

Lady Jay volleyball improved during season

By Dick Boyd

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The Norton Community High School girls volleyball team improved this season under second-year head coach Kevin Jilka but was not consistent enough to compile a winning record in an area of the state that produces the best volleyball teams.

Throughout the season, they had some good wins that demonstrated their ability to win when they eliminated mistakes.

"We thought our girls competed very well," said coach Jilka after losing to No.1 seeded Southeast of Saline in the Class 3A Sub-State Volleyball Tournament in Gypsum on Saturday, Oct. 20 to end the Lady Jays' season.

"Southeast of Saline doesn't make many mistakes and that is why they were the No.1 seed and are going on to the state tournament.

"Our girls passed the ball and served very well against them and we played very hard. Also, we played more consistent than we had been doing throughout the year.

"Our seniors will be greatly missed as they did a tremendous job of leadership for the season and we are very proud of them."

The Lady Jays will lose five seniors off this season's team: Rachel Slipke, Katherine Boteler, Bri Karnopp, Teslee Nickell and Alec Melvin.

"Next year, we just need to learn how to win and we hope our girls coming back will work hard from now until the season starts," said coach Jilka.

"We thank the students and community for their support throughout the year."

Assistant coaches this season were Traci Uehlin and Jodi Ward.

Opened with double win

Norton opened the season with wins over Mid-Continent League rival Plainville and Northern Valley on Friday, Aug. 24 in the NCHS Stull Gym in Norton. The Lady Jays defeated Plainville 20-25, 25-17, 25-22 and outscored Northern Valley 26-24, 12-25, 25-17.

"It was a great way to start the year," said coach Jilka. "We had a great effort to win both matches."

On Tuesday, Aug. 28, the Lady Jays had their first losses of the new season when they traveled to Colby. They lost 11-25, 17-25 to Holcomb, were edged by Osborne 25-27, 24-26 and lost to Colby 15-25, 20-25.

"Our match with Colby was our best of the night," said coach Jilka. "We led in both contests but gave up too many points at one time."

Norton traveled to Phillipsburg to play three more Mid-Continent League teams on Tuesday, Sept. 4. The Lady Jays came closest to Osborne, who edged them 25-23, 23-25, 21-25. Norton also lost to Phillipsburg 21-25, 18-25 and was outscored by Stockton 15-25, 26-24, 21-25. "We keep finding ways to lose games instead of having the confidence to put people away," said coach Jilka.

On Thursday, Sept. 13, Norton traveled to Goodland and lost 14-25, 22-25. That same night, they were outscored by Dundy County, Neb. 21-25, 13-25.

Norton continued their matches away from home when they traveled to Hoxie on Tuesday, Sept. 18 to play two of the top area teams. They lost 13-25, 11-25 to Hill City and were outscored 14-25, 9-25 by Hoxie.

On Tuesday, Sept. 25, the Lady Jays displayed improved play when they returned to Goodland. They defeated Wray, Colo. 25-19, 25-17, gave Goodland a run for their money before losing 15-25, 20-25 and beat Wheatland-Grinnell 23-25, 25-18, 25-22. "We hustled and played hard all night," said a happy coach Jilka.

Norton traveled outside their comfort zone when they competed against schools with much larger enrollments on Thursday, Sept. 27 in Hays. They lost to Class 5A Salina South 16-25, 20-25, were defeated by Class 4A Abilene 14-25, 17-25 and were outscored by Class 5A Hays 11-25, 19-25.

Competition continued for the Lady Jays on Saturday, Sept. 29 in the Oberlin Invitational and they played some of their best matches of the season. Norton opened tournament play with a 25-8, 25-12 win over St. Francis, was competitive in a 15-25, 22-25 loss to Oberlin and also played well in a 19-25, 25-22, 20-25 loss to Atwood before running out of steam and losing 9-25, 16-25 to Hoxie. "Other than the Hoxie match, our girls played very well," said coach Jilka. "We did a great job in all phases of the game."

Norton finally had the opportunity to play in their own NCHS Stull Gym for just the second time in the season when they hosted Smith Center and Trego Community on Tuesday, Oct. 20. They played well in front of

the home crowd but lost 11-25, 20-25 to Smith Center and 25-15, 21-25, 24-26 to Trego.

The home crowd really enjoyed Norton's next competition on Thursday, Oct. 4, which was also in the friendly NCHS Stull Gym and was on "Senior Night". The Lady Jays hosted Goodland in the best three of five games and the third time playing the Lady Cowgirls was the charm! After coming close in two previous meetings, Norton limited play to just three games by winning all three! Scores were 25-17, 25-20, 25-21!

