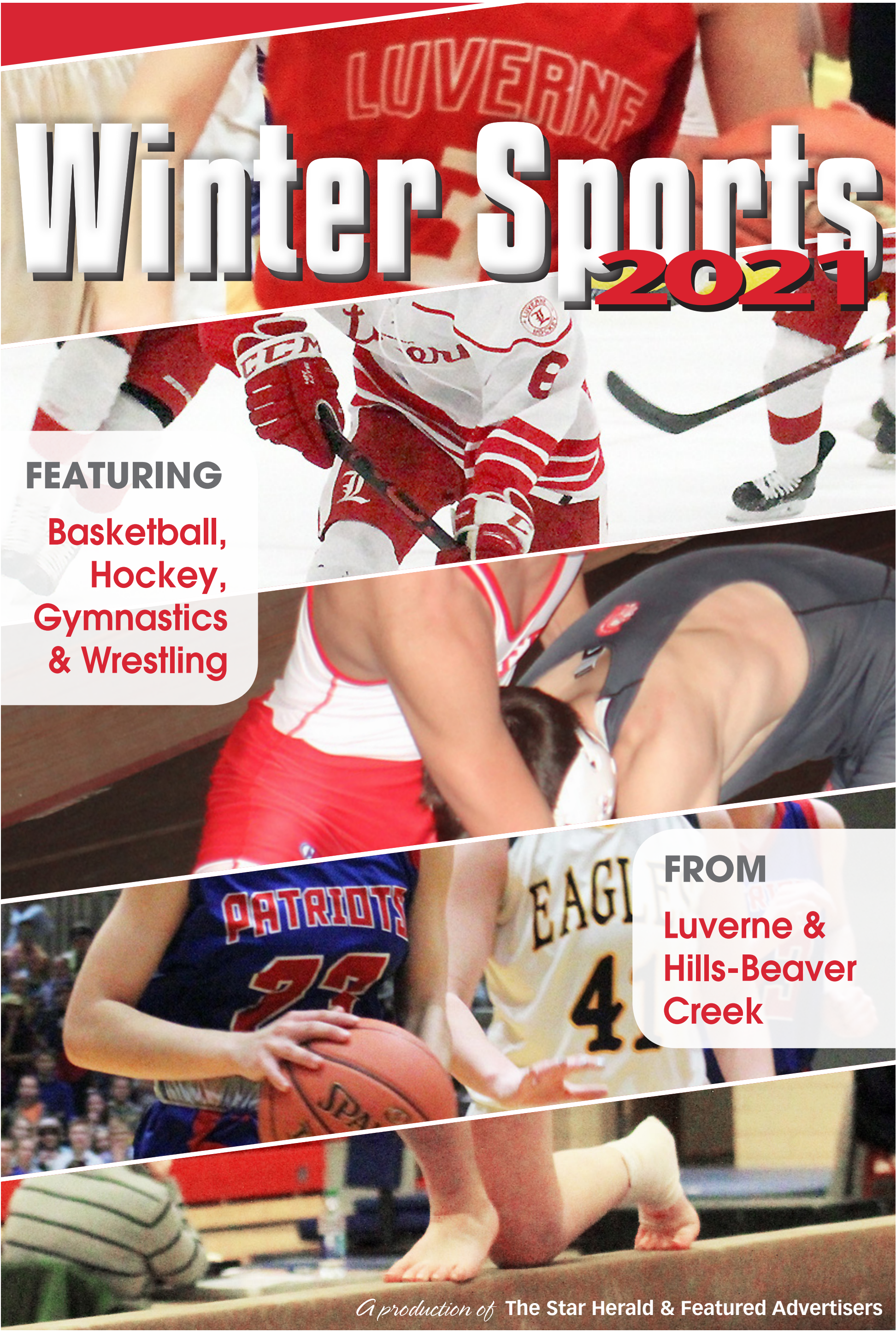




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Cardinals return strong core from state tournament team

By Brennen Rupp

The Luverne Cardinals girls' hockey team reached the state tournament for the second time in program history last season, finishing the season with a 20-4-1 record.

With the core of last year's team back, the Cardinals have visions of reaching the state tournament again in 2021.

"We haven't set any goals," Luverne head coach, Tony Sandbulte said. "We want to get back to the state tournament. We want to get better every day. We want to get back there."

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there was growing concern that the Cardinals wouldn't have an opportunity to get on the ice to try to accomplish the feat of reaching back-to-back state tournaments. Now that the Cardinals are back on the ice, Sandbulte has noticed an uptick in energy from his team.

"The big thing is these girls have a lot of passion for hockey," Sandbulte said.

"With not being able to play when we wanted to, it was tough on them. Now that we are able to play, that passion has multiplied by two. There is a lot of energy. They've been waiting a lot for this moment. We just want to go out and capitalize on this moment. We want to keep raising the bar and have some fun."

A part of the core that's returning from last year's team is a group of six seniors that include Roz Oye, Shelby Kracht, Rylee Gee, Regan Feit, Brynn Thier and Sophie Holmberg.

"They just hold the team together," Sandbulte said. "They have a lot of experience. They've been around since they were eighth-graders. Feit has played since she was a seventh-grader. They've just been around our program for a long time. They've learned from past seniors and now it's their turn



Brennen Rupp photo/1114 Hockey Senior photo

The Luverne Cardinals will be led by a strong senior class in 2021. They are (front, from left) Sophie Holmberg, Rylee Gee, (back) Regan Feit, Brynn Thier and Roz Oye. Not pictured, Shelby Kracht.

to lead."

Oye finished last season with 24 points on 14 assists and 10 goals.

"We can always count on her in the defensive zone," Sandbulte said. "She really rises on big occasions. The tougher the team, the tougher she plays."

Feit recorded 10 points on six goals and four assists last

season.

"She's just a hard worker," Sandbulte said. "She's very strong and athletic. If we are facing a top line, we want Regan on the ice against them."

Rylee Gee led the team with 26 assists last season. Gee also recorded 14 goals.

