

NEW ERA

PIAA READY TO WELCOME GIRLS WRESTLING

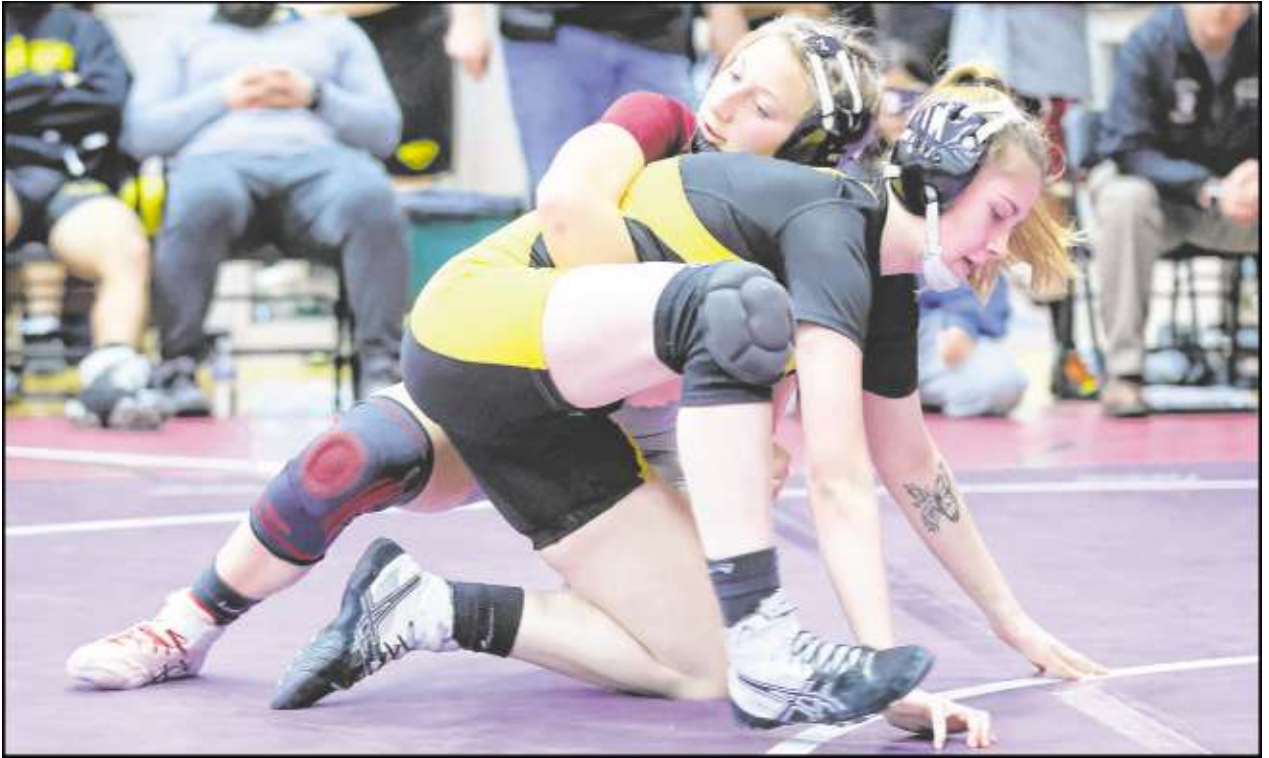
Panther Valley's Brenda Banks won a state championship in girls wrestling a year ago. This season, she will go after PIAA gold.



**THE 2023-24 TIMES NEWS
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FEATURE STORY



Lehighton's Maggie Pagotto (top) and Panther Valley's Haylee Fessler compete during a match last season. Both the Indians and Panthers will field girls wrestling teams this season. TIME NEWS FILE PHOTO

New era

PIAA - and area teams - ready to welcome girls wrestling

BY PATRICK MATSINKO

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In May, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) Board of Directors' voted unanimously to accept sponsorship and jurisdiction of girls wrestling for the 2023-24 season at the high school and junior high level.

It was a historic move for a sport that has grown exponentially - with the 100th school to approve girls wrestling coming in February of this year, a milestone the PIAA established for it to consider sanctioning the sport. By the time it was ap-

proved, there were 111 official teams.

Last year saw Panther Valley's Brenda Banks capture regional and state titles as a freshman, and placed fourth at the US Marine Corps Junior National Wrestling Championships for Team PA.

Lehighton, Panther Valley (which uses a co-op with Marian), Palmerton and Tamaqua are among 16 District 11 schools - and 187 across Pennsylvania - competing in girls wrestling.

And while they don't have a team, Northwestern Katie Brensinger has been stellar for the Tigers, capturing

a regional title and placing third at states a year ago.

The excitement and enthusiasm are undeniable.

Palmerton approved its girls program in June, something head coach Justin Petersen has been eager to see come to fruition.

"Since we've been pushing it, the growth of it, and seeing them all have fun with it and enjoying it and having new friends that are doing it, has been awesome," said Petersen. "And also, one of the biggest statistics when I was presenting this to the

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board that I thought was important was, a big percentage of the girls that come out for wrestling are first time athletes ... it's a lot of girls that aren't involved, who are now involved.

"Since I've been coaching, the main thing for me is that I love this sport. I love what it can give young individuals moving forward in their lives. That's the main thing. And to get more kids involved with it, means more kids will get those same things from it, those characteristics, those skill sets. I always want more kids involved because of that. We were big advocates for girls wrestling from the get-go."

That inclusion at Palmerton includes girls wrestling coach Josh Rake, a teacher at the junior high in the school district, who will work to keep the program growing from the ground up.

"It was a long journey," said Rake. "Petersen and I have both been advocating for girls wrestling for a while now. I've been encouraging girls to try out for wrestling and become a part of it. And not a lot of programs have a head girls coach, so that was very helpful in terms of being able to schedule matches and things like that. It's just been a long journey of recruiting girls and reaching out to other sports that might be interested ... girls that might play field hockey, getting them involved, they've been a big help with us as well.

"We just started, obviously, but we've had a lot of the girls come into our open mats, open practices, for months now, so it's been good."

Senior Gretchen Schaible was the only girl on the Bombers' roster the last two years. The team now features sophomores Cassidy Merkel and Lea Schaible, juniors Skylar Benninger, Maddy Bennyhoff, Jade Kuhns and Faith Rudalavage and senior Samara Elliot. The future also looks bright with seventh graders Lila Faust-San-severino, Izabella McFarland, Makenna Ringler and Nickayla Tomsic in the fold.

"It's great," said Rake. "I'm so excited. I think this is a long-time coming to have girls finally have fair, equal competition against other girls. It is a great thing, a great step in the right direction for the sport. I'm excited to see it grow, I'm excited to see

it become what it is going to become. There are still a lot of unknowns right now, but we can tell already all of the tournaments that we're reaching out to are packed with numbers, which is amazing.

"We're wait-listed for one tournament, other tournaments are 20 teams deep. It's amazing. So it's definitely a huge step in the right direction. It's going to take some time to work itself out and be what it's supposed to be, but it's a good start so far."

Leighton's Maggie Pagotto advanced to states a year ago after a third-place finish at regionals. In grades seven through 12, the Indians have nine girls in their program, five middle school (which had none last season) and four high school (which only had Pagotto and Layla Bravo).

"All our girls are going to be rostered with our girls team so that they're eligible for the girls postseason, which means they can't wrestle in any boys meets," said Indians head coach Floyd Brown. "They're strictly wrestling against girls and that's it, whereas last year we had Madgie and she would wrestle on our boys team throughout the year and she would step in and she wrestled a couple of varsity matches. But she was also able to do any girls tournaments last year. This year, she will just be wrestling against girls, at least that's the we're going to do it.

"Some people may roster their girls on the boys team, depending on what they want to do. But we're trying to build a girls team. So they're wrestling only girls, and they're practicing with other girls at this point."

When it comes to matches, the dual meet schedule will now include matches with those teams that have girls programs, something that will begin for Leighton and Palmerton when the schools meet on Dec. 4.

"We're keeping our same schedule, so when we wrestle another school that has a girls team, we would have a boys JV, girls varsity, and then boys varsity," said Brown. "Those would be the three meets, in addition to middle school. So we would run it like that."

The girls tournament schedule has continued to evolve, and one of the biggest events is nearby with the Coal Cracker, which moved its girls tournament from Leighton to Jim Thorpe last year to accommodate massive growth in just its second

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Q&A

So what are some of the questions that will come with incorporating a new sport for this season? SanctionPA has an extensive and informative FAQ which is a great resource for those seeking information for girls wrestling at the junior high and varsity levels. Here are just a few examples:

• **HOW MANY CLASSIFICATIONS WILL THERE BE FOR GIRLS WRESTLING? ...** There will be one, so it won't be split into 2A and 3A as the boys teams are.

• **WHAT ARE THE WEIGHT CLASSES? ...** Girls wrestling will follow the NFHS 13-weight classes for girls: 100, 106, 112, 118, 124, 130, 136, 142, 148, 155, 170, 190, 235.

• **CAN A GIRL BE ON BOTH A BOYS TEAM AND A GIRLS TEAM? ...** No. Under PIAA rules, a student-athlete cannot be rostered on the boys and girls team at the same time in any sport. A girl will need to be rostered on either a girls team or a boys team. If a girl chooses to wrestle on the boys team (with principal approval) when there is also a girls team at her school, then that girl cannot participate in the girls postseason.

• **WHEN IS THE POSTSEASON? ...** The PIAA will sponsor a girls individual state championship, beginning in March 2024. It will be held with the boys in the Giant Center, March 7-9 for the boys he first time.

JIM THORPE



Members of the 2023-24 Jim Thorpe boys basketball team include, front row from left, Ben Goldberg, Aaron Curran, Patrick Gallagher, Christian Barile, Matthew Domski, Pierce Gothard, Messiah Woodley and Andrew Coolbaugh. Back row, Ethan Moore, Ayden Yeakel, Caiden Hodor, Zachary Zurn, Zion Spruill, Josh Spruill, Tylieb Bullock, Aiden Curran and Brody Schrantz. JOE WICKERSHAM/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Thorpe boys set the stage for success

BY RICH STRACK
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Turn the page to a new chapter for Jim Thorpe boys basketball.

Bryan Bednar takes over the program after last year's 8-13 record. He brings a resume of coaching experience at Emmaus and Parkland to the Olympians' roster of 16 players, with five returning players.

Five seniors should see extensive action this season beginning with Ben Goldberg. "Ben is one of our leaders," said Bednar. "We expect him to contribute to our scoring and to help set up his teammates for opportunities to put the

ball in the basket."

Josh Spruill has experience at the varsity level and can score down low. Bednar hopes that Spruill will be one of the team's top rebounders.

With high marks for his ball handling skills, Matt Domski will play point guard. "Matt is very good at setting up our offense. He's also a good distributor of the ball and is quick to the hole when he sees the opportunity to penetrate the defense," said Bednar.

Seniors Tylieb Bullock-Parsley and Andrew Coolbaugh will also see action from their forward positions and also help with rebounding.

Thorpe will send seven or even eight players into the games so Bednar has solid team depth to help mix and match against opposing players. Junior Aaron Curran steps from the gridiron to the hardwood. "He's a really tough kid who you could just tell by watching him play that he loves the game," said Bednar. "We will count on him to add to our scoring."

Sophomore Pierce Gothard is a "well-rounded athlete" who can shoot from the outside and drive the lane as well. Another sophomore, Ethan Moore, will add rebounding strength off the bench and junior Christian Barile has

good ball handling skills and has shown scoring accuracy, according to Bednar.

Many of the Olympians achieved success in summer league play and Bednar believes that should transfer into the upcoming high school season. The team's identity is yet to be determined, but they are focusing on having balance in both their offensive and defensive style of play.

"We have enough team speed to play up tempo," Bednar said, "but we are also emphasizing the discipline that is needed to control the tempo when we play the halfcourt game."

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JIM THORPE



Members of the 2023-24 Jim Thorpe girls basketball team include, front row from left, Makena Scherer, Sarah Hartman, Kiara Ginopolas, Olivia Rosenberger, Madison Sargent and Isabella Sully. Back row, head coach Milton Moronta, Avery Balliet, Julianna Bowen, Kimora Seals-Griffith, Amara Robinson, Jaylah Yeakel and Leah Zurawa. JOE WICKERSHAM/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

New direction brings optimism for JT

BY RICH STRACK
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Milton Moronta takes over as the head Jim Thorpe girls' basketball coach and despite low roster numbers, sees the road ahead will be paved for success this season following last year's 12-11 record.

With just 13 girls and three returning starters, Thorpe will bring talent and relentless energy to the hardwood.

"We're excited by what we have seen at practice," said Moronta. "Our starting five at this point will have four seniors."

With a team that has no players who averaged in

double figures last year, Amara Robinson returns and will be expected to be a top scorer. She has "dynamic" skills according to Moronta.

"Amara is a playmaker with a very high basketball IQ. She has great court vision, and has the skill set to score 10 to 15 points a game."

The outside shooting game will feature senior Kiara Ginopolas. She has experience after playing in 19 games last year, and can hit the three-pointers. "She's our sharpshooter, and has set a personal goal to eclipse the school record of eight three-pointers in

one game."

Thorpe's Energizer Bunny is senior point guard, Sarah Hartman, a tireless player with relentless offensive and defensive mobility. Hartman averaged nine points a game a season ago, and will set up the offensive plays with her ball-handling skills. Moronta said she will be a "disruptive" force on defense against opposing top scorers.

Meanwhile, Juliana Bowen will be utilized as a center in the traditional sense.

"She can play down on the block where we can get her the ball at the low

post," said Moronta. "Juliana is a physical presence, and will be counted on for rebounds on both ends of the court."

The fifth starter might be freshman Jaylah Keakle. At 5-foot, 10-inches tall, she's aggressive at the forward position, as well as physical and "serious about the game", according to Moronta.

Depth should be an asset for the Olympians. Sophomores, Avery Balliet and Makena Scherer have shown court presence and hustle. Scherer will be asked to handle some of the rebounding responsibility.

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JIM THORPE



Members of the 2023-24 Jim Thorpe wrestling team include, front row from left, Justice Richardson, Stephen Korte, Cooper Kresge, Chris Jacobacci, Donovan Llewellyn; middle row, Marcus Muffley, Rafael Dinarte, Max Pfeifer, Eric Irizarry, Owen Acker, Jude Zito, Ricky Kenna; back row, Cael Heaney, Nik Schwartz, Blake Carroll, Pete Almeida, Christian Binder and Connor Zurawa. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Thorpe looking to take step forward

BY PATRICK MATSINKO
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Optimism — and turn-out — are high for the Jim Thorpe wrestling program this season.

The Olympians had more than 25 wrestlers out for the team, and return a solid core of upperclassmen eager to help the team take another step forward.

“Things are looking good,” said third-year head coach Dan Heaney. “We have quite a few upperclassmen that are returning; most of our varsity lineup is returning, so we feel pretty good about that. We should have a full lineup, and we’re just looking forward to getting the season started.”

Jim Thorpe went 10-7 a year ago and brings back seniors Ricky Kenna (21-16, sixth at districts, 160 pounds), Cael Heaney (160), Max Pfeifer (145), Pete Almeida (285), Rafael Dinarte (152), Jayden Mantilla (189), and Eric Irizarry (145), all of whom have significant varsity experience.

Additionally, sophomore Stephen Korte (27-11, sixth at districts, 120 pounds), juniors Chris Jacobacci (127) and Blake Carroll (215) bring valuable experience to the team.

Two upperclassmen, Nik Schwartz (170) and Owen Acker (138), are also returning, both of whom have the potential to secure spots in the starting lineup.

“We had open rooms through the summer. We bring in different clinicians to work with the guys,” said Heaney. “So we had guys come in and work with our kids through the summer, and then leading into the season we were opening the weight room and had an open wrestling room a couple days a week. Guys were in the weight room training all offseason. I’m happy with where we’re at.”

