

WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW 2024



Special Supplement of the Steele County Times December 2024



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BP brings back key pieces

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

After a trip to the section championship game last season, Blooming Prairie figures to be equally as competitive this season with the return of some key athletes.

The Awesome Blossoms lost twin phenoms Gabe and Zach Hein, but will benefit from the senior leadership of Brady Kittelson and Cooper Cooke, as well as the continued development of sophomore Gabe Staloch.

“Brady Kittelson returns after being first-team all-conference a season ago and one of the best players in the conference and section. Gabe Staloch was also

named all-conference last season and we expect him to take a big step forward this year. Other players who will be key contributors include Cooper Cooke, Jacob Pauly, Bradley Boyd and Lukas Loverink,” said Blooming Prairie Head Coach Cam Rutledge.

Kittelson enters the season just 50 points shy of his 1,000th at the varsity level – a feat he should accomplish early in the season.

Also joining the Awesome Blossoms this season is standout athlete Lukas Loverink.

After a year of being forced to sit out of sports due to transfer rules – Loverink came to Blooming Prairie from NRHEG

– the senior will make his basketball debut and figures to be a dominant player in the post with his size listed at six-foot-four and 238 pounds.

With all the momentum the team gained last season, the goals for 2024-25 remain the same.

“We are looking to compete for both conference and section championships again this season,” said Rutledge.

According to him, some conference contenders include Randolph, Triton and JWP, with section favorites being Goodhue and Rushford-Peterson.

Blooming Prairie’s season debut will be at home against WEM on Friday, Dec. 6 at 7:15 p.m.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Blooming Prairie Boys Basketball Schedule

Dec. 6	7:15 p.m.	vs. WEM	Jan. 24	7:15 p.m.	at USC
Dec. 13	7:15 p.m.	at JWP	Jan. 27	7:15 p.m.	vs. Kenyon-Wanamingo
Dec. 14	6:30 p.m.	at Fillmore Central	Jan. 30	7:15 p.m.	at Randolph
Dec. 20	7:15 p.m.	vs. Randolph	Jan. 31	7:15 p.m.	vs. Spring Grove
Dec. 27	5 p.m.	at Grand Meadow	Feb. 3	7:15 p.m.	at Triton
Dec. 28	6:30 p.m.	at Grand Meadow	Feb. 7	7:15 p.m.	vs. Bethlehem Academy
Jan. 2	7:15 p.m.	vs. Kingsland	Feb. 8	2 p.m.	at Wabasha-Kellogg
Jan. 4	7 p.m.	at Goodhue	Feb. 10	7:15 p.m.	at NRHEG
Jan. 7	7:15 p.m.	vs. Triton	Feb. 14	7:15 p.m.	vs. Hayfield
Jan. 10	7:15 p.m.	at Medford	Feb. 18	7 p.m.	at Alden-Conger
Jan. 11	7 p.m.	at St. Clair	Feb. 21	7:15 p.m.	at Kenyon-Wanamingo
Jan. 14	7:15 p.m.	at Bethlehem Academy			
Jan. 16	7:15 p.m.	vs. Lyle-Pacelli			
Jan. 17	7:15 p.m.	vs. NRHEG			
Jan. 21	7:15 p.m.	at Hayfield			



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Blossoms have a “big void to fill”

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Bloomington girls basketball graduated some key athletes last season on a senior-heavy team that won 17 games, meaning the 2024-25 season will hinge on the play of some younger athletes.

The Awesome Blossoms will feature two eighth-graders on its varsity lineup with Emerson Nelson and Elaine Schwarz both vying for minutes.

“It will be interesting to see how they develop over the season. It will also be interesting to see how our players with no varsity experience adjust

to the level. We lost 4 senior starters last year. They consisted of about 37 points per game and 23 rebounds per game. We have a big void to fill. The girls are eager to see what they can do,” said Bloomington Prairie Head Coach John Worke.

Headlining the Awesome Blossoms’ 2024-25 roster returning starters Catelyn Bartlett, Claire Schwarz and Ella Smith.

“Obviously, losing four senior starters, our team will look different this year. We feel it is a year where we look to improve every day, both individually and as a team. As these players gain more varsity experience together,

they will get better,” said Worke.

According to Worke, other names to watch out for will be juniors Ella Salinas and Madelyn Harvey.

Bloomington finished last season 9-7 in conference play and 17-10 overall, good for second place in the Gopher East Division.

“We felt a lot of teams were young last year. We feel most of the teams will be better this year. Goodhue is always the team to beat in the section,” said Worke.

Up next for the Awesome Blossoms is a road matchup against WEM scheduled for Friday, Dec. 6 at 7:15 p.m.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Bloomington Girls Basketball Schedule

Dec. 6	7:15 p.m.	at WEM	Jan. 14	7:15 p.m.	vs. Bethlehem Academy
Dec. 10	7:15 p.m.	at Lyle-Pacelli	Jan. 16	7:15 p.m.	at NRHEG
Dec. 14	5 p.m.	at Fillmore Central	Jan. 20	7:15 p.m.	vs. Grand Meadow
Dec. 17	7:15 p.m.	vs. JWP	Jan. 23	7:15 p.m.	vs. USC
Dec. 20	7:15 p.m.	vs. Randolph	Jan. 27	7:15 p.m.	at Kenyon-Wanamingo
Dec. 27	7 p.m.	at Hayfield	Jan. 30	5:45 p.m.	at Randolph
Dec. 28	3:30 p.m.	at Hayfield	Feb. 3	7:15 p.m.	vs. Triton
Jan. 2	7:15 p.m.	at Southland	Feb. 7	7:15 p.m.	at Bethlehem Academy
Jan. 3	7:15 p.m.	vs. Alden-Conger	Feb. 10	7:15 p.m.	at Kingsland
Jan. 7	7:15 p.m.	at Triton	Feb. 14	7:15 p.m.	vs. Hayfield
Jan. 9	7:15 p.m.	vs. Medford			
Jan. 11	7:15 p.m.	at St. Clair			



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Westfield is ready to right the course

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

After a couple of seasons contending for the top of the Gopher Conference pack, Westfield wrestling is hoping to break through and sit atop a loaded conference in 2024-25.

According to co-head coach David Lassahn, the Razorbacks are loaded with talent, and return eight starters from last season's team.

“Our main goal this year is to improve each day and be wrestling our best come section tournament time. We are expecting to have a competitive dual team again this year and be wrestling for a section title in February,” said Lassahn.

