

Even with nine seniors, Lady Gulls rebuilding

By Gary Henley
EO Media Group

Girls soccer was just one of several sports that ended with a Cowapa League school winning a state championship last season.

The "Conference of Champions" dominated 4A girls soccer, with three teams advancing to the quarterfinals (Banks, Scappoose and Valley Catholic), with the Valiants winning the state title.

The same three teams will likely battle for a state title this season, making it difficult for the rest (Astoria, Seaside, Tillamook) to have much success in league play.

Despite the unexpected loss of a couple all-league players, Seaside — which

was one penalty kick away from making the state playoffs a year ago — will still be a challenger for a top three spot in the Cowapa League.

"We've got a ways to go," said Matt Johnson, in his second year as coach. "We have some big problems to solve. We lost a lot of seniors, and they were good leaders, too."

The Gulls

The Gulls currently have nine seniors on the varsity roster, to go with two juniors, two sophomores and four freshmen.

Seaside lost three all-league players to graduation: Brianna Babbitt, Alli Utti and goalkeeper Allison Bussert.

All-leaguers Maddi Utti and Sydney Villegas would have been returning juniors, but Utti is playing volleyball, and Villegas is running cross country.

"I'll miss 'em, whether they graduated or they're trying another sport," Johnson said.

The more immediate concern: "We have to solve the keeper problem," he said. "When you have someone like Allison, it was fun to have coaches come up to you after a game and say 'Wow, what a keeper!'"

To help find and develop a goalkeeper, Johnson has brought two coaches on staff to help, including former coach Dave Rouse and former Seaside keeper Becca Lent. Former Gull

Josh Garhofer is also assisting Johnson.

One definite bright spot is senior Whitney Westerholm, who "can play anywhere," Johnson said. "She's a hard-working kid. Brenda Lopez (Sr.) is vocal and willing to take on challenges and lead by example; Alie Zagata (Sr.) has had a strong camp; Sophie Trevino (Sr.) will be a good player for us; and Morgan Brown is a returning junior."

Elsewhere, "Lizzy Barnes (Jr.) is experienced. She will have to be more vocal and get the younger kids where they need to be."

Sophomore Bryre Babbitt started as a freshman, and is "having a great

camp," Johnson said. "We have some freshmen who look like they're going to step right in. I'm just getting to know the names and faces."

The Cowapa

Johnson expects Scappoose and Valley Catholic to be strong — so strong that the rest of the Cowapa League benefits in the RPI rankings by playing the Indians and the Valiants, who have both won state championships over the last two years.

"They both have a good tradition," he said. "The Astoria girls have been working hard and they look good. They'll have a good team and I expect them to be tough."

SEASIDE GIRLS SOCCER

COACH: Matt Johnson, 2nd year

2014 SEASON: 5-6-4 (3-4-3 Cowapa)

PLAYOFFS: Lost Regional Play-in at North Bend, 1-2 (3-4 PK's)


ALL-LEAGUE LOSSES: Brianna Babbitt, Allison Bussert (GK), Alli Utti; Maddi Utti, Jr. (volleyball); Sydney Villegas, Jr. (cross country).

ALL-LEAGUE RETURNER: Whitney Westerholm, Sr.




JOSHUA BESSEX/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

With teammate Tania Martinez trailing, Seaside's Corrie Falleur delivers a shot during soccer practice.



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