Another newcomer to the team this year is freshman Jared Mantilla (17-7, District 11 junior high medalist a year ago), who should be at 133 pounds.

Freshmen Cooper Kresge, Aiden Bowman

and Jake Chamides will be in the mix at 107 pounds, while freshmen Donovan Llewellyn and Wyatt Berger will compete for time at 133. Freshman Jude Zito and sophomores Acker and Justice Richardson will be in the mix at 138 pounds, while sophomores Cole Harwood and Connor Zurawa, along with Schwartz, a junior who missed last season, will be vying for time at 170 pounds.

Sophomore Christian Binder should compete for time at 189 pounds, while junior Marcus Muffley will slot in at 215 pounds. Muffley missed the 2022-23 season.

The team has also been See **WRESTLE** on Page 7

JIM THORPE



Sarah Hartman

GIRLS

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ties when she is sent into play.

Getting plenty of court time will be senior Olivia Rosenberger, who steps from the goal mouth of the soccer field to the basketball hardwood. Freshman Isabella Sully adds to the physical style of play that Moronta will continue to emphasize.

He describes his team's style of play as up tempo on offense, and "in your face" on defense.

"We will look to steal the ball, and play physical on defense. We want our opponents to be one-and-done when they take their shots with our rebounding efforts. Defense wins games."

Moronta's goals are to compete for a league championship, make the districts and play at Martz Hall after the regular season has been completed.

"We understand there will be a few bumps in the road," Moronta said, "and that we have little overall experience, but we have a good foundation here, and we are up for the challenge."

Following the rich tradition of Jim Thorpe girls' basketball, the 2023 Olympian edition hopes to add their mark to the program's long period of success.

BOYS

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The Olympians' defensive scheme will be determined on a game by game basis. Playing zone or man-to-man defense depends upon the opponent.

"Rebounding on both ends will be key for us,"

said Bednar, "and putting pressure on the ball at half or full court will also be determined by the score of each game."

With his first year at the helm, Bednar is still evaluating his team talent. Predictions for postseason play and competing for a league title are not yet on his radar, but will come

with early team success. His philosophy is centered on aggressive play and endurance which will be important late in games.

"What we know is that we have athletic ability and that is crucial to play well at the high school varsity level. We also know our team has a no quit attitude. They practice had

and they will play hard. We expect to compete and to play our best basketball in the fourth quarter, especially in close games."

If everything goes according to the plan, Jim Thorpe will be competing for postseason play as the team moves into the second half of the regular season schedule.

WRESTLE

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boosted by a burgeoning elementary program now in its third with over 50 kids, which has started to increase numbers at the junior high level and ultimately feeds into the varsity program

With Korte and Kenna both medaling at districts and several others on the cusp of landing on the podium, Heaney has seen the squad put in the work to take another step forward.

"Stephen put a lot of off-season time in, wrestling at clubs, doing a lot of competitions," Heaney said of Korte. "Same with Chris Jacobacci, they did a lot of off-season work, on their own, in addition to the stuff that we did. I think the whole team in general is just looking forward to the season. We have a lot of guys who have been with us since their freshman year that were new to wrestling that are seniors now, and I think that they're just looking forward to having a good season.

"As much as we'd like to see individual success, I think our team as a whole likes to win (as a team); the team success is as important as the individual success. Even a guy like Stephen, who's had a lot of individual success and Ricky Kenna, those guys want the team to be successful as much as they want to be successful. They're always helping out with the younger guys and trying to make everyone better."

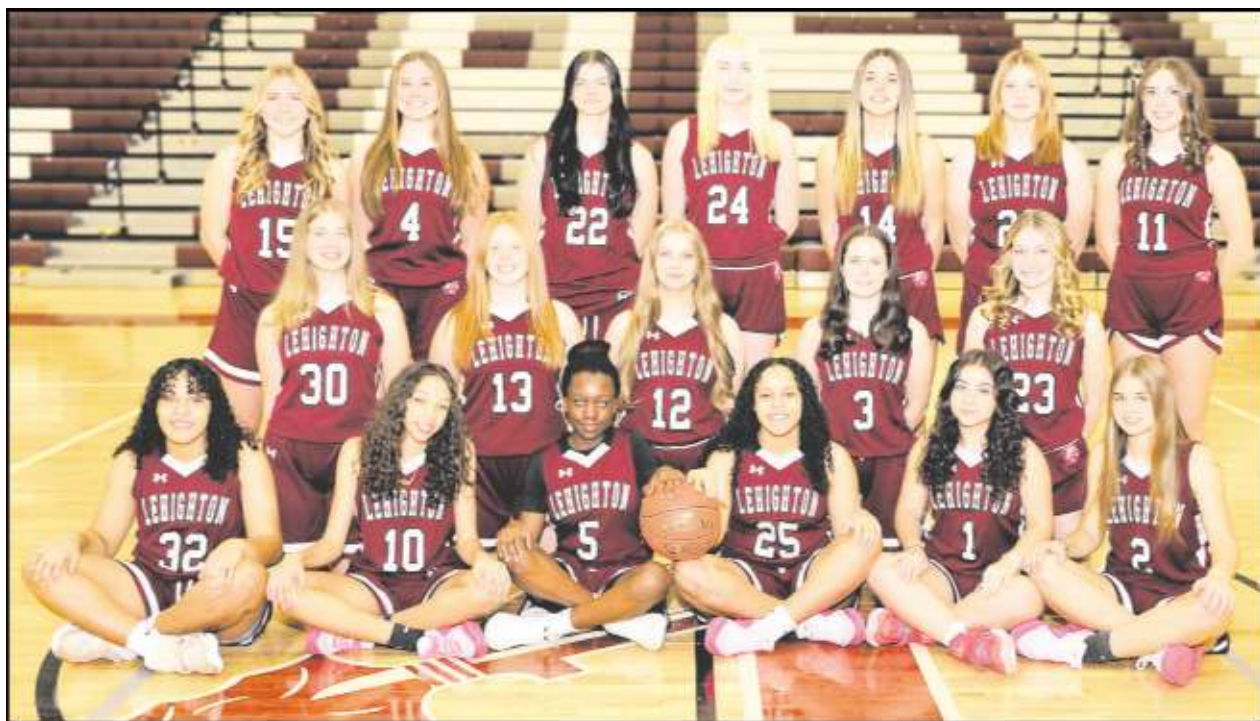
The squad has inspired each other to continue to

improve, both on and off the mat, something that has the Olympians in position to keep moving in the right direction.

"The entire team has been working diligently in preparation for the season and is eagerly anticipating the opportunity to compete," said Heaney.

They'll get the chance to do so at home in a few marquee events, as the Olympians will host the Jim Thorpe Christmas Tournament Dec. 27-28, and the annual Schuylkill League Championships on Jan. 13.

LEHIGHTON



Members of the 2023-24 Lehigh Valley girls basketball team include, front row from left, Calli Hewey, Cayley Reph, Purity Mahugi, C'anna Hewey, Aryanna Arzuagu, Taylor Moyer; middle row, Elizabeth Troutman, Leah Uyvari, Sabella Kresge, Ariel Barthol, Olivia Sheckler; back row, Emma Repsher, Charli McHugh, Morgan Costenbader, Sophia Saville, Ryleigh Trotman, Ella Sittler and Timara Klotz. RICH SMITH/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Indians a mystery heading into season

BY EMMETT MCCALL
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Joe Berezwick has been coaching girls basketball for a quarter of a century.

That experience has made him relatively good at getting a feel for his team going into the season.

But this year's Lehigh Valley team is the exception.

"I'm really having a hard time putting my finger on the pulse of this team," said Berezwick. "This is the first time in my 25 years of coaching that we didn't have a full schedule of summer workouts and games. When you combine that with a few less preseason practices, it has made it a lot more difficult than usual for me to gauge exactly where we are heading into the season."

Injuries, a key transfer, and some players having other commitments all combined to prevent Berezwick from getting most of his projected starters and key reserves together this summer.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing just how good we can be this season," Berezwick said. "We have some really good athletes coming back, and as unlucky as we were a year ago with injuries (the Indians' top three scorers all missed time — two of them significant), the one benefit of that was it allowed some younger kids to get a lot more playing time than would have been the case if we had stayed healthy."

"So now it's just a matter of these kids getting

some experience playing together, because they hadn't been together on the court as a team until our first official practice last week."

Lehigh Valley suffered several key losses from last year's starting lineup as Taylor Bowman (7.2 ppg.) and Jordan Haley (4.9 ppg.) both graduated, while freshman Olivia Serfass (9.6 ppg.) transferred.

Heading the list of returnees for the Indians are senior Charli McHugh and junior Emma Repsher. Both players are coming off ACL surgery after getting injured a year ago. Repsher missed 18 games, while McHugh missed 10.

The good news is that both players came back far quicker than Berezwick

anticipated.

"When they got hurt, I didn't even know if they would be ready for the start of this basketball season," said Berezwick. "But both girls are incredible athletes who worked extremely hard to rehab their knees and get back. Not only are they a full-go heading into our season, but they both actually made it back in time to play soccer in the fall."

McHugh was averaging 7.8 points per game, while Repsher was at 9.8 ppg. before their injuries. They will be joined in the starting lineup by Leah Uyvari, Ryleigh Trotman and Timara Klotz. Uyvari and Trotman, who are both sophomores, saw quality

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LEHIGHTON



Members of the 2023-24 Lehighton wrestling team includes, front row from left, Cody Troutman, Braxton Roetz, Mike D'Amico, Maggie Pagotto, Lukas Croizier, Preston DeGrazia, Cody Snyder, Danny Edgar, Zoltan Bedocs; middle row, Brok Scott, Anthony Amari, Aiden Dugan, Cassidy Litts, Aidan Gruber, Connor Dugan, Evan Wentz, Carter Hontz, Konner Nalesnik, Deven Armbruster, Jacob Ferguson; back row, Brian Sebring, Wyatt Smith, Addison Chavanic, Caleb Schrepple, Hunter Kintz, Marc Macias, Reese Balk, Hamilton Traylor, Camryn Dimmitt, Reese Scaturro, Connor Roetz, Kale Schultz, Jake Hall and Sebastian Warner. Other members of the team include Blake Muffley, Ethan Nothstein, Wyatt Sherer, Deacon Kimmins, Breydan Hand, Cooper Hartsell, Garrett Heiland, Cailey Hinkson and Riley Williams. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Indians' wrestling after more success

BY PATRICK MATSINKO
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Many of the names are the same and the faces are familiar.

They've helped set a standard of success for the Lehighton wrestling program, one that included a Schuylkill League tournament team title and berth in the semifinals at the District 11 Class 2A Team Tournament.

With a solid core of talent and experience returning, along with tremendous depth, the Indians are in position to be a major force once again this winter.

"We're looking forward to this year," said Lehighton head coach Floyd Brown, who was the Class 2A Coach of the Year a season ago. "We have a lot of returning starters back, a couple guys coming up that have experience from our

middle school team, and a whole lot of newcomers."

At the league tournament, the Indians saw Aidan Gruber and Reese Balk capture individual titles, while fellow returnees Connor Dugan and Evan Wentz both reached the championship round. The Tribe's depth helped them secure the title, with 12 wrestlers placing in the top six to top Pottsville, 217.5-211. "Winning the league tournament was big for our program, because it's really the first championship we've won in a long time," said Brown. "Our goal is to hopefully repeat that. And we had a really good offseason, probably the best offseason I can remember. I think it brought a little bit more excitement to it.

"We had 30 kids attend camp this summer. We

had a really good turnout for our open workouts. We have 43 kids on our team right now, which is great. So it's been really good."

Gruber, who is closing in on 100 career victories, will be eyeing a big senior season after qualifying for states as a sophomore and reaching regionals each of the last two years.

Balk enjoyed a breakout campaign a year ago as a junior, winning over 30 matches and qualifying for regionals, though he was unable to compete due to an injury.

Jacob Ferguson doubled his win total as a sophomore and punched his ticket to regionals a season ago, and will be looking to make another big jump this season.

"Most of our guys are going to be two-year starters for the most part, some

three-, some four-year starters," said Brown.

Senior Ethan Nothstein will return at 107 pounds and be joined at the weight by freshman Michael D'Amico, while Gruber will likely be at 113 pounds. Dugan, senior Jacob Hall, and senior Reese Scaturro will all likely slot in at 120 pounds.

Freshman Lukas Croizier, a runner-up at middle school districts the past two years, figures to make an impact at 127 pounds for the Indians. Senior Anthony Amari will also compete for time at 127.

Sophomore Blake Muffley will likely be at 133 pounds.

Wentz, a sophomore, figures to be at 139 pounds, along with sophomore Danny Edgar, and freshmen Braxton Roetz and Cody See **WRESTLE** on Page 11

LEHIGHTON



Joe Roth

BOYS

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scoring last year, averaging just over 11 points a game. He also had a team-high 54 three-pointers. Roth averaged just a shade under 10 points a game, while Roberts, Johnson and Serfass all averaged around six or seven points a contest.

In addition to the starters, the Indians return last season's sixth-man in John Light. Also expected to see quality minutes off the bench are Nick Hawk, Talin Fairchild and Yadiel Acosta-Rodriguez. Rounding out the varsity roster are Aiden Solt, Bekim Cokrlija and Dante

Kalbach.

While Miller is confident in his team's ability to score points, he knows the key to its success will be on the other end of the court.

"We've really stressed defense," said Miller. "We need to be better defensively than we were last year, and I think we are on our way to getting there."

"We still aren't where we need to be defensively if we plan on playing basketball into late February and early-March, but we are getting there. The kids have bought into it, and are working hard to improve defensively."

Lehighton went 8-14 overall a year ago, but struggled to a 3-11 re-

cord in the always-tough Schuylkill League Division 1.

"Our goals are to qualify for districts, and also get into the expanded Schuylkill League playoffs," said Miller. "We struggled in the league a year ago, so for us to reach our goals, we need to be better in league play."

"That means protecting our home court. There are a lot of tough places to win games at in our league, and we want to make our home court just as difficult for opponents to come into and win. If we are able to accomplish that, I think our goals of playing in the postseason are definitely attainable."

GIRLS

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time a year ago after the Indians were hit with injuries. Klotz is a junior who will play guard.

Ariel Barthol and Morgan Costenbader are expected to be the top two reserves. Rounding out the varsity roster are Aryanna Arzuaga, Taylor Moyer, Purity Mahugi, Cayley Reph, Sabella Kresge, Ella Sittler, Olivia Sheckler, So-

phia Saville, Canna Hewey, Elizabeth Troutman and Calli Hewey.

"We have some good athletes, and I think that was reflected in our defense a year ago," said Berezwick. "We do a nice job of pressuring defensively. Our record wasn't what we had hoped it would be last year (5-17), but our defensive numbers were very good. For a majority of the season, we were allowing an average of less than 40 points a game."

"What hurt us last year was after we lost Emma and Charli, we struggled to score points. That's the one area where we need to make our biggest improvement. We averaged less than 35 points a game last year. We need to improve in that area, and I think we have some kids who can help us do that."

Because of the question marks he enters the season with, Berezwick said his goal for the team is a simple one.

"We just want to get better every time we step on the court," he explained. "I think we definitely have the potential to improve on our win total from last year, but we aren't setting a goal of a certain amount of wins or making the playoffs, or anything like that. Our main goal is just to improve each and every practice, and each and every game."

"If we can do that, the wins and playoff opportunity will come."

WRESTLE

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Snyder, a group that might also see time at 133.

At 145 and 152 pounds, sophomore Konner Nalesnik should make an impact after placing at junior high districts a year ago. Sophomore Carter Hontz also returns after seeing time in the lineup a year ago. Freshman Cody Troutman will also be in the mix. Also, sophomore Sebastian Warner will likely see time at 152 pounds, along with sophomores Carter McCown and Kale Schultz.

Ferguson figures to be a key contributor at 160 pounds, along with Zoltan Bedocs and junior Wyatt



Blake Muffley

Smith, freshman Aiden Dugan and senior Deacon Kimmins.

