

The News SPORTS

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Lone Tree sophomore Vivian Zaruba secured a spot on the SEISC all-conference team with an eighth-place finish at Twin Lakes. **JEFF YODER/THE NEWS**

Golden Hawks serving up memories



Paul Bowker
Columnist

The fire in Sherry Evans' eyes burned hot one night last October.

She was standing in a hallway at West Liberty High School after the Golden Hawks had their season ended by the Comets yet again.

The determination in her eyes said this won't happen again and just wait until you see what this team looks like in 2022. The River Valley South won't recognize the Golden Hawks. Evans was so excited about what was to come, so hungry to see the Golden Hawks turn those kills and digs into wins.

The days of winless conference seasons were gone.

And that sets the Golden Hawks up for what could be a memorable volleyball run next week. The Golden Hawks host Washington in a Class 3A regional opener next Monday. Three wins in the regional would send the Golden Hawks to the state tournament for the first time since 2004.

And to appreciate that, you have to go back four years to 2019. That's where the story begins. Evans was Mid-Prairie's new head coach. Her husband, Zeb, joined in. The Golden Hawks didn't win a match in the River Valley South Conference that season. Or the season before that. Or even the season before that one.

Seriously. That's zero and 33.

The streak finally ended on the first day of September in 2020 when the Golden Hawks swept Durant. That's right. They swept Durant. Ella Groenewold and Landry Pacha, senior stars on this year's team, won their first conference matches as sophomores.

Dakota Mitchell, this year's sophomore libero, was in seventh grade that last winless year. So was her teammate, Lanece Duwa. Jovi Evans, the daughter of Sherry and a freshman this year, was in the sixth grade.

The environment and the expectations have changed drastically.

There isn't a single tap of the ball that escapes Mid-Prairie's coaches or any of their players. Sherry Evans has the type of stare-down look you just don't want to be on the receiving end of. And Zeb is shouting with every kill attempt, every set, every dig. Also helping out on that coaching is Rebecca Becker.

Every Golden Hawk point brings bench players to their feet.

The JV players and the freshman/sophomore team is as locked into this as

ALL-CONFERENCE

Zaruba and Thomann finish in top 15 at Southeast Iowa Superconference meet

BY JEFF YODER
The News

WINFIELD

As Erika Thomann began to tire in the final mile of Thursday's race, she ran past her coach Angie Strobel, who confirmed that the Highland freshman was in position to claim one of the last two spots on the SEISC all-conference team.

"It was a little tough," Thomann said. "I just had to keep reminding myself that I've just got to fight."

With a 14th place finish of 23:56 at the Southeast Iowa Superconference championships, Thomann earned a spot on the all-conference team, along with Lone Tree sophomore Vivian Zaruba,

who finished eighth with a time of 23:00. "She's a hard worker," Lone Tree coach Tiffany Regan said. "She's been improving all season and she did well."

It was the first time on the all-conference team for Zaruba, who was working her way back last season after a surgery. It was the first time running in a conference championship for Thomann.

Thomann enjoyed the loud music playing from the clubhouse as the runners traveled the 5,000 meters around the Twin Lakes golf course.

"I thought it was pretty easy, honestly," she said about the course. "Except the last stretch was pretty hard. I started off not too fast, but at a good pace, and I just kind of kept that pace going through."

Her fellow Husky freshman Siena Stanerson also placed in the top third with a 20th place finish of 24:40.

Hillcrest sophomore Micah Gerber led the Raven boys, finishing 22nd with a time of 19:23. Jesse Blossom was 42nd out of 87 runners with a finish of 20:26.

Hillcrest coach Marty Gingerich said the plan for Gerber was to run even splits and move up throughout the race. "At one mile he was 41st and at the two mile he was 28th," Gingerich said. "It's harder to gain places during that last mile because everyone else is putting out their last push."

"The course is a little long, so his

SEE SEISC MEET | PAGE 2B

SEE BOWKER | PAGE 4B

Huskies fend off Lions, take all three sets in Lone Tree

BY JEFF YODER
The News

LONE TREE

Lone Tree pushed its rival to extra points in the second set on Tuesday, but the Huskies were able to finish it off and earn the sweep on the road.

Senior MyLei Smith had 15 assists, 11 digs and six aces in the 25-18, 28-26, 25-12 win, Highland's ninth of the season.

"They're getting better every day, working together and not getting down on themselves, and it really showed in that second set for sure," Highland coach Shannon Hills-Copeman said.

Lone Tree responded to the close loss by taking a 7-4 lead in

the third set, but the Huskies took control and won easily to finish the match.

"That was impressive to see," Hills-Copeman said. "We've been waiting a long time to see these girls play like this tonight."

Junior Sarah Burton had 12 kills and 18 digs, and sophomore Adeline Krotz stepped up with nine kills and 22 digs.

The intensity picked on both sides of the net as the second set went to extra points. The level of effort and focus went up as each player worked to avoid making a mistake that would cost the match.

"I felt like throwing up, to be honest," said senior Adelynn Kleopfer, who had four

kills and five digs on Tuesday. "It was just so tense. It was like we're so close but we're so far away. I just wanted to finish it — on a good note, but just kind of be done with it."

Kleopfer finished 13-of-13 serving with two aces.

Smith, who had nearly half of the Huskies' 13 aces, had her biggest one of the night to give Highland the 28-26 victory in set two.

"Honestly, I was just thinking about getting it in, I didn't expect to serve an ace," she said. "It was just very nerve racking. We had set goals for ourselves before the game, and

SEE HUSKIES | PAGE 2B



JEFF YODER/THE NEWS

Highland senior Jessica Kraus slams the ball over the net during a sweep of Lone Tree on Tuesday, October 4.

ATHLETE of the WEEK

MYLEI SMITH HIGHLAND SENIOR

MyLei had 26 assists and 11 aces as the Huskies defeated conference opponents Lone Tree and Louisa-Muscatine in straight sets this week. Highland finished the week 4-2 with wins over Sigourney and Hillcrest in the Washington tournament.



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