As if the pressure of starting high school wasn’t hard enough, being thrown into a mix of new teammates you don’t know added an exciting twist for freshmen girls. At the beginning of the freshman volleyball season, the girls agreed there was mutual tension between one another.

Most of the girls came from different schools and hadn’t been acquainted with the others before. Although some of the girls knew each other off the court, they had never played together as teammates.

“When you put girls onto a team that have come from all different feeder schools, there is bound to be conflicts between players and an imbalance on the team,” Coach Maggi Butler said. “However, as the season went on, I really think I helped them to succeed as a team and it ended up being a fun and exciting season to watch as well as coach.”

Although they began the season with a rocky start, throughout the season the girls had a completely different attitude, and with each game they went in with more and more confidence.

“At the beginning of the season, I didn’t know how successful we would be,” freshman Claire Anderson said. “It was awkward at first with all the cat fights and cliquey-ness, but by the second week we really bonded as a team and there was a huge improvement with chemistry between us.”

As they looked back, the team could tell they made a statement. All the players stepped up and performed to the best of their ability. Some of their success is credited to their coaches for pushing them every day at practice and during games.

“It’s crucial that these girls keep their bonds and amazing work ethic,” Coach Erin Byrd said. “They will need it for the next years of their high school volleyball careers.”

The girls walked off the court looking forward to three more years of playing the game they love together, as Wildcats.
SISTER, SISTER
Twins work to achieve success while building everlasting bonds

Growing up, freshman MacKenzie Sempeck and her twin sister, freshman Maggie Sempeck, grew a love for volleyball together.

It wasn’t much of a surprise, for the sisters had always taken interest in similar things.

“Since I was seven years old, I’ve always been on the same volleyball team as my sister,” Maggie Sempeck said. “So when the rosters came out for high school volleyball, I was really nervous for what to expect because I didn’t want us to be separated.”

Sure enough, both sisters landed a spot together on the Reserve volleyball team. The girls celebrated on the Reserve volleyball court with more than just a leading record. They left with an even bigger sisterly bond.

As the team began to form, the sisters soon stepped out of their boundaries and started to make new friends on the team.

“The part that made me the most nervous about playing volleyball in high school, was that there were so many new people I didn’t know,” MacKenzie Sempeck said. “At first, my sister and I were glued to each other, but eventually we met new people and starting making new friends.”

While they continued to meet new people and make new friends, the sisters still remained close.

Towards the end of the season, it was clear that the sisters had walked off the court with more than just a leading record. They left with an even bigger sisterly bond.

As the team began to form, the sisters soon stepped out of their boundaries and started to make new friends on the team.

The part that made me the most nervous about playing volleyball in high school, was that there were so many new people I didn’t know,” MacKenzie Sempeck said. “At first, my sister and I were glued to each other, but eventually we met new people and starting making new friends.”

While they continued to meet new people and make new friends, the sisters still remained close.

Towards the end of the season, it was clear that the sisters had walked off the court with more than just a leading record. They left with an even bigger sisterly bond.

The part that made me the most nervous about playing volleyball in high school, was that there were so many new people I didn’t know,” MacKenzie Sempeck said. “At first, my sister and I were glued to each other, but eventually we met new people and starting making new friends.”

While they continued to meet new people and make new friends, the sisters still remained close.

Towards the end of the season, it was clear that the sisters had walked off the court with more than just a leading record. They left with an even bigger sisterly bond.
OWN THE SPOT
Players share perspectives of their position throughout each match

ALEXY WOODWARD '16
"I play defense mostly on the front, left side as the outside hitter. I also block and hit when I am in the front row. I like tipping and placing the ball on the court when I hit."

BRIDGET PETERSEN '17
"My position is the middle. My favorite set to hit off of is from the corners. A middle's main job is to block the ball or at least get a touch so it is easier for the defense to dig it up."

SYDNEY STOCKFLETH '16
"The outside is my favorite position because I get to play offense and defense. I love making shots to get the other team out of their system. It's like having two liberos in the back row."

EMMA WALKER '17
"I am the setter, so I tell the hitter where she is going to hit and be loud on the floor. I have to stay composed for the rest of our team to keep the team focused on the game."

ABIGAIL DURBIN '16
"I like how fast-paced the middle is and that I am the go-to person. If we need a good kill, my teammates try and get the ball to the middle because it is the best place to spike."

JORDAN DANIELS '17
"I play back row on the outside. I sub in for my front row teammate to serve and play her back row rotation. When I rotate to the front row, then she comes back in for me."

OVER THE NET
As she spiked the ball, junior Bridget Petersen confidently smacks it though her opponent’s hands. With every additional kill, she helped carry her team closer to victory in their set against the Marian Crusaders. "I love hitting the ball in the back corner because that’s how I get most of my kills," Petersen said. "It gives me such an adrenaline rush knowing that I added to the scoreboard."