Junior Brok Solt returns at 172 pounds, with Kimmins also in the mix.

Deven Armbruster, a junior, returns at 189 pounds, along with senior Camryn Dimmitt, freshmen Preston DiGrazia and Asher Traylor.

Senior Wyatt Sherer is a staple in the lineup at 215 pounds, while Balk returns at heavyweight. Freshman Marc Macias, senior Breydon Hand, Riley Williams, sophomore Brian Sebring, and juniors Connor Roetz and Caleb Schrepple are also in the mix at 285.

Lehighton will also have a girls team this season. Senior Maggie Paggotto advanced to states after a third-place finish at regionals a year ago. Freshman Cassidy Litts, sophomore Caeley Hinkson and Addison Chavanic will also help to continue to grow the girls program for the Tribe.

MARIAN



Members of the 2023-24 Marian boys basketball team include, front row from left, Nathaniel Rosario, Jake Tom, Jacob De La Cruz, Justin De La Cruz; back row, Jacob Miller, Bruce Hopeck, Jesse Rodino Julius Currie, James Rodino and Alex Thomas. SUE SERNAK-MARTINELLI/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Colts to rely on strong returning core

BY BRAD HURLEY
BHURLEY@TNONLINE.COM

After a 14-10 season, and a Schuylkill League Division 3 title in the 2022-2023 season, Marian once again figures to be competing for postseason medals this season with a strong core returning.

The Colts will look to get over the hump after an early-round exit to Minersville a season ago in the District 11 2A playoffs.

If Marian is able to do just that, its returning scorer in Julius Currie (15.3 points per game) will be a big reason why. Currie was one of the better shooters in the Times

News area last season, hitting 67 three-pointers.

“Having Julius back for us is obviously very important. He is playing very well, and looks really good,” said Marian head coach Scott Murphy. “He has improved his game on both ends of the floor. We’re expecting big things from him. Along with being excited about Julius, we’re really excited about what we’ve been seeing from our team chemistry. All of our guys have really been connecting and communicating well.”

Returning along with Currie is big man Jesse Rodino, which had a strong

season a year ago averaging eight points per game. Also returning are James Rodino, Jacob Miller, Bruce Hopeck, Jake Tom, Jacob Delacruz, Justin Delacruz and Alex Thomas.

“We’re going to go about 9-10 deep. I really like our depth. We have a lot of guys that bring different things to the table,” said Murphy. “The Rodino twins are guys who bring a physicality to the game from the football field, Miller, Hopeck and Tom all bring experience, and the Delacruz twins both have nice size and are smooth out there and Thomas is

going to be a contributor for us as well. It’s a good group that we’re excited about. We also have a talented freshmen class, and a solid JV program going right now. The future is definitely bright.”

Qualifying for the postseason, both league and districts are always a goal for the Colts’ program.

Marian will once again face a tough regular-season schedule, and if it’s able to qualify for the District 11 tournament, a deep 2A field.

“We’re excited to start competing, and to see how the season goes. We start See **COLTS** on Page 15

MARIAN



Members of the 2023-24 Marian girls basketball team include, front row from left, Deanna Pugh, Gabby Osenbach, Abbie Cryder, Maddie Kattner, Carley Hasara, Brooke Miskar, Kailee Thomas; back row, manager Ava Fritz, Aliya Tikhova, Addison Fritz, Olivia Serfass, Carly Minchhoff, Olivia Thomas, Frankie Martinello, manager Carlie Ankiewicz, manager Julia Dvorak and manager Addy Marek. SUE SERNAK-MARTINELLI/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Fillies after 3rd straight district title

BY BRAD HURLEY
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The goal is simple for the Marian Catholic girls' basketball team — keep the championship momentum going.

The Fillies enter the 2023-24 season looking to capture their third straight District 11 championship.

Marian once again figures to be in contention this season for a 2A championship.

Especially since it returns its two leading scorers from a season ago in Carly Minchhoff (12.35 points per game) and Frankie Martinelli (9.64 ppg). The two seniors and this season's captains for the Fillies also combined

for 53 three-pointers last season.

"We're obviously excited to have our two leading scorers back, but also our leading rebounder in Minchhoff, and our leader in steals last year in Martinelli. Both are captains for us this year, and both have taken that next step and have become the leaders of our team," said Marian head coach Damian Fritz. "That is going to be important for us; that they continue to grow as leaders for us on and off the court. We have a lot of incoming freshmen coming in this season, so we need strong leadership at the top to help them grow and develop, which in turn

grows the program, which is always our ultimate goal."

Helping out Minchhoff and Martinelli will be returners Addison Fritz (6.63 ppg) and Aliya Tikhtova (2.40 ppg). Fritz and Tikhtova have both added some new wrinkles to their individual games that will help bolster the Fillies' attack.

"Tikhtova has looked great all offseason. She has battled a bunch of injuries through her career, and this was really the first summer where she was fully healthy and she looks good," said Fritz. "Addison Fritz has also worked on putting together the whole game. I think she will have a more well-rounded game

this season, and she has also worked hard on her outside shot as well."

Other Fillies expected to see court time are Deanna Pugh, Emily Carone, Olivia Thomas, Gianna Corrado and Carly Hasara. Olivia Serfass is also a newcomer to the Marian team this season, and brings significant varsity experience to the program.

"We have a good mix of experience and young talent, but we're fortunate to have some players on our team that have been a part of two district titles, playing in the Schuylkill League playoffs and state playoff games," said Fritz. "Again, we are always

See **FILLIES** on Page 15

MARIAN



Members of the 2023-24 Marian swim team include, front row from left, Zoe Katona, Delaney Erickson; middle row, Kaitlyn Kisenwether, Octavia Zito, Lydia Strucko; back row, Andrew Metters, Makenzie Moyer, Michael Strucko and James Gomez. Other members of the team include Ethan Movassaghi and Reece Steibler. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Historic season for Marian swimming

BY BRAD HURLEY
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It's the third season for the Marian swimming program, and it will also go down as a historic season for the club.

For the first time in its history, Marian will field both a boys and girls team, and it will compete in dual meets this season.

In the past, Marian swimmers could only compete as individuals at meets, and many times had to swim by themselves against no other swimmers

in the pool to record their times.

"This is so exciting for our program. We have 11 swimmers on our roster, which is way up from the six we had on the team last season. We will compete in 10 dual meets, but unfortunately, we were not able to get into the Schuylkill League this season because the league is in the second year of a two-year cycle," said Marian head coach Andrea Feathers. "But it's going to be great for our swimmers to actually be

able to go out there and compete and race in the regular-season meets."

Marian returns the Times News Swimmer of the Year from a season ago in Michael Strucko. Strucko won the 500 freestyle and the 100 backstroke at the Schuylkill League meet last season, and followed that up with another 500 freestyle gold and 100 backstroke silver at the District 11 2A championships. His district gold earned him a berth in the PIAA state champi-

onship meet. Also returning is Zoey Katona, who finished second at leagues and third in districts in the 100 breaststroke. Delaney Erickson and Reece Steibler also return, and are expected to make yet another run at districts. Newcomer Lydia Strucko, the little sister of Michael, is a talented swimmer that is expected to make waves at the league and district level as well this season for Marian.

"We have a really good See **SWIM** on Page 15

MARIAN



Julius Currie

COLTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

out the season with a tough slate, going up against Panther Valley, Blue Mountain and Nativity. And then in our division you have Mahanoy and Nativity, who have been good year-in and year-out,” said Murphy. “And then you look at our crossover games, and there are a lot of good teams in there as well. But again, we’re excited for the challenge, and we believe these tough games throughout the season are going to prepare us to play good basketball down the stretch.”

Although Marian will be looking to be playing its best basketball midway or at the end of the regular season, getting off to a good start is important.

With a lot of the Colts key players just coming off the football season, odds are Marian will look much different from the start of the season to the midway point.

“One of the things I am seeing early on from this group is that they are doing a really nice job of sharing the basketball. That is something that is really good to see early on in the season,” said Murphy. “I think you’re going to see us evolve throughout the season.”

“We have guys right now just getting back and acclimated to the game after the football season, so in that sense we’re still trying to figure out who we are. But I think that will all take care of itself as we continue to work hard and get better every day.”

FILLIES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

looking to take the next step and grow, and the group is committed to that.”

So, with some new faces in key places, what will the 2023-24 Fillies look like on both sides of the floor this season?

Marian annually under Fritz has looked to push the ball on offense, and create havoc with different pressure looks on the de-

fensive end.

“Defensively, we’re still going to pressure. It’s going to look a little different this season than in past years, but we’re always going to pressure. We have athletic players that can do a number of different things,” said Fritz. “Then on offense, we’re going to look to run and get wide and space the floor. I think something that we will be able to do this season is get the ball inside more. That is something we have worked hard on.”



Carly Minchhoff



Michael Strucko

SWIM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

group returning. I expect both Michael and Lydia to get to states, and Zoey was so close last year, so I think she is going to be able to get there as well,” said Feathers.

“And then we have Delany and Reece that will make some noise at districts for us, and the rest of

the team is working hard as well and getting better every day.”

Now that Marian has enough swimmers to form a full roster to field both boys’ and girls’ teams, it can now also compete in relays at meets.

“Swimming in relays is also very exciting for us. We are hoping to put a good relay team together in order to qualify for districts. It also will help

our swimmers stay warm throughout a meet, and it will give us more participation opportunities,” said Feathers. “I also want to thank the Tamaqua swim team, Tamaqua Blue Waves and the Mahanoy Area swim team for allowing us to use their facilities and their pool. Without their support, we wouldn’t be able to have a team and we are very grateful for their help.”

NORTHERN LEHIGH



Northern Lehigh boys basketball team members include, front row, from left, Zaid Salih, Dregan Millroy, Dare-rious Smith and Kayden Novicki. Back row, Colin Karetsky, Connor Simms, Nicklaus Buskirk, Coy Daubert and Kellen Bauer. NANCY SCHOLZ/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Fahler wants NL to be 'fun' to watch

BY JEFF MOELLER
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Bob Fahler realized he still had some coaching in his blood.

Over the past few years, the former Parkland High School standout and former head coach still dabbled in the game as a shooting coach for his alma mater girls' basketball team, as well as a coach for some traveling teams.

Yet, the former Northampton head boys' coach and Parkland boys' assistant hasn't been on the sidelines for nearly 30 years. His last season in Northampton was in 1994.

So, when the Northern Lehigh boys' basketball job opened after the end of last season, Fahler figured it was time to get back into his passion.

"I always have loved basketball," said Fahler,

who retired in 2022 after a 20-year stint as a principal in the Plymouth-Whitemarsh School District. "I decided to get back into it, and Slatington is 10 minutes from my house. It seemed like a good fit at the time."

Just how Fahler will make it fit will be the challenge. The Bulldogs are coming off a 1-12 campaign last season, and they have a 9-71 overall record over the last four years.

However, Fahler isn't overly concerned with wins and losses his first season.

Instead, he wants to make his team memorable with an upbeat style that he began to initiate during summer league. Fahler will also have to juggle with a total of 13 players on varsity and JV.

"We want the team to be fun to watch," said Fahler. "We want to push the ball up the floor and apply a lot of pressure. However, we know we can't press for 32 minutes, and we'll have to adjust. We want people to say that we were a fun team to watch, and that our kids hustle."

"We worked on that during the summer, and it seemed to work out well. We have a small team, but we can make it work."

Senior Nick Buskirk, who averaged nearly five points per game last season, has already seen plenty of positives.

"I see this season as a great opportunity to play as hard as we can while still having fun," he said. "I think we'll surprise some teams throughout the season as well."

"My teammates and

I have learned that even though we might not have the biggest guys on our team, we can still stay in games. We all have to do our job."

Buskirk and his teammates have elevated confidence levels with the new approach.

"I believe the team has adapted relatively quickly to the new style," he added. "I believe we can start the season pretty comfortably."

Besides Buskirk, other starters will be junior Connor Simms, sophomore Coy Dauber, and freshmen Kellen Bauer and Dare-Rious Smith.

Sophomores Dregan Malloy and Zaid Smith, along with freshmen Kayden Novicki and Colin Karetsky will round out the rotation.

"We'll look to Buskirk
See **BOYS** on Page 19

NORTHERN LEHIGH



Members of the Northern Lehigh girls basketball team, include front row, from left, Natalie Moffitt, Ariana Williams, Naerobys Silverio, Cadence Whaler, Dekota Barthold and Katelynn Barthold. Standing, head coach Chris Heery, assistant coach Cadence Peters, Kylee Snyder, Tegan Simms, Aubrey Pollard, Ella Tosh, Jackie Richards, Leah Wentz and assistant coach Bill Watkins. Also on the team is Gabriella Hanna. NANCY SCHOLZ/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

NL wants to build on run to state playoffs

BY JEFF MOELLER
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Cadence Whalen can still feel some of the anguish from her team's loss to Line Mountain in the first round of the PIAA Class 2A State Tournament.

It certainly has served as a motivator for not only her, but her teammates season ahead as well.

"We all felt disappointed when things didn't go how we wanted them to," said the Northern Lehigh senior. "This year, we are hungrier than ever and want to go farther than last year.

"This is my last season, as well as Aubrey's (Pollard). We want to more than ever, and the team knows it."

Head coach Chris Heery will look to both Whalen and Pollard, the

latter who is the team's returning leading scorer at 16.9 points per game. Both Whalen and Pollard are three-year returning starters.

Juniors Katelyn and Dekota Barthold, who averaged 11.9 and 7.3 points, respectively, are also back as three-year starters.

Heery feels confident with a strong nucleus that the Bulldogs can make another postseason run after they finished last season with an overall 15-12 record, their second consecutive winning season since 2011-12.

"We started playing really good basketball toward the end of the season," said the veteran coach. "These girls played well together last year, and they should be ready to take the next step."

Along with their returning starters, another major strength for the Bulldogs will be their depth. Freshman Teegan Simms is expected to see some significant minutes, as she played on the JV team last season. Simms is among several underclassmen who will round out a deep rotation.

Juniors Gabriel Hannah, and Jackie Richards, and sophomores Natalie Moffitt, Ariana Williams, Ella Tosh, Leah Wentz, and Kylee Snyder, along with freshmen Emily Gad will all be vying for playing time.

Heery stated that either Simms, Snyder, Williams, or Moffitt would be the fifth starter.

"I can see us playing 12 girls in games this year," noted Heery. "We

do have depth, and we shouldn't have any trouble scoring.

The Bulldogs has a scrimmage against Jim Thorpe, before they opened the season against Panther Valley, which has developed into a rival.

"Jim Thorpe always had a good program, and we know that is a good test for us," he said. "We can get a good read by playing them.

"Panther Valley has been a nice rivalry for us. We beat them in a barnburner last year (85-84 victory), and that helped propel us into the state playoffs."

Whalen knows her team can score, and how they have to be sound on both sides of the ball. She sees a strong bond among her teammates.

See **GIRLS** on Page 19

NORTHERN LEHIGH



Members of the Northern Lehigh wrestling team are, front row, from left, Isaac Raber, Zachery Gosart, Skyler Loos, Cody Mazzocca, Grady Newhard and Noah Gosart. Second row, Nate Kuhns, Issac Jackoviz, Porter Kern, Chris Frame, Mason Rothrock, Kyle O'Connell and Chase Gall. Back row, assistant coach Ryan Kern, Zachary Lehman, Andrew Rudolph, Chase Moffitt, Cyrus Kinchen, Jack Tosh, Sam Frame Jr., Noah Herring and head coach Scott Snyder. NANCY SCHOLZ/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Youth movement underway at Nolehi

BY JEFF MOELLER
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Northern Lehigh head wrestling coach Scott Snyder was faced with some early-season decisions that will impact his squad in the near future.

One major conflict was whether or not to introduce a number of freshmen into the lineup. After a scrimmage with Parkland a week before their opener, Snyder decided to inject some youth into his lineup that has eight returnees.

For the Bulldogs, the youth movement has begun.

