

## Vikings trade for quarterback Mullens

After two preseason defeats in games where starting quarterback Kirk Cousins did not play, it became clear to the Minnesota Vikings front office that an upgrade was needed at the backup quarterback position. Neither Kellen Mond nor Sean Mannion, who had been competing for the second-string quarterback job behind Cousins, looked particularly capable in the team's losses to the Las Vegas and San Francisco. To their credit, the Vikings proactively tried to solve this quarterback depth issue rather than simply hoping Cousins stays healthy all season. The Vikings traded a conditional 2024 seventh-round pick to the Raiders to acquire Nick Mullens, with the pick conveying if Mullens is active for one game this season.

After witnessing the incompetence of Mond and Mannion, this deal was a no-brainer for the Vikings. Seventh round picks rarely pan out, so the cost was minimal, and Mullens is a clear upgrade for the Vikings at the backup quarterback position. Mullens has started 17 career games and has posted 4,861 passing yards and 26 touchdowns in his five-year career.

To his credit, Cousins has been an iron man throughout his career. He's started at least 15 games in each of the last seven seasons. COVID-19 is apparently the only thing that can consistently keep Captain Kirk out of the lineup. Knowing that, the Vikings backup quarterback job isn't the most sought-after role in the NFL. Players want to play, and most talented backups don't want to sign here because they know they are probably going to be riding pine all season. That's why this trade was a smart way for the Vikings to acquire a competent backup.

That said, Cousins isn't invincible. Do you remember last January when Mannion had to start a must-win game against the Packers? Yeah, that didn't go well. He went 22-36 for a measly total of 189 yards, and the Packers romped to a 37-10 victory in a game that was never in doubt. The Vikings were wise to make a move to potentially avoid a similar situation this year. Mannion seems like a good guy, and he's reportedly an asset in the quarterback room, but at age 30, there's little chance he's ever going to develop into a winning quarterback.

Mond is a different story. Drafted in the third round of last year's draft by departed general manager Rick Spielman, Mond has failed to develop. It's glaringly obvious he struggles to process coverages and coordinate protections, and it looks like the speed of the NFL game (even against backups in preseason games) is still too much for him. He's got raw talent and there might be a chance he can figure things out at some point, but right now, he's not ready to compete in meaningful games. Based on what we've seen this preseason, Mike Zimmer apparently wasn't kidding when he harshly assessed Mond's progress late last season.

In an emergency, Mullens absolutely gives the Vikings a better chance to win than either Mannion or Mond. To get a competent backup at the most important position on the field for a pick in the final round of the draft is good business by Kwesi Adofo-Mensah and his front office team. Hopefully, Vikings fans aren't going to need to see Mullens take meaningful snaps this year, but if Kirk Cousins does have to miss time, they're going to be glad Mullens is on the roster.



**SPORTS COLUMNIST**  
BY ANDY THAYER

# Storm tennis makes history

## SRR downs Montevideo for first program victory

**BY TOM FENTON**  
STAFF WRITER

It was bound to happen. Yet, they were not sure when.

After a year of paying their dues as a new program, the dividends paid off in a big way for the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls tennis team Aug. 23. The Storm defeated Montevideo in a marathon match as part of the a triangular at New London-Spicer High School in New London.

The dual meet score was 5-2, and it was the first victory in program history. Until 2021, SRR competed as a cooperative team with Apollo.

The day finished with a 7-0 loss to the host Wildcats. It was the fourth match in less than 36 hours for the Storm, who opened the season with a pair of 5-2 losses Aug. 22 at the Foley triangular in Foley.

The team celebrated the victory with pre-practice donuts before practice Aug. 24 at Bob Cross Park.

"It's great to be part of history; I was so excited," said senior Gabby Jaskolka, who played No. 1 doubles with Addison Buchanan. "This will make a great example for the future girls coming into the program. It was super great to get the win, especially since it's early in season and it's already happening. It was nice to see all of that improvement pay off and get that win."

The victory was the first of two matches that were played in high humidity and lasted until about 9:30 p.m. The Storm got wins in third-set tiebreakers from seniors Grace Roesch and Belle Haddy in the top two singles slots.

"I think attitude is the biggest thing

on the court for us," Jaskolka said. "When you see people happy and light on their feet, it makes the energy so much more fun and makes it easier to win."

Freshman Leah Roesch earned a straight-set win at fourth singles. The doubles team of senior Taiya Partch and freshman Brielle Partch earned a three-set win. And, the sophomore third doubles tandem of Sydney Entner and Miah Boos won in straight sets to complete the victory.

"I'm so thrilled for girls, and I'm so proud of them," Buchanan said. "It was a long and rough night. It was hot and it was late, but we pushed through. It feels good to have a win on our record. Now that we have one and want to make it two, three then four. We've really got something to build off of."

The win perhaps meant the most to head coach Trish Bemboom, who helped build the program through the middle school ranks and is in her second



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

Freshman Leah Roesch focuses on the ball before returning serve as the Storm tennis team faced Foley Aug. 22 at the Foley High School courts in Foley. Roesch and Brielle Karasch lost a 7-6, 6-4 match at No. 3 doubles.

season leading the Storm.

"It was a great testament to the work these players have been putting in," Bemboom said. "They deserved to win and have been putting in the time. It was fantastic and exciting. Building off our first win will bring us to our next few victories."

SRR gave a hint to how competitive it could be in its season-opening competition at Foley. The host

Falcons annually have one of the better teams in central Minnesota and defeated the Storm 7-0 last year at the same event.

Grace Roesch and Haddy showed why SRR will be strong at the top of the lineup with their Foley wins. Bemboom switched up the lineup against Rorcori, which loaded its singles lineup.

