player. “She keeps pushing herself to get better,” said Crede. “Carly asks a lot of questions to help her improve.”

Wilde returns to the back row as the team’s libero. “Nevin gets to a lot of hard-hit balls and never gives up on a play,” said Crede. “She has quick feet and reads the ball well.”

JUNIORS

Last year’s Show-Me Conference MVP, Vivian Bax, is a team captain moving to the setter position. “That’s not her typical position, but she’s doing well



and always looking for ways to improve,” said Crede. “She’s vocal and holds players accountable in a positive way.”

Bax also earned second-team All-District honors. Sydney Muenks (OPP) will be a right-side hitter instead of her normal outpost on the left side. “The transition has gone pretty well,” said Crede. “She has a desire to learn and is doing a great job.”

Reesa Kempker (OPP) is new to the team. “She’s going through an adjustment period,” said Crede. “She’s not afraid to ask questions about how to get better.”

SOPHOMORES

Lily Kempker (MH) will have an important role. “We will rely on her heavily this year,” said Crede. “She’s a great kid with a positive attitude. I foresee her being a main player in the middle.”

Alayna Backes (MH) played outside hitter the last two years in club ball but is moving this year.

“She’s making a good transition,” Crede noted. “She’s smart and a quick learner, so I think she’ll flourish in her new position.”

At the JV level, Coach Quinn looks forward to an eventful season. “Our team is made up of juniors, sophomores, and some enthusiastic freshmen,” he said.

Juniors Maggie Dickneite (MH), Rory MacLellan (DS), and Tessa Markway (S) will use their experience to help lead the team this year. Sophomore Addisyn Nilges (S) will be instrumental in leading the offense.

Freshmen Leah Muenks (libero), Addison Lehmen (MH), Abby Rogers (OH), and Avery Perrey (OH) round out the roster. Quinn said Lehmen and Dickneite bring a lot to the team, and the outside positions will be filled by Rogers and Perrey, who are both athletic and learning the position very well.

“With Nilges and Markway running as setters,

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I foresee great things happening this year," said Quinn. "I am happy to have Muenks in the libero position and know she will do great things for this team. We have lots of young players, but the girls have been enthusiastic all summer and are ready to compete."

Bertels is happy to coach the C team. "It's a little strange to coach here, but Ellie asked for help over the summer, and I'm glad to be here," she said. "It's a great experience, but I'm making the adjustment from playing to coaching at this level. I love watching the girls'

personalities on the court."

Team members are sophomores Ava Kremer (MH) and Adelyn Post (libero) and freshmen Cameron Reinsch (MH), Stella Wieberg (OPP), Lilly Borgmeyer (OH), Brenna Ocheskey (DS), Abby Rogers (MH), Avery Perrey (OH), and Sophie Hertzling (S).

"We are throwing them a lot of new things, but they're handling it well," said Bertels. "As long as we communicate effectively, we can have a great season. I'm excited to watch them develop."



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Fatima girls' cross country team loaded with returners

Of the 10 members of this year's Lady Comets cross country team, six are returners, led by senior Lauren Berhorst, Fatima's top runner and two-time All-State athlete.

"Lauren has been our top runner the last two seasons and has done a good job leading the girls' team so far," said Coach Marc Bridges.

Berhorst turned in a 24th-place finish at Gans Creek in the Class 3 cross-country state championship race last November. She passed 27 runners in the final 1K to earn her second All-State medal in 20:23. At the district meet, Berhorst placed 13th in 20:51.

Senior Addyson Wilbers is also a varsity returner who had her best district run last year, breaking the 23-minute mark for the first time as she finished 37th in 22:58. At the Show-Me Conference meet, she finished eighth in 24:45.

Senior Breanna Rademan, juniors Regan Bock and Lily Gregory, and sophomore Heidi Struempf also return to the team and are

See **FATIMA GXC** on Page 22



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Fatima boys' XC returns entire team from 2022

Nine of Fatima's 14 boys' cross-country runners ran last year, which is not something you see every day.

"It's a rarity in high school sports to return an entire team, but that's where we stand this season," said Coach Marc Bridges. "We didn't lose any team members from a season ago and have picked up five talented and dedicated freshmen."