"Initially, I was on the fence about the freshmen," said Snyder. "We have a number of freshmen, and I was at a crossroads. I wasn't sure to pull the trigger on the matter.

"But after our scrimmage at Parkland, we decided to get them into the lineup."

Snyder does have three seniors, four juniors, and one sophomore returning to the lineup for the 2023-24 campaign.

Senior Chase Moffitt, who was 23-16 overall and had a sixth-place district finish, will open at 189. Fellow senior Jack Tosh (14-10) should be at 215, and senior Sam Frame (22-15) likely has the heavyweight spot.

The trio is expected to lead a relatively young squad, as well as being ready to take the next step in their careers.

Frame anticipates his team to be on the upswing this season, as the Bulldogs were 4-16 overall and 0-5 in the league.

"We have a young team, but I think we are going to do a lot better than we did last season," said Frame. "The goal for the team is to qualify for team districts, and I believe we can get there."

On a personal note, Frame expects a strong postseason, and has noticed a difference in his own strength.

"A goal for me is to win districts, and place in the top five at regionals," he added. "One of the biggest things I've done is to hit the weight room hard. I can already notice a change in how much stronger I am from last season."

Snyder is also looking to junior Cody Mazzocca (121 pounds), who was 19-13 last season. Sophomores Noah Gosart (114 pounds) and Skyer Loos (139) were both 8-21 last year, respectively, and will vie for spots.

"Cody fell a little short last season," noted Snyder. "He spent a ton of time working in the off-season, and he worked with MMA tactics and Ju-Jitsu.

"We have already seen

a difference with him, and his hard work will pay off."

Snyder stated there are some holes to fill between 127-172, and will work to fill those vacancies.

There are also some spots open at other weights, and six rising freshmen will get their opportunity.

Henry Slonaker (107/114), Andrew Rudolph (127), Kyle O'Connell (133), Mason Rothrock (145/152), and Chris Frame (145/152) are all first-timers looking to fill the voids.

Sophomore Grady Newhard (172-189 pounds) was a junior high district runner-up last season, while junior Issac Raber (160-172), a football player, has reacted well in his first season.

Snyder credited assistant coach Ryan Kern, who has helped recruit a

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NORTHERN LEHIGH



Katelyn Barthold

GIRLS

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“This season, we are really focused on our defense,” stressed Whalen. “It is really what we need to improve upon to win games.”

“Before the season, we talked about our goals, our strengths, our weaknesses, and how we can improve on them.”

“As a team, we are very close and push each other every practice, and we also hang out and have a lot of fun together.”

“I think this helps the natural chemistry our team has. Overall, I am very excited for this season and to see how far we can go.”

WRESTLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

number of younger wrestlers through his role as baseball coach in the sys-

tem.

“Coach Kern has brought a number of wrestlers through the program,” said Snyder. “A number of them had not wrestled before, and

we can see how many of them quickly developed.”

Overall, it can be a steady maturation process for the Bulldogs that could pay some huge dividends later in the season.

“Our freshmen and some others will have some growing pains in the room, and on the mat,” said Snyder. “But they will be better, and we’ll be better as a team.”



Connor Simms

BOYS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

and Simms to lead for us,” said Fahler. “Smith is young, but he can do a good job at the point, and Bauer is our shooting guard.”

Freshmen Landon King, Rami Quaziz, Parker Schaffer, and Joseph Chando will begin as JV players and complete the 13-man roster.

“They will all play,” said Fahler. “We have liked what we have seen so far; they have worked hard.”

Fahler will be assisted by his son Bob, who also played at Parkland, along with Jake Whalen, Mike

Bauer, and Zach Williams.

“They are a nice group of guys to work with,” said Fahler. “They have really helped the kids along.”

The Bulldogs will open the season in the Hamburg Tip-Off Tournament Dec. 1, and will meet the hosts in the opening game.

Fahler is looking forward to the opener, and his team’s approach and pace won’t change anytime soon.

“I’m anxious to see what we can do,” he said. “Hamburg is a 4A school, so it will be a test for us.”

“We’ll be fun to watch, and our kids won’t stop working.”

NORTHWESTERN



Members of the 2023-24 Northwestern boys basketball team include, front row from left, Malachi Coleman, Blake Howard, Kaden Moyer, Cannon Fitch, Weiland Hite, Ethan Kozlowski; back row, Nolan Fitzgerald, Del Tyler, Shane Marth, Ben Moyes and Gavin Nelson. NANCY SCHOLZ/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Wanamaker returns to guide Tigers

BY CHUCK HIXSON
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When Billy Hallman stepped down as the boys' basketball coach at Northwestern following the 2018-19 season, it started something not often seen at Northwestern: a revolving door of coaches.

Jerry Lloyd coached for one season, before he left unexpectedly. Cory Cesare stepped in at the last minute to take over the team for the 2020-21 season and coached two years before he exited.

This past spring, Northwestern Lehigh athletic director Jason Zimmerman turned to Patrick Wanamaker, a former assistant under Hallman, to take over the reins of the pro-

gram.

Wanamaker spent the past three seasons as the head coach at his alma mater, Northern Lehigh.

"It's really been a smooth transition, and the kids have bought in on what we are trying to do, and they have made all of this a non-issue," said Wanamaker of his first few months at the helm.

While last year's team that finished 11-12 lost just one senior, there are nine other players who aren't with the team right now. Those nine are chasing a state football championship on the Tigers team that is 14-0 and prepping for the PIAA semifinals.

Where some see a problem, Wanamaker sees an

opportunity.

"One thing that it has done has been to give us the chance to work with the 11 other guys on a closer basis," pointed out Wanamaker. "We are also giving guys some time in different spots, which could help during the season. I think it's great for those guys, and I am cheering them on. They're getting a great opportunity in going for a state championship, and I'm sure they're gaining confidence by playing in big games."

While the players have not practiced with the team, they have been around to support the other players and learn some of the new wrinkles that Wanamaker is using.

The Tigers again have just one senior. Ethan Kozlowski averaged 1.7 points per game last season. Junior Gavin Nelson led the team in scoring last season, averaging 12.6 per game. Fellow juniors Shane Marth and Del Tyler impressed Wanamaker with their play in the summer league and will see increased minutes this season. Eli Zimmerman averaged 4.6 per game last season, playing in 23 games as a sophomore.

"Kozlowski is kind of that Swiss army knife guy, who we can use in a lot of different ways," said Wanamaker. "We can move him around and know that he is going to be able to See **RETURNS** on Page 23

NORTHWESTERN



Members of the 2023-24 Northwestern girls basketball team include, front row from left, Devon Heinly, Gracie Scheffler, Sadie Fenstermaker, Sophia Schaffer, Ashley Yacynych; back row, Emma Freeman, Mallory Conner, Megan Fornwalt, Olivia Minnich, Hannah Gober, Olivia Reinhart, Cara Thomas and Brook Balliet. NANCY SCHOLZ/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

NW needs to replace plenty of players

BY CHUCK HIXSON
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For the first time in years, Northwestern girls basketball coach Chris Deutsch will not have a Sevrain on his roster.

Gabby Sevrain joined the team in 2014, Sydney Sevrain came along in 2016 to play two seasons with her older sister and was joined by Paige, the youngest, in 2019, giving her the chance to play a season with her younger sibling as well.

Paige Sevrain scored just over 12 points per game last season, helping the Tigers to a 25-2 record, but she is now playing at

Bloomsburg.

The team also lost Maci Fisher (5.2 ppg), Nina Miller (2.2 ppg), and Gabby Gober (1 ppg). Along with the loss of seniors came two other losses when juniors Rylee McGinley and Paige Bissell decided not to play this season.

This year's roster has just two seniors. Sadie Fenstermaker got some playing time, having seen action in 15 games, but Olivia Minnich missed the season because of an injury.

The junior class includes the team's second-leading scorer, Cara Thomas. As a varsity starter in her first two seasons,

Thomas averaged just over 10 points per game, and has continued to progress as a ball handler and as a defensive player.

Thomas comes into the season with 568 points, putting her on track to take a shot at the 1,000-point milestone before her career is over. She also comes in with a bad ankle that she injured late in the field hockey season playing a pick-up basketball game.

"We don't know when she will be back, but she hasn't practiced yet. There's a chance she could be cleared to play, but we just don't know," said Deutsch. "Whenever she

does get back, it will help our team tremendously."

Junior Brook Balliet gives Deutsch a quality outside shooter, who hit on 37 three-point shots last season. Balliet took a big step forward last season, as she went from five points per game as a freshman to 8.6 as a sophomore.

"Brook continues to get better and better. She's very athletic, and has the personality to be a leader on the floor," said Deutsch.

The loss of Sevrain leaves open a spot for someone who can play down low and muscle through defenders. That role falls

See **REPLACE** on Page 23

NORTHWESTERN



Members of the 2023-24 Northwestern wrestling team include, front row from left, Braydon Uricchio, Kenny Kerkes, Justice Weaver, Aris Gabriel; back row, Trent Croll, Noah Griffith, Noah Schlofer, Luke Fugazzoto and Nate Geiger. NANCY SCHOLZ/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Youth movement faces NW wrestling

BY MIKE HAINES
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With just a few weeks to go before the high school wrestling season begins, some uncertainty still surrounds the Northwestern Lehigh team.

One thing is for sure; a youth movement is underway in New Tripoli.

But, what had yet to be determined just over a week before the season began was whether or not the team's most accomplished veteran wrestler would be back for his senior season.

The Tigers return a 2023 District 11 champ in sophomore Luke Fugazzotto, but 2021 district champ and

three-time district medalist Dalton Clymer was still undecided about his senior wrestling season as the pre-season was winding down.

"He hasn't decided, and I don't want to bug him about it," said second-year Northwestern head coach Joe Killar. "I will soon though."

Killar pointed out that Clymer's favorite sport by far is football, and he is having a successful senior season on a successful football team.

Fugazzotto, a sophomore, won districts at 160 last season and will likely wrestle at 172 this season. He will be a leader on this

year's team, along with senior Noah Schlofer, who went 23-15 at 215 last season, but came up one win short of placing at districts.

"Luke and Noah are both wrestling good right now," said Killar.

Schlofer and Katie Brensinger (145) could be the team's only seniors this season.

Northwestern doesn't have a full girls team, so Brensinger will compete in a lot of matches against boys. Over the past two seasons, she's placed first at girls regionals twice, and finished in the top three in the state both of the past two years. She has gone

25-5 in her career when wrestling against other girls.

Another returner to this year's Tiger line up will be Nate Geiger, who will compete at 160 pounds. Another football player, Jackson Bailey, a junior, was undecided about wrestling this year. He and Clymer could help the team avoid forfeits in dual meets.

Killar said if everything falls into place, he could be filling out a full lineup this year, while he anticipates that if things don't fall into place, the most forfeits his team should have to give up would be three.

See **YOUTH** on Page 23

NORTHWESTERN

REPLACE

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to another junior, Olivia Reinhart, who will have an increased role on the court this season and like Balliet, is coming off a soccer season that saw the Tigers go to the semifinals of states.

The sophomore class is talented with Mallory Connor, Emma Freeman, and Hannah Gober all expected to see increased playing time thanks to their performances in camp leading up to the season.

“Let’s put it this way,” said Deutsch. “They’re going to play in every game,

but not necessarily as a starter. They’ll be in there though because they have really worked hard, and are ready for more responsibility.”

Another soccer standout, freshman Sophia Schaffer, will also see some time on the floor for Northwestern.

When all is said and done, success may come down to one thing: injuries. Getting Thomas back is key, and Gober also had injury issues last season.

Deutsch does not have the depth that he would like to have, so injuries could be the only thing that derails the Tigers this season.



Brook Balliet



Ethan Kozlowski

RETURNS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

handle whatever we give him.”

Sophomores Mason Bollinger averaged 6.1 ppg. last season on the court, and his football teammate and sophomore classmate, Shane Leh, impressed Wanamaker this summer and can give the Tigers a strong role player.

Freshmen Brady Zimmerman and Brady Krimmel are also still on the

football field, but showed some skills during the summer. Once the run for a state championship is over, they will be welcomed onto the hardwood.

“We’re going to be a much better team later in the season than we will be at the beginning,” said Wanamaker. “When we get the whole group together and get them all on the same page, we should be in pretty good shape. Until then, we’ll work hard and go with the guys we have now, and bring in the other guys when they’re ready.”

YOUTH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

The Tigers will have a number of freshmen who will be in the lineup, including Trent Croll (133), Braden Uricchio (114), William Turner (139), Kenny Kerekes (127) and Noah Griffith (121).

A few other freshmen and newcomers to the sport could also make the lineup.

“We have a young team overall,” said Killar, whose son is in eighth grade, while Killar has coached

several of this year’s freshmen and eighth-graders for the past several years in the Northwestern youth program. “I’m hoping to see improvement from last year, and help the kids meet their goals.”

Northwestern went 3-5 in Colonial League matches last season and did not make the District 11 team tournament.

The Tigers graduated two district medalists from last year’s team in Buck Miller (second at 189) and Dartanyon DeLillo (fifth at 285).



Noah Schlofer

PALMERTON



Members of the 2023-24 Palmerton boys basketball team include, front row from left, Beau Stahler, Mason George, Logan Anthony, Cameron Pengelly, Brady Reph, Jay Carelli, Corey Serfass; back row, head coach Ken Termini, Filippo Scuccato, Aiden Leister, Zack Anthony, Jacob Grammes, Trace Stahler, Matt Machalik, Brayden Hosier and assistant coach Art George III. LYNN SHUPP/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS.

Talent returns to Blue Bomber roster

BY TJ ENGLE
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For close to a decade, the Palmerton boys' basketball players have continued to buy into Ken Termini's coaching style.

And don't expect that to change this season, as Termini enters his eighth season as head coach with plenty of talent returning on his roster.

It's a successful style of play that has developed the Bombers basketball program into Colonial League and District 11 contenders' year-in and year-out.

Last year was no different, as the Bombers capped the season with a 20-8 overall record (13-4 Colonial League).

The only downfall from the season was they fell a game short of the championship contest in both leagues and districts.

Entering the 2023-2024 season, the Bombers are without the presence of Chase Reph, Kendall Robinson, and Justin Sebelin due to graduation.

Still, Termini has the luxury of two First Team All-League selections back in his lineup, with senior guards Brayden Hosier (17.07 points per game) and Matt Machalik (16.39 ppg) back for the blue-and-white for one more season.

Fellow seniors Zach Anthony (F), Jacob Grammes (F), Aiden Leister (G) and Trace Stahler (F) also return to give the Bombers six experienced players.

Last year, Machalik (1,000-point scorer) and Hosier (close to reaching 1,000 points) finished as the team's top two scorers.

For as talented as that duo is, the Bombers will need others to step up to fill

the voids of Reph (7.04) and Robinson (5.18), who were next best in the scoring column.

"I think we have a program where guys are working their way up, learning our system, learning our way to play and even when we lose key guys, like Chase, Kendall and Justin Sebelin, we have guys that are just ready to step right in, and are hungry to step right in," said Termini, who needs eight more wins to become the sixth in PHS history with 100.

"In addition, there are a lot of young guys that are going to be pushing our older guys. I mean obviously like guys like Machalik, Grammes and Hosier, those guys are pretty much entrenched as starters. But there are other guys that are going to be pushing people, and it's going to be

interesting. We're going to be deep."

Those Bombers looking to break the starting lineup include senior Filippo Scuccato (foreign exchange student), juniors Corey Serfass (G) and Mason George (F), as well as sophomores Jason Carelli (G), Cameron Pengelly (F), Brady Reph (F), Logan Anthony (F) and Beau Stahler (F, injured).

There are 21 players on the varsity roster, and Termini said a combination of depth, experience, and the ability to execute serve as the team's strength.

"Having a lot of bodies is great, but if they're not experienced or can't execute, then it's limiting," he said.