Leading the pack for the Razorbacks will be senior Bo Zwiener, who stands just four wins away from being the program's all-time leader in wins.

Zwiener enters 2024-25 with 138 wins, and also hopes to reach the coveted 150-win mark by the end of the season en route to another high placement on the state podium after taking fifth in 2024.



Joining Zwiener as senior captains will be Alex Lea and Gage Mullenbach, joined also by junior captain Wyatt Arndt.

Rising in the ranks for the Razorbacks are names such as Bentley Miller and Cannon Wacek.

Miller is new to the program as a freshman and figures to make a difference at 107 after placing in the Northland Youth Wrestling Association's state tournament last season.

Wacek makes his return as a junior after

being forced to miss time with a back injury last season.

Westfield finished last season 12-20 overall, due in part to not being able to field a full lineup, but still managed to finish 4-2 in conference duals.

The Razorbacks also made it to the section team championship, where they finished runner-up.

Westfield's first duals will be against Medford and Mankato East at Hayfield High School on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 5 p.m.

Westfield Wrestling Schedule 2024-25

Dec. 5	5 p.m.	vs. Medford/ Mankato East (HHS)	Jan. 16	7 p.m.	vs. Kenyon- Wanamingo (HHS)
Dec. 14	10 a.m.	at Byron	Jan. 18	9 a.m.	Home Invitational (HHS)
Dec. 17	5 p.m.	at Pine Island	Jan. 23	5 p.m.	at Triton
Dec. 20	5 p.m.	at WEM/JWP (at JWP)	Jan. 25	10 a.m.	at Rochester Century
Dec. 31	8:30 a.m.	at North High	Jan. 28	5 p.m.	vs. La Crescent/ Goodhue (HHS)
School – St. Paul			Jan. 30	5 p.m.	Home Quad (BPHS)
Jan. 7	5 p.m.	at Lake Crystal- Wellcome Memorial	Feb. 6	5 p.m.	at Tri-City United
Jan. 9	7 p.m.	vs. NRHEG (BPHS)			
Jan. 11	8 a.m.	at Farmington			

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Steele Sports

JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

The snow may not have got the memo, but winter sports are already back in full swing in Steele County.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Blooming Prairie guard Gabe Staloch drives past a Kenyon-Wanamingo defender in last season's section quarterfinal game. Staloch burst onto the scene as Blooming Prairie's starting point guard as a freshman last year.

It's time to head inside, avoid the cold and watch your favorite athletes hit the courts, rinks and mats.

Here's who to look out for this winter:

Boys basketball

Blooming Prairie boys basketball is coming off of a section championship game run last season and brings back some standout names to try and make another deep run this year.

Leading the Awesome Blossoms will be senior guard Brady Kittelson, senior forward Cooper Cooke and sophomore guard Gabe Staloch.

Adding some extra height and physicality will be senior forward Lukas Loverink, who sat out last season due to transfer rules.

NRHEG boys basketball will rely heavily on a few rotational starters from last season in Jase Knudson, Aaden Hanna, Grayson Schaefer and Jordan Brouwers.

The Panthers will have plenty of speed and

pure shooting ability but will lack height, making Knudson's role in the post a pivotal position.

Medford boys basketball will return to a normal varsity schedule this season and leading the way will be the tandem of Landon Seiler, Cain Johannes and John Hora.

The Tigers will look to utilize the athleticism of Seiler and feed Johannes and Hora the ball down low to use their size and length.

Girls basketball

NRHEG girls basketball will feature a strong roster of returning talent with Camryn and Quinn VanMaldeghem coming back to the team after finishing first and third in scoring for the Panthers last season.

The twins have a rare mixture of size and speed that could make them dangerous to guard anywhere on the court.

Chloe Stork will also make her long-awaited return to full-time action after being forced to sit out

the majority of last season with an injury.

Blooming Prairie will have a younger lineup than in recent years with two eighth graders on this year's roster, but the Awesome Blossoms will be able to bank on familiar faces Claire Schwarz, Catelyn Bartlett and Ella Smith for crucial minutes this season.

Schwarz will run the point while Bartlett and Smith float around the post, offering the Awesome Blossoms a balanced attack.

Medford girls basketball will have a first-year head coach in Megan Noble, but the Tigers have a host of varsity starters ready to take on their senior seasons.

Amanda Bock will slot in as the team's starting point guard while Olivia Ward and Addison Vandereide offer some height and athleticism in the post.

Wrestling

Westfield wrestling is primed for a breakout year and will look to senior leaders Bo Zwiener, Alex Lea and Gage Mullenbach for huge seasons if the Razorbacks are going to vie for a deep run in sections.

Zwiener currently sits four wins from the Westfield all-time wins record,



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Westfield's Bo Zwiener gets his hand raised after winning a match at last year's state tournament. Zwiener sits just four wins shy of Westfield's all-time win record with 138 heading into the 2024-25 season.

a feat he will obtain early in the season.

Medford wrestling will also have first-year Tigers head coach in Trevor Erler who is looking to keep the school's wrestling program in elite form after the departure of long-time head coach Dennis Whitman.

Erler's top weapons will be Kaden Harfmann, Mason Degrood, Connor Wilson and Elliot Jones.

Harfmann and Degrood are coming off of competing at last year's state tournament while Wilson and Jones will hope to make it there themselves in 2024-25.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG's Camryn VanMaldeghem drives past a Triton defender in a game last week. VanMaldeghem returns to the Panthers after leading the team in scoring last season with 488 points.

However, Medford will be without 2023-24 160-pound state champion Tommy Elwood, who is not listed on the team's roster.

NRHEG wrestling will rely on five senior wrestlers to shoulder the load in bringing the Panthers back to the top of the Gopher Conference.

Panthers Harbor Cromwell, Cole Hutchens, Jace Ihrke, Aidan Schlaak and Seth Staloch will make up the core of the team's lineup and bring gritty, veteran experience to a team still looking to develop its younger, lighter weights.

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Medford ready to take the next step

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

After electing to not play a full varsity schedule last season, Medford boys basketball should be ready to take the next step in 2024-25 to rejoin the Gopher Conference as a full-time competitor.

The Tigers were short on varsity experience last season, and although the team lacks big numbers again this season, Medford should be able to compete.

The Tigers will roll out a varsity roster of 10 athletes, meaning the team will have subs to be able to

mix in fresh legs.

Highlighting this year's team are a couple of returning athletes in Landon Seiler, Cain Johannes and John Hora.

Seiler has proven to be an explosive playmaker at the point; meanwhile, Johannes and Hora give the Tigers some much-needed height inside the post.

