

Grafton girls bank on new blend of talent after taking hit from graduation

Loaded with veteran talent at every position, the Grafton girls' soccer team staked its claim as one of the state's top Division 1 programs last season.

But with a new year comes new challenges, and the Black Hawks are no exception.



This time they'll have to restock a roster that lost nine players to graduation, including standouts such as forward Carley Pfannerstill, midfielders Emma Fatla and Hannah Knauer, defender Gabi Kuester and goalkeeper Alissa Viste.

"Numbers-wise, we've graduated this amount in the past, but we never graduated this much talent," said coach Don Arnold, who guided Grafton to a 20-7-2 record and the state semifinals last year.

"It was definitely a huge hit for us defensively and with the goals lost. It's a challenge, but it's one that our players can relish.

"It's another opportunity for them to step up and become leaders."

The Hawks certainly aren't short on skills.

Their offensive attack includes forwards such as seniors Angie Mann and Haley Orlowski and junior Zoie Bauer. Mann is the team's top returning scorer, finishing with 11 goals and 10 assists last season.

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Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 20 March 2013 18:21

"Angie can attack out of the midfield and on top," Arnold said. "She's got a very strong shot."

In the midfield, Grafton is counting on a transition game triggered by seniors Alyssa Arnold and Abby Freeland. A gifted passer, Arnold had 14 assists and seven goals in 2012.

"As a center midfielder, Alyssa has a key role in setting things up," the coach said of his daughter. "We'll look for her to create scoring opportunities."

The Hawks' defense will feature seniors Maddy Huibregste, Audrey Dickmann and Alli Demerath, who's returning from a knee injury that sidelined her late last season.

"We lost some good players on defense, but we have some very strong ones back with a lot of experience," coach Arnold said.

One major question mark for the Hawks is at keeper, where Viste earned all-state honors last year. The position is up for grabs, with sophomore Megan Otto holding an inside track in the preseason, coach Arnold said.

Being counted on to contribute are several players in their first full varsity season, including junior midfielders Jessie Bader and Sarah Couer, junior defender Elena Destrampe and freshman Maria Salm, a midfielder/forward.

"They're young, but they stepped up last year in some tournaments for us and did well," coach Arnold said. "It's important for us to have some good young players coming up."

Despite the loss of firepower to graduation, coach Arnold doesn't see his team changing its offensive approach.

"I think we're going to have to throw more into our offense this season. We can't lay back and wait for things to happen," he said.

"Last year, we got so much from our forwards. We'll keep the same mentality this time."

Coach Arnold expects defending champion Cedarburg, which has most of its top players back, to be the conference title favorite this season. Nicolet and Whitefish Bay should also have strong teams, he said.

"We lost the most talent-wise, but we have a chance to be right there with them," Arnold added.

The Hawks are scheduled to scrimmage at Cedarburg this Saturday and open the season with a 7 p.m. nonconference game against Plymouth on March 26 at Uihlein Soccer Park in Milwaukee.

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If that match is postponed due to snow, Grafton will open the season by hosting Cedarburg at 7 p.m. April 9.

Image Information: THE LEADERSHIP OF midfielder Alyssa Arnold will be one of the keys to success for the Grafton girls' soccer team, which lost nine of last year's players to graduation.
Photo by Sam Arendt