



2026 FALL SPORTS



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New look on the gridiron as BP joins forces with Hayfield

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Bloomington's traditional black and white jerseys will have a little extra color to them this year when their helmets read "BPH" with a dash of purple and yellow to highlight the team's merge with Hayfield as a co-op program in 2026.

The BPH football team was created this summer when activities directors, school officials and head football coaches from both high schools decided that a co-op was necessary to create a safer environment for all players.

See **NEW LOOK** on 16 ►



COURTESY TAMMY WOLF

2026 Bloomington Prairie Football Schedule

Sept. 11	7 p.m.	vs. Blue Earth Area (Hayfield)	Oct. 9	7 p.m.	vs. WEM (Hayfield)
Sept. 18	7 p.m.	at Fillmore Central	Oct. 14	7 p.m.	at JWP
Sept. 25	7 p.m.	at Maple River	Oct. 20	7 p.m.	at Medford
Oct. 2	7 p.m.	vs. St. Clair/Loyola (Bloomington Prairie)			

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Good Luck
Blossoms!



Good Luck This Season Team!
From the Bloomington Prairie Bus Company



Moving kids forward

BP aims to keep building in 2026

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

After posting an 8-22 season in 2024 and a 5-20 finish in 2025, Blooming Prairie volleyball aims to keep building on its varsity experience and turn the tide in 2026.

Past troubles aside, the team has a positive outlook for the 2026 season after having gained more experience and court knowledge from last year.

This year's team will feature seven seniors – Grace-lyn Anderson, Jaspher Doocy, Aubrey Klocke, Addison Mongeau, Neila Nelson, Isabella Schiller and Dixie Swenson – most of whom will make an impact on and off the court for a program hoping to get back to its winning ways.

Doocy and Klocke will operate as main targets in the front row attempting to rack up kills on offense, and will primarily be

assisted by Schiller, who will operate as a setter for the squad alongside sophomore Emmerson Nelson.

Meanwhile, Mongeau and Neila Nelson will serve in the back row with the former playing libero and the latter serving as a defensive specialist.

Other names to watch out for include junior Ellie Stoen and underclassmen standouts Elaine Schwarz, Amelia Pauly and Ava Lea.

Stoen is a physical middle whose shot blocking will pay dividends for the Awesome Blossoms on defense with Schwarz, Pauly and Lea also providing great height and athleticism as rotational players on the outside.

Schwarz will be the team's primary height up the middle, standing five-foot, 11 inches as a sophomore.

In total, the Awesome Blossoms will have plenty of depth with 16 ath-



letes on roster and nine upperclassmen athletes to lead the way during the season's tough Gopher Conference schedule.

Up next for Blooming Prairie is a road match against Kenyon-Wanamingo on Thursday, Sept. 17 at 7 p.m.

2026 Blooming Prairie Volleyball Schedule

Sept. 10	7 p.m.	at Hayfield	Sept. 24	7 p.m.	at Randolph
Sept. 12	8:30 a.m.	at Hayfield	Sept. 29	7:15 p.m.	at Rochester Lourdes
		(Tournament)	Oct. 1	7 p.m.	vs. Triton
Sept. 15	7 p.m.	vs. JWP	Oct. 5	7 p.m.	vs. Rochester Lourdes
Sept. 17	7 p.m.	at Kenyon-Wanamingo	Oct. 8	7 p.m.	vs. WEM
			Oct. 13	7 p.m.	at Medford
Sept. 21	7:15 p.m.	at St. Charles	Oct. 20	7 p.m.	vs. Bethlehem Academy
Sept. 22	7 p.m.	NRHEG			



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JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

I would never wish away summer, but the moment the weather dips below 80 degrees, I get excited to get back out to the fields and courts for fall sports season.

There is a lot of mix-ups amongst local squads after each program graduated a strong senior class, so here's who to look for as Gopher Conference teams get back into competition.

Football

Blooming Prairie football has been a small-town powerhouse for years now,



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Blooming Prairie's Gloria Hernandez leads a pack of runners down the home stretch of the course at the Class A state cross-country meet. Hernandez returns to Blooming Prairie cross-country as a captain and multiple-time team MVP this season.

but the program will have a new look in 2026 when it joins with Hayfield to become the Blooming Prairie/Hayfield football team.

Chase Escamilla will take over as the starting quarterback after spending the last two seasons as the quarterback for Hayfield. His athleticism is undeniable, and he should be an immediate threat with both his arm and legs. He will be joined by key athletes Lukas DenHerder, Easton Johnson and Jesse Mealy. Mealy is a sizeable wideout with great speed and hands, while Johnson is a finesse back with blistering straight-line speed, and DenHerder is a bruising back who will contribute with his tackling and physicality on defense.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Medford's Joseph Hora runs down the final stretch at River Bend Nature Center at the Tigers' first home meet this season. Hora is the team's top runner as a freshman this season.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG running back Sean Lassahn breaks free from a tackle and runs the ball down the Panthers' sideline. Lassahn will be a key piece of NRHEG's 2026 team as a standout running back and linebacker.

NRHEG will have Sean Lassahn back and this year he will step into the bell-cow running back and linebacker role to pick up where 2026 senior Ryan Schlaak left off.

Expect Lassahn to captain this team alongside quarterback Brooks Gililand and wide receiver Calvin Nissen, who both will be major contributors on offense this season.

