

2023 Jay County Fall Sports Preview

A special section in The Commercial Review
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Ready to repeat

*Patriot boys soccer and
boys tennis teams are looking to
reprise sectional championships*



Regional qualifiers return to lead runners

The Patriots return two regional qualifiers.

The boys will be looking to replace their No. 2 runner.

The girls will add a foreign exchange student to become eligible as a team.

The young teams are looking to advance in the postseason.

Jay County High School's cross country teams both return their top runners from the 2022 season and will get some key additions that have coach Bruce Wood excited about the teams' postseason opportunities.

While the individual athletes will work with Wood to set personal goals, the ultimate challenge is to have those goals unite to help the teams reach the regional round of the postseason.

"Team success, to me, is if we could get one of the teams or even both ... to advance in the postseason," Wood said.

The girls last made the regional meet as a team four seasons ago in 2019. It has been much longer since the boys have been to the regional.

"So I would really like to see (the boys) team have some postseason success," Wood said. "I think that would feel good as a program."

Two of Jay County's athletes have gotten a taste of the regional level already.

Sophomores Alexis Sibray and Joseph Boggs — along with 2023 graduate Sebastian Solis — qualified for the regional meet last season, making two of the younger Patriots the most tournament experienced.

Last season the top five teams advanced to



Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School girls cross country team. Front row are Willow Hardy, Nina Ribas Cesar, Alexis Sibray, Courtney Harris, Paityn Wendel and Tina Japaridize.

the next level of the postseason as well as the top 10 runners not on advancing teams. With the elimination of the semi-state level of the postseason, the format has changed to allow the top five teams and top 15 individuals not on qualifying teams to advance.

With the new format, the alignment of schools the Patriots will have to face changes as well.

Their regional will now be held in Fort Wayne,

where they won't face some of the schools from Indianapolis and "the doughnut" that they would have at the regional hosted by Delta.

"I think we fit better in this regional than we did ... with those large Indy teams that, you know, they pretty much just dominated," Wood said.

Boggs finished 10th at the 2022 sectional (17 minutes, 23 seconds) before he placed 38th in the regional (17:40), while Sibray finished

16th at sectional (21:27.93) and 39th at regional (21:34).

For both Patriots, their sectional times were the best of the season. Boggs improving his time by 1:35 during the season and Sibray by 2:02. Wood is hoping for both runners to shave about a minute off of their times during the 2023 campaign.

The girls team returns all four runners from last season. Joining Sibray will be sophomore

Paityn Wendel, senior Willow Hardy and junior Courtney Harris.

Wendel is someone who can benefit from the new format, as she finished 34th with a time of 23:01, just 38 seconds off of Mariah Manning, the final regional qualifier from last season.

Wood said that during the track season he saw Wendel both improve physically and mentally to the point where he could see her making the regional this season.

The girls add foreign exchange students Tina Japaridize and Nina Ribas Cesar, giving them enough runners to be eligible to score as a team.

The boys lose four athletes from last season. Regional qualifier and Jay County's No. 2 Solis is gone, as well as Owen Ransom and Wyatt Kunkler, who contributed to the Patriots' sectional score of 188.

See **Regional** page 3

Cross country

Date	Opponent	Time
Saturday, Aug. 19	Trojan XC Opener	9 a.m.
Saturday, Aug. 26	Celina Rotary Invite	9 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 9	Rand. Southern Invite	9 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 16	Yorktown Invitational	10 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 30	Winchester Invitational	9 a.m.
Saturday, Oct. 7	ACAC at Adams Cent.	11 a.m.
Saturday, Oct. 14	Sectional	10:30 a.m.
All meets are away		

Regional ...

Continued from page 2

The other loss was Isaac Kunkler, who had returned to cross country for the first time since his freshman year.

“We’ve got to get somebody back into that No. 2 that can finish high and help our team out,” Wood said. “So we’ve got some work to do to replace that.”

“The other seniors that we lost were good leaders, and great teammates, and just great people to be around.”

The Patriots have a few candidates that could fill that spot.

Returning to the team

is sophomore Max Klopfenstein, who finished third for the Patriots in the sectional with a time of 19:22.

Also competing for that spot are freshmen Caleb Garringer and Beckett Brandenburg. While Wood isn’t certain where they will perform at the beginning of the season, he expects them to continually improve by the time the postseason hits.

“I think they’re gonna make good replacements by the end of the year,” Wood said. “We can’t push them too hard early, they’re freshmen,



Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School boys cross country team. Front row from left are Beckett Brandenburg, Lukes Powers, Darren Fisher and Bryan Garcia. Back row are Brayden Collins, Joseph Boggs, Max Klopfenstein, Will Hawbaker and Caleb Garringer.

so hopefully by our postseason, they’re rounded in shape.”

