



**By Jan Schultz**

***The Imperial Republican***

Longhorn volleyball opens this weekend at the Lexington tournament, and Chase County fans will see a young high school team out on the court.

Head Coach Jodie Schuller said they don't have a lot of returning starters, after graduating four last year, but they hope to make that up with more offensive consistency and strong serving.

The team will be led by a group of five seniors—Mayra Acosta, Karlee Kunnemann, Paula Leibbrandt, Dee Dee Pursley and Maria Ramos.

Of that group, Schuller said Kunnemann is the only senior with a lot of varsity experience.

Leibbrandt, Acosta and Ramos saw some limited varsity playing time last season. Pursley played softball last fall.

Schuller said she's still working on her starting lineup for Saturday's opener, but Leibbrandt will start as setter and Kunnemann as opposite hitter. Sophomore Shannon Liewer will start as an outside hitter.

Pursley is competing for a middle hitter position, and looks like a possible starter this week, Schuller said.

Acosta, who played a libero late last season, will be valuable as a back row specialist, Schuller said, and Ramos will be an important sub off the bench.

Lexee Reichert is working at the outside hitter post. Other middle hitters could include Alexa Bernhardt and Shayla Dinnel, Schuller said. Dinnel may also be used as an outside hitter.

The coaches still have some questions on who will play where, but Schuller said players will get better.

"We could all use another week" of practice, Schuller said Monday.

But, she believes she'll have more options and more consistency with the team's offense this year.

"And, our serving's good. We have some aggressive servers," Schuller added.

She said there's been consistent improvement since their work over the summer, and she expects that to continue.

"It's going to take some time to get our roles down," she said.

But that will come with lots and lots of reps, she said.

"Having fun and regular improvement is what I want to see," Schuller said.

The team has a roster of 24 players, three who played softball last season—Pursley, Reichert and Rebecca Martin.

Schuller said they are making the transition, are good listeners and are putting out a lot of effort.

The Lady Longhorn schedule mirrors last year pretty closely, but subdistricts will be a lot closer this year in McCook. Last season, Chase County had to travel to Gering for subdistricts.

North Platte St. Pat's, in the same SPVA conference as Chase County, is ranked No. 3 in some pre-season volleyball polls. Hershey will also return as a tough SPVA foe.

**Opener at Lexington**

Coach Schuller expects another challenging tournament at Lexington, where the Lady Longhorns will meet fellow SPVA opponent Hershey in their first match.

Start time should be around 10 a.m. (MT).

St. Paul, last year's tournament champs, are expected to be a very good team again, Schuller said.

The activities office at Lexington said matches will run right after one another at Saturday's tourney, with about 20 minutes allowed in between for warmups.

Chase County opens at home next Thursday, Sept. 10, when they host a C, JV and varsity triangular with two Colorado schools, Haxtun and Wray.