"Her speed is her greatest strength," Sandbulte said. "She's very quick on her skates.

She can just get up and down the ice."

Kracht finished last season with 16 points on 10 assists and six goals. Sandbulte said her greatest strength is her versatility.

"She's been very flexible," Sandbulte said. "We feel comfortable having her on offense or defense. She's got a lot of strength. She's just very physi-

cal."

Sandbulte said that Thier may be one of the team's strongest assets on defense.

"She's a strong defender," Sandbulte said. "She's another physical player for us. She's a stay-at-home defenseman. You know what you're gonna get from her every day."

Holmberg finished last season with one assist. Sandbulte said she's a positive voice for the team.

"She adds depth to this team," Sandbulte said. "She's kind of a spark plug for us."

Sophomore Kamryn Van Batavia led the team in goals (42) and points (67) last season as a freshman.

Van Batavia has led the team in goals the past three seasons.

Junior Reghan Bork finished tied for second on the team with 40 points. She recorded 17 goals and 23 assists.

"Our top two lines are going to be very strong," Sandbulte said. "I like where our offense is at right now."

Junior Cheyenne Schutz and sophomore Mallory Von Tersch return between the pipes for the Cardinals.

Schutz finished last season 12-3-1 and recorded 295 saves.

Von Tersch went 8-1 and recorded 147 saves.

"I like the experience with this defense," Sandbulte said. "We bring back two established goalies."

The Cardinals open the season on the road against Windom Area on Jan. 15.

It's been a long wait for this Cardinals team to return to the ice. With an established core leading the way, the Cardinals could be in store for another special season in 2021.

"We just have a lot of things pointing in the right direction for this team," Sandbulte said. "We're excited to get back on the ice and started."



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LHS boys' hockey will lean on seasoned players in 2021

By Brennen Rupp

The Luverne Cardinals boys' hockey team finished the 2019-2020 campaign with a 15-10 regular season record. That 15-10 mark earned the Cardinals the No. 5 seed in the section tournament.

The Cardinals opened the section tournament by pulling off a minor upset of the Marshall Tigers. Luverne edged their Big South foe 5-4 to advance to the section semifinals.

Luverne lost in the next round to eventual state qualifier Hutchinson 6-1.

With four seniors and a handful of returning players back for the upcoming season, the Cardinals will look to build off the success they enjoyed last season.

"We'll rely heavily on all the players with returning experience," Luverne head coach Phil Paquette said.

"We don't have a lot of depth. It's going to be a collective effort. We'll especially lean on our seniors. They have to bring it every day and keep everybody on board and power through."

Cade Wenninger is one of four seniors on the roster. As a junior, Wenninger recorded 17 points on 11 goals and six assists.

"He has great knowledge of the game," Paquette said.

"He's a smart player. He's become a strong and a physical presence on the ice for us. He's come a long way since his first year at the varsity level."

Carlton Oftedahl is the team's Swiss army knife. Paquette said Oftedahl will wear many hats for the Cardinals during the upcoming season.

"Carlton is a utility player for us," Paquette said.

"He's going to play some defense and some forward. He has an outstanding shot from the point. He'll work in on



Brennen Rupp photo/1114 Hockey Boys Senior photo

The Luverne Cardinals will rely on their four seniors to lead the way in 2021. They are (from left) Cooper Arends, Shaid Shearer, Cade Wenninger and Carlton Oftedahl.

"It feels so much better having that start date. Once we got the OK to start competition, it was weight-lifted off our shoulders. Some of these guys have already lost seasons last year with baseball. A lot of them are football players and they're looking to bring that effort and energy over after having a successful season on the gridiron. We're grateful to have the opportunity to play. It's a quick season; it's going to be here and gone in a blink of an eye. We just want to enjoy every minute that we have and have fun."

- Luverne boys' hockey coach Phil Paquette

special teams in front of the net. He'll work out on the blue line. He's just a big physical presence for us. He's got great size. He's got a heavy shot from the blue line. We're going to try and get him to trigger it from the blue line as often as we can."

Cooper Arends finished his junior campaign with seven assists. Paquette said that Arends'

greatest strength is high hockey IQ.

"He's the most experienced defenseman for us," Paquette said.

"He's a very smart player. He sees the ice well. He moves the puck up well."

Over the last two seasons, Shaid Shearer split time between the pipes with a fellow

teammate. Last season he shared time with Colton Schutz, going 6-5 with 307 saves.

Now as a senior, Shearer is the man.

"He's the backbone for this team," Paquette said.

"He's our only goalie. He's split time as a sophomore and junior. He's the only goalie we have this year. We will rely

heavily on him. He'll get a chance to get into a good groove. He's got great hand-eye coordination. He anticipates the play well."

As a freshman, Brock Behrend finished last season with nine goals and six assists. Behrend's ability to light the lamp makes him a dangerous player for the Cardinals.

"He's a very skilled forward," Paquette said.

"He's got a knack for scoring. We'll want to get him as many scoring opportunities as possible. He's a very fast player."

Fellow sophomore, Ethan Langseth finished his freshman season with five points on four assists and one goal. Paquette said he's looking forward to watching Langseth's development this season.

"He was a starter for us last year as a ninth-grader," Paquette said.

"He's a similar player to Cooper. He makes intelligent plays on the blue line. He's got good size and reach, and he's able to break up a lot of plays. We'll just look to have him improve throughout the season."

Zachary Kruse finished last season with five points on three goals and two assists. As a junior, Kruse will look to expand his role on the ice for the Cardinals.

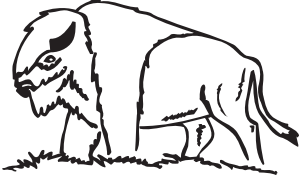
"He had a quite a bit of ice team last year," Paquette said.

"He plays a physical game for us. He drives the puck to the net. We'll rely on his speed and playmaking ability. this season."

The Cardinals won't have as much depth as the teams they face each week. However, each player that will be on the ice has played varsity minutes.