Senior Darren Fisher is also expected to improve to provide a solid score in most meets. If he can shave an extra minute off of his current career best, Jay County

would be in a great position for advancing in the postseason.

“He is putting in quality training. Probably the best preseason he’s had so far,” Wood said. “The more runners we can get in that 18-19 (minute) area, then the better

chance that we have advancing as a team.”

Also returning is Lukes Powers, who took three minutes off of his time last season, as well as sophomore Will Hawbaker. They also have a newcomer in senior Bryan Garcia, who will

be added to the mix of possible scorers this season.

“I like to see the kids improve,” Wood said. “So as long as they’re getting better at running, getting in better shape, and improving their times I’ll be happy.”



Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School girls golf team. From left are coach Marvin Buckner, Brooklyn Bright, Brooklynn Zimmerman, Maddy Snow, Meah Devoe, Jamie Davis and Whitney McIntire.

All stories in the 2023 Jay County High School Fall Sports Preview are by Andrew Balko.

Football, volleyball, cross country and golf photos are by Ray Cooney. Soccer and tennis photos are by Andrew Balko.

Front page photos and design are by Ray Cooney.

Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School boys soccer team. Front row from left are Welder Mendez, Zavier Hudson, Garrett Hidy, Blake Collins and Rhoen Brown. Second row are Cayden Buckland, Emmitt Reynolds, Zander Hudson, Jackson Edwards, David Keen, Aryan Montes and Dylan Marentes-Estrada. Third row are coach Bobby Ruiz, Kaleb Coppock, Brayden Collins, Hugo Gutierrez, Trevin Dunnington, Ramses Anaya, Alan Ortiz and assistant coach Rodney Reynolds. Back row are Gavin Young, Oskar Alart, Osmar Gonzalez, Brenden Runyon, Payton Yowell, Levi Muhlenkamp and manager Katelynn Moeller. Not pictured is Mario Ardizzone.



Sights set on return to championship

Expectations were low for the Patriots in 2022.

They only had one senior. They didn't have great depth. Bobby Ruiz was stepping in for Brad Horn, making his debut as a varsity head coach.

They smashed all expectations.

This year, the pressure is on. How will the Patriots respond?

Jay County High School's boys soccer team brings back all but three players from the group that claimed the sectional crown as it looks to make it back to the sectional championship.

The Patriots have a big gap to fill with the loss of Josh Dowlen. The graduate played a key role for Jay County defensively, as he was the final line of defense before Kaleb Coppock in the goal.

The biggest thing coach Bobby Ruiz will miss is toughness and competitive edge Dowlen brought to the team. Still, Ruiz feels confident that senior Brayden Collins can find success in the position as well.

Boys soccer		
Date	Opponent	Time
Tuesday, Aug. 15	Muncie Central	5 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 22	New Castle	7 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 24	Delta	7 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 26	Woodlan	noon
Monday, Aug. 28	Heritage	7 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 31	Norwell	6:30 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 7	Yorktown	7 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 12	Richmond	5:30 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 14	Bellmont	5 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 16	Woodlan	10 a.m.
Monday, Sept. 18	Heritage	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 26	Blackford	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 28	Liberty Christian	5:30 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 30	Oak Hill	10 a.m.
Home games in bold		

"He's an experienced guy. He's got better technique," Ruiz said. "(The defense) is now older and more experienced. Hopefully with the skills all five of them have, we will be as solid as last season."

Collins has also taken on more of a leadership role of the team, being more vocal and rallying his teammates to make sure they are all pulling in the same direction.

Collins is the only

shakeup for the Patriots on defense. Trevin Dunnington and Gavin Young will still flank out to either side, with Alan Ortiz and Cayden Buckland reprising the half-midfield-half-defensive line.

Coppock will also return for his senior season guarding the goal for Jay County. Coppock gave up 31 goals over 15 games last season, but held teams to one goal or fewer in eight games.

"He's the best," Ruiz said. "He has proved he can do it, so I don't have any doubts about him."

The Patriots retain one of their top-two scorers from last season. Levi Muhlenkamp will remain as the primary forward for the Patriots this season. Last year, Muhlenkamp scored a team-high 14 goals.

In the midfield, Carter Link and Kaleb Meadows both graduated. Link was the second-leading scorer with 13 goals in 2022. Meadows added four goals.

With Collins being moved to the back of the defense, Dylan Marentes is the only midfielder returning to the mix. He will take over as the focal point of the midfield to control the ball and the pace of the action.

