



Senior Leadership, Experience Will Be Key To Edwardsville Girls Volleyball Team In New Season

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Senior leadership and experience will play an important role in the story of the 2023 season for the Edwardsville High School girls' volleyball season as the Tigers come off a successful 2022 campaign. Despite losing key players for the 2021 team that finished fourth at the IHSA Class 4A state finals in Bloomington-Normal, Edwardsville went 25-13 on the year, losing to Southwestern Conference rival O'Fallon in three sets in the sectional semifinals at Belleville West.



As the team goes through preseason practice, spirits and confidence are both high in the Edwardsville camp and the players are working very hard to get ready for the season.

"All of the girls are working hard," said Tigers' head coach Heather Ohlau. "They're strengthening their muscles, they're getting into habits, they're putting in the work and it's starting to show. I'm glad that we've had about a week-and-a-half to get them going and get them in the gym, so they've been itching for it."

The senior leadership is showing itself already and has been standing out as the Tigers continue their preseason preparations.

"We've got a lot of leadership at the varsity level," Ohlau said. "We've got several returners. Sydney Davis, a senior outside, has had experience at the varsity level since a freshman, so we're looking to her to be a leader in the front row on the outside position. Hanna Matarelli on defense, as our returning libero. Defensive footwork, defensive movement, just being that leader in the back row.

"We have three senior setters," Ohlau continued, "being able to run an offense. All three of them had experience last year in setting a varsity court, with Liv Johnes, Sara Gouy and Megan Knobeloch. We also have some young returners in the middle for us. Addie Reader, a junior, and Ciara Cunningham, a sophomore in the middle. So, we've got a lot of experience returning, which helps going into the next season."

The experience will be invaluable as the Tigers compete in an always rugged Southwestern Conference and against the top-flight competition Edwardsville always plays against. And there's additional motivation for the Tigers as well.

"Yeah, I think how last year ended was a little short of the goal that that team had," Ohlau said. "I think that left something to be desired in the players that are returning, have some unfinished business they want to take care of, including winning another Southwestern Conference, O'Fallon, Belleville West, Belleville East. Our conference school are always going to be tough, so that's gonna be a challenge that they're up for, along with all of the tournaments that we travel to. Just another tough, competitive season we're looking forward to, so like I said, they have some unfinished business."

Ohlau agreed it's a lot of fun to watch the Tigers grow and play every night, and she's looking forward to the upcoming season.

"Yeah, just to see them develop and grow as a team," Ohlau said, "not just as individuals. It's always fun, because they've got that connection. There's a level of trust the more that they play together, the more they practice. It's just nice to see that they're having this experience together."

As usual, the expectations are high with the Tigers and they're looking ahead to another successful season, with the usual lofty and ambitious goals.

"We're expected to do well," Ohlau said. "Again, we're looking for, like, another successful season, hopefully winning the Southwestern Conference again, or at least

sharing that title, coming home with a couple of tournament championships and as always, making that solid postseason run and hopefully, returning to the state tournament for the third time in program history is always that end goal."

There's much to look forward to for the Tigers in the 2023 season and Ohlau is ready to see how her players perform on the court this year.

"I think that, hopefully, it'll be nice to watch what these girls can do," Ohlau said.