

Key losses affect Wildcat fall sports teams

Football

By Lauren Callison

After a 5-4 record last season, the Durant Wildcats will face a tough district this year without standout athlete Nolan DeLong who graduated in May.

Head Coach Joel Diederichs believes this year's season will have to be more of a group effort since much of the offense ran through DeLong, who rewrote the Durant football record book and is ranked ninth in the state in career rushing yards.

"I believe this year's members have excellent qualities that each of them bring, and it will be a total team effort," said Coach Diederichs.

The Wildcat football team has been in the weight room all summer preparing for the upcoming season.

Sophomore Tate McKinley has been working hard to return to the shape he was in last season and wants to fill DeLong's running back position.

"I've been lifting everyday, doing more conditioning than ever, and getting back to where I need to be," said McKinley.

McKinley started last season as a freshman and is feeling more confident after a year of experience on the field.

"We have some underclassmen that will have to step up, but our seniors will be steady across the board," said Coach Diederichs. "This is the seniors' team. They are expected to represent on and off the field, and I believe they will do an outstanding job in this role."

Senior Charles Huesmann has felt the weight of leadership since he was starting quarterback his sophomore year. Leadership comes naturally to him now, and he feels this season will be just like any other year.

Huesmann has dealt with two collarbone injuries the past two seasons and has since recovered. He wants to be the best he can for his team and is not going to hold back.

"In the off-season, I've worked hard in the weight room to get bigger to help protect myself and training in other areas such as working with a quarterback coach

to work on footwork and scrambling to stay away from contact as much as I can, but what it comes down to is winning games, so I'm willing to sacrifice my body and health at any point in games to help the team win games," he said.

Durant, Beckman Catholic, Cascade, Regina, Wilton, and West Branch make up the 1A-5 district this year.

Durant will open up the season against Lisbon at home tomorrow. The Wildcats will then visit Columbus Catholic on Sept. 1 and will host Central Lee on Sept. 8 before beginning district play at Regina on Sept. 15.

Coach Diederichs said it will be a "very challenging district from top to bottom, so we will have to take it one week at a time."

Volleyball

By Colby Gast

Led by new coach Alec Straw, the Wildcat volleyball team comes into the 2023 season with high hopes and experience as all but two players return.

"It's rare to find athletes like the ones we have in our program," said Coach Straw. "With proper buy-in...there is no ceiling for us."

Two-year starter Isabelle DeLong returns for her senior season. DeLong led the team in kills last year with 164 and understands her role this year.

"Working hard and leading by example is the best recipe for success," said DeLong.

Layla Streeter also returns for her senior season. Streeter recorded 157 kills last year and has been a starter for the last two years.

Streeter attributes some of her success to her travel volleyball team.

"Playing for a travel team allows me to stay in the gym often and constantly touch a volleyball year round," Streeter said.

Junior Katelynn Toft is excited to be back for her third season with the Wildcats. Toft put up 126 kills and led the team with 52 blocks last season.

Toft feels confident to step into a leadership role as she now is an upper-

classman. She believes the new coach will provide a great learning opportunity for the team.

Along with Toft, senior Avery Paper is excited for the opportunities with the new coach.

"We are doing a lot more open gyms that involve more drills," Paper said. "Coach Straw has a very high volleyball IQ, so I enjoy learning from him."

Paper returns this year looking to have another successful season. Last year, Paper led the team in digs with 266. Paper was also an efficient server with a 92.8% success rate.

Coach Straw has big plans for the program's future.

"In order to grow the volleyball program at Durant and achieve our goals, we need to implement a gym culture that competes, works for each other, remains disciplined, and is dedicated to the program," he said.

Coach Straw has had a long history of volleyball. He played nine years himself, which included college volleyball at Augustana in Rock Island. He then coached volleyball for the past seven years. He has been involved in various high-level programs at the club and high school level.

The Wildcats' season opener will be played at Bellevue on Aug. 28. Shortly after, their first tournament will be played at Muscatine on Sept. 2.

Cross Country

By Paige Happ

The Wildcat cross country teams have some big shoes to fill with the departure of two-time state qualifier Carlie Jo Fusco.

"We don't have a lot of upperclass runners, but I think junior Race Starr will do well," said boys' coach Andrew Hermiston "I also look at him to be a good leader and role model for the underclassmen."

Starr's main goal is to get better throughout the season, and he also has the drive to make it to state this year.

Last year went well for Starr. He ended the season with a personal record of 18:38 and finished 12th at the state qualifying meet. The top 10 individuals advance to state.

"I met most of my goals and ended up getting a lot better last year," Starr said.

"I've been running a couple of miles every other day recently to get prepared for the upcoming races."

As the cross country season starts, the boys' team led by Coach Hermiston has five runners, and the girls' team led by Coach Tracy Tappendorf has four runners.

Fusco, who is now running at the University of Northern Iowa, will be sorely



Senior quarterback Charles Huesmann will direct the Wildcat offense again this year.

missed by the teams and coaches.

Coach Tappendorf and Coach Hermiston both agree that Fusco's shoes will be hard to fill.

"Carlie Jo was a great runner, leader and motivator," Coach Tappendorf said. "Her positivity and drive will be greatly missed."

Both Coach Hermiston and Coach Tappendorf look forward to seeing how the season goes.

The Wildcat runners have been participating in local 5K races to prepare for the season.

"We also have had a few optional runs as a team to help condition the runners and work on building relationships," Coach Tappendorf said.

Having only four runners on the girls' team makes them fall short by only one runner to have a team score.

"Fingers crossed that someone will show interest and join us so that we can put up a team score for girls' cross country," said Coach Tappendorf.

Sophomore Grace Euson is the oldest runner on the girls' team.

"Some of my goals are to have a better running form, have my times a little more consistent, and beat my personal record from last season," Euson said.

Sophomore Nolan Williams has also set new goals for himself this year.

"I am looking forward to this season," Williams said. "I really want to set a lot of new PR's."

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Apex Ink and Apparel's junior high athlete of the month

Eighth grader Landon Retherford has been playing football for seven years. Retherford plays defensive tackle and offensive guard. When he was younger, he got inspired by his dad who played football in college. Retherford enjoys football because it is a contact sport.

Retherford

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Arty's Ice Cream and Grill's football player of the month

Sophomore Tate McKinley has been playing football since kindergarten. Tate is hoping to average 10 or more tackles a game. Over the years of playing football, he has learned a lot, and what he enjoys most about the game is the ability to go on the field and hit someone as hard as he wants.

McKinley

624 5th Street
Durant, IA

Rise & Grind's volleyball player of the month

Junior Rilynn Buesing has been playing volleyball for seven years. Buesing hopes to be more consistent in setting and hitting this year. Buesing enjoys many things about volleyball, and one of the most enjoyable things about the game for her is the hype and energy that is on the court or the bench after gaining a point.

Buesing

502 9th Ave.
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Today's Dentistry coach of the month

Coach Denise Ahrens, who coaches fresh/soph volleyball and girls' golf, has been coaching since the 1990s. Coach Ahrens is retiring this year from coaching volleyball after the season is over but still hopes to coach girls' varsity golf for a few more years. "I have always enjoyed being around sports and helping young people improve their skills," said Coach Ahrens, who enjoys helping out at Durant sporting events.

Ahrens

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Peel's Inc. cross country runner of the month

Sophomore Nolan Williams has been in cross country for one season. His goals this season are to go to state and also to get around 20:00 for his time. He enjoys cross country because it is a small team, and it's fun getting PR's and trying to catch up to lead runner Race Starr.

Williams