"Marentes is the quarterback kind of guy," Ruiz said. "He's got the skills, the brain and the knowledge of the game to do anything ..."

"He has the will to share the ball with everyone. He doesn't say, 'It's

my ball. I'm going to score.'"

Rounding out the midfield will be junior Brenden Runyon, freshmen Emmitt Reynolds and Hugo Gutierrez, an exchange student from Spain. Runyon found his way into the rotation late into the season last year, giving him some experience working with Marentes in the middle.

Other players that Ruiz mentioned that could find time on the field include Osmar Gonzales, Oskar Gonzales (another exchange student from Spain) and freshman Aryan Marentes.

Ruiz said that part of the reason his team was successful last year was because other teams didn't fear them, while the Patriots came out ready to play every single day, despite lacking depth.

"Every game, these guys brought courage," Ruiz said. "I think that bonded them being so light on numbers and brought out the courage to achieve the championship."

This season, the team

won't be able to fly under the radar, but rather, will have a target on its back as the team to beat.

Ruiz believes that the experience, chemistry and increased depth will help the team pull through this season as well.

"Almost everybody's back," Ruiz said. "That means they know each other. That's a plus for us. They know how we play and what we did last season. Hopefully that makes the team a little bit more solid."

With a year under his belt, a lot of returning players and some reinforcements, Ruiz has set the mark high for this team. He wants to at least make another sectional championship game.

"To be a successful year, we need to be in the final game," Ruiz said. "Anything can happen. A game's a game so we could play good and things can still go wrong ... We just need to get to the final game. If we win it, good, but that's what we need to get."



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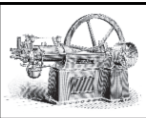
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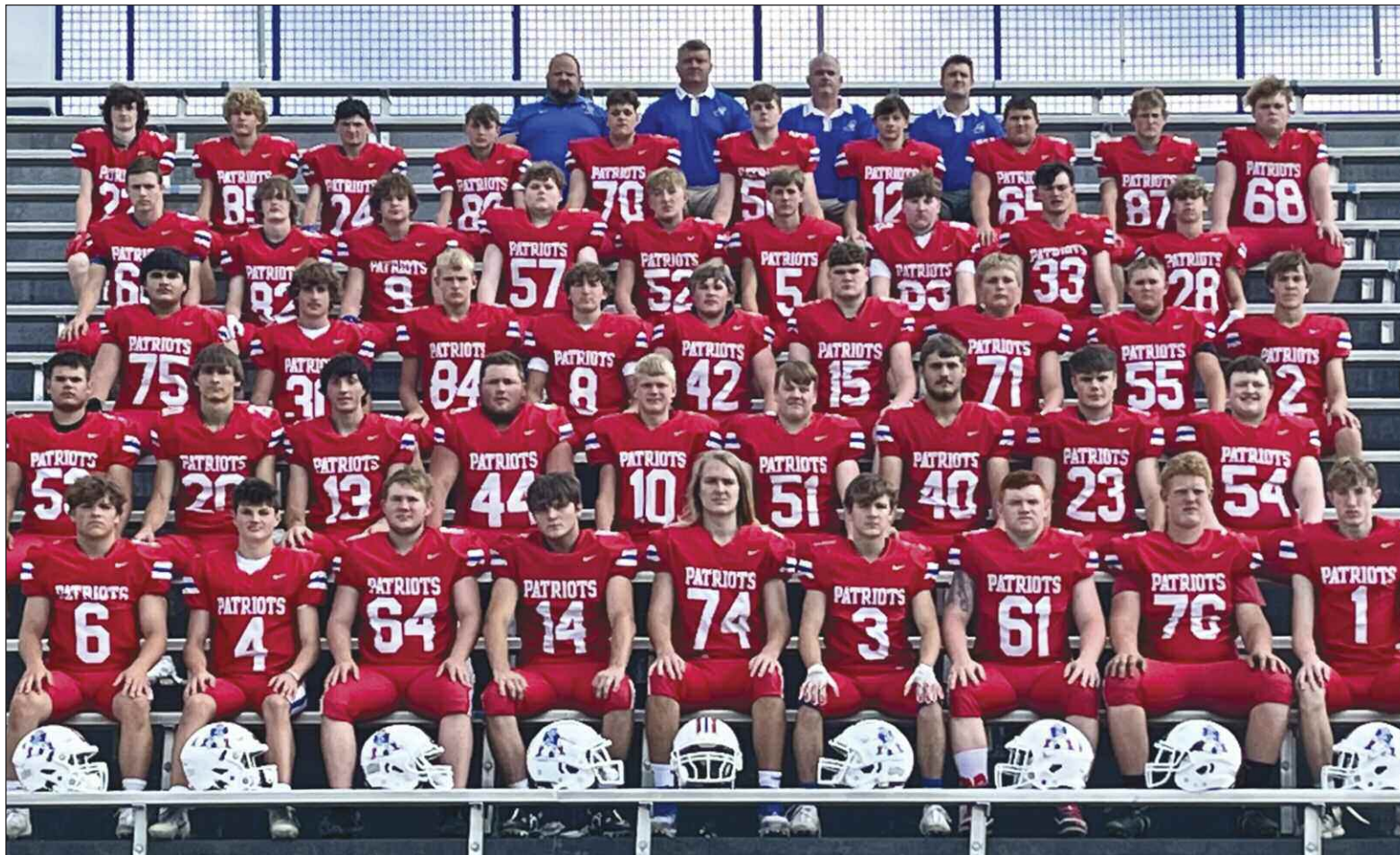
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Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School football team. Front row from left are Carter Barton, Sean Bailey, Ryne Goldsworthy, Bryce Wenk, Garrett Hime, Justin DeHoff, Sean Carpenter, Joe Hemmelgarn and Ben Crouch. Second row are Joaquin Johnson, Benson Ward, Lucas Strait, Austin Schoenlein, James Brunswick, Cory Emery, Issac Dues, A.J. Myers and Dre Phenis. Third row are Alejandro Ruiz, Brady Jetmore, Tyler Brunswick, Carter Fugiett, Garrett Bennett, Rhysin Blowers, Matt Fisher, Brasen Glassford and Nick Laux. Fourth row are Wyatt Bihn, Quintin Mackey, Leighton Brown, Carson Busick, Garret Dillon, Brayden Fox, Stephen Garringer, Aiden Phillips and Grant Wendel. Fifth row are Colten Bowlan, Eli Petro, Kaiden Reynolds, Jayden Comer, Trevor Jones, Blake Bonifas, Cooper Glassford, Dawson Goldsworthy, Hayden Ison and Brayden Romine. Back row are assistant coaches Ryan Fritze and Michael Schlechty, coach Grant Zgunda and assistant coach Tanner Koch.