**Tennis** page 15



(Above) Senior Addison Buchanan keeps her eye on the ball during her No. 3 singles match Aug. 22 at the Foley High School courts in Foley. Buchanan lost a 6-4, 6-3 decision to the Falcons.

(Right) Senior Gabby Jaskolka follows through on a backhand during her No. 3 singles match as the Storm faced Foley in their season opener Aug. 22 at Foley High School in Foley. Jaskolka lost the match 6-4, 6-3.



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

Junior Erica Poganski prepares to serve for the Storm tennis team during her match Aug. 22 at Foley High School in Foley. Poganski teamed with Taiya Partch at No. 1 doubles for Sauk Rapids-Rice High School.

Freshman Brielle Karasch concentrates on the ball before hitting a forehand as the Storm tennis team faced Foley Aug. 22 at the Foley High School courts in Foley. The Falcons defeated SRR 5-2 in the first match of the triangular.

## Tennis from page 14

Grace Roesch and Haddy won their No. 1 doubles match as did Jaskolka and Buchanan.

“Grace and Belle really stepped up to start the season,” Bemboom said. “The changes in the lineup allowed us as

coaches to see a variety of skills. Brielle and Leah showed depth in the lineup, and we are eager to find the best combinations to try to get a win.”

The Storm are scheduled to be road warriors in the com-

ing days with matches scheduled Saturday, Aug. 27, at Big Lake; Monday, Aug. 29, at Monticello; Thursday, Sept. 1, at Little Falls; and Friday, Sept. 2, at Cambridge-Isanti.

### NEW LONDON-SPICER TRIANGULAR

**SRR 5, Montevideo**  
Singles: No. 1 Grace Roesch won 1-6, 6-4 (10-7);

No. 2 Haddy won 7-5, 6-4; No. 3 Erica Poganski lost 6-3, 7-6; and No. 4 Leah Roesch won 6-1, 6-3. **Doubles:** No. 1 Jaskolka-Buchanan won 6-2, 6-4; No. 2 Partch-Karasch lost 2-6, 6-3 (10-7); and No. 3 Entner-Boos won 7-6, 7-6.

### NLS 7, SRR 0

**Singles:** No. 1 Grace Roesch lost 6-1, 6-1; No. 2 Haddy lost 6-1 (retired); No. 3 Jaskolka lost 6-3, 6-2; and No. 4 Buchanan lost 7-6, 4-6, (11-9). **Doubles:** No. 1 Poganski-Piper Froiland lost 6-0, 6-0; No. 2 Partch-Boos lost 6-2, 6-1; and No. 3 Leah Roesch-Karasch lost 6-2, 6-2.

### FOLEY TRIANGULAR

**Foley 5, SRR 2**  
**Singles:** No. 1 Grace Roesch won 6-4, 1-6 (10-8); No. 2 Haddy won 7-6, 6-1; No. 3 Jaskolka lost 6-4, 6-3; and No. 4 Buchanan lost 7-5, 7-5. **Doubles:** No. 1 Poganski-Partch lost 6-1, 6-0; No. 2 Froiland-Allison Lundebrek lost 6-0, 6-0; and No. 3 Karasch-Leah Roesch lost 7-6, 6-4.

### Rocori 5, SRR 2

**Singles:** No. 1 Poganski lost 6-1, 6-0; No. 2 Froiland lost 6-0, 6-0; No. 3 Leah Roesch lost 6-0, 6-2; No. 4 Karasch lost 6-3, 6-2. **Doubles:** No. 1 Grace Roesch-Haddy won 6-0, 6-1; No. 2 Jaskolka-Buchanan won 6-2, 6-0; No. 3 Partch-Lundebrek lost 6-0, 6-4.



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SR34-1B-RB

# STORM

## FALL SPORTS PREVIEWS

# Hoping to build on SUCCESS

### Storm bring back talent, but rely on newcomers

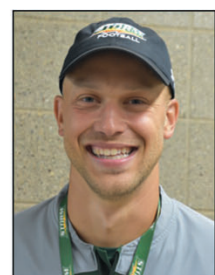
BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

Phillip Klaphake is being truthful when he says he has no idea how good his 2022 Storm football team will be until things get real under the lights on a Friday night.

Sure, some years he feels more confident than others. Last year, for example, with a senior-laded group that included several who are playing collegiately this fall, Klaphake likely had an inkling his Sauk Rapids-Rice squad could do big things.

Most times, however, it takes a few games to get questions about his team answered.

“I’ve not gone into a single season having any clue how good we are,” said Klaphake, who has won 24 games in his six previous seasons as Storm head coach. “But what I know is this group of kids can go out there every Friday night and I’ll feel like we can win. We’ve had seasons where maybe we haven’t been there. This group is talented enough where we can go beat everyone.”



Phillip Klaphake, seventh year head coach

Those answers are expected to start filing in when SRR hosts rival Sartell at 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 2, at Sauk Rapids-Rice Middle School stadium in Sauk Rapids. A year ago, the Storm immediately served notice of their potential with a dominating 27-0 win over the Sabres on their home field.

While every team has its own identity and SRR – which won its first six games last season before a combination of injuries and unfortunate bounces led to finishing with three emotional losses – has several important pieces to replace, the hope is the trickle-down effect of the 2021 team’s success is beneficial through all layers of the game.

“Last year showed we can compete with anyone, and it gives us confidence we know we can be the best team on the field,” said Andrew Harren, a senior receiver and defensive who caught 25 passes for 426 yards and five touchdowns last season. “This team can be as good as we want it to be. The keys will be staying healthy, getting more depth throughout the lineup and getting those younger kids ready to play.”

