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Newton begins season with No. 12 ranking

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With two returning all-staters, the Newton girls soccer team begins the 2008 campaign as the No. 12-ranked team in the state.

The difference from last year's 11-4 team is that this season the Cardinals will be competing in Class 1A instead of their usual 2A classification.

Therefore, Newton's players and new coach Rick Barnhill have some lofty expectations. "We definitely have high hopes this season," said junior Jordyn Thompson, who is one of the two returning members of last year's team that earned honorable mention all-state honors. "I am just hoping we win state. We are going to be one of the biggest schools in Class 1A."

Barnhill, who steps in for the departed Nolan Carson, said he is an optimistic person by nature but understands the growing pains of a team under a new coach.

"We lose a first-team all-stater and an experienced goalie from last year, so that will be something we have to look at right away," Barnhill said. "But if we prepare and do the right things, the wins will come."

Newton will not be the only team in the Little Hawkeye Conference to start the season ranked. Norwalk begins the year at No. 2 in 1A and Pella starts at No. 8. The Cardinals also play 1A No.

9 Dallas Center-Grimes and 2A No. 10 Ames, the team's season opener Tuesday, this year. Also on the schedule late in the season will be 1A No. 4 Waverly-Shell Rock.

Thompson and fellow honorable mention all-state member Jenna Clausen will be the leaders on this year's squad. Thompson scored 25 goals last year and has set the school's career scoring record with 36 over her first two seasons.

Clausen should also provide some scoring punch as will junior Amy Vos and seniors Lauren Patty, Amy Speer and Natalie McCormick.

That cast of players will all have to fill the shoes left by Stephanie Goos and Kaci Marshall, who both graduated last year. Goos was first-team all state last year and Marshall earned honorable mention honors.

Having a lot of scoring options this year is just what Barnhill is looking for.

"I want to have a balanced attack," he said. "Jordyn will catch some attention, but we are going to need others to take pressure off her. Hopefully, we won't have to use her as our main option all the time."

While the offense is shooting for balance, the defense should be led by junior Mallory Sturtz and senior Haley Riggs, who will be the leader on defense according to Barnhill.

They will both try to make things easier for new goalkeepers Jessica Mouchka and Jean Dougan, who will both take over for the graduated Megan Hicks.

As stated above, some teams on the schedule will no doubt present Newton, which lost 3-2 in overtime in the second round of the playoffs last year to Cedar Rapids Jefferson, with some tough challenges. But Barnhill is more worried about his team than the team the Cards are facing.

"All we can do is worry about ourselves," Barnhill said. "We are not going to concern ourselves on what other teams do. We'll measure ourselves from our previous performances."

And so far, things are right on track.

"Some of us have been nervous because we were not sure if the new coach is going to play us on varsity," said Thompson, who has aspirations of playing Division I soccer when she graduates in 2009. "But this team has a lot of confidence, and things are looking good so far."

The team's season opener against No. 10 Ames will begin at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday in Ames. The home opener will be 7 p.m. Friday against Grinnell.