

Sticking with it after a lost season

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Otter Valley's Ryleigh LaPorte (24) dribbles the ball down the field as she is chased down by Fair Haven defenders Tegan Hoard (23), Emilee Higgins (2) and Alana Williams (8) assisted by teammate Sydney Gallo (6).

File photo by Hannah Dicton

The 2020 campaign might best be described as a lost season for area field hockey teams. Rutland, Springfield, Middlebury and Fair Haven were a combined 0-22-1 in the regular season. Springfield did salvage something of the year by beating Milton in a first-round Division III playoff game.

The team that did attain respectability was Otter Valley. The Otters fashioned a 3-3-2 record and then picked off Middlebury in the opening round of the Division II playoffs.

They are all hoping for better things when the bell rings.

Otter Valley

The Otters come into the season with a veteran presence in the form of six seniors.

One of them is Riley Keith and, oh man, is the OV field hockey fandom happy to see her back. She missed last year with an ACL injury.

"She is 100 percent," OV coach Jodie Keith said.

The other seniors are Riley's cousin Alice Keith, Marissa Connors, Brittany Jackson, Madison Colburn and Josie LaRock.

Connors will anchor the defense and Jackson is an offensive player who has scored some big goals.

Alice Keith is the glue of the team. Her contributions come both on the attack and on the defensive end as a midfield player.

"She is end line-to-end line," coach Keith said.

Colburn is in her fourth varsity season as an offensive player and LaRock is also in her fourth varsity campaign at the defensive end.

Juniors include Ryleigh LaPorte, MacKenzie McKay, Abi Adamsen, Taylor Lantman, Casey Sue Thompson and Sydney Gallo.

The sophomores are goalie Lily Morgan and Elizabeth Atherton.

Morgan has a full year of varsity goalie experience under her belt.

There are freshmen Charlotte Newton and Matelin LaPorte, both offensive players.

Saturday's Play Day at Mount Abraham is about shoring up the defense.

"I am 99% sure I've got a good offense," coach Keith said. "We have a really strong offensive line with Riley and Ryleigh (LaPorte)"

The Otters host Brattleboro in the season opener on Sept. 4.

Rutland

The numbers game is finally catching up to Rutland, said RHS coach Karen Poljacik.

"We have 25 girls out this year. That is a lot different than the 40 to 50 we normally have," Poljacik said.

There are five returning seniors including Elizabeth Franzoni, a rock on defense as the fullback.

"Elizabeth has a great clear and she worked very well with our goalie," Poljacik said.

Now, Franzoni and the defense will have to adjust to a brand new goalie. Sophomore Emma Cosgrove steps into the net.

Poljacik has confidence in Cosgrove to make the big leap from JV goaltender to a varsity one.

“She has had a year of JV and did a great job,” the coach said.

The other seniors are Alyssa Kennedy, Jaryn Mazzariello-Peer, Olivia Andrews, Rylee Plante and Abby Stoodley.

Plante and Stoodley will both see time on the forward line and Stoodley might also spend some time on defense.

Lauren Solimano returns to the midfield as a junior.

“She and Jaryn should be very strong at the midfield,” Poljacik said.

Poljacik is not at all certain as to the status of the remaining players. She hopes to use the time at the Play Day at Burr and Burton on Saturday to figure out where those players might best fit into the puzzle.

“The Play Day will be some good competition for us,” Poljacik said.

The Ravens open on the road, traveling to Windsor on Sept. 3 and then making the short trip to Otter Valley on Sept. 9. The home opener comes on Sept. 11 at 11 a.m. against defending Division I state champion Bellows Falls.

Fair Haven

Coach Allison Resnick is working with some small numbers in Fair Haven. Thirteen players have answered the call.

Resnick sees better days ahead. When the middle school is relocated to the high school campus for the 2022-23 school year, she figures she will reap the benefits of a feeder program, something FHUHS field hockey has never had.

Right now, she is concerned with this season which begins with a tough test on Sept. 4 when Woodstock comes to town.

The Slaters have two goalies. Either Bailey Pettis or Laurel Boutwell will be in the goal.

Pettis will be the starter against Woodstock because Boutwell won't have the required number of practices by then.

"There is no clear cut No. 1 at goalie," Resnick said.

That is the way Resnick approaches all positions.

"Just because you started a game, does not mean you will start the next one. You have to earn your position every day," she said.

Tegan Hoard returns for her senior year. She was named to the All-Southern Vermont League Team last season as a right midfield player but she will be shifted to central midfield this fall.

Marissa Holcomb and Katarina Stevens are seniors. Stevens is new to the sport this year.

Juniors include Alana Williams, Alexis Murray and Paityn DeLong.

Sophomores are Emiliee Higgins, Paige Paquette, Katrin Shaw and Jaylena Haley.

Resnick loves the team chemistry.

"This is a team. They are all focusing on getting better and working together," Resnick said.

"They want to win and I want to win."

Fitness is a focus of the preseason because numbers are so low.

That fitness will be tested on Sept. 4 against the Wasps because only 11 players will be able to play that day.

Resnick was excited about Saturday's Play Day at Burr and Burton because it would enable the team to go in a game situation, 11-on-11, something they do not have the luxury of on a team with 13 players.

Some of the players dedicated themselves to the sport over the summer.

Williams was one who has jumped out at Resnick in the preseason.

"Alana Williams has really got a lot of power this year.

"Emiliee Higgins made every practice we had this summer and it shows.

“And Paityn DeLong is another who came every day during the summer. She is a defensive midfielder and is very solid. “

Middlebury

The Tigers endured an 0-7 regular season and then were quickly knocked from the Division II tournament by Otter Valley.

Middlebury coach Brandi Correia will hope for better things when the Tigers welcome Mount Mansfield Union to Gail Jette Field.

Jette was a legend. She won eight Division I state field hockey championships coaching the Tigers. She amassed a record of 375-73-73.

Now, Correia would love to bring some of the magic and mystique the Tigers enjoyed under Jette while playing the game on the field that bears her name.

Springfield

New Springfield coach Alex Nikolovski is still learning names. That’s a good thing because new players are joining the squad each practice.

She figures a safe number right now is 16 and the attitude of her players has her extremely excited about the season.

The Cosmos don’t waste any time taking on the giant. They meet defending Division I state champion Bellows Falls on Sept. 3 on Springfield’s Michelle Porter Field.

That’s some indoctrination to Vermont field. Don’t worry, though, Nikolovski has been around the block when it comes to field hockey. She played four years of NCAA Division I field hockey at Bucknell where she was a first team All-Patriot League selection as a forward/midfielder.

The new coach feels she has some building blocks in place. Senior Olivia Loney, junior Angelina Woychosky and sophomore goalies Gretchen Gilcris and Zada Grant have jumped out at the coach in early practices.

She also retains Jenna Young, a former Springfield High goalie, who will work with the goaltenders.

“We work very well together,” Nikolovski said.

“I am really excited about this group.”

She wants to restore the luster to the Cosmos on the field hockey field and she maintains that she is in it for the long haul.

“I am putting down roots in this area,” said the Upstate New York native.

She took the Cosmos across the Connecticut River to scrimmage against Stevens High School on Thursday evening.

Then, comes the biggest test of all, the vaunted Terriers on Sept. 3.

That’s fine with Nikolovski.

“You learn from your opponents,” she said.