

Versatility brightens Warriors' soccer outlook

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Roster with interchangeable talent should give Ozaukee another shot at league title

With five of last year's players lost to graduation, the Ozaukee girls' soccer team has several voids to fill as it prepares for another shot at a league title this spring.

The Warriors won't be without firepower, though. Topping the list of their returning veterans are three players who received All-Central Lakeshore Conference honors last year.

"We have a good blend of talent and athleticism," said Ozaukee coach Eric Liebergen, whose team's 13-9 record last season included a 9-5, third-place mark in the conference.



"I like the flexibility that our players provide for us. I wouldn't be surprised to see a lot of girls playing more than one position."

Being counted on to provide much of the Warriors' leadership are seniors Katie Bares (midfielder), Micaela Burns (defender) and Erika Karrels (goalkeeper) and junior Natalie Clark (forward).

Bares is coming off back-to-back seasons as an All-CLC first-team selection. She scored 12 goals and led the Warriors with 10 assists last year.

Clark joined Bares on the top all-league team after leading Ozaukee with 24 goals. She was the Warriors' first player with four hat tricks since 2007 and should again be one of the area's top offensive threats.

Burns, an all-conference second-team selection, helped steady Ozaukee's defense but also excelled as a midfielder and forward.

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Karrels was expected to be one of the conference's top keepers last year but missed most of the season due to a broken finger.

"She is healthy now. It's good to have her back," Liebergen said.

In Karrels' absence, the Warriors moved Kaylee Klopp into goal. But Klopp, a junior, should be able to spend most of this year at midfielder, Liebergen noted.

"We had to play people out of position because of Erika's injury," he said. "Now, we will have her back in goal and be able to play Kaylee in the field."

Among his other veterans, Liebergen said he's counting on steady play from Lizzie Janke, a junior midfielder.

Ozaukee will also be strengthened by two standout freshmen — forward Emily Janke and midfielder/defender Haley Gabriel.

"We have a good freshman class. They're very athletic," Liebergen said.

Ozaukee's biggest loss to graduation was sweeper Mari Scalone, who received honorable mention in all-league voting.

Although snow-covered fields have limited the Warriors to indoor practices so far this spring, Liebergen is pleased with his team's skill level and work ethic.

"So far I like what I'm seeing in practice," he said. "Our challenges will be in finding our optimal lineups.

"We also want our opponents to have to scheme for us, so it's important that we can impose our style of play and make them adjust to our game."

Liebergen said he expects defending champion Howards Grove, runner-up Cedar Grove-Belgium, Oostburg and his team to all be in the thick of the conference title chase this season.

Last year, the Warriors lost a WIAA Division 3 regional final, 3-2, to Racine Prairie School, which advanced to the state level along with Oostburg. That came after Ozaukee defeated Oostburg twice during the regular season.

"I think this shows the depth in our conference and just how competitive it is," Liebergen said. "I would say the CLC is the toughest conference in Division 3 soccer."

The Warriors had their first two games this season — March 26 at Living Word Lutheran and March 28 at Port Washington — postponed due to snow. No makeup dates have been announced.

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Ozaukee is now scheduled to open play Saturday, April 6, when it participates in a tournament at Brookfield Academy.

The Warriors' first conference game will be April 11 when it travels to Howards Grove for a 4:30 p.m. match.

Image Information: THE ALL-AROUND SKILLS of junior forward Natalie Clark (left photo) and senior midfielder Katie Bares (right) will be among the keys to success for the Ozaukee High School girls' soccer team this season. Photos by Sam Arendt