

Broncos see highs and lows in 2013 volleyball season

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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By Diane Stamm

The Wauneta Breeze

With high expectations entering the 2013 volleyball season, the Wauneta-Palisade Bronco volleyball team was unable to reach its goals, thanks, in part, to injuries to key players.

Healthy early in the season, WP opened the fall schedule with a 6-0 record before losing consecutive matches to Southwest and Chase County.

Moving into the D2 ratings and remaining high in the Wildcard Points Standings, the Broncos picked up another eight straight wins. Included in those eight victories were defeats of state tournament qualifiers Brady and Wallace. It was in the win over Brady on Sept. 28 that junior Lesley Towery suffered a season-ending knee injury.

The injury bug bit WP once more heading into the RPAC tournament. Looking to avenge a five-set loss to Dundy County-Stratton a week earlier, the Broncos opened RPAC play without senior Tailor Lee due to an ankle injury. Although the Broncos were the number one seed in the

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West Bracket, the team was defeated by DCS, who went on to place second overall.

With a 15-3 record midway through the season, WP limped into subdistricts with a 16-6 record. Despite a sound three-set sweep of Wallace Oct. 29, the Broncos were defeated in the subdistrict finals by the Wildcats in five sets.

The Broncos were led in 2013 by seniors Cassidy Rathe, Brooklyn Nordhausen, Abbie Fanning and Taylor Lee.

Starting the season on the bench, Rathe finished the season starting in place of the injured Towery. Rathe ended her career with 10 aces and 31 kills. Coach Harchelroad said Rathe did a nice job of stepping up for her team and filling in when needed.

Nordhausen led the team in blocking with 39.5. Nordhausen also had 22 ace serves and 104 kills. "Brooklyn improved this season, she could do some really good things at the net when she set her mind to it," said Coach Harchelroad.

Lee finished the season with 116 kills and 21.5 blocks. She had 12 aces and served at a 93.2 percent clip. She was much more consistent hitting this season and did a good job of making adjustments when asked. In the game against Chase County she blocked very well and had other games that her blocking was key.

Fanning led the team with 155 kills and was second with 304 digs. Fanning had 32 ace serves, keeping the ball in play 93.5 percent of the time. "Abbie really stepped up this season with her whole game," said Coach Harchelroad, adding, "She was a great leader and was so competitive. Her hitting improved so much from last season and her quickness was an asset in the back row."

Junior Sydnee Harchelroad once again led the Broncos in serving with 60. Even with a change in positions, she also finished the season tied with Lee for second on the team in kills, with 116, while leading the team in assists with 283. Harchelroad was third on the team with 299 digs.

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Fellow junior Leiauna Alberts was second on the team with 35 ace serves and also set for the Broncos, ending the season with 239 assists. "Leiauna really stepped up with setting. She had never set before so was asked to take on a new role and I really think you will see some good things from her next season with a year of experience under her belt," credited Coach Harchelroad.

Libero Brianna Einspahr was also a junior. Einspahr had 383 digs and 18 service aces. Coach Harchelroad said "Brianna does an awesome job of serve receiving. Her job is so thankless and sometimes goes unnoticed unless she isn't passing well."

In just 13 games, half the season, Towery earned 33 ace serves, 103 kills, 13.5 blocks and 110 digs. Towery transferred into WP over the summer from Hitchcock County. "She is such a great young lady and has handled this all so well," said Coach Harchelroad.

Both Harchelroad and Towery were all-RPAC performers as sophomores and will lead the Broncos into 2014.

Also seeing action for the Broncos were juniors Hannah Nordhausen and Nicole Strand, plus sophomores Ellie Lee and Cameo Rector.

"I really tried to work some younger girls in toward the end of the season to see if it would spark anything," said Coach Harchelroad. "I thought Ellie, Nicole, Hannah and Cameo did a good job."

The team was improved over last year. In 2012, the Broncos had 622 kills to 506 errors. This season WP had 674 kills and 397 errors.

Coach Harchelroad said WP went up against some good defensive teams. "I really liked that there were four girls with very similar kills. That is one thing that I thought we did well was mixing it up."

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“We knew this was the year we could be at state and with a lot of adversity I thought we were still ready to get the job done,” said Coach Harchelroad.

“I am proud of the girls that have had to step up and it really has me more prepared for next season with the changes that I had to make this season,” Coach Harchelroad added.

The JV team finished the season with an 8-5 record, including two wins Nov. 9 at the Hayes Center JV Triangular.