The 2022 schedule mirrors last season week for week with only the host sites changing. The Storm are on the road for four of the first six weeks, highlighted by games at Alexandria and Bemidji – which dashed SRR’s playoff dreams in the Section 8AAAAA semifinals a year ago. The regular season concludes with home games against Moorhead and Monticello.

“Last year allows us as coaches to have a million examples of what good football looks like to show these kids,” Klaphake said. “The easiest thing is being



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

The 2022 Sauk Rapids-Rice football team captains are Keegan Patterson (front, from left) and Andrew Harren; (back, from left) Travis Biery, Ethan Klug and Ethan Anderson. The Storm open the season Friday, Sept. 2, at home against Sartell.

able to pull film from last year and say ‘When we were successful, this was how.’ The kids have seen how hard it is and what it takes to be really good. (But) it’s a totally different team.”

Klaphake’s offensive system relies heavily on the quarterback being a quick decision-maker, and early on three athletes have been getting the majority of the repetitions in practice. Seniors Jack Klein and Keegan Patterson along with sophomore Hudson Omoke each bring something different to the position.

Klein was forced into action in week seven at Moorhead last season when starter Dom Mathies, who was enjoying a widely successful season, went out with a broken foot. Klein threw for 274 yards with two and three interceptions in the final two-plus games.

“Jack and Keegan, being seniors, are super smart, and Hudson is the young kid who is learning but is super talented,” Klaphake said. “They all have talent. Whoever isn’t starting at quarterback, they’re likely starting somewhere else because they’re that good. They’re smart kids who want to play Sauk Rapids-Rice style of football. Those kids have to be the show.”

The Storm outgained their opponents by almost 1,000 yards last season but will have a new quarterback and mostly a new running back core as their top three rushers graduated. Aside from Harren, the receiving

group also will be mostly newbies.

“High school football is so unique,” Klaphake. “There are times when your team maybe isn’t super good but the teams you play against are also down those years. So sometimes you can be a below-average team and have a really good record, but you can also have a really good team and play good teams the same year and you don’t have a good record. I think you’re going to see good football from us.”

SRR’s defense relied heavily on a pair of defensive ends in Carter Loesch and Jayce Walrath – both of whom are now playing for NCAA Division II powerhouse Minnesota-Duluth. Four of the top five tacklers will have to be replaced.

Senior lineman Travis Biery will anchor the line after recording 85 tackles last season, and junior Mason Rudolph, coming off a two-interception season, will be a staple in the defensive backfield, along with Ethan Anderson.

“Last year created a football town for us. It showed that Sauk Rapids-Rice is a legit football program,” said Anderson, who had 16 tackles and an interception last year. “It’s awesome being out here again being with my teammates and having fun.”

Football page 3B

### Check out previews for Storm fall sports

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## VOLLEYBALL SCHEDULE

<b>Willmar</b>			
Tuesday, Aug. 30	A		7:00 PM
<b>Rocori</b>			
Thursday, Sept. 1	H		7:00 PM
<b>Brainerd</b>			
Tuesday, Sept. 6	A		7:00 PM
<b>Becker</b>			
Thursday, Sept. 8	A		7:00 PM
<b>Invitational</b>			
Saturday, Sept. 10	H		9:00 AM
<b>Fergus Falls</b>			
Tuesday, Sept. 13	A		7:00 PM
<b>Apollo</b>			
Thursday, Sept. 15	H		7:00 PM
<b>Monticello</b>			
Tuesday, Sept. 20	H		7:15 PM
<b>Sartell</b>			
Thursday, Sept. 22	A		7:00 PM
<b>Tech</b>			
Tuesday, Sept. 27	A		7:00 PM
<b>Willmar</b>			
Thursday, Sept. 29	H		7:00 PM
<b>Rocori</b>			
Tuesday, Oct. 4	A		7:00 PM
<b>Brainerd</b>			
Thursday, Oct. 6	H		7:00 PM
<b>St. Michael-Albertville Invitational</b>			
Friday, Oct. 7	A		5:00 PM
<b>St. Michael-Albertville Invitational</b>			
Saturday, Oct. 8	A		9:00 AM
<b>St. Francis</b>			
Tuesday, Oct. 11	H		7:15 PM
<b>Alexandria Area</b>			
Thursday, Oct. 13	H		7:00 PM
<b>Fergus Falls</b>			
Tuesday, Oct. 18	H		7:00 PM

# Confidence key to repeating playoff success

Strong, experienced attack to lead Storm volleyball

BY TOM FENTON  
STAFF WRITER

Pressure? What pressure?

That word has no part of the vernacular of the 2022 Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team despite the fact they are not likely to have the luxury of surprising their opponents this season. Not after a run through the section tournament that included a victory over heavily-favored Alexandria that put the Storm in the state tournament for the first time since 1988.

Instead, the Storm look at this season as an opportunity to prove themselves.

"We set the bar high, but I don't think there's pressure," said junior Ava Athman, who was second in the Central Lakes Conference last year in hitting percentage at .410. "It's mostly excitement and hoping for round two. I'm just so excited to get going. Volleyball brings me so much happiness, and it's great to be back with all the girls and coaches."

Senior Morgan Eggert, who saw significant action during the regular season but missed the state tournament due to a back injury, agreed with her teammate.

"We're hoping to go back to state this year, but we also are staying humbly



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

The 2022 Sauk Rapids-Rice volleyball team captains are senior Morgan Eggert (from left) and juniors Ava Athman and Katelyn Anderson. The Storm are coming off an appearance in the Minnesota State High School League Class AAA Girls Volleyball State Tournament.

confident about it," Eggert said. "I think a lot of girls coming in saw that excitement we created and are coming in ready. Some of them are a little timid to meet the older girls, but we're all one family and love each other so much. We want to help everybody get better whether you're younger or older."

