

THE ECHO

JUNIORS IN VARSITY



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JUNIORS IN VARSITY

Maya Stone
Staff Writer

Juniors, the graduating class of 2022, are getting ready to be the upperclassmen of Neuqua Valley High School in the 2021-2022 school year. Last year, Fall and Winter sports were offered the opportunity to compete in their sport, while Spring sports had short-lived seasons. Remote learning and changes to seasons have impacted everyone differently.

Junior Staff Writer for The Echo, Maya Stone, took a deep dive into the lives of her athletic peers. After an extensive interview, including a junior from virtually every Varsity team at Neuqua Valley High School.

Edited by Staff Writer Aarti Gupta and formatted digitally by Magazine Editor Salman Khan, this extended article eventually evolved into our third quarter issue of The Echo magazine.

Photographer Sachin Fong and Co-Author Maya Stone both participate in sports at Neuqua. Fong is a member of Neuqua Valley Boys Varsity Track and Cross Country, and Stone plays for Neuqua Valley Girls Varsity Soccer.



FALL SPORTS

GIRLS TENNIS

Andrea Gerald has been on the Varsity for Tennis for two years, and she was lucky enough to have a season this year.

“It was certainly very different than last year. We all had to be apart while we were on the courts, and we all were wearing masks. We also had a new coach this year so that was definitely another change in our tennis season.”

Even after tennis season, Gerald has stayed in shape by working out for an hour everyday and eating nutritious food. To her, the biggest reward of the season was still being able to see her teammates un-



GIRLS TENNIS

der safe protocol and continue to have somewhat of a routine, but she was nonetheless upset that there were less games and the team couldn't participate in their off-key singing on the bus rides.

“I would honestly say that I was lucky for my season to still take place this year. So many things have been taken away from so many people and it was a blessing to have one normal part of my school life still present.”

GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

Liel Thomas has been on Varsity Girls Volleyball for three years, joining the postseason her freshman year.

“I didn't have a season [this year] due to COVID-19, but I was looking forward to the playoffs because that is the most intense time of our season, and the feeling of winning games is amazing.”

However, she has continued to stay in shape by participating in club volleyball, speed/agility workouts and weight training. She has been able to get more training as a result of the season being postponed.

Another positive impact of COVID-19 on her is that “it's actually become much easier to balance being a student athlete and making sure I get all my work done efficiently.”

GIRLS SWIM AND DIVE

Nikki Sterchele has been on Varsity for Girls Swim and Dive for three years and has been swimming since she was young.

“I was most excited to be able to compete again. For most swimmers, the last meet we all swam was in late February or early March and we were all so excited to race again.”

Sterchele has stayed in shape by running every other day and working out with her sisters every single day. She’s figured out how reliable she is and is proud of her ability to motivate herself. However, sometimes she remembers that nothing is guaranteed, so the ability to adapt to new changes is really challenging.

“[COVID-19] made me realize how thankful I am for literally everything. I didn’t realize how lucky I was to be able to go to school everyday. Also, it made me realize how lucky I am to be a part of the swim team.”

DANCE TEAM

Jenna Henderson has been on the Varsity Dance Team for one year, and while she understands why their season was pushed back, she is still upset.

“I made Varsity during competition season my sophomore year, so the experience of being at a Varsity Football game with a big crowd was what I was most looking forward to.”

She has not let her morale fall low, as she continues to stay in shape by running five miles over the summer every week as well as attending online technique classes with the team. During the school year, they have had a few in-person practices and home workouts on days where there is no practice. She is glad that she could still stay connected to her team over Zoom and see the dedication of her teammates, but she still worries about not knowing if they will have a season.

“The pandemic has definitely changed a lot of things both in athletics and academics. The rules are obviously a lot more strict when we are practicing inside the building. Having school online has been a big change but I think I’m slowly starting to get more and more used to it.”



JENNA HENDERSON

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

Ashley Robinson has been on the Varsity Girls Cross Country team for two years but has raced in Varsity events for three years straight.