Also returning to the team are Timmy Wilson and Jacob Nielsen.

Wilson was unable to suit up last season due to an ACL tear but figures to slot in as one of the team's guards, while Nielsen will finally be able to play varsity after transfer rules

kept him ineligible for varsity last season.

The only way for the Tigers to go is up in 2024-25 after last year's squad finished 0-12 in an abbreviated varsity schedule.

With many top players gaining valuable minutes last season, Medford is somewhat of a question mark when it comes to how their season will pan out.

If the Tigers can play strong on defense, they could surprise some teams this year.

Medford's first game of the season is on the road against Randolph on Friday, Dec. 6 at 7:15 p.m.



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG- OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY



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Medford Boys Basketball Schedule					
Dec. 6	7:15 p.m.	at Randolph	Jan. 21	7:15 p.m.	vs. USC
Dec. 9	7:15 p.m.	at Kingsland	Jan. 24	7:15 p.m.	vs. Triton
Dec. 13	7:15 p.m.	vs. Kenyon-Wanamingo	Jan. 28	7:15 p.m.	vs. NRHEG
Dec. 19	7:15 p.m.	vs. WEM	Jan. 31	7:15 p.m.	at WEM
Dec. 20	7 p.m.	at Parnassus Preparatory	Feb. 3	7:15 p.m.	vs. JWP
Jan. 3	7:15 p.m.	at Hayfield	Feb. 4	7:15 p.m.	at Schaeffer Academy
Jan. 6	7:15 p.m.	vs. Alden Conger/Glenville	Feb. 6	7:15 p.m.	at Leroy-Ostrander
Jan. 7	5:45 p.m.	at JWP	Feb. 8	5 p.m.	at Lyle
Jan. 10	7:15 p.m.	vs. Blooming Prairie	Feb. 10	7:15 p.m.	vs. Bethlehem Academy
Jan. 13	7:15 p.m.	vs. Rochester STEM	Feb. 11	5:45 p.m.	at Nicollet
Jan. 14	7:15 p.m.	vs. St. Clair	Feb. 14	7:15 p.m.	at USC
Jan. 16	7:15 p.m.	at Bethlehem Academy	Feb. 17	7:15 p.m.	vs. Mankato Loyola
			Feb. 21	7:15 p.m.	at NRHEG
			Feb. 24	7:15 p.m.	at Madelia



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MEDFORD TIGERS

Noble's Tigers are ready to hunt

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
Medford girls basketball featured a lineup that was built around sophomores and juniors last season, but the outlook for 2024-25 is an upperclassmen-heavy squad that should be ready to turn heads.
Last season was a rough ride, with Medford going 1-26 overall; however, first-year head coach Megan Noble figures to inject some youthful energy into her Tigers squad.
This year's team will be without one varsity

starter, Peyton Snow, but some familiar faces are prepared to make leaps this season.
Likely names to take over the Tigers' offense are Amanda Bock, Clara Thurnau, Olivia Ward and Addison Vandereide.
Bock will resume her role as the team's point guard with Thurnau and Ward rotating in and out of the post.
Vandereide was not a member of last year's squad, but the standout volleyball player will join the Tigers this season and

could spark the offense with her athleticism.
The Tigers will have more height than in years past – crucial for the Tigers to improve their rebounding game.
Consistent offensive production figures to be the most important key for the Tigers this season.
Medford scored over 40 points just three times last season over the course of 27 games.
Medford's next game is at home against NRHEG on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7:15 p.m.



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG- OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

Medford Girls Basketball Schedule

Dec. 5	7:15 p.m.	vs. NRHEG	Jan. 23	7 p.m.	at Minnesota Valley Lutheran
Dec. 6	7:15 p.m.	vs. Randolph	Jan. 24	7:15 p.m.	at Triton
Dec. 13	7:15 p.m.	at Kenyon-Wan	Jan. 27	7:15 p.m.	at NRHEG
Dec. 17	7:15 p.m.	vs. Madelia	Jan. 28	7:30 p.m.	at Waseca
Dec. 20	7:15 p.m.	at WEM	Jan. 31	7:15 p.m.	vs. WEM
Jan. 2	7:15 p.m.	at Lyle	Feb. 3	5:45 p.m.	vs. JWP
Jan. 3	7:15 p.m.	vs. Hayfield	Feb. 4	7:15 p.m.	vs. Mankato Loyola
Jan. 6	7:15 p.m.	at Alden-Conger	Feb. 10	7 p.m.	at Mankato Loyola
Jan. 7	7:15 p.m.	at JWP	Feb. 13	7:15 p.m.	vs. USC
Jan. 9	7:15 p.m.	at Blooming Prairie	Feb. 14	7:15 p.m.	at Pine Island
Jan. 13	6 p.m.	at St. Charles	Feb. 17	7 p.m.	at Nicollet
Jan. 16	7:15 p.m.	vs. BA			
Jan. 21	7:15 p.m.	at USC			



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Erler replaces legendary coach Whitman

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Long-time Medford Head Coach Dennis Whitman called it a career after last wrestling season, going out on top by coaching now-senior Tommy Elwood to a state title at 160 pounds.

Flash forward to the 2024-25 season, and Medford will have a first-year head coach in Trevor Erler.

Erler will adopt a team that includes multiple state entrants in Mason Degrood and Kaden Harfmann.

The latter was able to take sixth place last season after entering the state tournament unranked. Meanwhile, Erler believes Degrood will be ranked in the top six after multiple senior place winners graduated state-wide last year.

However, Medford will be without reigning 160-pound state champion Tommy Elwood who is “working this season,” according to Erler.

Other staple wrestlers who left the lineup include

Luis Lopez and Evan Schweisthal – both of whom made it to state last season as seniors.

With big shoes to fill, Erler believes his team has the right guys to plug into the lineup.

“Junior Conor Wilson competed last year for Medford and has made huge strides in the off-season with his technique and packing on muscle during the football season. Another name ready to break out is eighth-grader Elliot Jones. He placed fourth in Section AA at 107 pounds last year as a seventh grader. He will build upon that success and look to earn his first trip to the state tournament. Another name to watch for is Sophomore Tanner Milewski. He enters his second year on varsity and his strength and athleticism can help him pull out matches for the Tigers. Look for him to continue to develop his technique and turn some heads. Sophomore Chase Balzer is one of the strongest athletes on the team. He’s raw on his technique,

but his determination to learn new techniques will only help him win some matches this season. James Wegner is also one to watch. He is disciplined to put in the work necessary for success on the mat. He will lead the middle of the line-up and his leadership will help determine how successful the middleweights can be,” said Erler on his guys.