Medford's offense has some top-notch playmakers coming back in senior quarterback Landon Seiler, senior wide receiver Justin Limon and junior running back Mason Krenz.

Seiler now has three years of experience under his belt and will have no issues finding weapons in the field with Limon's speed downfield and Krenz's north-to-south run style.

Volleyball

Blooming Prairie

volleyball has a wealth of talent returning to its squad in 2026 with nine upperclassmen on roster.

The squad of Gracelyn Anderson (defensive specialist), Jasper Doocy (middle hitter), Aubrey Klocke (right side), Addison Mongeau (libero), Neila Nelson (defensive specialist), Isabella Schiller (setter) and Dixie Swenson (outside hitter) will represent the Awesome Blossoms as seniors.

Also look out for some key underclassmen in Elaine Schwarz, Amelia Pauly and Ava Lea to be key offensive weapons in the front court.

NRHEG volleyball will have just one returning starter in Anika Ladlie (outside hitter), but should get some help from talented teammates in Izley Boerner (missed 2025 with an injury) and Brooklyn Sommer (previously back-up setter).



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Blooming Prairie's Jasper Doocy goes up for a kill attempt over two Hayfield blockers. Doocy will be on of the Awesome Blossoms' main offensive weapons, playing from the middle hitter position this season.

Medford volleyball is in rebuild mode after losing nearly the entirety of its front court for the second consecutive season.

Leading the Tigers will be middle hitters Addison Doty and Jules Brady, outside hitter Jayden Schweisthal and setter Lexi Laue.

"Jules Brady, Addison Doty, Lexi Laue and Jayden Schweisthal all had significant playing time last year on varsity and we are looking at them to help lead our young squad this year. Jules and Addison are retuning in the middle for us. Jayden will be playing outside for us this year, she played right side and outside for us last season and Lexi will be returning in our setting position," said Underdahl.

Cross-Country

The cross-country season will feature smaller roster numbers for local

teams, but fans can still expect to see some individuals make waves and win races in 2025.

The most decorated returning runners will be Blooming Prairie's Gloria Hernandez and NRHEG's Julieann Wobbrock.

Hernandez is a multiple-time team MVP, a Gopher Conference champion and school-record holder for her 29th place finish at state in 2025.

Meanwhile, Wobbrock was a 2025 Gopher Conference champion and returns after finishing 18th at the Class A state cross-country meet a year ago.

Medford will have an experienced runner leading its team this season with Joseph Hora being the program's top athlete.

The Tigers will also have Avery Arndt and Amelia Fitzgerald keeping the pace for the Tigers' girls' team.

Huskies loaded with proven talent



Owatonna Live SPORTS WRAP

ROY KOENIG

As a new school year dawns, the sounds of smacked tennis balls and collisions of football pads have filled the air at Owatonna High School. Several Huskies' teams are coming into the season loaded with proven talent. Other squads are looking for their new leaders. Here's a look at some of the student-athletes to keep your eyes on.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna quarterback Aedan Tackmann makes a running throw to evade the Rochester Century pass rush. Tackmann will lead the Huskies with hopes on improving last season's 5-5 record.

Girls Cross-Country

Nearly all the runners return to the girls cross country team that made its third straight appearance at state last fall. Juniors Clara Sennott, Gracie Randall, and Clara Meier all ran sub-20 minutes in the Chatty 5K fair week. They were closely followed by Leah Leckner, Jacie Smith, Kaylin Herman, Bergan Rolloff, and Sophia Qualley.

Boys Cross-Country

The boys return most of their runners from a state meet team. Kaiden Struss "has had an incredible summer of training with over 500 miles and is extremely determined" according to coach Luke Holt. Micah Gentz "is coming off a strong track season where he broke two minutes in the 800." Grayson Slotsve was a top



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna goalkeeper Carson Van Gelder makes a diving save in a game last season. Van Gelder will be the Huskies' starting keeper again in 2026.

ten finisher in sections in 2025. All are seniors.

Volleyball

Huskies volleyball had a big graduating class off a conference runner-up run in 2025. Coach Josh Halva believes Blair Kath "will be our go-to hitter as an outside." Callie Cook will take on the libero role. He will depend on setter Taelyn Klein "to control our offense and get us in a good position to score." All three are juniors.

Others to watch include junior middles Kenzie Harguth and Liv Kahn and senior outside hitter Bristol Behne who "finds a way to put the ball on the floor."

Football

OHS football coach Jeff Williams delivered an optimistic outlook on the season during the rally on the final day of the Steele County Fair. Sam Dulas comes back in the trenches where he opened up big holes for the running game and is proficient in pass protection. Nolan Rolloff was second in de-

fensive points. Ben Sackett led the team in sacks. Each is a senior.

Leading receiver junior Cooper Routh returns. A stable of running back options include seniors Kade Hullopeter and Carson Bock, and juniors Zach Roesner, Will Frantesl, Lance Wagner and Colton Glende. Starting quarterback senior Aedan Tackmann is back but could get pushed for playing time by his younger brother Arik, a junior.