Though SRR finished with a 13-18 overall record, things came together when it mattered most. The key now is maintaining the momentum and excitement they created with the state tournament run, where the Storm lost to eventual runner-up Kasson-Mantorville and then



Gail Bialke,  
first year  
head coach

in four sets to Chisago Lakes.

The journey begins Tuesday, Aug. 30, at Willmar – which swept the Storm in their two meetings a year ago. The team makes their home debut Thursday, Sept. 1, against Ro-

cori. The Storm defeated the Spartans to reach last year's section title match.

Gail Bialke was on the bench as assistant coach through last year's playoff run. She now sits at the front end of the bench as the team's head coach after taking over for Karen Beckmann, who resigned after the season.

"The girls who had that experience last year of playing on the court or

just being at state definitely know what it takes to get us down there again," Bialke said. "Last year was a dream come true for many players, parents, community members and coaches. I was on cloud nine. I hope those girls can continue that momentum as the season gets going. We'll have more of a target on us. There will definitely be some teams who want to beat us this year."

There are plenty of reasons to believe the Storm can back up that success. Two of their big hitters, Athman and senior Lexi Helmin, return and are expected to be offensive and defensive front-row forces.

Volleyball page 5B

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# Hoping to take positive step

## Storm girls tennis looks to gain traction in second year

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

While the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls tennis team will play a full schedule this season, a good chunk of their competition is expected to come from within. For second-year head coach Trish Bemboom, that is a good thing.



Trisha Bemboom, second year head coach

There is plenty of room for rebuilding in a program in only its second year on its own. Prior to the 2021-22 season, the team was a cooperative with Apollo High School.

The Storm lost eight seniors, including their top singles player and half of the No. 1 doubles team, meaning there are ample opportunities for a group of young and inexperienced players to snatch a spot in the varsity lineup.

"This year we have a lot of potential for the younger class girls to step up into the varsity spots," Bemboom said. "We have some girls who have been playing

a lot of tennis this summer, so we should have some good competitions this year with in our own team."

Four players who saw significant varsity action last year return.

Senior Grace Roesch was one of the team's most consistent

players a year ago at No. 2 singles, and she will face top competition at the top of this year's lineup. Roesch also will have a role in helping develop the large group of young players looking to make the team.

"It's important to bring energy, get the younger girls involved and wanting to come play tennis with a drive to do well," Roesch said. "Our coaches are supportive and narrow in on what we need to work on. They also help us stay close as a team and build relationships, which makes tennis super-fun."

Also back after a year of varsity action



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

The 2022 Sauk Rapids-Rice girls tennis team seniors are Addison Buchanan (front, from left) and Gabriella Jaskolka; (back, from left) Chloe Sunder, Taiya Partch and Grace Roesch. The Storm are scheduled to host their first meet on their new home courts at Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in mid-September. Not pictured is Belle Haddy.

are seniors Belle Haddy, Gabby Jaskolka, Addison Buchanan, Taiya Partch and Chloe Sunder.

"Being seniors, we have to bring a lot more excitement to this program to show that this is our baby," said Buchanan, who also competes with the Storm Nordic ski team in the winter. "We're here to help grow it so that the future kids in the program have the founda-

tion already set."

Also expected to contribute are juniors Erica Poganski and Piper Froiland.

"Our focus this season is preparedness for things we cannot change and also for things we can control," Bemboom said. "That's how we keep things positive. If we can control those things, we'll go out and do wonderful things."

There is another reason for the Storm

to be excited about the season. For the first

time, SRR will have a tennis complex to call its own.

Construction is nearing completion on an eight-court tennis facility on the west side of Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. It is expected to be ready the week of Sept. 19 and to give the program needed exposure to the students and community.

"I'm so excited to have a home base to play on," Buchanan said. "It's a sense of home, which is something we haven't had before."

For Bemboom, the excitement to have a "real" home meet cannot be measured.

"The new courts will help this program 100%," Bemboom said. "If you don't see it, you don't know there's a program. I can already see we're going to have larger numbers in the near-future. We'll be able to have more practice time, and they'll have easier access to the weight room. All of that will help us."

## TENNIS SCHEDULE

<b>Big Lake</b>		
Saturday, Aug. 27	A	10:00 AM
<b>Monticello</b>		
Monday, Aug. 29	A	4:00 PM
<b>Alexandria Area</b>		
Tuesday, Aug. 30	A	4:30 PM
<b>Little Falls</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 1	A	10:00 AM
<b>Cambridge-Isanti</b>		
Friday, Sept. 2	A	9:00 AM
<b>Brainerd</b>		
Tuesday, Sept. 6	H	4:30 PM
<b>Rocori</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 8	H	4:30 PM
<b>Fergus Falls</b>		
Tuesday, Sept. 13	A	4:30 PM
<b>Sartell</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 15	A	4:30 PM
<b>Willmar</b>		
Tuesday, Sept. 20	A	4:30 PM
<b>Alexandria Area</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 22	H	4:30 PM
<b>St. Cloud Crush</b>		
Tuesday, Sept. 27	A	4:30 PM

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# Strength, conditioning emphasized for girls soccer

## Second-year coach Neu stressing endurance while building program

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

Tash Neu is in her second season as head coach of the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls soccer team. That does not mean she is not willing to change things up a bit.

With hopes of getting her team in prime condition, Neu decided to start the season with two-a-day practices rather than one

longer workout session. During the first morning practice of the season, there was not a soccer ball to be found.

The new routine is an effort to have her team ready for the long season.