Termini wants every one of his players to know they play a key role each time they enter the gym-

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PALMERTON



Members of the 2023-24 Palmerton girls basketball team include, front row from left, Megan Matsko, Hannah Barry, Sydney Frantz, Hailey Andrews; middle row, Taylor Wasilewski, Leah Rumfield, Ella Baumgardt, Cate Morgan, Mikayla Pengelly; back row, assistant coach Jim Hay, assistant coach Travis Fink, Grace Schneider, Jalynn Herman, Courtney Connell, Emma Rex, Hailey Barry, manager Sarah Sabo and head coach Jeremy Coleman. LYNN SHUPP/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Palmerton girls welcome new coach

BY TJ ENGLE
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Jeremy Coleman is no stranger to the sport of basketball at Palmerton.

For over the past decade, Coleman served as an assistant coach with the Blue Bombers boys basketball program – as junior high and freshmen coach.

Now, after taking a season off, he's ready to take on responsibilities on as the Lady Bombers' first-year head coach.

"We're all excited for this new season, and look to continue to grow and gel as a team throughout the season," said Coleman, who is a Health and Physical Education teacher at the high school. "Practices have been going smoothly,

and the energy in the gym is high.

"However, we're ahead of schedule, and the girls are quick learners. We're a team that wants to play with heart and passion, and we are looking forward to getting to game action."

Whether Coleman is around the basketball talent each day in class, or simply passing in the hallways, he's fully aware of the capabilities the Bombers possess.

The team is fresh off a year that stretched into the postseason after the Bombers finished with a 21-6 overall record (16-1 Colonial League), and were Colonial League and District 11 Class 3A runners-ups.

Gone, however, are a

few links from last year's postseason run in Bethie Morgan (all-league First Team, 1,000-point scorer), Kelsey Balliet, Emily Bollinger and Emilie Peterson.

While Coleman knows his squad has its work cut out for them, he pointed to a "next person up" concept that lies within his system.

"The loss of all-league player Bethie Morgan is a setback for this team, as she accounted for over 350 points of the team's offense in 2022-2023," Coleman said. "However, this team does have many younger players waiting in the wings to fill the void."

Last season's Bomber JV team went undefeated, and Coleman is counting

on them having similar success at the next level.

"This team could struggle early as they adjust to their new coach, a new system, and a new style of play. Last year's team had early season success, and should a rough start occur, mentally it could prove difficult to overcome for this team. But currently, the spirits are high at Palmerton, and these girls seem determined to make a late season run."

Back to prevent any twists in the Bomber winning tradition are a handful of returnees who played key roles in last year's success.

Hannah Barry (10.7 ppg last season, Sr., G), Sydney See **GIRLS** on Page 27

PALMERTON



Members of the 2023-24 Palmerton wrestling team include, front row from left, Izabella McFarland, Lila Faust, Nickayla Tomsic, Gretchen Schaible, Cassidy Merkel, Lea Schaible, Madelyn Bennyhoff, Jade Kuhns, Skylar Benninger; middle row, from left, Tegan Silfies, Thomas Pasquariello, Matt Gombert, Levi Johnson, Colton Becker, Jagger Serfass, Kellen Trotter, Mason Becker, Dillon Anthony, Joshua Dunwoodie; back row, from left, David Steele, Jake Rutkowitz, Dawson McCoy, Derek King, Dillon Lombardi, Caleb Gaffney, Bryce Smith, Anderson Garcia-Escobar, Josh Merkel, Antonio Oller. Other members of the team not present include Aidan Ortiz, Jameson Trainer, Chris Zengen, James Mack, Vincent Taglieri, Chris Collier, Nate Goldstein, Makenna Ringler, Faith Rudalavage and Samara Elliot. PATRICK MATSINKO/TIMES NEWS

Plenty of interest in Bomber program

BY TJ ENGLE
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This season, numbers are more on Palmerton wrestling coach Justin Petersen's side than in years past.

In his 10th season with the program, the Bombers' head coach has seen the greatest number of kids out for the sport.

There seems to be one issue in the wrestling room working against them though, as the Bombers prepare for the up-and-coming 2023-2024 season.

"We have great numbers, but nobody that weighs more than 180 pounds," said Petersen. "That's the frustrating thing with wrestling: we not only need to fill 13 varsity spots, but they have to

be all different sizes.

"I have the most kids out that I have ever had by a wide margin, but I still am going to have forfeits."

While the Bombers are short on the heavy-weights and will take a hit on the scoreboard at those weights, that won't stop Petersen's grapplers from giving it their all out on the mats.

Leading the way is Derek King (152-pounds), who was one of two Regional qualifiers and District medalists (fourth place) for the Bombers last season. The other was Daniel Lucycanish, who was the lone graduate from last year's team and a bronze medalist at Districts.

Returning to Petersen's roster are Mason Becker

(127), Caleb Gaffney (172), Dillon Lombardi (160), Josh Merkel (133), Aidan Ortiz (139), Bryce Smith (152/160), Jameson Trainer (172) and Kellen Trotter (121). Sophomore Vincent Taglieri returns as well with some varsity mat time at 139 pounds.

Although there might not be a single senior on the Bombers' roster, it won't stop every single one of them from utilizing one true characteristic to lead them into battle.

"Work ethics and camaraderie amongst members of the team," said Petersen of what he believes will be the strength of the team this season. "We have a solid group of kids who all work hard and care about each other. Their selfless-

ness is what will continue to help all of them progress throughout the season.

"They have been working hard in the wrestling room and weight room all offseason, and the benefits of that should be seen in the near future."

Petersen is beyond excited to coach these Bombers into Colonial League Dual action this season, and said it helps that "they're good kids all-around."

It doesn't stop there, as the seasoned mentor believes they are more wrestlers looking to give it their all to break the varsity lineup.

The list includes juniors Dawson McCoy (121), David Steele (145) and Chris Zengen (172), along with See **WRESTLE** on Page 27

PALMERTON



Brayden Hosier

BOYS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

nasium for practice, or on game day when they slide on their Bomber jersey.

“The biggest thing we need to worry about is because we have so many dedicated, talented, hard-working kids, that you can’t play 14 kids on varsity,” Termini said. “They all can have varsity uniforms. They all may get in certain situations. But guys are going to have to accept their role, and they’re going to have to understand no matter what role they’re in, some day down the road very quickly they may be in a bigger role ... it’s okay to want

more, but you’ve got to embrace your role and continue to work hard.”

Termini said the Bombers’ goals are the same as any other team.

“Everybody wants to win their Christmas Tournament,” he said. “Everybody wants to win their league. Everybody wants to win districts. Everybody wants to make states. Everybody wants to beat their rivals.”

Termini stressed that even if his Bombers were playing cornhole, they’re still going to want to win because “that’s just the way they’re wired.”

“I think what separates this group is that this group is driven from high goals for a long time,” Termini

said. “The only thing this group is afraid of is mediocrity. They would rather aim high and fail than to except mediocrity. So, I think with this group, with the experiences we have had in the past, what we’re more focused on right now is the behaviors that it’s going to take us to achieve some of those goals.

“Like being a great teammate. Being a great student. Being a great communicator. Someone who embraces his roles. Someone who celebrates someone else’s success. If we embrace those behaviors and carry them over in the things we do on the court ... a lot of those goals are going to just take care of themselves.”

GIRLS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Frantz (7.9 ppg, Sr., G) and Megan Matsko (4.3 ppg, Sr., F) will return to their starting roles, while Hailey Andrews (Sr, F), Mikayla Pengelly (Jr., G) and Ella Baumgardt (Jr., G) will all vie for starting spots.

Morgan, Hannah Barry and Matsko played in all 27 games last year for the Bombers, while Frantz and Courtney Connell — who also returns — saw action in 24 games.

“These starters will be joined by some quality sophomores, juniors, and senior forward Hailey Andrews,” said Coleman about the Bombers’ strength this season. “We will have substantial depth at all positions, and will be able to rotate players in and out of the lineup with ease. The depth of this roster will allow this team to push each other in practice and they will just keep getting better throughout the year.



Hannah Barry

“This team has worked extremely hard in the offseason, and has high expectations for the postseason. We have a great combination of shooters, ball-handlers and quality role players which will make this team hard to defend.”

Those looking to make another

postseason push by adding their talents to the mix include Hailey Barry (Soph., G), Courtney Connell (Soph., F), Cate Morgan (Soph., G) and Emma Rex (Soph., G). Grace Schneider (Soph., F) and Leah Rumfield (Soph., G) will also look to make a name for themselves.

While Coleman expects the Lady Bombers to match “the same success they have had over the past few seasons,” he has set several attainable goals for his squad to attain this season.

“It starts with the fact that we need to become better individually, and as a team on a daily basis,” he said.

Along with that, Coleman would love to see the rest fall in place for his program this season.

“We’d like to qualify for league playoffs, to win a league championship, to qualify for District 11 playoffs, to win a District 11 championship, and of course, to be a contender in PIAA 3A playoffs.”

WRESTLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

sophomores Anderson Garcia-Escobar (189), James Mack (145) and Jaggar Serfass (145), and incoming freshmen Dillon Anthony (160/172), Colton Becker

(107/113), Chris Collier (113), Joshua Dunwoodie (152), Nathan Goldstein (145), Matthew Gombert (121/127), Levi Johnson (113), Antonio Oller (145), Thomas Pasquariello (107), Jake Rutkowitz (145) and Tegan Silfies (113).

While the Bombers con-

tinue to battle for spots in the starting lineup and look to improve on a 4-11 overall (3-5 Colonial League) mark from last season, the coaching staff will look to strategize on ways to hopefully fill those unwanted few forfeit spots this season.

Petersen explained the

standard that’s been set for this new season.

“We want to compete to the best of our abilities,” he stressed. “I want the kids to have fun and enjoy this great sport. We aren’t going to be afraid of anybody or any result; we are just going out there to compete.

PANTHER VALLEY



Members of the 2023-24 Panther Valley boys basketball team include, front row from left, Jake Moyer, Thomas Buyce, Brody Breiner, Chase Krynock, Brady Jones, Chase Wever, Conner Penberth, Drew Kokinda, Hayden Goida; middle row, Eddison Mitchell, Mrgim Nezridi, Nuredin Gjoca, Cam Caffrey, Andrew Hazzard, Logan Fisher, Gino Williams; back row, Danny Wehr, Stephen Hood, Eli Maynard, Ben Baneravage and Tyler Black. BRAD HURLEY/TIMES NEWS

Key returnees to lead Panther Valley

BY BRAD HURLEY
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Over the past two seasons, the Panther Valley boys basketball team has been close to making yet another run. The Panthers have gone a combined 25-21 over their last two campaigns and have suffered defeat in the first round of districts in both seasons.

PV again returns a strong contingent, including a trio of seniors who have been playing significant varsity minutes since their freshmen seasons. The Panthers key returnees could certainly help them break through.

Guards Chase Weaver (11.35 points per game) and Drew Kokinda (9.26

ppg) put together solid seasons for Panther Valley last season. Both were good from beyond the arc as well. Kokinda led PV with 59 triples and Weaver added 22 three-pointers from his point guard position. The Panthers leading scorer from last season in the 6-4 Stephen Hood (14.09 ppg) also returns, but Hood is still recovering from offseason shoulder surgery. Hood is cleared to shoot and run, but is not yet cleared for full contact.

“We have strong senior leadership and we have experience, which are always key elements to having a successful season,” said Panther Valley head coach Pat Crampsie. “Chase and

Drew have worked hard this off-season and you can see that from the way that they have been playing. They’re in great shape. And Stephen looks good. He’s been shooting and running and we will continue to monitor his rehab and progress.”

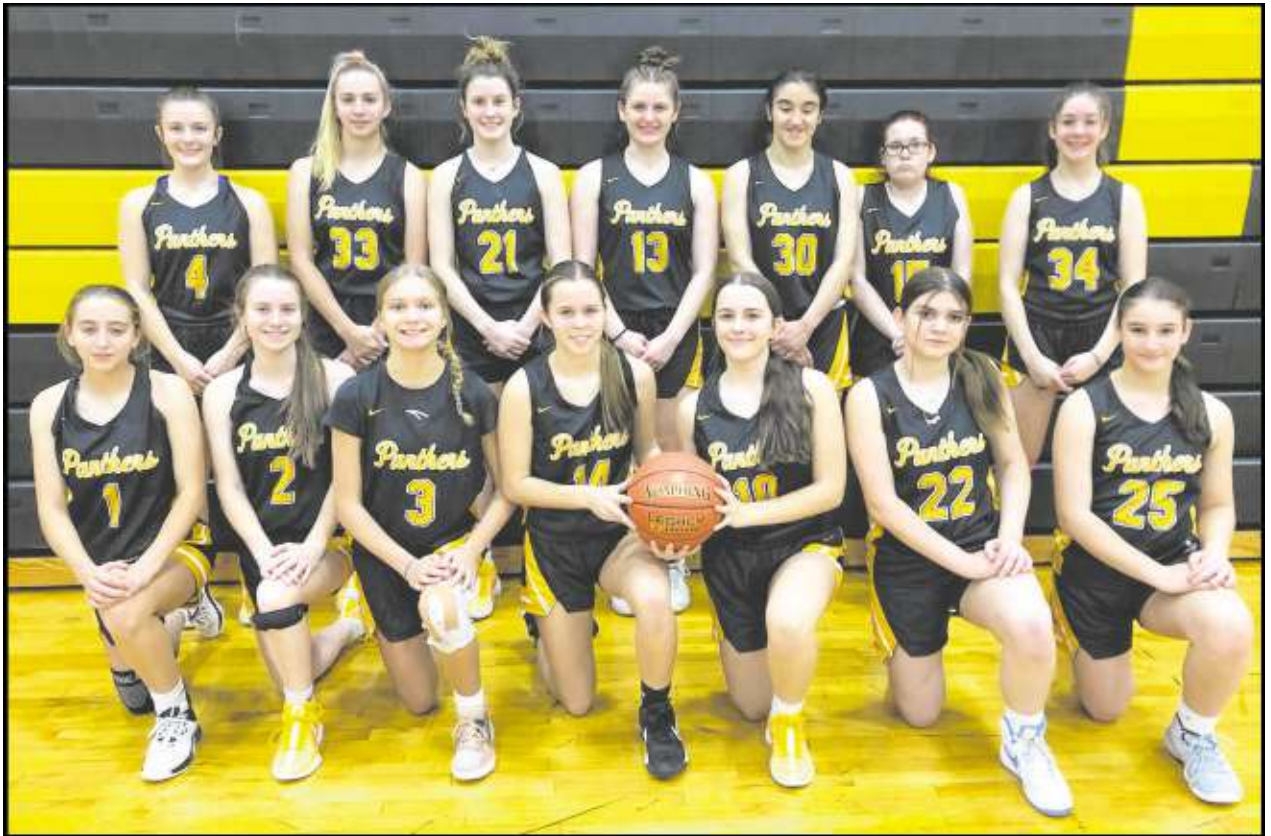
PV is also expected to have strong depth and it starts with first-year starting point guard Conor Penberth. Penberth will be moving to the point in order to free up Weaver for more off-the-ball opportunities. Logan Fisher and Thomas Buyce return after seeing some court time last season. Six-four newcomer Tyler Black is expected to make

an impact as well as players Brady Jones, Brody Breiner, Hayden Goida, Eli Maynard and Andrew Hazzard.

“We’re really excited about Penberth. Love the way he handles the offense for us, and he did a good job running the point on JV for us last season, and we’re even more excited about getting Chase off the ball more and getting him those types of opportunities,” said Crampsie. “Black is another guy we’re excited about, who has come back out for the team after a few years. He’s got some size and is a good athlete. I honestly like our depth this season.

See **BOYS** on Page 31

PANTHER VALLEY



Members of the 2023-24 Panther Valley girls basketball team include, front row from left, Hilary Shreffler, Kaidence Krapf, Lucy Kocha, Caroline Breslin, Ajeti Gjoca, Janessa Bruben, Megan O'Brien; back row, Natalie Vermillion, Mikayla Yurichuk, Morgan Orsulak, Maddison Maynard, Morgan O'Brien, Faith Accardi, Brenna McAndrew. BRAD HURLEY/TIMES NEWS

PV girls have made quick turnaround

BY BRAD HURLEY
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It sure has been a quick turnaround for the Panther Valley girls' basketball program and its head coach Rob Kovac.