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Cardinal girls aim to take it a step further in 2021

By Brennen Rupp
The 2021 Luverne Cardinals girls' basketball team is hoping to wrap up some unfinished business this season.

A year ago the Luverne girls earned the No. 1 seed in the South Section in the 3A Section Tournament after finishing the regular season with a 17-9 record.

The Cardinals opened the section tournament with back-to-back double-digit victories over St. James and Jackson County Central.

Luverne's first appearance in a postseason championship ended in heartbreak. The Cardinals fell to Windom Area 54-52 after the Eagles hit a buzzer-beater to send the Cardinals packing.

Since then, the Cardinals have been itching to get back on the court to put that loss in the rearview mirror.

Unfortunately they've had a long wait due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now that they are gearing up for the shortened 2021 season, the Cardinals are focused on what they can control.

"We take things day by day and prepare and compete as if basketball could end tomorrow," Luverne head coach TJ Newgard said.

"We have unfinished business we would like to take care of this year and that is what we are focused on."

Averill Sehr said it feels great to be back out on the hardwood with her teammates.

"It feels pretty good," Sehr said. "Our team has been working pretty hard and we're excited to get the season started."

The first week of practice is usually focused on conditioning. It's a week that a lot of athletes dread.

With the mask mandate in place that week was even more difficult for Sehr and her teammates.



Brennen Rupp photo/0114 All State photo

The Luverne Cardinals earned the No. 1 seed in the South Section of the 3A Section Tournament last season. With a strong team returning, the Cardinals figure to be a factor in the section tournament in 2021. Mackenzie Van Grootheest (#9) is the lone senior on the roster.

We have a very balanced team and each player has their own individual strengths. We really preach 'We over Me,' so having a variety of girls fulfill their role trumps having one or two standout players."

- Luverne head coach TJ Newgard

"It's been hard," Sehr said. "Newgard has been conditioning us this first few weeks. It's been an adjustment. We obviously don't want to wear a mask while playing, but we just have to get used to wearing them and adjust."

The Cardinals return a strong of core players from last year's team that tied the

program record for wins in a season. They return four starters and 11 out of 13 players.

"We have a very balanced team and each player has their own individual strengths," Newgard said.

"We really preach 'We over Me,' so having a variety of girls fulfill their role trumps having one or two standout players."

The four returning starters include Brooklynn Ver Steeg, Elizabeth Wagner, Christina Wagner and Averill Sehr.

Ver Steeg has been playing at the varsity level since she was an eighth-grader.

Last season as a sophomore she averaged 16.5 points, 5.1 rebounds and 3.2 steals per game.

Ver Steeg earned Big South All-Conference honors last season for her efforts on the court.

"Brooklynn is very good at seeing the court," Sehr said.

"She does a great job of driving and kicking it out to other people for open looks. She's become a really good shooter. On defense she can guard down in the post."

Sehr averaged eight points, two steals and two rebounds per game last season.

Elizabeth Wagner averaged six points, five rebounds and two steals per game last season.

Christina Wagner averaged four points, four rebounds and one block per game.

The lone senior on the squad is Mackenzie Van Grootheest. Newgard said that Van Grootheest has bought into the "We over Me" quote that the coaching staff preaches to the team.

"She is the epitome of selfless," Newgard said.

"She's a team-first student athlete and a positive voice on our bench."

On paper, the Cardinals are a young team. However, with four returning starters that have plenty of varsity experience under their belts, the Cardinals could produce a special season for Newgard and his program.

"Even though we are still a young team, we have a lot of varsity experience," Newgard said.

"The girls on the roster have played a lot of basketball together and have also been part of successful varsity teams in their other sport."

The Cardinals are one week into practice for the upcoming season, and Newgard said that the biggest difference he's seen in his team is the confidence that they are playing with. As a

Luverne Girls/Page 14



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Photo courtesy of John Sichmeller/0114 Luverne BB photo

The Luverne Cardinals have eight seniors on the roster for the upcoming season. They are (front, left) Ethan Beyer, Bailey Cowell, Arekel McLaughlin, LaShad Smith, (back) Kaden Lampron-DeSollar, Ben Jarchow, Justin Dohlmann, Jayson Rops, Matthaus Dobbe (manager).

Strong group of seniors will lead LHS in 2021

By **Brennen Rupp**

The Luverne Cardinals boys’ basketball team finished the 2019-2020 regular season with an 11-13 record. They opened the section tournament with a 74-40 victory over St. James. They then dropped a nail-biter to Fairmont in the next round, 61-59.

The Cardinals return two starters from last year’s team and will have eight seniors on the roster. With that plethora of experience the Cardinals will have a strong shot to finish the season with a record over the

We have eight seniors. Which is definitely a large group of seniors for us. They are a really fun group to be around. They work hard and set the tone for the rest of the players in our program.”

- Luverne head coach John Sichmeller

.500 mark for the first time since the 2012-2013 season.

“We have eight seniors,” Luverne head coach John Sichmeller said. “Which is definitely a large group of seniors for us.

They are a really fun group to be around. They work hard and set the tone for the rest of the players in our program.”

Bailey Cowell is one of those eight seniors for the

Cardinals. Cowell returns as a three-year starter at point guard. Sichmeller said he’s the one that stirs the proverbial drink for his team.

“He is our point guard

who gets our team going,” Sichmeller said. “When he is playing well, our team generally plays well.”

Sophomore Gannon Ahrendt joins Cowell as a returning starter. As a freshman Ahrendt led the Cardinals in scoring. The Cardinals will expect even more from Ahrendt as a sophomore.

“Gannon was our second leading scorer as a freshman last year, and he has had a good first week of practice,” Sich-

Luverne hoops/Page 10

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Luverne returns a pair of state tournament participant gymnasts in Cowell and Reisdorfer

By Brennen Rupp

The 2019-20 gymnastics season marked the first time since 2004 that the Luverne Cardinals had representatives at the state tournament.

As seventh-graders, Ella Reisdorfer and Amira Cowell ended the 16-year drought.

Cowell earned her trip to the state event by recording a score of 8.95 on the vault.

