



STAFF PHOTO BY MITCHELL BREUER

Freshman Samantha Bogen, sophomore Ezra Oien and senior Grace Wolfe share a moment together during a recent hockey game. Bogen and Oien proved to be big assets for the team on offense this season, coming up with 75 points for the Huskies.

YOUNG TALENT

Newer hockey players raise confidence for Owatonna's future

BY MITCHELL BREUER
SPORTS WRITER

While the team may not be heading to state this season, the Owatonna girls hockey team still has a bright future ahead of them, and this is in large part due to the young talent currently on the team.

Out of the 27 players on the team's roster, 17 are either freshmen or sophomores, and they already making a big contribution to a team that went 16-4. Two of the team's top scorers were in that age range.

"Being able to rely on the younger players to step up like our sophomores and freshmen being able to step up and score a lot of points and be offensive and being strong on the defensive side, too, with having three of our starting forward defensemen a 10th grade or younger is a

"They're a very hungry group of kids that want to continue to improve and push themselves."

Tony Cloud
Huskies Girls Hockey Coach

huge piece," Head Coach Tony Cloud said.

Two players that really stand out in this young class are freshman Samantha Bogen and sophomore Ezra Oien, with the two combining to be responsible for 75 points this past season.

Bogen really came into her own this past season, collecting two hat tricks, with the biggest highlight of her season coming in the March 2 game against Winona, where she scored five goals.

And then, there's Oien, who continued to shine this season. One of her most recent accomplishments being that she scored her 100th point as a part of the

varsity roster and became only the seventh person in the team's history to do so.

"It's been a testament to the level of play that our team has had for the last couple of years, being able to go up and put a lot of points on the board against our conference opponents and then being able to be competitive in our non-conference games as well," Cloud said. "It's a goal that she had set out for herself when she was in the program as an eighth grader, too. She looked at the school leader boards and said, 'I want to get to this spot.'"

Cloud said that what really impresses him with this group

of players is how driven they are and how they are determined to get better. He noted that with the team again failing to get past the sections, it only makes them want it more.

"They're a very hungry group of kids that want to continue to improve and push themselves," Cloud said. "So for me as the coach, it helps me to keep getting them new stuff and being able to go deeper in all the things that I'm working towards to get them to be more complete hockey players and be a little bit less reliant on one or two individuals, but more of the whole team."

One big thing Cloud said that has really helped these players develop is the cast of upper classmen around them, which he believes will only make the team even better as this group grows and passes these lessons learned on to whoever the next group of young players may be.

BOYS BASKETBALL

Blossoms bounced in the first round of playoffs

BY ALEX NUEHRING
SPORTS WRITER

After an up and down regular season in which they went 6-11, the No. 11 seed Blooming Prairie boys basketball team went on the road to take on the six seed Grand Meadow Superlarks in the first round of the Section 1A playoffs.

Unfortunately for the Awesome Blossoms, throughout the game the Superlarks showed why they were the higher-ranked team and ended up winning 69-50.

Blooming Prairie Head Coach Nate Piller said Grand Meadow won by doing a lot of things really well.

"Grand Meadow shot the ball extremely well. They're a solid group. They made a lot of three-point shots and rebound the ball very well. They play good defense and don't turn the ball over," he said.

Thanks to their three-point shooting, rebounding, defense and limiting turnovers, the Superlarks led 32-23 at halftime.

Throughout the whole game, Piller said Grand Meadow's star player, Colt Landers, was phenomenal.

"His length and skill set make him a very difficult opponent. He shoots the ball well from [three-point range] with just the narrowest of space," he said.

To contain him, Blooming Prairie sometimes committed multiple players to him, but that opened up the offense for Grand Meadow's other players.

"They had great balance from their role players to really take advantage of our defenses," he said. "We had the margin under 10 at times [but] they got valuable stops that just made it an uphill battle all evening."

Grand Meadow end-

ed up prevailing 69-50 to advance to the section quarterfinals.

This loss marked the last game of the high school basketball careers for Blooming Prairie's seven seniors: Boone Carlson, Mitchell Fiebiger, Luke Larkoski, Alex Miller, Jacob Naatz, Chris Naatz and Alex Piller.

"We close out the year saying goodbye to seven seniors who I've seen grow since they were in grade school. They're a group with a lot of personality and they know how to compete. I'll miss coaching them and wish them nothing but the best as they continue on into the spring activities and beyond," he said.

BP scoring: Colin Jordson – 16 points, Drew Kittelson – 11 points, Alex Miller – 10 points, Mitchell Fiebiger – 6 points, Chris Naatz – 5 points and Luke Larkoski – 2 points.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Panthers end on losing note in sections

BY ALEX NUEHRING
SPORTS WRITER

After losing its last three games of the regular season, the New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Genève (NRHEG) girls basketball team was hoping to snap that losing streak in the playoffs but they had to go on the road to face the 12-5 Fairmont Cardinals.

The Panthers' Head Coach Onika Peterson said Fairmont got off to an early lead thanks to its strong defense.

"We put ourselves in a quick 10-point hole. Their press caused us some issues--we tried to rush through it which caused too many turnovers which lead to easy buckets for them," she said. Once the Panthers adjusted to the Cardinals' defense, their offense started playing better.

"We ended up

fighting our way back and had it within two in the first half but they hit a couple key threes and scored on a turnover and we went into half down by 11," she said.

At halftime, Fairmont led 27-16.

NRHEG's offense was more successful in the second half, scoring 26 points, but the Panthers weren't able to claw their way back out of their deficit.

Even though their season came to a disappointing end, Peterson is proud of the hard work of all her players, specifically her seniors who saw their high school basketball career come to an end.

"I'd like to thank our two seniors Cassidy Martin and Kendall Johnson. We appreciate your hard work and leadership throughout the year. I am so excited to see what you will be doing

after graduation," she said.

Despite losing those two seniors to graduation, Peterson is optimistic about the Panthers' future.

"I'm excited for our future and the number of kids we have coming back next year," she said. "We are looking forward to a great summer of basketball."

NRHEG statistics: Sophie Stork – 18 points, 4 rebounds and 3 steals, Sidney Schultz – 7 points, 5 rebounds, 3 steals and 1 assist, Erin Jacobson – 8 points, 3 rebounds and 1 steal, Kendall Johnson – 2 points, 5 rebounds and 1 steal, Faith Nielsen – 2 points, 3 rebounds, 1 steal and 1 assist, Hallie Schultz – 2 points and 1 rebound, Rhys Martin – 2 points and 1 rebound, Sarah George – 1 point, 1 rebound and 1 steal and Cassidy Martin – 1 rebound.