

A STEELE COUNTY SPORTS PIONEER

Heger: 'It didn't just happen, you know..'

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

A Steele County local through-and-through, one of Pat Heger's claims to fame is that her Medford home is the second, original home in the woods of the town.

However, her house is far from the reason she is so well-known in Medford.

A retired physical education teacher at Medford high school, Heger is also a pioneer of girls sports at the high school.

Heger began her tenure at Medford in the fall of 1969 after graduating from Mankato State in the spring and quickly found herself involved in Medford athletics.

"Back when I started teaching, there were no high school sports for girls. So back in the spring of 1973, we started a track and field team for girls. This was back when Title IX was being enacted. And in the fall of 1973, we began a girls basketball team. Then came volleyball next in 1974... and I was the head coach of all of them for probably about 20 years," said Heger.

Heger said that she took the coaching positions because she felt that the girls at the high school deserved the opportunity to play sports and compete.

"It didn't just happen, you know, we had to get people on our side. Jerry Roberts, our athletic director at the time, was really helpful in trying to enact this in our school."

Although Heger had experience playing basketball in college, she said that she had little to no previous experience in track and field or volleyball.

She said that she asked other coaches



Pat Heger, right, looks on from her referee position as Medford junior outside hitter Mackenzie Kellen prepares to serve against St. Charles. Heger was Medford's first head volleyball coach when the team was formed in 1974.

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Head coach Pat Heger poses with her girls basketball team for a team photo during the 1974 season. Pictured left to right: L. Houglum (Captain), D. Maas, D. Kavitz, K. Miller, D. Sanborn, D. Pike, C. Maas, C. Heim. Kneeling: Coach Heger.

STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS



Heger smiles for the camera in the 1970 Medford high school yearbook. Heger began teaching at Medford in 1969 and appeared in the yearbook for the first time in 1970.

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Heger smiles for the camera in the 2014 Medford high school yearbook. Heger retired from Medford in 2014 after 45 years of teaching physical education at the high school.

STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

around the school for advice, determined to give her girls the best possible coaching.

It was at Medford that Heger also met her husband, John Gross.

Gross, the late football coach of Medford High School, is someone who Heger said was a major influence on her career at Medford.

"It was like having a coaching manual at home every day," said Heger.

Like Heger, Gross kept his involvement in Medford athletics for as long as he could.

Even after she retired from Medford in 2014, Heger continued her involvement with the sports programs.

To this day, she helps officiate volleyball games, is the starter for the track and field team and coaches Medford's junior varsity basketball team.

Loyal to her school, Heger has never worked anywhere else and said that it has been everything she could have asked for.

"Well, the best part I guess, is just being a part of the school and being a part of the school community. The people I worked with were just wonderful. I went in in 1969 and there were a lot of teachers who had been there for one, two, three, four years... so not real veterans. But I went in and learned tons from them about how to run class and sports."

Heger said that she is thankful for her cast of supportive coworkers who helped her from the very beginning of her career and whom she became good friends with over the course of her career.

"The community is just so super supportive. And of course, John Gross."

Huskies lose to Northfield

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The Owatonna Huskies volleyball team lost to Northfield in three sets on Friday, Oct. 29, officially ending the team's season.

The sets favored Northfield 25-12, 25-8 and 25-13 with Owatonna struggling to find the answers for Northfield on offense.

"We came out serving strong in efforts of keeping Northfield out of system offensively. Defensively we were aggressive and were doing a good job of reading their hitters to get balls up, but Northfield's size in the front made it difficult to get quality shots on offense," said head coach Tai Tolle.

The Huskies entered the first round of the Section 1AAAA playoffs as the No. 6

seed with Northfield entering the match as a No. 3 seed.

Both sides battled with multiple long rallies in the first set, but Owatonna was unable to maintain offensive possession of the serve as Northfield set up consistent scoring opportunities.

The second set featured the same struggles for the Huskies who went down early and never recovered.

Owatonna found some success in the third set, staying neck-and-neck with Northfield early, before going on scoring droughts and losing 25-13.

Sophomore left side Mehssa Krause and junior right side Ava Eitrheim both recorded four kills to lead the team offensively.