ALL FOR ONE
Coming together, junior Cassidy Loberg and sophomore Jordan Daniels celebrate with their teammates. They won their first set against the number one ranked Papillion-La Vista, which motivated the girls. "Your adrenaline is pumping and when someone gets a really good kill or block," Daniels said. "It's the best feeling ever."

RULING THE COURT
In between serves, senior captain Tiffany Wentworth and junior captain Loberg take a breath while anticipating the next move from their opponent. As co-captains of the squad, Wentworth and Loberg worked side by side to rally their teammates to victory. "Being a captain is a huge honor for me, and I love feeling like I am respected," Loberg said. "I want the team to know I will do all I can to help us take steps together."

THREE-PEAT
Varsity wins Heartland Crossroads Tournament three years running

By KAITLYN COOPER & HANNA SELINGER
As they began the season with back-to-back victories, the Varsity team took home first place in the Heartland Crossroads tournament for the third year in a row.

The team started with a close 25-23 final set against Elkhorn South, and were determined to win the second game and third consecutive tournament title. "It was pretty cool to get back to the tournament and win it again," sophomore Bridget Petersen said. "I loved being a part of the team both my freshman and sophomore year."

From the bottom-up, the players and coaches believed that the team could accomplish great things this year. Head the Varsity squad, coach Erin Byrd returned to the Heartland Tournament with high hopes for her team to take home the traveling trophy.

"The beginning of the year tournament showed us a glimpse as to the potential we had," Byrd said. "The girls understood that each match mattered and put us in a good post-season position."

With the momentum of the tournament victory behind them, the girls had big expectations for the remainder of the season. This win was the first step towards the end goal of making it back to State. The girls were determined to play up to standards of their coach, so they pulled together for their first win.

UNION JUMPSTART
Awaiting the ball, junior Talia Guido waits prepared for the next play. She adjusted her headband so that her hair could stay out of her eyes, and she could focus on the game. "I also wear my hair in a braid because if I don’t, it gets caught under me when I dive," Guido said. "Whenever I put my hair in a ponytail, it would whip me in the face or get stuck under my arm."
A team of underdogs battle once again to prove themselves at State

After taking second place in the State championship last year, the team was ready to come together in order to make it back to the tournament. However, losing six seniors created a major setback for the upcoming year. The young team was not threatened by the obstacle for long, as they started the season with a 7-0 winning streak.

The team’s first loss was against Omaha Skutt in the Millard North Invitational. They then played Skutt again in the championship game, winning 2-1.

“After we lost, we had to refocus on what we were doing,” senior Sydney Yong said. “We all went to practice and worked on fundamentals, so when it was game time again, we won.”

A loss from Papillion-La Vista motivated the girls to focus on teams such as Millard South and Millard North. The Wildcats played stronger than ever mid-season, once again pulling in seven straight wins.

“We had a lot of meetings to ensure we kept team unity throughout the year,” junior Sydney Stockfleth said. “When we started playing only for ourselves, we came together and fixed the problem.”

As they entered the first District game against Bellevue East, the team took the court by storm, bringing in a 3-0 victory. The girls then advanced to the District finals. With a close 2-2 match against Lincoln Southwest, the squad defended their title as District Champions, winning the final set 15-9.

“It was the most exciting and deserving game of the season,” junior Cassidy Loberg said. “We have a lot of momentum and confidence from the win for State.

In the start of the tournament, the team upset fourth-seeded North Platte in a 3-0 sweep. They then advanced to play top-ranked Papillion-La Vista in the semifinals. Even though the girls did not advance to the championship game, they ended their season 28-7.

SENIORS SHINE
A peek into the thoughts of the three team leaders

KIRA SHAPIRO ‘15
“Everyone thinks that we aren’t going to be as good this year because we lost all the seniors. We have a lot of players to replace, but we also have new talent from the underclassmen. We started off slow, but we have already improved. I think we will make it back to the state finals and compete. We have to prove ourselves and keep playing strong with the new players we have.”

TIFFANY WENTWORTH ‘15
“I became a captain because I am a positive leader, and I never sub out during games. I also listen to my teammates when they have ideas about what to run, where to set, and where to place my hits. I love being a captain because in those tight and stressful games, my teammates look to me to step up and make the game changing play while keeping everyone calm.”

SYDNEY YONG ‘15
“We have big shoes to fill because we have a completely different squad compared to last year. As a senior, I think the most important thing is chemistry within the team. My senior season is important to me because I want to be the first class to win State in volleyball. I am determined to take my team to state finals this year and hopefully win the championship.”

START TO STATE
A team of underdogs battle once again to prove themselves at State
**THE JUAN AND ONLY**

Saying a final goodbye to his life in the United States

By MACY MATT

And he’s off! Sophomore Juan Vera Villafane is prepared to leave Omaha behind and move all the way across the world to India. As Vera and his family members gather their belongings, they look back at the memories and times they had here.

Cross country being such a huge part of his life so far, yet Vera told us that it was his teammates and coaches who really impacted his outlook on XC.

