

Coaching changes abound for area volleyball programs

The three new kid coaches on the volleyball block are coming in with muscles.

Three Livonia and Westland girls volleyball programs turned over their coaching jobs between seasons and all appear to be coming into situations where they have something to work with.

Livonia Ladywood eventually settled on Larry Wyatt to take over for Tom Teeters at Livonia Ladywood, a state quarterfinalist last season and a state power nearly every season.

The question at Ladywood isn't whether the Blazers will be good, it's how good.

Mary Helen Diegel replaces Ann Hutchins at Livonia Franklin, which broke through to take the Western Division title in the Western Lakes Activities Association last season.

Actually it's four new coaches, because Grace Mattek is sharing the job as new volleyball coach at Westland Huron Valley Lutheran with Tom Schwartz.

They replace Jeff Hale and have everybody back from a team which went 8-13-3 last season.

Wyatt may be on the hot seat but he's got some invaluable good players.

"As a coach," he said, "you always want to do well and be a part of a strong program."

"Actually, we hope to be able to compete in the

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same way they have over the last 10 years or so. We hope to continue that tradition — and be able to beat some of the elite teams."

It won't hurt to have the likes of outside hitter Jenny Young on his team.

Diegel wants to build on the level which Hutchins elevated the Franklin program. The Patriots were 26-10-7 last year.

"I'm pushing them hard and they're reacting," Diegel said. "That's good. They're responding very well."

"We went to Saginaw (for a tournament) this weekend and we're going to Portage Northern for a tournament during Christmas break. Those are two good trials for us."

"After that we have the (new) Grand Rapids (invitation) tournament, so that will be a good experience for us."

"I think there's going to be a lot of surprises this year. Of course there will be growing pains. But overall, the program is going in the right direction."

Her team will be built around middle hitter Andrea Kmet, Tera Morrill, Nicole Boyd and set-

ters Lindsay Duprey and Lindsay Sopko.

The Western Lakes Activities Association will produce some quality teams again this season and veteran Mike Hughes of Livonia Churchill calls it "the finest volleyball conference in the state."

"We have more fine volleyball teams than at any time in the history of our conference."

"In our division, Franklin, Northville and Canton will be at the top. Franklin, as last year's champion, has a slight edge we all will be very good."

"Walled Lake Western is a half-step behind. Harrison will be competitive and we hope to be also."

"On the other side, Salem would have to be the favorite. Walled Lake Central is as big and very athletic. And I think Stevenson with Stephanie Dule will be absolutely excellent. It will be as much of a dogfight as our side will be."

Hughes has a transfer from volleyball mad Brazil, Fernanda Leite, and seven veterans returning.

Kelly Graham at Livonia Stevenson has the daughter of former Franklin coach Hutchins. Kelley Hutchins, as a sophomore setter. Middle blocker Kate LeBlanc should also be a mainstay.

Westland John Glenn only won seven matches last year but didn't lose any players and that alone

should make the Rockets fly higher. It suffered a big loss when it was learned junior Noelle Swartz will have to undergo ACL knee surgery in January for a soccer injury suffered earlier in the fall.

Wayne Memorial brings back nine key veterans from a 12-17-6 squad, and eight of them are seniors.

Mattek and Schwartz have two sophomores and four juniors to go with their senior group.

Lutheran Westland's strength appears to be its basketball team. Nearly all the players from that winning squad are trying to transfer that feeling to Coach Joan Ollinger's volleyball team.

Alisha Love at Clarenceville led seven players from last year's squad, which won 38 matches, but has some balance and skilled players returning led by Danielle Slez and the Skrelias, Kristina and Vera.

The only discordant note was that the WLAA will play matches that are best two-of-three, instead of best 3-of-5, for the second year in a row. Some coaches remain unhappy with that decision.

"When went from best 3-of-5 to 2-of-3," Hughes noted, "we kept statistics and we found we played 42 percent fewer games."

"Which meant fewer kids got an opportunity to play. And I thought that was the idea of high school athletics."

VOLLEYBALL TEAM CAPSULES

LIVONIA CHURCHILL

•Head coach: Mike Hughes, 24th season.
•League affiliation: Western Lakes (Western Division).

•Last year's overall record: 19-17-7.

•Notable losses to graduation: Jennifer Loidlaw, Jessica Sherman, Jenny Durken, Lisa Fehrlinger, Beth Rutkowski, Susan Hill.

•Leading returnees: Luba Slez, Sr. OH 5-6; Megan Sherman, Jr. OH 5-5; Brandon Munn, Jr. MH 5-9; Kristin Leszczynski, Jr. 5-5-8; Lauren Ruprecht, Sr. MH 5-8; Jessica McKay, Sr. S-7; Courtney Lim, Sr. S-5.