Gridders seek first .500 year since '16

The Patriots didn't have the wins last season, but took a step in the right direction.

Coach Grant Zgunda returns a core group of players and is eyeing a .500 record.

The Jay County High School football team is aiming to get their first even record or better in seven years.

The Patriots ended the 2022 season at 2-8 (1-5 Allen County Athletic Conference), with wins against Blackford in week one and Southern Wells week three. Despite failing to close out games, they had second-half leads twice and closed the gap on a handful of other opponents.

"I'm not a big moral victory guy," Zgunda said. "But we closed the gap a

Football		
Date	Opponent	Time
Friday, Aug. 18	Blackford	7 p.m.
Friday, Aug. 25	Huntington North	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 1	Southern Wells	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 8	Adams Central	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 15	Bluffton	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 22	Woodlan	7:30 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 29	South Adams	7 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 6	Lapel	7 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 13	Heritage	7 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 20	Sectional	TBA
Home games in bold		

bit ... Last year was a year that we were better, but we still just didn't get over the hump ..."

Jay County brings back a handful of juniors and seniors who have been regular contributors and Zgunda will look for them to continue to improve.

While the Patriots do

bring back a lot of athletes, they lost 75% of their scoring from a season ago and will need to replace it. Kadin Ridenour and Patrick Hemmelgarn accounted for 118 of the Patriots' 200 points throughout the season.

"Man, I loved coaching (Ridenour)," Zgunda

said. "Just a tough, grind it out, old school type of football player. Very quiet but put him on a football field and he turns into that competitor. ..."

"Hemmelgarn was just a threat that we needed last year to stretch the defense vertically and made a lot of great catches."

Zgunda will need some of those juniors and seniors to step up. To replace Ridenour in the backfield, he is looking to junior A.J. Myers. Last season, Myers rushed for 94 yards and three touchdowns on 21 carries.

"Kadin was what I classify as a power runner," Zgunda said. "Myers is a little bit more shifty. Still got power, but I think he is going to

do a good job for us."

The move opens up the fullback spot for senior Bryce Wenk to step into. Wenk shifts into the backfield after having nine receptions for 80 yards as a tight end the previous year.

"Bryce is kind of the heart and soul," Zgunda said. "He plays both offense and defense. He's a good leader and more of a lead by example types."