Girls Soccer

OHS returns its leading scorer, sophomore Finley Rolloff, "a quick and explosive player who loves to scores," says coach Nate Gendron. Sophomore Mee-la Hartman distributes the ball well and can also score. Sophomore Addy Elmhorst "will be a big presence in the middle." Senior Addie Gerdes "uses her physical play to win the ball." Junior Paige McGrath "Leads our defensive unit."



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna's Gracie Randall sprints down the home stretch at Brooktree Golf Course last season. Randall will be a key piece of Owatonna's 2026 cross-country team that brings back all but one starter after finishing 13th at the 2025 Class AAA state meet.

Boys Soccer

Longtime goalkeeper senior Carson Ven Gelder is coming off a strong summer of club soccer. "He's got the capability to make those game-changing saves," says first-year head coach Jeremy Wood. Senior forward Jack Hawkins "pressures the opposition's defenders like few other players."

In the midfield, senior Akram Haji "in many ways is one of our most technically gifted, creative and experienced players." Wood wants the ball to go through junior Logan Wilker, "The more we're able to get Logan on the ball, the more success we will have."

Girls Swim and Dive

Senior Kate Karsten is a two-time state meet diver. Senior Krin Eickhoff was All-Conference and

the squad's MVP in 2025. Freshman Brynlee Johnson was the Most Improved Swimmer. Senior Allison Vandenbroeke earned Most Improved Diver honors last year. Eighth grader Allison Hartle was Rookie of the Year. Freshman Vivienne Bell was named Hardest Worker.

Girls Tennis

Owatonna's top three singles players have extensive experience from last year. Two of them move up spots. Senior Patty Propicio again holds down the "ultra competitive No. 1 singles position," says coach Curt Matejcek. Junior Greta Veldman takes over at No. 2. Senior Gabbi Navarro (17-1 in the fourth position in 2025) moves up to No. 3.

The top doubles team is senior Lily Thiele and sophomore June Froman.

BP runners primed for breakout season

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
Bloomington boys' and girls' cross-country lost four runners combined to graduation in 2025, returning near-identical rosters that earned the girls team a Gopher Conference title and the boys a runner-up finish.

This year, both teams will have plenty of high-level running experience to tap into over the course of the season in order work their way back to the front of the pack.

"The girls Gopher Conference champions last year. We have everyone back again this year. Gloria Hernandez, Sophia Esplan, Haley McIntosh and Bella Romeo have earned all-conference awards for the past three years straight. Evie Emanuel was a great addition last year and earned her first all-conference award. In addition to these five, we also added three girls to the roster who will do very well as they get acclimated to the 5K distance in cross-country. This group could make up one of the best girls cross-country teams we have seen in a while," said Bloomington Prairie Head Coach John Bruns.



The future outlook is equally as bright on the boys side as well. "The boys were very young last season with six of our top seven being [freshmen]. In spite of that inexperience, they earned a second place in the Gopher Conference meet last year. It will be exciting to see what that young group will accomplish in the future. We added nine runners to our roster this year and many of them will compete for varsity spots as the season progresses," said Bruns.

According to Bruns, hopes are higher than ever for another strong year from each team. "We are very excited for this [boys]group. We have a nice mix of experience and youth which will make it fun. As the season goes on and we get closer to our big meets it will be fun to watch what this group can accomplish. We expect to be in the mix for another conference championship and finish in the top half of the always competitive Section 1A meet. [Our girls team

has] a great core group of returning runners this year. Adding three more legit varsity runners will make this a team that is capable of competing for a

conference championship again. We have the potential to have one of our best finishes in school history at the Section 1A meet and hopefully advance a

runner or two to the state meet," said Bruns. Bloomington Prairie's next meet will be at Riverview Golf Course on Tuesday, Sept. 22 at 4:30 p.m.

2026 Bloomington Prairie Boys & Girls Cross Country Schedule					
Sept. 10	4:15 p.m.	at Oaks Golf Club	Oct. 6	4:30 p.m.	at Chatfield Golf Course
Sept. 15	4:30 p.m.	at Bloomington Prairie Country Club	Oct. 13	4 p.m.	at Austin Meadow Greens Golf Course
Sept. 22	4:30 p.m.	at Riverview Golf Course	Oct. 20	4 p.m.	at Medford High School
Oct. 1	4:15 p.m.	at Prairie Ridge Golf Course			



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Good Luck Area Sports Teams!

Medford still searching for answers

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Simply put, there hasn't been much to admire about Medford football in recent years outside of the athletes' will to continue playing despite extreme adversity.

After an 0-9 season in 2025, the Tigers have shown a tendency to play well in the early stages of games, but injuries and lack of depth have resulted in depleted athletes that can't compete in the second half.

With another small roster chock full of underclassmen, the Tigers are going to have to be grittier than ever to take teams

late into games and still be competitive.

The yearly fears about depth are validated. The team consists of only 35 players, with 20 being sophomores or younger with little to no varsity experience.

However, some key returners will be asked to help ease their teammates into the learning curve that is varsity football.

Names to look out for will be Landon Seiler, Justin Limon, Mason Krenz and Tanner Milewski.

Seiler will lead the pack as the team's senior starting quarterback for the third consecutive season with Limon slotting



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

in as his main receiver and Krenz handling most of the work as the team's bell-cow running back.

Milewski will anchor the team's offensive and defensive lines as a three-year starter as well.