Senior returning varsity runners are Cody Berhorst, Cody Kampeter, Tyler Kloeppe, and Harrison Stratman.

Kampeter and Kloeppe made their first trip to the state meet, and both had great races. Kampeter led the Comets through all of 2022 and went into state with the goal of breaking 18 minutes. He passed an astounding 58 runners in the last 4,000 meters of the race to finish 70th in a time of 17:58. Kloeppe passed 54 runners in the last 4,000 meters and finished 79th in 18:06, just one-tenth of a second off his all-time best.

Juniors Wyatt Gabelsberger and Brady Hager and sophomores Zach Kloeppe and Michael Groene also ran varsity last year, and junior Ben Luebbert ran JV.

At last year's conference meet, Fatima's boys' team won the event, earning the top three spots and placing five in the top 10.

Kampeter took the lead during the second mile and never looked back as he cruised to a championship title, finishing in 18:21 to set the

tone.

Kloeppe (2, 18:44) and Berhorst (3, 19:10) also ran well, and Gabelsberger (5, 19:16) and Hager (8, 19:51) rounded out the top 10. Stratman won the JV race (22:45), and Luebbert finished fifth in 26:18.

At last year's district meet, W. Gabelsberger (34, 18:25) and Berhorst (42, 18:42) ran their best races of the year to help move the team up three spots from pre-race predictions. Brady Hager (64, 19:31) showed as much improvement as any team member last year and had a very good race at districts as Michael Groene (79, 20:03) got his first district-level experience and ran a personal best.

"Cody B., Cody K., Tyler, and Wyatt G. return with state-level experience, and our three seniors stood on the podium and received a first-place trophy their freshman year, an experience they are hungry to repeat," said Bridges. "The boys took advantage of our 20 group runs this summer with the best attendance since I took over the program."

Berhorst and M. Gabelsberger are setting the pace in practice, with Kloeppe, Kampeter, and Gabelsberger on their heels.

"Michael Groene and Wyatt Dake are run-

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ning very well right now, and I have been impressed with their improvement,” said Bridges. “Ben, Brady, and Harrison are getting better every day and could have a big impact as the season progresses.”

Newcomers are freshmen Wyatt Dake, Zach Eisterhold, Michael Gabelsberger, Trenton Kampeter, and Trenton Orscheln. “I have been very impressed so far with our younger runners,” said Bridges. “All five freshmen have the ability and determination to fill varsity roles, creating a great atmosphere at practice.”

In the JH ranks are eighth-graders Mason Huhn (returner) and Tucker Schroeder.

“So far, I have been impressed with their work ethic,” said Bridges. “All the kids are eager to get into shape, and they are all coachable. For the next few weeks, we will continue to get them in shape and start focusing on a little race strategy. I’m excited to watch this group progress throughout the season.”

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primed for a great season.

Last year, Struempfler (67, 24:21) earned valuable district-level experience, and Bock (73, 24:51) was one of the most consistent runners.

“Addyson, Breanna, Regan, and Lily look to be picking up where they left off last season or maybe even a bit ahead,” said Bridges. “Heidi has shown a ton of improvement in the offseason, pacing Lauren in practice.”

Senior Skyla Schroeder, junior Anna Rakestraw, and freshmen Brie Massman and Melissa Verslues are newcomers to the team. Struempfler’s conference run of 25:32 was good for 14th, followed by Bock (15, 26:04), Rademan (16, 26:21), and Gregory (21, 28:00).

“Skyla and Anna have added depth to our team and are improving every day,” said Bridges. “Brie Massman is also pushing toward the front of the pack in early season practices, with Melissa not far behind.”

Consistency has been key leading into the season. “The girls had a terrific summer of pre-season training as they were consistent in their attendance for our 20 group runs between June and July,” said Bridges. “Because of their dedication this summer, I feel we are already in pretty good shape and look forward to sharpening their skills as we get ready for competition.”

At the JH level are eighth-grade returners Rose Backes and Jaidyn McCann and seventh-graders Faith Peters, Chloe Schaben, and Aliza Stratman. “So far, I have been impressed with their work ethic,” said Bridges. “All the kids are eager to get into shape and they are all coachable. For the next few weeks, we will continue to get them in shape and start focusing on a little race strategy. I’m excited to watch this group progress throughout the season.”