Senior Justin DeHoff will be asked to step up to replace Hemmelgarn's playmaking downfield as a wide receiver. While DeHoff only had two receptions that went for 55 yards, he has been getting snaps on varsity since his freshman year. With more opportunities this season, Zgunda thinks that he

will step up into a leader role for the receiving core and increase production this season.

"He's got a lot of ability, very athletic and shifty with good speed," Zgunda said. "We didn't really get the ball to him too much last year, but I think he's gonna have a breakout year at wide receiver."

Joining him will be juniors Benson Ward and Ben Crouch, and sophomore Rhysin Blowers earning the tight end spot.

Junior Sean Bailey will be the Patriots' guy to sling the ball again this season. In 2022, he completed 52% of his throws for 1,058 yards and 10 touchdowns, getting picked off nine times.

See .500 page 7



Pictured, counter clockwise from above are:
Offensive skill players (front row) Rhysin Blowers, Sean Bailey, Justin DeHoff and A.J. Myers, and (back row) Bryce Wenk, Ben Crouch, Benson Ward and Isaac Dues.

Defensive backs (front row) Carter Fugiett, Justin DeHoff, Brady Jetmore and Grant Wendel, and (back row) James Brunswick, Lucas Strait, Ben Crouch, Benson Ward and Nick Laux.

Offensive linemen Cory Emery, Ryne Goldsworthy, Garrett Hime, Joe Hemmelgarn, Sean Carpenter, Drew Phenis and Joaquin Johnson.

Linebackers Joaquin Johnson, Leighton Brown, Carter Barton, A.J. Myers and Garrett Bennett.

Defensive linemen (front row) Sean Carpenter, Cory Emery, Bryce Wenk, Austin Schoenlein and Dre Phenis, and (back row) Rhysin Blowers, Garrett Hime, Joe Hemmelgarn, Isaac Dues and Aiden Phillips.



.500 ...

Continued from page 6
He also put in some work on the ground for 109 yards and three touchdowns.

Protecting him on the offensive line will be seniors Joe Hemmelgarn, Sean Carpenter, Garrett Hime and Ryne Goldsworthy, as well as junior Cory Emery. Zgunda pointed

out Hime as having taken over vocal leadership of the line this year.

A point of weakness for Jay County last season was its defense, giving up 32.6 points per game. With the core of his defense returning, Zgunda expects that part of the game to improve.

Isaac Dues and Wenk will make up the defensive ends while tackles Austin Schoenlein and Carpenter finish the line.

Jay County will have one safety back, that being DeHoff. The only sophomores starting on defense will be Carter Fugiett and Brady Jet-

more playing cornerback and Garrett Bennett at linebacker. The other three linebackers are juniors Lucas Strait, Carter Barton and Ward.

Zgunda said Jay County wants a winning season.

What will it take to make the jump?

"I don't know that there's

any secret to any of that," Zgunda said. "I think all that takes care of itself with maturity and playing time ... The biggest difference I see this summer and the first week of practices, I just think our guys are more confident in their abilities and then our team's ability overall."





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Boys tennis

Date	Opponent	Time
Saturday, Aug. 12	New Castle invite	9 a.m.
Monday, Aug. 14	Madison-Grant	5 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 15	Alexandria	5 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 17	Norwell	5 p.m.
Monday, Aug. 21	Union City	5 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 26	Muncie Central invite	10 a.m.
Thursday, Aug. 31	Marion	5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 5	Randolph Southern	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 7	Bluffton	5 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 9	Patriot Invitational	10 a.m.
Monday, Sept. 11	Blackford	5 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 12	Adams Central	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 14	Winchester	5 p.m.
Monday, Sept. 18	Bellmont	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 21	South Adams	5 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 23	Eastern Hancock	9 a.m.
Wednesday, Sept. 27	Sectional	TBA

Home matches in bold

Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School boys tennis team. From left are Luke Muhlenkamp, Isaac Miller, Gage Sims, Eli Dirksen and Jacob Monroe. Middle row are Blake Kahlig, Chase Spencer, Dylan Chalfant and Gabe Pinkerton. Back row are trainer Spencer Tonner, Liam Garringer, Sam Myers, Abraham Dirksen and coach Donald Gillespie.



Almost everyone back to defend title

The Patriots reclaimed the sectional title in 2022.

They are hoping to go back-to-back for the first time since 2007.

The Jay County High School boys tennis team returns six of seven starters from the team that earned the sectional title a year ago.

Seniors Simon and Austin Dirksen were the only players to graduate from the team in 2023, leaving a hole at No. 2 singles — Simon's position — and a valuable piece that could be placed into doubles matches.