Kovac took over the struggling Panthers in 2021, where they came away with just a few wins, but last season PV was able to finish over .500 for the first time in nearly 20 seasons.

The Panthers ended the 2022-23 campaign 12-11, and qualified for the District 11 2A playoffs. The season ended for PV in the 2A quarterfinals in one of the better basketball games of the year in the Times News

area in a back-and-forth battle with Northern Lehigh.

"We would not have been able to turn this thing around so quickly without my staff. That's one thing I think I have always been good at as a coach is surrounding myself with people that are going to make me look good. But my staff, they work hard, and they teach the game," said Kovac. "Also, most of the credit has to go to the kids. They have to buy in to what you want to do, and they have done that. They are also now learning and understanding the game of basketball and becoming intelligent basketball play-

ers. It's a great group that has put in the time to get better."

The Panthers sights are set on returning to the postseason, and they have a good chance of doing so as they return All-State League's leading scorer from a season ago in Maddison Maynard.

Maynard averaged 22.6 points per game for PV, scoring 20 more points in 16 games, and 30 or more points in six contests.

Over the Panthers final five games last season, Maynard averaged an impressive 30.4 points per game. Maynard also did much more than score for

PV last season, averaging 8.2 rebounds per game, along with 4.1 steals.

"Maddison is one of the best players in the entire area, and I think she has taken her game to an even higher level. Everyone knows that she's a dynamic scorer, but what we're seeing from her this season is she is really making her teammates around her better," said Kovac. "In the scrimmage the other day, she had about nine or 10 assists, so she is really seeing the floor well. She lives in the gym and is just a great kid. Works hard in the classroom as well, as she is No. 2 in her class. We're

See **GIRLS** on Page 31

PANTHER VALLEY



Members of the 2023-24 Panther Valley wrestling team include, front row from left, Racer McGuire, Landon Hunsicker; middle row, Rory Dixon Aneliz Bennick, Adam Gardiner, Michael Cobb; back row, Ivan Terry, Mergim Bushati, Chase Hower, Coach Kris Nalesnik, Brian Welsler and Jah Bushati. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Numbers rising in wrestling program

BY ROD HECKMAN
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Panther Valley's return to wrestling last season was punctuated with a state champion.

Freshman Brenda Banks energized the PV community with a gold medal in the girls competition. After that, she placed fourth at nationals.

So what can the outstanding grappler do in her sophomore season?

Her head coach is anxious to find out.

"I'm obviously very excited to see what Brenda's going to do this season," said Panther mentor Kris Nalesnik. "With her, we

have expectations for another state title. It feels weird going in to the season saying that, but when you did it last year and now you're ranked fifth in the nation when nobody else (in the state) is ranked in the top 30, it kind of sets the bar pretty high.

"There's certainly an element of the unknown (with more teams and more wrestlers in the sport now) but just watching the way she works, it doesn't matter. She's the hardest worker in the room every day. She wants to be great. A lot of the guys don't even want to wrestle against her. They don't want to get

embarrassed ... They all work hard and want to test their skills, but she's head and shoulders above anybody else I've seen in a long time."

Banks anchors the PV girls squad at the 235-pound weight class. The team has 14 wrestlers, with only two seniors — Angelique Wolfgang at 118 and Haylee Fessler at either 155 or 170 — and three juniors — Kadance Wentz at 136, Mayrin Vasquez-Frias at 142 and Kyla McQuillen at 148.

Along with Banks, other sophomore starters could include Kaylyn Gasker (106), Rylyn Gensey-Strohl

(130), Anelia Bennick (155/170) and Alisa Williams (190).

"I know that the renewal of the booster club program was a lot easier because of Brenda winning," said Nalesnik. "A lot of people saw her win that state title, and now kids are looking up to her and wanting to do the same thing."

The girls team has grown from three wrestlers a year ago to 14 this season, and an increase can also be said about the boys squad.

Nalesnik now has 37 boys between the varsity and junior high levels, up from the mid 20s last season. See **WRESTLE** on Page 31

PANTHER VALLEY

GIRLS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

excited to see what she can do this season.”

PV returns most of its starting lineup from a season ago, beginning with sophomore Morgan Orsulak, who nearly averaged double-figures last season (9.48 ppg). Sharp-shooter Natalie Vermillion also returns after averaging 4.39 points per game with 32 three-pointers. Kaidence Krapf, Caroline Breslin, Mikayla Yurichek, Lucy Kocha and Brenna McAndrew will also all see significant time for the Panthers.

“We have eight solid pieces this season, and that is a luxury that we have

not had in the past,” said Kovac. “Orsulak, we think, can take a bigger step this season after a good freshman year, especially in the post. Krapf is our most improved player, and she has left no doubt that she will be a starter for us, and Breslin is right there with Krapf as one of our most improved players as well. Then you have Vermillion, which can really shoot it. You might see her double her three-pointers made this season with the increased shot opportunities she’s going to have, and then you have great and hard-working athletes in Yurichek and McAndrew, and a freshman in Kocha who is going to play some for us, and most likely see

her minutes increase as the season goes on as she gets used to the speed of the varsity game. It’s a group we’re really excited about.”

The Panthers will be tested right out of the gate as they face off with a Northern Lehigh team that returns a ton of talent from last year’s playoff squad on the opening Friday night of the season.

“We’re looking forward to the start of the season, and we have a tough one right away against a really good Northern Lehigh team,” said Kovac. “But again, we have a solid group here. A group that is now playing good and intelligent basketball, and that is going to keep working to get better.”



Maddison Maynard

BOYS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

Fisher and Buyce will be big for us as well, we have a bunch of guys who are going to get on the floor and who are going to contribute for us.”

It’s no secret that Panther Valley’s winning recipe over the last five years has been the run and gun game. The Panthers have been at their best running the floor and hitting three-pointers. Last season, PV hit an impressive 179 three-pointers, which

is just over seven triples per game.

“We’re always going to look to run up and down the floor, where we’re looking to drive and kick and knock down shots,” said Crampsie. “I like the way we’ve been moving the ball in the preseason.

We’re moving the ball well, cutting well and sharing the basketball. Overall, I love the high energy we’ve been getting from our guys at practice. Practice has been very competitive, which is what you always want. We’re excited to get the season started.”

WRESTLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

son. Not only are the numbers up, but where the program is now compared to a year ago is vastly different.

“It’s night and day,” said Nalesnik. “When you look at where we were Day 1 last year where most people had no idea how to wrestle, I mean this year I went in there and I already had leaders pushing without me saying a word ... They had a full offseason, where they knew coming in they were wrestling and ready to go. They’ve also been in the weight room all summer.”

Seniors expected to crack the lineup and be key contributors include Justin Kuehn at 114, Michael Cobb at 133, Mergim Bushati at 189 and Brian Welser at 215. Justin Kevevnaar may also end up at 127, while Ivan Terry looks to hold the 172-pound spot.

A number of youngsters could also shine for the Panthers, specif-



Michael Cobb

ically sophomore Jah Bushati at 145 and freshman Rory Dixon at 152. Two other freshmen — Hayden Matula (107) and Landon Hunsicker (121) — will start, with sophomore Adam Gardiner slotted at 139. Junior Giovanni Flemming is projected to get the nod at 160.

“I love the addition of Rory,” said Nalesnik of Dixon, who was a junior high champion at Hazleton last year. “He’s got a shot to go to Hershey as a

freshman. The kid works hard. He’s fast and he’s smart. And he’s probably one of the best teammates in the room I’ve ever seen. Welser definitely has a chance to make some noise in the postseason, and I expect both Bushatis, Cobb and Kuehn to also do well.”

If his individuals provide success, it could also mean Nalesnik’s team will do well. After wrestling an independent schedule last year, PV is back in the Schuylkill League.

“With some key losses some of the other teams have had, and what we’ve gained, we have a shot to compete at the higher level of Division 2,” said Nalesnik, whose team was 4-12 a year ago. “I’m not saying for sure we’re going to win it, but I am going to say it’s not out of the realm of possibility that we could win our division.

“I’d also like to try and make district duals. I’d really like to make that tournament. If everything turns out the way it should, we have a shot.”

PLEASANT VALLEY



Members of the 2023-24 Pleasant Valley boys basketball team are, front from left, Quinn Kaufman, Dakota Lucas, Sean Hallenbeck, Darius Arce; middle, from left, Valentino Byers-Robinson, Tyler Weidman, Isaiah Montgomery, Jereal Moore, Dylan Heckman, Dan Baker; back from left, Sebastian Sacci, Brandon Young, Aiden Fava, Zachary Prator, Zachary Pandolfo, Joseph Greene. KYLE MAGDA/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Bears motivated for bounce back year

BY KYLE MAGDA
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When Pleasant Valley head coach Bobby Hahn took over the boys basketball job, there was a lot of work to be done to the program.

Every year, Hahn's teams have been getting better, and the Bears just missed out on making the district playoffs last year.

"Last year was definitely injury-ridden," Hahn said. "We had two of our starters that

missed pretty much half of the year, and I think that hurt us overall. We missed it by one game to make districts. I think that missing by that game really gave the guys that are returning a little bit of extra motivation this year."

The team will have to change things up for the winter season, as PV lost three key scorers from last season.

Pleasant Valley placed a lot of emphasis on Jarod Moore, Patrick Moore (no

relation) and Austin Ratti last season, and the Bears have to make changes to this year's team, even though they have eight seniors.

"They were three big-time scorers for us, and we were very reliant on them to carry the load a lot," Hahn said. "It's going to be very different for us to adapt to a new style without them having the ball and clinging for everybody else."

PV was injury-plagued last season, so staying

healthy will be important for the Bears. Sean Hallenbeck, Zach Prator, Zach Pandolfo and Joe Greene return, all of whom got considerable playing time last season, and will most likely see more minutes this year.

"We have a lot of guys that were double-roster, JV-varsity," Hahn said. "They got in here and there with injuries last year, and working really hard and be ready to go

See **BEARS** on Page 35

PLEASANT VALLEY



Members of the 2023-24 Pleasant Valley girls basketball team include, front row, from left, Lilly Hower, Celia Gavinovich, Neveah Allie, Rylan Knapp, Katelyn Honadel, Alexia Polazo, Madison Gamble, Kira Hnat; back row, left to right, Seree Gaddist, Aryn Stivala, Ella Rothrock, Jules Soucy, Annalisa Lanigan, Brooke Greene, Cielle Coston, Milly Lamberty, Abbey Dominick, Mya Williams, Taylor Hawkins. KYLE MAGDA/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Pleasant Vy. girls focused on positives

BY KYLE MAGDA
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

Pleasant Valley head coach Corinne Morris coached her first season in 2022-23, and has a lot of girls returning to the team.

PV didn't lose much in the offseason, as four of its five starters are back.

"Our first year was a big learning curve and getting experience," Morris said. "Our offseason went great and had a good turnaround. I only lost two, so I have a lot returning, and we're looking forward to a positive season."

The turnaround is good for the team, and

after a 4-17 season, the Bears strung together a three-game winning streak at one point last year.

The turnout for the Lady Bears basketball team has been looking better for the upcoming season, and Morris mentioned a few things her team had to learn.

"We had to learn a lot of basics and communication as a team," Morris said. "Our numbers were on the lower side, so we had a lot coming up through the program, and our numbers are looking more positive."

Aryn Stivala and Katelyn Honadel return to the team, which ex-

pects a few more girls to step up. Stivala was the team's leading scorer last season at 12.89 points per game.

The only starter Pleasant Valley lost was Ella Muir (9.67 ppg.), and there won't be much of a change to the starting lineup. Honadel scored 4.45 points per game for the Lady Bears and also returns, along with Stivala.

Ryan Rosenberg and Brooke Greene just averaged around 3.5 ppg. and can see more playing time this season.

Morris talked about how practices were going and getting ready for the 2023-24 season. The

season is looming, and the team will continue to improve on what was established last season.

"Our practices are really positive," Morris said. "We're working on game situations, and running and getting into shape and conditioning. We're ready to kick off the season."

The team also had a preseason scrimmage against Pen Argyl, and appears ready to take on the challenges that lie ahead.

"Our season is looking really positive," Morris said. "We're in great spirits, and ready to tackle anything thrown our way."

PLEASANT VALLEY



Members of the 2023-24 Pleasant Valley wrestling team include, kneeling, left to right, Mackenzy Kutzler, Alicia Karas, Mykaila Colandino; front row, left to right, Victor Custodio, Marlen Gonzalez, Emily Fox, Juliette Trout, Tyson Nimtien; middle row, left to right, Anthony Antonucci, John Hargrave, Lennox Granda, Michael Pomilio, Matthias Lynch, Barrett Nelson, Lorenzo Demaio, Frederick Merklin, Fathi Bawab, Jason Kays, Jacob Klostermann, Lily Decker; back row, left to right, Aiden Granda, James Cordle, Sean Kratzer, Aiden McCabe, Adis Vukel, Shawn Radcliffe, Andrew Mihalichko, Aldin Vukel, Scott Trout, Justin Delgado, Jason Schubert, Blake Walters, Joshua Careccia. KYLE MAGDA/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Weiss ready to lead PV wrestling team

BY KYLE MAGDA
PMATSINKO@TNONLINE.COM

The Pleasant Valley Bears wrestling team has seen a lot of changes the last few years and PV has a new head coach coming in.

James Weiss took over the Pleasant Valley wrestling program in his first season as Bears head coach and has been involved with the wrestling community for years.

“The big thing for me is I’ve been a part of the wrestling community here for a while,” Weiss said. “I wanted to bring some stabilization and guys from the community to give

these kids the opportunity to wrestle. I’ve been invested in these kids for years, whether I coached them when they were younger or at club. We’re just watching them out on the mat at the Duals here at the High School.”

There was a big turnout for wrestling tryouts and Weiss noted the importance of how many kids came to try to make the team. The offseason is over and all attention turns to his first season as Bears head coach.

“The offseason has been almost overwhelming,” Weiss said. “Moving into the beginning of the season, it’s been

overwhelming. We’ve had about 70 kids come out and try out for this team. We’ve retained about 40 of them on the high school level and about 20 on the middle school level. It’s grown a lot. I’ve been able to go out and find some kids who used to wrestle when they were younger, very talented athletes and bring them back. We’ve just been working. The kids have the opportunity to work and taking it seriously and working very hard.”

The Bears have six seniors on the team and will try to rely on the wrestlers who can step up. PV lost Seniors James Barruzza

and Edward Lauritsen to graduation and Pleasant Valley is practicing hard in the meantime before the season gets going.

Barruzza and Lauritsen shared most of the success of PV’s wrestlers last season.

The Bears have 11 juniors on this year’s team with mainly underclassmen.

“The biggest thing is just grit and enjoying the grind,” Weiss said. “I’m just seeing them grind every day. They want more practices and practice harder. That’s the biggest thing. We need to polish

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PLEASANT VALLEY

PV

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

them up as wrestlers, but they do have the work ethic and they've been working for a while. We're pretty close to wrestling shape now."

Weiss wants to bring success to the Pleasant Valley wrestling program in his first year. He also isn't setting goals for the season, but is ready for his

wrestlers to get the opportunity on the mat.

"One thing I've told the kids already is I'm not setting any goals and not giving any promises," Weiss said. "I'm giving the opportunity for them to wrestle and I've shared with them what their mindset should be. Their biggest mindset should be just go out and score points in the position they're in. If they make that happen, everything else will follow."



Aiden McCabe



Sean Hallenbeck

BEARS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

this year as well. Those guys will be back and we're looking forward to that, adding that experience and they're all great kids and hard workers. We definitely have good leadership, and I'm hoping that takes us pretty far."