The only way for the Tigers to go is up, and despite a tough conference schedule, look for head

coach Jerome Johannes's team to give every team they play a good fight.
**The Steele County*

Times sent a questionnaire to the Medford football program, but received no response prior to the dis-

closed deadline, resulting in a lack of valuable information for reporting about the Tigers' 2026 season.

2026 Medford Football Schedule

Sept. 18	7 p.m.	vs. WEM	Oct. 8	7 p.m.	vs. JWP
Sept. 25	7 p.m.	at St. Clair/Loyola	Oct. 14	7 p.m.	at NRHEG
Oct. 2	7 p.m.	at Blue Earth Area	Oct. 20	7 p.m.	vs. Blooming Prairie



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Young Tigers ready to prove themselves

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Medford volleyball had a lackluster season last year finishing 6-19 overall and the Tigers will have plenty on their plate in 2026 to try and reach the .500-mark.

Back-to-back loaded graduating classes once again leave the Tigers playing catch-up trying to fill spots in their starting lineup.

The senior class will be a bright spot for the team as it features a four multi-year letterwinners.

“We are a young team this year, we lost a big senior class last year that led in a lot of different positions last year. We have four returning seniors and one senior that is seeing her first year on varsity. We are undersized compared to most teams. Our goal is to be competitive in our conference and keep

working hard all season,” said Medford Head Coach Missy Underdahl.

Leading the Tigers will be middle hitters Addison Doty and Jules Brady, outside hitter Jayden Schweisthal and setter Lexi Laue.

“Jules Brady, Addison Doty, Lexi Laue and Jayden Schweisthal all had significant playing time last year on varsity and we are looking at them to help lead our young squad this year. Jules and Addison are retuning in the middle for us. Jayden will be playing outside for us this year, she played right side and outside for us last season and Lexi will be returning in our setting position,” said Underdahl.

They will have to find their chemistry early on to be able to fill the offensive production left behind by graduates Libby Suther-

land, Olivia Ward, Lauren Ristau, and Jade Laue. Captaining the Tigers in 2026 will be Doty and Schweisthal. The team’s next game will be at Randolph on Thursday, Sept. 17 at 7 p.m.



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

2026 Medford Volleyball Schedule					
Sept. 17	7 p.m.	at Randolph	Oct. 1	7 p.m.	vs. WEM
Sept. 22	7 p.m.	vs. Triton	Oct. 3	9 a.m.	at Nicollet
Sept. 24	7 p.m.	at USC	Oct. 9	7 p.m.	vs. JWP
Sept. 26	9 a.m.	at Sibley East	Oct. 12	7 p.m.	at Bethlehem Academy
Sept. 28	7 p.m.	at Sibley East			
Sept. 29	7 p.m.	vs. Blooming Prairie	Oct. 19	7 p.m.	at Waseca

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Tigers shooting for “constant improvement”

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Medford cross-country will have a tale of two different teams this season with its boys team returning three letter winners on a roster of six athletes, and the girls team returning three letter winners on a lineup of just three runners.

Thus, the girls team will not be able to field a scoring lineup for team points, while the boys are eligible for scoring team points.

According to Medford Head Coach Dave Bon, scoring points isn’t all that matters in cross-country.

“As always in cross-country, the focus is on consistent improvement. Success will be determined by running faster as the season progresses and faster than the same meets from the previous season. Unfortunately, the girls will not have a scoring team, but the boys have the potential to place higher at both the conference and section meets than they did last year,” said Bon.

Medford’s boys team finished fifth of six teams at the Gopher Conference meet while the girls came

in last both at conference (fourth) and sections (18th).

Coming back to the boys team this season are letterwinners Drake Stursa, Mason Kolling and Joseph Hora.

“Joseph Hora was our top runner last season and looks strong in early season practices. Drake and Mason continue to improve and could have breakout seasons this year. We have a solid group of returning runners and a few new faces. Connor Pena improved during the track season and is excited to prove himself in the long races. I have not seen Jesse Kreber and Landon Schultz race yet, but they are both welcome additions to the team,” said Bon.

On the girls team, the trio of Avery Arndt, Amelia Fitzgerald and Claire Gibbons will make up the starting roster.

According to Bon, “Avery, Amelia, and Claire are all returning letter-winners who put in some miles this summer. I expect them to improve consistently during the season.”

The 2025 season was not a strong one for the program, but Bon knows



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

the potential in his athletes, and plans to push them to be their best.

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2026 Medford Boys & Girls Cross-Country Schedule		
Sept. 17	5 p.m.	at Daly Park & Campground
Sept. 22	4:30 p.m.	at Riverview Golf Course
Sept. 29	4:15 p.m.	at Ney Nature Center
Oct. 1	4:15 p.m.	at Prairie Ridge Golf Course
Oct. 13	4:30 p.m.	at Oak View Golf Course
Oct. 20	4 p.m.	at Medford High School

Huskies ready to build on last season

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna football salvaged an 0-3 start in 2025 to finish 5-5 by the end of the season in year where player turnover and changes to the coaching staff made winning football games difficult initially.

This season, Owatonna will look to go back to being its usual self with a more experienced lineup in hopes of contending for a Section One title.

Senior Aedan Tackmann will once again be the team's starting quarterback, and despite having an up-and-down season in 2025, Owatonna Head Coach Jeff Williams said he has "worked extremely hard" and made "big improvements" to his game over since last year.