"Losing Simon, you lost a quiet leader," said coach Donald Gillespie. "He's a guy that could stand out here for 20 minutes and play one point."

Simon clinched the sectional title for the Patriots by rallying against Ethan McHolland of Winchester for a 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory.

Austin Dirksen rotated with Isaac Miller and Luke Muhlenkamp in the No. 2 doubles position all throughout the year.

"Another key player people forget because he wasn't on the sectional team was Austin Dirksen," Gillespie said. "If Austin would have been at sectional time, we would have won sectional as well, because Austin's that kind of kid."

To replace Simon Dirksen at the No. 2, Gillespie plans to promote the 2023 graduate's brother, Eli, from No. 3 singles. Eli is the sole junior in the starting lineup, the rest being made of seniors.

Gillespie thinks Eli's strong serves and advanced backhand will help him carry over the success he found at the No. 3 position when he moves up.

Gillespie doesn't plan on touching the No. 1 positions, leaving the singles to Abraham Dirksen and the doubles to the duo of Sam Myers and Gage Sims.

"Last year, Abraham did a nice job at No. 1, he won 15 matches. No. 1 doubles team for Sam and Gage, they also won 15, 16 matches," Gillespie

said. "So we're strong in those two positions."

Gillespie is excited about how much stronger Abraham Dirksen has gotten and how that can play into his topspin-heavy swing, allowing him to nail players deep and potentially get the ball to bounce over the fence without giving his opponents a chance. He will also look for Abe to shut out some of his competition a lot quicker in the later parts of the season, ending matches within the hour.

The No. 1 doubles duo of Myers and Sims have had a slow start to summer workouts with Myers coming off of a sprained ankle he suffered in the Patriots' baseball sectional opener in May and Sims suffering a foot injury upon Myers' return.

Despite those issues, Gillespie isn't worried about the pair. Healthy again, the duo has gotten to work and are looking to improve their game at the net.

To begin the season, Isaac

Miller will move from No. 2 doubles to No. 3 singles. Gillespie expects Miller to have a lot of success in the new position because of all the offseason work he has put in and his ability to serve and volley, an unusual skill at the No.3 spot.

To fill the void at No. 2 doubles, first-year player Liam Garringer will join Luke Muhlenkamp. While Gillespie will experiment with different lineups in the first few weeks, he is optimistic that Garringer's athleticism will complement the steady play of Muhlenkamp to create a winning duo.

Returning so many players and having a senior-leaden team has created a palpable buzz within the program about the kind of season they can have.

"They can be special," Gillespie said. "I think you're going to see really good leadership. They went through it last year. They had the high and the lows and I think the sectional boosted their spirit."

The group is motivated by

last year's finish, with the returners pushing each other to get better and to take advantage of their experience and maturity in the sport.

"I'll be honest, I think we're gonna be really good," Myers said. "Having a senior-stacked team is a very big advantage that we can take advantage of, and just use it throughout the whole season and get a lot of wins, hopefully, an ACAC, the sectional and maybe a regional."

While the players have set high goals for themselves, Gillespie is focused on improving every match and growing them as young men by improving sportsmanship and playing with pride.

Ultimately their goals converge to play the best tennis by the end of the season.

"I want to play high quality tennis at the end of the season with high quality opponents," Gillespie said. "Because I know that's what my kids need to get a sectional title for us."

Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School volleyball team. Pictured front row from left are manager Leah Wenning, Heavyn Willoughby, Lani Muhlenkamp, Maggie Dillon, Brenna Haines and manager Zion Beiswanger. Back row are Paisley Fugiett, Laila Waddell, Mya Kunkler, Isabella Denton, Sophie Saxman and Brenna Bailey. Not pictured are managers Nick Lyons, Breanne Siegrist and Emily Young.



Spikers enter season with confidence

The Patriots will be a lot smaller this year.

They'll try to make up for it with their defense. They just need to believe.

The Jay County High School volleyball team lost some of its taller athletes to graduation, forcing the Patriots to focus on defense in 2023.

Hitters Madison Brunswick and Lauren Brewster and middle blocker Abby Fields all graduated from JCHS in 2022, taking two of the Patriots' three tallest players and a great jumper. Their departure also took the top two attackers as Fields racked up 203 kills and Brunswick added 169. Fields also led the team with 82 blocks.

"We lost a lot of size with Abby Fields and Madison Brunswick," coach Amy Dillon said. "Lauren (Brewster) wasn't a tall kid but she jumped big, so that was helpful for blocking."

