

Lady Dawgs hope to return to volleyball playoffs with new coach

**By Mike Lee
Eagle Contributor**

Talk about a culture change. Megan Howard, after coaching middle school volleyball for six years at Class 6A Plano and 6A Prosper, recently began as head coach Class 1A Mullin High School. Howard went from coaching 34 players on her team to "hopefully six" this season at Mullin.

She had five players at the Lady Dawgs' first practice on Aug. 3, but hopes to have between six and 10 players.

"I'm looking forward to working with smaller numbers so we can build stronger relationships," said Howard, a 2003 graduate of Comanche High School. "With smaller numbers, we can address specific needs -- whether they are individual or as a team. With smaller numbers, you know exactly what each player needs to work on. It's more specialized coaching."

Mullin returns two players from last year in juniors Montanna Day and Zoe Maas. The 5-foot-9 Day is a third-year player for Mullin. Darcey Derrick, another junior, has played in the past. Leading newcomers include freshmen Allie Powell and Tyranny Latta.

Help could come from junior Taylor Lee, sophomore Andi Voelkel, and freshmen Sophia Williams, Melisa Bocanegra and Eden

Pledger.

The Lady Dawgs made the Class 1A playoffs last year as the third-place team in district. Mullin lost to perennial state power Bronte in bidistrict.

"I'm impressed with the school board and administration here," Howard said. "You can tell they have a lot of pride in Mullin volleyball. I want to give them something the whole community can be proud of."

But winning isn't the first priority this year as high school sports teams deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our priorities are different this year. Our No. 1 priority is student safety," Howard said. "We want to make sure we are following UIL guidelines, and we have our own protocol."

Another priority for Howard is to provide some coaching stability since the Lady Dawgs have been through a number of coaches that stay at Mullin for one year.

"The first thing the players asked me was if I was going to leave after a year," Howard said. "I want the girls in the sixth grade this year to have me as

their coach for their senior year. That's what they've needed here for a while. The players need to have as much faith in me as I have in them. We need to trust each other."

Mullin competes in District 8-2A, a combination Class 2A/1A district. The eight-team district includes Class 2A teams Coleman and De Leon, along with 1A teams Gorman, Gustine, Lingville, Mullin, Rochelle and Zephyr. Both 2A teams will qualify for the 2A playoffs. The top three 1A finishers in district will qualify for the 1A playoffs.



Mullin Lady Bulldogs Coach Megan Howard, Tyranny Latta, Allie Powell, Zoe Maas, Darcey Derrick, Montanna Day.