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Jewell still young, still improving

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

The 3-1 finish was a lot better than the 0-8 start last year for the Jewell volleyball program.

The young Lady Blue Jays got off to a rough start, but by season's end they had turned a corner.

They hope to keep the momentum flowing as they enter the 2017 campaign, with more experience and more players on the roster.

Head coach Jessica Miller had Jewell on the verge of the state playoffs in 2016, as the Jays finished fourth in the 1A Casco League standings, two games behind Perrydale.

The Casco

Crosshill Christian ran away with the Casco League title a year ago, sweeping its way to a 10-0 league record and a fifth-place finish at state.

Willamette Valley Christian and Perrydale were the other state playoff qualifiers, with the Pirates clinching their spot to state with a league playoff victory over Jewell.

The Lady Jays

Jewell is still on the young side, with just two seniors on the preseason roster.

Niqui Blodgett — part-time softball pitcher at Warrenton — will be serving up serves instead of softballs as she enters her senior year at Jewell, along with Emma Guillen.

The junior class also has returning varsity experience, with Joe Armstrong and Lily Kaczynski, with first-year player Cheyenne Stapleton.

The remaining half of the roster includes sophomore Haley Norman and freshmen Ashlee Fraser, Aliyah Hart, Lillie Meier and McKenna Miller.

JEWELL VOLLEYBALL

Coach: Jessica Miller
2016: 5-12 (4-6 Casco)
Playoffs: Lost league playoff to Perrydale
Seniors lost: Alyscia Littlepage
Seniors returning: Niqui Blodgett, Emma Guillen



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

Paris Vanderburg, No. 5, will block and hit again for the Knappa volleyball team.

KNAPPA VOLLEYBALL

Coach: Jeff Kaul, 8th year
2016: 10-10 (5-6 NWL)
Playoffs: Defeated Faith Bible, lost to Gaston and Delphian in league playoffs.
All-League losses: Kaitlyn Landwehr, Alisha Murphy
All-League returners: Jaden Miethe, Sr.; Paris Vanderburg, Sr.

LOGGERS LOOK TO DEFEND LEAGUE TITLE

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

After a brief detour (the 2015 season), the Knappa Loggers reverted last year to their familiar routine of blowout wins and a perfect league season, before falling in a first-round state playoff against St. Paul.

Outcomes of the league games were pretty much expected. The Loggers would like to change their luck against nonleague competition.

Knappa dominated the Northwest League (averaging 54 points per game in going 4-0), but the Loggers were just 1-5 against teams from outside the league.

Part of that was a tough nonleague schedule, and part of it was a weak league. In recent years, the NWL just hasn't been that good.

Other than Knappa, the last NWL team to advance past the first round of the state playoffs was Portland Christian in 2013, and the Royals are no longer in the league.

Since the 2006 OSAA reclassification, Gaston, Neah-Kah-Nie and Vernonia have not won a state playoff game.

In addition, none of the five teams in the Northwest League had a winning record last year, and the only other state qualifier was Gaston, which lost in the first round to Kennedy, 61-14.

The league

"The league last year wasn't as good as we hoped it would be," said Knappa coach Aaron Barendse. This year, "Neah-Kah-Nie will probably be a handful — they've got a sophomore group with a lot of size, (junior Tristan) Bennett is a beast, and they have a couple other kids returning."

Then again, the Pirates only had 20 players on their roster last season.

With 10 all-league starters on offense (and most of them returning) and a perfect league record last year, the Loggers will once again be the prime targets in the NWL.

Knappa will look to advance to the quarterfinals for the first time since 2014, after suffering a first round loss to St. Paul last season.

"The playoff didn't go as planned," Barendse said. "We thought we could pull it off, but losing Kaleb (Miller) on that final drive hurt. We were just young varsity experience-wise. I still think we could have been the better team."

The Loggers

Knappa lost Andrew Goozee to graduation, the Northwest League's Offensive and Defen-



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

Senior Kaleb Miller returns as the top quarterback in the Northwest League, along with a roster full of all-league players.

sive Player of the Year.

Still, "We'll be all right," Barendse said. "We've got a bunch of kids who are happy to be here, and we're way ahead of where we were last year at this point."

Besides, the Loggers have never been short on league MVP candidates.

"When we had Kyle Kelly (league MVP), we were wondering the same thing — who was going to step up," Barendse said. "Then we had Justin Dragoo (league MVP, followed by Goozee, league MVP). We've always had that big power guy for the last six, eight years. We don't have that one dependent guy this year, but we have a very, very versatile team, probably one of the most versatile teams we've had in a while."

Included in that is more team speed. So in addition to being the biggest team on the field in the NWL, the Loggers are also the fastest.