The tallest player the Patriots return is Bella Denton, a 5'11" senior who will play as a middle blocker for Dillon. She was

Volleyball		
Date	Opponent	Time
Thursday, Aug. 10	Mississinewa	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 15	Madison-Grant	6 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 17	Delta	6 p.m.
Monday, Aug. 21	Celina	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 22	Winchester	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 29	Fort Recovery	6 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 31	Wapahani	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 5	Bluffton	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 7	Woodlan	6 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 9	Noblesville Invitational	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 12	Adams Central	6 p.m.
Monday, Sept. 18	Blackford	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 19	South Adams	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 21	Wes-Del	6 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 23	ACAC at S. Wells	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 26	Southern Wells	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 28	Heritage	6 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 30	Patriot Invite	9:30 a.m.
Monday, Oct. 2	Daleville	6 p.m.
Thursday, Oct. 5	New Castle	6 p.m.
Saturday, Oct. 7	Union County tourney	9 a.m.
Home matches in bold		

right behind Brunswick in kills with 162 and second in blocks with 55.

Joining Denton as a middle is first-year varsity player Mya Kunkler. So far, Dillon has been impressed with Kunkler's blocking ability and volleyball IQ, but wants to see her adjust

to the speed of varsity more as the year goes on. Maggie Dillon, a senior, will be the other outside hitter to fill in the front row.

Jay County will be running a 5-1 this season to play to the Patriots' strengths defensively and allow senior Sophie Sax-

man to stay on the court throughout the rotation. Saxman was the Patriots' main setter, totaling 385 assists last season.

Senior Brenna Haines will be the libero, subbing in and out for Denton and Kunkler. The four-year-varsity player led the 2022 Patriots with 461 digs and 52 aces.

"I think defensively we're probably going to be one of the better teams we've had in a few years," Dillon said. "Defensively we're a lot better if we run a 5-1."

One player that has impressed Dillon in the pre-season is Lani Muhlenkamp. Last year, Muhlenkamp was a setter on the JV team, but based on scrimmages and pre-season workouts, Dillon thinks Muhlenkamp can have a breakout season and is moving her to a defensive specialist spot to keep her on the floor.

"She has blown me away. I can't even believe where she is at," Dillon said. "Lani needs to be on the floor defensively."

Dillon will have another defensive specialist in the

starting rotation with Brenna Bailey patrolling the back row alongside Muhlenkamp and Haines. When Muhlenkamp and Bailey rotate into the front row, Paisley Fugiett and Laila Waddell will sub in for them.

Fugiett was JV's primary setter last season and is expected to become the main setter for varsity next season after Saxman graduates. While playing a 5-1 won't give Fugiett as many reps as a setter as a 6-2 would, Dillon thinks having her rotate in for Muhlenkamp will help balance out the experience on the floor while getting Fugiett up to speed.

The Patriots had a slow start to their season last year, dropping five of their first six matches en route to a 9-23 record. Despite not having the best record, Jay County made some noise in the playoffs as it swept Centerville in the semifinal round before falling to No. 10 Delta in the championship. Early in the season, Delta blew the Patriots out of the water, but a growing belief in the

team kept things close in their rematch.

"It was a roller coaster," Dillon said. "They definitely had the potential to beat a lot of teams. I'm not sure I had a lot of believers on my core."

"I do think that we grew a lot ... It was really fun when we got to that game. And it was like, 'You guys can beat them,' and they played like they believed they could beat them, but that took the whole season to get there."

Starting the season with that belief will help the Patriots this year as opposed to trying to develop that attitude as the season goes along. Dillon has already seen the girls mesh together and have positive chemistry.

"I'm really excited about this year," Dillon said. "Personality wise, I think that we all mesh very, very well. We have a lot of kids on this court this year that don't give up. I think that they will pull each other in that way, and I really look for us to be more successful earlier in the season and later in the season."



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Pictured is the 2023 Jay County High School girls soccer team. Front row from left are Emma Hatzell, Jocelyn Minch, Naroa Zugasti Goicoechea, Krishna Flores, Aixa Lopez, Jayla Hueskamp and Finley Hatzell. Middle row are Taven Bentley, Ellie Wendel, Ariel Beiswanger, Tessa Frazee, Raylah Newton, Maleah Parsons and Sophia Sprunger. Back row are assistant coach Amber Houck, Kadence Allred, Jenna Dues, Molly Muhlenkamp, Angelina Clairday, Meredith Dirksen, Morgan DeHoff and coach Kendra Muhlenkamp.



Muhlenkamp going with fluid formation

The Patriots graduated some key players from each position.

