

Fall Sports Report 2021: Otter Valley Union High School

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OTTER VALLEY UNION High School Varsity Boys' Soccer



OTTER VALLEY UNION High School Varsity Field Hockey



OTTER VALLEY UNION High School Varsity Football



OTTER VALLEY UNION High School Varsity Girls' Soccer



OTTER VALLEY UNION High School Varsity Golf



OTTER VALLEY UNION High School Varsity Cross Country

BRANDON — School is back in session at Otter Valley Union High School, and so are fall sports. At OV, that includes girls' and boys' soccer, field hockey, football, cross-country running and golf. Coaches and athletes have set goals as they move forward in the season. Here's a brief preview of the season ahead for OV athletes

FIELD HOCKEY

Field hockey won its first game this season — 6-0 against Brattleboro in Brandon on Sept. 4, with Lily Morgan in goal for her second year starting.

The Otters highlighted what should be a balanced attack this fall: Riley Keith and Brittney Jackson knocked in two goals apiece, and Alice Keith and Mackenzie McKay each scored once.

"It was a really great game for us," said Coach Jodie Keith. "Defense saw little play on their end of the field, but Marissa Connors was the anchor of the defense when play was down in their territory."

The Otters followed that up with a 3-2 road win at Division II rival Woodstock.

Jackson (assisted by McKay), Alice Keith (assisted by Ryleigh LaPorte and scored on a penalty corner) and LaPorte unassisted, put the goals on the board, and Morgan made seven saves.

Coach Keith was again happy with the team's effort. "It was a really good game for everyone. Offense worked hard to keep the ball in the circle, midfielders hustled to help offense and quickly get back to play defense when needed, and defense did well moving the ball out of the circle."

Overall, Coach Keith said she was optimistic about a team that features senior tri-captains Connors, Alice Keith and Riley Keith, all of whom played against Mount Abraham in the 2019 title game.

"We have a really strong team this year with six seniors returning. Everyone is excited to be back playing a full schedule of games this season," Keith said. "The team is working really hard every day and wants to get back to the state championship this year."

FOOTBALL

The football coaches and helpers are as follows: Head Coach Kipp Denis; Defense Coordinator Keith Alexander; Offensive Coordinator Jordan Tolar; Special Teams Coach Ken Stanley; Assistant Christian Polli; Manager Morgan Landesman, OV junior; and helpers Dylan Anderson (OV senior) and Mark Jackson (OV freshman).

"We're a young team and our goal is to make the playoffs," Coach Denis said. "We came up one game short of championships two years ago."

The Otters started on the right foot, rolling to a 34-6 victory at Missisquoi in its D-III opener. OV QB Luca Polli threw for 129 yards and three touchdowns to help spark the win. The Otters showed offensive versatility; on the ground, Robert Hutchins broke loose for a 79-yard score, and Keevon Parks ran 11 times for 64 yards and another touchdown.

The Otters played well in the 7v7 touch football during the COVID season a year ago, which consisted of nothing but passing plays and allowed Polli to develop his passing game, but Coach Denis said the program is happy to return to 11-man football with full contact.

"We're just grateful to play tackle, not tag," he said.

If the Otters keep working hard, Denis said the program could attain its playoff goals.

"We'll get better each game and go from there. It rides upon them, that's for sure," he said.

CROSS COUNTRY

In his first year as OV cross-country coach, Cameron Perta said he hopes to build the program.

"I'm hoping to lay a good foundation so that the team is able to not only be successful this season, but also be able to work hard in the offseason to improve throughout the year. Having a few of our athletes work hard in the offseason is one of my major long-term goals. I think this could lead to some really great progress in the ensuing years," he said.

Perta also wants to focus on "establishing good goals for each individual on the team. Goals that each athlete is able to build from moving forward."

Three of the top five runners who led the Otter boys to a fifth-place finish in D-III this past fall graduated, but sophomores Dillon Ladd and Baker LaRock return after running for OV at the state meet in Thetford.

OV fielded a non-scoring team of four female runners at Thetford in 2020. Two of those runners are back, and they are the cross-country team captains this fall, juniors Kelsey Adams and Zoe Elliott.

GOLF

OV golf Coach Greg Hughes and Assistant Coach Kristen Shaeffer are going into the season with primary returning players Thomas Politano and Matthew Bryant.

"These two have been helpful on the course and at practice helping the less experienced golfers get better," Hughes said. "Thomas is a dual sport athlete, so Matt has been an integral part to our team in the preseason so far."

Of the other athletes, the coach notes young-yet-experienced golfer Lucas Politano is someone to follow.

On the female side, the team has one returning player, Elena Politano, who went to the D-II state tournament last year with her sister Mia, who graduated this past spring. Politano is also a dual-sport athlete this fall as a member of the girls' soccer team.

"Our hope this year is to make it to states as a team in both the male and female divisions and bring some wins home as well as continue to improve as golfers," Hughes said.

The Otters got off to a good start, as the boys won at Rutland in their first match by shooting a collective 187 with Thomas Politano's 40 over nine holes leading the way.

GIRLS' SOCCER

Coach Tammi Blanchard will lead a relatively inexperienced team of seven freshmen, five sophomores, six juniors and one senior.

"The team may be young, but it shows lots of promise," Blanchard said. "The girls have been working hard to refine their skills, get back into shape and most importantly, play as a team."

The captains on the team are juniors Bryn Blanchard, Ella Brytowski, Alexis Hayes, Emily Peduto and Elena Politano. The Otters took their lumps in the early going, with losses to strong sides Proctor and Black River — in Black River's season-opening tournament — and then to Woodstock in their home opener.

Coach Blanchard said Peduto, Hayes and Savannah Cook had good moments in the BRU tournament, in which Marley Richardson found the net for OV. Against Woodstock, Blanchard noted goalie Linnea Faulkner excelled, making 25 saves.

BOYS' SOCCER

Coach Dick Williams said his team has an even split of experience — seven seniors and three juniors — and youth — nine sophomores and freshman.

He called his seniors "a decent core" to build on, and said his freshmen and sophomores "have some skill, and quite a bit of potential."

The Otters got off to a respectable start, a big win at home over West Rutland and then a 0-0 tie at Proctor in which they outshot their hosts, 17-8. Williams acknowledged the road ahead will get tougher,

"We won our opener and needed to win the game against Proctor as we don't have easier games on the schedule," he said.

As for key players, he listed athletic senior goalie Hayden Bernhardt, senior center midfield playmaker Kieran Williams, senior central defender Fraser Pierpont, senior midfielder Evan Thomas, sophomore midfielder Owen Thomas, and senior striker Luca Cifone, who returns after taking the pandemic year off.

Coach Williams said how well the midfielders click together and whether Cifone can continue to work well with Kieran Williams to create and finish chances will go a long way to determine how well the Otters do this fall.

"Now we need to work on finishing," the coach said.