The Bears will be ready to go, and a lot of time in the offseason has helped PV get prepared for the upcoming season. Hahn also said the importance of the youth leagues in his time at Pleasant Valley has been key to the Bears having success.

The seniors who are on the team now played in the youth leagues for Hahn and continue all the way up the ladder.

"We've had a really good offseason with guys attending," Hahn said. "We've had good attendance, and great attitude. They're always willing to listen and learn. Through the years here, I've been involved in the youth leagues to get them ready, which the seniors this year were the ones that were in the youth league when I started. That's part of the thing that makes me very proud as seeing that all the work and nights away that

I was putting them in leagues traveling to make sure they had games. I was doing things in the summer leagues and have everything ready to go when now they're at this level."

Pleasant Valley lost many close games last season, and Hahn hopes his team can win those games and continue to be competitive in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference.

The Bears have been on the cusp of making the district playoffs, and the 2023-24 season is a good opportunity to achieve that goal. The EPC expects to be a competitive one, with Pocono Mountain West and the rest of the Pocono schools competing.

"We've been very competitive in the EPC, which is something that is important to us, and we want to be competitive every game," Hahn said. "I'm just hoping that this year, each year, we can take that next step, and we win those close games this year. I tell our guys all the time that we can win five games this year, or we can win 15. It comes down to hitting foul shots, not turning the ball over and doing those key things that gets us the key wins at the end of the game."

TAMAQUA



Members of the 2023-24 Tamaqua boys basketball team include, front row from left, Matthew Vucolitis, Noah Mateyak, Cooper Ansbach, Connor Dillon; back row, Isaiah Davis, Michael Styka, Luke Kane and Brady McCabe. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Blue Raider boys have veteran lineup

BY SAM MATTA
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

The pickings are not ripe in the Land of Running Waters for the winter boys basketball season.

Jim Barron has been at the head of the class for the past seven seasons, and is now ready to raise the curtain on his eighth version.

Oh, the cupboard isn't totally bare, mind you. There are four seasoned veterans, but a fifth decided not to return for his junior season; instead baseball is his brand.

That would be Mason Ligenza, who would have given the Blue Raiders range in the paint, a poten-

tial shot blocker, but more importantly a skilled athlete to compliment the four other starters.

"We've lost him, it's his decision so we move on without (Mason)," Barron said, not crying over spilt milk.

Now for the good part: Cooper Ansbach (3.62 ppg) and fellow guard Connor Dillon (12.23 ppg). Toss in another guard Noah Mateyak (12.29 ppg) and forward Luke Kane (5.05 ppg) at 6-2, all returnees from last campaign. Meanwhile, junior Mike Styka (6-0 5.29 ppg) will be counted on to man the post position.

Tamaqua would have

been much stronger had Ligenza returned, since the Blue Raiders lost but two true-grads in Cameron Lewis (5.59 ppg.) and Lucas Milot (6.14 ppg.). Still Barron says his team is athletic, and will need to hustle up and down the court.

"We have speed, quickness, what we need to do is play both ends of the floor by being smart and hustle with determination," the coach said in an inspiring tone.

The coaches positive vibes should rub off on the team

"We have a very talented starting five," he opened his interview stating. "Dil-

lon and Mateyak can really shoot the ball and score very well. Kane returns as a big man from last year. Ansbach is a very savvy guard who has a huge basketball IQ. (Brady) McCabe and Styka will provide good size and athleticism down low."

McCabe, a junior, is a seasoned player and will be called on to man a four or five role, while several other players are expected to get their share of court time.

And with only two seniors — that being Dillion and Styka — the coaching staff will tap into a num-

See **BOYS** on Page 41

TAMAQUA



Members of the 2023-24 Tamaqua girls basketball team include, front row from left, Cadi Fannock, Kolbe Robb, Sarah Hope, Alexis Bowman; middle row, Veronica Scott, Sam Plasha, Makenna Ellington, Laura Lehr, Hailey York, Mia Bamford, Julie Oakes; back row, Ceanna Gormley, Makayla Bartenope, Jordan Rehrig, Lauren Ligenza, Leah Black, Kendle Miller, Lorelei Plasha and head coach Erika Davis. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Tamaqua returns plenty of experience

BY PATRICK MATSINKO
PMATSINKO@TNONLINE.COM

There were no banners to be hung a season ago in the already crowded Tamaqua gymnasium.

Yes, the Tamaqua girls basketball team has a boatload of tradition, just look at its coach; Erika Barron Davis. She is true tradition, and now entering her 10th season as the lady in

charge of this proud program, Davis has had her share of flags draping in the gym; both as a coach and a player.

Now as the 2023-2024 season is ready to lift the curtain, the Blue Raiders would seem to be in a position to compete in the tough Schuylkill Girls Basketball League.

With nary a senior

last winter on the roster, the Blue Raiders return a horde of experience and will look to improve on last season's 6-16 record.

"We had a solid summer, I thought we finished fairly strong last season," Davis said. "I feel that we have some momentum going into this season."

A lack of scoring hurt the Raiders last year. How-

ever experience was a factor and this time around Tamaqua should be able to generate points.

"We have the ability to have a strong inside game and shooters from the outside," Davis said. "Our speed is a plus factor so that is going to help us this time; so we want to take advantage of it as much as we can." See **TAMAQUA** on Page 44



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TAMAQUA



Members of the 2023-2024 Tamaqua wrestling team include, front row from left, Aiden Schlier, Levi Kunkel, Evan Temarantz, Brody Schlier, Frank Hill; middle row, Gabe Erbe, Greg Sabo, Allen Tracy, Chase Zeigenfuss, Tippy Soneja; back row, Bradley Whalen, Stephen Keiffer, Will Behun, Jacob Hahn and head coach Jim McCabe. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Blue Raiders enjoy having a full room

BY SAM MATTA
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

The operative words in the high school wrestling world — The Room Is Full.

As Tamaqua coach Jim McCabe enters his 17th season, the Blue Raiders are significantly up in terms of

the roster numbers.

Which equates to competition at every class, and no weight class forfeits during the season.

“We’ve got a full room, we’re a year older, we’re looking to have a full lineup with extra kids,” said

McCabe, a former state champion at Mahanoy Area.

Losing only two seniors, Jacob Schleer and Matt Hedring, coming off a 7-11 record indicates that there are plenty of veterans who can help the team to a winning record.

It will be tough for the Raiders to hit .500 in the Schuylkill Wrestling League.

“The league has a lot of quality wrestlers that we will face,” McCabe continued. Pottsville, Blue Mountain and Lehighton are in the fray.”

One of the top-notch wrestlers returning with experience is Gabe Erbe, who has been a three-time District 11 qualifier.

McCabe thinks Erbe — who is closing in on 100 career wins — should be a standout. Also Aiden Schlier is coming off a big season after posting 22 wins last winter. Keep an eye on 172-pound Jacob Hehn, a junior, who could also have a banner year.

Here’s the rundown on the team’s veterans.

At 114/121 are juniors Aiden and Levi Kunkel.

At 121/127 is battle-tested Erbe, a senior who is a three-time District 11 place winners. Junior Brody Boyce is at 133, while juniors Chase Zeigenfuss and Allen Tracy are competing for the 139 spot.

Senior Stephen Keiffer

See **WRESTLE** on Page 41

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TAMAQUA



Members of the 2023-24 Tamaqua boys swim team include, front row from left, Jack Tharp, Ben Hunsicker, Logan Morgans, Nassir Nobles, Stephen Behun, Ethan DiBonifazio; middle row, Jesse Gormley, Jathen Krall, Peter McGinley, Thomas Graham, Vincenzo Valentine, Alex Zehner; back row, head coach Jen Paisley, assistant coach Lisa Trubilla and managers Maura Walker and Katie Behun. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Raider boys swim team senior-laden

BY SAM MATTA
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

To say that Tamaqua swimming coach Jen Paisley is optimistic about her boys team may be an understatement.

To hear Paisley speak of this season, her voice is full of energy and she sees the rise in numbers as a huge plus for the program.

While most boys teams in the league are down in numbers, not this squad.

"We've got the most swimmers ever in our program," Paisley said.

The roster has 15 and

features nine seniors.

"How can you not be excited," she said.

At the head of the senior class are Alex Zehner, Ethan DiBonifazio, Jack Tharp, Jathan Krall, Jesse Gormley, Peter McGinley and Stephen Behun. Juniors who return after winning letters are Vincenzo Valentine, Brody Boyce and Jacob Hehn.

A trio of sophomores and three freshmen make up the remainder of the roster. There's Logan Morgans, Thomas Graham and William Behn; the fresh-

men are Nassir Nobles and Benjamin Hunsicker.

"The boys are hoping to have a great season," Paisley said. "With a bunch of underclassmen, it will give us depth.

Heading the sprints are Jason Paul and Zehner. Gormley will be in the distances and mid-distance. Paisley calls McGinley a strong solid swimmer, as well as Tharp.

Paisley thinks the squad can better its record of 8-6 from a year ago.

"Oh, definitely we can do better and I feel that we

will," the coach said.

She also mentioned the league's top dogs.

"Last (season) we gave Pottsville (league champs) a run for the money," Paisley said. "Blue Mountain always brings a solid contingent. I'd say they are the top contender for the league title."

Paisley feels that her team can contend.

"Maybe we can put (ourselves) in position to be one of those contenders and surprise (Blue Mountain). I know we are capable of doing it."

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TAMAQUA



Members of the 2023-24 Tamaqua girls swimming team include, front row from left, Gabrielle Blasko, Isabella Jones, Julia Lawfer, Ava Murray, Destiny Steinmetz, Lily McNutt; second row, Avery Deitrich, Andrea Betz, Addison Krall, Kimmy Rudy, Adrianna Geronimo, Ashleigh McGuinness; third row, Janna Brown, Savannah Wilson, Lyla Clemson, Ava Jones, Emily Kohlineir, Keira McGuinness; back row, head coach Jen Paisley, assistant coach Lisa Trubilla, Maura Walker, Kate Behun and Lexi Buchala. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Tams' girls swim team has 'potential'

BY SAM MATTA
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

Tamaqua coach Jen Paisley is excited about the Blue Raiders girls swim team this season.

Paisley says the team has the "potential" to be very good, to make a statement against Blue Mountain and Pottsville.

The girls team always seem to be in the mix. They may not size up talent wise with the other top-flight programs, but they find ways to compete and get positive results.

There is a star in senior

Gabrielle Blasko, who is one of the top swimmers in the Schuylkill League.

Paisley can also point to several other seniors as well — Lexi Buchala, Lily McNutt and Alexis Jones. Add in Emily Kohlmeir who returns for her final season.

"Last season we were 6-8, I think we can tip those scales," Paisley said. "I feel we can have a winning season ..."

She points to a roster of 22 girls.

"We're expecting to be a little more compet-

itive on the girls side," the coach said. "This is our biggest senior class. They'll lead the team. Leix Buchala in the mid-distance (events), as well as Blasko and Kohlmeir. We've are looking to Savannah Wilson and Isabella Jones, a pair of underclassmen we are hoping to score for us."

The key to the Blue Raiders' season will be consistency. Paisley's teams usually are strong in the relay events. That was something missing last season. And with

only one team returning with district place winners, the Raiders can flip the tables with strong individual swimmers, and relay teams.

"We always have a very good girls team," Paisley about the program's tradition. "We have a large number; hopefully we've got to figure out what those girls sprints are and getting them in the events they need in order to compete."

Tamaqua opens the season Dec. 5 against Marian Catholic.

TAMAQUA



Luke Kane

BOYS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

ber of untested players who have the ability to add depth and can emerge as the season moves forward.

Barron said his is looking to junior 6-0 forward Issiah Davis to compete for varsity minutes.

“While Davis is looking strong and competing for varsity minutes along with (Matt) Vecolitis, we are getting some quality preseason work from a pair of freshman. Two freshmen who are pushing for time may be Jakin Tamagini and Lando Kamant.”

Tamagini is a 5-11 forward, while Kamant is a 5-9 guard.

Though the lineup is sea-

soned with four returning starters, Barron knows it’s all about getting the team in sync with untested players.

The Raiders will have their work cut out in the tough Schuylkill Boys Basketball Division I league after going 5-9 and 9-13 overall, having to match up against defending champs Blue Mountain, and always perennial threat Pottsville.

“We will have to grow up fast,” Barron mentioned as his team allowed but 51.5 points per game. “Our kids that haven’t seen varsity time will be getting a trial by fire, but the staff has a lot of confidence in their abilities.

“We will need to make adjustments on the fly. I like our quickness, our determination and our will to win.”

WRESTLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

seems locked in at 145, while junior Bradley Whalen is at 160. Whalen competed in districts last year. Two more juniors are listed at 172 and 215 pounds, including Hehn and Tip Soneja, respectively. Anthony DeBellis returns at 285 pounds.

“We’re pretty much junior-heavy,” McCabe said of his eight juniors. “You know the big thing (from this season to last) is that we have a full lineup; that’s huge for us. We’re not giving up points, and that means a lot.”

Tamaqua will welcome frosh Eric Tamerentz, who is expected to see plenty of time at 107, while at 190 — one of the vacant giveaway slots last winter — Will Behun steps in for his sophomore campaign.

“We are excited because we will also have a heavy-weight (DeBellis) to compete. Last (season) we had to forfeit a lot of times,” McCabe mentioned.



Gabe Erbe

“We were giving up 18 points last (season)... we’ve got a good group of kids. They’re confident, they’re working hard and that’s all I can ask for.”

Tamaqua will also feature six high school girl wrestlers for the coming season — Lexi Jones (Sr.), Amanda Chen (Jr.), Cean-na Gormley (Soph.), Rylin Arroyo (Fr.), Addison Trunk (Fr.) and Jocelyn Navitsky (Soph.).

There are also a pair of junior high girls taking to the mats in Clare Boyce (Fr.) and Kiely Kunkel (8th

grade).

Indeed, a new age is dawning in the world of high school girls’ sports.

At Tamaqua, McCabe and his staff will have a second season for the aspiring program. The sport is starting to generate momentum.

“Pre-pandemic, we had over 40 some girls in the elementary, but we lost most of them, now they’re starting to come back,” McCabe said. “We have a group (of girls) that is excited, and they wrestle on Sundays. We found a number of

tournaments last year, and the girls were able to have matches.”

The most astounding note for the sport would be that of scholarships.

“Since we have a program, I’ve gotten more calls from college coaches,” McCabe continued, “they’re looking to give scholarships for girls. Believe or not, the only other sport that gives out more scholarships for (women) is golf. This winter, Iowa is sending their team to East Stroudsburg for a match. That shows you how the sport is growing. ESU has a full team for (women).”

McCabe was quick to add “... you know the ACC (Atlantic Coast Conference) doesn’t have (men’s) wrestling. Now (it) is thinking of adding for (women), and they will need to do it for the men.”

Which brings about more scholarships in the sport.

“Our numbers are going to start to pick up in the elementary, so we’re really happy and excited,” McCabe said.

WEATHERLY



Members of the 2023-24 Weatherly boys basketball team include, front row from left, Dominic Kokinda, Ian McKeegan, Alex Ortiz, Corbin Wagner and Zane Lare. Back row, assistant coach Robert Bryan, Brandon Davis, Isiah Williams, Matt Adler, John Donish, Niko Saldukas, Tyler Hinkle, Jacob Hinkle, head coach Luke Medico. Other teams members are, Austyn Lamonica, Sebastian Williams and Chance Stauffer. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Weatherly grad returns as head coach

BY RICH STRACK
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

Luke Medico has gone back to the school where he left his name hanging from the gymnasium wall.

The former basketball star who scored 1,000 points during his four years at Weatherly High School is the new head boys basketball coach.

Medico understands the task at hand after last year's one win season and he's putting his faith that his 15-man roster will restore the school's round-ball credibility.

"We have some new players and some that are returning to the team," said Medico, "and there's certainly enough talent here to get more wins for Weatherly basketball."

