

Otter Valley looks to be competitive

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Otter Valley soccer players go through ball drills during practice on Wednesday at Otter Valley Union High School.
Adam Aucoin / Staff Photo

BRANDON — The Otter Valley boys and girls soccer teams were in a similar boat in 2020.

Their records were nearly identical with the boys going 3-6 and girls going 4-6 in the abbreviated season. They both started strong, but sputtered a bit once their schedule got more difficult down the stretch.

They're hoping to find more good than bad this year and are the returning talent to make it happen.

GIRLSThe Otter girls were underclassmen-heavy last year and that remains the case this year with just one senior.

Experience isn't an issue though. A standout junior class will see to that.

The 2023 graduating class will carry a lot of the scoring load.

“They couldn’t do more than they do,” Otter Valley coach Tammi Blanchard said. “They work well together.”

Elena Politano was the team’s leading scorer in 2020 with 12 goals. Ella Brytowski will play on the wing. Emily Peduto and Bryn Blanchard will play in the middle of the field.

“I think with them, it’s going to keep us up and we’ll scoring a lot of goals,” Coach Blanchard said.

Another one of those juniors Alexis Hayes will be a stalwart on the back line, playing center back.

“She is just a beast out there. She is kind of running the defense,” Blanchard said.

Sophomore Kylee Raymond will also play in the middle defensively. Grace O’Connell is returning to soccer this year and will play outside, along with freshman Savanna Cook.

Cook is one of seven freshmen on the roster, along with Laura Allen, Randi Lancour, Miley Lape, Ivanya O’Connell, Lauren Palmer and Malee Richardson.

“I have a lot of freshmen who I think can take charge,” Blanchard said.

Linnea Faulkner returns in goal for Otter Valley after a strong showing during her freshman year in 2020. She is also working with Palmer at goal to allow Faulkner to potentially play some minutes in the field too.

“(Linnea) plays club soccer all year, so that’s a big plus for us,” Blanchard said.

The other sophomores outside of Faulkner and Raymond are Clara Cifone, Sierra Cormany and Mykenzie Thibault. Forward Faith Scarborough is the team’s lone senior.

When Otter Valley opens its season in the Josh Cole Memorial Tournament Friday, Sept. 3 against defending Division IV champion Proctor, it doesn’t plan to be outworked.

“They are all hard workers and give 100%,” Blanchard said. “We’re focusing on conditioning. We’re trying to get everyone back into shape, but the girls all work great together.”

BOYSThe Otter Valley boys lost a handful of players in key spots, but the Otters feel good about their chances to be competitive in 2021, boasting eight seniors.

“The boys have shown good energy in preseason, so it should be good,” said Otter Valley coach Richard Williams.

The Otters lost some scoring punch with the graduation of Cole Letourneau, but they have capable guys who can put the ball in the net.

Luca Cifone and returning sophomore Max Derby are both guys who will contribute offensively.

“Max played some striker last year for me and then picked up an injury,” Williams said. “This year, we’ll have him back and he’s healthy.”

Seniors Kieran Williams and Evan Thomas are as solid as they come in the midfield.

“They’re both veterans. They’ve been playing there for me for years,” Coach Williams said.

Williams has a bunch of other guys trying to fill that spot in the field, so he’s not sure who will slot in where just yet.

“I have a lot of choices there, which is good because when it comes to the season, those are hard places to play. It requires some depth.”

Senior Fraser Pierpont is the ace of the Otter Valley pitching staff and he’s just as good on the soccer pitch. He returns at center back and will captain the defense.

Otter Valley will be working in a new keeper with Ben Adams not returning this year.

Brian Stanley, Austin Cormany and Hayden Bernhardt are all potential choices for that spot, according to Williams.

Bernhardt, a senior, has been a do-it-all kind of player for OV for the past few years, playing all over the field.

Otter Valley opens the season on Friday Sept. 3, hosting West Rutland, who they beat 2-1 in their lone matchup last fall in Westside.

The Otters have plenty of tough games sprinkled on their schedule, playing against high-level clubs like Hartford and Woodstock and even Division I Mount Anthony.

They hope those tests will serve them well come Division III playoff time.

“Hopefully, we take care of business in the games that are winnable and in the ones like (Hartford, Woodstock and MAU), I hope to surprise some people,” Williams said.

“We’re a D-III school, but we don’t really play a D-III schedule. The hope is that when we’re getting ready to play in the playoffs, we’re used to more difficult teams and that pays off in some way.”