

## Relays

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"That was a fun race. I was proud of them," coach Heck said. "They have a lot of speed and to come in as confident as freshmen and get that win (is something). Vivian's really a strong sprinter and I knew she'd have a good race. She just loves the competition so I think she wanted it a little more than the girl next to her too."

Ella Heck and June Chiamulera joined Lamers and Sundby on that relay. Lamers was part of three relay wins on the day, as was fellow freshman Celia Francis. Ella Heck was part of two wins while Chiamulera and Kiley Pooch were part of one win each.

It was a good day for seniors, too. Abi Winnicki and Karis Francis were each four-event winners on the day. They swam together with junior Ellyse Younker in the 500 crescendo freestyle relay (4:46.44), the 200 butterfly relay (1:50.22) and the 400 freestyle relay (3:42.35). They swam with Celia Francis in both the crescendo and 400 free relay, and junior Lily Thorsen in the butterfly.

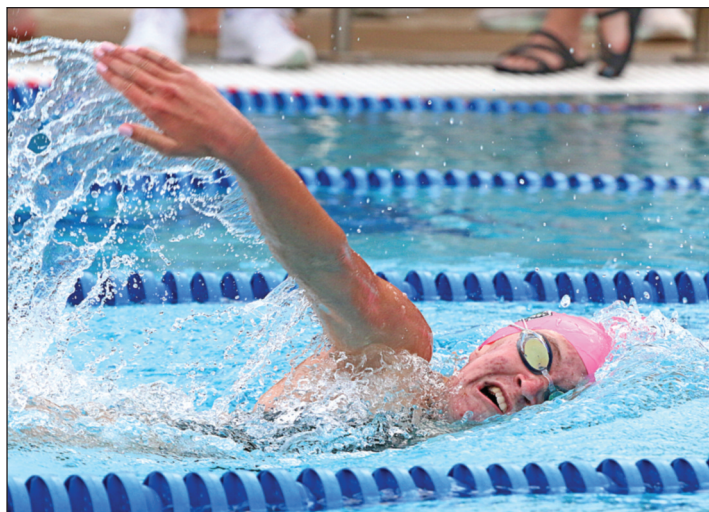
Winnicki was part of the winning 200 backstroke relay (1:53.31) with Pooch, sophomore Emma Houg and Celia Francis. Karis Francis was on the winning 200 breaststroke relay (2:10.66) with Thorsen, Lamers and Ella Heck.

Houg, Sundby, Thorsen and Lamers swam to victory in the 400 class medley relay (4:23.67), which required teams to have one swimmer represented from each grade level.



Rhinelanders' Karis Francis swims a leg of the 200-yard breaststroke relay during the Merrill Relays girls' swim meet Thursday, Aug. 17 in Merrill. Francis was a part of four event victories.

PHOTOS BY JEREMY MAYO/RIVER NEWS



Rhinelanders' Vivian Lamers swims the freestyle leg of the 400-yard medley relay during the Merrill Relays girls' swim meet Thursday, Aug. 17 in Merrill. Lamers, a freshman, was part of three event victories on the day.

"We have so much depth that we knew that we could do well in the fly, breast,

back, those relays," coach Heck said. "We can only put together four for an A

relay when we really have six that we could put together for a fast combination. We tried to get every to swim one of their favorite events and maybe an event that might not have been their favorite, but we needed them to do."

Rhinelanders added runner-up finishes in the 200 medley and 400 individual medley relays. Senior Margaret Lambert, Ella Heck, Younker and Celia Francis made up the team in the 200 medley while Houg, Lamers, Ella Heck and Thorsen swam the 400 IM.

The Hodags added a pair of third-place finishes with non-scoring B relays. Lambert, Pooch, freshman Rylee Micevicius and Chiamulera took third in the 500 crescendo. Chiamulera,

Lambert, Pooch and Houg were third in the 400 freestyle relay.

Despite all the success, coach Heck said she saw plenty of details the team can still perfect.

"As a coach, that's what you look at," she said. "We're already looking at the details of things we're going to do tomorrow morning at practice and things we can improve on. I'm going to keep pushing and keep things in perspective here."

"It's great that I can get that specific with some of the things the girls are working on that, a lot of times, we're not doing until the end of season. That's a really good problem to have."

Wisconsin Valley Conference teams Stevens Point, D.C. Everest, Merrill and Wausau West rounded out the top five on Thursday. The Hodags, seeking their fifth straight Great Northern Conference title, bolstered their case as the early-season favorite. Conference rivals Ladysmith, Tomahawk, Lakeland and Antigo finished ninth through 12th, respectively.

Coach Heck called it a fun way to start the season.

"That was the goal of today's meet," she said. "We said we were going to go out here to have fun. We've been training so hard the last couple weeks and this was almost like a reward day just to actually compete and not to have to train."