At the state event Cowell placed 38th in a field of 47 entries. She recorded a score of 8.9375.

Reisdorfer stamped her ticket to the state tournament by recording a score of 8.1 on the bars.

At the big dance, Reisdorfer placed 39th in a field of 48. She recorded a score of 7.8375.

Along with being a state qualifier, Reisdorfer earned All-Big South Conference honors for her efforts last season. She was one of 15 athletes to be recognized.

"Ella and Amira are two very strong gymnasts. We knew coming into their seventh-grade year they would do well," said Luverne head coach Phoebe Flom.

"Both had been members of our Cardinal kids program. They became scoring members of our varsity team right away. Ella was one of our top scorers immediately. Amira kept getting stronger as the season progressed. She worked hard on the vault that got her to the state tournament. In fact, we had debated whether or not to throw the vault at the section meet.



Brennen Rupp photo/0114 State Gymnasts photo

Amira Cowell (left) and Ella Reisdorfer (right) qualified for the gymnastics state tournament last season as seventh graders. The talented two will look to replicate that success this season.

We're very glad we did."

Now as eighth-graders, Cowell and Reisdorfer will look to build off the success they enjoyed last season. Considering their strong worth ethic, Flom said that shouldn't be a problem.

"Both of these girls have the drive and a passion for the sport," Flom said.

"They both compete all-around (all four events). They push each other and go above and beyond what is expected

of them. I am expecting these two to stand out and be scoring leaders for the varsity team. They both have new skills they are looking forward to adding to their routines."

With no seniors on the roster, Flom will lean on Cowell and Reisdorfer for team leadership.

Last season marked the first time since 1989 that the gymnastics squad had multiple state qualifiers. Flom noted that there are several other gym-

"Both of these girls have the drive and a passion for the sport. They both compete all-around (all four events). They push each other and go above and beyond what is expected of them. I am expecting these two to stand out and be scoring leaders for the varsity team. They both have new skills they are looking forward to adding to their routines."

- Luverne coach Phoebe Flom on eighth-graders Amira Cowell and Ella Reisdorfer

nasts, aside from Cowell and Reisdorfer that could make the trip to the state tournament in 2021.

"We also have Sara deCesare coming to us this year," Flom said.

"She has been competing in Sioux Falls. She looks strong."

Flom also mentioned Hailey Como, Corynn Oye, and Kendra Thorson as athletes who work hard and show potential.

"Tianna Lais is looking good and competed in the vault at sections last year," Flom said.

"Our group of incoming seventh-graders looks good as well."

She said one thing all the Cardinal gymnasts have in common is the desire to get better, which makes her excited to get to practice each day.

"This is a great group of kids," Flom said. "They are all very competitive and self-driven. They push each other. The excitement that they have makes me want to be in the gym."

While in the gym Flom and her team have had to adjust due to COVID-19 and the protocols and restrictions that have been put in place.

One of those restrictions is

the mask mandate, that requires athletes to wear a mask.

"We have had no problems at all with the mask mandate," Flom said.

"The girls wear them without complaint. Our girls have the option of removing them for tough skills. They choose to just leave them on. It's more of a pain to put it on and off. So far so good for us."

The 2021 season will mark the 26th season for Flom as the head coach at Luverne. This winter sports season is going to be unlike any other she's seen due to COVID-19 pandemic.

For a time period it looked like the 2021 winter sports season was in jeopardy. There was fear that it could fall to the wayside, much like the 2020 spring sports season.

The fact that Flom and her team will get the opportunity to compete already makes this season a success.

"Staying healthy and injury-free are our goals," Flom said.

"We would love a trip back to the state tournament if they have one. Putting the last year into perspective, getting a chance to perform is a success."

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Luverne wrestlers taking nothing for granted in 2021

By Brennen Rupp

Riley Cowell led the Luverne wrestling team in total wins last season and earned all-conference honors for his efforts.

This season as a senior, Cowell will look to build off that individual success as he leads the Cardinals into the 2021 campaign.

"Riley brings many years of experience," Luverne head coach Jordan Kopp said. "He has a strong work ethic in the practice room."

Cowell will be joined by fellow senior, Hunter Baker, who decided to join the team for the upcoming season at the last minute.

Baker wrestled for the Cardinals a few years ago and decided it was time to get back out on the mat for the Cardinals.

"He is back after being away the last few years," Kopp said.

"He looks like he is ready to compete. He has previous experience and he feels he can bring that experience and be a benefit to the team."

With all the uncertainty surrounding winter sports in the state of Minnesota, there was serious doubt about there being a wrestling season in 2021. After all, it is the most physical and the athletes are in close quarters of one another

Now that the dust has settled, Kopp said his wrestlers won't make any assumptions.

"The biggest thing is we need to make the most out of it," Kopp said.

"We do not want to take this for granted. We want a postseason. We pray we get one, but for now we need to go out and enjoy it, and as I said, pray for the best."

The Cardinals are in a good place in terms of leadership. Aside from Cowell and Baker, the Cardinals have a trio of



Brennen Rupp photo/0114 wrestling photo

The Cardinals will be led on the mat this season by a pair of seniors they are (from left) Riley Cowell and Hunter Baker. Cowell led the Cardinals in total wins last season as a junior.

juniors with experience.

"Braydon Ripka had a good year for us last season as a sophomore," Kopp said.

"We have a couple of other juniors looking to come back and have a good year as well in Zach Bradley and Chris Rosin."

With a fairly young squad, Kopp said he's looking forward to watching the development of the underclassmen.

"We have some new younger inexperienced guys coming

back that will be fun to watch this year," Kopp said. "It will be nice to see how far they've come in their development."

The last time the Cardinals participated in a competitive event was during the section tournament on Feb. 21 and 22 of last year, which was held in Luverne.

The Cardinals will open the shortened 2021 season in Redwood Falls for a match against Redwood Valley.

Kopp said he's noticed an uptick in terms of intensity in practice as the team prepares to hit the ground running.

"This whole team stands out," Kopp said.