Receivers Nolan Rolloff, Zach Roesner, Cooper Routh, Lucas Ginskey and Jordan Gleason will make up the receiving room and bring plenty of talent to the offense.

The five weapons add a mixture of height, speed and athleticism that will match up well against any secondary the Huskies come across.

See **HUSKIES** on 16 ►



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Huskies hope to gain experience quickly

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna volleyball broke out with a 20-10 record in 2025, but the 2026 squad will have some big shoes to fill after graduating nine seniors on a roster of 13 athletes last year.

Despite having a lack of varsity experience on hand, Owatonna Head Coach Josh Halva is hopeful that a team still full of upperclassmen will still prove capable of putting up big performances.

“Gain as much experience as quickly as possible. This team does not have a lot of varsity games however that is the fun part because this team is going to get better every day. The girls are hungry to work and carry on the success of last year,” said Halva.

The Huskies’ graduates from last season include

Kendra Bogen, Libby Jensen, Kyleah Miller, Danielle Roush, Autumn Frandsen, Adeline Schroht, Kennedy Wagner, Kali Belting and Miley Fulton.

The loss is a significant blow to the team’s offense and defense as it loses multiple Big Nine Conference kills leaders and multiple key members of its back row.

“We are replacing both starting middles, both outsides, our libero, both setters and a defensive specialist. Six all-conference players and one all-conference honorable mention,” said Halva.

However, despite the losses, height will still be a major factor for this Huskies’ team with two players hitting the six-foot mark (Ella Thompson and Grace Mitchell), and another six players standing five-feet, eight-inches or taller (Ella



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

Schuster, Liv Kubicek, Taelyn Klein, Blair Kath, Olivia Kahn and Mackenzie Harguth).

According to Halva, names to watch will be Kath (outside hitter), Klein (setter) and (Callie Cook (libero).

Blair Kath played right See **EXPERIENCE** on 16 ►

2026 Owatonna Volleyball Schedule

Sept. 17	7:15 p.m.	at Rochester Century	Oct. 1	7:15 p.m.	vs. Rochester John
Sept. 19	8 a.m.	at Farmington	Oct. 5	7 p.m.	at Kasson-Mantorville
Sept. 22	7:15 p.m.	at Winona	Oct. 6	7:15 p.m.	vs. Mankato West
Sept. 24	7:15 p.m.	vs. Austin	Oct. 8	7:15 p.m.	at Rochester Mayo
Sept. 25	1 p.m.	at Kasson-	Oct. 13	7:15 p.m.	at Mankato East
Mantorville			Oct. 20	7:15 p.m.	vs. Northfield
Sept. 29	7:15 p.m.	at Faribault			



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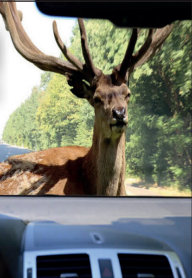
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Wood takes the reigns as Huskies' head coach

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

For the first time in program history the Owatonna boys soccer team will have a new head coach when Jeremy Wood takes over for 28-year head coaching veteran Bob Waypa this fall.

Wood had previously been an assistant under girls' team head coach Nate Gendron since 2018, and has been able to hone his skills alongside one of Owatonna High School's top-tier coaches, meaning he should fit right into a team that is built to win.

The Huskies' 2026 sea-

son will feature a mixture of old leadership and new talent.

Eleven seniors graduated from the team in 2025, but 10 varsity athletes return with some in key roles for the team in 2026.

The most notable re-turners are senior goalkeeper Carson Van Gelder, senior forwards Jack Hawkins and Emilio Rosas, senior midfielder Akram Haji, senior defender Canaan Zinter and junior midfielder Logan Wilker.

Van Gelder was able to take over the role as starting goalkeeper last season,

See **HUSKIES** on 16 ►



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

2026 Owatonna Boys Soccer Schedule					
Sept. 17	7 p.m.	vs. Austin	Sept. 29	7 p.m.	vs. Mankato West
Sept. 19	1 p.m.	at Farmington	Oct. 1	7 p.m.	at Rochester Mayo
Sept. 22	7 p.m.	at Faribault	Oct. 6	7 p.m.	at Mankato East
Sept. 24	7 p.m.	vs. Rochester John Marshall	Oct. 8	7 p.m.	vs. Northfield

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PUBLICATION OF STEELE COUNTY TIMES

Owatonna eyes return to section title

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna girls' soccer has been a force to be reckoned with over the course of the past few seasons, but the team hit a road bump last year by going 8-6-2 and finishing fifth place in sections.

A lot of scoring output and leadership will be transferred onto a younger roster, which head coach Nate Gendron hopes is ready to make the next step.

The Huskies' depth chart features a balance of 10 upperclassmen and 12 underclassmen with 11 returning letter winners from 2025.

However, the Huskies will be top heavy with eight seniors and two juniors, with the underclassmen makeup consisting of 10 sophomores and two freshmen.

Despite the discrepancy in experience and age, Gendron's team has talent

all across the pitch.