Schnieders wants Lady Comets to have fun while improving

Fatima softball coach Ashlee Schnieders knows that coming back from a state championship is good and bad, but she’s not focused on that so much as she is that her girls have fun while improving as the season unfolds.

“There’s initial pressure, but that’s not always a bad thing,” she said. “The girls are working harder in practice. We have a target on us, but it’s a new season. Just because you won a state title does not mean you’ll get back to that place again. You have to earn it every day. Our goal is not to be a team that never loses. Our goal is to improve and learn as we go, win as much as we can, and see how far we can go.”

Last year’s Class 3 state softball championship was one for the books in many ways, from the 16-14 final — a record combined score — to the fact it took eight innings to decide. Perhaps most important for the Lady Comets is that they trailed by nine runs but kept their composure to pull out the victory at the Killian Sports Complex in Springfield.

Schnieders said no one expected the Lady Comets to face a nine-run deficit, but she noted that pulling out a 16-14 win was an emotionally draining game and a little overwhelming.

Now, moving into the season, Schnieders is confident the Lady Comets understand their position. “I don’t care about rankings, and the girls get it,” she said. “They know we have to keep working. Being an underdog is easier than being on top all the time.”

Fatima has seven seniors suiting up this fall: Hannah Heisler (CF), Taylor Baumhoer (P), Faith Jaegers (C), Kaitlyn Plassmeyer (2B), Emerson Williams (OF), Ella Massman (P/IF), and Avery Brandt (P).

Heisler went 49-128 (.383) with 12 doubles, three triples, and three home runs while driving in 26 runs last year to earn first-team All-State honors in the outfield. Heisler was perfect defensively, with no errors in 47 attempts with three assists and 44 putouts. She also earned All-Region (first team) and All-District accolades.

“Hannah is a leader through her actions on and off the field,” said Coach Schnieders. “She’s an excellent student and a key player in center field again. She’s quick, tracks the ball well, and goes after every ball, even if that means hitting the fence. Hannah is also aggressive at the plate, which will be a huge plus for the team.”

Baumhoer finished last year with a 20-3 record with six saves and a state championship. She allowed 24 earned runs on 89 hits (1.133 ERA) while issuing 20 walks and posting a season-record 235 strikeouts in 148.1 innings. She



set the record in the quarterfinals after striking out 14 Seneca batters to reach 217, and in the Final Four, struck out 11 in the semis and seven in the championship game. Against Chillicothe, Baumhoer walked three, and eight runs were earned on 13 hits to win her 20th game of the year, third on the all-time record list. She ended the year with a .958 fielding effort, with 17 assists and six putouts in 24 attempts.

“Taylor has done off a lot of work over the off-season,” said Schnieders, noting that Baumhoer has committed to play for William Woods University. “She had 5 a.m. workouts, and it’s showing in her improvements. We hope to see more of her bat this year.”

Baumhoer earned first-team All-State and All-Region honors and was named to the C3D5 team.

First-team All-State catcher Faith Jaegers hit .452 on the year, going 56-124 with 13 doubles, two triples, a team-high seven home runs, and 51 RBI. Jaegers was nearly perfect defensively, with a mark of .997 on the year, with 15 assists and 315 putouts on 330 total touches.

“Faith is a great all-around player with a good attitude,” said Schnieders as

Jaegers has committed to play for Lincoln University. “She’s capable of having another great season.”

Seven of Jaegers’ big hits last year were home runs, which gave her a tie for third in the Fatima HR record book.

KP is the team’s returning second baseman with a solid rep. “She does a lot of things right, and there were games last year we wouldn’t have won without her,” said Coach Schnieders.

In the 2022 season, KP hit .224 (15-67) with a double and 11 RBI.

Williams was a pinch-hitter and runner last year, and this season will vie for time in the outfield. “She’s quick and very smart on the bases,” said Schnieders. “We need her to do things right, from big plays to small, and she’ll have an opportunity to see time on the field.”

Williams had 10 hits in 31 BAs last year (.323) with five RBI.

Massman, who worked hard in the offseason, has improved at the plate in practice. “She can play multiple positions, which gives us options,” said Schnieders. “Her pitching has gotten better too.”