"These guys are ready to compete, they are getting after things. Usually it's tough to get going these first couple of weeks but these guys are ready. They want to compete and they're ready to get after things."

Cowell figures to lead the

"The biggest thing is we need to make the most out of it.

We do not want to take this for granted. We want a postseason. We pray we get one, but for now we need to go out and enjoy it, and as I said, pray for the best."

- Luverne head coach Jordan Kopp

team in wins again this season. It's a safe bet that Cowell will earn the Cardinals a point each time he is on the mat and Kopp expects his team to be strong in several other weight classes this season.

"Our strengths will be in the 120, 138, 145, 152 and 182 weigh classes," Kopp said.

"Those classes will be our more experienced weights. Obviously Riley as a senior is coming off a third place finish last year. He'll probably be wrestling at 120 this year and that will be our greatest strength."

Last season in the section tournament Cowell earned third place in the 113-pound division. Kopp believes that he's one of several grapplers that have a shot at making it to the state tournament in 2021.

"We have wrestlers that have an opportunity if they wrestle well to go to state," Kopp said. "I know that is their goal. For them to be able to get there would be great for our programl Our goal is for our team to grow and mature and compete no matter what the numbers are."



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Photo courtesy of H-BC athletics/114 H-BC photo

The H-BC Patriots will be led by five seniors. They are (from left) Allie LaRock, Abby Knobloch, Taryn Rauk, Annie Bos and Lauren Tatge.

Patriots primed for special year after a 20-2 season

By **Brennen Rupp**

The Hills-Beaver Creek girls' basketball team has enjoyed success over the last three seasons.

During the 2017-2018 season the Patriots finished their regular season with a 19-5 record. They opened the section tournament with double-digit victories over Ellsworth and Adrian.

In the section semifinals H-BC fell to Southwest Minnesota Christian, 74-66.

The Patriots enjoyed an undefeated regular season in 2018-2019 with an impressive

23-0 record.

H-BC opened the section tournament with a convincing 73-13 victory over Westbrook Walnut-Grove. They then took care of Murray County Central 86-46.

The Patriots saw their perfect season come to an end at the hands of Southwest Minnesota Christian in the section semifinals. The Eagles bested the Patriots 58-46 to move on to the section championship.

Last season the Patriots put together a 20-2 season. Just like the previous two seasons, they won the first two games of the

section tournament, setting up a showdown with Southwest Minnesota Christian for the third straight year in the section semifinals.

Unfortunately for the Patriots, the third time was not the charm, as they fell to the Eagles 50-47.

The Patriots will return three starters from last year's team and have five seniors on the roster. It's a group of seniors that will look to get the proverbial monkey off their back and get past the section semifinals this season.

"This group of seniors has

great leadership qualities," H-BC head coach Kale Wiertzema said. "They understand who we are as a basketball program and want to instill those qualities into their teammates. Early in the season they have already demonstrated they are great teachers and models for our younger athletes."

Taryn Rauk is one of those seniors. Rauk has been playing on the varsity level since she was an eighth-grader. The senior recently committed to continue to play basketball at Dordt University after she graduates from H-BC.

Wiertzema said that Rauk has developed into a force on both ends of the floor for the Patriots.

"Taryn has always been someone we relied on heavily on the defensive end of the floor," Wiertzema said. "Last year she really transformed her game to become a huge threat on both ends of the court. She was our leading scorer averaging over 17 points per game and also led us in steals. She will be a huge part of what we do both

H-BC Girls/Page 13

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The Hills-Beaver Creek Patriots varsity squad members are (from left) Dallas Page, Ty Bundesen, Zander Wysong, Andrew Harris and Drew Leenderts (Back) Sean Elbers, Oliver Deelstra, Cole Baker, Troy Durst and Liam Raymon. The Patriots are coming off an 8-15 season.

H-BC boys preparing for a season unlike any other

By Brennen Rupp

Steve Wiertzema is starting his 30th season as the Hills-Beaver Creek boys' basketball coach. Wiertzema has seen it all and been through it all during his tenure with the Patriots.

For the Patriots and every team in the state of Minnesota, it's been a roller coaster to just get to the start of winter sports due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the season starts,

there will certainly be curveballs that Wiertzema and his team will have to deal with.

"Just like everything else this year, we have to adapt," Wiertzema said.

"We have to be able to adjust to the situations in front of us."

One of those curveballs that the Patriots will have to deal with is the mask mandate, which requires the student athletes to wear a face covering

while practicing and during competitions.

"Nobody wants to wear a mask," H-BC senior, Zander Wysong said.

"It is what it is. We're just happy to be playing. It feels really good to be back out on the court. Especially after having our football season cut short. We weren't entirely sure about the basketball season. We're just going to enjoy this season."

Oliver Deelstra said that

wearing a mask while playing is not ideal, but noted that him and his teammates are just happy to be out on the court together again.

"We don't agree with all the rules," Deelstra said. "We're just happy to be out here and playing though. As long as we're out here together I'm fine with them."

Last season the Patriots finished the regular season with an 8-15 record.

They defeated Heron-Lake Okabena 50-47 in the first round of the section tournament. The Patriots then lost to No. 1 seed Southwest Minnesota Christian in the second round.

The Patriots will return three starters from last year's team. Zander Wysong, Oliver Deelstra and Cole Baker will lead the Patriots as they look

H-BC Boys/Page 12

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Luverne boys' basketball preview/continued from page 5

meller said.

“We are counting on him to continue to score the points for us and keep improving his game.”

Ethan Beyer and Jayson Rops are two seniors that could help the Patriots get over the .500 mark this season. Last season as juniors they played a minor role. Now that they are seniors, Sichmeller is excited to watch them play a more prominent role for the Cardinals.

“Ethan and Jayson saw some playing time last year and have done a really good job through the first week,” Sichmeller said. “We will be counting heavily on them as well.”

There are always players that stand out during practice after the offseason. Junior Seth Bose is that player for the Cardinals. Sichmeller said it’s evident that Bose worked hard on his craft during the offseason.