She was “most excited about being able to race again and being able to train with [her] team. This season was slightly different because [they] had to train in smaller groups and [they] couldn’t really interact outside of those groups, so [she is] excited to get to know some of [her] teammates who were in different groups next season provided things are at least more normal by then.”

Robinson has stayed in shape by going on a lot of runs. To her, the biggest reward of COVID-19 was getting to focus on personal training, which led



SARAH ZHENG



ALYSSA ZANGHI

to an improvement in her running and PR (personal record). However, it has been difficult to maintain a strong team bond and she is upset for the seniors who are not able to have a final Cross Country season.

“It has been both good and bad; [COVID-19] has given me a lot of time to focus on myself, but it has also been hard being so isolated and not being able to see my teammates and classmates all the time.”

GIRLS GOLF

Sarah Zheng has been on the Varsity Golf team for three years and is always looking to make progress and improvement.

“I was most excited about going to state this year because I knew I had a really good chance of placing a lot better than my sophomore year.”

Zheng has temporarily moved to Florida to continue working on her golf game with her coach for the possibility of upcoming tournaments. She’s glad that she was able to have a high school season, but she was upset that she was not able to compete at State, especially since she made it in as an individual. She was also upset that she wasn’t able to see the competition or old friends and that the normal 18-hole tournaments got restricted to 9-holes.

“Through the pandemic, I have been able to see a silver lining. It gave me the opportunity to try and focus more on my sport as I’ve been able to put in more work during my off season. However, it has been a real struggle to stay motivated in school. Being able to still play my sport as it can be played socially distant brings a sense of normality during these tough times.”

SIDELINE CHEER

Alyssa Zanghi has been on Varsity level Sideline Cheer for two years. She shared that her season this year “is going to look a lot different because we aren’t able to stunt, but I am still grateful that I will get to compete.”

During remote learning, Zanghi has stayed in-shape by working out at her house and doing other cardio activities. To her, the biggest reward of COVID-19 was learning to always try your hardest since sport seasons aren’t guaranteed right now. If anyone gets sick, though, all of the effort and hardwork is halted to a stop.

“[COVID-19] has made me want to work harder to take advantage of all the opportunities I can get.”

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

Noah Schalliol has been on Varsity level Cross Country for two years, and he is proud of the accomplishments he’s made throughout his time.

“[My team took] second at sectionals in one of the toughest sectionals in recent years. We had come off a pair of rough defeats to Naperville North in conference and regionals. I ran my best race of the year on sectionals and we really came together as a team.”

Unfortunately, we came up just a few points short of a stacked Downers Grove North team who was ranked #2 at the time.”

Quarantine has trained Schalliol to stay in shape by training with teammates and keeping a positive mindset. To him, the biggest reward of COVID-19 is that athletes during this time period will be remembered as incredibly perseverant. His team has had to manage with no summer practices, big invitationals or a State meet, but he’s still proud of how they’re doing.

“[COVID-19] has taught me that what you’re working for now may not pay off right away. During the summer, we were unsure if we were gonna race, but we kept training anyway, knowing that when the day comes that we toe the line and get ready to race, we’ll be ready.”

FOOTBALL

Peter Shewman has played Junior Varsity and Varsity level Football for three years. Neuqua’s team has a tradition to host a “Friday night lights” on game days, and Shewman was looking forward to seeing it. He hopes that this tradition will continue if they have a season in the spring.

During remote learning, Shewman has stayed in shape by going to the gym about four-five times a week and working out for an hour. He’s glad to have gotten the motivation to get out of the house and actually work out, but he misses the excitement of having a fall season.

“[COVID-19] has just made everything more difficult and complicated, but it’s also forced me to look at different ways to improve myself.”



PETER SHEWMAN



NOAH SCHALLIOL

BOYS SOCCER

Harshit ‘Hershey’ Gupta has played on the Varsity Boys Soccer team for two years and hopes to continue playing for the team as a junior.

“The last 2 years, I was a underclassmen, so a lot of the teammates I played with were upperclassmen, and now finally being an upperclassmen, I would’ve got the chance to play with more kids that I’ve known since I was kid and it would of been an even better time.”

