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Nugget Netters Striving For Expecting Excellence



The Hawley Nuggets Volleyball team members are, left to right, front row-Destiny Flaten, Makenzie Halvorson, Jada Jegtvig, Taylor Reep, Ashley Fletcher, McKenzie Koenig; middle row-Grace Fleming, Elle Hastings, Anna Steer, Maria Vetter, Faith Rustad, Marissa Ahles, Alex Eilertson; back row-Coach Martin, Coach Baasch, Emily Tjaden, Rudee Hockett, Paige Thompson, Coach Christofferson, Coach Strand and Manager Abby Norris.

Marc Ness Sports Writer



Hawley has had pretty good volleyball teams and seasons over the years, and everyone has been mostly satisfied with that. This season things are going to be a little bit different with the Nugget Netters, said coach Jenny Christofferson.

"Most of the time it has been the coaching staff getting the players going and fired up. This year it is the players that are leading. They get us fired up," Christofferson said.

As the Nuggets enter their third season under Coach C., the talent is all over the place. You can see it in the younger grades as well as in this year's squad. When asked if this is the most talented group, Christofferson smiled and said yes.

"We have had some talented teams and some super-talented kids before, but as a team, we are talented. From a fan's perspective, we will be super-fun to watch."

Leading the way for the Nugget Netters will be the trio of senior captains, Paige Thompson, Emily Tjaden and Kenzie Koenig. Paige is considered by many as one of the best middle hitters in the state. Now, she will take her talents to the back row

as well.

"That is really amazing for a girl of her size to be able to move like she does. She is so quick and now that she will be playing (front and back) that is a huge compliment for her and huge for our team," Christofferson said.

Fellow captain Emily Tjaden may have been thought of as a dominant softball player who was a good volleyball player. Not anymore, according to Christofferson. She is now a great volleyball player as well.

"Emily deserves a lot of credit. She has gotten better in leaps and bounds. She is a force in her own right and she will be playing both front and back row as well. When Emily and Paige are lined up together, they are hungry and will feed them the ball. They are beasts, maybe some of the best hitters and blocker combinations in the area."

The Nuggets' third captain this

season is Kenzie Koenig. She brings a high level of enthusiasm, skills and confidence to the team. She will be the team's libero and one of the quickest players in the area.

"She is just irreplaceable," Christofferson said. "She brings so much to the table for us. She makes all the right calls out there on where we are going to hit the ball. It's just awesome."

Another player who will be leaned on heavily is Maria Vetter. While she is a junior, she plays like a senior. She gets out on the ball and makes amazing plays and all of the regular ones as well.

"This is her third year as a starter and she has great ball handling skills for us," Christofferson said. "She can play either outside hitter or right side hitter. She is a fantastic server and can place the ball right where she wants it."

Grace Fleming, another talented sophomore, can really get it going as well. She is a super-hard worker who wants to get better every day. She is one of the first girls in the gym and one of the last to leave. As she keeps getting better and better, so do the Nuggets.

Alex Eilertson, who is a

sophomore and the team's setter, is out with a stress fracture but should be back in the next couple of weeks. She does a great job at setter for the Nuggets.

At the moment, Faith Rustad has stepped into that spot and is doing a great job. Normally an outside hitter, Faith is doing it all right now. She has good hands and feet and even though she doesn't have any varsity experience, she looking very comfortable with the varsity team.

The long bodied Rudee

Hockett is an amazing blocker for the Nuggets. The 5'10" junior who plays more like 6'1" can play every position in the front row.

Also on varsity for the Nuggets this year is Anna Steer, Taylor Reep and Elle Hastings. All of the girls contribute to the Nugget netters and play important roles.

One area the coaching staff would like to improve on is winning the close games. Over the years they have proven that they can play with the best teams

in the area, but they need to continue to gain confidence that they can win those close games. One of the things the team is working on every day is an 18-18 drill. That means the match is tied and they have to get to 21 to win. Three straight points, or they go back to 18-18 until they get it.

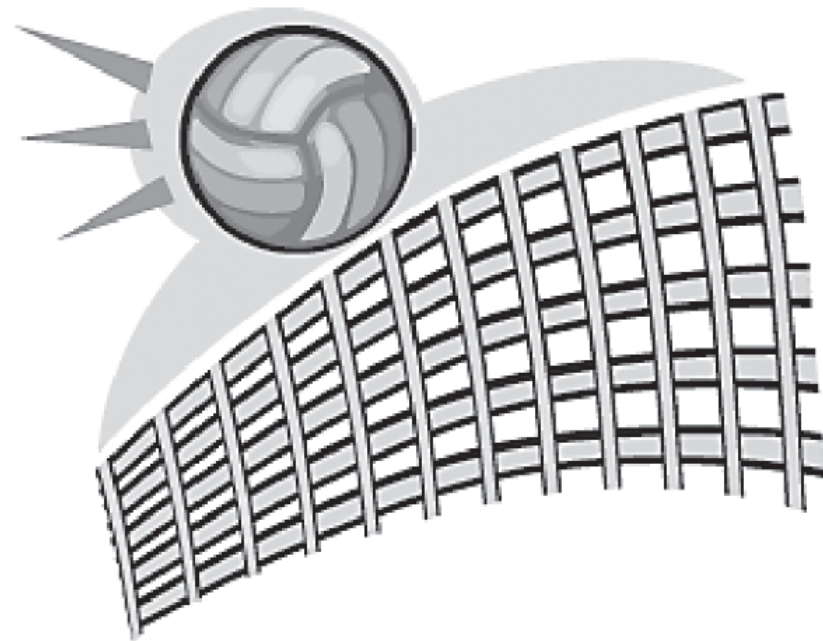
"We were one or two in every tournament we played in this summer for JO Volleyball," Christofferson said. "They can do it and they showed that this summer. Now they have to do it during the season. We talk about the motto for the season and that is 'Raising The Bar' and I think they will do it. Our expectation this year is excellence. That is not just how we think but it how the players think."

In the conference the top teams are Hawley, Perham and DGF with Breckenridge looking really good this summer.

"We are considered one of the favorites this season," Christofferson said. "I can see what people are saying with the talent we have, but now we need to show it every night. And I have faith in our team. I know they can bring it every night and that is a fun and wonderful experience for a coach, the team and the fans."



NUGGETS



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