“Seth has been the biggest surprise through our first week of practice,” Sichmeller said. “He has put in a lot of work on his game and it is starting to show. It will be fun to get into games and see how some of the kids who have little or no varsity experience perform and who steps up to fill some needed roles on the team.”

With eight seniors and talented underclassmen the Cardinals will have plenty of depth for the upcoming season. That deep bench will be one of the team’s strengths this season.

“I think the strength of this year’s team is our overall speed and athleticism,” Sichmeller said. “We also have a lot of guys that will get a chance to play.”

During the COVID-19 lockdown, prep teams in the state of Minnesota were not allowed to practice together. Now that the Cardinals are back on the hardwood together, they’re not taking a second of it for granted.

“We are just stressing that it is good to be back together and getting the chance to play and practice,” Sichmeller said.

“There was a point where we



John Rittenhouse file photo/Bailey Cowell photo
Bailey Cowell drives to the basket during a game against Worthington last season. Cowell returns as one of eight seniors for the Luverne Cardinals.

weren’t sure if we would even get a season so we are just happy to be playing. The kids have been great with the masks and I don’t think they really care anymore about them because if that is what allows them to play then they will do whatever it takes.”

Last season the Cardinals lost four

games by five points or less, including a two-point loss in the section tournament. Sichmeller believes that his team is capable of going toe-to-toe with any team in their section.

“We obviously want to win as many games as possible and set ourselves up to do well in our section,” Sichmeller

said.

“We think we can beat anyone in our half of the section but we can lose to anyone as well. More importantly, we want to enjoy our time together, have a lot of fun and give these eight seniors a great senior year.”

“We are just stressing that it is good to be back together and getting the chance to play and practice.

There was a point where we weren’t sure if we would even get a season so we are just happy to be playing.

The kids have been great with the masks and I don’t think they really care anymore about them because if that is what allows them to play then they will do whatever it takes.”

**- Luverne
Head boys’
basketball coach
John Sichmeller**



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After long delay winter sports finally gets green light

By Brennen Rupp

The long wait is finally over for prep athletes, coaches and their families. On Jan. 4 teams began practicing to gear up for the winter sports season with competitions getting the green light to start on Jan. 14.

When those contests resume on Jan. 14, they will do so under some strict COVID-19 restrictions. One of those restrictions is a mask mandate, requiring athletes to wear a mask during competitions.

That mask mandate will be loosened for wrestling, gymnastics and swimming, where the mask could become a choking hazard.

“We’ve had no problems at all with the mask mandate,” Luverne gymnastics coach, Phoebe Flom said. “They wear them without complaint. Our girls have the option of removing them for tough skills. They choose to just leave them on. . . So far so good for us.”

For the players it hasn’t

been ideal, but they’re adjusting to practicing with a mask, according to Hills-Beaver Creek basketball player Oliver Deelstra.

“We don’t agree with all the rules,” Deelstra said. “We’re just happy to be out here and playing though. As long as we’re out here together, I’m fine with them.”

Luverne boys' basketball head coach John Sichmeller said that his players could care less about the mask mandate. They're all just happy to be back out on the court.

"The kids have been great with the masks" Sichmeller said. "I don't think they really care anymore about them because if that is what allows them to play then they will do whatever it takes."

On Jan. 6, Gov. Tim Walz announced Minnesota would loosen some restrictions that had been intensified since mid-November in an effort to halt a record surge in COVID-19

cases.

“This opportunity to participate in athletics and activities also comes with great responsibility,” said Minnesota State High School League Executive Director Erich Martens.

“It is critical that all students, coaches, directors and officials maintain the highest standard of health and safety, both in and outside of school. Everyone must actively share the responsibility of reducing the spread of COVID-19 and keeping themselves and others safe and healthy.

“The League appreciates the hard work of Governor Walz and state departments in recognizing the significance and importance of these activities and athletics for our students,” Martens said.

“Through participation in League activities and athletics, our students have enhanced physical and mental health and well-being. And, when they participate under the leader-

ship and mentorship of League-trained and certified coaches and directors, implementing League provided protocols and guidance, they can enjoy the safest possible experiences.”

Infection rates in Minnesota have been reduced drastically since mid-November, when the governor and Minnesota Department of Health ordered a four-week pause. It affected bars, indoor dining and other activities, including youth, high school and adult recreational sports, a pause that was extended into this week.

The state reported more than 8,600 confirmed coronavirus infections on Nov. 14, and more than 9,000 on Nov. 28, but that was down to 1,573 late in December, and Walz said hospital capacity was down to a high of 98 percent for a few days in December.

For amateur sports, including high school sports, loosened restrictions began Monday Jan. 4, when leagues were

allowed to resume practices after a 45-day pause.

No spectators have been allowed inside arenas, with some exceptions, since practices resumed Jan. 4, and athletes, coaches, trainers and other officials are required to wear face coverings.

Masks will still be required when games begin Jan. 14, but spectators will be allowed at 25 percent capacity capped at 150 attendees.

Teams, coaches and officials will not be included in that number for high school sports, Minnesota State High School League spokesperson Tim Leighton said.

According to the Minnesota Department of Health’s guidelines, those rules “do not prevent a parent, guardian or support from being present if necessary due to a participant’s age, disability or medical condition” at practices, but it won’t be an issue at all for competitions.



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Hills-Beaver Creek boys' basketball preview/continued from page 9

"He has shown great leadership in practice. He encourages his teammates and has a great work ethic. His teammates respect him and look up to him. He's very approachable and willing to offer suggestions for the team."

*- H-BC head coach
Steve Wiertzema*

to get over the .500 mark in the shortened 2021 season.

Wiertzema said the calling card for this year's team will be its athletic ability, noting the team's ability to play an uptempo brand of basketball.

"We are going to be very athletic," Wiertzema said.

"I expect our quickness will give teams fits."

Wysong is the lone senior for the Patriots. Wiertzema lauded Wysong's leadership skills as he looks to guide H-BC during his final season.

"He has shown great leadership in practice," Wiertzema said.