To prepare for the season, Gupta has continued to practice and play games with his club team, as well as doing individual cardio works. He is honored to have the opportunity to practice with his team, while other individuals who do not participate in a team activity do not have the ability to do so. However, practices are still sometimes non-contact which can be boring, especially because he did not have the opportunity to play with his team after the season last year was cancelled.

“COVID-19 has made me realize how much there is that I can do myself. I often times found myself unwilling to practice soccer at my house because I told myself there wasn’t enough space or couldn’t do some things, but COVID-19 has really showed me that these were all just excuses to not practice and has told me that there are things that we can do at home to help us excel at our sports.”

BOYS GOLF

Golfer Alec Cross has been on Varsity level Golf for three years, and needless to say, he has enjoyed his time playing.

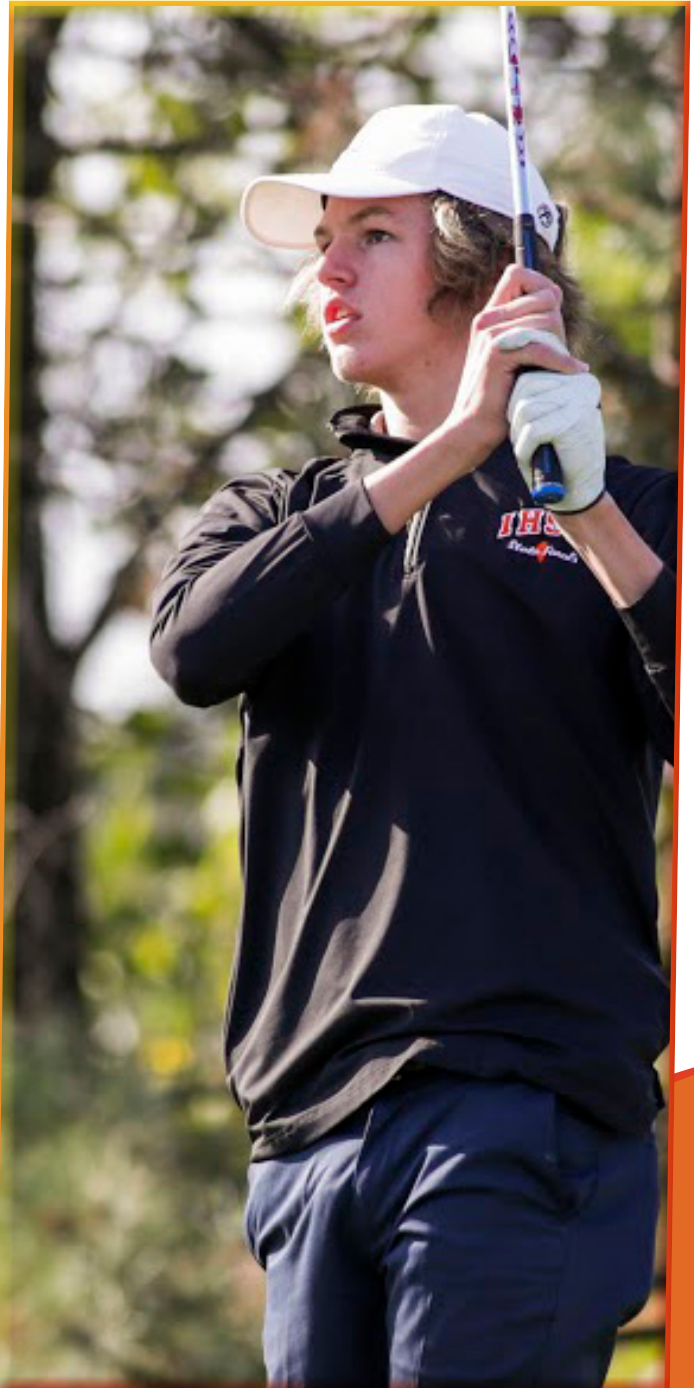
“I like playing on varsity. It brings a challenge to you. Being on varsity since a freshman, I’ve been able to learn a lot from upperclassmen and now I’m able to pass that down to the freshman and sophomore.”

