



# SPORTS

## FIRE UP Trojan volleyball unit optimistic, with several key players returning for 2021

By Doug Wolter  
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### Worthington

With several proven players in camp along with a few promising younger recruits, the Worthington High School volleyball team is optimistic heading into the 2021 season.

“We have a really positive outlook. We’re very optimistic,” said veteran head coach Jessica Hogan. “We feel we can put a very competitive group on the floor this year. Our first few matches will be finding that cohesiveness with each other.”

The Trojans open the regular season on Thursday at home against Heron Lake-Okabena/Fulda. Next, it’s the Big South Conference Showcase at St. James on Saturday, then back home on Aug. 31 to face Austin.

Cohesiveness is always an important word in high school volleyball. In a sport where even the best teams tend to lose their focus at some point during a match, the Trojans are determined this year to stay sharp. To help make that happen, Hogan likes to break the game down into shorter



Tim Middagh / The Globe

Key Worthington Trojans volleyball players returning for 2021 are (from left) Brooklyn Scheitel-Taylor, Tarren Spartz, Ellie Weg, Madison Beckmann, Olivia Hayenga and Karissa Maxwell.

segments in an attempt to keep minds from wandering.

The 2020 campaign is a worthy example how difficult it can be to finish off opponents. The Trojans were impressive in beating a tough Windom Area opponent at home in their

second match of the season, but the good start wasn’t sustained. Worthington finished with a 1-11 record.

“We were in a lot of matches last year. We just couldn’t get over the hump in a lot of them,” Hogan said. “We lost a lot of close

matches and we weren’t able to close it out. I think this group will be able to pull out some of those closer matches. I think this group will have confidence.”

Back to lead the 2021 Trojans are three strong hitters, one unusually

versatile athlete, and a back row specialist.

Tarren Spartz, a 6-0 junior hitter, is a noteworthy presence near the net who can attack from every angle. She is also an excellent

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## WHS soccer taking the pitch, boys team determined to finish

By Doug Wolter  
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WORTHINGTON — Worthington High School’s soccer teams have differing views on what success looks like.

The Trojan boys squad is determined to be a strong finisher. The Trojan girls squad just wants to be more competitive.

On Thursday, both teams will get started on the 2021 fall campaign. The boys will host Mankato Loyola in a 7 p.m. regular season opener on Trojan Field. The girls will travel to play Loyola, in a 5 p.m. start time.

A look at the teams:

### BOYS

Still smarting from a 1-0 overtime loss to underdog Bloomington Kennedy in the Section 2A finals last year, the 2021 Trojans have a burning desire to prove a



Doug Wolter/The Globe

A strong veteran class leads the Worthington High School boys soccer team this fall. They include (front row, from left) Mir Gossom, Oscar Galvez, Edgar Carrillo, Omar Fernandez, Jonathan Banegas, (back) Dalen Gonzalez, Menkem Mehri, Isaiah Noble and Ulises Barrera.

point. They’ve been anxious to get back out on the pitch ever since that day.

“I think I include myself in this,” said head coach Juan Flores. “As a team, we have a

chip on our shoulder on what happened.”

The Trojans were undefeated when they met Kennedy on Trojan Field in what they all expected would be a crowning moment and a precursor to a state tournament berth. The 2A title loss was as stunning as it was unexpected. Flores said recently that some of the players put that second-place medal in their rooms and looked at it every day — using it as motivation.

The good news for WHS is that the boys again have an outstanding team on paper. There is a large and talented senior class which includes midfielders Menkem Mehri, Ulises Barrera and Mir Gossom, and defenders Dalen Gonzalez, Isaiah Noble, Omar Fernandez and Edgar Carrillo. Sophomore Jonathan Bane-

gas is a key scoring threat.

Last fall, Worthington was the second-best team in the state for goals-against average. This year should be more of the same.

“We’re going to have a solid defense. That’s definitely going to be a strong point. But we’re also going to have a lot of guys who can attack for us, who can score goals,” Flores said. “We’re going to stick with what we do.”

Team speed is an advantage Worthington can use to wear down opponents. The object is to apply pressure and get possession of the ball quickly when the Trojans don’t have it.

Weakness? “I like to think we don’t (have weaknesses),” Flores said. “Just as long as we stay focused.”

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## Dragons’ Tweet hard to beat on the volleyball court

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ADRIAN — There are still a lot of volleyball fans who aren’t exactly sure what a libero does.

The hitting and setter positions are better defined for the average fan.

