

2022 Jay County High School fall sports preview



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Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School girls soccer team. Front row from left are Finley Hatzell, Emma Hatzell, Sophia Sprunger, Alba Badajoz Dominguez, Jayla Huelskamp, Myra Lopez and Madison Springer. Second row are Raylah Newton, Elizabeth Wendel, Peyton Shannon, Angelina Clariday, Aubrey Millspaugh, Alizabeth Stotler, Morgan DeHoff and Aixa Lopez. Third row are Paige Mumbower, Audrey Muhlenkamp, Molly Muhlenkamp, Gabriela Bilbrey, Jenna Dues, Mara Bader and Daysha Mumbower. Back row are assistant coaches Alex Bader and Sophie Bader, trainer Spencer Tonner, coach Kendra Muhlenkamp, assistant coach Amber Houck and manager Destiny Mcmanus.

Coach seeks to develop passion for game

The Patriots won two-thirds of their games.

They made it to the sectional championship.

They bring back almost everyone who saw major playing time last season.

That all makes for a fun formula for first-year Jay County High School girls soccer coach Kendra Muhlenkamp as her team opens its season.

Leading the returning players are the top two scorers from 2021 — seniors Mara Bader (22 goals, eight assists) and Gabi Bilbrey (17 goals, seven assists). Not surprisingly, they will both be captains alongside junior Molly Muhlenkamp.

While lineups may shift, Kendra Muhlenkamp is looking at playing a 3-1-3-3 format with Bilbrey as the “1,” to take advantage of her skills to control the game.

“Gabi Bilbrey, she is our strongest player on the

Girls soccer		
Date	Opponent	Time
Monday, Aug. 15	Richmond	5:30 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 18	Heritage	6 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 20	Burris	11 a.m.
Saturday, Aug. 27	Woodlan	11 a.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 30	South Adams	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 1	Norwell	5 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 6	Wapahani	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 8	Oak Hill	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 15	Bellmont	5 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 17	Centerville	10 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 20	Delta	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 22	Yorktown	7 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 27	Blackford	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 29	Muncie Central	5 p.m.
Home games in bold		

field,” the coach said. “(I want to) position her in a way that she can be at her highest potential to help all of her teammates for us to be successful.

“She’s our most versatile player. She knows how to set up her teammates and also score.”

Sophomore Morgan DeHoff — she was No. 3 in goals last season with six — and freshman Aixa Lopez will join Bader as strikers on the front line.

With that group up front and Jayla Huelskamp, Jenna Dues and Molly Muhlenkamp in the mid-

field, Kendra Muhlenkamp is pushing her players to understand that positions are fluid.

“We have to be able to use the whole field,” she said. “I’ve really emphasized cross passes and moving the ball, moving our position as much as possible ... just to allow the girls to know they’re not in a set position. In soccer, we have to do triangle passes, we have to work together, we have to talk in order for us to keep the ball on our side and to score.”

Two starters — Ellie Wendel and Alizabeth Stotler — are back to lead the defense with freshman Emma Hatzell likely to join them.

The biggest loss from last season’s lineup is goalie Tricia Ison, who saw the bulk of the action. Her backup, junior Angel Clairday, will take over between the posts.

On the defensive side of the ball, attitude will play a key role.

“We’ve really worked on being aggressive in practice,” said Muhlenkamp. “In the past ... we’ve shied away from the ball. On the defensive end, we have to be more aggressive.”

The coach said she also sees Sophie Sprunger, Raylah Newton, Paige Mumbower and Madison Springer as key contributors off the bench.

As the Patriots, who finished 10-5-1 last season, get going this year, they are looking to reset the balance of the Allen County Athletic Conference.

Winning the ACAC used to be a foregone conclusion for JCHS. It had a 16-game conference winning streak and earned five straight championships from 2015 through 2019. (Four of those came with

Kendra Muhlenkamp, a 2019 Jay County graduate, on the field.)

But South Adams has won each of the last two ACAC crowns.

The Patriots hope to get a new conference streak started and have a chance at their first sectional championship since 2014. To do so, they’ll have to find a way to upend Hamilton Heights, the team that beat them 9-0 in last season’s title game.

Just as important as those goals, Kendra Muhlenkamp said, is the motivation behind them.

“We’ve been incorporating as much team bonding as possible,” she said. “My philosophy behind coaching is passion drives success. If the girls aren’t there to have fun then they’re not going to win games. And even if they win games, it’s not going to feel as good if that passion isn’t behind it.”



Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School boys soccer team. Front row from left are Zander Hudson, Mario Ardizzone, Levi Muhlenkamp, Cayden Buckland, Brenden Runyon and Peyton Yowell. Middle row are Garrett Hidy, David Keen, Kaleb Meadows, Osmar Gonzalez, Gavin Young and David Plummer. Back row are coach Bobby Ruiz, Josh Dowlen, Alan Ortiz, Carter Link, Trevin Dunnington, Brayden Collins and Kaleb Coppock.

Inexperienced squad will look to fill voids

The good news is two of the top three scorers are back.

The bad news? The bulk of those who played alongside them are gone.

The Jay County High School boys soccer team graduated eight seniors from its 2021 squad, including its leading scorer, midfield anchor, goalie and most of its defense.

“We are low on experience,” said first-year coach Bobby Ruiz, who was Brad Horn’s assistant last season. “It’s going to be a brand new team.”

“I expect a lot from them. I told them from the very get-go ... we have to man up and pull this out. ... We have to try to fill all the empty space that the seniors left last season.”

Gone from the 2021 squad are leading scorer Cristian Marentes, who

Boys soccer		
Date	Opponent	Time
Tuesday, Aug. 16	Muncie Central	5 p.m.
Monday, Aug. 22	Woodlan	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 23	New Castle	5:30 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 25	Delta	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 1	Norwell	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 8	Yorktown	5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 13	Richmond	5:30 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 15	Bellmont	5 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 17	Centerville	10 a.m.
Monday, Sept. 19	Heritage	5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 27	Blackford	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 29	Liberty Christian	5:30 p.m.
Saturday, Oct. 1	Oak Hill	10 a.m.
Home games in bold		

tallied a third of the team’s 31 goals and dished out a team-best eight assists, midfielder Gavin Muhlenkamp, goalie Ian Ruiz, Jayden Maymi, Dylan Knap-schafer, Adam Muhlenkamp, Bryce Collins and Juan Pablo Wiggins.

With just one defen-sive player — Josh

Dowlen — back in the starting lineup, Ruiz plans to build around him.

“He’s my experienced guy,” the coach said. “He’s my safety guy.”

“He showed that he was a leader last season. ... He was an asset. ... He’s strong physically, fast and willing to do

what it takes to keep the other team out.”

Jay County would typically use a four-player defensive line in a diamond format with the sweeper (Dowlen) in the back. But with less experience, Ruiz is looking at moving to a five-man defense — three on the back line with two in front of them — against stronger foes. That look would have Trevin Dunnington and Gavin Young flanking Dowlen with Cayden Buckland and Osmar Gonzalez in front of them.

“When we see a strong team we’re going to try to play a 3-2,” said Ruiz. “Why? Because all four of them, they are new (varsity) to that position to begin with.”

That group of defend-ers will play in front of Kaleb Coppock. As the backup to Ruiz last season, he saw action in

three varsity games and allowed one goal while making four saves.

“I have confidence in him,” said Ruiz. “Last year, even though Ian was our main goal-keeper, any time we put him there he proved that he could take the spot.”

Building up from the defense, the Patriots will use Dylan Marentes and Carter Link as center midfielders with Caleb Meadows and Brayden Collins on the outside.

Levi Muhlenkamp will play the striker position, though, like the defense, the offense will shift depending on the opponent and situation.

“Levi Muhlenkamp is 100% a striker,” said Ruiz of the sophomore who was second on the team with seven goals last season.

“(Dylan) can be your striker but also he can be your midfielder,” he

added. “The quarter-back, if you want to call it that position. He’s the quarterback of soccer. He can lead and make the changes of the game as well as play striker.”

Dylan Marentes recorded five goals and five assists in 2021.

Even with all the expe-rience last season, the Patriots (8-5-1) were a low-scoring team. They averaged 2.2 goals per game but were able to lean on their defense, recording four shutouts and limiting opponents to a single goal six times.

They bowed out of the sectional tournament with a 2-1 loss to Delta. And they know the Eagles and two-time de-fending sectional champion Yorktown will be at the top of the group that also includes Blackford, Eastbrook, New Castle, Centerville and Mississinewa.



Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School boys cross country team. Front row from left are Joey Belda, Darren Fisher, Joseph Boggs, Max Klopfenstein and Lukes Powers. Back row are Wyatt Kunkler, Isaac Kunkler, Sebastian Solis, Owen Ransom and coach Bruce Wood.



Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School girls cross country team. From left are Alexis Sibray, Willow Hardy, coach Bruce Wood, Courtney Harris and Paityn Wendel.

Teams look to build toward regional berths

The only Patriot who competed at the regional last season is gone.

Her father is hoping to help those who remain take that next step.

Jay County High School's cross country teams are both light on tournament experience — and in the girls' case, any kind of high school experience — as they head into the 2022 season.

Lindy Wood, the daughter of coach Bruce Wood, was the lone Patriot to advance to the regional last season, taking sixth at the sectional meet. The then-senior, who is now running at the University of St. Francis, went on to a 22nd-place finish in the regional meet and capped her career in 106th at the semi-state.

Across both teams, Sebastian Solis is the top returning runner after he narrowly missed joining Wood at the regional meet last season. He finished 39th overall and 11th among those on non-quali-

Cross country

Date	Opponent	Time
Saturday, Aug. 27	Celina Rotary Invite	9 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 10	Rand. Southern Invite	9 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 17	Yorktown Invitational	10 a.m.
Saturday, Sept. 24	Delta Invitational	8:30 a.m.
Saturday, Oct. 1	ACAC at Adams Cent.	11 a.m.
Saturday, Oct. 8	Sectional	10:30 a.m.
All meets are away		

fying teams. (The top 10 on non-qualifying teams earn regional berths.) With a time of 20 minutes, 10 seconds, he was seven seconds behind final qualifier Brock Hays of Winchester.

"Sebastian I'm certain ran before we even started our preseason program in June," said Bruce Wood. "We had a program that the guys who were serious about running started on their own. And I know Sebastian was doing half-marathon training before that even. So I know he was getting the miles. I know he has the base."

The top returning girls runner is junior Willow Hardy. She posted the No. 3 time for the Patriots at the sectional meet, finishing 48th in 27:03.

Jay County will be looking at a couple of freshmen — Joseph Boggs and Alexis Sibray — to make an immediate impact.

Boggs finished second in the Allen County Athletic Conference junior high meet last season after taking third place as a seventh grader. In June, he ran in the Nike Outdoor Nationals track meet in Eugene, Oregon, placing

22nd in the boys middle school mile.

Wood said he expects Boggs to challenge Solis for the top spot in the lineup.

"He and Sebastian Solis are really tight right now," the coach said. "One workout one will look a little bit quicker, the other workout it'll flip."

Solis ran a career-best 19:01 last season at the ACAC Championships.

"And I am certain that Joseph can run at least in there," said Wood. "I feel like he can definitely be right with Sebastian and hopefully after a race or two we'll have two guys in the mid 18s."

Sibray, like Boggs, had a strong ACAC meet last season. She finished in sixth place after taking fourth a year earlier.

"Alexis has been a good middle school runner," said Wood. "Of course, that's a 3K. So we're not real sure where she's at with a 5K. I think (she and Hardy) will be really, really close to

each other when we first get started. Hopefully, they'll push each other."

Two other newcomers round out the small girls team — Wood said he's hopeful a few more runners can be recruited — in freshman Paityn Wendel and sophomore Courtney Harris. Wendel followed Sibray as the No. 2 runner for Jay County at the ACAC junior high race last year in 14th place. Harris, whose brother was the No. 2 runner for the Patriot boys in the 2021 sectional, is a newcomer to the sport.

"If we can get these girls in close to the 22s and the 23s this year, we're building, then that's something where if we can pick up another couple girls ... then hopefully we'll have a team that can compete in the sectional," said Wood. "We just need to get those girls to compete in races, continually to improve. We want to PR at sectional."

In addition to Dustin Harris, the boys team graduated Seth Wilson and

Aaron Funkhouser from its 2021 sectional top five.

Owen Ransom, the No. 5 runner at the sectional meet, returns along with Darren Fisher and Isaac Kunkler. Senior Wyatt Kunkler is back with the team for the first time since his freshman season, and freshmen Max Klopfenstein and Will Hawbaker will also look to crack the top seven.

After finishing well out of the mix for a regional berth last season — the JCHS boys were 11th out of 12 sectional teams, with the top five advancing — Wood is hopeful they can make strides this season.

"I thought we had a team that with some work last year that we could get into a spot where we could get close to getting the team to regional," he said. "And I think this team is equally as talented as that team and possibly a little more upside. ..."

