

Astoria running in the 'district of champions'

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

It was hard to say how the Astoria cross country team did in 2015, judging just by the results.

Yes, the Fishermen boys finished fifth out of six teams in the Cowapa League championship meet. Then again, the top three teams in the league (Seaside, Tillamook, Valley Catholic) also happened to be the top three teams in the entire state at the 4A level.

The Astoria Lady Fishermen have an equally tough time on the girls' side.

Tough league or not, most of the runners are back for more, as Andrew Fick returns for another season as the Astoria cross country coach, with one meet already under their belt.

The Fishermen hosted their annual "Alumni Run" Aug. 25 at Cullaby Lake, complete with post-race potluck. At least they're having fun.

"The Alumni Run was great," Fick said. "We were a small group, but everyone ran hard and had fun. It was great to have coach (Carl) Dominey

THE RUNNERS

Girls

McKenzie Burnett, Jr.
McKenna Long, Fr.
Libbie Nash, Jr.
Taylor Palmrose, So.
Kathy Perez, Jr.

Boys

William Berezay, So.
Lucas Caruana, Sr.
Andrei (Dex) Gregory, So.
Parker Ivanoff, So.
Calvin Kaul, Fr.
Kevin Kumar, Fr.
Anthony Miller, Sr.
David Sharp, Jr.
Elias Simmons, So.

Last school year, Caruana began with a 10th-place finish in the district cross country meet, and closed it out by finishing third in the 800-meter final at the state track meet.

Besides Caruana, other returning runners for the Astoria boys include senior Anthony Miller, and sophomores Andrei "Dex" Gregory, Parker Ivanoff and Calvin Kaul.

The top runner for the Astoria girls — junior Kaylee Mitchell — has moved on, as the three-sport athlete has taken her talents to the Salem area.

That leaves three returners for the Astoria girls — juniors McKenzie Burnett, Libbie Nash and Kathy Perez.

Burnett ran a personal best 20 minutes, 17 seconds in the 5,000-meter Alumni Run, after placing 16th in last year's district meet in 22:42.

Nash and Perez also ran personal best times in their first official run of the season. Completing the varsity five this year will be sophomore Taylor Palmrose and freshman McKenna Long.

and (John) Goodenberger (who also ran) there, and it was fun as always to have everyone together for the family potluck afterward.

"I'm looking forward to having the rest of our AHS runners with us as we get closer to the start of school, but we're already working hard and having fun."

Not surprisingly, the first-place runner in the Alumni Run also happens to be Astoria's top prospect this season, senior Lucas Caruana.



Astoria's Lucas Caruana is one of the top returning cross country runners in the Cowapa League in 2016.

Astoria spikers enter new era at the net

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

Their best player from last season is now playing at the collegiate level. They've got a new coach on the sidelines, and they're coming off one of their worst league seasons in recent memory.

For Jessie Todd, it's not exactly the ideal way to begin a new coaching regime ... but that's the hand she's been dealt, as the Astoria volleyball program enters a new season and a new era.

Todd coached at Class 3A Sheridan last season, leading the Spartans to a 10-4 record in the West Valley League. Sheridan went 0-2 in the state tournament, with losses to eventual state runner-up Creswell, and a consolation loss to Coquille.

She takes over for Angee Hunt, who coached Astoria for nine years overall, while daughter Chloe Hunt is competing for Evergreen College, following her all-league season with the Lady Fishermen.

The Cowapa

For yet another year in yet another sport, the Cowapa League is the home of a 2015 defending state champion.

Banks won the 4A state title last year, with a three-game sweep over Sisters in the final.

Tillamook and Valley Catholic were also part of the final eight at the state tournament, and ended up facing each other in the consolation final, the Valiants winning in three games.

Todd is new to the Cowapa, but she knows the league has a reputation.

"What I know about the league is that Banks won (state) last year, Valley Catholic was fourth and Tillamook sixth," she said. "It is a very tough league. We are getting prepared for that."

The Lady Fish

Chloe Hunt was Astoria's strong presence at the net last year, and while she's gone, all is not lost.

The Lady Fishermen still have a pair of all-league return-



Astoria's Aurora Grafton sets the ball at the front of the net for a teammate as Valley Catholic's Regan Dean looks to defend the shot in a 2014 game.



Astoria's Madi Landwehr, No. 2, sets the ball during the volleyball game at Seaside last year.

ers in senior Aurora Grafton and junior Madi Landwehr, while Astoria will have two 5-foot-10 players at the net — senior Jacqueline Jarrett and sophomore Kes Sandstrom, a transfer from Scappoose.