A new group of upper-classmen are primed to step up and fill the absence.

Kendra Muhlenkamp will have her work cut out for her in her second year at the helm of the Jay County High School girls soccer team after losing a trio of seniors.

The Patriots lost their primary striker in Mara Bader, the captain of the field in Gabi Bilbrey and a key defensive player in Alizabeth Stotler.

Bader and Bilbrey made up over 67% of the team's scoring last season as Bader had a breakout year scoring 37 goals as she broke both the single-season and career records for goals. Bilbrey was second on the squad with 12.

The duo also held the top two spots in the assist column, with Bilbrey dishing out 25 and Bader adding 10.

"Just like every year, (losing) seniors is always going to have an effect," Muhlenkamp said. "It's just losing anyone, even if they weren't a star player on the team. It's

Girls soccer		
Date	Opponent	Time
Monday, Aug. 14	Richmond	6 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 17	Heritage	6 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 20	Heritage	2 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 26	Woodlan	10 a.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 29	South Adams	5 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 31	Norwell	5 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 2	Coldwater	10 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 5	Wapahani	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 7	Oak Hill	6 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 9	South Adams	10 a.m.
Thursday, Sept. 14	Bellmont	5:30 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 16	Woodlan	10 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 19	Delta	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 21	Yorktown	7 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 26	Blackford	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 28	Muncie Central	5 p.m.
Home games in bold		

an adjustment every year.

"But just like Mara had a breakout year, anyone can have that type of year if they really want it."

Beyond the scoring numbers, Jay County loses two high-IQ players that understood spacing on offense and could help direct traffic on the pitch.

"Last year, I had really experienced players that were able to carry their knowledge on to others on the field," Muhlenkamp said. "It is really important for players to be able to do

that. So I feel like slowly our leaders are understanding how important being a leader is."

Some of the leaders Muhlenkamp referenced include 2023 captains Morgan DeHoff, Jayla Huelskamp and Molly Muhlenkamp. That group will give the Patriots a leader at each of the three levels on the field.

DeHoff — who was fourth in goals with six — will take over as the No. 1 forward in place of Bader to lead the forwards on the offensive end of the field.

Molly Muhlenkamp will spend a bulk of the time in the midfield, but will get the chance to move with the flow of the game, taking advantage of her coach's philosophy for position fluidity. Huelskamp will be shifted back and forth between being a forward and a defender depending on who the Patriots play. When Jay County faces a fast team with dominant players, she will be shifted to help protect the goal while getting the opportunity to be a striker when she isn't needed along the back line.

Defense will be key for Jay County.

The Patriots return starting goalie Angel Clairday, who had 80 saves during last season and gave up 20 goals. She only gave up multiple goals in four of the team's 15 games while holding shutouts in seven contests.

"This year, Angel has her confidence where it needs to be to accomplish the task," Muhlenkamp said.

Joining Huelskamp on the back line will be Ellie Wendel and Emma Hatzell. Muhlenkamp pointed out her excitement

for the group, noting that Wendel will be an effective leader for the defense and how much Hatzell has improved since last season.

Another key player the Patriots return is sophomore Aixa Lopez. She is the returning player with the most goals from the 2022 campaign, with 10. Lopez will take over Bilbrey's role of patrolling the middle. Lopez has some experience with the position as she filled in when Bilbrey needed a break last season.

"She has the skill. She has the IQ, it's just the confidence," Muhlenkamp said. "When she gets that, she'll be hard to beat."

Two more returners who will log some extra minutes are Jenna Dues and Sophia Sprunger. Both girls played in all 15 contests last season, but will look to be inserted as starters more permanently.

The Patriots also have three newcomers that can make an impact right away as well. Junior Meredith Dirksen came out for the soccer team after spending the past two fall seasons with the volleyball program. Her length and athleticism

make her a prime candidate to be utilized at multiple positions depending on what the team needs in a given match.

Muhlenkamp also expects freshmen Ariel Beiswanger and Tessa Frazee to work into the rotation. While their roles are still uncertain, they will likely find themselves somewhere in the midfield.

To complement the cast of returning players, Muhlenkamp is looking into a 2-3-2-3 formation and letting the players naturally space out and move from that starting position.

"We have to be able to control the ball in the middle really, really well," Muhlenkamp said. "Just to provide more help in the middle, and not try to stay offensively stacked."

While the success the team found last year brings some pressure, Muhlenkamp is focusing her players on keeping things simple by doing what they can to improve every day as athletes and even better humans.

"Our motto this year is, 'When you win, you win. When you lose, you learn,' and we're sticking by that," she said.