"Finley Rolloff is a quick and explosive player who loves to score. Her speed can beat any defensive back in the Big Nine Conference and last year was our leading goal scorer. Meela Hartman works right next to Finley and is able to distribute the ball but also can score. Finley and Meela are a great duo for our attacking presence. Addy Elmhorst will be a big presence in the middle of the field winning 50/50 balls and will be a key part of our transition from defense to offense. Addie Gerdes uses her physical play to win the ball. You will often see her on all ends of the pitch. Paige McGrath leads our defensive unit and will be the most vocal on the team to control the defense side of things. Norah Cederstrom is lightning fast on the outside and will be winning the ball and quickly tran-



COURTESY MIKE OLDENBURG - OLDENBURG PHOTOGRAPHY

sitioning from defense to offense with an amazing cross into the middle," said Gendron on his key players for 2026.

The team will also get a boost with a few new faces hoping to make names for themselves with the Huskies in their first varsity seasons.

-Hannah Wernicke is a

foreign exchange student from Germany who can score from anywhere on the pitch. She is able to place a pass splitting the defense in incredibly tight spaces and has great vision. Emma Hess will be our starting goalkeeper and is really talented making aerial saves.

Megan Skala is quickly becoming a strong leader in our defensive unit," said Gendron on a couple new athletes to keep an eye on this season.

With a loaded roster, the Huskies have their eyes set on winning now.

"This year we hope to be on top of the Big Nine

Conference and compete to get to the section finals," said Gendron.

Captaining the Huskies will be Gerdes, Cederstrom, McGrath and Audrey Dowling.

Owatonna's next game will be at Farmington on Saturday, Sept. 19 at 11 a.m.

2026 Owatonna Girls Soccer Schedule					
Sept.	19 11 a.m.	at Farmington	Sept.	26 1 p.m.	vs. St. Peter
Sept.	22 7 p.m.	vs. Faribault	Oct. 1	7 p.m.	vs. Rochester Mayo
Sept.	24 7 p.m.	at Rochester	Oct. 6	5 p.m.	vs. Mankato East
		John Marshall	Oct. 8	7 p.m.	at Northfield



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Huskies should remain near front of pack

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Owatonna boys' and girls' cross-country is hungry for another strong year in 2026 after the boys' and girls' teams both qualified for state last season. The two programs will have very similar years in terms of runners' varsity-level experience, with both having enough talent to make another run to the state meet. Owatonna's girls team will have six of its seven state runners back on roster in 2026 with four

juniors and two eighth graders making up the starting lineup. The team's only loss from the 2025 season was senior Kendra Melby, who finished fourth of seven at the big meet. Leading the pack for the Huskies will be state participants Leah Leckner, Clara Sennott, Gracie Randall, Clara Meier, Kaylin Herman and Bergan Rolloff. Herman and Rolloff will play pivotal roles as the team's two junior-high runners on the varsity roster, while Leckner, Sen-

nott, Randall and Meier will be juniors. Owatonna's boys roster will also bring back significant varsity experience and high-level runners. "We have five returning athletes and one alternate from last year's state team including Micah Gentz, Kaiden Struss, Grayson Slotsve, Andrew Jacott, Mason Myrom and Lowell Schultz. All these athletes are coming into the season with expectations to have another successful season," said Owatonna boys' Head Coach Luke Holt.

However, the team won't only have to rely on its seasoned runners for results; depth will play a key role in the team's success. "The team is the biggest that we have had in over a decade, so the goal is to compete at a high level at the middle school, junior varsity, and varsity races. Our depth overall is continuing to improve, and there should be lots of athletes competing for varsity spots which helps build a more competitive team. The team goal for the season is to finish in the

top two spots in the section securing a state qualifying spot, and then to compete with the best at the state to continue to build off of last year," said Holt.

The next meet for both Owatonna's boys and girls teams will be held at St. Mary's University Nordic Trails on Saturday, Sept. 26 at 9:30 a.m.

2026 Owatonna Boys & Girls Cross-Country Schedule

Sept. 26	9:30 a.m.	at St. Mary's University
Oct. 1	4 p.m.	at Brooktree Golf Course
Oct. 8	4 p.m.	at Brooktree Golf Course
Oct. 14	3:15 p.m.	at Benson Park
Oct. 20	3:55 p.m.	at Brooktree Golf Course

New look on the gridiron as BP joins forces with Hayfield

◀ **NEW LOOK** from 3
“(Blooming Prairie) is hoping to stay in Class AA football and when you’re going to a game with maybe 30 bodies and the other team has 60, there’s certainly a discrepancy there... It’s a whole other beast than Class A. We could get by with the numbers we had in single-A, and we tried to get by in double-A, but as the season progressed and injuries happen, it became more of a challenge for us. Knowing our numbers were a little bit smaller this summer, it wasn’t going to be feasible to safely put our kids out there and provide great experiences, and to continue the tradition we’ve had of having

success,” said Blooming Prairie Activities Director Ali Mach.
The merge did increase athlete turnout for the new program, but BPH will still be relatively light in numbers with just 37 players.
The football team will play Blooming Prairie’s Class AA schedule but will split games between the football fields at both high schools.
Highlighting the co-op’s new roster are a host of familiar faces that have become accustomed to competing against one another instead of playing alongside each other.
BPH’s quarterback Chase Escamilla and running back Easton

Johnson are Hayfield students while linebacker Lukas DenHerder and defensive lineman Kingston Lee are Blooming Prairie students.
The team returns a host of letter winners from previous seasons and has the athletes in place to be a dangerous competitor in the Mid-South – Silver Division, but it will come down to how fast the team can find its chemistry.
According to co-head coach Chad Gimbel, the athletes have “gelled quickly” since the beginning of the summer practices.
BPH’s next game will be on the road against Fillmore Central on Friday, Sept. 18 at 7 p.m.