"I'm hoping that we can compete for that top-five spot in sectional."



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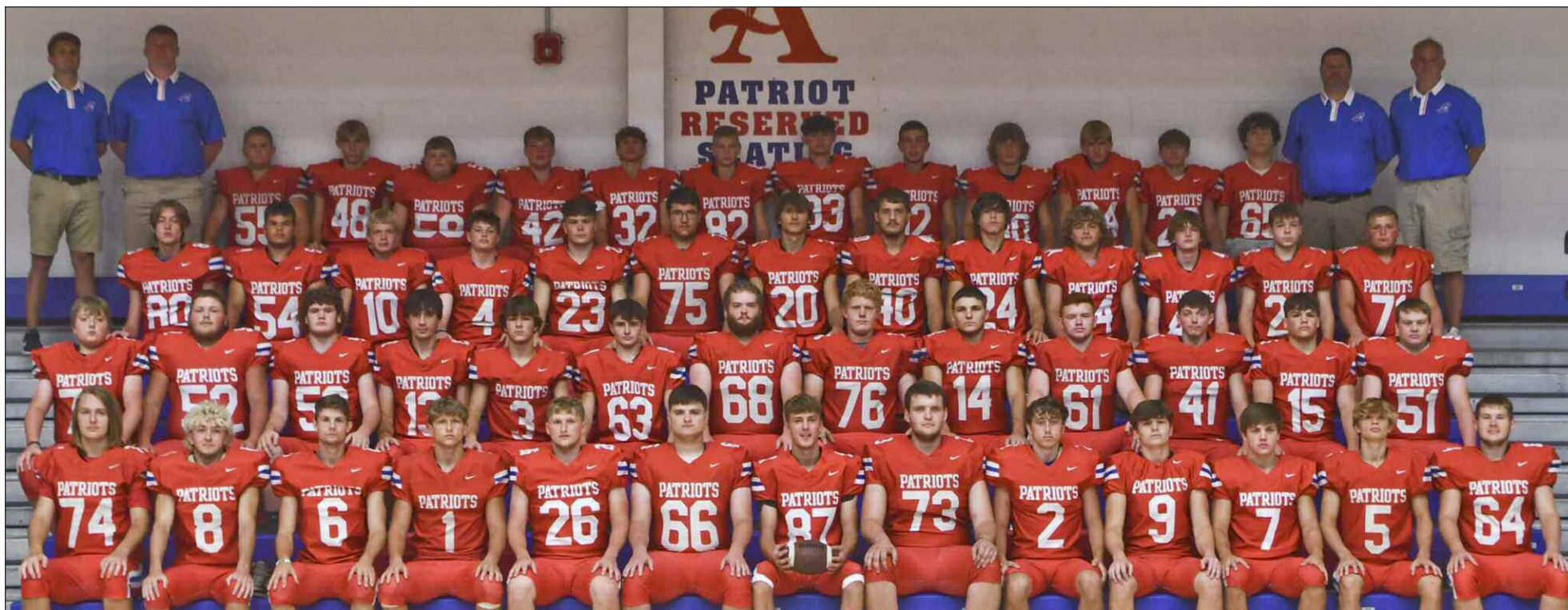
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Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School football team. Front row from left are Garrett Hime, Daidrick Retz, Sheldon Minch, Cameron Smitley, Kadin Ridenour, Hunter Young, Patrick Hemmelgarn, Joseph Kunk, Brady Davis, Trey Nichols, Christian Runkle, Ethan Reiley and Ryne Goldsworthy. Second row are Grayson Swoveland, Austin Schoenlein, Rhysin Blowers, Lucas Strait, Justin DeHoff, Logan Orso, Conner Specht, Joe Hemmelgarn, Bryce Wenk, Sean Carpenter, Tommy Adkins Jr., Carter Barton and Corey Emery. Third row are Gradin Swoveland, Joaquin Johnson, James Brunswick, Sean Bailey, A.J. Myers, Zedrian Vazquez, Benson Ward, Isaac Dues, Vasin Ridgway, Cody McFarland, Quinten Mackey, Jacob Robinson and Matthew Fisher. Back row are assistant coaches Tanner Koch and Michael Schlechty, Brasen Glassford, Cole Carpenter, Jakob Lawrence, Garrett Bennett, Grant Wendel, Max Dues, Aiden Phillips, Nicholas Laux, Brady Jetmore, Tyler Brunswick, Carter Fugiett, Aidan Baker, assistant coach Steve Boozier and coach Grant Zgunda.

