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FALL

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES



PRESS PHOTO BY NANCY SCHOLZ

The 2023 Salisbury High School football team.

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Progress is goal No. 1

BY MIKE HAINES
mhaines@tnonline.com

Coming off a winless season, the Salisbury football team is planning to take a step forward this year.

While the team must replace seven key players lost to graduation, there is optimism around the program after a good offseason and a preseason scrimmage against Kutztown.

"I'm very excited,"

said senior running back/linebacker George Spann. "We have made a big turnaround from last season. A lot of guys have a much better mindset than last season and we're ready to come out and surprise a lot of people."

Head coach Andy Cerco agrees that his team could be much-improved since last season, but he also knows that it needs to keep getting

better every day.

"We've made progress in every phase of the game in terms of football IQ, their understanding of our schemes and their execution of techniques we're teaching them in all three phases of the game," said Cerco. "With that said, in order to compete in our league we need to continue to make improvements. If we don't we'll experience some struggles, but

I don't see that.

"Knowing their mentality and the coaches' mentality I just see us continuing to build together as a team. That's been our big theme throughout camp, being together and forming a positive culture to execute at an elite standard. Our kids have stepped up to that challenge every day. That's been re-

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PRESS PHOTO BY NANCY SCHOLZ

The 2023 Salisbury High School boy soccer team.

Falcons will use new system of play

BY CHUCK HIXSON
Special to the Press

What did you do on your summer vacation? For Salisbury soccer coach Mark Allinson, the answer was to improve his team for the upcoming season.

Scraping together a lineup during the summer season was not easy with players heading off for vacation or having other things on their agenda, but Allinson presided over a team that battled and made big strides for the up-

coming season.

Another task for Allinson was to put in some changes that will make the team stronger in 2023.

"Our team is learning a new system of play to match our player's skill sets," said Allinson, who credits the addition of players from the school's baseball and basketball teams with making the soccer program more athletic.

Over the summer, Blaine Berger, Eddie Hernandez, Josh Hudak,

and Jacob Knerr showed strong development of their skills as they look to be team leaders. Berger returns for his senior year as the Falcons' goaltender with classmate Knerr helping guide the backfield in front of him. On the other side of the field, Salisbury returns Hudak, a junior midfielder and senior forward Jack Monahan to pair with junior forward Alejandro Zuniga Garcia, who had a breakout season as a sophomore.

Salisbury finished 3-9 in Colonial League play and failed to qualify for the league and district playoffs. As the Falcons young core of players continue to develop, that could change in relatively short order.

"Our players are adapting to what is being asked of them to do and they are working hard with a positive outlook," said Allinson. "We are working toward qualifying for Colonial League and district tournaments."

The league portion of the schedule opens with games against Saucun Valley, Palmerton, Bangor, and Wilson, who combined for a league record of 14-31-3 last season. The scheduling gives Salisbury a chance to perhaps work out some kinks and gain confidence before the meatier part of the schedule hits in mid-September when they play at league runner-up Northwestern Lehigh. Less than a week later they play Notre Dame

Green Pond and their final two league games of the season are against Moravian Academy and Southern Lehigh, the defending league champions.

"I suspect we'll see the usual suspects again," said Allinson in sizing up the league. "Northwestern, Southern Lehigh, Moravian, Notre Dame, they are always good. We have to find a way to compete with them."



PRESS PHOTO BY NANCY SCHOLZ

The 2023 Salisbury High School field hockey team.

Five key graduates must be replaced

BY CHUCK HIXSON
Special to the Press

Salisbury field hockey head coach Jane Brennan has a way of bringing out the best in the student-athletes she coaches. Whether it's softball in the spring or field hockey in the fall, Brennan stresses a strong work ethic and works on building a strong atmosphere centered around performing as a team.

So when she loses five key players from a team that went 9-9-1 last season, it generally just means that there are going to be younger play-

ers who have learned under those philosophies and are now ready to take the next step.

Ella DeFazio, a four-year starter for Brennan, and a leading goal scorer during her high school career is now at Susquehanna University and defensive stalwart Kendall Schaeffer is at Penn State. In addition to that, goalie Olivia Ringholm, defensive back Bella Natosi, and forward Chandler Straub, who played as part of a contingent of athletes from Allentown Central Catholic, have all gone on to college.