Wood takes the reigns as Huskies’ head coach

◀ **HUSKIES** from 13
and despite the team finishing 6-10-2 overall, had a solid year backstopping a relatively inexperienced varsity team.
After having another full offseason to prepare for the fall, Owatonna’s Hawkins, Rosas, Haji and Wilker figure to be dangerous scoring threats against any opposition.
Meanwhile, Zinter will be the team’s most reliable defending option

in the back line.
Big losses for the 2026 team include forward Landon Sturges, midfielder Gavin Burmeister, midfielder Jackson Kath and defender Mubarak Hassan.
The defense will be the part of the team most affected by graduation, however, the majority of the team’s depth from last season was in its midfield, meaning there is opportunity for some

athletes to step into defensive roles.
In contrast, the team will also have plenty of returning firepower in its midfield and forward lines to hold possession and provide younger athletes stepping into starting roles on defense an easier transition to the varsity level.
Owatonna’s next game will be at home against Austin on Thursday, Sept. 17 at 7 p.m.

Huskies ready to build on last season

◀ **HUSKIES** from 11
The Huskies’ running back position has long been a highly coveted role and will primarily fall in the hands of Kade Hullopeter, who replaces 2025 standout graduate Tristan Graham.
Hullopeter’s physical downhill running and his ability to find the hole is something that Williams’ will be excited to utilize as the offense looks to find its identity early in the season.
The team’s offensive line will have plenty of size and skill with the trio of Sam Dulas, Andrew Selbrade, Pierce Louks, Alejandro Martinez and Xzabian Her-

andez on the roster.
The Huskies figure to be improved at nearly all positions with an added year of experience and should be capable of more explosive offensive games after a lackluster 2025 season in terms of scoring.
Dulas will anchor the line as a team captain and multi-year starter and play tackle with Martinez on the opposite side of the line.
In the middle, Selbrade will take over at center with Louks and Hernandez flanking him as guards.
Defensively, the Huskies will have plenty of returning talent with Dulas and

Ben Sackett anchoring the defensive line, Carson Bock and Roesner holding down the middle linebacker roles, and Rolloff, Willie Moore and Nolan Johnson leading the secondary.
Owatonna’s defense will be the real wildcard to watch out for in 2026 after giving up multiple explosive plays in 2025 that cost the team critical momentum and points in tight games.
Captaining the Huskies in 2026 will be Dulas, Rolloff, Sennott and Tackmann.
Owatonna’s next game will be at home against Rochester Century on Friday, Sept. 18 at 7 p.m.

2026 Owatonna Football Schedule					
Sept. 18	7 p.m.	vs. Rochester Century	Oct. 9	7 p.m.	vs. Northfield
Sept. 25	7 p.m.	at New Prague	Oct. 14	7 p.m.	at Rochester Mayo
Oct. 2	7 p.m.	vs. Rochester John Marshall	Oct. 21	7 p.m.	at Apple Valley

Huskies hope to gain experience quickly

◀ **EXPERIENCE** from 12
side for us last year and will be our go to hitter as an outside this year. Callie Cook was a defensive player for us last year, is our captain and will be our libero this year. Taelyn Klein is our starting setter, we are depending on her to control our offense and get us in a good position to score,” said Halva.
Breaking into conference and section title contention will not be easy for the Huskies, as the team will have to face some line-

ups that will have much more experience over the course of the season.
However, Halva still believes there is a reason for fans to expect a lot out of his squad.
“In our conference, we should be towards the top if we stay healthy and keep getting better. Northfield has won a bunch of conference championships in a row. They are always good and have a sophomore outside who is very good. Mankato West returns both of their outsides and will be in the

mix for the championship. Austin, Century and Mayo will be good and tough to beat. As far as our section goes, Lakeville South is the back-to-back state champions and did not lose a set last year in the state tournament. Lakeville North is ranked fourth in the preseason poll as well,” said Halva.
Captaining the Huskies for the 2026 season will be Cook, Klein and DeWitz.
Owatonna’s next game will be on the road against Rochester Century on Thursday, Sept. 17 at 7:15 p.m.

Lockerby takes over as Panthers' head coach

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG football will have a culture change in 2025 as new head coach Devin Lockerby joins the team to try and bring the Panthers back to the top of the Mid-South – Green Division.

The Panthers finished last season 2-7 under previous head coach Marc Kruger despite moving back down to Class A from AA, meaning there is plenty of room for improvement during Lockerby's first season.

NRHEG's roster has been relatively unaffected by graduation and only lost seven seniors in 2025.

The most notable losses came in the Panthers' trenches where names like Jordan Brouwers, Trevor Selover and Wyatt Larson will be missed.

However, the team does return its feature running back in Sean Lassahn, who figures to take on an even bigger workload in 2026 as a junior.

The talented, physical back also plays linebacker on defense and will be a captain on both sides of the ball.



Joining Lassahn as key returners will be Brooks Gilliland, Calvin Nissen, Ryan Schlaak and Owen Schlaak.