As for the season’s goals, nothing about Medford’s standards have changed.

“The goal for the team is to reach the Section AA finals. The expectations individually are for the athletes to build upon success last year, learn from their mistakes, develop confidence in themselves, and improve our overall team results. This year’s mantra is ‘family.’ Our whole team will be the key players this season,” said Erler.

Medford’s next match-up will be a road triangular with Westfield and Mankato East at Hayfield High School on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 5 p.m.



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG- OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

Medford Wrestling Schedule 2023-2024

Dec. 5	5 p.m.	at Westfield	Jan. 9	7 p.m.	vs. Triton
Dec. 6	5 p.m.	at Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted	Jan. 11	10 a.m.	at Buffalo
		at St. Clair	Jan. 17	5 p.m.	at NRHEG
Dec. 12	5 p.m.	at Delano	Jan. 18	10 a.m.	at LCWM
Dec. 14	10 a.m.	at Pequot Lakes	Jan. 23	7 p.m.	vs. WEM/JPW
Dec. 20	1 p.m.	at Pequot Lakes	Jan. 25	10 a.m.	at Lake City
Dec. 21	9:30 a.m.	at Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa	Jan. 30	7 p.m.	at Kenyon-Wanamingo
Jan. 3	2:30 p.m.				vs. Maple River/USC
Jan. 7	5 p.m.	at Madelia	Feb. 6	7 p.m.	



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BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Where there’s a Williams, there’s a way

If there’s one thing Owatonna sports knows, it’s coaches with the last name Williams have a solid track record of excellence.

While head coach Josh Williams’ squad graduated some key pieces in Rielly Kleeberger, Leyton Williams and Nathan Theis, the Huskies still bring back some multi-sport athletes who have proven to be winners no matter the season.

“It’s a similar theme to last year. We’re very green, with only a couple of starters returning and not a ton of others with varsity experience. We have a lot to figure out in a short time. With football’s trip to state, we were without a core of our guys and began behind the 8-ball compared to most schools. Our focus will have to be the ‘long term.’ The goal will be to be great in February and March and work hard in December and January to really develop our identity, improve, and figure out roles and rotations. So, by the end of the year, we will be one of the top teams in the conference and section,”

said Williams. Leading the Huskies this season will be Nolan Ginskey, Darian Stransky and Zach Haarstad – all of whom come to basketball after a trip to state with the Huskies’ football team. Ginskey was a pivotal player for the Huskies during their 17-10 season in 2023-24 and led the team in scoring, rebounding, assists and steals.

He also sits in position to potentially become the Huskies’ all-time leader in steals with 136 – just 68 shy of Brayden Williams’ 204.

Meanwhile, Stransky and Haarstad figure to be the physical presence Owatonna needs to own the post.

“Zach started 13 games last year and was one of our leading rebounders. He’s a high-motor kid who really competes and plays bigger than his six-foot-three frame. Darian started 10 games, but missed most of his junior year due to injury. He’s a physical forward who can really defend as well as being a solid shooter,” said Williams.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

However, outside of the Huskies’ big three, the team will be lacking in upperclassmen depth – an issue the squad has not had to face in recent years.

“After having numerous large senior classes for the last 3-4 years – we had 9-10 plus every year – we do lack numbers and some depth in both our junior and senior classes. This is obviously a bit of concern. Fortunately, we have deep and talented ninth- and 10th-grade classes to fill in our rosters at all levels,” said Williams.

Owatonna’s next game will be on the road against Mankato West on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m.

Owatonna Boys Varsity Basketball

Dec. 5	7:30 p.m.	at Mankato West	Jan. 14	7:30 p.m.	at Northfield
Dec. 9	7:30 p.m.	vs. New Prague	Jan. 16	7:30 p.m.	at Faribault
Dec. 13	7:30 p.m.	at Austin	Jan. 21	7:30 p.m.	vs. Mayo
Dec. 17	7:30 p.m.	vs. Winona	Jan. 24	7:30 p.m.	vs. Mankato west
Dec. 19	7:30 p.m.	vs. Century	Jan. 28	7:30 p.m.	at Red Wing
Dec. 27	TBD	at Owatonna HS	Jan. 30	7:30 p.m.	vs. Austin
(Holiday Tournament)			Feb. 1	7:30 p.m.	at Delano
Dec. 28	TBD	at Owatonna HS	Feb. 4	7:30 p.m.	at Winona
(Holiday Tournament)			Feb. 7	7:30 p.m.	vs. Mankato East
Jan. 2	7:30 p.m.	at Mankato East	Feb. 11	7:30 p.m.	at Century
Jan. 6	7:30 p.m.	at John Marshall	Feb. 14	7:30 p.m.	vs. John Marshall
Jan. 9	7:30 p.m.	vs. Albert Lea	Feb. 21	7:30 p.m.	vs. Northfield
Jan. 13	7:30 p.m.	vs. Stillwater	Feb. 25	7:30 p.m.	vs. Faribault
			Feb. 28	7:30 p.m.	at Mayo



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Huskies primed for breakout season

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna girls basketball has all of the pieces in place to be a potential breakout team this season after finishing last year 13-14 overall and in the middle of the Big Nine Conference pack.

The Huskies' entire starting lineup will be made up of big-minute players from 2023-24 and will feature a variety of size, speed and athleticism.

"Our goal and expectation is to challenge for the Big Nine Conference title. For sections, our goal is to have a home game for sections, as well as compete for a section championship. In terms of the Big Nine Conference, we expect to be in the top third. There will be several solid teams, with Mayo being the favorite to win," said Owatonna Head Coach Pat Webb.

Returning to the Huskies' lineup are Jersey Coleman, Ava Olson, Maryn Pool, Abby Shornock and Lexie Klecker.

"Jersey brings a lot of versatility on offense. She can play through the post, shoot from the perimeter

and attack off the bounce... Ava brings a great presence in the paint both offensively and defensively. Offensively, Ava shows a great touch around the basket... Maryn brings a lot of positives on the floor. She has a very high basketball IQ and can succeed in any position we put her in... Abby will be a solid combo guard for us this year. Offensively, Abby is very good in the open floor, making shots, and creating for others. Defensively, Abby is a great on-ball defender, and is really good in our press... Lexie brings the energy. She moves very well for a post, and is very disruptive on the defensive end of the floor," said Webb on his starting five.