•Promising newcomers: Marci Phillips, Jr. OH 5-7; Colleen Guardiola, Jr. S-5-2; Sarah Tennessy, Jr. OH 5-9; Amy Cadovich, Jr. MH 5-9; Becky Weber, Sr. MH 5-8 (did not play in 1997-98); Fernanda Leite, Sr. OH 5-9 (exchange student from Brazil).

•Hughes' 1998-99 outlook: "We're going to be a little more athletic than we were last year. We'll have a little less experience."

"A key for us will be to develop the starting setter. We have three who are close, but we need one to take the bull by the horns and run things."

"A key will also be how much of an impact Fernanda will have. We know she can play."

"Our goal is to play the best defense in the conference, which we're going to have to do because we're not as big as most people."

LIVONIA FRANKLIN

•Head coach: Mary Helen Diegel, first year.
•League affiliation: Western Lakes (Western Division).

•Last year's overall record: 26-10-7 (Western Division champions).

•Notable losses to graduation: Brooke Henman (first team All Area), Danielle Werning (second team All Area), Jackie Ziem, Sarah Gush.

•Leading returnees: Nicole Boyd, Sr. OH 5-10; Lindsay Duprey, Sr. Setter 5-10; Lindsay Sopko, Jr. Setter 5-10; Andrea Kmet, Jr. MH 5-10 (third team All Area); Tera Morrill, Jr. R- OH 5-11.

•Promising newcomers: Alexis Bowman, Jr. OH 5-8; Rachel Bramlett (transfer from Inlay City), Jr. OH 5-9; Jamie Linden, Jr. MH/OH 5-9; Monica Little, Jr. OH/MH 5-9; Daniela Gapp, Jr. DS 5-4; Lisa Wilkoski, Jr. OH 5-7; Kirstin Marshall, Soph. MH 6-0.

•Diegel's 1998-99 outlook: "The team looks good. We had a scrimmage and tried a lot of combinations and for the most part they were successful."

"Sopko and Duprey have looked good as setters."

"And the best part is that the newcomers have come in and become part of the program. They're filling our voids beautifully."

"So as long as we can maintain our intensity and positive work ethic, we'll be O.K."

LIVONIA STEVENSON

•Head coach: Kelly Graham, sixth season.
•League affiliation: Western Lakes (Lakes Division).

•Last year's overall record: 34-11-4.

•Notable losses to graduation: Lindsay Pfeiffer, Dawn Kiri, Irena Bickelova.

•Leading returnees: Stephanie Dule, Sr. MH 5-10 (first team All Area); Kristi Cop, 5-8 OH 5-9; Grand Proderon, 5-4 Def. Specialist Sr.; Kate LeBlanc, Jr. MB 5-11.

•Promising newcomers: Carly Wadsworth, Jr. OH/MB 5-8; Cassie Ehlendt, Jr. OH 5-9; Melley Hutchins, Soph. setter 5-6; Beth Moody, Jr. OH 5-4; Julie Pfeiffer, Jr. DS 5-4; Megan Vibers, Jr. OH 5-8; Janice Tanzo, Jr. DS/OH 5-3; Sara Derfelak, Sr. MB 6-0 (Swedish exchange student).

•Graham's 1998-99 outlook: "The key to our season is communicating on the court. We hope with our sophomore setter (Hutchins) that we can gain quick transition to our experienced hitters and utilize our power."

"We hope Stephanie (Dule) can come close to what she did last year, which was to be one of the top middle hitters in the conference. We hope she can communicate with Kelly and everybody can work together."

WESTLAND JOHN GLENN

•Head coach: Stacy Graham, fifth season.
•League affiliation: Western Lakes (Lakes Division).

Last year's overall record: 7-21-3.

Notable losses to graduation: None.

•Leading returnees: Amanda Bell, Sr. DS 5-2; Kristen Krohn, Sr. OH 5-9; Jessica LaTourneau, Sr. Setter 5-5; Jamie McKend, Jr. OH/MB 5-8; Melanie Panyard, Sr. OH 5-8; Noelle Swartz, Jr. Host for the season with knee surgery.

•Promising newcomers: Jessica Banchee, Jr. Setter; Nicole Panyard, Jr. MB; Holly Deedler, Soph.; Samantha Dean, Jr.; Lucy Catano, Soph.; Lindsay Beard, Soph.

•Graham's 1998-99 outlook: "We're going to miss Noelle being out of the middle. She's an interior clutch player. I expect during soccer season in the fall and will have surgery Jan. 25."

"We're going to try to be aggressive, play tough defense and never give up."

•Head coach: Laura Fisher, third season.

•League affiliation: Mega Conference (White Division).

•Last year's overall record: 12-17-0.