Gilliland will slot in as the team's starting quarterback again, giving the Panthers a true dual-threat playmaker behind center.

The trio of Nissen and the Schlaaks will be Gilliland's main weapons behind Lassahn with Nissen and Owen Schlaak playing receiver/defensive back, and Ryan Schlaak slotting in as a linebacker and secondary running back option.

With 32 athletes on roster, the Panthers will have to withstand bumps and bruises as the season goes on while avoiding serious injuries in order to remain competitive.

Up next for NRHEG is a home game against Southland on Friday, Sept. 18 at 7 p.m.

2026 NRHEG Football Schedule

Sept. 18	7 p.m.	vs. Southland
Sept. 25	7 p.m.	vs. Lewiston-Altura
Oct. 2	7 p.m.	at Redwood Valley
Oct. 9	7 p.m.	at Fillmore Central
Oct. 14	7 p.m.	vs. Medford
Oct. 20	7 p.m.	at USC



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Panthers bring back one starter



COURTESY DEBRA BENTLY

2026 NRHEG Volleyball Schedule

Sept. 17	7 p.m.	vs. Bethlehem Academy	Oct. 8	7 p.m.	at Alden-Conger
Sept. 22	7 p.m.	at Blooming Prairie	Oct. 12	7 p.m.	vs. Maple River
Sept. 24	7 p.m.	vs. Hayfield	Oct. 13	7 p.m.	at Randolph
Sept. 25	7 p.m.	at Jordan	Oct. 19	7 p.m.	vs. Waseca
Oct. 1	7:30 p.m.	at JWP	Oct. 20	7 p.m.	vs. Triton
Oct. 6	7 p.m.	vs. Kenyon-Wanamingo			

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG volleyball will have a new look in 2026 after losing nearly its entire starting lineup – 10 seniors total – to graduation last season and bringing back just one athlete with varsity experience.

The lone letter winner will be Anika Ladlie, who should be the team’s main weapon on offense.

“Anika is our only returning Varsity starter from last year. The past two years she has been on the right side hitting but this year will transition to the outside position. We look to her to be a leader and a key part of our offense,” said NRHEG Head Coach Bethany Tennis.

Her vision for the team’s 2025 court makeup will include some new faces, but she’s confident she has the right athletes to step into crucial roles.

“Brooklyn Sommer will be starting in our setting role this year. She will be running a 5-1 rotation and we look to her as the leader on the court. Izley Boerner was unable to play last season due to injury. She is back this year and ready to help guide our defense as a defensive specialist,” said Tennis.

Meanwhile, other athletes have taken on new roles as starting positions have opened up.

“We are looking to Aubrey Hendrickson to fill the role of libero. She will be essential for our team’s success as she takes charge of the back court. Ezra Boerner is coming into a versatile

role as the Panthers can use her across the front and back row in multiple positions,” said Tennis.

After a 21-8 season in 2025, the Panthers will have some work to do in order to find themselves back near the top of the Gopher Conference.

However, Tennis knows that chemistry is more important than experience at this point in her team’s career.

“The Panthers enter the season with a talented and versatile varsity roster that brings a variety of strengths and abilities to the court. With six seniors providing leadership and setter Brooklyn Sommer taking charge on the court, the Panthers will look to build chemistry and establish their identity as the season progresses. One of the team’s biggest challenges will be developing consistency and cohesion quickly. With a relatively new group of players who have not had extensive playing time at this level, building trust and learning to play as a unit will be an important focus early in the season,” said Tennis.

Up next for NRHEG is a home game against Bethlehem Academy scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 17 at 7 p.m.



Good Luck Panthers!



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NRHEG small in numbers, big in heart

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG cross-country is one of the small teams in the state numbers-wise, but that’s not stopping a Panthers squad that is excited to compete.

Runner Julieann Wobbrock figures to be the team’s top runner this season and one of the top competitors in the section title race.

“I expect Julieann to contend for both the conference individual title and qualifying for the state meet after a successful 2025 season. It will be a tough challenge, but I think she is up to the task,” said NRHEG Head Coach Larry Nydegger.

Wobbrock finished last season by winning the Gopher Conference

title, finishing fourth as an individual at sections and ultimately coming in 18th at the Class A state cross-country meet in 19:21.30 as a freshman.

Joining Wobbrock on the girls team as letter winners will be Violette Botten and Rylie Cromwell.

Meanwhile, the boys team will be led by two sophomores in Devlin McWilliams and Colton Leron.

The Panthers will have no seniors in the 2026 season, meaning all athletes on roster have ample opportunity to compete and gain experience as the year progresses.

Thus, Nydegger knows the importance of his team working hard and progressing each time it takes the trails.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

“This is a very young team. No juniors or seniors. We simply want everyone to strive for improvement in each meet that they compete in,” said Nydegger.

NRHEG’s next meet will be at home at River-view Golf Course on Tuesday, Sept. 22 at 4:30 p.m.

2026 NRHEG Boys & Girls Cross-Country Schedule

Sept. 22	4:30 p.m.	at Riverview Golf Course
Oct. 1	4:15 p.m.	at Prairie Ridge Golf Course
Oct. 8	4 p.m.	at Waseca Lakeside Golf Course
Oct. 13	4:30 p.m.	at Oak View Golf Course
Oct. 20	4 p.m.	at Medford High School



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