He had the ability to do so this year, with courses remaining open, but there were still opportunities taken away from him.

“I was most excited about the State tournament but it got cancelled. That would’ve been fun.”

He has still managed to keep a positive outlook throughout the year and has stayed in shape by continuing to practice with his team since his season was not cancelled. He feels rewarded by the massive character development that he has had as a result of his ability to persevere during the pandemic.

“COVID-19 hasn’t impacted me in a good or bad way, it’s just something we’ve all had to deal with and get through together. It has just made life and everything we do a little more challenging.”



ALEC CROSS



HARSHIT GUPTA

WINTER SPORTS

BOYS BASKETBALL

Cole Vonnahme played on Junior Varsity Basketball his sophomore season, and will be playing Varsity as a junior.

“For this season, I am most excited to just get back into it. Basketball is a super fun sport and when you get to get together with friends, especially in these times, it is often the relief you need. Although basketball still plans on having a season, it did get postponed, and this does make me feel on edge. It’s hard to think about the future when large parts are in jeopardy, but recently, not knowing what is going to happen next seems like the norm.”

Vonnahme has stayed in shape through team-provided workouts and exercises. COVID-19 has provided athletes with a sense of normalcy and allows for a mental and physical break, but it can become exhausting when everything is very day-to-day and no one knows what is really going to happen.

“I feel like I have been forced to be a little bit more independent with my studies. Not seeing my teachers every day means that I have to do a lot more problem solving than I have done in the past. Sports wise it is very difficult to plan ahead. Like I said earlier, it is very day-to-day planning.”

BOYS SWIM AND DIVE

Aiden Dunn has been on Varsity Boys Swim and Dive for three years.

“I’m definitely most excited about training with a bunch of my close friends and seeing how great they do this year with the difficulties,” Dunn said about this season.

He himself has fought the difficulties and stayed in shape by lifting, going to the gym, and swimming once club season starts again. It has been rewarding to have a chance to rest and relax his mind as an athlete, but many factors, like the cancellation of their national meet, have been upsetting for him.

Aside from sports, Dunn described that “it’s been a struggle to keep [himself] engaged during classes for sure.”



AIDEN DUNN

WRESTLING

Jack Reina has been on the Wrestling team for one year, and the accomplishments he's made keep him going.

"I made it to sectionals last year and since then I have always had the thought of State in my mind."

Reina has stayed in shape by lifting every single day and going to extra wrestling training. He's had to learn to have a boost of self-motivation as team practices were not occurring, but it's still difficult because he loves sports and competing but can't really do that during this time.

"I went from playing three sports to having basically no sports. I also went from never really being able to hangout with friends to almost everyday being able to hangout."

HOCKEY

Richie Mattia has been on Varsity Hockey for two years, and he's built a relationship with his team that can only be described as "the boys."

"I was excited about having a chance to play for State. [The event takes place] in front of a huge crowd on a Saturday night at All Seasons Ice Rink against Wabounsie. Being with the boys [is great], but it changed because we can only have a few people inside the rink at once."

Mattia has stayed in shape by lifting a lot, going for runs constantly and skating at the ice-rink. He has been working on his craft at home, allowing him to get in peak condition, but the uncertainty of having a season, especially for his senior teammates, makes him upset.

"[COVID-19] personally impacted me because I had it, and I had to isolate for 2 weeks. I have to stay away from family because of it, and that [the team is] not able to play as much as we want; let alone play at all as of right now."

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Corey Kasche has played Varsity level Girls Basketball for three years. Basketball has faced many controversies this season, with IHSA and Governor J.B. Pritzker disagreeing on whether or not students should play.

"It's really sad because I was excited to play with everyone, especially the Seniors. I feel like this was going to be a really fun season, but sadly, there may not be one."

Kasche has been attending Physical Therapy due to an injury, practicing with her AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) team and going to the gym during this time. While she hasn't been able to see her team as often as she would like and been unable to participate in certain tournaments due to travel restrictions, she has focused on herself during this time.