“I just hope we can spend more time on soccer in practice,” Neu said. “A lot of our previous practic-

es were getting eaten up by getting stronger and conditioning. We’re trying to get back to gritty soccer and hard work. That’s what our program wants to embody. We’re definitely working hard, and we didn’t need soccer balls to start it off.”

SRR is coming off a 4-10-2 season that included a 2-1 loss to Little Falls in the first round of the section playoffs. This season started with a home game Aug. 25 versus Cathedral, which annually has one of the better teams in central Minnesota.

Count senior co-captain Olivia Bauer as someone who knows the conditioning focus will not be easy but also realizes its necessity.

“It’s going to be difficult early, but it’s what our team needs to get us prepared for the season and helps us focus on things like footwork and other skills,” Bauer said. “I think we’re going to do well in the center of the field, and we’re focusing on transitioning. I’m hoping we can score a lot of goals.”

When the Storm found scoring goals difficult, they had the luxury of relying on former goalkeeper Maggie Fernholz to keep them in games.



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

The 2022 captains for the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls soccer team are seniors Olivia Bauer (from left), Mackenzie Felchle and junior Gabrielle Fernholz. The Storm opened the season against Cathedral Aug. 25 at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School fields in Sauk Rapids.

This season, SRR will have to rely on newcomers whom Neu said need to learn the game quickly.

“Even with doing just conditioning, you can tell the group has good mental toughness,” said junior Gabrielle Fernholz, who will be counted on to be an offensive leader. “We don’t give

up easily and everyone is just pushing through. We don’t have quitters on our team, and that’s a good thing. If we’re not going to be better than others skill-wise, we want to be able to outrun them.”

Senior Mackenzie Felchle will also be one of the players counted on for leadership off the field and for providing needed support for the new goalkeepers. She is a three-sport athlete who does whatever possible to help her team, which includes getting into the best shape possible.

“I definitely think the conditioning is for the best, so we don’t have to cram it in with our other practices,” said Felchle, who also plays basketball and competes in track and field. “We’re definitely going to be competitive this year, and I think our defense

Junior Gabrielle Fernholz leads her team through footwork drills during an early-season girls soccer practice at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. The team finished the 2021 season with a 4-10-2 record.



Tash Neu, second year head coach



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will be strong.”

Neu and her team also believe that the familiarity between the coach and the players will help this season. Neu had military duties in the middle of the season last year, but she will be with the team full time in 2022 and hopes that makes a difference.

Regardless of record, there are smiles at practices. What happens in games

in terms of results will not affect SRR’s attitude of doing whatever possible to compete.

“We have a great group of kids,” Neu said. “A lot of them are young and we have minimal amount of experience with the upperclassmen, but they’re already buying in with each other and are fun to work with.”

## GIRLS SOCCER SCHEDULE

<b>Sartell</b>	Tuesday, Aug. 3	H	7:00 PM
<b>Tech</b>	Thursday, Sept. 1	A	7:00 PM
<b>Willmar</b>	Tuesday, Sept. 6	H	5:00 PM
<b>Rocori</b>	Thursday, Sept. 8	H	7:00 PM
<b>Apollo</b>	Monday, Sept. 12	A	7:00 PM
<b>Fergus Falls</b>	Tuesday, Sept. 13	A	7:00 PM
<b>Alexandria Area</b>	Thursday, Sept. 15	H	5:00 PM
<b>Apollo</b>	Tuesday, Sept. 20	H	7:00 PM
<b>Detroit Lakes</b>	Thursday, Sept. 22	A	7:00 PM
<b>Little Falls</b>	Monday, Sept. 26	H	3:30 PM
<b>Tech</b>	Tuesday, Sept. 27	H	7:00PM
<b>Willmar</b>	Thursday, Sept. 29	A	7:00 PM
<b>Rocori</b>	Tuesday, Oct. 4	A	6:30 PM
<b>Brainerd</b>	Thursday, Oct. 6	H	5:00 PM

## Football from front

We're feeling pretty good about our chances to go far. We can't have too many kids getting hurt, and if that happens, others will have to step up. We've got good players on both sides of the ball."

Klaphake and his staff will spend much of their time in upcoming practices finding where the new players best fit. He said this year is different than many years in that most position groups have both veterans and newcomers. Last year's team mostly had returning starters at several key positions.

Exactly how many victories the Storm reach will depend on numerous things coming together along with avoiding key injuries. But Klaphake feels good about the possibilities.

"We have a chance," said Klaphake, a record-setting quarterback at St. Cloud State University. "I told the guys I'm going to coach them really hard this year because this group is good enough to be competitive, which now means I get to go and push them, and they want that. They're comfortable with the coaches challenging them and they're capable of handling that."



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Junior running back Ethan Martin follows his blocks and looks for running room during a recent practice for the Storm football team at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School fields in Sauk Rapids. Sixteen seniors are out for the team.

## Volleyball from page 2B



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Junior Katelyn Anderson prepares to receive a pass during an early-season practice for the Storm volleyball team at Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. Anderson is expected to be one of the key players in the back row for the Storm.

Helmin ranked fourth in the CLC in hitting percentage at .344 and led the league in blocks per game with 1.18. Athman's attack is relentless and she thrives on keeping opposing defenses guessing.

"The playoff run instilled that confidence coming into this year," Athman said. "We set that expectation and now we're working toward it. We have the drive because of that. We've got some big holes to fill, but I think we'll come together as a team."

Junior Katelyn Anderson is expected to see most of the action at setter, replacing a player who was all over the floor last year in Kieryn Hirdler. Bialke said there are several young prospects who have potential to add depth to that position as the season progresses.

