

## Cotter's Gardner a scoring machine on the soccer field

Ramblers' senior, 3-time All-State player, has sights on state tourney

BY PAT RUFF  
Post Bulletin

What happened last year was fulfilling for Olivia Gardner.

But only to a point. Gardner and her Winona Cotter girls soccer team accomplished something that had forever eluded them. Among southeastern Minnesota's best teams for years, the Ramblers finally won the Section One, Class A championship.

In a normal year, that would have meant that a trip to the coveted state tournament was next. But not last year. The COVID-19 pandemic put the kibosh on all state tournaments last fall.

So, beating Dover-Eyota 3-0 in the section title game and finishing their season a perfect 14-0-0 felt good to the Ramblers. But great? Nope, not quite.

"It was kind of a bitter-sweet ending," said Gardner, a forward who has been named All-State for three consecutive years. "It was great to end with a win, but we've always wanted to go to state. That's always been a big goal of ours."

It still is. Cotter, behind Gardner and a pack of fellow talented seniors, has made state its quest again. Cotter will be favored to make it happen, and this time it

is expected that the state tournament will actually be played, though nothing is guaranteed with COVID 19 still lurking.

### HIGH HOPES

Gardner knows she's on a special team and one that might be even more special this season.

"I'm super excited about this season," said Gardner, who had 28 goals and 11 assists last year. "From what I've seen this summer, everyone on our team has improved so much. You can tell that we have a really good squad coming back."

There's no doubt who the leader is. It's Gardner, the team's undisputed top player — at least until fellow All-State player and senior midfielder Sera Speltz is deemed healthy enough to return after having torn her ACL in last season's section title game. Speltz's return is likely to happen a few weeks into the season.

Until then, Cotter has a great person to lean on in three-sport star Gardner, who is also a standout basketball player and sprinter in track and field. She's someone who Cotter coach Marie Barrientos has regarded as special for a long time.

"I could tell from very

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Post Bulletin file photo / Andrew Link

Winona Cotter's Olivia Gardner is a three-time All-State player and the Ramblers' all-time goals leader with 100.



Traci Westcott / Post Bulletin

Century junior Emily Garrison is looking forward to a normal girls swimming and diving season in 2021 after the 2020 season was altered due to COVID-19. Garrison would have earned state berths in four events a year ago, but the state meet was not held due to the pandemic.

## 'SHE DOESN'T HAVE MANY WEAKNESSES'

Century's Garrison looks forward to a 'normal' season, has eyes on state

BY GUY N. LIMBECK  
Post Bulletin

It's tough to talk about individual accomplishments with Century junior Emily Garrison because the topic quickly switches back to her girls swimming and diving teammates.

Garrison had a stellar sophomore season for the Panthers in a highly unusual season. Due to COVID-19, nearly every meet was a virtual contest — with opponents swimming in their own pools — plus time spent with teammates was limited and no state was meet held in 2020.

Century and the rest of the area teams are about to embark on the 2021 girls swimming and diving season and it's expected to be back to normal.

"I'm really looking forward to a normal season for two reasons," Garrison said. "One, we didn't really have a lot of team bonding last year and we had so many new underclassmen. And I feel like I didn't really get to know them as well as I could have. So I'm looking forward to all

the team bonding activities.

"Also the competition," she added. "I'm super excited to compete in person for once. It's been about two years."

If there would have been a state meet a year ago, Garrison would have qualified in four events. She was part of two winning relays at the Section 1AA meet and she placed second in both the 100 backstroke and the 200 individual medley.

"I wish we would have had a state meet," Garrison said. "It would have been so nice to compete, but I wasn't really that disappointed because the section meet was just like icing on the cake."

The Panthers should be primed for another strong season after going 7-0 in dual meets a year ago, winning the Big Nine Conference meet and placing second in the section.

Garrison was a big part of that success.

"She's a phenomenal swimmer for us," Century co-coach Dale Magnuson said. "She's strong in all four strokes; she really doesn't have many weaknesses, if any at all."

Garrison's personal goal is to qualify for the state meet

in both individual and relay events. But she is even more excited about the prospect of a strong team season for the Panthers.

"I've improved by myself, but the team has gotten a lot stronger," she said. "The underclassmen are really strong this year and of course the upperclassmen are strong. I think we have the opportunity to break a lot of team records this year so I'm really excited."

Swimming is a year-around sport for Garrison as she also swims for the Rochester club team. Magnuson said "she always gives 100 percent."

"She's just focused and dedicated to do as well as she can," Magnuson said. "She's always smiling, she has a good attitude towards things and she comes out of races very positive and just really works hard."

"I feel like I'm pretty self motivated, but it helps to have a team goal that you're all working towards," Garrison said. "I think we have our goals set out for this season so I'm excited to see how far we can go."

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## After taking a year off, RCTC itches to get back on football field

BY GUY N. LIMBECK  
Post Bulletin

Last fall the season was called off due to COVID-19. Now the Rochester Community and Technical College Yellowjackets are ready for some football.

RCTC and the rest of the teams in the Minnesota College Athletic Conference are ready to return to action as the league begins play on Saturday. All the teams in the MCAC, including RCTC, have questions heading into the season. The Yellowjackets open with a home game at 3 p.m. Saturday against

Vermilion.

"COVID has really turned things upside down," RCTC coach Derrick Hintz said. "Guys coming in out of shape, a lot of unknowns. And we don't know what the rest of the league has because nobody's talking."

Hintz is in his 19th season coaching football at RCTC and the sixth as the head coach, which has been split over two stints.

RCTC has 19 players back who were on the roster when the team last played in 2019. Another 20 players practiced with the team in 2020.

RCTC has won a league-high

21 state championships, but will be looking for its first title since 2016. The Yellowjackets will have about 70 players on their roster. Here is a position-by-position breakdown of the team heading into the season.

### OFFENSE

#### QUARTERBACK

Justin Lynn returns after being the starter and having a stellar 2019 season. He earned NJCAA National Player of the Week honors for a game in which he threw for 485 yards and seven touchdowns. He will have plenty of competition, however. Sophomore Billy Maples was a Division I

recruit and is making a bid to be the starter.

"It's a dogfight between those two," Hintz said.

Cavin Russell and Zachary Cowan are also in the mix for playing time.

"I think we're solid and we're deep, too," Hintz said. "We have four quarterbacks who could win us a championship."

#### RUNNING BACK

Rochester Mayo grad Israel "Speedy" Lozoya returns after leading the team in rushing in 2019. Lozoya is a big-play back who is always a threat to score anytime he touches the ball. Dylan Ingram, Gage

Horning of South St. Paul High School and Moses Hancock of White Bear Lake are also in the mix for playing time. Ingram is a Division I recruit and Horning played for RCTC in 2019.

#### WIDE RECEIVER

RCTC will run a spread offense and that could mean a lot of playing time for a lot of different receivers.

"I thought that was going to be a strength, but now I don't know," Hintz said. "We've had a lot of injuries, a lot of illness."

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