COREY KASCHE

GYMNASTICS

Ame Wachtel has competed on the Varsity Girls Gymnastics team for three years. She has found the season to be extremely unbalanced.

“We started tryouts, then got postponed until later in December or January, which is disappointing. Those two months are usually the bulk of the season and will no longer take place. What I am most excited about is spending time with my team. When we all get together every year it’s like we never left because we have such a great and supportive team comradery.”

Wachtel has stayed in shape by going to club practices at the gym whenever possible and strength training. To her, the biggest reward of COVID-19 was realizing how much persistence athletes have and a true passion for their sport, but it can still be upsetting when she realizes that her season has been shortened and certain competitions are being postponed.

“[COVID-19] has made motivating myself especially difficult because the things that make me enjoy school and sports are taken away. Socialization during school makes me happy to be there, but that is gone at the moment. Another example is bus rides for gymnastics; they are such a fun time getting pumped up for competitions, but now we have to drive ourselves.”



SANIA CHISNELL

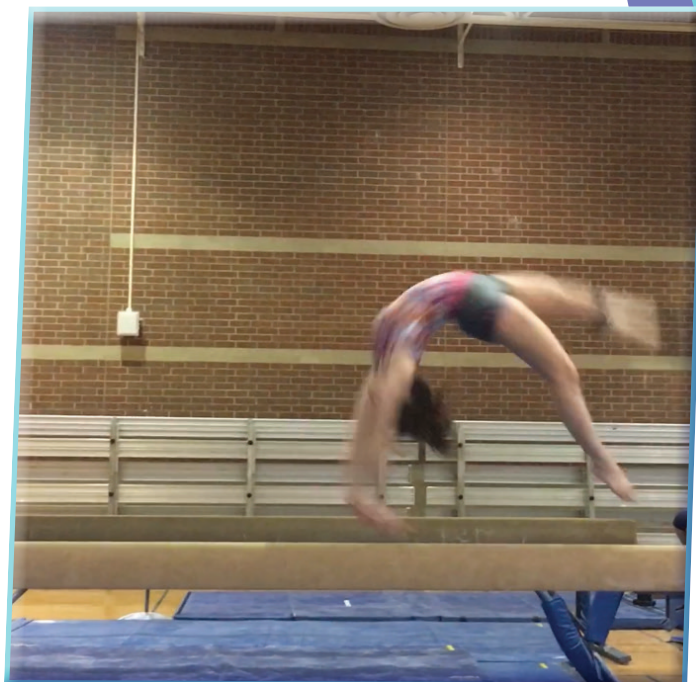
COMPETITIVE CHEER

Sania Chisnell has been on Varsity Competitive Cheer for three years and has built close relationships with her teammates.

“I was most excited to be able to bond with my team and see what challenges we could talk on, but with COVID, it’s been hard to not be able to see them frequently.”

Chisnell has stayed in shape by working out four times a week and practicing her skills at home. She’s glad that she’s had a chance to let her muscles relax and time to improve on her individual skills, but she still fears the possibility of her season being cancelled at any moment.

“Personally, [COVID-19 has] made it a bit easier to manage my schedule because I’m mainly at home, and I don’t have to worry about any commitments in different locations.”



AME WACHTEL

ORCHESIS

Ira Singh has been a part of the Orchesis team at Neuqua for one year, this year being her first.

“For Orchesis, most of our rehearsals are over zoom, but some were in person in small groups, with masks and social distancing. A lot of the things that I was looking forward to, such as the pep rally, NKICD, and the (in person) showcase, were cancelled. As disappointing as this is, I am very grateful that we still have a season, and for the directors for all their hard work in making this happen.”

Singh has continued to participate in dancing zooms with her team as well as work out in the mornings. Returning to the studio after a long pause due to

the pandemic felt amazing to her, but at the same time, the season was definitely not “normal” and a lot of the competitions got cancelled that were previously competed in.

“COVID-19 has impacted me personally in many ways. With dance, I felt that I was going to regress since I was limited with space and equipment from my basement. With academics, I find it harder to focus and learn more efficiently through remote learning, but I still try my best. It also requires me to be on technology all day long; the morning I spend on zoom classes and the afternoon/evening I spend doing homework/assignments.”