"We have high expectations," Anderson said. "Last season was really good and we want to live up to that. We need to stay connected as we were last year. I'm very confident. We've got a lot of good players and talent. Hopefully we can sew that together and finish as section champions again."

Bialke said reaching the high hopes have as much to do with attitude as talent. The CLC almost always is a grind, meaning tough stretches are tough to avoid.

Putting those aside while focusing on peaking in the playoffs is something that will be stressed.

"Our motto this year is 'We Encourage, We Believe, We Achieve,'" Bialke said. "This motto is what we need on the volleyball court. I think volleyball is the ultimate team sport in which we need all six players to communicate, move and work in unison to be successful. I want us to improve every night and by the time playoffs start we need to be working together on all cylinders."

### FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

<b>Sartell</b>			
Friday, Sept. 2	H		7:00 PM
<b>Tech</b>			
Friday, Sept. 9	A		7:00 PM
<b>Alexandria Area</b>			
Friday, Sept. 16	A		7:00 PM
<b>Cambridge-Isanti</b>			
Friday, Sept. 23	H		7:00 PM
<b>Bemidji</b>			
Friday, Sept. 30	A		7:00 PM
<b>St. Francis</b>			
Friday, Oct. 7	A		7:00 PM
<b>Moorhead</b>			
Friday, Oct. 14	H		7:00 PM
<b>Monticello</b>			
Wednesday, Oct. 19	H		7:00 PM
<b>Section QF</b>			
Tuesday, Oct. 25	TBA		7:00 PM
<b>Section SF</b>			
Saturday, Oct. 29	TBA		7:00 PM

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# BOYS SOCCER SCHEDULE

<b>Sartell</b>			5:00 PM
Tuesday, Aug. 30	A		
<b>Tech</b>			5:00 PM
Thursday, Sept. 1	H		
<b>Willmar</b>			7:00 PM
Tuesday, Sept. 6	A		
<b>Rocori</b>			6:30 PM
Thursday, Sept. 8	A		
<b>East Grand Forks Green Wave</b>			1:00 PM
Saturday, Sept. 10	H		
<b>Fergus Falls</b>			7:00 PM
Tuesday, Sept. 13	H		
<b>Alexandria Area</b>			7:00 PM
Thursday, Sept. 15	A		
<b>Apollo</b>			7:00 PM
Tuesday, Sept. 20	A		
<b>Detroit Lakes</b>			5:00 PM
Thursday, Sept. 22	H		
<b>Little Falls</b>			5:00 PM
Monday, Sept. 26	A		
<b>Tech</b>			7:00 PM
Tuesday, Sept. 27	A		
<b>Willmar</b>			7:00 PM
Thursday, Sept. 29	H		
<b>Rocori</b>			7:00 PM
Tuesday, Oct. 4	H		
<b>Brainerd</b>			7:00 PM
Thursday, Oct. 6	A		

# Rugged schedule nothing new for Storm boys

Soccer team focuses on coming together quickly

BY TOM FENTON  
STAFF WRITER

The Central Lakes Conference in boys soccer is not a place for schools who do not take the game seriously. The league annually produces some of the better teams in outstate Minnesota, which means taking a game off is rarely an option.

This year is not likely to be an exception, which adds to the challenge for a Sauk Rapids-Rice team that lost their top two scorers from a year ago. That hardly means the Storm are in any mood to back down or use a difficult schedule as an excuse to not compete.

Instead, seventh-year head coach Chris Rothstein said his team embraces the situation.

"I think we can compete against most of the teams we play," Rothstein said. "We do have a lot of difficult opponents, but if we do all of the right things and play collectively with better teamwork, there is no team that is impossible to beat. Our goals would be to have a better win-loss record than last season and win at least one playoff game."

The Storm finished 4-12 last season in a rugged CLC that had three teams reach the Minnesota State High School League state tournaments. Willmar, which won 18 games, and a 12-win Tech team each went to state in Class AA, with the Cardinals placing fourth. Moorhead finished 14-3-2 overall and advanced to state in Class AAA.

A big key to competing this season will be how quickly a big group of younger players progress, especially offensively.



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

The 2022 Sauk Rapids-Rice boys soccer captains are seniors Owen Berg (from left), Noah Blodgett, Cooper Godwin and junior Leif Rudnick. The team opens its season against the Sabres at 5 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 30, in Sartell.

SRR lost its biggest scoring threats in Eli Moilanen and Keegan Pham, who each finished the season with 10 goals.

Replacing that offense is likely to be the largest question mark, though a group of players led by seniors Owen Berg, Noah Blodgett and Cooper Godwin along with junior Leif Rudnick have the tools to put the ball in the net while helping the newcomers quickly learn the ropes.

"We graduated a lot of kids last year, but we've got some young guys who are pretty solid," said Godwin, who had eight shots on goal last year. "I'm excited for the season. I like to make sure everyone is working hard in practice, so we can have the best season possible. I think we've got an athletic team with a lot of team chemistry."

Based on what he has seen through the first week of practice, Rothstein feels good about how his team will compete.

"I have seen many players that have clearly put in a lot of hard work to get ready for the season," Rothstein said. "We have a good group of upperclassmen, and we also



Chris Rothstein, seventh year head coach

have a group of young guys who are hungry to challenge for a varsity spot which is encouraging to see. I also appreciate how much support and encouragement our players have shown for each other day in and

day out at practices so far."

The Storm have the luxury of bringing back a player with experience and talent at arguably the most important position on the field – goalkeeper. Senior Josh Tapio played in 13 games last season, recording 101 saves in 930 minutes of action.

"I'm hoping to see the guys pass around the ball really well and get opportunities to score," Tapio said. "I love having the best vision of the field, so I can use my voice to be a leader and I can help direct where they need to be."