Next up, the Hodags travel to Colby/Abbotsford on Wednesday for an individual pentathlon meet.

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## Soccer

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The Hodags graduated six of their seven All-GNC selections from last year. The lone returning player from that group is senior Will Quinn, who earned first-team honors as a midfielder. He's expected to have a big role in the attack this year.

Fellow seniors Mason Shinnars and Matthew King also will likely figure prominently. Both had goals as Rhinelanders erased a 2-0 deficit in the playoffs at GNC champion Medford before the Hodags eventually won in penalties.

"I think Will Quinn has stepped up huge. He was a huge player last year and I think he's one of the top midfielders in the conference," coach Weigel said. "Mason's improved a ton, his shot, his power. We have a lot of juniors that are now seniors that I think will do really good."

Goalkeeper Cooper Radke, who made a number of pressure-packed saves in last year's tournament run, also graduated. Junior Barak Rappley, who served as the Hodags' backup keeper last year, will step into the starting role this fall.

"Barak has worked under Gavin and Cooper for a couple of years and has had a lot of good practice," coach Weigel said. "I think our keeper is right up there with them. We've had some good keepers in the past."

It will also be on a mainly new defensive line. Only senior Neil Weigel returns from last year's unit, which graduated defensive co-player of the year Charlie Heck along with other defensive stalwart Leo Losch.

"The other three are stepping into new shoes," coach Weigel said. "That's what practice is for. We're



BOB MAINHARDT FOR THE RIVER NEWS

In this Sept. 13, 2022 file photo, Rhinelanders' Will Quinn reacts after scoring the go-ahead goal in the second half of a GNC boys' soccer game against Mosinee at Mike Webster Stadium. Quinn, a senior is the lone returning all-conference selection from last year's Hodag team that reached the WIAA Division 3 state tournament.

working on it and trying to get it back to the spot where Leo Losch and Charlie were."

Will Gretzinger, Garrett Younker and Dalton Fritz round out the list of returning seniors.

Quinn, Shinnars, King and Neil Weigel are serving as team captains this year. Though a number of pieces are different, Quinn said he's still optimistic about what the season may bring.

"We've got a lot of good players returning," he said. "We've got a lot of kids stepping up. Just go out there, give it our all and I think we can make a good run for it. I'm excited to see what this season holds."

Though Rhinelanders lost a number of key players, so did its two chief rivals in the GNC last year — Medford and Lakeland. Because of that, coach Weigel said the conference may be as even as it's ever been this year.

"It's going to be a tough conference this year," he said. "It seems like, even in past year, it's almost

like that football saying, 'any given Sunday.' Any given Tuesday or Thursday any team could beat any team with just a set piece or a good cross or something.

"Medford, it seems like they lose 11 seniors every year and come back with a tough team. It should be interesting to see. Last year Eagle River (Northland Pines) had a young team. It seemed like Mosinee had a lot of young players that were really good."

It's worth noting that the Hodags ended Friday morning's practice by taking penalty kicks. That practice obviously served Rhinelanders well in last year's playoffs and Weigel said it will likely come in handy again this season, considering the perceived parity in the GNC.

"It's one of the things the kids like to do a lot. They have fun. You can see there smiling over there practicing them. It paid off huge," he said. "Three of our final games ended in PKs. Nowadays conference games don't end in ties. It's a big part of the

## RHS BOYS' SOCCER SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent/Event	Time
8/22	at New London	6 p.m.
8/24	WAUSAU EAST	7 p.m.
8/29	MEDFORD*	7 p.m.
8/31	at Antigo*	4:30 p.m.
9/7	LAKELAND*	7 p.m.
9/9	HODAG INVITE	10 a.m.
9/12	MOSINEE*	7 p.m.
9/14	at Northland Pines*	4:30 p.m.
9/21	at Medford*	7 p.m.
9/23	HAYWARD	Noon
9/28	ANTIGO*	7 p.m.
9/30	WIS. RAPIDS	11:30 a.m.
10/3	at Lakeland*	7 p.m.
10/5	at Mosinee*	7 p.m.
10/6	at Merrill	7 p.m.
10/12	NORTHLAND PINES	7 p.m.
10/17	WIAA Regionals	TBD

\* Conference games | HOME GAMES IN CAPS

game, and a lot of those conference games are not really blowouts. They're 1-0, 2-1 games. Could you end in a PK shootout? It's pretty likely nowadays."

The Hodags will start to see how this year's team comes together tonight when it travels to New London for the regular season opener. Rhinelanders comes home to host Wausau East in non-conference play on Thursday and will start GNC play at Mike Webster Stadium next Tuesday with a sectional semifinal rematch against Medford.

"We obviously have those big lofty goals," coach Weigel said. "Every team wants to make it to the big games at the end, but I think we're going to slowly take it game by game. We'll start with New London, then look toward Wausau East and get into conference."

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