And the Fishermen have two more athletes who play bigger than their listed height, 5-7 junior middle blocker Darian Hageman (the state high jump champion) and 5-5 sophomore outside hitter Samantha Hensley.

Rounding out the varsity

ASTORIA VOLLEYBALL

Coach: Jessie Todd, 1st year

2015: 1-9 Cowapa

All-League Loss: Chloe Hunt

All-League Returners: Aurora Grafton, Sr.; Madi Landwehr, Jr.

roster will be juniors Chelsea Christensen and Kira Worwood; sophomore defensive specialist Aly Cotte; and freshmen setter Julia Norris and libero Hailey O'Brien.

Despite the coaching change, Todd said, "the girls have been real receptive, and it's been a very positive experience so far."

"We've got some size, which is great, and we're improving defensively. It's still early. We have a couple weeks before we start league play, so I can kind of play around with things, see what's going to work, and go from there. We're relatively young," with only two seniors.

Todd adds, "I am going to run a 6-2, with Aurora and Madi. They're both talented setters, and they've been really good leaders for the team."

"Darian can jump — her and Jacqueline will both be great middles. We've been working a lot on them connecting with the setters and quicker hits, and they've done a real good job of picking up on it."

Astoria girls soccer hopes for quick turnaround

By GARY HENLEY
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Luck just hasn't been with the Astoria girls soccer program in recent years.

Despite improvements on the field, the numbers — just two wins in each of the last two seasons — remain the same. In fact, if it wasn't for Tillamook, the Lady Fishermen wouldn't have any wins at all.

Astoria's two wins last year came over the 0-14 Cheesemakers, and the two victories in 2014 also came over Tillamook.

With a new coach and four all-league players returning, the Astoria girls are hoping to break through some barriers in 2016.

Tim Fastabend is the new coach, replacing Sarah von Colditz, who stepped down after two seasons.

And the new coach likes what he sees.

"We've got a large senior group and a fairly large junior group," Fastabend said. "They're optimistic, enthusiastic, and there's a lot of returning lettermen who have played varsity their entire careers. I'm positive."

The Cowapa

It remains to be seen if Scappoose and Valley Catholic can overcome big hits in the graduation department. Given their history, the answer is yes.

The defending state champion Indians lost 10 players, including five all-league players and Cowapa Player of the Year Lucy Davidson.

"Scappoose and Valley Catholic are there, and Banks looked real athletic at the (preseason) tournament," Fastabend said. "They'll be a lot stronger than people think. And whenever Astoria plays Seaside, it's like a state play-off game."

"After those first two spots, it will be a pretty good fight for position."

The Lady Fish "have been working really hard in practice, so if we can continue that and go into October playing well, there's a chance to finish strong."



Daniela Garcia moves the ball upfield during a recent scrimmage for the Astoria girls soccer team.

ASTORIA GIRLS SOCCER

Coach: Tim Fastabend, 1st year

2015: 2-12 (2-8 Cowapa)

All-League Loss: Megan Bergeron

All-League Returners: Claire Albright, Jr.; Daniela Garcia, Sr.; Lexis Law, Jr.; Jenna Rudolph, Sr.

The Lady Fish

Astoria is certainly in better shape than a lot of teams, returning both talent and experience. Nine seniors will provide a solid foundation.

"Numbers-wise, we had to keep a couple juniors with the JVs," Fastabend said. "There's just not a lot of room on the varsity with that many seniors."

The long list of experience includes seniors Ashlee Dalton, Sariah Dieffenbach, Daniela Garcia, Anna Gimre, Victoria Holcom, Jenna Rudolph, Shrida Sharma, Rachel Simmons and Kristen Travers.

"We have pretty strong leadership from the seniors," Fastabend said. "Shrida, Jenna, Anna and Daniela are captains this year."

"It's going to be about dis-

cipline on the field and how we're going to attack, and hopefully we can put together a good season," he said. "It will take a little while to gel as a group. We have one of the stronger goalkeepers in the league, that's for sure."

That would be junior Lexis Law, one of four all-league returners, along with Garcia, Rudolph and junior Claire Albright.

Also back for their junior seasons are Sarah Lertora, Jasmin Mabry, Hailey Ranta and Megan Schacher.

Adding depth to the lineup will be sophomores Andrea Harris and Samantha Messing — and Astoria may need some of that depth, with Holcom and Law both suffering preseason injuries.

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