As for the libero, even the name seems weird. Wikipedia says it’s an Italian word meaning “free.” Google defines the libero as a back-row defensive specialist, often reserved for shorter players with outstanding ball-control skills.

### Tweet Drill

Mayssa Tweet, a senior with the Adrian/Ellsworth Dragons high school



volleyball team, is a libero. She’s also one of the more exceptional liberos in southwest Minnesota, and has been for at least a couple of years now as she has helped her team to impressive success in the sport.

So if you ask her to describe what she does on the court, you probably couldn’t get it from a better source.

“Being a libero is a tougher job than a lot of people think,” Tweet

explained. “It’s a very mental position where you have to snap out of it if you make a mistake. You have to have a short memory. It’s throwing and sacrificing your body no matter what. You get a lot of bruises and floor burns, but it’s worth it because you can’t get a set or a hit without a pass.”

Tweet’s athleticism and aggressiveness pays high dividends. She is often the first player to get a bump on an opponent’s serve. She saves points by diving and tumbling in all directions. She’s sometimes needed to make a good set. Other times,

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Tim Middagh / The Globe

Adrian/Ellsworth volleyball player Mayssa Tweet is an exceptional libero and a leader for the Dragons.



### Mayssa Tweet

### Adrian/Ellsworth

### Senior

### Volleyball



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# Look out for Luverne in cross country

**Scott Mansch**  
The Globe

Last fall the Luverne girls cross country team claimed an unofficial state championship.

This time the Cardinals are aiming for the real deal.

The Luverne girls of head coach Pete Janiszewski appear to be the class of southwest Minnesota — and perhaps all of Class A. Six of the Cards' top nine runners from 2020 are returning, a group led by senior Tenley Nelson and sophomore Jenna DeBates, and Luverne's girls are No. 1 in the state cross country coaches' presea-

son rankings. Nelson and DeBates are ranked third and fifth, respectively, in the coaches' preseason poll.

Luverne also has a pack that features Grace Ingebretson, Tiana Lais and Kayla Bloemendaal. Most also sparkle on Luverne's award-winning girls track team, which has won no less than four straight 4x800 relay state titles.

Because of COVID precautions, the Minnesota State High School League did not offer state cross country meets last fall. There was an invitation-only showcase competition in Atwater, though, with many of the top teams

and individuals competing.

"It was our quote-unquote state championship and our girls won that pretty handily, so we kind of feel like we were the state champs," Janiszewski said.

Last fall was such an unusual season in that meets were restricted to three teams and the final competition that counted was a sectional meet. It allowed for social distancing by having timed heats for the 5,000-meter cross country distance.

There are two classes for Minnesota cross country. Luverne's girls finished second in Class

A in 2019, the last time there was an MSHSL state cross country meet. Nelson was third in that one, while former Murray County Central/Fulda star Morgan Gehl won the race.

There are several other noteworthy programs and individuals in the area, including the Murray County Central/Fulda teams of veteran coach Dominick Damm.

"We'll be competitive both on the boys and girls," he said.

The Rebel girls are led by sensational junior twins Amanda and Ashley Overgaaauw, who are ranked second and 12th, respectively, in the

coaches' preseason poll. "They're both elite runners," Damm said. "They seem to be picking up right where they left off."

Ashley won nearly every race she entered last fall, with Amanda finishing second in most. Amanda was fifth at the showcase meet in Atwater, where Ashley had to withdraw midway through.

At the state track meet last May, the twins teamed with Brylei Schreier and Megan Bakke for a fifth-place finish in the Class A 4x800 relay. Schreier's sister, Ryana, is also running cross country this fall, along

with capable runners like Chelby Kesteloot, Lindsey Hause, Braelyn Damm and others.

Losing Gehl, a Fulda High graduate who placed in multiple state cross country and track meets and is now running at the University of Sioux Falls, will be about impossible. Josie Harms also graduated from last year's squad.

But Damm, who has been at MCC/F for two decades, is optimistic this could be his best girls team.

**For the full cross country preview story, visit [d globe.com](http://d globe.com) and search under sports.**

## VOLLEYBALL

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server and solid in the back row. Ellie Weg is a junior middle hitter who also has great skill at the net. She will also do some setting.

Senior hitter Olivia Hayenga will be useful in a variety of places. An outstanding athlete, she has an exceptional vertical jump.

Another fine all-around athlete, senior Brooklyn Scheitel-Taylor is a strong passer, a strong defensive player, and is more than capable on the front row. Wherever she is on the court, she can do any task that is asked.

