

MIFFLIN COUNTY VOLLEYBALL

New coach looking for growth against Mid-Penn

By **GREG WILLIAMS**
Sentinel correspondent

AT A GLANCE

MIFFLIN COUNTY HUSKIES

District 6, Class AAA
Coach: Jill Yeager, assisted by Jessica Smith and Roy Bucher
2012: 5-17, 1-15 Mid-Penn Commonwealth Division, 4-2 Tri-Valley League

HIGHLAND PARK — The Mifflin County Huskies certainly struggled in their first season as a member of the rough and rugged Mid-Penn Conference, winning just a single volleyball match against Central Dauphin East — which also won only a single Commonwealth Division game.

But this is a new year and the slate has been wiped clean. And with it comes first-year coach Jill Yeager, who is more than familiar with the ranks of the Mid-Penn, having played for Commonwealth rival Chambersburg.

“I’m familiar with the style and competitiveness of the Mid-Penn,” said Yeager, who is making her head coaching debut after three years as an assistant at the high school and middle school levels. “Our record wasn’t that great last year, so we are hoping for a few more wins.

“But this will be a growing year again,” she added. “It will be a challenge to compete in the Mid-Penn, but it will make us a better program. I’d rather compete against those solid teams to help us reach that next level of play.”

The Huskies went 5-17 in their inaugural Mid-Penn campaign and must replace all-star Alyssa Stackpole, an honorable mention Commonwealth selection. Stackpole, also a first-team Tri-Valley League all-star, led Mifflin County in digs.

The return of seniors Haley Hower and Kaitlyn Dreese should help. Hower, who should see plenty of time at the outside hitter position, has impressed Yeager

during preseason workouts.

“Haley has had a strong influence on the girls and she’s really encouraged them to work hard,” Yeager said. “We’ve been working on our hitting and talking a lot about team cohesion. We see her as a pivotal person in reaching that goal by her actions on and off the court.”

The Huskies are counting on the same kind of performance from Dreese, who seems primed to be the Huskies’ top setter in 2013.

“Kaitlyn has been very consistent and she has a lot of skill as our lead setter,” Yeager said. “She has been a strong leader and she exudes confidence, showing a great ability to run a good squad.”

Juniors Anna Aurand and Chloe Benner are also expected to be difference-makers for the Huskies, according to Yeager. Aurand, who should find a home in the middle, has also had a strong preseason.

“She has come out strong and is really working hard,” Yeager said. “She encourages her teammates and has been a leader in the sense of trying new things. She will help us take Mifflin County volleyball to the next level.”

The same can be said for Benner, possibly one of the smallest players on the court. Benner closed out last

season with an impressive array, notching three aces and 15 service points in a loss to Red Land.

Benner has been penciled in as the Huskies’ defensive specialist and libero. “She will be our main defensive player. She has been so encouraging to her teammates and has worked hard and led by example. Chloe’s a good quality athlete and we see her doing good things on the court.”

The preseason play of junior Jenna Snyder, who is vying for time in the starting lineup as a middle hitter, also has stood out.

“She’s impressed us in terms of her work ethic,” Yeager said. “She’s motivated. She’s not only willing to better herself, but she’s encouraging others to do what it takes to help make the program better.”

Senior JoHanna Laub may also see time at the outside hitter spot, along with junior Jessica Dzupova and sophomores Kierra Imler and Shania Teenie. Dzupova also is a setter.

The lone freshman on the varsity roster is Bryn Ferguson, who has been working out as a middle hitter.

Despite their tireless efforts in practice, Yeager knows the members of her squad have a long road ahead of them. The amount of success they have could be determined by their ability to pass the ball and play as a squad.

“We need to be very cohesively, moving as one unit,” Yeager said. “This is a young program (in terms of the Mid-Penn Conference), but they are putting the time in and working hard. They’re learning new styles and we’re throwing new ideas at them to prepare them for the Mid-Penn.”



Sentinel photo by BRADLEY KREITZER

Members of the Mifflin County volleyball team are, from left, front, Kaitlyn Dreese, Bryn Ferguson and Chloe Benner; back, Shania Teenie, Kierra Imler, JoHanna Laub, Haley Hower and Anna Aurand.

Yeager believes State College, Cumberland Valley and Chambersburg, which finished as the top three teams in the division last season, will be tough once again. Mifflin County also plays a secondary league schedule against the three TVL schools that sponsor the sport.

The Huskies travel to Cedar Cliff for their season opener on Tuesday.

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