SRR will not be able to ease into the season based on its schedule. The Storm open the season at 5 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 30, at Sartell. The Sabres hovered around the .500 mark last season, but are usually a fixture in the top half of the CLC.

Tech will be the visitor for the Storm home-opener set for 5 p.m. at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School fields in Sauk Rapids.

"I hope a couple of the young guys can continue to grow and show what they have to offer this team," said Rudnick, who had three goals and three assists last year. "When we're all really focused and going 100%, we can be a lot more competitive than people think. Hopefully we can get a few wins under our belts early. If things aren't going well, I try to forget it and help the guys move onto the next game."



Senior goalkeeper Josh Tapio works on his form during an opening-week practice for the Storm boys soccer team at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School fields in Sauk Rapids. Tapio is coming off a busy season for the Storm and is expected to anchor the team in goal this season.

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# Girls swimming and diving team headed in right direction

## New coach, training program has Storm motivated

**BY TOM FENTON**  
STAFF WRITER

It is normal to have a transition period when a new coach takes over a sports program.

Julia Wallace understands that, which means the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls swimming and diving coach is more than willing to throw in the proverbial curveball.

Aside from the usual workouts consisting of seemingly countless laps in the pool, Wallace has added dryland training to the early-season regimen, and it has been welcomed by the athletes.

"There are a lot of positive attitudes with this team, so that makes me really look forward to the season," said senior Jadeyn Stover, who will be a regular four-swim competitor this season. "I like the dryland. Our practices are a little longer, so we're getting a lot more technique in. We need a lot of leadership to build people up and keep that going throughout the season."

Wallace, who competed against the Storm while in high school at Brainerd, hopes mixing it up the practice sessions breaks up the monotony of fall camp while keeping the attitude light.

"It's been a blast and was nice to finally get started after so much preparation," said Wallace, who also swam for Minnesota State University-Moorhead. "I've thrown dryland training at them, which they're not used to and they're

already doing really well with that. ... They're really taking it in stride. That shows they're excited to work."

While the Central Lakes Conference annually produces top-quality competition, SRR expects to make some waves this season. Half of the 200-yard freestyle relay team that went to state last year returns in senior Kaytlin Bittman and sophomore Vivian Tangen, while numbers in the younger classes continue to grow.

It all adds up to a vibe that senior co-captain Richelle Peacock looks forward to watching develop. Peacock will lead the team alongside co-captains Kaytlin Bittman, Jadeyn Stover and Liberty Kosloski.

"We were a little nervous at first to get in the pool and hang out with each other again," Peacock said. "Once that went away, we were excited to be back into things. I think it's going to be a good season."

We're hoping to really stick together and that should help us."

Motivation does

not appear to be an issue for the Storm, who eagerly went after aggressive drills early on. Wallace said she already has been pleasantly surprised with some of the times she has seen as the team continued preparations for the season-opener, which was Aug. 26 at Willmar.

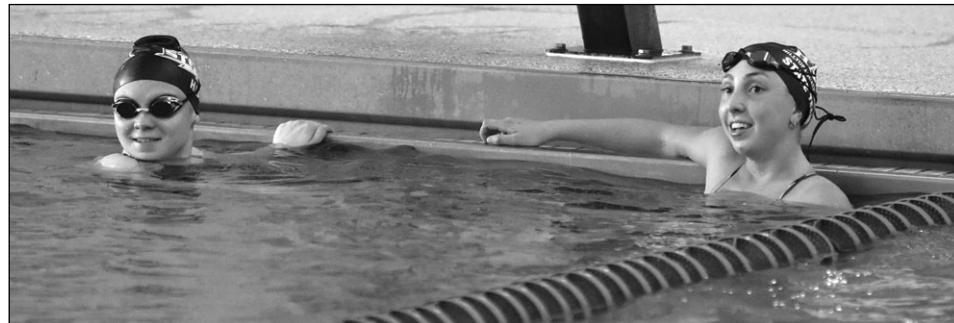
The Storm open the home portion of the season with a triangular against Foley and Monticello at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 30.

"We have so many girls with so many great personalities on the team," Bittman said. "There's never a dull moment. We focus on encouraging each other, and pushing ourselves makes practice not as bad as it seems."

Bittman is at the top of the motivated list after narrowly missing out on a state meet berth last year in the 100 breast-stroke. She said she had eight practice sessions a week during the summer



Julia Wallace, first year head coach



Junior Samantha Haaf (left) and senior Kaytlin Bittman each catch their breath between laps during Storm girls swimming and diving practice at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. Bittman competed at the state meet last year as part of the 200-yard freestyle relay team.



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

The 2022 captains for the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls swimming and diving team are senior Richelle Peacock (from left), Kaytlin Bittman and Jadeyn Stover. The Storm opened the season Aug. 26 at the Willmar Invitational. Not pictured is diver Liberty Kosloski.

to prepare for her final high school season.

"We've been going really strong so far," Bittman said. "With a new head coach, she's implementing some new things, and I think all the girls are getting included. Everyone is seeing success in the pool, which is tough with these long practices. I'm more motivated than ever to get back to state. I've been training hard all summer long. With a lot of work throughout the season, we can get there."

Wallace took over the program from co-coaches Megan Dingmann and Whitney Jendro, though Dingmann is back in an assistant coaching role.

"My goal is to grow this program and to become one of the top teams in the conference and section," Wallace said. "We are sitting in a nice spot, but I believe

we have the ability to move up in both. Every day I hope to see the girls dedicating themselves to every practice, meet and teammate. For the end of the season, my goal for

them is to be able to look back on all of their accomplishments, big and small, and to be proud of what they accomplished as a team."