"He encourages his teammates and has a great work ethic. His teammates respect



H-BC Zander Wysong gets off a shot during a game last season against the Lakeview Lakers. Wysong is the lone senior on the 2021 roster for the Patriots.

him and look up to him. He's very approachable and willing to offer suggestions for the team."

Last season as a junior, Wysong averaged 8.8 points

and 4.2 rebounds per game.

Deelstra, who averaged 9.1 points and 4.8 rebounds per game last season said that Wysong is a great basketball player and said that his greatest

strength is his leadership skills.

"He's a really good team player," Deelstra said.

"He's always encouraging. He's a good shooter, you can always count on him."

Wysong is a multi-dimensional player. He can knock down a three-pointer. The senior leader for the Patriots can make noise in the paint. On the defensive side of things he's able to guard multiple positions.

Wiertzema said Wysong's greatest strength is his versatility on the hardwood.

"Zander is able to play all positions on the court," Wiertz-

ema said.

"He can shoot the ball from the three-point line and post up. He's a very unselfish player. He has been doing whatever it takes to make the team better."

The Patriots opened practice on Jan. 4. Wiertzema said he's been pleased with the energy level at practice, noting that Wysong's done a great job of setting the tone.

"I have been very happy with the work ethic of the whole team," Wiertzema said.

"As I stated before, Zander is setting a great example and the team is following his lead."

If the Patriots continue to practice at a high-level, Wiertzema believes the wins will follow for his team.

"If the work ethic and hustle continues, it will be a successful year for us."

Deelstra believes the Patriots have the talent to be conference champions this season.

"We want to win conference," Deelstra said.

"It's a big goal. This group of guys work really hard and I think we have the talent to accomplish that."

As a senior, Wysong is hoping to close out his prep basketball career with a bang.

His goal during his final season is to help the Patriots capture their first conference championship since 2010.

"I'd like to win conference as a senior," Wysong said. "I think we have the talent and a ton of team chemistry."

The Patriots will open the regular season on Thursday, Jan. 14 at home against Red Rock Central.

The Patriots will look to extend their winning streak over RRC to four games when they open the 2021 season.

The Patriots swept RRC last season, defeating them 60-43 in the first matchup and then edging them 64-63 in the second meeting to complete the regular season sweep.



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Hills-Beaver Creek girls' basketball season preview/continued from page 8

offensively and defensively.”

One thing that will be missing on the 2021 version of the Patriots is size inside the paint. H-BC lost Whitney Elbers (6’4”) to graduation. What the Patriots lack in size they’ll more than make up for with their quickness.

“We have a group of athletes that love the game of basketball,” Wiertzema said. “We are going to lack the interior size we are used to having after 6’4” Whitney Elbers graduated, but we return our core scoring group and have a few younger athletes that bring even more athleticism to the floor for us.”

With Rauk, Abby Knobloch, Annie Bos, Allie LaRock and Lauren Tatge, the Patriots have plenty of senior leadership. That’s the good news.

The even better news for the H-BC program is they have seven incoming freshmen that are eager to learn from this group of seniors.

“We have seven freshmen on our roster, five that are new to the varsity program. That is the most newcomers we’ve had to the girls’ basketball program in awhile. They have done a great job learning and growing throughout the first week of practice.”

From the middle of November to December there was a dark cloud that was hanging over winter sports. There was a question of when and if the season would ever start.

Now with the team back in the gym as they gear up for the season, Wiertzema and his staff are telling the team to ignore all the outside noise.

“Our main message has been to control what you can control,” Wiertzema said.

“We have no control over the mask mandate or any of the other protocols that have been put in place. Our focus needs to be on controlling our attitude and effort each and every day.”



H-BC senior Abby Knobloch works on drills at the start of practice. Knobloch is one of five seniors on the H-BC roster. Knobloch and her fellow seniors are hoping to go out on a high note in 2021.

Rauk said that there were times during the shutdown that she though she'd miss her final basketball season at H-BC.

"It feels great to be back," Rauk said. "I was worried at first that we weren't going to have a season. It feels good to be back with the team and grinding every day."

Through the first week of practice the Patriots have had to adjust to all the COVID-19 protocols. Knobloch said it was uncomfortable at first to be wearing a mask.

"At first it was really odd,"

Knobloch said. "After a few practices we've adjusted. I think it's all mental. We've all adapted to the change."

What postseason play will look like this season is still unclear. The Patriots have hopes of getting past the section semifi-

“Our main message has been to control what you can control. We have no control over the mask mandate or any of the other protocols that have been put in place. Our focus needs to be on controlling our attitude and effort each and every day.”

- Coach Kale Wiertzema

nals.

In order to get to that point, the Patriots will have to improve day in and day out. If they are able to do that, this season will be chalked up as a successful one for Wiertzema.

“This season will be successful if we approach every practice and game with a growth mindset,” Wiertzema said.

“Our goal is to improve as people and basketball players every time we step on the court, whether that’s for practice or for a game.”

With a strong group of seniors Wiertzema believes they could be in store for a special season.

"We have really good team chemistry, which is very helpful," Wiertzema said.

"We just have a lot of girls that can play and know the game of basketball. We feel we have a great team this year and think we can do some great things."



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Luverne girls/

from page 4

"We want to be champions. We're going to try and get to the finals. We have a lot of re-turning players from last season. We're a really young team, but we have a lot of experience. One of our big goals is to get further than we did last season."

- Averill Sehr, LHS sophomore

younger team Newgard expects that confidence to continue to grow as the season goes on. "I don't think anything has really surprised me, as I know what each girl brings to the table," Newgard said. "I think our returning starters and key reserves from last season have looked great so far. I think the thing that stands out the most to me is the level of confidence each girl seems to have. From last year to now it is night and day. These girls may have doubted their own ability last year, but now they know they are capable of great things."