Zgunda: Talent there for turn-around

By winning three games in 2021, the Patriots outperformed the previous two seasons — combined.

Still, coach Grant Zgunda acknowledges the wide gap in the losses.

The Jay County High School football team went 3-7 last season with wins over Blackford, Southern Wells and Bluffton, all by double-figures. But their seven losses all came by at least 24 points, including a 49-0 blasting by Mississinewa in the sectional.

To build on those three wins after going 1-18 over the previous two campaigns and close the gap against other rivals, the Patriots need to believe it's possible, Zgunda said.

Football		
Date	Opponent	Time
Friday, Aug. 19	Blackford	7 p.m.
Friday, Aug. 26	Huntington North	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 2	Southern Wells	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 9	Adams Central	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 16	Bluffton	7 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 23	Woodlan	7:30 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 30	South Adams	7 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 7	Lapel	7 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 14	Heritage	7 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 21	Sectional	TBA
Home games in bold		

"The games we lost last year, we've got a lot of ground to make up," said the coach who is in his second year with JCHS after a long career at Delta. "Those games weren't close. I have no doubt we can do it ... It's just we've got to stay healthy and all the little

things that go along with it.

"The main thing has been just to get out of the mindset that any time a bad play happens to hang the head. I just feel like this team, I think we're going to be OK. ... We've got to have confidence and believe in

what we're doing. I think we're getting there. ... These guys have worked hard. They're coachable. They want to win. They want to be good. And I feel like we've got the talent to get that turned around."

If that is to happen, it will come with new leaders.

The Patriots lost 2021 offensive catalysts Quinn Faulkner and Sam Dunlavy to graduation. Faulkner led the team in both rushing and receiving with more than 1,000 yards and 13 touchdowns on the ground to go along with 19 catches for 145 yards and a TD through the air. Dunlavy passed for 375 yards and four TDs.

On the defensive side, they also lost their top

tackler — Qadon Ferrell — to graduation.

Zgunda is looking to rise to the occasion. He'll be the lead runner out of the backfield.

"With what we're trying to do this year — we changed up our offense a little bit — he'll be a big factor for us getting a lot of carries," the coach said. "We've gone to a power scheme with a tight end. I think he's going to have a big year. He's healthy. He's strong. He's worked really hard."

And he will be the general of the defense from his linebacker spot.

"He's just a hitter," said Zgunda. "He gets to the ball quickly. He's a good tackler. He plays with emotion. He's got it all. He's a typical linebacker."

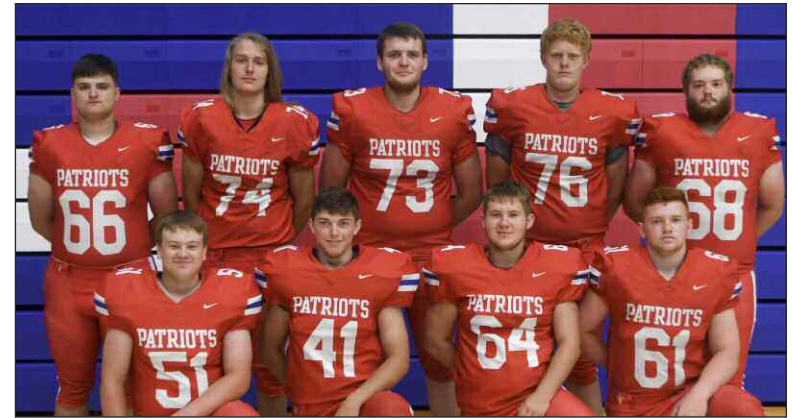
On offense, Ridenour will run behind an offensive line of Joseph Kunk, Garrett Hime, Sean Carpenter, Ryne Goldsworthy and either Hunter Young or Conner Specht. A.J. Myers will be the fullback, with Bryce Wenk at tight end.

There will be a long list of receivers — it includes Patrick Hemmelgarn, Justin DeHoff, Cameron Smitley, Trey Nichols, Brady Davis, Christian Runkle and Ethan Reiley — for quarterbacks Shawn Bailey, a sophomore, and Nick Laux, a freshman, to throw to. (As of Friday, Zgunda said the QB position is unsettled and that both players are likely to see the field this year.)