The lineup will include Shornock and Pool at the guard spots with Coleman floating around the court as a forward, while Klecker and Olson hold down the post from the power forward and center positions.

Captaining the Huskies in 2024-25 will be Pool, Olson Klecker and Shornock.

Owatonna's next game will be at home against Mankato West on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m.



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

Owatonna Girls Varsity Basketball

Dec. 5	7:30 p.m.	vs. Mankato West	Jan. 16	7:30 p.m.	vs. Faribault
Dec. 10	7:30 p.m.	at Red Wing	Jan. 21	7:30 p.m.	at Mayo
Dec. 13	7:30 p.m.	vs. Austin	Jan. 23	7:30 p.m.	at Mankato West
Dec. 17	7:30 p.m.	at Winona	Jan. 28	7:30 p.m.	vs. Red Wing
Dec. 19	7:30 p.m.	at Century	Jan. 31	7:30 p.m.	at Austin
Dec. 27	11:30 a.m.	at Sauk Rapids-Rice	Feb. 4	7:30 p.m.	vs. Winona
(Holiday Tournament)		(vs. Champlin Park)	Feb. 7	7:30 p.m.	at Mankato East
Dec. 28	4:15 p.m.	at Sartell (vs. Delano)	Feb. 11	7:30 p.m.	vs. Century
(Holiday Tournament)			Feb. 13	7:30 p.m.	at John Marshall
Jan. 2	7:30 p.m.	vs. Mankato East	Feb. 15	1 p.m.	vs. New Prague
Jan. 6	7:30 p.m.	vs. John Marshall	Feb. 18	7:30 p.m.	vs. Albert Lea
Jan. 9	6:30 p.m.	at Hastings	Feb. 21	7:30 p.m.	at Northfield
Jan. 14	7:30 p.m.	vs. Northfield			



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BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna wrestling has a roster bursting with talent and state entrants in 2024-25 and as a result, the Huskies find themselves in the Class AAA top 10 entering the season.

With a wealth of senior leadership, Owatonna's confidence will surely be high heading into a season that could be a dogfight for the top spot in the conference and section.

"We will start the season ranked in the top 10 in Class AAA, but just behind section and conference rivals Albert Lea and Northfield. Albert Lea will be the section favorite, but this year will be a tighter battle for going to state than the past couple. Both duals against Northfield last season were 1-match swings, and we have every reason to believe we will overcome that hurdle and vie for the title," said Owatonna Head Coach Derek Johnson.

Owatonna's senior leadership will come from captains Blake Fitcher, Lane Karsten, Isabelle Townley, Donovan

Sorenson and R.J. Reinardy. Fitcher, Karsten and Townley are all multiple-time state entrants, while Reinardy made his state debut in 2023.

Adding extra experience to the roster are two-time state entrants Trey Hiatt (junior), Aliah Fischer (freshman) and Kaden Lindquist (freshman.)

The wins run deep for this squad as multiple athletes are on the radar to surpass the 100-win mark.

"Lane Karsten, Blake Fitcher and Trey Hiatt should all reach 100 wins this season. Donovan Sorenson, Isabelle Townley and Kaden Lindquist will all reach 75 wins, and possibly 100," said Johnson on his squad.

According to Johnson, there are some new faces that could potentially make a difference as well.

"107-pounder Miles Aase and 100-pounder Kayla Pastika are both freshmen that are finally big enough for high school weight classes. They have both been on Minnesota state traveling teams in the offseason and have seen a lot of success,"

Owatonna starts season in Class AAA top-10



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

said Johnson.

Johnson's goals for the team include "a section championship and sending eight boys and four girls to state individually."

Owatonna's first meet is an invitational at Woodbury High School on Saturday, Dec. 7 at 8 a.m.

The Huskies will face a heap of talent in a field of schools including Woodbury, Simley, Stillwater, Anoka, Eagan, Farmington and Two Rivers.

Owatonna Varsity Wrestling 2024-25

Dec. 7	8 a.m.	at Woodbury (Invite)	Jan. 11	10 a.m.	at Sanford Event Center (Girls)
Dec. 12	5 p.m.	at Northfield (Tri)	Jan. 17	5 p.m.	at Mayo
Dec. 14	10 a.m.	at Prior Lake (Invite)	Jan. 23	5 p.m.	Home Quad
Dec. 20	4:30 p.m.	Home Invite	Jan. 24	3 p.m.	at Simley (Invite) (Multiple Schools)
Dec. 27	9 a.m.	at Champlin Park (Invite)	Jan. 25	9 a.m.	at Kasson-Mantorville (Invite)
Jan. 4	10 a.m.	at SJA HS Event Center (Girls Invite)	Jan. 30	7 p.m.	at Albert Lea
Jan. 11	9 a.m.	at Zumbrota-Mazeppa (Boys)	Feb. 1	9:30 a.m.	at Maple River (Tourney)
			Feb. 6	6 p.m.	Home Tri



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Huskies seniors ready for strong showing

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna boys hockey had a stellar 2023-24 season taking third place in the Big Nine Conference, and 2024-25 could easily be as competitive as a new wave of Huskies' standouts prepare to take the ice.

Head Coach Dennis Will's team will be without some serious scoring from last season, but regardless, he feels his squad will be able to hang tough even if goal totals decrease.

"We lost 13 Senior players from a team that went 18-6-3. We have a lot of positions to fill. Our seniors led this team last year and it may take some time to try to fill this void. Our first line of Owen Beyer, Joseph Webster, and Brody Goodnature contributed to 70% of our scoring last year. We

will have to win games with a lower scoring margin this year," said Will.

Making up the Huskies' core in 2024-25 will be seniors Blake Davison, Seth Johnson and Andy Mitchell.

Mitchell will lead from the front as Owatonna's top-line forward; meanwhile, Johnson and Davison figure to make up the Huskies' first line of defense.

With Beyer, Goodnature and Webster gone, Mitchell is the highest-scoring returner from last year's squad after posting 28 points in 27 games.

Joining him on attack will be Zachary Knott and Jackson Kath, who had 17 and 16 points, respectively, last season.

The Huskies will be fairly inexperienced in net as Garrett Stelter and Brekxton Nelson vie for the starting goaltender



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

role with minimal varsity minutes.

Owatonna's next game will be on the road against Rochester Lourdes on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7 p.m.

