

Ricker, Ward return to lead optimistic group of Lady Eagle volleyballers

By MIKE COURSON

Shelly Duvall led the Ellinwood volleyball team back to its winning ways in 2016. This year, despite losing five seniors from a club that went 25-12, the expectations are even higher.

"We have a group of girls that have worked extremely hard over the summer to get better," Duvall said. "Not only on the court, but in the weight room also."

"In the past, we have been very weak mentally. This is our No. 1 focus with this group is to learn how to compete until the very last point and not let down. We have the talent, now it is just a matter of them believing in themselves as well as their whole team."

Ellinwood played for a sub-state title last year, falling to perennial powerhouse Central Plains.

Duvall took some hits to graduation. Allison Panning was a four-year player who earned all-league honors multiple times. She earned first-team honors last year after leading the team with 291 kills, 252 digs and 59 aces.

Jenna Oelke earned second-team honors a year ago after finishing with 146 kills and eight aces. Also missing in action will be Brittney Beck, Brynlee Baker, and Elizabeth Standlee. Beck was second on the team with 242 digs last year. Standlee served up 29 aces and had 116 digs, and Baker was fifth on the team with



2017 Ellinwood Lady Eagles, back row from left: Teigan Torres, Jenna Caspers, Mya Maxwell, Madison Ward, Eliana Hernandez, Kennedy Harrington, and Kelly Ann Williams. Middle row: Jozlyn Brown, Emily Frakes, Lataja Gray, Hailey Gross, Anahi Mendez, Kaitlyn Panning, and Kaitlyn Pohlman. Front row (seniors): Maria Santos (Brazil), Emma Ricker, Sofia Pieroni (Italy), and Detje Steiner (Germany).
 (photo courtesy of Lesli O'Neill/EHS)

101 kills.

Emma Ricker emerges as the lone returning senior on the squad. Last season, Ricker's 104 kills were fourth best on the team. She was also big on the serve with 38 aces. She's had a nice career with a .077 hitting percentage and 468 digs entering her final campaign.

Not a tall player, Ricker played bigger than her height with 66 total blocks last year. That effort was second best on the squad.

Junior Maddy Ward also returns as a force at the net. Her

160 kills last fall were second-most on the team, and her 0.197 hitting percentage was just off the team-high. Ward was the team's biggest force at the net defensively with 69 blocks in 2016.

"She was strictly a front row player last year, but will be playing some back row this time around," Duvall said of Ward.

Duvall has her leading setter back in the way of senior Jenna Caspers. Caspers and Standlee split passing duties last year, and Caspers accounted for 459 of the team's 821 assists.

ly strong, so it will be fun to see this change."

Junior Kaitlyn Pohlman returns as the team's libero. She had 41 digs on the back row last year. She will move to an outside role this fall. "She is small, but very tough for her size," Duvall said.

The Lady Eagles posted 25 wins in spite of a tough schedule inside and out of the Central Prairie League last year. That trend will continue in 2017.

"I am not one for a weak schedule," Duvall said. "The more we play good teams, the better we get. It's always fun seeing Great Bend, LaCrosse and Central Plains on our schedule. Nickerson was an outstanding team last year and we saw them at the Ellsworth tournament. We are looking forward to that match up as well."

After weeks of practice, Duvall is just ready to see her new squad hit the court. The Lady Eagles open the season at home against Wichita Independent and Hutchinson Trinity.

"I'm looking forward to seeing all of the hard work finally pay off for these girls," she said. "We are constantly trying to instill in the girls that how much you put in and how hard you work will determine the end result."

"When they are able to see the payoff, it's worth every early-morning agility and weight hour, intense camp setting, and sweat-filled practice."

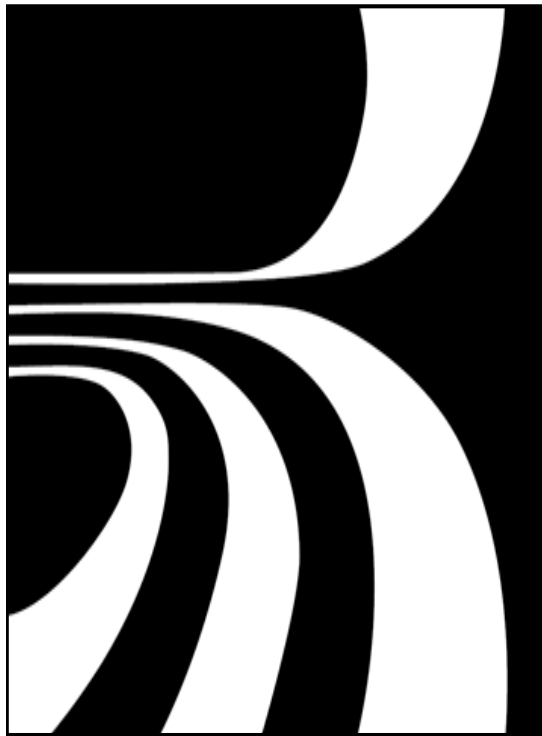
Ellinwood volleyball 2017

Aug. 29	HOME TRI
Aug. 31	@ Ellsworth
Sept. 5	HOME TRI
Sept. 7	HOME TRI
Sept. 9	@ Ellsworth Tourn.
Sept. 11	@ Smoky Val. Tri
Sept. 19	HOME TRI
Sept. 21	@ Larned Quad
Sept. 23	@ Lyons Tourn.
Sept. 26	@ Ness City Tri.
Oct. 3	@ Victoria Tri.
Oct. 10	HOME TRI.
Oct. 14	CPL @ CPHS
Oct. 21	Sub-state
Oct. 27-28	State

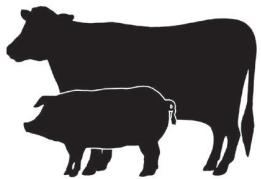
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Go Eagles!



Lady Eagle senior Emma Ricker (with ball) and junior Maddy Ward will serve crucial roles for the Ellinwood volleyball team this fall.

(photo by Mike Courson)

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