See **Turn-around** page 10



Pictured are the varsity quarterbacks, running backs, receivers and tight ends for the 2022 Jay County High School football team. Front row from left are Corey Emery, Logan Orso, Ryne Goldsworthy and Sean Carpenter. Back row are Hunter Young, Garrett Hime, Joseph Kunk, Joe Hemmelgarn and Conner Specht.



Pictured are the varsity offensive linemen for the 2022 Jay County High School football team. Front row from left are Corey Emery, Logan Orso, Ryne Goldsworthy and Sean Carpenter. Back row are Hunter Young, Garrett Hime, Joseph Kunk, Joe Hemmelgarn and Conner Specht.



Pictured below are the varsity linebackers and defensive backs for the 2022 Jay County High School football team. Front row from left are Trey Nichols, Ethan Reiley, James Brunswick, Garrett Bennett, Justin DeHoff, Daidrick Retz, Carter Barton, Christian Runkle and A.J. Myers. Back row are Isaac Dues, Lucas Strait, Benson Ward, Vasin Ridgway, Kadin Ridenour, Cameron Smitley, Brady Davis and Patrick Hemmelgarn.

Pictured are the defensive linemen for the 2022 Jay County High School football team. Front row from left are Matthew Fisher, Jakob Lawrence, Corey Emery, Austin Schoenlein, Cody McFarland and Rhysin Blowers. Back row are Grayson Swoveland, Bryce Wenk, Joseph Kunk, Joe Hemmelgarn, Conner Specht and Zedrian Vazquez.





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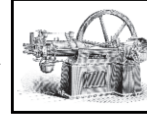
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Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School boys tennis team. Front row from left are Gabe Pinkerton, Austin Dirksen, Gage Sims and Dylan Chalfant. Middle row are Eli Dirksen, Isaac Miller and Simon Dirksen. Back row are Blake Kahlig, Luke Muhlenkamp, Sam Myers and Abraham Dirksen.

Boys tennis

<u>Date</u>	<u>Opponent</u>	<u>Time</u>
Saturday, Aug. 13	New Castle invite	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 16	Alexandria	5 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 18	Norwell	5 p.m.
Monday, Aug. 22	Union City	5 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 27	Muncie Central invite	10 a.m.
Thursday, Sept. 1	Marion	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 6	Randolph Southern	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 8	Bluffton	5 p.m.
Monday, Sept. 12	Blackford	5 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 13	Adams Central	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 15	Winchester	5 p.m.
Monday, Sept. 19	Bellmont	5 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 22	South Adams	5 p.m.
Wednesday, Sept. 28	Sectional	TBA

Home matches in bold

Dirksens dominate the Jay County lineup

Don't know the Patriots' roster?

No problem.

Just guess "Dirksen" and there'll be a 50% chance you'll be right.

The entirety of the Jay County High School boys tennis team's singles lineup will be made up of Dirksens, with another looking to see time at doubles.

Following the graduation of 2021 No. 1 singles player Crosby Heniser, Abraham Dirksen will move up to the No. 1 singles spot from No. 2, his cousin Simon Dirksen will jump to No. 2 from No. 3 and Simon's brother Eli will step into No. 3 after playing at the top junior varsity spot last season.

Abraham Dirksen, a

junior, earned one of the Patriots' two points in their 3-2 sectional loss to Union City in the championship match last season. He dominated the first set and then held on to finish off the sweep 6-2, 7-5.

He steps into a difficult position, as coach Donald Gillespie said 80% of the No. 1 players from teams on the JCHS schedule are back from last season.

"He's got some experience," he added. "He was very effective at No. 2 last year, won some big matches for us. The conference match against Bluffton was a big one for him.

"He realizes No. 1 is a different story."

(The win against Bluffton's Drew Pressiere came after Dirksen dropped the first set 6-1. He rallied for a 1-6, 7-5, 6-4 victory.)

Simon Dirksen, a senior, had Jay County's other win in the sectional championship match. He topped Union City's Jude Connor 6-2, 6-3.

As he heads into his final year as a Patriot, he's working on improving his serve and overall game to contend at the No. 2 singles position.

"Simon is one of those who likes to get the ball back," said Gillespie. "He's a human backboard. However ... we're working more on, him and Abraham together, getting the speed of the

ball to go quicker. No. 2 is going to be quicker than No. 3.

"Simon is going to be hitting the ball a lot harder."