Owatonna Boys Varsity Ice Hockey

Dec. 5	7 p.m.	at Lourdes	Jan. 14	7 p.m.	at Holy Family Catholic
Dec. 10	7 p.m.	vs. Red Wing	Jan. 17	7 p.m.	at Mankato West
Dec. 12	7 p.m.	vs. Farmington	Jan. 23	7 p.m.	vs. Austin
Dec. 19	7 p.m.	at Mayo	Jan. 25	1 p.m.	vs. Mayo
Dec. 27	TBD	at Essentia Duluth Heritage Center	Jan. 30	7 p.m.	at Century/John Marshall
Dec. 28	TBD	at Essentia Duluth Heritage Center	Feb. 1	7 p.m.	at Mankato East
Jan. 2	7 p.m.	vs. Century/John Marshall	Feb. 4	7 p.m.	vs. Albert Lea
Jan. 7	7 p.m.	at Kasson-Mantorville	Feb. 6	7:15 p.m.	at Northfield
Jan. 9	7 p.m.	vs. Mankato East	Feb. 11	1 p.m.	vs. Hopkins
Jan. 11	7 p.m.	vs. Northfield	Feb. 13	6:30 p.m.	at Hastings
			Feb. 17	7 p.m.	at Winona



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Huskies girls hockey hoping to rebuild

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna girls' hockey has been rebuilding its roster and trying to fill some big shoes in 2024-25 after losing multiple top scorers in Izzy Radel, Samantha Bogen, Molly Achterkirch and Zoie Roush to graduation.

According to Head Coach Tony Cloud, the team has done some mixing and matching with its lines, trying to build chemistry between athletes who weren't always on the ice together last season.

Owatonna earned its first notable win of the season last week when it toppled 4-1 Apple Valley despite entering the game with a 1-4 record of its own.

The Huskies offense looked rejuvenated and scored six goals to win 6-5, proving that the team's offensive firepower is still there.

Leading the way for the Huskies this season are forwards Anna Mol-

lenhauer, Averi Vetsch, Grace Mitchell and Brielle Goodnature.

Also adding some much-needed blue line scoring are defensemen Kendra Bogen and Alia Kubicek.

The team also benefits from a veteran presence in goal with returning standout Leah Spencer taking the reins to serve as the team's nightly starter.

Owatonna finished last season 14-12-1 and came close to taking out No. 1 Northfield in a road matchup during the section semifinals, ultimately falling 2-1 in a heartbreaking overtime loss after allowing the equalizing goal with one minute left in the game.

If anything is certain, the Huskies will be resilient and dangerous on any given night, and should be fine-tuned for a successful year as the season progresses.

Up next for the team is a home game against Winona on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7 p.m.



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

Owatonna Girls Varsity Ice Hockey

Dec. 5	7 p.m.	vs. Winona	Jan. 9	7:15 p.m.	at Mankato East
Dec. 12	7 p.m.	at Red Wing	Jan. 11	7:15 p.m.	at Northfield
Dec. 14	8 p.m.	vs. Dodge County	Jan. 14	6 p.m.	vs. Blake
Dec. 17	7 p.m.	vs. Century/John Marshall	Jan. 16	7 p.m.	vs. Mankato West
Dec. 19	7 p.m.	vs. Mayo	Jan. 21	7 p.m.	vs. Lakeville South
Dec. 26	11 a.m.	at Schmitz-Maki Ice Arena	Jan. 23	7 p.m.	at Austin
Dec. 27	11 a.m.	at Schmitz-Maki Ice Arena	Jan. 25	7 p.m.	at Mayo
Dec. 28	11 a.m.	at Schmitz-Maki Ice Arena	Jan. 28	7 p.m.	vs. Albert Lea
Jan. 3	7 p.m.	at Rogers	Jan. 30	7 p.m.	vs. Mankato East
Jan. 4	1 p.m.	at Elk River			



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Owatonna gymnastics set for success

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna gymnastics has been one of the state's premiere programs for close to a decade now, and nothing figures to change in 2024-25 with a full roster of talented, experienced gymnasts ready to perform.

The Huskies only graduated one senior, Emma Johnson, in 2024 and will have a plethora of multiple-year varsity staples at its disposal for a multitude of events.

"We think we can make a strong push for another conference title and hopefully take back the section title this year. Anytime we compete at an invite or section meet we think we have a great chance to win," said Owatonna Head Coach Evan Moe.

The Huskies' leadership will come from seniors Averie Roush, Halle Theis and Jozie Johnson.

The trio all competed at the state meet last season as individuals with Roush competing on the floor, Theis taking on the all-around category and Johnson vaulting.

Roush, Theis and Johnson will also captain the Huskies this season.

"Averie is a returning individual state competitor. She is a tremendous leader and a rare two-year captain for us. She's been a varsity cornerstone since she came into the program and will continue to battle for an all-around spot this year. Halle is a returning individual state all-around competitor. She is coming off a great return year and we think she's poised to repeat and make a deep run at a state medal in the all-around. She's a great 'lead by example' athlete and who just tries to work harder than anyone in the gym no matter where she's practicing or competing," Moe said.

The team will also benefit from the return of three more state entrants in Kendra Miller, Johanna Spielman and Delia Neumann.

Chloe Myer will also start the season and reclaim her role on the balance beam after being held out for the majority of last season with a leg injury.

According to Moe, this year's squad is one that



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

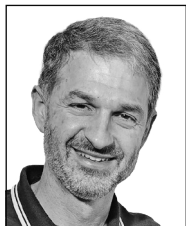
could shake up the state tournament if it were to compete to the level he knows they can achieve. Owatonna's first meet will be against the Austin Packers at the Austin YMCA on Friday, Dec. 6 at 6:30 p.m.

Owatonna Gymnastics Schedule 2024-25					
Dec. 6	6:30 p.m.	at Austin	Jan. 14	6:30 p.m.	Home Invitational
Dec. 12	6:30 p.m.	vs. Winona	Jan. 17	6:30 p.m.	at Northfield
Dec. 14	11:00 a.m.	at Brainerd	Jan. 18	10 a.m.	at Park HS
Dec. 21	9 a.m.	at St. Cloud Tech	Jan. 23	6:30 p.m.	at Faribault
Jan. 4	11 a.m.	at Farmington	Feb. 8	12 p.m.	at Rochester
Jan. 11	12 p.m.	at Lakeville North	Mayo		

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Owatonna Live SPORTS WRAP

ROY KOENIG

Before we get buried in snow, the prep sports scene will be up and running. Here's a primer of athletes to keep your eyes on at Owatonna High School events.

