

Outlaws look forward to strong soccer season

By Rongi Yost
Correspondent

Expectations are high for the Outlaws boys soccer team as they return eight starters from last year's championship team, including two first-team all-state returnees, and many experienced all-league players.

Seniors that are back for their final season, who hope to close out their careers at the top include Malachy Sundstrom, Minam Cravens, Ryan Funk, Sean Willitts, Anson Ricker, Keegan Greaney and Alec Gannon.

Sundstrom will play at forward, and last year led the team with 23 goals and 12 assists. Malachy was voted Player of the Year in the Sky-Em League, and Player of the Year in Oregon, and scored the game-winning goal in the state championship game last season.

Coach Rob Jensen said, "Malachy has continued to improve this season and is faster and stronger, with an outside shot that has a lot more pace on it. The coaching staff is expecting him to have another great season this year."

Cravens was a second-team all-league selection last season and will play center defense. He is one of the top defenders in the state this year and will anchor the

Outlaws' defense.

Ryan Funk was a first-team all-league and all-state player last year as goalie. He will play keeper for the Outlaws again this season. He's improved his skills and will be very tough to score on. Jensen noted that Funk has become a vocal leader in the back and was one of the top-ranked 4A defense last season, which only allowed 10 goals in 17 games. Willitts earned honorable mention last year and has great vision on the field. Sean will play at both midfield and defense. Jensen told *The Nugget* that Sean does a great job kick-starting the offense and distributing the ball.

Ricker returns for his second season starting at defense. Jensen noted that Anson is athletic and smart and will make his teammates better.

Greaney was also an honorable mention selection last season. He is a lock-down defender and will play in the midfield.

"Keegan has great speed and athleticism, and teams have a very tough time controlling him," said Jensen. "I expect he will contribute on the offensive end more this season."

Gannon rounds out the returning senior players, and last year he was third on the team in assists. Alec has

worked hard to improve his skills over the off-season, and will play at midfield.

"Alec's quickness and defensive skills will have a big impact this season," said Jensen. "He distributes the ball very well, and should be more offensive this season as he adapts to his new role as a center midfielder."

Also back for another season are sophomores Willie Stewart, Keaton Green, and Asher Bachtold.

Stewart played a lot of minutes off the bench last season and will provide some good experience this season on defense. Green will play at midfield. Jensen stated that Keaton is a great leader with a tremendous work ethic, who does a great job of not over-complicating things.

Bachtold started every game at outside defense as a freshman last year. This season he will move into the center midfield position and will contribute more offensively, while he locks down the middle on defense. Jensen described Asher as a bundle of energy.

Five players are notable newcomers to the squad: seniors Sam Garbrecht, Andrew Mayes, and Austin Tolle, and sophomores Colby Simeral and Jude Kokesh-Carhart.

Garbrecht is a fast and tenacious player and will play forward. He will be a spark-plug for the Outlaws and will pressure defenses constantly.

Mayes will play defense and be a rock for the team.

"Andrew is a great human," said Jensen. "He works hard all the time, and has a positive attitude."

Tolle will play defense and is a great addition to the team. Austin is expected to provide even more senior leadership and positive work ethic.

Simeral has worked very hard to improve his skills in the off-season and will play at both forward and midfield. According to Jensen, he has a nose for the goal, is extremely coachable and will be a constant threat offensively.

Kokesh-Carhart will play midfield, and Jensen stated he's improved dramatically

since last year.

"Jude does a great job of being in the right position and doing what is needed," said Jensen. "He will provide an athletic component off the bench."

The Outlaws have set high goals for the year.

Jensen said, "Considering we return eight starters from last season, and have many experienced all-league players, I would say our expectations are pretty high for this season. We will need to have lots of commitment and continued improvement throughout the season, as the roles on the team change, as well as luck with health and bounces, but the overall mood of the team is super positive."

"We will be shooting to be at the top once again, however, having six straight Sky Em titles and two out of the three state championships, the target on our back will be pretty big. We're looking forward to another great season."

The Outlaws kick off the season at home on Tuesday, August 30, against Madras.

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