The Cardinals will open their season on Friday, Jan. 15, at home against Jackson County Central. Luverne went 2-1 against JCC last season. JCC edged Luverne 64-63 in the first meeting of the season. The Cardinals then defeated JCC, 87-67 in the second meeting. The Cardinals then ended JCC's season with a 66-45 in the section tournament. Newgard said that the goal for his team this season is to be playing their best brand of basketball at the end of the season as they gear up for a deep postseason run. "We just want to go out and compete to our fullest potential," Newgard said. "If we do that, we will have a chance to win some games. With the shortened season we just want to be playing our best basketball when the post-season rolls around. If we can peak at the right time, I think we have as good a chance as anyone to make some noise in the section tournament." Sehr said that the team's goal this season is to get further in the section tournament. A year after reaching the section semifinals, the Cardinals have aspirations of reaching the section championship. "We want to be champions," Sehr said. "We're going to try and get to the finals. We have a lot of returning players from last season. We're a really young team, but we have a lot of experience. One of our big goals is to get further than we did last season."



John Rittenhouse file photo/hockey file photo
Luverne sophomore Brock Behrend scored nine goals last season as a freshman during the 2019-2020 season. Behrend figures to be a key contributor for the Cardinals during the 2021 season.

LHS boys hockey/

from page 3

That experience will be Luverne's calling card during this shortened season. "We will rely on our experienced players," Paquette said. "We're a very small team. We're going to have to work together. We'll have to be committed to using everybody we have." The Cardinals will open up the season on Jan. 14 at home against Windom Area. After such a long delay to the start of the season, Paquette said the Cardinals are eager to get onto the ice. "It feels so much better having that start date," Paquette said. "Once we got the okay to start competition, it was weight-lifted off our shoulders. Some of these guys have already lost seasons last year with baseball. A lot of them are football players and they're looking to bring that effort and energy over after having a successful season on the gridiron. We're grateful to have the opportunity to play. It's a quick season; it's going to be here and gone in a blink of an eye. We just want to enjoy every minute that we have and have fun." Each team goes through a period of finding out their identity. The Cardinals will begin that quest on Thursday, Jan. 14 when they welcome Windom Area to Blue Mound Ice Arena. The Cardinals swept the Eagles last season defeating them 3-2 and 4-3. With a smaller squad in terms of numbers, Paquette said that in order for his team to have success this season, they'll have to find new ways to win each time they take the ice. "We're going to work hard and have a blast while doing so," Paquette said. "We want to find what works for us and find new ways to win. Most of the teams we face will have more depth in numbers. We're going to have our work cut out for us. We're just going to have to find new ways to win this season."

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H-BC

Date	Boys Hockey	Girls Hockey	Boys BB	Girls BB	Wrestling	Gymnastics	Boys BB	Girls BB
Jan. 14 (Thurs.)	vs Windom						vs RRC	
Jan. 15 (Fri.)		@ Windom	@ JCC	vs JCC	@ Redwood Valley			@ RRC
Jan. 16 (Sat.)							vs SWMNC	
Jan. 18 (Mon.)			@ Worthington					
Jan. 19 (Tues.)		vs Windom		vs Worthington	home meet			vs Edgerton
Jan. 21 (Thurs.)					home meet	@ Worthington		@ WWG
Jan. 22 (Fri.)	vs Redwood		@ Martin County West				@ Slayton	
Jan. 23 (Sat.)		vs Rochester						
Jan. 25 (Mon.)			@ St. James			home meet		vs SWMNC
Jan. 26 (Tues.)	@ Redwood			vs St. James	away meet		@ HLOF	
Jan. 28 (Thurs.)			@ Marshall		away meet			
Jan. 29 (Fri.)	vs Minnesota River	@ Minnesota River		vs Marshall			vs MLA	
Jan. 30 (Sat.)		vs MBA Storm						
Feb. 1 (Mon.)						home meet		
Feb. 2 (Tues.)	@ Minnesota River	vs Minnesota River	vs Redwood	@ Redwood			vs Edgerton	
Feb. 4 (Thurs.)					away meet	home meet		vs MLA
Feb. 5 (Fri.)	vs Dodge County	@ Dodge County		@ HBC			@ WWG	vs Luverne
Feb. 9 (Tues.)			vs Pipestone	@ Pipestone				@ MCC
Feb. 11 (Thurs.)	vs Worthington	vs Worthington			home meet		@ Adrian	
Feb. 12 (Fri.)			@ Windom	vs Windom		home meet		vs RRC
Feb. 13 (Sat.)	@ MBA Storm	@ MBA Storm						
Feb. 15 (Mon.)						away meet		@ Adrian
Feb. 16 (Tues.)	@ Worthington	@ Worthington	vs HBC				@ Luverne	
Feb. 18 (Thurs.)					home meet	away meet		@ HLOF
Feb. 19 (Fri.)	vs Waseca	@ Waseca	vs Worthington	@ Worthington			@ RRC	
Feb. 22 (Mon.)							vs MCC	
Feb. 23 (Tues.)	@ Waseca	vs Waseca	vs JCC		away meet		vs RTR	@ Edgerton
Feb. 25 (Thurs.)	@ New Ulm					home meet	@ SWMNC	
Feb. 26 (Fri.)		vs New Ulm		@ JCC	home meet			vs WWG
Mar. 1 (Mon.)								@ MLA
Mar. 2 (Tues.)	vs New Ulm	@ New Ulm	vs Marshall	@ Marshall			@ MLA	vs RTR
Mar. 4 (Thurs.)			@ Fairmont	vs Fairmont			vs Adrian	
Mar. 5 (Fri.)	vs Marshall	vs Marshall			away meet	away meet		vs HLOF
Mar. 6 (Sat.)	vs Fairmont	@ Fairmont			home meet			
Mar. 8 (Mon.)			@ Redwood	vs Redwood			@ Edgerton	vs MCC
Mar. 9 (Tues.)	@ Fairmont	vs Fairmont						
Mar 11 (Thurs.)	@ Marshall	@ Marshall	@ Pipestone	vs Pipestone			vs HLOF	
Mar 12 (Fri.)	@ Windom							vs Adrian
Mar 13 (Sat.)							vs WWG	@ SWMNC

* These are tentative schedules that will be subject to weather cancelations and COVID-19 requirements.



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