SPRING SPORTS

GIRLS BADMINTON

Bhavi Barnwal has competed at the Varsity level for Badminton for two years.

“This season, I was most excited for demonstrating my improvement as a player in the games and hopefully surpassing the Top 16 at State. When the season got canceled, it was mildly disappointing even though it was somewhat expected. None of us got to give a proper goodbye to the seniors or the rest of our teammates, which was rough.”

Barnwal has fought past the disappointment and stayed in-shape by working muscles not typically used in badminton, as well as walking/running 2-4 miles. Working muscles not traditionally used in her sport have surprisingly helped her enhance her overall game. These workouts have also allowed her to promote her physical and mental health, but not being able to train with her team has caused a decrease in her motivation as there seems to be no end in sight.

“COVID-19 has allowed me to fix some of my bad habits of procrastinating and not following a regular schedule. The schedule split Tuesday-Friday gives me more time to focus on school subjects that I’m struggling with, and I’m also getting more sleep. The increased free time in my day also allows me to work out in unique ways, such as playing some Just Dance or doing yoga.”



TAYLEN LACHENHEIT

GIRLS LACROSSE

Taylen Lachenheit has been on the Girls Lacrosse Varsity team for two years.

“It was really hard saying goodbye to last year’s seniors especially since we all thought we had one more season together. I am excited to be one of the older players on the team though.”

“It has been very hard to stay motivated and on track. Lacrosse games and the season help reduce stress for me so not being able to have a season was very difficult.”

However, Lachenheit has stayed in-shape by practicing with her club team. To her, the most rewarding part of this situation is that she has continued to grow as both an athlete and a teammate, despite the setbacks of last year’s cancellation.



ALYSSA MEAD



BROOKE MILLER

GIRLS TRACK

Alyssa Mead has run on Varsity level Girls Track for three years.

“This season, I think most girls on our team didn’t have high expectations because the season was so fragile; however, it turned out to be our most successful season in a few years. Our cross country team made it to state for the first time in three years, and our teammates have had tremendous PRs (personal records). The season was certainly different from normal, but our team managed to be closer and more cohesive than ever. This is definitely a season I’ll be most proud of.”

To prepare for the season, Mead has gone for runs as much as possible in her neighborhood and parks. There’s a peace of mind she was able to obtain as well as have somewhat of normalcy within her life through her running practice. However, she’s upset that coming runners were not able to experience their team bonding activities such as bus rides and pasta parties.

“COVID-19 has impacted me pretty positively so far. I have really enjoyed spending time at home with my family, especially considering I will be going to college in less than two years. Some days it is hard to feel motivated when I’m unable to see my friends, but being able to run with them after school helps.”

GIRLS SOCCER

Brooke Miller has competed at the Varsity level for Girls Soccer for two years and is hoping to make it a third if there is a season this year.

She wants to play a new position this season. “Freshman year, I played center-back, and I was looking forward to playing in the middle. It was really upsetting to not have a season; I look forward to high-school so much, and knew that I would have to wait another year, and not be able to play with the leaving seniors.”

Miller has stayed in shape by going for long distance runs and sprints, lifting a lot of weights and practicing her soccer skills. COVID-19 has allowed her to be able to focus on areas that she wanted to improve on, making her a better and stronger athlete. However, she hasn’t been able to play with other people, which is difficult since soccer is a team sport.

“[COVID-19] definitely impacted me by improving my mindset. When I didn’t have any practice it was up to me to keep staying active, by doing this my mindset got better and I was more motivated by myself, without others telling me to do something.”

SOFTBALL

Maia Clifford has played on Varsity level Softball for three years.

“I was really looking forward to last year’s season the most, because we had a lot of talent and team chemistry, so it was looking like it was going to be a successful season. Since last year was cancelled, I am really looking forward to actually getting to play a game this year, because last year we never got to that point. I am also excited to finally be an upperclassman, and help to be a leader for all the new girls who will join the team this year.”