Girls hockey

Girls hockey brings back veteran all-conference skaters Kendra Bogen and Alia Kubicek, plus honorable mention picks Averie Vetsch and Grace Mitchell.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna guard Nolan Ginskey dribbles past a Rochester Century defender in last season's section game. Owatonna Head Coach Josh Williams called Ginskey "one of the top guards in the conference."

Coach Tony Cloud expects great upper-class leadership.

"We have probably the largest class I've had since I've been here with nine seniors on the team. It's pretty awesome to see those girls stick with it as long as they have," he said.

Girls hoops

Federated Court will feature some returners in girls basketball.

"Senior Maryn Pool brings a lot to the table for us. She has the ability to hit shots from the perimeter, finish at the rim, and can be a great facilitator as well," said Owatonna Head Coach Pat Webb.

Sophomore Jersey Coleman is a "very

versatile offensive player that can be a really tough match up." She can score inside and outside, by shooting or driving. Webb said that senior Ava Olson, a Bemidji State commit, provides "a lot of size and length. Defensively, she shows the ability to block or alter shots."

Wrestling

On the mat, coach Derek Johnson has a stable of potential stars including five seniors. Blake Fitcher "is slated to be the most explosive heavyweight in Minnesota this season." Lane Karsten dealt with a broken foot at sections last year. He is "ready to finally get on the state podium this year," said Johnson.

Isabelle Townley "is looking strong and ready to get back to the podium like she did her freshman year. R.J. Reinardy "is a human highlight reel, always looking to throw and put his opponents away." Donny Sorenson "hit the weights hard and will be moving up weight classes and his explosiveness and tenacious offense should benefit from his new strength."

Boys hockey

Boys hockey coach Dennis Will has veterans at both ends of the ice. Senior Blake Davison is "a strong leader both on the ice and in the classroom. Very strong defender and will anchor our defense." Senior defenseman Seth Johnson is "fiery and competitive. He thrives on



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna's Grace Mitchell fires a shot on net against Apple Valley this season. Mitchell scored the attempt in a 6-5 win over the Eagles.

competition and will be a leader." Senior forward Andy Mitchell "will be a force for us this year."

The team is coming off an 18-win season, "They know how to win now. We got guys coming from the football season. They know how to win. That will hopefully rub down to the lower levels and get them focused on how to play the game," said Will.

Boys basketball

Get ready for more minutes from players that got a taste of varsity basketball on Josh Williams' club. Cole Kruschke is a "great shooter and someone we are relying heavily on" offensively. Jack Motl is a "very versatile player who can guard and play a number of different positions." Will Halverson "gives us some nice size off the bench."

The Huskies bring back several seniors with extensive experience including all-conference guard Nolan

Ginskey, who led the squad in many stat categories last season. "He's one of the top guards in the conference," said Williams. He also called Zach Haarstad, "a high motor kid that really competes," and Darian Stransky, "a physical forward who can really defend as well as a solid shooter."

Gymnastics

OHS gymnastics has a new home in the OHS Gymnastics Center in the old high school. Senior captains Halle Theis, Averie Roush and Jozie Johnson competed at state last season as did junior Kendra Miller, sophomore Johanna Speilman and freshman Delia Neumann. Newcomer Paige Hulloper could crack the varsity lineup at times for coach Evan Moe.

Boys swim/dive

In the pool, coach Peter Rhodes sees junior Isaiah Smith as one to watch. "He was on the state relay and also part of the two re-



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna's Jersey Coleman goes up for a jump shot during the Huskies' section game against Lakeville North last season. Owatonna Head Coach Pat Webb listed Coleman as a player to watch on this year's team.

cord-breaking relays," said Rhodes. Junior Logan Flynn "can swim anything." Junior Phoenix Storm "showed some promise at the end of last year" in the 100 free and 100 backstroke. Don't miss freshman Jacob Gleason in sprint freestyle.

Dance

The Owatonna Dance Team finished second in the Big Nine last winter and hosts the conference competition in January. Senior leadership includes Taylor Schewe, Chloe Walerius, Norah Kath, Nora Effertz, Maren Smith, Kennedy Katzung, Lauren Kubicek, Sophie Woodfill, Alyssa Bock and Aniston Sorum for head coach Nikki Gefre.

Panthers “expect some bumps along the way”

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

NRHEG basketball will continue to rebuild its program after again losing a strong contingency of varsity starters to graduation.

With just four seniors on the team, the Panthers will rely heavily on their nine juniors and three sophomores, many of whom will be playing their first share of critical varsity minutes.

“We’ll be looking to improve as the season goes along, and hope to be playing our best basketball by the end of the year. We’ll be inexperienced, so I expect some bumps along the way. We have a very smart team with good chemistry and should be able to make

adjustments on the fly. We should be more versatile on both ends of the floor. This group moves the ball well, along with the defensive flexibility and attitude,” said NRHEG Head Coach Dan Schmidt.

Returning this season and stepping into larger roles will be Aaden Hanna, Grayson Schaefer, Jase Knudson and Jordan Brouwers.

All four athletes rotated in and out of the Panthers’ starting lineup last season, making them the team’s most experienced veterans on a relatively young team.

According to Schmidt, the team has a wealth of pure shooters, but one attribute that the team will be lacking is adequate size.

“We’ll need to really focus on rebounding as

we lost some size. We’ll be scoring with a new group of players and dealing with inexperience. We’ll be relying on our seniors for leadership, while also needing the younger guys to step into their roles quickly. It will definitely be a team effort, and will be fun to watch it progress as the season goes along. If we can find a groove offensively, I think we can be more competitive than we have been in the past,” said Schmidt.

NRHEG is coming off of a 3-24 season, meaning the Panthers have plenty of room to improve on last year’s record.

Up next for the team is a home matchup against Madelia scheduled for Friday, Dec. 6 at 7:15 p.m.



