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Nugget Volleyball Pursuing Excellence This Season



The Hawley Nuggets volleyball team members are, left to right, front row-Rylie Olson, Destiny Flaten, Hailey Bigger, Morgan Ebersole, Kendra Peterson, Anna Steer, Abby Norris; row two-Katie Todd, Taylor Reep, Maddy Heidinger, Skye Johnson, Maddy Libak, Makenzie Halvorson, Elle Hastings, Siri Danielson; back row-Faith Rustad, Grace Fleming, Maria Vetter, McKenna Karsten, Paige Thompson, Rudee Hockett, Emily Tjaden, Alex Eilertson, Rianna Lilleby and McKenzie Koenig.

**Marc Ness
Sports Writer**



Enthusiasm is contagious. It is a proven fact. The Hawley Lady Nugget Volleyball must agree, because everyone is very excited about the 2018 season. Leading the way with the enthusiasm is second-year coach Jen Christofferson. Jen is a winner and you just can't help but be excited too.

"Practice is going great," Christofferson said. "Every kid in the gym grades 9-12 has made the decision to give everything they have on every play. What more could we ask for! What we lack in varsity experience we make up for in athleticism and heart.

"Our motto this year is 'Relentless.' The girls have decided to raise their standard of excellence by increasing their mental toughness, getting physically stronger, and believing that they can get to every ball on that court each and every time. It has been rewarding to see the effort and the commitment from each kid out there."

The Nuggets had a strong 2017 season. The team even beat East Grand Forks in the first round of the playoffs, only to lose in round two to DGF. The team also graduated four strong starters (Marissa Thompson, Grace Grani, Makayla Weiss, Cara Hovelson). Thompson and Weiss were both all conference. Thompson graduated third all-time with 682 kills and received a scholarship to play Division 2 at Southwest State. Weiss graduated third all time in assists with 1,137.

While those are some incredible athletes, Christofferson is excited about 2018. She said that senior captain Rianna Lilleby will lead the team as a setter. Senior McKenna Karston will provide a powerful swing on the right side. In the middle, juniors Paige Thompson and Emily Tjaden will challenge teams with their agility and blocking (Thompson led the conference in blocks as a sophomore).

Junior McKenzie Koenig has shifted from libero to OH and sophomore Katie Todd will take over the libero position. Sophomore OH Maria Vetter will start the season with a small break in her radius (elbow) but

should return mid-September as a starter. Freshmen Grace Fleming (OH) and Alex Eilbertson (RH/S) have done a great job stepping up to fill the void caused by injury. All of these kids are athletic, strong, and committed to personal and team growth.

In the conference, Barnesville seems to have the strongest squad right now, but Perham and DGF are always tough teams. But in the HOL you never know what can happen on a given night. In the section, Detroit Lakes and Roseau have a lot of talent as well.

When asked about what Christofferson thinks of her team and her upcoming season you can just feel the enthusiasm.

"Our greatest goal this season is to be relentless in our pursuit of excellence on and off the court," she said. "We will strive to become a smart, scrappy, defensive team. We will need to pay attention to the details this season and make other teams uncomfortable with our ball placement.

"We will need to become mentally tough as volleyball is a game of mistakes. We need to overcome adversity and keep our emotions in check. These girls have the capability to do

great things if they find a way to come together each and every day. They need to understand that their bodies are ready, and now we just need to believe 100 percent of the time."

If energy and enthusiasm were commodities, Coach C and her Lady Nuggets would be millionaires. It will be a lot of fun to watch these grow, mature and get better every game.



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