## SWIMMING AND DIVING SCHEDULE

Event	Day	Time
<b>Triangular</b>		
Tuesday, Aug. 30	H	6:00 PM
<b>Willmar</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 1	H	6:00 PM
<b>Alexandria Area</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 8	A	6:00 PM
<b>Sauk Centre</b>		
Tuesday, Sept. 13	A	6:00 PM
<b>Fergus Falls</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 15	H	6:00 PM
<b>Rocori</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 22	H	6:00 PM
<b>Lincoln Park Invite</b>		
Saturday, Sept. 24	A	11:00 AM
<b>Brainerd</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 29	A	6:00 PM
<b>Sartell</b>		
Tuesday, Oct. 4	A	6:00 PM
<b>Tech</b>		
Tuesday, Oct. 11	H	6:00 PM
<b>Apollo</b>		
Tuesday, Oct. 18	A	6:00 PM
<b>Conference Championship</b>		
Saturday, Oct. 29	A	10:00 AM

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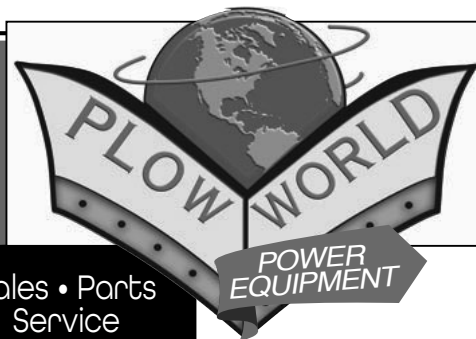
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# Cross-country program growth continues

## Boys, girls to field full teams this season

BY TOM FENTON  
STAFF WRITER

There are certainly larger cross-country programs in the area. But for Sauk Rapids-Rice coach Sandie Lahr, the progress she has seen in numbers in the past two years is a positive sign.

The Storm have 23 boys and girls out for cross-country. While that may not seem like a lot, they had two girls on the team two years ago.

Last year, SRR was able to field a varsity team of five girls, and this year's group has seven runners.

The boys have 16 athletes, giving the Storm depth they have not enjoyed in several years.

That added depth, Lahr hopes, leads to more competitive teams though SRR is still youth-dominated.

"Our boys numbers are solid with a lot of talent," said Lahr, in her third year of leading the program. "I would like to see our teams be even more competitive this year than last year. We are still a very young team with only two seniors and the bulk of our team seventh through ninth-graders. We were in a new section last year and able to change our schedule to be in more competitive and larger meets."

The Storm are scheduled to open the 2022 season at the Apollo Early Bird Invitational Saturday, Aug. 27, on the grounds of the St. Cloud VA Medical



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

Storm cross-country captains are Alex Ostendorf (from left), Nathan Martin and Kieran Hixson. The Sauk Rapids-Rice boys and girls teams open the season Saturday, Aug. 27 at the Apollo Early Bird Invitational in St. Cloud.

Center in St. Cloud. The highlight of the regular-season schedule is the team's lone home meet set for Sept. 29 on the grounds of Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. The team also competes in two new meets this season – at Monticello and Litchfield.

Team captains are junior Alex Ostendorf along with seniors Nathan Martin and Kieran Hixson. The trio has plenty of race experience and will lead the Storm this season.

"Self-improvement is huge for me this season," said Ostendorf, who was the team's top runner last season. "Seeing my times drop during the season is what keeps you going. When you start the season, you see how much you work on and why you need to keep practicing. When you see those results by the end of the season, you can be proud of yourself."

Hixson has watched himself grow from a freshman.

"My role starting as a freshman was just to come in and run," Hixson said. "Now as a senior, I like to

lead by example. I'm hoping to continue on what we did last year to help build the program. I like to show the younger guys what it takes and being there if they need help. I love every bit of competing."

Martin completes the trifecta of runners. He had a strong season for the SRR track and field team and hopes that success continues this fall.

"It's a hard sport," Martin said. "You just have to work hard to be stronger than the runner next to you. I enjoy showing the younger runners how important it is to work hard to accomplish good things."

Also expected to contribute this season are Mason Foss, Kade Lovell, Collin Wiebe, Grant Pallansch, Avery Nathe and Gavin Weber.

"With that experience, our veteran runners know

what to expect and know what the competition will be like," Lahr said.

The Storm girls team returns letter-winners Amelia Reker and Faith Bogle. Lahr said she expects newcomer McKenzie Wagman-Kelly as one to watch this season.

Lahr said they use the first two weeks of practice to work on creating a family culture for the team along with setting goals and team-bonding.

"I also would like to see the continued progress of our runners," Lahr said. "Each athlete sets a season goal and weekly meet goals. We help guide our athletes to commit to a goal, work toward that goal learning about themselves in the process, gain confidence in overcoming obstacles and achieve a level of success. This is really what we work for during our season."



Sandie Lahr, third year head coach



Storm cross-country team members take a warmup lap before an early-season practice at the Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. The Storm will host an invitational Sept. 29.

## CROSS-COUNTRY SCHEDULE

<b>Invitational</b>		
Saturday, Aug. 27	A	9:00 AM
<b>Brainerd - Forestview Invitational</b>		
Friday, Sept. 2	A	10:00 AM
<b>Little Falls</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 15	A	4:00 PM
<b>River Oaks Cold Spring Invitational</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 22	A	4:15 PM
<b>Invitational</b>		
Thursday, Sept. 29	H	4:00 PM
<b>St. Cloud - Boulder Ridge</b>		
Tuesday, Oct. 11	A	3:00 PM
<b>Conference Championship</b>		
Tuesday, Oct. 18	A	4:00 PM

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