Back-row specialist Karissa Maxwell is a senior who's ready to come into her own. And 6-2 sophomore Madison Beckmann, who saw some varsity action as a freshman, is a good blocker who's ready for a bigger role.

Two others, junior back row specialist Kamryn Spartz (a cousin of Tarren) and sophomore setter Addison Gerber can also help.

Hogan says this 2021 group reminds her of Worthington's 2016 team, which was the last WHS volleyball squad to post a winning record (15-14). These 2021 players are dedicated, she explained, to the sport of volleyball. And the seniors do a good job of showing leadership.

In practice, the Trojans are focusing on having good first touches on the ball. When a team can do that, it keeps them "in system" so they don't need to scramble as often.

"We have the capability of being a strong hitting team. But that's only going to come by having ball control. But we also have to improve our serve and serve receive," Hogan said.

Playing in the tough Big South Conference, Worthington never has an easy time of it. Mental toughness is a firm requirement for winning.

"It takes a lot of mental toughness just to get through a match," Hogan pointed out. "You can work and work and work and do everything right, and you only get a point. Then you go back and serve, and you have to go through it all again."

## SOCCER

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### GIRLS

Victories have been hard to come by for the WHS girls in recent seasons. Every year begins with the hope of progress.

"We're excited about this season. We are going to be making a shift in our defense," said veteran head coach Emily Ahlquist. "For the past eight or nine years we had a four-flat defense. And we're going to go into a diamond defense this year."

In short, that means that instead of forming a line of defenders on the pitch, they will be set up in the shape of a diamond — with one defender forward and another back — to limit breakaways.

Unlike their counterpart Trojan boys, the Trojan girls do not have quickness as a strength. But they do have several experienced players.



Doug Wolter/The Globe

Returning veterans for the 2021 Worthington High School girls soccer team include (front row, from left) Jenny Perez, Jessenia Ybarra Muniz, Johana Merida, (back) Pamela Lomeli Ibarra, Leidy Chavez, Chantel Peralta and Sofia Montoya Mendez.

Senior Sofia Montoya, a center/midfielder, is adept at finding the forwards. Senior Pamela Lomeli is a "stopper" on defense and a good communicator. Other top players include junior Jeidy Chavez and senior Jessinia Muniz in the forward positions, and seniors Chantel Peralta and Jenny Perez in goal. Worthington graduated

its entire defensive line from 2020, so the replacements will need to develop quickly. Offensively, Ahlquist believes more goals can be scored.

"Our goal is to really work on shifting and moving on the field as a team, and realizing that the job isn't done when the ball is off your feet," said the coach.

## TWEET

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she needs to get the ball over the net from a deep position. Yes, it's a tough job.

This week, Mayssa joins her older sister Kasie as the featured athlete in The Drill. Kasie was featured two years ago and now Mayssa gets the same treatment.

It's fitting, of course. Both are outstanding volleyball players, and for years they formed a kind of mutual admiration society. Naturally, Mayssa looks up to Kasie. In her Drill interview two years ago, Kasie said she actually looks up to Mayssa.

You can see a video of Mayssa's Drill feature online at [www.dglobe.com](http://www.dglobe.com). Here's a sample of the interview:

**QUESTION:** How good might this Adrian/Ellsworth volleyball team be this year?

**ANSWER:** "We have a couple girls who have played club year-round volleyball this year, so the work will definitely benefit us. We're going to try to be a very scrappy team this year. We have a couple coming back who are very good offensive hitters for us."

**QUESTION:** You and your sister Kasie are close. Can you explain?

**ANSWER:** "My sister Kasie, I've played with her for three or four years on varsity, and now she's off playing at Gustavus Adolphus in St.

Peter. I definitely think growing up and playing with her, I've always looked up to her. She's always made me push to be a better player on the court, but more so off the court. We've always been so close."

**QUESTION:** Have you got a special sports memory to review, something that you'll never forget?

**ANSWER:** "Something in my high school career that happened that I'll never forget is my sophomore year

at the sub-section championship game against Tracy. We lost the first two sets and we came back, won the third, won the fourth, and it was in the fifth set and things were getting shaky. We were getting nervous because if we didn't win, the season was done. And we wanted to get back to the section finals to compete against Minneota again. It was, I think, game point, and I was so nervous I could just feel myself

shaking. And I kind of shanked the serve receive ball, and Brianna Reckamp sacrificed her body, threw it up, and someone put it over, and we ended up winning the point. And I could just remember a feeling of such relief that we won and she saved my butt. I'll just never forget that moment."

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