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Grafton boys' soccer banks on depth, vesatility in NSC wars and beyond

Playing competitively in the perennially tough North Shore Conference is almost never a problem for the Grafton boys' soccer team, which regularly finishes in the top half of the league standings.

With the Black Hawks returning most of their talent from a 2011 team that went 4-3 in NSC play, coach Don Arnold has hopes for bigger things this season.

"On paper, we are better, no question about it," said Arnold, who welcomed more than a dozen varsity veterans to practice this week.

"We will have some depth and a lot of guys who can play different positions. But the biggest thing for us is going to be attitude — how much they want to put into this season and what they want to get out of it."

Grafton, which was 12-7-1 overall last season, has nine seniors vying for starting positions, including defenders Andrew Best, Jake Wilde and Alec Rosenberg, midfielders Jacob Kellett, Wolfgang Pilarski, Michael Stockhausen and Nick Bocanegra and forwards Alex Lorbecki and Aaron Hodges.

Lorbecki, Hodges and Kellett were the team's top three offensive threats last year.

Leading the Hawks' juniors are goalkeeper Killian Mielotz and defenders Matt Salm, Zach Greenwood and Alex Eidman, who will join forces in a back line that should be especially solid.

Arnold is also counting on steady play from two sophomores, forward Brendan Larsen and midfielder Adam Huibregste. Among several promising freshmen, Jake Demerath earned an

early nod for his midfield work, the coach added.

Versatility will be one of the Hawks' top strengths, Arnold believes. He said Best could easily slide into a midfield spot, Wilde may see action at forward, and Rosenberg has considerable skill as a keeper.

"I think our defense will be solid and our center midfield could be very strong," Arnold said. "Our overall speed should be pretty good."

Last year, Grafton showed flashes of excellence on the way to a fourth-place tie in the eight-team North Shore. The Hawks scored a 3-1 road win over second-place Cedarburg but were also blanked by champion Whitefish Bay and Germantown in a season that had plenty of ups and downs.

The Hawks' WIAA tournament hopes were quickly dashed with a 2-1 loss to Milwaukee Pius in the Division 1 regional semifinals.

With more experience and depth this time around, Grafton has a better shot at joining the North Shore's elite, their coach said.

"It's hard to tell with the conference this year," Arnold said. "It's always a tough conference, and I think there may be four or five teams that have a chance to win it."

With only a few days of practice under their belts, the Hawks still have plenty of things to work on before they open the season Tuesday, Aug. 14, with a 7 p.m. nonconference game at Waukesha Catholic Memorial.

This Saturday, Grafton will start to fine-tune its lineup with a scrimmage at Cedarburg.

"Most of the positions on the team are up for grabs," Arnold said. "I think there are going to be a lot of guys fighting for playing time, which is a good situation for us."

Image Information: DEPTH AND EXPERIENCE are expected to be the strengths of the Grafton Black Hawks boys' soccer team. Among the veteran leaders the team is counting on are senior

forward Alex Lorbecki (left), junior defender Matthew Salm (upper right) and senior forward Aaron Hodges. Press file photos