"That group of players was really the backbone of our team over the past several seasons," said Brennan. "They will be missed and are difficult to replace, but our coaches are excited by the players who are ready to step up and assume the leadership roles."

Even with the loss of talent, the group of players that finished at the .500 mark is still pretty well intact and took a big step in their development last season, which gives the team the opportunity to catch some teams by surprise this

season.

On offense, Salisbury still has sophomores Gwyn DeFazio and Kendra Morgan, who scored 14 goals last season for the Falcons. DeFazio started every game last season as a freshman and provides some toughness on both ends of the field to go up against the more physical teams on the schedule. Also back are forwards Mya Afif, a junior, and sophomores Sarah Beckage and Emma Yakaitis.

In addition to DeFazio, the defense also has seniors Bailey Neitz

and Riley Knecht to work beside sophomore Meredith Kelley. That talent and experience will help first-year starting goalie Caroline Gedney, who takes over the job in her sophomore season.

"We also have freshman midfielders Ellie Schneider and midfielder-defender Katie Carbone, who made immediate impacts during summer league play and the preseason and are expected to be major factors on the field," said Brennan.

The mix of more experienced players and

younger players for Salisbury is impressive and gives them a good balance going into the season. Some of the players will be in different roles or counted on to provide more than they have in the past and as they grow into those roles.

Brennan loves for her team to stymie opponent's offensive attacks and there are weapons available to do just that. She has the task of bringing together players from two different schools onto one team, but sees that as a See **HOCKEY** on Page A9



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The 2023 Salisbury High School cheer team.

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The 2023 Salisbury High School girls soccer team.

Falcons look for better health in 2023

BY CHUCK HIXSON
Special to the Press

It is difficult to gauge how successful the Lady Falcons may have been last season because they were grounded by myriad injuries that pushed them well off course.

Officially, Salisbury finished 6-11 overall and 2-10 in the Colonial League and missed out on a postseason spot in a season that did see some bright spots from the team. If there is any silver lining, injuries did give some opportunities to other players to gain varsity experience, which is never a bad

thing.

It's easy to forget that the team opened with a 4-3 record before the injury bug started to bite.

Success often starts with defense and last season, the Falcons had senior Hannah Kamp in goal, and she went out with a bang, collecting over 300 saves last season alone and finishing with nearly 750 career saves.

Kamp, along with senior classmates Angela Bitar and Mikayla Lighting all graduated, leaving much of the young core of the team to show how much they have developed over the

past year.

In front of Kamp, the defense fought through injuries to become a cohesive group that has a lot of talent and the potential to help lead Salisbury. Senior Alex Miller, who could move to goal keeper this season, and junior Shyann Cortes are both back and look to put injuries behind them to solidify the defense. Senior Gianna Cilibretti also returns as does junior Gabi Pena, who was a consistent defensive force for the Falcons in 2022.

Offensively, Salisbury did not get its first goal against a Colonial

League opponent until the third game of the season, but it was a big one that gave the Falcons a 1-0 win over Wilson. The game-winning goal came from freshman Madison Reis, who went on to prove herself ready for varsity, scoring 13 goals.

Reis was not the only member of the freshman class to standout as midfielders Autumn Evans and Kaitlyn Neuhs also took advantage of time on the field, which will help the Salisbury offense this season.

The schedule also had some tough games packaged toward the

end of the year with games against Moravian Academy and Southern Lehigh finishing up the league portion of the schedule.

By that point, injuries had taken their toll, but Salisbury continued to fight through adversity, giving Southern Lehigh a battle before the Lady Spartans were able to flex their muscles and get the win.

Just as the schedule ended with a tough stretch last season, it starts with one this season. The schedule has Salisbury opening at Palmerton before hosting Saucon Valley.

Palmerton was the top seed and eventual Colonial League champion, while the Panthers fell to the Bombers in the semifinals of league playoffs. Their next league opponent is Bangor, who finished at 6-6 in the Colonial League last season.

The first key for Salisbury is to hope for better health.

After that, it is just a matter of young players building on what they were able to do last season while they were in a tough situation and playing short-handed.



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XC teams are ready to run

BY MIKE HAINES
mhaines@tnonline.com

The Salisbury Township High School cross country teams may be small in numbers, but the program often churns out some of the top runners in the Colonial League and District 11.

Last year was no different as then-freshman Emily Batten ran to a seventh-place finish at districts to earn a trip to the state meet in her first season.