Seniors Rachel Slipke, Katherine Boteler, Bri Karnopp, Teslee Nickell and Alec Melvin were honored along with their parents. "What a night of volleyball," said coach Jilka. "Our girls played awesome tonight! We just did everything so well!"

Next, Norton played in the very competitive Scott City Invitational on Saturday, Oct. 6. They lost to Wheatland 23-25, 19-25, defeated Oakley 21-25, 25-21, 25-20 and lost to Scott City 25-19, 14-25, 12-25. "We are playing better but making enough mistakes to keep us from the next level," said coach Jilka.

The Mid-Continent League Tournament in Phillipsburg was next on the agenda but Norton had to win one match to get into the tourney. The Lady Jays came through with a 25-22, 25-18 win over Plainville on Tuesday, Oct. 9 in Norton.

Norton was the No.8 seed in the tournament so played No.1 seed Hill City in the opening round on Saturday, Oct. 13. Norton lost 19-25, 21-25; then lost to No.4 seed Stockton 25-20, 15-25, 15-25 and lost to No.5 seed Phillipsburg 8-25, 21-25. Smith Center won the championship, followed by Phillipsburg, Hill City and Ellis.

The Class 3A Sub-State Volleyball Tournament was next on Saturday, Oct. 20 with Southeast of Saline at Gypsum as the host. Norton was seeded No.8 with an 8-24 record so had to play No.1 seed Southeast of Saline with their 26-8 record. The Lady Jays lost 14-25, 14-25 to end their season. Southeast of Saline continued on to win the tournament and qualify for the state tournament in Salina.

Season statistics

Baily Ambrosier was team leader in kills with 147 for the year, followed by Bri Karnopp, 93; Teslee Nickell, 33; Katie Bohl, 29; Alec Melvin, 20; John-

The A-Team won a two point nail-biter to get to 4-0. The B-Team also improved to 4-0 but did it a little easier, beating the Thunderhawks 28-6.

The Huskies leading scorer was Ross Cole with nine points, Nick Stutsman with eight points, Briely Yocum with four points, Kale Cox, Aidan Baird and Caden Bach added two points each and Cooper Mussman had one point.

Junior Huskies win another

The Northern Valley Junior High boys basketball team continued its winning streak with a tough 27-25 victory over Grinnell/Wheatland on Nov. 15 in Grinnell. The Huskies are 4-0 on the season.

The Huskies leading scorers were Caden Kinderknecht and Carson Wallace with 14 and 10 points, respectively. Nick Stutsman added two points and Riley Sides had one point.

Lady Huskies face another loss

By Mike Stephens

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The Northern Valley Junior High School girls basketball team traveled to Grinnell on Nov. 15, losing to the Grinnell/Wheatland Thunderhawks 36-18.

The Lady Huskies leading scorers were Chaylee Lowry with eight points, Paige Baird with four points and Kylie

Kinderknecht, HalLee Linner and Katie Johnson each scored two points.

The A-Team is 1-3 on the season.

Despite the loss, Huskies head coach Jim Cole was pleased with his team's effort.

"I was proud of how hard the girls played tonight. We played pretty good defense in both games and are improving our

offensive skills each game," said coach Cole.

The B-Team lost to Grinnell Wheatland, 24-10.

Leading scorers were Paige Baird with six points, Jaden Smith and Morgan Wright with two points each.

The B-Team is 0-4 on the season.



Norton senior Teslee Nickell digs an attack during play in the annual Mid-Continent League Volleyball Tournament in Phillipsburg on Saturday, Oct. 13. No.6 for the Lady Jays is senior Bri Karnopp. - Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

nye Ruder, 13; Rachel Slipke, 3. Bohl was solo blocks leader with 23, followed by Ambrosier, 15; Karnopp, 14; Melvin, 7; Nickell, 6; Ruder, 4; Slipke, 3.

Leading in serving aces with 16 was Melvin, followed by Ruder, 13; Karnopp, 13; Nickell, 13; Slipke, 7; Ambrosier, 6; Katherine Boteler, 5.

Nickell led in setting assists with 132, followed by Ruder, 109; Bohl, 11; Boteler, 8; Melvin, 8; Ambrosier, 7; Karnopp, 7; Slipke, 4.

Digs leaders were Karnopp, 106; Ambrosier, 101; Melvin, 91; Ruder, 56; Slipke, 53; Nickell, 34; Boteler, 23; Bohl, 14.

Passing leaders were Karnopp, 68; Melvin, 46; Ambrosier, 37; Slipke, 29; Nickell, 17; Ruder, 16; Bohl, 14; Boteler, 4.

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