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Brandt had a limited pitching role last year, with appearances in five games. She posted a save while striking out 11 and allowing no earned runs. "Avery will have more opportunities in the circle this year," said Schnieders. "She's a lefty, so that's nice to have in the mix. It's a good change of pace, and she has good control of her speeds. I look forward to her helping us succeed."

Schnieders said Brandt's bat has improved, and she's a good situational hitter.

JUNIORS

First-team All-State shortstop Kinzey Woody led the Lady Comets last year with a BA of .533 (56-105), with 16 doubles, six home runs, and 41 RBI. She had a fielding average of .927 with 54 assists and 35 putouts in 96 attempts.

"We're glad to have Kinzey back at short," said Schnieders. "She's one of the best players in mid-Missouri, and her leadership continues to develop. Kinzey works well with the younger girls; she's a good teacher."

Woody is considering multiple collegiate opportunities.

Second-team All-State (at-large) player Mia Kliethermes posted 21 hits in 53 at-bats (.396), with three doubles, a home run, and 16 RBI. She went 13-0 with a save, with an ERA of 2.20 after allowing 22 earned runs on 51 hits. She struck out 65 and walked 27 in 70 innings. Defensively, Kliethermes had no errors in 24 attempts, finishing with 18 assists and six putouts.

"Mia's bat was key last year, and we'll need that again this season," said Schnieders. "She played a lot of travel ball over the summer and is fighting for time at first base when she's not pitching."

Kliethermes also earned All-Region and All-District honors.

Returner Kristen Robertson will move to third base this year. "She's working hard at third," said Schnieders. "She's very athletic but asks for help and improves with every suggestion we make. I am confident that she will be a big part of the team's push this year."

Robertson went 15-56 (.268) last year with two doubles and two HR driving in 17.

Madelyn Backes (OF) has fast hands and quickness. "She tracks the ball well and does a good job on the bases," said Schnieders. "Madelyn is a good all-around player and power hitter."

Eva Wildhaber (OF/IF) has a strong bat and is working to secure a spot. "She could wind up playing either," said Schnieders. "We'll continue to evaluate how best she fits into the scheme of things."

Megan Gabelsberger (P/OF//PH) is one of the hardest-working players on the squad. "She'll get the chance to play and pitch," said Coach Schnieders. "Her pitch selection has improved a lot."

Lilly Cunningham (IF) hopes to improve on last year's .247 (20-81) with five doubles, a triple, and 10 RBI. She stepped up to cover first base last year and will battle for time there again.

SOPHOMORES

Sydney Scheppers (IF) has a lot of offensive potential. "She's crazy strong and puts the ball in play," said Schnieders. "We want her in the lineup for sure."

Elise Dickneite (OF) came up in the postseason to catch in the bullpen and prep pitchers. "She also ran bases and pinch-hit for us," said Schnieders. "She's fighting for a spot, and with her strong bat, anything is possible. She's a solid player and a great teammate."

Mindy Buscher (P/IF/PH) will primarily play JV this year but will have some chances at the varsity level.

JV TEAM

Primary JV players who will see time at varsity are Gabelsberger, Cunningham, and Scheppers. Freshmen are Anna Struempf (OF), Marlee Oliver (OF/C), Lucy Warren (P/IF), Lexey Bassett (IF), and Kacey Brune (OF/IF).

"We will continue to develop our younger players to be ready for varsity and to support the program," said Schnieders. "All the freshmen played summer ball, and they work and play at a high level."

Schnieders praised the efforts of her assistant coaches, Kenny Bonnot, Makayla Broeker, and Steve Schnieders. "They work wonderfully with the girls, and I'm so glad to have them with me," she said. "I'm very happy with their efforts."



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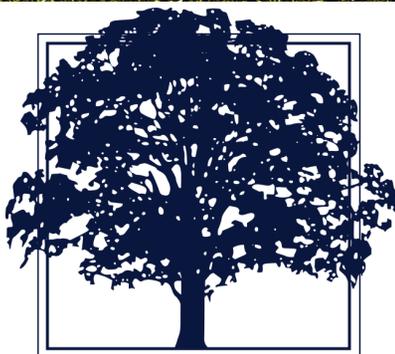
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