Eli Dirksen, a sophomore, plays a similar style to that of his brother, though with a stronger serve and not quite as much consistency.

Junior Sam Myers is locked in at the No. 1 doubles spot after playing there with his brother, Gavin, last season. With Gavin graduated, he'll now team up with Gage Simms, who saw action as part of the team's No. 2 doubles rotation last season.

Looking to fill out the lineup at No. 2 doubles

are another Dirksen — Austin — as well as Luke Muhlenkamp and Isaac Miller.

"We're really improving on our doubles play, I hope," said Gillespie. "I'm working with teams this year earlier on where they can play together more.

"Working with your partner, coming to the net at the same time, staying back, a lot of communication. Last year I didn't think we communicated well. ... We're hoping that will change this year."

The Patriots are coming off of an 11-8 season in 2021. They were hoping for back-to-back sectional titles for the first time since 2007 but came up short against the Indi-

ans. (The championship has been passed around the four-team group in recent years with Winchester winning in 2019, the Patriots in 2020 and Union City last season.)

Reclaiming the crown won't be easy as rivals bring back large portions of their lineups from last season.

"Improvement every match at every position," said Gillespie of his expectations. "Be very competitive in the conference. ... Sectional, I don't want to let that get away. It's going to be harder this year because Winchester brings six of theirs back. Union City, they've got a lot of theirs back. Sectional would be nice to win."

Turn-around ...

Continued from page 8

The team is shifting to more of a power scheme with a pistol formation. (The quarterback takes a short shotgun snap with the fullback offset and the tailback behind him.)

“Just the overall personnel we have fits it, I think,” said Zgunda. “We were kind of trying to figure it out last year. ...

“Last year we went the run-and-shoot route and by the end of the year we were running a lot of pro and a lot of power. That’s where we’re at. With our big offensive linemen and with Ridenour being a 6-foot, 200-pound running back, we want to be able to step up.”

The coach said he still plans to throw the ball, but a lot of what the Patriots do will be dependent on the defense — seven or fewer in the box, run; eight or more in the box, pass.

The defense will also get a new look as the Patriots shift to a 3-4. It will feature Wenk as the nose tackle with a rotation of Corey Emery, Hemmelgarn, Kunk and Young alongside him.

Joining Ridenour at linebacker will be Garrett Bennett, Isaac Dues, Benson

Ward and Patrick Hemmelgarn. Safeties are Brady Davis and Cameron Smitley, with Trey Nichols and Lucas Strait at the corners. (Runkle and DeHoff will be in the rotation as defensive backs as well.)

The new formation, which will feature a Cover 2 on the back end, allows the defense to adjust more easily as it faces power offensive sets

early and more wide-open looks later in the season.

“You’ve got to be flexible, definitely,” said Zgunda. “We feel like with our three down guys we’ve got the size to take on the run but then we’ve got a lot of good athletes who can run around and make plays on the outside.”

Captains along with Ridenour are Kunk, Davis and Nichols.

Looking back at the losses last season, Zgunda notes that some of the problems came from self-inflicted wounds — mistakes that can be eliminated. He said believes overall execution will take a step forward and that the Patriots have the opportunity to get to .500 for the first time since 2016.

“We’re up number-wise,” he said. “We picked up some

guys. The attitude has been great. I just feel like right now we’re in a good spot to try to get this thing turned around. ...

“I’m excited. I really am. ... There’s just something about these guys. They’re just ballers. They like playing. They don’t seem to care about who’s getting the ball and who’s not. So far they’ve been a fun group to coach.”

‘The attitude has been great. I just feel like right now we’re in a good spot to try to get this thing turned around. ... I’m excited. I really am. ... There’s just something about these guys.’

—Grant Zgunda, JCHS football coach

Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School girls golf team. From left are assistant coach Cindy Denney, Ellie Klarer, Stacy Fomina, Maddy Snow, Meah Devoe, Rosealynne Smith and coach Marvin Buckner. (The team’s preview story and schedule were printed in the July 30 edition of The Commercial Review.)

All stories and photos in this section are by Ray Cooney

ON THE COVER: Pictured on the cover are Jay County High School girls soccer player Gabi Bilbrey and boys tennis player Sam Myers.