On defense, junior libero Lainey Smith

kept the backcourt in check with 10 digs.

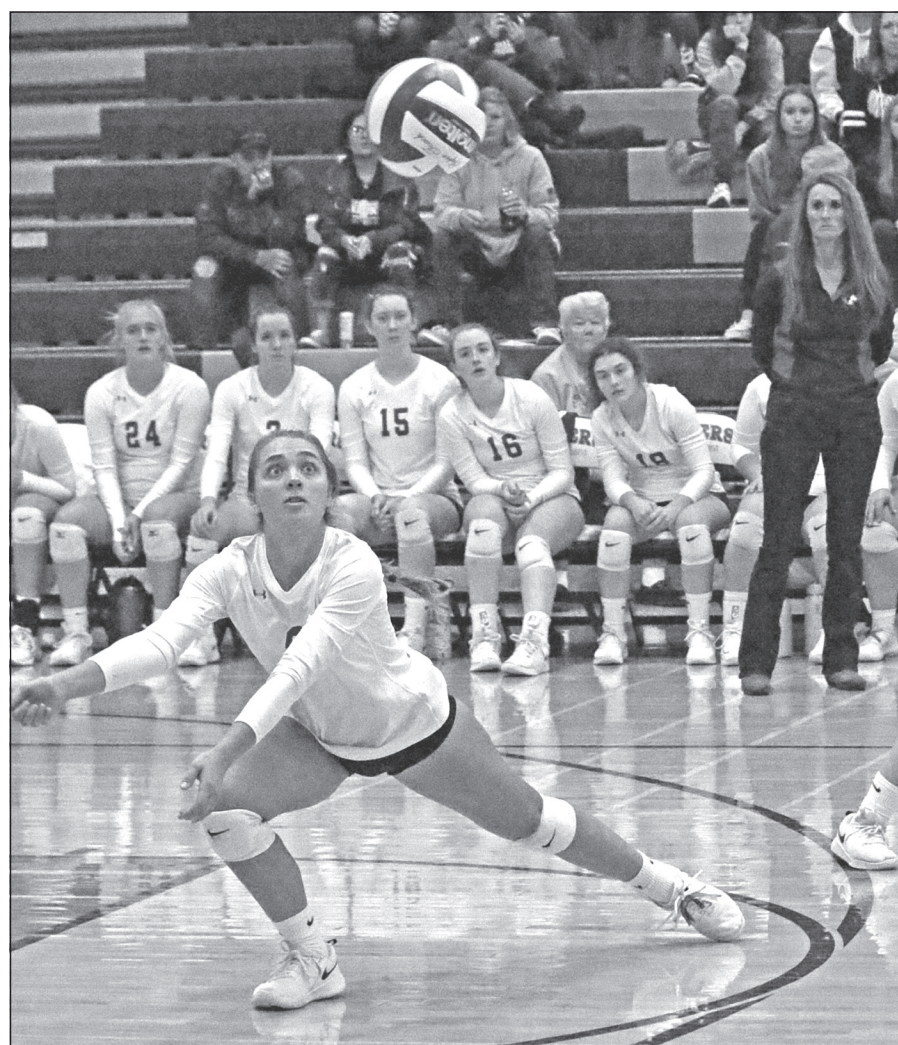
Despite the loss, Tolle said that she was proud of how the girls worked together and gave it their all, supporting one another throughout the contest.

Owatonna's season officially ends, but there is still reason for Huskies fans to be hopeful about next season.

Despite losing seven seniors to graduation, the team returns Eitrheim, Krause, Lainey Smith, as well as left side and consistent-scorer Lauren Bangs.

A focus for the team will be filling defensive roles as the Huskies will lose defensive specialists Madison Voracek, Moriah Noeldner and Camryn Smith.

Libero Lainey Smith is the only returning defensive player.



Senior defensive specialist Moriah Noeldner fully extends on a dig attempt against Northfield in the first set. Noeldner and the backcourt competed against Northfield's kill attempts, but the Huskies ultimately lost in three sets in the opening round of the Section 1AAAA playoffs.

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