“Moving to India will be a great experience but the people I have grown to spend so much time with will be greatly missed,” Vera said.

When Vera found out the shocking news that he would not only be moving but leaving the United States he was driven to the fact that he would miss his friends, family, and most of all being a Wildcat the most.

On the day of September 4, 2014, social media was corrupted with hashtags stating “#keepJuanhome”. With the tweets beginning to trend around eight o’clock in the morning and continuing on throughout the day he knew he would be missed.

After having ran for several years he has grown to love and have a passion for the sport. Making various amounts of friends, continuing to become better at running, and meeting his goals.

“Juan and I have become very close these past two years because of cross country,” junior Josh Klien said. “I consider Juan like a brother to me and its going to be hard once he moves.”

Vera’s determined to keep running in India. With a confident attitude Vera is sure that his “boys” will defeat everyone else and continue to do so every single year.

Vera plans on searching for a new sport in India, that will allow him to push his limits and create new friends. Although Juan will begin new sports, he will never find a coach to replace Kruz.

“I will always remember Juan and his motivation to the team”, coach Max Kruz said. “He’ll definitely be missed, but I’m sure he will find another sport he loves in India.”

Vera is full of lots of nerves but yet exited to see what new beginnings await.

---

**STANDARDS SET HIGH**

Freshmen pushes to reach highly set goals

After he trained week after week all summer long, freshman Nick Brdicko’s hard work had finally paid off. Brdicko had put in lots of endless hours and energy through the extreme conditioning for months.

“With my mind set and all the motivation I have received from the upperclassmen, I plan to be successful throughout this season,” Brdicko said.

With his mind set on reaching his specific goals, he ran at least four miles each day this summer.

“I am proud of how far he came this season,” sophomore Andrew Dubas said. After making Varsity one this season, his determination was clearly shown.

Brdicko has had many years of experience in cross country, starting in the seventh grade.

“After competing for two years in cross country I hope to improve to a 17:10 by State,” Brdicko said. “Practice makes perfect and having a goal only makes me more competitive”.

Brdicko not only felt he impressed himself but the whole entire team and his coaches from this season.
As a way to get pumped up teammates rowdy together and jump on each other. To them this is called the “pile up”. Although it seems like a painful experience, it gets the boys energized and ready to run. “The pile up gets me hyped up before the race getting all our pre-race jitters out,” junior James Bodwell said.

**THE PILE UP**
Max Kruz, coach of the boys Cross Country Team, encourages his team to motivate one another. “The team pile up has been a tradition for many years”, says Kruz. “It allows some of the nerves to be let out in our loud chant before the race”. Besides the fact that it’s a little wild, he appreciates the boys getting each other excited to run their hearts out. With all the boys contributing to the team pile up it shows the team’s spirit. The boys hope to continue this tradition.

**TRADITIONS CONTINUE**

**MISSING KRUZ**
Athletes express their thoughts and opinions on Coach Kruz retiring

**PUSHING FOR PERSONAL GOALS**
As runners set their personal time goals, they work hard to break their records.

“Training as hard as I possibly could all season long, I’m proud for the accomplishment of making 17:10 as my personal record compared to 17:56, my personal record last year. I am also proud I made it to state this year.”

-**ANDREW DUBAS**

“Working my absolute hardest this entire season I’m proud of how far I have come since last year. I think that my time and effort that I have put in this season has resulted in my personal record of 17:53.”

-**ROBERT HAY**

“Not only has Cross Country made me more fit it has made me set higher standards for mymeet times, achieving my personal record of 23:00.”

-**FLORIAN WURTLE**

“Improving week by week and setting goals for myself I have finally reached my personal record of 20:41 and its proved to me that my hard work has paid off.”

-**MICHAEL ARMAS**

“Training as hard as I can all season long, I’m proud for the accomplishment of making 17:10 as my personal record compared to 17:56, my personal record last year. I am also proud I made it to state this year.”

-**SAM HARTER**

“Working hard throughout the season with the encouragement from my teammates and advice from my coaches, I have been able to reach my personal record of 17:53.”

-**GRANT RAY**

“Improving week by week and setting goals for myself I have finally reached my personal record of 20:41 and its proved to me that my hard work has paid off.”

-**JOHN HENDERSON**

“Training as hard as I possibly could all season long, I’m proud for the accomplishment of making 17:10 as my personal record compared to 17:56, my personal record last year. I am also proud I made it to state this year.”

-**ANDREW DUBAS**

“Working my absolute hardest this entire season I’m proud of how far I have come since last year. I think that my time and effort that I have put in this season has resulted in my personal record of 17:53.”

-**ROBERT HAY**

“Not only has Cross Country made me more fit it has made me set higher standards for my meet times, achieving my personal record of 23:00.”

-**FLORIAN WURTLE**

“Improving week by week and setting goals for myself I have finally reached my personal record of 20:41 and its proved to me that my hard work has paid off.”

-**MICHAEL ARMAS**
Hanna Selinger
Millard West High School