COURTESY ELI LUTGENS - NRHEG STAR EAGLE

NRHEG Boys Varsity Basketball

Dec. 6	7:15 p.m.	vs. Madelia	Jan. 24	7:15 p.m.	vs. Bethlehem Academy
Dec. 12	7:15 p.m.	vs. St. Clair	Jan. 28	7:15 p.m.	at Medford
Dec. 13	7:15 p.m.	at Randolph	Jan. 30	7:15 p.m.	at USC
Dec. 17	7:15 p.m.	at Maple River	Feb. 3	7:15 p.m.	vs. WEM
Dec. 19	7:15 p.m.	vs. USC	Feb. 6	7 p.m.	at Nicollet
Dec. 20	7 p.m.	at Le Sueur-Henderson	Feb. 7	7:30 p.m.	vs. JWP
Jan. 3	7:15 p.m.	at Kenyon-Wanamingo	Feb. 10	7:15 p.m.	vs. Blooming Prairie
Jan. 7	7:15 p.m.	at WEM	Feb. 13	7 p.m.	at Mankato Loyola
Jan. 10	7:30 p.m.	vs. Hayfield	Feb. 14	7:15 p.m.	at Alden-Conger
Jan. 14	5:45 p.m.	at JWP	Feb. 17	7:15 p.m.	vs. Tri-City United
Jan. 17	7:15 p.m.	at Blooming Prairie	Feb. 20	7:15 p.m.	vs. Waseca
Jan. 20	7 p.m.	at LCWM	Feb. 21	7:15 p.m.	vs. Medford
			Feb. 28	7 p.m.	at Martin County West

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NRHEG looking forward to “tough battles”

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

NRHEG girls’ basketball has been an elite-level program for quite some time, and the Panthers aren’t showing any signs of slowing down as the team enters the 2024-25 season.

The Panthers will return some key athletes in Camryn and Quinn VanMaldeghem, as well as names like Chloe Stork, Izley and Ezra Boerner, Kylie Olson, Clara Buendorf and Savannah Farr.

“I’m excited for this team. They are competitive, athletic and a fun group of girls. We are bringing back a couple of kids who played big minutes for us last year. This is a group that has some speed, rebounds

and runs the floor well, and should cause some havoc on defense. We have a few kids who are making the jump from junior varsity last year to big varsity minutes this year. We have a tough schedule this season and are excited to have some tough battles that we can learn from. We’re hoping to continue to improve all season long so we’re playing our best come playoff time,” said NRHEG Head Coach Onika Peterson.

The VanMaldeghem twins figure to be the team’s biggest scoring threats this season after Camryn led NRHEG with 488 points in 2023-24, with Quinn posting a team third-best mark of 204 points.

However, NRHEG also returns Izley Boerner and Olson, both of whom

surpassed 125 points last season as well.

Stork will also return to the team after being held out for the majority of last season due to injury.

With a team that is stacked with athleticism, Peterson sees a clear path for her team to take over games.

“We need to rebound and run the floor every chance we can. Defensively, we need to be smart but aggressive. We have a solid core of returning athletes but are looking to see who will be stepping into some holes that we still need to fill from last season,” said Peterson.

NRHEG’s next game will be on the road against Medford on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7:15 p.m.



COURTESY ELI LUTGENS - NRHEG STAR EAGLE

NRHEG Girls Varsity Basketball

Dec. 5	7:15 p.m.	at Medford	Jan. 10	6 p.m.	vs. Hayfield
Dec. 13	4:15 p.m.	vs. Sibley East	Jan. 14	7:15 p.m.	at JWP
		(at Maple River HS)	Jan. 16	7:15 p.m.	vs. Blooming Prairie
Dec. 14	2:15 p.m.	at Cotter Schools	Jan. 17	7:30 p.m.	at Waseca
		(at Maple River HS)	Jan. 23	7:15 p.m.	at Bethlehem Academy
Dec. 20	7:15 p.m.	at USC	Jan. 27	7:15 p.m.	vs. Medford
Dec. 27	5:30 p.m.	vs. Minnesota Valley Lutheran	Jan. 31	7:15 p.m.	vs. USC
		(at NYA HS)	Feb. 3	7:15 p.m.	at WEM
Dec. 28	4 p.m.	vs. LCWM (at NYA HS)	Feb. 7	6 p.m.	vs. JWP
Jan. 3	7:15 p.m.	vs. Kenyon-Wanamingo	Feb. 10	7:15 p.m.	vs. St. Clair
Jan. 4	5:30 p.m.	at Goodhue	Feb. 13	7:15 p.m.	vs. Alden-Conger
Jan. 7	7:15 p.m.	vs. WEM	Feb. 14	7:15 p.m.	at Randolph
			Feb. 18	7:15 p.m.	at Tri-City United



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NRHEG to lean on senior leadership

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

NRHEG wrestling lost some firepower last year with Annabelle Petsinger and George Roesler graduating, but the Panthers have plenty of rising stars on roster ready to make their senior years count in 2024-25.

Highlighting the senior class are Harbor Cromwell (172), Cole Hutchens (215), Jace Ihrke (285), Aidan Schlaak (160) and Seth Staloch (139.)

“Our team’s strength comes literally where the strength usually comes from: the bigger wrestlers. We have solid wrestlers

with several years of experience at the top end of our lineup. We have a group of athletes who work well together, and if we work together, we will be strong,” said NRHEG Head Coach Shawn Larson.

The Panthers figure to have a daunting back end to their lineup as the squad’s experience is more skewed toward the heavier weights.

However, duals begin at 107 pounds, meaning NRHEG will have to work hard to fill its lighter weights and begin matches strong.

“Our weaknesses come from lack of experience in the lighter weights.

These younger wrestlers have been working hard, though, and we’re thinking they will open some eyes in the area,” said Larson.

In order for his team to remain competitive, Larson sees some key changes that must be made to the way his team wrestles.

“We need to be able to get athletes to wrestle full matches. Last season, our downfall was giving up too many bonus points. If we can eliminate that, we will be much more competitive. Also, taking risks to score points in situations where we have been tentative in the recent past. If we focus on scoring instead of win-

ning and losing, the wins should come as a result,” said Larson.

NRHEG’s first dual of the season will be on the road against Maple River/USC on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 7 p.m.



COURTESY ELI LUTGENS - NRHEG STAR EAGLE

NRHEG Varsity Wrestling 2024-25

Dec. 5	7 p.m.	at Maple River/USC	Jan. 9	7 p.m.	at Westfield
Dec. 7	9:45 a.m.	at St. James (Tourney)	Jan. 11	8 a.m.	at Stewartville (Invite)
Dec. 12	7 p.m.	at Le Sueur-Henderson	Jan. 17	5 p.m.	Home Tri
Dec. 13	4 p.m.	at Lakeville South (Tri)	Jan. 23	5 p.m.	at SJA HS Event Center
Dec. 19	6 p.m.	at Blue Earth Area	Jan. 28	5 p.m.	at Triton
Dec. 20	4 p.m.	at Redwood Valley (Tourney)	Jan. 30	7 p.m.	at WEM/JWP
Dec. 21	9 a.m.	at Redwood Valley (Tourney)	Feb. 1	9:30 a.m.	at Maple River (Tourney)
			Feb. 6	7 p.m.	vs. Kenyon-Wanamingo

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