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## Titans Off-Season Work Paying Dividends Early On



The cooperative between Norman County East and Ulen-Hitterdal has been successful over the past few years and has shown growth and improvement among all Titan Track and Field athletes since its inception four years ago.

That success comes from the competitive drive and talented, focused athletes Norman County East and Ulen-Hitterdal have brought to the meets each spring. Another part of that success comes from strength, knowledge, and guidance under Titans' head coach Ryan Pahl.

Pahl is entering his fourth year as head coach, taking the reins in the first year of the co-op. Pahl is assisted by Hunter Schow, entering her second year on staff with the NCE-UH Track and Field program.

Much like other area programs, the Titans are having to focus on rebuilding their team this year. Despite having a nice set of returning athletes, there were quite a few lost to graduation over the past two years who brought a lot of leadership to the team.

However, Pahl was quick to note that while, "Last year's group had a great mixture of personalities, talent, and leadership that our team will miss this upcoming, but I don't think I've ever had a group get after the first week of practices like this team has."

That dedication and internal drive will be key to NCE-UH's success as they will have to leave more spots open this year. With numbers down, "This just means we won't have the relays we may have had in the past," noted Pahl. "But everybody that came out for the season is working their tail off each day to achieve their own personal goals."

Even with numbers down there are some athletes that are able to lead the way and set the tone for younger athletes in practices. Seniors Travis Sullivan (sprinter/jumper) and Trevin Stalberger (thrower) get to cap off their senior year with a season. Their strong consistent presence across multiple disciplines has set a positive tone and a strong example for the novice tracksters.

Joining in on the leadership roles and strong examples are juniors Riley Ramstorf (runner/thrower), Dylan Nysetvold (thrower), Soren Hoekstra (hurdler/jumper); sophomore Cole Bentley (runner/jumper/thrower); and freshmen Thomas Gunnufson (sprinter/jumper) and Dirk Booth (sprinter/thrower).

Pahl said, "A few of these athletes have been a part of the NCE-UH Track and Field team since its beginning four years ago. The knowledge they bring to practices to help the younger athletes and how they themselves have progressed over the years is vital to the creation of a successful program."

Another component of the success is the work put in during the off-season. While all the athletes continued to progress and improve athletically, the Titan throwers (on both the boys and the girls side) were markedly impressive.



The Titans boys track team members are, left to right, front row-Tanner Swanson, Axel Kjono, Ayden Woltjer; middle row-Dylan Nysetvold, Travis Sullivan, Dirk Booth, Riley Ramstorf, Thomas Gunnufson; back row-Coach Hunter Schow, Teddy Booth, Trevin Stalberger, Keian Wibbels, Cole Bentley, Soren Hoekstra and Coach Ryan Pahl.

"All of our throwers put in extra work on their own when spring sports shut down last year and it's showing this spring," stated Coach Pahl.

While the pandemic is still showing its effects this year, at least there are practices and competitions unlike last year.

"The conference did an awesome job putting together a schedule to get all teams at least seven varsity meets," said Pahl. "But this is down

from the nine or ten or more from other years."

Pahl realizes that he and his track and field athletes are lucky as it is easier to social distance during this sport because of being outside, spreading out along the tracks and pits, and being able to have individual workouts.

Pahl's positive attitude, paired with the silver lining of being an outdoor, more individualized sport

has set the opportunity for the Titans and the rest of the surrounding schools to at least have a season this year, bringing in a little more excitement.

Coach Pahl notes, "Go Titans! And good luck to the other area schools!"

NCE-UH had their first track meet on April 15 at Bagley High School and they plan on finishing their regular season right where it started in Bagley on May 25.

- BOYS ROSTER**
- 12: Trevin Stalberger
  - 12: Travis Sullivan
  - 12: Teddy Booth
  - 11: Soren Hoekstra
  - 11: Keian Jenson
  - 11: Dylan Nysetvold
  - 11: Riley Ramstorf
  - 10: Cole Bentley
  - 9: Dirk Booth
  - 9: Thomas Gunnufson
  - 7: Axel Kjono
  - 7: Tanner Swanson
  - 7: Ayden Woltjer

## Titans Girls Track Positivity And Perserverance Noticeable



"We were able to be outside on Day One!" noted four-year head coach of the Norman County East/Ulen-Hitterdal girls track team. And that is just one positive marking the Titans' 2021 campaign.

After losing last year's entire season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and questions circling throughout this school year on activities, virtual learning, and returning to normal. The Titans are embracing each opportunity and have shown a lot of energy and excitement coming into their spring track and field season.

Senior Amelia Gunnufson is back for her final season in a Titans uniform. Serving as captain for the NCE-UH track and field team, Gunnufson is able to bring her experience, work ethic, and leadership to help keep the Titans moving in a positive direction. Gunnufson is planning on showcasing her athletic ability through the sprinting events as well as long jump.

Also returning to the Titans are junior Michaela Halvorson (hurdler) and freshmen Chloe Abraham (runner) and Cassidy Abraham (runner/thrower).

Even with these strong returners, there are still some gaps to fill in the NCE-UH squad; however, that may be difficult as "numbers are down since we graduated eight seniors last year," stated Coach Pahl.

But that doesn't mean there won't be any success for the Titans. Pahl explained, "This just means we

won't have relays we may have had in the past, but everybody that came out for the season is working their tail off each day to achieve their own personal goals."

Likewise, Pahl noted, "We have a solid mixture of experience and youth to help drive the team in a positive direction."

That positive direction will be important to continue to recruit athletes into the program. Between big graduation numbers from the past two years and lower participation out of the seventh and eighth graders, the Titans, like many schools, are looking for ways to round out their rosters.

But just filling in events isn't the definitive goal for Coach Pahl and the Titan tracksters. While it would be nice to have more numbers out for the program, he said ultimately, "Our goal for this team is to compete and have fun."

And that should be possible as track and field does allow for individual as well as team success. Then pairing those opportunities with the good dynamic of personalities and work ethic out this year, the NCE-UH Titans are putting themselves in prime position for improvement, enjoyment, and competitiveness at all the meets.

The meets, however, were reduced this year, mirroring schedule adjustments made to other sports seasons as well.

"We have a lot fewer meets this season," said Pahl. While he credits the Pine-to-Prairie Conference for getting at least seven in this year, that is down from the usual 10-plus they are able to participate in during a normal track and field year.

But they will take what they



The Titans girls track team members are, left to right, front row-Barbara Trego, Daleah Spaeth, Michaela Halvorson, Amelia Gunnufson; back row-Coach Hunter Schow, Cassidy Abraham, Elise Tweten, Chloe Abraham and Coach Ryan Pahl.

can get and the competition will be tough either way.

"All of the conference teams are the teams to beat if you want to get to the top," Pahl said.

And being an individual sport, that is plausible for the NCE-UH athletes, especially the way they have attacked these first few weeks

of practice with grit, determination, and driven focus, keeping up with their positive attitudes and finding the silver linings in all their situations.

While Coach Ryan Pahl has been the head coach for all four years of the cooperative, he is not alone.

Helping with the NCE-UH athletes is second-year assistant Hunter Schow.

The Titans jump-started their season on April 15 at the meet in Bagley. They then move on to Ada-Borup the week following.

- GIRLS ROSTER:**
- 12: Amelia Gunnufson
  - 11: Michaela Halvorson
  - 10: Barbara Trego
  - 9: Cassidy Abraham
  - 9: Chloe Abraham
  - 9: Elise Tweten
  - 8: Daleah Spaeth