The Falcon boys team didn't have a state qualifier last year, but it won more meets than it had in any season since 2014. Salisbury boys went

9-15 last season, but will have to make up for the loss of their top runner from 2022 in Connor McGinty.

First-year head coach Emily DeOliveira likes the way her team has been preparing in pre-season.

"They seem strong, they seem ready and wanting to run," she said.

Batten, a sophomore, makes up half the girls team along with sophomore Soledad Lausch. With just two runners, the girls team is three runners short of being able to score as a team.

Batten finished in the top five at most dual See **XC** on Page A11



The 2023 Salisbury High School cross country team.

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Multisport athletes hit the links in fall

BY MIKE HAINES
mhaines@tnonline.com

Many high school athletes play two or three sports during the school year, especially at small schools where teams need all hands on deck to be competitive.

At Salisbury Township High School, some student-athletes not only play multiple sports, but they also compete in more than one sport during a season.

This year's Salisbury golf team features many two- and three-sport athletes, with some of them competing on two teams during the fall season.

The Falcons' have no fewer than three golfers who are competing on the Falcon soccer teams this season in seniors Ava Smarch and Jake Zellin and junior Conner Leavy. Many other members of the team play baseball or basketball in winter, and some compete in both. While junior Nathan Staack competes on the Falcon

rifle team in spring.

While some players are on fall teams, for the majority of the team golf is their top priority during its short fall season.

"In the fall, most of these guys golf in their No. 1 sport," said Salisbury golf head coach Mike Pannella, a two-sport head coach who also runs the Salisbury rifle team in winter.

This year's Salisbury golf roster included all of the team's top players from last season.

Smarch was a fourth-place finisher in the Colonial League tournament last season and a top-10 finisher in the girls District 11 championship. Junior Owen Fogel, and seniors Zellin and Josh Holler competed in the league's boys tournament last season.

They all are hoping to return to the championship tournament and maybe go a little further this season.

"They all want to



PRESS PHOTO BY NANCY SCHOLZ

The 2023 Salisbury High School golf team.

get back to leagues this year," said Pannella. "They want to make it to the postseason. They had a good time playing there and they love playing and Bethlehem and

hopefully go on."

This season Pannella would like to see some of his boys qualify for districts, which is done by playing to a scoring average that is determined

later in the season but is usually somewhere in the mid-80s for boys player in Class AA.

Joining Smarch, Fogel, Zellin and Holler in the Falcons' line up for

most matches is freshman Jackson Skeans. Pannella plans to play those five players in each match they are available for.

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HOCKEY

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strength for her team.

"While we are a bit young, we find that to be a great positive because it means more time together to gel," said Brennan. "Our co-op with Central Catholic has been really successful and the relationship that has developed between players from both schools is fantastic. Although we have players from two schools, we are definitely one team that has developed an attitude of pride and togetherness and an awesome team culture."

FOOTBALL

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ally, really positive."

The Falcons return senior quarterback Jacob Bucchinn, who began last season as a wide receiver then moved to quarterback about halfway through the year.

"It was definitely an adjustment," he said. "I wasn't used to being live in a game situation at quarterback. As I did it more it became more comfortable. That gave me an idea of what it's like. This year I can come out and do better because I have a better understanding of my job and my responsibilities."

Spann, Bucchinn and Gavin Cerco have been leading the offseason work-

outs.

"We had a lot more guys showing up this year and a lot more guys that were committed," said Gavin Cerco, a senior wide receiver, quarterback and defensive back. "We have the right mindset going into the games."

Other seniors on this year's roster include Jaydien Kennedy (TE/LB), Dominic Popovich (WR/DB) and Zack Baab (RB/OLB). Juniors include Jason St. Leger (RB/LB), Derek Trinidad (RB/LB), Andrew Lucas (WR/QB/LB), Ty Claudio (OL/LB), Andrew Nemeh (OL/DL) and Andrew Wright (WR/LB). Sophomores Sam Krauss (OL/DL) and Griffin Lakics (OL/DL) will be part of a young but experienced Falcon offensive line led by Nemeh and Krauss.

"I think definitely the offensive and

defensive line have grown a lot because last year we had a really young line," said Spann. "As they're maturing and getting more reps they're learning how to play the position better."

Salisbury opened the season on Aug. 25 at Panther Valley. The Falcons return home to host Saucon Valley on Sept. 1, which is also Community Night.