All-league quarterback Kaleb Miller returns for his senior season, after transferring from Pleasant Hill the year before.

KNAPPA FOOTBALL

Coach: Aaron Barendse, 6th year
2016: 5-5 (4-0 NWL)
Playoffs: Lost first-round state playoff to St. Paul.
All-League losses: Andrew Goozee (Offensive and Defensive Player of the Year); Timber Engblom, WR; Mitch Geisler, RB/LB; Ethan Rubus, WR/LB.
All-League returners: Jacob Ford, Sr., OL/DL; Jaxson Goodman, So., OL/DL; Mason Hoover, Sr., WR/DB; Reece Hunt, Sr., OL/DL; Kaleb Miller, Sr., QB/DB; David Patterson, Sr., OL; Cody Stuhr, Sr., OL.

At running back, "we'll have a couple kids move around," Barendse said. "Luke Goozee and Braeden Eltagonde will carry the load as far as getting the carries, and we'll definitely be throwing the ball around. We have a lot of good receivers, with Kanai Phillip, Braeden, Luke and Mason Hoover, who will get some carries as well."

Also returning is sophomore tight end-receiver Joe Ramvick.

Sophomore Eli Takalo will see action at receiver, strong safety and outside linebacker, in addition to serving as a placekicker and backup quarterback.

"We've got a lot of skill kids running around," Barendse said. "We threw the ball a ton last year compared to the year before, and we'll up that a little this year. With our line being back, we can do a little of both."

Every single Logger offensive lineman was named all-league last year, but "we've moved some kids around, so our line will look a little different," he said, after some changes on the defensive side of the ball "to make up for the defensive guys we lost."

And that list includes all three linebackers (once again, all three were all-league) Mitch Geisler, Goozee and Ethan Rubus.

"That's a big deal — between Rubus, Geisler and Goozee, that was a big chunk of our tackles from last year," Barendse said.

The names on the offensive and defensive lines include seniors Jacob Ford, Reece Hunt, David Patterson and Cody Stuhr, as well as sophomores Jaxson Goodman and Ryson Patterson.

Quoteable: "I'm excited for these boys to get out there and showcase their speed and talent," Barendse said, "because we have some kids who can play."

Prediction: With the best quarterback in the league and five returning all-league offensive linemen ... should be lots of points and another perfect league season for the Loggers. **League champions.**

Lady Loggers will chase the Greyhounds

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

A turnout of 23 girls for a 2A volleyball squad ... not bad, as the Knappa Lady Loggers and coach Jeff Kaul prepare for the 2017 season.

One factor — the Loggers only lost two seniors off last year's team, which also had strong numbers in the freshmen and sophomore classes.

Those players are a year older, stronger and wiser, which makes for a promising season.

"Some of the girls who didn't get a chance to play last year are stepping up," said Kaul, at the end of the first week of practice. "And we've got another good group of freshmen."

The cycle continues, as Knappa

plans on being a player, once again, in Northwest League volleyball.

The NWL

Gaston ran the table and finished 12-0 in league play last year — but the Greyhounds lost a first-round state playoff against Central Linn. Second-place Vernonia was swept by Culver in the first round.

Gaston may be ready to make a move this year, however, with the return of league MVP Charity Hall.

"Gaston will be the dominant team with Charity Hall," Kaul said. "She played all summer, and leads that group. If somebody figures out how to stop her, they're beatable. But she can hit from anywhere."

Vernonia "lost a huge number of seniors, but they had a pretty large JV group, so they should still be strong; Delphian's always a wild

card; and we had some good games with Nestucca last year, but they lost a couple seniors.

"With our blocks and our speed in the back row, hopefully we can compete a little better."

The Lady Loggers

From two seniors last year, to six this season.

The list is led by all-leaguers Jaden Miethe and Paris Vanderburg, with Ressa Inman, Mack Strain and Kaitlyn Truax lending experience.

"Paris was starting to come along with her hitting towards the end of the year," Kaul said. "She's started off good already, and hopefully she will take some of the work that Kaitlyn (Landwehr) was doing in the front row."

The Loggers are big, by North-

west League standards, so "hopefully we'll be able to do some blocking against the stronger teams," the coach said.

Miethe returns as the libero, Strain is an opposite side hitter, and junior Kourtney Tischer has the tough task of picking up the setter duties left by Landwehr, as Knappa will still run a 6-2 formation.

The varsity will also carry senior outside hitter/blocker Emma Taggart. The junior class has Jordan Walter. Young contributors stepping up include sophomores Sophie Carlson and Aiko Miller, who both saw varsity action last season.

Kaul left two spots open on the varsity, because "with such a young JV group, we'll wait and give somebody some playing time towards the end of the season."

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