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Volleyball

Date	Opponent	Time
Thursday, Aug. 11	Mississinewa	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 16	Madison-Grant	6 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 18	Delta	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 23	Winchester	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Aug. 30	Fort Recovery	5:30 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 1	Wapahani	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 6	Bluffton	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 8	Woodlan	6 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 10	Noblesville Invitational	10 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 13	Adams Central	6 p.m.
Monday, Sept. 19	Blackford	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 20	South Adams	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 22	Wes-Del	6 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 24	ACAC at Heritage	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 27	Southern Wells	6 p.m.
Thursday, Sept. 29	Heritage	6 p.m.
Saturday, Oct. 1	Patriot Invite	9:30 a.m.
Monday, Oct. 3	Daleville	6 p.m.
Saturday, Oct. 8	Union County tourney	9 a.m.
Home matches in bold		

Pictured is the 2022 Jay County High School volleyball team. Front row from left are Maggie Dillon, Laila Waddell, Sophia Saxman, Lauren Brewster and Brenna Haines. Middle row are Abbie Fields, Madison Brunswick, Isabella Denton and Joske Herndon. Back row are coach Amy Dillon, Heavyn Willoughby, Nick Lyons, Leah Wenning and assistant coach Michelle Bennett. Not pictured are assistant coach Ava Kahlig and managers Zion Beiswanger and Breanne Siegrist.

Spikers face a more manageable sectional

There's really not a question as to who will play and who will be on the bench.

With just nine players on the varsity squad, all of the Patriots will see plenty of time on the court.

The roster breakdown is pretty simple for the Jay County High School volleyball team as it starts its season. Its lone returning back-row player is the libero and coach Amy Dillon has two players each as middle hitters, left sides, right sides and setters.

While there is a lack of overall experience along the back line, the one Patriot who is returning has already proven to be top-notch.

Brenna Haines, a junior, led the Allen County Athletic Conference in digs with 451 last season. (The Patriots lost their No. 2 through 5 players — Grace Brewster, Izzy Rodgers, Hannah Muh-

lenkamp and Kylie Klopfenstein — in terms of digs.) She is also Jay County's top returning server after connecting at 93.7% last season and matching 2022 graduate Madison Dirksen with a team-best 37 aces.

"Brenna has the thought in her head that there is no ball she can't get to," said Dillon. "She sees the court really well. She talks to everyone while she's on the court. There is always something coming out of her mouth, the whole time she is on the court, the whole time she is on the bench. She just has a really great energy about her."

The rest of the lineup is as follows:

Middle hitters — Abbie Fields and Bella Denton

Left sides — Madison Brunswick and Maggie Dillon

Right sides — Laila Waddell and Lauren Brewster

Setters — Sophie Saxman and Joske Herndon

With Dirksen and her team-high 282 kills and 65 blocks gone from a year ago, Fields returns as the top attacker. She recorded 172 kills last season and matched Dirksen's block total.

Brunswick had 105 kills and 47 blocks a year ago and Brewster finished with 54 kills and 45 blocks.

"Abbie is just very athletic," said Dillon. "She is a naturally good blocker. She sees that really well and just has a really great, quick offense. ...

"Really all three of my seniors could play anywhere on the front row," she added of Fields, Brunswick and Brewster. "All three of them were in the top 10 for blocking last year. That's huge for us."

At the setter position, Saxman (75 assists) and Herndon (30) played behind 2021 sen-

ior Rodgers, who totaled 494 assists.

Planning to have both setters on the court in a 6-2 format this year, Jay County is looking to pick up the pace.

"We've really, really talked about running a quicker offense," Dillon said. "We want to depend on our block a lot this year. ...

"We have been really working on getting a quicker offense and getting the ball to the setter quicker, our setters getting to the net quicker. Because we know to beat some of the teams that we play, we have to play at that speed."

The good news in terms of who they play is that the sectional has been revamped. Gone from the group are Wapahani, Belmont, Heritage and Burriss, all of which were ranked in the top 10 in the state last season. The only rival that remains for Jay

County is Delta, which won just six matches a year ago. New sectional foes will be Centerville, Frankton and New Castle.

It makes for a more manageable group and provides some hope for postseason success. (The Patriots' last sectional title came in 2002.)

Dillon is looking for a winning season after going 10-18 in 2020 and 15-15 a year ago. But more than that, she is pushing for her team to play to its potential regardless of whether it is headed to a blowout victory or battling a state-ranked opponent.

"I want to compete," she said. "That's what I want to do. I don't want to go out and drop to someone else's level if they're not as good as us and I don't want to crumble when someone's better than us. I want to compete every single day we walk in the gym."