MAIA CLIFFORD

Clifford has stayed in shape by going to the gym every day, working out in her basement, going for runs and honing her skills by practicing hitting off of a tee and practicing her side toss. This effort has given her newfound knowledge of not taking softball for granted and realizing the passion that she has for the sport. Though, the uncertainty of what will happen with her season as well as the fact that she may never get to play Softball for Neuqua again depending on the pandemic’s circumstances upsets her.

“Although there are some good things that have come out of this pandemic, I feel like I have mostly been negatively affected. I am really not liking the online learning situation, because it barely feels like real school, and I find it difficult to pay attention and truly care about the assignments because I just want to be done. Also, being that all of my sports are cancelled as of right now, I don’t have practices or games to look forward to after school, which really just makes it difficult to have motivation during these times.”

GIRLS WATER POLO

Callie Tuma has been a part of the Varsity level Girls Water Polo team for two years.

“I was excited [for season] because I love the seniors and now we won’t be able to play together for our last season.”

Tuma has stayed in-shape by doing workouts with friends and still swimming with her swim team. She was rewarded by being able to realize how much she enjoys water polo, and now she will not take it for granted, which makes it harder for her because she will not get a season this year.



CALLIE TUMA

BOYS WATER POLO

Matthew Strange has been on Varsity level for Boys Water Polo for three years.

“I’m not sure if we will have a season, but if we did, I feel like my teammates and I will work even harder than the previous years.”

He has been working hard by working out with fellow teammates. COVID-19 has given him time to work and train hard to be even better for when he can have a season, but doing this without his teammates and coaches can be difficult.

BOYS LACROSSE

Reese Baron has played Varsity level Boys Lacrosse for two years, and he wants to be able to play with his team against.

“Our season was canceled last year because [COVID-19] hit as soon as we started practicing. But our season has been moved to late spring and into summer, which is annoying because there is a rule that states you can’t play club and high school lacrosse at the same time, which means we will have to choose which to play.”

He has been preparing for the spring by going to club practices, working out from home and going for runs, whether that be for distance or quick sprints. He’s glad that he can still compete in tournaments, but the rules are incredibly strict so games aren’t as fun with the team.

“[COVID-19] has limited the workout I go through. I used to be able to lift weights at Neuqua, but now I can’t. In academics, I have been doing pretty much the same as I would if we were still in school.”



REESE BARON



MATTHEW STRANGE

BOYS VOLLEYBALL

Matthew Penrose has played one year on Junior Varsity Volleyball one year, and Varsity Volleyball for one year as well.

“I was most excited about playing with my team because a lot of us are good friends. Last season got cancelled and that was pretty sad, but you just [have to] move on and prepare for the next season.”

Penrose has been preparing by working out during his freetime and continuing to go to practices. This has given him a chance to improve his skills and become more independent in terms of working out and motivating himself.

“I believe that COVID-19 has personally made me a more independent person. I learned better time management skills and how to both athletically and academically learn on my own.”

BOYS TRACK

Charlie Rook has been on Varsity level Boys Track for one year.

“This season I was most excited to run at some of the bigger meets and see how our team stacked up. Unfortunately, that wasn’t really able to happen because of the restrictions, but we did still have some great competition within our conference against one of the best teams in the state. It was obviously really disappointing to not get to do some of that stuff we usually get to, but we’re luckier than a lot of sports, so that’s what we focused on.”

His coach has provided workouts that allow Rook to keep himself motivated and in-shape. The feeling of winning a race during the pandemic is rewarding to him because it means even more, especially since some people aren’t even doing anything and

athletes are working incredibly hard. However, there were many precautions taken as the team had to run every practice on only one of the three track courses. It was also unmotivating to hear that the state meet was cancelled.

“Personally, it’s been pretty difficult to stay focused in school and stuff like that, but I think I’m starting to get the hang of that more and more. Athletically, yeah, it was frustrating but it hasn’t changed too much other than just no meeting in giant groups anymore. I’m still able to do all my workouts and do everything I need to do, so I don’t mind it too much in that sense.”



NICK ROHLWING