•Notable losses to graduation: Kirsten Bult, Erica Haley.

•Leading returnees: Rachel Raines, Sr. OH 5-7; Kristin Keeler, Sr. MH 5-10; Bethany Maltor, Sr. MH 6-0; Stacy Long, Sr. MH 6-0; Jennifer Wagle, Sr. Setter 5-5; Natalie Timman, Sr. OH 5-7; Bridget O'Rourke, Sr. DS/Setter 5-5; Melissa Jones, Jr. DS-5-5; Nicole Suchan, Sr. DS-5-4.

•Promising newcomers: Melissa McKenzie, Sr. OH 5-8; April Coats, Jr. OH 5-9; Julie Gamber, Sr. OH 5-9; Amy Pating, Soph. setter 5-6.

•Fisher's 1998-99 outlook: "If there is ever a year we're really going to be successful, this is the year."

"We have real cohesiveness. They get along well. It's the most talented team I've coached. The boys with these girls since the ninth grade. They've taken time to play and mature together."

"Raines, skill-wise, is our strongest and most consistent player. She's our No. 1 pass er."

•Head Coach: Larry Wyatt, first season.

•1997-98 record: 6-9-1 (CHS, championships, district champions, regional champions).

•Notable losses to graduation: Sarah Peglits (first team All Area); MaryLu Hemme (first team All Area); Katie Brogan (second team All Area); Jenny Lachapelle (second team All Area).

•Leading returnees: Jenny Young, Sr. OH 6-1 (first team All Area); Debra Fuller, Sr. OH 5-10; Tracy Bellini, Sr. OH 5-7; Rebekah Thornton, Sr. Setter 5-7; Patty Horai, Jr. MH 5-8.

•Promising newcomers: Erin Barte, Soph. MH 5-10; Jessica Tilton, Jr. OH 5-11.

•Wyatt's 1998-99 outlook: "We should do well. We should be able to compete with the area teams and do well in the Catholic League."

"I'm optimistic but at the same time realistic."

"We're inexperienced at the setting position but everyone else we're looking pretty good."

•Head coach: Grace Mattek and Tom Schwartz, first season.

•League affiliation: Michigan Independent Athletic Conference.

•1997-98 record: 6-13-3.

•Notable losses to graduation: None.

•Leading returnees: Stephanie Graves, 5-11 Sr. MH; Shae Graves, 5-7 Jr. setter; Rachel Zehn, 5-7 OH; Anya Day, 5-9 Sr. OH; Jessica Whitaker, 5-9 Jr. OH; Gretchen Grouse, 5-10 Jr. utility; Katie O'Hanlon, 5-8 Sr. MH; Danielle Jolly, 5-6 Jr. setter/back row; Cassie Zell, 5-5 Soph. back row; Regina Pischner, 5-7 Soph. OH.

•Promising newcomers: none.

•Schwartz's 1998-99 outlook: "We just have to make things just if we work together. We're looking for a good season. As in a lot of teams our setter has to be the key player when you run a 5-1 offense."

•Head coach: Anna Roff, Jr. OH 5-7; Heather Maltor, Jr. Setter 5-2; Rene O'Brien, Jr. S-5-2; Jennifer Dash, Jr. OH 5-7; Sarah Mandy, Jr. OH 5-10; Amanda Sales, Jr. OH 5-9.

•Ollinger's 1998-99 outlook: "I think it's a pretty unified team. They seem to work pretty well together, so I'm hoping for good things. And they seem to really want it. That's a good sign."

"Everybody wants to play and that's a good problem to have."

"We should do all right in the conference. We'd like to finish second, like we did last year, or better."

LUTHERAN WESTLAND

•Head coach: Joan Ollinger, fourth season.
•League affiliation: Metro Conference.

•Last year's overall record: 13-17-3.

•Notable losses to graduation: Sarah Hoffmeier, Kirsten Rae.

•Leading returnees: Anna Schwecke, Sr. OH 5-11; Beah Hoffmeier, Sr. MH 5-11; Stephanie Lynch, Sr. OH 5-10; Katie Heden, Sr. Setter 5-2; Karin Alzobard, Sr. S-5-2.

•Key newcomers: Anna Roff, Jr. OH 5-7; Heather Maltor, Jr. Setter 5-2; Rene O'Brien, Jr. S-5-2; Jennifer Dash, Jr. OH 5-7; Sarah Mandy, Jr. OH 5-10; Amanda Sales, Jr. OH 5-9.

•Ollinger's 1998-99 outlook: "I think it's a pretty unified team. They seem to work pretty well together, so I'm hoping for good things. And they seem to really want it. That's a good sign."

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LIVONIA CLARENCEVILLE

•Coach: Alisha Love, eighth season.

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