Senior Austin Lamon-

ica will man the shooting guard position and is one of the quickest players on the team, according to Medico. "He's going to be super helpful in getting us points. He's aggressive and can get to the basket from any direction."

Medico, who graduated from Weatherly in 2000, will give the ball to sophomore Ian McKeegan who returns to play the point and direct the offensive attack. "Ian will be our captain on and off the court. He's our floor general, the glue to keep our team together."

The coach says McKeegan is a hard worker and a great ball handler who can also put up double figures in points and become a top scorer. "He sets the bar higher and that's some-

thing we need to do if we expect to be a good team this year."

Sophomore Corbin Wagner will play guard and has a "long wingspan" at 5-6. He brings enthusiasm and a positive attitude to the game, necessary character qualities to keep his teammates motivated.

Nico Salukis is pound for pound the strongest player on the roster, according to Medico. "He can drive, post up, and shoot threes. We have high hopes for his scoring ability."

At the power forward slot will be freshman Chance Stauffer. Medico likes his overall strength and speed. "Chance has a great skill set. He's fast and physical. We expect him to score on driving layups and putbacks off of offen-

sive rebounds."

Medico calls 6-2 junior John Donish his "garbage man" because Donish will be counted on for rebounding, getting to loose balls, and scoring from scrums underneath the basket.

Flexing into the lineup will senior Alex Ortiz in Medico's multiple guard offense. He's described as quick and understands correct positioning during the play calling schemes.

Coming off the bench will be Brandon Davis, Matt Adler and Dominic Kokinda, all of whom work hard and run the floor well. Tyler and Jacob Hinkle are rebounders and play good team ball.

Medico has settled on a style of play for the Wreckers based on what he sees

See **BOYS** on Page 44

WEATHERLY



Members of the 2023-24 Weatherly girls basketball team include, front row from left, Jillian Russell, Kaylee Gaydoscik, Abby Weston, Taylor Davidovich; back row, assistant coach Chris Gaydoscik, Cortney Snyder, Bria Gordick, Kelly Reiner, Brianna Pugh and head coach Jason Kane. Other members of the team are Bethany Houser and Ana Bloom. RON GOWER/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS

Wreckers hoping to build off D-11 win

BY RICH STRACK
TNSPORTS@TNONLINE.COM

Last season, the Weatherly girls basketball team proved that regular season records don't always matter. Despite losing more games than they won, coach Jason Kane's group not only qualified for the district playoffs, they came away with a first-round victory.

With only 11 girls on this year's roster, Kane has the challenge of keeping his team motivated as well as healthy in their quest to qualify for postseason play again.

Kane will count heavily on senior Bethany Houser, the team's leading scorer the past two years with an average of 13 points a game last season. "She can handle the ball in any situation and can drive to the basket or create her own jump shots from outside the paint."

At the second guard position will be senior Taylor Davidovich, another skilled ball handler. Kane will try to get her open space for jumpers and threes. She's a good foul shooter as well so driving layups can put her on the

free throw line.

Speaking of three-point shots, Brianna Pugh could be the go-to girl for jumpers beyond the arc.

Senior Kaylee Gaydoscik will play the other forward position. "Kaylee plays solid defense and she will be needed to rebound on both ends of the court. She positions herself against a ball handler and has quick hands to cause turnovers by stealing the ball."

Sophomore Kelly Reiner is what Kane calls a "Jack of all trades." She can play both point guard and for-

ward and do everything well. "She'll play where we need her," Kane said.

Three more players will see court time for the Wreckers. Senior Ana Bloom does the "dirty work" says Kane. She fights for rebounds and frustrates opposing players with her relentless defense. Sophomores Abby Weston and Bria Gordick add different skill sets to the Wreckers' game. Weston will contribute to the defensive side of the game and Gordick can play the center position to get rebounds and score

See **GIRLS** on Page 44

WEATHERLY

BOYS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

at practice.

“We will play up tempo for sure,” he said, “and try to take advantage of our overall speed. We’re working on quick transitions from defense to offense and get right to the basket.”

He expects that opposing teams will try to press his offense, and beating the press has been a focus in practice.

The Wreckers intend to employ a man-to-man defense, but be adaptable to go to a flash zone depending upon the opponent’s tendencies and the score of the game.

He explained that there is no ceiling set for his team because their first objective is to build a foundation that sustains a competitive edge.

“First, we have to stay in the game and when we get behind, keep the scores close. To earn success and return Weatherly basketball to a solid reputation, we have to maintain motivation each time we step onto the court.”

Making district playoffs in the single A classification is an attainable goal, but Medico feels that is an outcome that begins with learning what it takes to win. His formula for winning basketball is talent plus effort and both are required to build a program he hopes to be heading for years to come.



Ian McKeegan

GIRLS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

points off of putbacks.

The Wreckers will dictate their style of play based upon the specific skill sets of their players. Kane’s offensive strategy will be to control possession and slow the game down. “We have been focusing on playing good defense and winning low scoring games. We’ll play an aggressive zone most of the time and will ease into some full court pressure once we gain more experience.”

He anticipates that his team will struggle at times to score points so every good opportunity to put the ball into the basket will be significant to their chances of coming out on top once the final horn sounds.

“We’ll play a halfcourt offense and look for high percentage shots and drive to the basket for layups. Grab offensive rebounds and score on putbacks.”

Of course, the Wreckers would love to return to the post-season playoffs, but right now, Kane says his team is working on “getting better.”

TAMAQUA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

possible.”

Translation: Run the court, create turnovers and look for fastbreak points, a missing ingredient.

Sarah Hope will be the floor general. Davis calls her a strong defender with experience.

Team captain Kolbe Robb is called a scrappy player who sees the floor well and can get to the rim. Forward Lorelei Plasha is a threat inside and outside, and is also a team captain. Lorelei’s sister, Samantha, mans a guard spot who has quickness and is a strong defender.

Davis points to Kendle Miller saying she has high basketball IQ, a great shooter and does the little

things well.

Another veteran, forward Makayla Bartenope, can hit the glass, get key rebounds and putbacks from the paint. She, too, has the ability to run the floor on breakaways. Toss in Veronica Scott, who was the sixth girl off the bench and brings consistency. She played sparingly last winter after an injury and will see her share of playing time at guard.

Tamaqua will look to add depth from Lauren Ligenza, who has the skills to be a strong forward, with range and can be a threat inside, and is a student of the game as well.

Look to sophomore Leah Black who missed the entire campaign last season with an ACL injury. Davis feels she has the capability to add rebounding play,

calling her a strong inside player, especially from 12-foot range.

Davis said her team has to be at the top of its game, physically and mentally.

“We need to execute, show patience, focus, limit our turnovers, finish and control the controllables,” she said.

Also of concern for the coach is adapting to the new 1-and-1 rule; foul a player and they shoot two shots, no more sixth foul to reach 1-and-1. Davis added, “we need to play 32 minutes of solid basketball and have no let-up (in our play).”

The team is hoping to play beyond the 22nd game.

“Our goal is to play a meaningful 23rd game in the postseason, compete for a league and district playoff spot,” she said.



Sam Plasha



Matt Machalik



Stephen Hood



Frankie Martinelli



Aubrey Pollard

2022-23 Boys Basketball Stats

Team	W	L	Pct.	Avg.	Opp. Avg.
Palmerton	20	8	.714	56.71	44.07
Marian	14	9	.609	58.78	51.43
Panther Valley	13	10	.565	57.22	52.96
Northwestern	11	12	.478	44.00	44.39
Pleasant Valley	10	11	.476	54.71	56.62
Jim Thorpe	10	12	.455	45.09	49.55
Tamaqua	9	13	.409	52.05	51.50
Lehighton	8	14	.364	44.82	48.68
Northern Lehigh	1	21	.045	30.55	59.82
Weatherly	1	21	.045	36.86	66.95

Team Free-Throw Pct.			Name, Team	FTM	FTA	Pct.	
Northwestern	168	233	.721	N. Mateyak, Tam.	21	258	12.29
Panther Valley	191	274	.697	C. Dillon, Tam.	22	269	12.23
Palmerton	264	419	.630	C. Fitch, NW	23	273	11.87
Lehighton	170	274	.620	C. Weaver, PaVy.	23	261	11.35
Tamaqua	170	286	.594	C. Dietz, Leh.	20	221	11.05
Marian	170	297	.572	A. Warner, JT	22	239	10.86
Pleasant Valley	194	345	.562	N. Rosahac, JT	16	162	10.13
Jim Thorpe	195	359	.543	J. Roth, Leh.	22	209	9.50
Weatherly	87	169	.515	D. Kokinda, PaVy.	23	213	9.26
Northern Lehigh	127	265	.479	P. Moore, PIVy.	21	355	8.67
				C. Simms, NL	22	186	8.45

Team Three-Pointers			Individual Free-Throw Pct.			
Team	Three-Pointers		(min. 1 FT per team's games)			
Panther Valley	179		Name, Team	FTM	FTA	Pct.
Marian	140		C. Fitch, NW	54	61	.885
Northwestern	128		C. Weaver, PaVy.	75	88	.852
Tamaqua	127		S. Hood, PaVy.	42	53	.792
Lehighton	114		C. Dietz, Leh.	41	53	.774
Pleasant Valley	89		B. Hosier, Palm.	108	142	.761
Palmerton	88		G. Nelson, NW	53	71	.746
Northern Lehigh	85		C. Dillon, Tam.	54	77	.701
Weatherly	82		J. Roth, Leh.	48	69	.696
Jim Thorpe	81		F. Valente, Mar.	61	91	.670
			M. Ligenza, Tam.	37	57	.649

Individual Scoring				Individual Three-Pointers		
(min. half of team's games played)				Three-Pointers		
Name, Team	G	Pts.	Avg.	Name, Team	Three-Pointers	
B. Hosier, Palm.	28	478	17.07	J. Currie, Mar.		67
J. Moore, PIVy.	21	355	16.90	D. Kokinda, PaVy.		59
F. Valente, Mar.	22	368	16.73	N. Mateyak, Tam.		55
M. Machalik, Palm.	28	459	16.39	C. Dietz, Leh.		54
J. Currie, Mar.	23	348	15.13	C. Fitch, NW		47
K. Herron, JT	11	161	14.64	C. Dillon, Tam.		43
S. Hood, PaVy.	23	324	14.09	F. Valente, Mar.		37
I. McLaurin, Wea.	21	279	13.29	S. Hood, PaVy.		36
G. Nelson, NW	23	287	12.48	G. Nelson, NW		36
				B. Hood, PaVy.		34
				A. Ratti, PIVy.		31

Statistics compiled by Rod Heckman

2022-23 Girls Basketball Stats

Team	W	L	Pct.	Avg.	Opp. Avg.
Northwestern	26	3	.897	47.34	25.59
Marian	25	3	.893	57.29	30.93
Palmerton	21	6	.778	44.52	33.59
Northern Lehigh	15	12	.556	44.56	42.04
Jim Thorpe	12	11	.522	39.96	39.78
Panther Valley	12	11	.522	54.96	51.65
Weatherly	8	17	.320	31.58	42.67
Tamaqua	6	16	.273	36.50	49.73
Lehighton	5	17	.227	34.95	41.23
Pleasant Valley	4	17	.190	33.67	47.67

Team Free-Throw Pct.			Name, Team	FTM	FTA	Pct.	
Northwestern	220	333	.661	Han. Barry, Palm.	27	290	10.74
Marian	214	328	.652	B. Houser, Wea.	24	252	10.50
Panther Valley	168	263	.639	C. Thomas, NW	27	275	10.19
Palmerton	198	335	.591	E. Muir, PIVy.	21	203	9.67
No. Lehigh	222	378	.587	F. Martinelli, Mar.	28	270	9.64
Jim Thorpe	122	217	.562	O. Serfass, Leh.	19	181	9.53
Weatherly	188	336	.560	M. Orsulak, PaVy.	23	218	9.48
Lehighton	110	216	.509	G. Cinicola, JT	23	214	9.30
Pleasant Valley	96	189	.508	L. Plasha, Tam.	22	197	8.95
Tamaqua	128	265	.483	E. Kane, Wea.	24	205	8.54
				B. Balliet, NW	29	247	8.52

Team Three-Pointers			Individual Free-Throw Pct.			
Team	Three-Pointers		(min. 1 FT per team's games)			
Marian	164		Name, Team	FTM	FTA	Pct.
Panther Valley	130		D. Barthold, NL	29	38	.763
Palmerton	106		P. Sevrain, NW	67	88	.761
Northwestern	105		C. Minchhoff, Mar.	59	79	.747
Jim Thorpe	99		M. Yuhas, JT	59	79	.747
Pleasant Valley	85		M. Maynard, PaVy.	86	116	.741
Northern Lehigh	73		L. Plasha, Tam.	43	59	.729
Lehighton	55		F. Martintelli, Mar.	51	73	.699
Weatherly	52		E. Muir, PIVy.	41	59	.695
Tamaqua	21		B. Morgan, Palm.	83	123	.675

Individual Scoring				Individual Three-Pointers		
(min. half of team's games played)				Three-Pointers		
Name, Team	G	Pts.	Avg.	Name, Team	Three-Pointers	
M. Maynard, PaVy.	23	522	22.70	S. Robin, PaVy.		58
A. Pollard, NL	26	440	16.92	Han. Barry, Palm.		48
M. Yuhas, JT	23	362	15.74	G. Cinicola, JT		47
B. Morgan, Palm.	27	411	15.22	A. Pleban, Mar.		39
A. Stivala, PIVy.	18	232	12.89	B. Balliet, NW		37
P. Sevrain, NW	29	361	12.45	D. Barthold, NL		32
C. Minchhoff, Mar.	26	321	12.35	M. Maynard, PaVy.		32
K. Barthold, NL	27	322	11.93	N. Vermillion, PaVy.		32
S. Robin, PaVy.	23	259	11.26	F. Martinelli, Mar.		27
				S. Frantz, Palm.		26
				C. Minchhoff, Mar.		26
				B. Morgan, Palm.		26
				A. Stivala, PIVy.		26

Statistics compiled by TJ Engle



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FEATURE



Northwestern Katie Brensinger (top) has control of her opponent during a match last season. Brensinger and female wrestlers throughout the state will be competing for PIAA medals for the first time ever this season. TIMES NEWS FILE PHOTO

FEATURE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

year.

At last year's Coal Cracker, Pleasant Valley's Juliette Trout captured the 106-pound title at the 36-team event as an eighth-grader. Lily Decker, another talented Bears' wrestler, also qualified for states last year as a sophomore with a third-place finish at regionals.

"We're looking forward to eventually getting a girls team," said Olympians head coach Dan Heaney. "We like having the girls Coal Cracker. It's a nice tournament and it's one of the few bigger girls tournaments, so it's turning out to be quite an event. I think this year it's gotten bumped and a day added to it, rather than it being

just on Saturday; it's Friday and Saturday. So it's just showing the growth of the teams that were already in place last year. A lot of the teams that came last year brought three or four girls, and now they're bringing 10 girls. So the numbers are up quite a bit, so that's encouraging."

Maximizing mat time and opportunities is something that each program knows will be paramount throughout the season and moving forward.

Tamaqua will be hosting a duals tournament on Dec. 16 with that aim in mind.

"We have that full, but then people started saying, 'Well, what about girls?'" said Blue Raiders coach Jim McCabe. "So then we tried to get a certain amount of girls and we can run a tournament in the other gym and make sure we

get them five matches. It doesn't have to be a dual meet; we'll just try to get as many matches as possible. And that's where we're at right now, is trying to find opportunities for the girls to wrestle.

"You look at the girls that wrestled last year, some of them had 30 matches, because we went to a lot of matches on a Sunday, and the PIAA is allowing those tournaments to occur again on a Sunday, because a lot of the head coaches are coaching the boys, and Saturdays are filled. So we're going to continue to go to those Sunday matches. And that's where we're at and that's what we're looking to do, is maximize opportunities for the girls."

The momentum is positive and the focus is forward. For girls wrestling in Pennsylvania, the time is now.



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