Each home game will have a theme. The Sept. 8 game against Jim Thorpe will be Military Appreciation Night.

After two weeks on the road, the Falcons' return home for a Sept. 22 game against Tamaqua, which is Shirt of My Back Night.

The Sept. 29 game against Northern Lehigh is Homecoming, while senior night will be Oct. 6 against Palmerton.

Five players make up 2023 girls tennis team

BY MIKE HAINES
mhaines@tnonline.com

When Salisbury girls tennis head coach Greg Laub took over the program during the offseason he was encouraged that 29 players signed up for open gyms.

That feeling changed quickly when no girls players attended the open gyms while nearly the entire boys team, which Laub also coaches, attended regularly.

When the season rolled around, Laub had five players on his roster, which includes just two players returning from last year and one who had never played tennis before signing up for the team.

"I was so encouraged," Laub said of his feeling when seeing the open gym sign ups. "I was going to be able to turn this program around. I see all those kids sign up, but when

I did open gyms no one showed up. We're going to try with what we've got."

For the second straight season the team won't be able to field a full line up, but the players who are part of the team will compete in matches.

Senior Mia Kezengwa returns as the team's No. 1 singles player this season. Sophomore Neileen Perez was also on last year's roster. Freshman Kacie Kaugh will play in the No. 2 singles position.

Sophomore Jaylene Vazquez and Perez will make up the team's No. 1 doubles team. Freshman Ariana Cachia is new to the sport and could join the line up for matches sometime during the season.

"The girls we have are decent players, but many of them are so new," said Laub. "I com-



PRESS PHOTO BY NANCY SCHOLZ

The 2023 Salisbury High School girls tennis team.

mend them for coming out."

Laub also had commendation for team manager Nolan Grejda, who is the No. 1 player

on the boys team and a member of the Falcon cross country team this fall. Grejda, a senior, helps instruct the girls players on the game.

"He's a godsend for the team," said Laub. "He is so good at working with them. If it wasn't for Nolan Grejda we wouldn't be doing

well at all."

Salisbury got its season underway on Aug. 23 against Pen Argyl, losing 4-0.



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PRESS PHOTO BY NANCY SCHOLZ

The 2023 Salisbury High School band.

GOLF

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He will rotate other players in the other three spots in the eight-player line up that competes in matches. But with golfers also competing in other fall

sports there should be plenty of opportunities for other players to get match experience.

The rest of the team includes sophomores Aidan Smarch and Steven Lozada, junior Connor Leavy, senior Aiden Bonser, junior James Scialla and freshman

Markus Jones, along with Staack.

The Falcons have gone 1-3 in their first four matches, beating Wilson while falling to Palmerton, Southern Lehigh and Notre Dame - Green Pond.

Holler led the team in most of those matches,

with Fogel often as the second-best score.

While the Falcons might have a difficult time competing in team matches against some of the league's larger and more experience teams, Pannella wants his team to play its best and learn the lessons that game

can teach. It's a sport where players must figure things out themselves.

"They're on their own," said Pannella. "Once they go on the golf course, I can check on them but I can't coach them while they're playing in a match. They

have to be very independent. It's really good for them.

"The nice thing is with golf is they meet kids from other schools. Some of them will go out in the summer time and play golf with kids from other schools."

XC

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meets in the regular season before a 22nd-place finish at leagues and a stellar district race. Last year's experience should benefit her in the 2023 postseason.

"She looks strong in preseason," said DeOliveira. "She's ready. We foresee her to have a great season."

The boys team, while still young with just one senior, returns five runners who competed in leagues last year and four that raced in last

year's district championship meet.

Juniors Cameron Kubinsky, Gregory Tenzler, Joshua Orach and Joseph Tiao all ran in leagues and districts last season, while sophomore Rafael Carpo was part of the team at league's but not dis-

tricts.

Senior Nolan Grejda and sophomores Emerson Juhasz and Riley Nemitz make up the rest of the roster. All three competed in dual meets last season.

DeOliveira, a middle school teacher in the Catasauqua School Dis-

trict, graduated from Salisbury High School where she played varsity soccer and ran cross country. She has been coaching soccer since she was 14-years old and was part of the Falcon girls soccer and track and field coaching staffs last season.

She's excited to take the helm of a varsity team for the first time and encouraged by what could lie ahead for her team.

"I want to see what these guys can do and excited to see improvements and love for the sport," she said.

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